



PUBLIC DIALOGUE BRIEF: Youth in National Leadership and Transitional Politics

Makerere University Business School Leadership Annex
26 February, 2015 | 1415-1645

The day's lead presenter, Mr Asuman Basalirwa began by "setting the stage for the discussion" and this he sought to do by offering some facts and figures surrounding the situation that the youth find themselves in: he began by observing that the obtaining political and socio-economic situation in Uganda spells danger unless concerted efforts are undertaken to avert it. Widespread uncertainty about a peaceful transition, ethnic tensions over resources and opportunities, religious animosity and mutual distrust between the social classes punctuates daily life in the country.

With a government that increasingly seeks to rely on rule by law, coercion and patronage in pursuit of regime maintenance, pertinent questions such as unemployment, healthcare, social security and education are relegated from the priority list. This, coupled with the continued emasculation of the arms of government and other institutions has eroded and continues to erode whatever pretensions to democracy Uganda had claimed especially after the promulgation of the 1995 Constitution.

In equal measure, the social, cultural and religious institutions that should augment the state's role in ensuring stability have also been eroded by the patronage and malaise that affects the mainstream pillars of government.

It doesn't help matters that Uganda has one of the youngest populations in the world¹ which is largely dependent (i.e. uneconomically productive), detached from civic processes and not alive to the danger that the current leadership crisis portends for their individual and collective prospects for the future.

Whereas there seems to be progress in terms of real estate, telecommunications and the leisure industries, these are superficial at best. The same is true for macro-economic indicators such as Gross Domestic Product which have increased every year but without a tangible improvement in terms of disposable income for the lowest rungs of the economic ladder.

He stated that as opposed to his days at the university when he and his colleagues were attentive to the political situation in the country, the youth today have resigned themselves to this question and are instead concerned with less important trivialities.

He called for a united front that is not defined by political party affiliation, religious or ethnic differences to close ranks behind a shared goal/unity of purpose.

The discussant Dr Zaid Mpaata pointed out that the solutions to this ought to be pursued after elaborate thought, consultation and engagement across the spectrum of opinions. He relied very heavily on President Barack Obama's campaign posture and message. This he advanced by saying that if the youth want to impress the ideas that they hold upon any body's mind, they should tailor

¹ 78% of Ugandans are below 25 and half of that 78% is below 15 years of age



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their message uniquely, undertake grassroots mobilization to ensure a functional and countrywide structure to support their mobilization and other activity. The plenary was moderated by Ms Mbasuuta Mary on behalf of the Director Ms Regis Namuddu and ended at 4.45PM