

Fresh face > Lenia will be one of the fresh faces in the 12th Parliament. She explains why she switched to NRM

Museveni is proof that age is but a number, says Lenia

The Vurra County MP-elect says elders in her constituency convinced her that getting the NRM flag would stand her political career in good stead.

BY DERRICK KIYONGA

When we meet, Charity Lenia, who recently secured a place in the 12th Parliament as the Vurra County lawmaker in Arua District, is eager to prove that she belongs. She was "either a head girl or head prefect" while still in school. Lenia had barely joined Makerere University Business School (Mubs) when she was elected Vice Guild President.

"They were never such a thing before," she says of being elected to that position as a freshman.

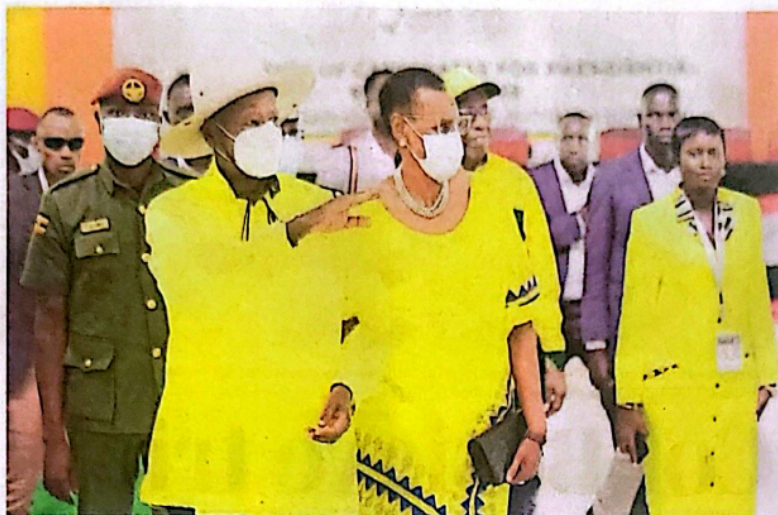
Lenia does not shy away from the fact that she was a youth wing member of Uganda's biggest Opposition party, the National Unity Platform (NUP). She has since swapped NUP for the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) party.

"I need to make myself clear: It was about the intention to serve my people," she says of the switch, adding, "I need to be very honest with people that if I had stayed with the National Unity Platform, I wouldn't have been able to diligently serve my people. You need to work with the government in power if you want to get the necessary services availed to your people."

New blood, fresh ideas

With figures indicating that the attrition rate for incumbent lawmakers was anywhere between 60 percent and 70 percent, Lenia will be one of the fresh faces in the 12th Parliament. She said it was the elders in her constituency who convinced her that getting the NRM flag would stand her political career in good stead.

"I had a strong belief in the values of the National Unity Platform, but when I came to the constituency, my elders enlightened me about the NRM, that's when I decided to switch as well," she tells *Weekend Monitor*, adding, "They told me the picture of the NRM and what it has done for our people. They told me how the NRM has en-



Vurra County MP Charity Lenia (right) strongly believes that Mr Yoweri Museveni (left) is one of the most brilliant presidents the country has ever had. PHOTOS/COURTESY OF LENIA'S X HANDLE

ship cannot stand on their own two feet? Do they need octogenarians to keep holding their hands, pointing them in what is believed to be the right direction?

"You have to go through the system. You have to understand the system," is Lenia's response. "You might have the passion and vision to say that you want change, but, the change you are crying for, are you very certain that you will be able to achieve it? Yet you can achieve it with the system and leader-

ship in play."

Listening to the elders

Lenia vividly remembers one of the elders telling her, in no uncertain terms, that "you would rather complain and struggle to change while you are in the system than when you are outside the system." And that is what she intends to do.

"I know my principles, I know what I stand for, and I know that I'm going to serve my people. You know very well that there are NRM cadres

that are doing well for their constituencies and the reason as to why people keep voting for them is because of their personality," she declares.

