

By Nelson Kiva

An energetic mood gripped Makerere University over the weekend when some of Uganda's youngest elected leaders stepped forward to inspire their colleagues about leadership under a panel discussion known as Ekyoto on Saturday night.

Ekyoto, organised by the Emerging Leaders Programme (ELP), brought together former Makerere guild presidents Lawrence Alionzi and Robert Maseruka, alongside the current office holder, Gracious Kadondi.

The value and character-driven ELP is championed by the First Lady and Minister of Education and Sports, Mrs Janet Museveni and is implemented under a partnership comprising Makerere University, Global Leadership Summit and Life Ministry Uganda.

The trio delivered candid reflections on leadership and personal conviction, striking a chord with hundreds of students who filled the venue.

Alionzi, who is the mayor-elect of Arua city, started by addressing one of the most frequently asked questions about his political journey, his decision to abandon the National Unity Platform (NUP), the party under whose ticket he secured the 88th guild presidency in November 2022, for the National Resistance Movement (NRM).

"Political parties are not the only sense of belonging as far as the political arena is concerned," he said, stressing that political identity goes beyond party affiliations. He challenged students to think beyond labels and divisions, warning against superficial judgments. "When you paint a monkey a certain colour, its behaviour does not change; it will still jump from one tree to another," he added.

Drawing from his campaign experience in Arua city, Alionzi stressed the importance of unity over sectarian politics.

YOUNG POLITICIANS **INSPIRE COLLEAGUES** AT MAKERERE EMERGING LEADERS EKYOTO

PHOTO BY DAVID LUKIIZA



(L-R) Lawrence Alionzi, the Arua city mayor; Gracious Kadondi, the new Makerere University guild president and incoming Mukono South Member of Parliament, Robert Maseruka at the Ekyoto

ELP SHAPING FUTURE LEADERS

Currently in its pilot phase, ELP was launched at Makerere University on September 24, 2024, following its conceptualisation at State House. The programme is built on four SAFE pillars: Sexually fortified, addiction-free, financially faithful and education-focused. Programme director Geoffrey Denye described recent sessions as impactful, noting strong peer-to-peer engagement. The Ekyoto forum complements SAFE clubs and small peer groups, offering reflection and support, including access to counsellors and mentors. The initiative has reached over 25,000 students, with sessions attracting 300-400 participants. It is expanding beyond Makerere to institutions, such as Makerere University Business School (MUBS) and Kabale University, supported by digital platforms.

"Members of the Ayivu community are not the enemy of the Terego; the Terego are not the enemy of the Maracha; our enemies are poverty, illiteracy and disease," he said.

On leadership and decision-making, Alionzi urged students to stay anchored to their vision.

"If at any point you are faced with a challenge, look at your vision. Does it

make a positive contribution to your vision or a negative contribution?"

Reflecting on his grassroots campaign in his area, Alionzi highlighted the value of direct engagement with ordinary Ugandans.

"I had 469 villagers, and I moved to each of them twice in the primary elections. I was addressing 10 rallies every day. My approach was grounded in practical realities rather than theory. I don't claim any expertise on the subject of politics. What I have said are just real and urgent solutions to the problem I was faced with," Alionzi said.

A GENERATION WITH A MISSION

Maseruka, now Member of Parliament-elect for Mukono South, used the platform to highlight the importance of

mentorship.

"In Uganda we lack places where young people can be involved, get to understand, get to be educated, get to be trained," he said, while praising the ELP for filling that gap.

"We are so thankful because we are very sure that through this, we have leaders who are going to impact our country," he said.

Maseruka challenged the emerging leaders to reflect on their generational responsibility.

"Every generation has a mission, and it is upon that generation to either fulfil or betray the mission. What our country is going to look like in the next 40 years is going to be determined by how we treat ourselves as we speak today," he said.

BREAKING BARRIERS

Kadondi drew applause as she shared her journey to victory. "By the time we voted, I had about 800 people viewing my status updates, yet I received 6,800 votes. That means thousands voted for me without even having my contact," Kadondi said. She said this reflected a growing focus on values and capability.

"People voted for what the person stands for, their potential and capability, not money," she said.

Addressing gender dynamics in student leadership, Kadondi spoke about overcoming stereotypes.

"People say Makerere cannot be led by a female, yet we have had five female guild presidents. I wanted to prove that even as a woman, I can lead," she said.