

Makerere Celebrates Achievements of Gerda Henkel Doctoral Program

Makerere University College of Humanities and Social Sciences (CHUSS) held a celebratory dinner on January 10, 2025, at Fairway Hotel in Kampala to mark the milestones and achievements of the Gerda-Henkel Doctoral Funded Program. The event, presided over by the Vice Chancellor's representative, Prof. Robert Wamala, brought together project coordinators, mentors, alumni from the program's first cohort in 2017 to 2023, prospective candidates for 2024, and members of the university's leadership.

The Gerda Henkel Doctoral Funded Program has been lauded for its significant impact on empowering doctoral candidates to undertake advanced research and innovations. The program has not only bolstered Makerere University's reputation and strengthened partnerships, but also reignited confidence, morale, and interest in the Humanities and Arts. Its structured approach to PhD research has inspired the university to organize graduate studies more efficiently, facilitating the smooth progress and timely completion of doctoral programs.

Program Impact Lauded by University Leadership

Prof. Robert Wamala, Director of the Directorate of Research and Graduate Training (DRGT) at Makerere University, commended the Gerda Henkel Doctoral Funded Program for its significant contribution to research excellence and innovation. Speaking at the program's alumni gathering, Prof. Wamala highlighted how the initiative has not only empowered doctoral candidates to pursue advanced research but also bolstered Makerere's reputation as a hub of academic and research excellence.

In his remarks, Prof. Wamala expressed deep gratitude to the Gerda Henkel Foundation for its unwavering support, noting that the foundation's investment in graduate education has helped nurture some of the brightest minds addressing global challenges. "Your generosity has enabled us to nurture researchers whose work addresses critical issues in our communities, region, and on the global stage," he said.

Wamala further emphasized the program's success in enhancing Makerere University's standing as a leader in research. "The Gerda Henkel Doctoral Funded Program has fostered groundbreaking research and innovations, placing our institution among the leading academic giants in Africa and beyond," he remarked.

He also praised the program for its role in creating a culture of mentorship, collaboration, and inclusion, ensuring that its impact extends beyond academia and into broader societal development. "Through this

initiative, we have seen researchers develop solutions to local and global challenges in areas such as public health, education, technology, and climate resilience," he added.

As Prof. Wamala transitioned from his previous role as Director of Research and Graduate Training to his current position in the Directorate of Research, Innovations, and Partnerships, he underscored the critical role of research and innovation synergies. "It is through partnerships like the one we celebrate tonight that we bridge the gap between knowledge generation and its application," he noted.

He encouraged the continued collaboration between faculty, students, and external partners, urging them to seek innovative opportunities and amplify the impact of their work. "Let us continue to innovate, collaborate, and amplify the reach of our work as academia, as CHUSS, and as the Gerda Henkel Foundation," he concluded.

Prof. Wamala also congratulated the doctoral candidates and alumni, acknowledging their resilience and the significant contributions they have made. "The knowledge you have created and the challenges you have overcome prove what can be achieved with determination and the right support," he said.

In closing, Prof. Wamala reaffirmed the commitment to sustaining and expanding the legacy of the Gerda Henkel Fellowship Program, ensuring that it remains a beacon of excellence for generations to come. "Together, we can ensure that this program continues to inspire even greater achievements in the years to come," he concluded.

Acknowledging Champions and Partners Assoc. Prof. Helen Nambalirwa Nkabala, Principal of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, expressed her gratitude to all those who have nurtured the program.

From faculty members to administrative staff, their collective dedication has transformed challenges into achievements. "Thank you to everyone who has supported our students, from supervisors and examiners to support staff and alumni. Tonight is a celebration of your unwavering commitment," she said.

A special mention was made for the program coordinators, including Edgar and Lewis, who have gone above and beyond to ensure its smooth operation. Prof. Nambalirwa also celebrated students and alumni, highlighting their resilience and contributions to global knowledge.

"To those who graduated, thank you for setting the pace. To those finishing now, we assure you that you will follow in the footsteps of your predecessors," said Prof. Nkabala.

Gerda Henkel Program Revitalizes Humanities at Makerere University

The Gerda Henkel Doctoral Program has played a transformative role in reviving interest, confidence, and morale in humanities and arts research at Makerere University, according to Prof. Julius Kikooma, Deputy Director of the Directorate of Research and Graduate Training (DRGT).

Speaking at the dinner, Prof. Kikooma highlighted how the program has not only revitalized the College of Humanities and Social Sciences (CHUSS) but also inspired a structured approach to doctoral training across the university.

“Before Gerda Henkel stepped in, CHUSS was struggling. Humanities were not a priority in funding, with the focus skewed heavily towards STEM fields,” he explained. “It was a challenging time when even staff members sought ways to dissociate from the arts. Yet, Gerda Henkel’s intentional support for the humanities gave us the confidence to rebuild.”

Prof. Kikooma credited the program for creating a ripple effect, attracting other funders like Andrew Mellon and Carnegie, which further reinforced the growth of the humanities. “Today, the humanities are regaining their rightful position. Graduate student numbers have surged, and we are seeing more publications and innovations from the college—achievements that were unthinkable a decade ago,” he added.

The Gerda Henkel Program also served as a model for structuring Makerere’s PhD programs. Prof. Kikooma revealed that the cohort-based system, initially introduced in CHUSS, was later adopted at the university-wide level. “What we learned here at CHUSS informed how we now run structured PhD programs at Makerere. It’s a model that has transformed graduate training,” he said.