Still only 25, Lenia will be one of the youngest lawmakers in the 12th Parliament. She was born in 2001, the year Yoweri Museveni won his second elective term as President of Uganda. The strongman has also won elective terms in 2006, 2011, 2016, 2021, and 2026, following his maiden win in 1996. The octogenarian has in fact been in power since 1986 after he successfully waged a guerrilla war in the jungles of Luweero.

"Yeah, it's very true that the system has been in place for 40 years. But you get to realise that there are many young people who are part of the NRM, right now. And I think the question you should ask is: 'why are very many young people part of the NRM?' These are discussions we have had with the government," Lenia tells *Weekend Monitor*.

"Even [the] President knows that at the end of the day he needs the young people to build the party but the young brand comes at a cost. Now I believe that if we represent young people well things will get better. And if you realise that

when it comes to leadership, it's far from that. They say experience and knowledge are two different things. I respect the bravery of [Robert] Kyagulanyi [the NUP principal]. I respect his bravery to come out and say: 'I want to be president of this country. I want to represent the young people, but it takes experience, it takes knowledge to be able to run a country. I have never run a country, but I'm among those people.... From the little time I have spent in the system I have come to realise that it takes a lot to be a leader,' she says.

"I want to give you an example: back then when we used to go to the houses of our elders, you used to find a tonne of books because they wanted to stimulate their intellectual abilities. But when it comes to us young people, we are always on our laptops, playing video games (...). Even leaders, you ask them how many books you have read compared to the historicals [i.e. NRM ideologues]. So [...]. It's about age and I'm not undermining the intelligence of Bobi Wine to run the country, but I think he needs more of that," she adds.

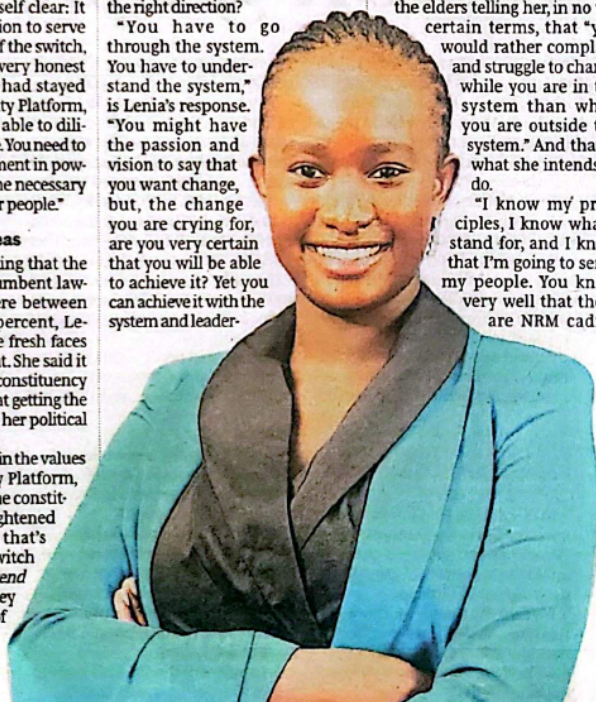
A brilliant leader?

Lenia strongly believes that Museveni "is one of the most brilliant presidents we have ever had." She further notes that when a comparison is made with other African countries, a crystal clear picture emerges. One that stands the Ugandan strongman in good stead. She does not see Museveni as a dictator despite among other things the widespread detentions without trial.

"If you are talking about many young people being incarcerated in [the] central region [Buganda], why are they being arrested? Because for me I believe that if you want to destabilise the peace of the country and the security we have in the country, obviously you are going to face the law.

If you are moving out, you want to cause raucous then you have to face the law. I have been part of the National Unity Platform and I know how they push people out on the street to go and cause chaos. But at the end of the day when you get arrested it's your parents that come and cry," she observes.

"I have been part of the National Unity Platform, I know how they work. Now about poverty, I for one I know West Nile statistically could be among the poorest sub-regions in Uganda but we support Yoweri Kaguta Museveni. While I was at the National Unity Platform, I used to wonder why my people supported Museveni yet they are poor. But now I understand why they support him. You would rather cry of poverty than not having peace. I believe Gen Yoweri Museveni has



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—Charity Lenia, Vurra County MP