

Humanities and Social Sciences key in addressing social problems-Mak luminaries

The College of Humanities and Social Sciences (CHUSS) on 19th May 2022 held its 2nd conversation to commemorate the centennial celebrations under its overarching project, *Historicising the Humanities at Makerere University since 1922*, funded by Andrew W Mellon.

The College brought together the former faculty members who served in various capacities as classroom teachers, heads of departments, deans, wardens, counsellors, to hear from them their experiences at Makerere university and their scholarly service beyond the gates of Makerere university in similar or other capacities.

Held under the theme, “*Humanities and Social Sciences: 100 years back, 100 years forward*”, the aim of the 2nd CHUSS conversations aimed to re-examine the basis of the disciplines in the humanities and humanistic social sciences at Makerere University and, to establish how the disciplines have evolved overtime and what their existence has meant for Uganda. The other purpose was to evaluate the contribution of humanities and humanistic social sciences at Makerere University to interdisciplinary research and to public, local and global knowledge production.

The project coordinator Dr. Levis Mugumya underscored the luminaries’ service at Makerere university, particularly at the former Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences that paved way for greater things for students, their colleagues, the university and the country.

“You are our giants on whose shoulders we have stood to advance the core values of a university and interests of Makerere university. Indeed, we are proud of you and we are grateful to you for laying the foundations of humanities and social sciences scholarship at Makerere University”.

Dr. Mugumya acknowledged how vibrant the humanities and humanistic social sciences were in the 1960s and 1970s:

“We know the former Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences was a zone that attracted eminent scholars in these fields and groomed post-independent political leaders such as Julius Nyerere, Milton Obote, Mwai Kibaki, Benjamin Mkapa, Oginga Odinga, and others. The intellectual debates of Okot p’Bitek, Ali Mazrui, David Rubadiri, Nuruddin Farah, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, John Ruganda, V. S. Naipul, Wole Soyinka and Mahmood Mamdani were cherished and informed knowledge production on the African continent”.

We are also aware of the complex and difficult challenges that you endured (even we still experience such difficulties), but you waded the stormy waters to stay the course of humanities and social sciences disciplines”. Dr. Mugumya said.

Dr. Mugumya highlighted a number of challenges including: the pressure from the University and government to reform in order to conform to contemporary national development programs; grappling with restrictive and inadequate funding of research and training.

Other bottlenecks are the stereotypic outlook of governments of the humanities as non-significant disciplines in national development; the legitimacy of humanities at Makerere University and the value of their contribution to society and development resulting in reduced government funding for research and students admitted into the disciplines of humanities and social sciences.

Dr. Mugumya was also cognisant of the significant attempts to reform the humanities enterprise at Makerere University to conform to market demands and render the humanities relevant to society as well as to forestall the demise of the faculty and ‘disciplines.

“Therefore, today’s conversation has been organised to reflect largely on the scholarship of the humanities and social sciences one hundred years ago (of course, we do not have the personalities who saw the beginnings of Makerere College in 1922; however, we have luminaries who witnessed the nascent growth of the disciplines in the early 1960s and 1970s. We would also like the conversations to look into the future of our disciplines, thus the theme *Humanities and Social Sciences: 100 years back, 100 years forward*”. The don said.

The days ‘program had a mix of panellists from Gender and Women studies, Linguistics and Languages studies, Political Science, religion (African traditional religion), Performing Arts, History, Literary Studies, Journalism and Communication, and Social Psychology.

The panellists narrated their experiences at Makerere and how the university shaped their academic paths and possibly their relationship with Makerere after they retired or transferred their services elsewhere. Mugumya said this was not an event to reminisce the yester years of Makerere (the illustrious and perhaps gloomy days), but most important, to learn from these experiences as we live in different times (of Email and WhatsApp as opposed to handwritten letters and chits) with different academic aspirations and challenges.

The Conversation was planned to focus on three sub-themes:

Panel One: Leadership, Mentorship and Welfare in the Humanities and the Social Sciences that examined issues of selection of leaders, expectations of leaders and mentorship among social sciences academics.

Panel Two: Academic Publications and ICTs in Teaching the Humanities and Social Sciences focusses on issues of publication avenues for humanities and social sciences scholars, the politics of publication, Mawazo journal and lessons from it, decolonizing publications, the future of publications in humanities and social sciences, and the use of technology/ICTs in teaching and publishing.

