

## **Innovation and technology in Combating Crisis**

The College of Engineering, Design, Art and Technology (CEDAT) held its Annual Open day on the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> of November 2021 on the Theme; ‘Innovation and Technology in Combating Crisis’

The event which was also an avenue to celebrate 50 years of Makerere Engineering Society (MES) was characterized by a display of many student ideas and innovations in line with the theme of the event.

The Minister of Science, Innovation and Technology Hon. Dr. Monica Musenero was Chief Guest at the event held at Makerere University Central teaching Facility II. In her remarks Dr. Monica Musenero expressed her commitment towards building the future in partnership with the young engineers. She applauded the great work done by the students as seen from the exhibitions and expressed optimism that the future of the nation was assured with the kind of work the students were doing.

‘We are standing at cross roads, we are standing between the past and the future, standing between what has been and what we want to be, she said adding that we need to choose whether we go forward and take our future in our hands or choose to sit down, lament and blame everybody else’.

Dr. Musenero noted that the young people were the face of the future and congratulated Makerere Engineering Society for the 50 year milestone whose success she said, should be used to reflect on what had been realized as seen from the number of Engineers and products nurtured. She emphasized to the students that they were privileged given that science and technology where engineering falls was a key component for development.

The Minister informed the gathering that her Ministry was ready to support ideas and innovations in areas that included digital technology such as electronics, infrastructure engineering like roads and railways, mobility, the pathogen economy, import substitution and creating products for export as

well as space engineering. She charged the students to have the right mindset and determination and assured them of the support of the Ministry.

The 2021 CEDAT open day later in the course of the event hosted the State Minister for Minerals Hon. Peter Lokeris who not only inspected the exhibition of the innovations by the students but also handed over a prize of Five Hundred Thousand Uganda Shillings to the best innovator courtesy of the Uganda Electricity Generation Company Limited (UEGCL).

Hon. Lokeris informed the Engineering students that the Mineral Development sector had a big docket and urged them to continue striving to become big innovators as demonstrated in the exhibition. He noted that the positive side of COVID 19 made it possible for certain innovations to be seen and that in times of crisis, the mind works at its best.

The Principal College of Engineering, Design Art and Technology and Ag. DVC Finance and Administration Prof. Henry Alinatwe while welcoming the Ministers and other guests said the CEDAT open day was student led which was testimony that the College was training leaders. He said the Kira Motors Corporation, a government Parastatal that came to a level of constructing a factory started as a student project.

He extended his appreciation to the Ministers for the words of encouragement to the students and that his role and the role of the faculty and the line Ministry was to nurture the student's ideas some of which were seen in the innovations exhibited.

The event was also graced by the Deputy Director Research and Graduate Training who represented the Deputy Vice Chancellor Academic Affairs Prof. Urmal Kakumba. In his message, he observed that the theme of the event was at the heart of Makerere University and its commitment to offering transformative and innovative teaching, learning, research and services responsive to dynamic national and global needs. 'Please note that innovations are like wind. You cannot claim ownership of any innovation until you take the necessary steps to protect the idea' he said while encouraging the student to protect their ideas. He assured the students that

the Directorate of research and Graduate training together with the Intellectual Property Management office was ready to support them.

The President Makerere Engineering Society (MES) Mr. Walusimbi Edmund called for increased collaborations between Makerere University and Companies to enable the students get more training through internships as well as take on alumni of the College of Engineering, Design, Art and Technology. He noted that a number of students were constrained in the development of their projects by lack of opportunity and avenues through which their ideas could be nurtured further. He urged Government to create more incubation centers that would be useful in furthering the practical training of engineering students.

‘We need more incubation centers to enable students get more training and be able to run their projects until such a time when the student can be able to earn from their innovation, he said adding that most times students develop prototypes but not optimally because of lack of resources and further training opportunities.

During a panel discussion, issues centered on the relationship between innovation and the industrial revolution, with the relevant tenets that include artificial intelligence, virtual reality and that data was one of the key tenets necessary for Uganda to move forward. The Students were urged to ensure that the innovations they came up with were aligned to the needs of the society and industry and were also encouraged to work with companies, identify the gaps and come up with innovative ideas to solve the issues at hand.

Makerere Engineering Society was started in 1971, a year after the establishment of the then Faculty of Technology. It was aimed at creating a medium of communication among students in the engineering discipline, to promote relationships between students and the industry, support effort to secure internship placement as well as seek out sponsorship for industrial training and skills development among other social causes.