However, Prof. Kikooma emphasized the need to formalize and protect the program's curriculum. “The National Council for Higher Education requires every program to have a written, accredited curriculum. While our program is highly regarded, it is imperative we document it as Makerere University’s own. If not, there’s a risk that others might replicate it and claim credit,” he warned.

Kikooma urged stakeholders to prioritize the protection of intellectual property in academia. “Let’s ensure that this groundbreaking program remains our legacy and continues to inspire future generations,” he said.

Vision bearers and the Journey of Gerda Henkel Program at Makerere University

Dr. Levis Mugumya, the program’s project coordinator, welcomed attendees, expressing gratitude for their participation and reflecting on the program's growth and impact since its inception in 2017.

In his remarks, Dr. Mugumya recounted the early stages of the project, starting in 2016 when efforts began to secure funding from the Gerda Henkel Foundation in Germany. He noted the support from

key figures, including the late Professor Edward Kirumira, the former Principal of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences (CHUSS), and other collaborators who helped shape the foundation of the program.

Dr. Mugumya described the challenges faced during the program's early years, including concerns raised by international partners about the feasibility of implementing a similar training model in Uganda, given the country's distinct academic climate. Despite initial apprehension, the team pressed forward, overcoming hurdles and finding support from key stakeholders in the university.

"The road was not easy," Dr. Mugumya shared. "We encountered opposition, skepticism, and at times, hostility. But with the support of our mentors and supervisors, we managed to push through, and here we are today."

Acknowledging the vital role of faculty and staff in the program's success, Dr. Mugumya thanked Professors Josephine Ahikire and Julius Kikooma, as well as other leaders, including the current principal of the college, for their unwavering support. He also recognized the work of the steering committee, including professors and deans who provided guidance throughout the process.

The coordinator also thanked the administrative and coordination teams, highlighting the critical role of staff such as Ms. Esther Namitara and Duncan, as well as the Directorate of Research and Graduate Training (DRGT) for their vital contributions to the program's operations.

Looking forward, Dr. Mugumya expressed optimism for the future of the program, acknowledging that while there have been challenges, the program has made substantial strides in developing and supporting doctoral students. He noted that the alumni present at the event serve as a testament to the program's success, with many graduates now pursuing advanced careers both in academia and other sectors.

"This evening is a celebration of our journey," Dr. Mugumya concluded. "We are proud of the work we have done and the lives we've impacted. It is a testament to the dedication and collaboration of everyone involved."

Program structure facilitated the smooth progress and timely completion, Alumnus Charles Kinyera Okeny

Gerda Henkel funded Alumnus Charles Kinyera Okeny, a student representative and lecturer at Kyambogo University, shared his heartfelt appreciation for the program's positive impact on students and the broader academic community saying, it contributed to their professional and academic growth.

Okeny expressed gratitude for the structure and support provided by the program, which facilitated the smooth and timely completion of doctoral studies. He specifically credited the mentorship of Dr. Edgar

Nabutanyi, the program coordinator, whose dedication to the success of the students was evident in the specialized training, pre-fieldwork workshops, and retooling seminars for mentors.

“The sacrifices made by our mentors and the resources provided, including laptops and books, have been key in ensuring our progress,” Okeny said. He also highlighted the importance of the program's specialized courses and workshops that helped students stay on track throughout their doctoral journeys.

Okeny further emphasized the program's success in securing employment for its graduates. Since 2021, Kyambogo University alone has hired five Gerda Henkel Fellows, a clear testament to the quality of training the program offers. He also acknowledged the fellows who were set to graduate in January 2025, noting their continued dedication to the program and academic excellence.

“We congratulate the eight fellows who have just completed their fellowships. Their success is a reflection of the program's impact,” Keny said, recognizing Abdallah Mana, Elizabeth Katusime, Eugino Njoloma, Fatuma Mirembe, Juliet Simatimba, Naomi Namanya, Samuel Nyasa Chikowera, and Simon Masiga.

While celebrating the achievements, Okeny also called for the establishment of an alumni association for Gerda Henkel Foundation fellows. This, he argued, would create opportunities for academic enrichment through seminars, mentorship, and networking, further fostering academic progress across Africa.

He also reiterated a request made during a previous interaction with the Foundation's team in Germany, urging for the introduction of post-doctoral funds. Okeny explained that such funding would enhance the academic visibility of graduates and contribute to their community service efforts, helping to solidify the program's long-term impact.

Okeny voiced gratitude on behalf of all Gerda Henkel Fellows, acknowledging the Foundation's unwavering support for their academic and professional development. “We are confident that the seeds sown in 2017 will continue to multiply, bringing Africa closer together through academic collaboration and development,” he concluded.

The evening was a reminder of the program's lasting legacy and the continued commitment to fostering academic excellence across Africa.

Gerda Henkel Foundation

Gerda Henkel Foundation is financially supporting students from Uganda and SSA to pursue PhD studies by research in Historical Humanities and Humanistic Social Sciences at Makerere University. The Inter-disciplinary PhD by Research programme in the fields of Historical Humanities and

Humanistic Social Sciences engages a cluster of subjects that study human society with a particular sensitivity to change over time, historical context, and the development of various kinds of evidence to support analyses about the causes, characteristics, and implications of such changes in human society. The grant is worth EURO 2.4million and has greatly contributed to building the capacity for Graduate Programme management at the College level. The programme has helped to demonstrate the value of cohort PHD training.

By Jane Anyango

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