Panel Three: Inter-disciplinarity and Curriculum Development in the Humanities and Social Sciences which interrogated how knowledge was compartmentalized and issues of the human resources in departments, management of cross-cutting courses, how the public perceived the humanities and social sciences and their efforts to keep afloat, curriculum design and relevance in the humanities and social sciences, as well as the future of BA Arts.

The event was officially opened by the Deputy Vice Chancellor in charge of Academic Affairs, Dr. Umar Kakumba. Kakumba commended the college's efforts to galvanize humanities scholarships for greater utility on the African continent and the enriching academic exchanges that come with these initiatives.

He said the theme of the conversation, "Humanities and Social Sciences: 100 Years Back, 100 years Forward" resonates well with the mandate of Makerere University as an academic institution through which various members of society interact to exchange and generate new knowledge with the ultimate goal of finding solutions to challenges and improve livelihoods.

“In the context of the changing global trends and increasing competition in higher education, I commend the college leadership and the faculty for their passion for building this academic space as a platform for thriving intellectual discourse.

These kinds of initiatives indeed help to serve as catalysts for improving academic excellence by exposing our faculty and students to the wealth of wisdom, knowledge and understanding of the discipline of Humanities and Social Sciences, which in turn revitalizes the pursuit of academic professionalism and nurture a positive publication culture”.

Dr. Kakumba said the centenary celebrations come when Makerere University is implementing its new Strategic Plan (2020/21-2030/31) to transform the university into a "research-led institution with a multi-faceted research agenda; enhanced engagement with industry and business sector.

Over the next ten years, he said, the university seeks to continue optimizing its potential as a knowledge hub and focusing its research and innovation on addressing the complex issues in the nation, region, and Africa.

“It is, therefore, my sincere hope that this 2nd CHUSS conversation will provide a great opportunity to exchange and share experiences and discuss the practical challenges and possible solutions.

It is also my aspiration that these conversations will be a foundation for the growth of new ideas towards a better tomorrow as students, researchers, faculty, and a more established academic community interact in a pleasant setting to discuss about pertinent issues in our university such as leadership, mentorship and welfare; academic publications and ICT in teaching; as well as the interdisciplinarity for the Humanities and Social Sciences”. The DVC(AA) said.

On behalf of the University management, Dr. Kakumba thanked the development partners, especially the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, USA and Gerda Henkel, for supporting research and human capacity building in CHUSS, and other academic programs. He also thanked the Government of Uganda for providing an environment conducive to research to thrive at Makerere University.

The Principal CHUSS Associate Prof. Josephine Ahikire said the college’s core mandate is to inform society around social cohesion, around citizenship, productivity, culture and language because when all is done, what is actually left is the individual within a community and social existence.

Using COVID-19 as an example, Prof Ahikire recalled that when all the planes in the sky and vehicles stopped, all simply became human and that is why it revealed that there was need to strengthen the humanity aspect, culture languages and understanding of society and existence; the need for revalidating the indigenous knowledge all that is resident in humanities and social sciences.

Prof. Ahikire said these conversations are aimed at bringing all these varieties of knowledge. The college she said, bought its ruminaries --these are professors who served the universities in the 60’s, 70’s and 80’s some in the early 90’s. who have retired but still active citizens, active members of the humanities fraternity.

She also said they aimed at celebrating Makerere at 100, celebrating the century that has passed since 1922 but also looking forward on how Makerere can leverage its contribution to society, the nation, the region and the world at large.

“These ruminaries are talking about their experiences at Makerere University from which we are learning a lot especially in the areas of academic leadership and mentorship. They are also

talking about what are kind of things that the current generation needs to do in order to make their contribution as we say, We build for the future.

So, we aim at ensuring we motivate staff and students to debate some of the issues that are pertinent to society and to also learn from each other and also for students when they attend such conversations they get motivated, get skills of speech and debate and also get motivation for leadership.

We need to cultivate leadership. Most of the time when we talk about leadership we only talk about political leadership, MPs, LCs, and so on. But leadership is a wide range right from the family, to community, to school, media and universities we need to cultivate leadership and mentorship and that comes from this College of Humanities and Social Sciences”. The Principal explained.

Speaking on the debate on natural vis a vis social sciences, Prof Ahikire emphasised that all countries that have developed have also developed with natural sciences in combination critical combination with social humanities with philosophers and artists informing society, media, and social scientists addressing political challenges.

“There is no society that can develop with only natural sciences, it is like standing on one leg. Society actually knows that what you need is a holistic approach to development. Without the humanities you cannot actually have a holistic development.

