

## **Dialogue on Belonging, Identity, and Resilience at Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology**

On 30th August 2025, fellows of the KPPC 2<sup>nd</sup> program convened at Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology for a reflective and challenging session titled “*Dialogue on Dialogue, Identity, and Resilience: Reimagining Education for Healing and Inclusion.*” The session formed a critical part of the School’s engagement with higher education spaces as laboratories for peacebuilding, civic learning, and living with difference.

Hosted at MMUST, the dialogue was facilitated by Dr. Mandilla, a lecturer whose scholarship and practice focus on identity, leadership, and social resilience. She guided participants through foundational concepts of dialogue emphasizing listening, reflexivity, and humility as well as the role of identity in shaping how individuals and communities relate to one another. A central focus of her session was bias: its different forms, how it is socially produced, and the difficult but necessary work of learning to live with bias rather than denying its existence. For many fellows, this framing was both intellectually grounding and practically relevant, especially in contexts marked by ethnic, political, and cultural polarization.

Participants engaged deeply with the material, reflecting on how unexamined biases shape leadership, exclusion, and conflict. The discussion resonated strongly with fellows’ lived experiences across Kenya, Uganda, and Congo, reinforcing the importance of dialogue as a tool not for agreement, but for coexistence.

A pivotal moment emerged during the question-and-answer session. A fellow from Congo posed a direct and deeply personal question: “*If one day your son came home to introduce his lover, and you found out that the lover was gay, what would you do?*” The room fell silent. Dr. Mandilla chose not to engage the question directly, instead redirecting the conversation. Her hesitation was noticeable, and for many fellows, it became the most instructive moment of the session.

This silence revealed something profound. It exposed belonging and the limits of dialogue, even within academic and pedagogical spaces committed to openness and inclusion. The moment underscored a central insight of the KPPC–CEDAR pedagogy: that while dialogue expands our capacity to live with difference, it does not erase deeply held beliefs, cultural boundaries, or non-negotiables. As one fellow reflected afterward, “*Even in safe spaces, there are non-negotiables. That is also part of learning to live with difference.*”

Rather than undermining the session, this moment enriched it. It demonstrated that dialogue is not about forcing resolution or consensus, but about recognizing boundaries honestly and learning how to live together amid unresolved tensions. The encounter affirmed that resilience personal, institutional, and communal often begins with acknowledging discomfort rather than avoiding it.

The MMUST dialogue thus became a living lesson in the practice of peace education: showing that education for healing and inclusion must grapple not only with what can be said, but also with what remains unsaid. In doing so, it offered fellows a deeper, more honest understanding of dialogue as both a possibility and a limit and a vital tool for navigating difference in complex societies.