Humanities addresses the human aspect without fear and it includes the soul and the mind. You can look after the material aspect of food, clothing and housing but if you don't look at the mind and soul of that individual, then you have lost that individual and because we are not critically looking at human development aspects, you have a lot of violence in the society, family level, in institutions, sexual harassment and many people just going mentally unstable” .Prof. Ahikire stated.

Luminaries call for equal opportunities and salary review commission for all public servants

Speaking on the subject of humanities and Social sciences, the professor of Political Science and Public Administration Prof. Yasin Olum currently based in the Islamic university in Uganda based in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and also Director Institutional Planning and Development in Mbale discussed a number of challenges that the scholars of humanities and social sciences face.

Prof. Olum observed that there is little or no government funding to students, academic and administrative staff in social sciences, humanities and arts courses as priority goes to finance science based courses. This he said, means accessibility to university and tertiary institutions of higher learning is not there for the arts, humanities and social sciences students. They have to look for their own sources of money to finance their education. This brings in the problem of lack of equity, increasing in the problem of lack of equality because education is a human right.

The second challenge according to prof. Olum is Globalization through technology particularly super highway and telecommunications has enabled most of the social scientists particularly in Africa, Uganda inclusive and the third world to be controlled and dominated by foreign

countries and there is a lot of influence that is happening outside the continent and the third world. That he said, limits their capacity to deliver as much as they should.

He also observed that most of the people in the third world, in Africa are poor. Social scientists should be the ones to be able to change their circumstances for the better but the language they use cannot be understood by these local people. He said, there are also people down there in the villages who have a lot of accumulated knowledge which they should also respect and listen to as they do their research so that they harmonize their different knowledge for the purposes of changing the circumstances of the local people for the better

The other challenge according to professor Olum is remuneration where science based scholars will be paid better than the non-science based lecturers or teachers.

“I can understand the rationale of government, the relevance and the contribution of science, technology and so on to development. There is no question about that and I really very much agree with the president on that argument. Except now how you actualize it, and how you make sure that position of science based can agree with the contributions of those who are not science based because there is no way you can have a society without social scientists, without humanity scholars, without art scholars”.

Whereas Prof. Yasin Olum agrees that natural sciences a key catalyst to development, this should not relegate social sciences for underpayment.

“And I challenge all that let us remove all the disciplines of arts from primary, secondary and universities. How will they communicate in primary if there are no English teachers, then remove all positions in government, non-government organizations in the private sector that have been occupied by graduates from arts, humanities and social sciences, remove them such as CAOs, remove all from all districts, remove town clerks, remove PROs have only scientists how will they do the job?

Supposing all this people who are not considered relevant were removed and we only have people who did physics, chemistry, biology and mathematics. What sort of society are we going to breed?”

He said the salaries for all public servants should be revisited to ensure that there is no division among academic staff at whatever level whether it is primary, secondary, university whatever case is.

“Right now they are very divided and you can now see that some of the science based teachers are going on strike on their own, then what is happening in schools the non-science are teaching. Now tomorrow the artists will also go on strike for their own, then the scientists will now continue to teach.

In my view we need a salary review commission at the end of the day that should look at all jobs in government and see given an economic situation how much should somebody really earn? If you have an extra skill, then that can be costed”.

The professor advised social scientists to continue to interact, to interface with government on this matter of their relevance or irrelevance, they need to continue to do workshops and invite policy makers and policy implementers in government so that they exchange views with them, so that they show them the relevance of arts, social sciences and humanities

Humanities and social science scholars urged to encourage the science of translation.

Prof. Manuel Murunga was at Makerere from 1973 to 2009 and taught languages specifically German and Runyashitara. He emphasised the importance of people having their mother tongue preserved, sustained, developed and intellectualized.

Prof. Manuel urged Makerere scholars to pay attention to the mother tongues to ensure that the nations identities, linguistic and cultural identities do not get lost. He proposed that all the 65 languages in Uganda are at least taught in regions where they are spoken.

“Mother tongue must be there for identity, for history and for strength, political and philosophical strength. English for international purposes and Swahili.

For example at the University of Teso, they should be teaching Atesot and maybe Kumam. At Busitema they should be teaching the Eastern Ugandan languages. Busoga University they should be teaching Lusoga and even Lugwere. In the west we are trying to teach Runyakore, Rukiga and in Toro for example the university, mountains of the moon in Fort portal which is not a state university, they should be teaching Runyoro, Rutoro over there as well as Runkojo and Ruwesi and other languages there. In Muni, they should be teaching Lugbarati and Kampa.

Compiled by

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