1. **University World News**  
**How to train data scientists (South Africa)**  
The world is inundated with data. There’s a virtual tsunami of data moving around the globe, renewing itself daily. Take just the global financial markets. They generate vast amounts of data – share prices, commodity prices, indices, option and futures prices, to name just a few. But data is of no use if there aren’t people able to collect, collate, analyse and apply it to the benefit of society. All that data generated by global financial markets gets used for asset and wealth management – and it must be properly analysed and understood to inform good decision making. That’s where data science comes in. Data science’s primary aim is to extract insight from data in various forms, both structured and unstructured. It’s a multi-disciplinary field, involving everything from applied mathematics to statistics and artificial intelligence to machine learning. And it’s growing. This is because of advances in computer technology and processing speed, the relatively low cost to store data, and the massive availability of data from the internet and other sources such as global financial markets. For data science to happen, of course, you need data scientists. Because data science is so wide in scope, being a data scientist covers a range of professions. These include statisticians, operations researchers, engineers, computer scientists, actuaries, physicists and machine learners. This variety isn’t necessarily a bad thing. From my own practical experience, I quickly learnt that when solving data science problems, you need a range of people. Some can work in depth on theory and others can explore the application area. But how should these data scientists be trained so they’re prepared for the big data challenges that lie ahead? Data scientists typically use innovative mathematical techniques from their own subfields to try and solve problems in a particular application area. The application areas – finance, health, agriculture and astronomy are just some examples – are very different. This means that each poses different problems, and so data scientists need knowledge about the particular application area.  
Read more [here](#)

2. **University World News**  
**Funders, public key to growing research capacity – Study (Africa)**  
African-led organisations and initiatives that are geared towards research capacity strengthening in Africa are failing to properly take account of either funders or the general public – two ‘populations’ that could have a positive influence on boosting research capacity, a new study suggests. According to a recent (non-peer-reviewed) study published by the Collaboration for Research Excellence in Africa (CORE Africa) in January on the preprint repository, bioRxiv, out of the 11 African organisations* selected, all had programmes aimed at building the capacity of researchers and academics but none of them targeted funders or the general public. All 11 of the organisations selected had an online presence and were based in South Africa, Malawi, Mozambique, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Nigeria. Researchers were found to be a high-priority group for research capacity strengthening (RCS), targeted by a majority (73%) of the identified RCS organisations. Academics, research institutions and policymakers were all medium priorities, targeted by 66%, 46% and 46% of the RCS organisations, respectively.
The study found that 82% of the RCS organisations had programmes or initiatives providing research education and research training opportunities, while only 45% of the RCS organisations offered job opportunities to researchers. Providing funding and facilitating the utilisation of research findings were seen to be low priorities and the two population groups not targeted by RCS organisations were funders and the general public. The study notes that without direct access to local communities, funders are forced to rely on programme outcomes, effectiveness and gaps in order to make decisions about funding. “Targeting funders in the RCS process and bringing this information to them is therefore key to establishing a negotiating position vis-a-vis funding for RCS in Africa,” the study notes. It recommends that RCS organisations in Africa develop initiatives that help funders understand what works to improve research capacity in Africa, to inform funding decisions for effective and sustainable programmes. Concerning the general public, the study notes that because the “overall aim” of RCS is to be able to address challenges that affect the general population, it is important that the public understands the need for research to foster appreciation of that need and to create opportunities for engagement in research by the general public. “Public understanding of the need for research can help generate interest in research, improve research literacy and influence the use of research knowledge. Such understanding could also help create new funding streams to support research in Africa. For example, families with members suffering from chronic illnesses could be influenced through their understanding about research to pool funds for research towards a particular disease.”

Read more here

3. University World News

Centres of Excellence meet to learn, share experiences (Africa)

African Centres of Excellence (ACEs) and their partners converged last Monday in Djibouti for an inaugural ACE Impact workshop and boot camp aimed at strengthening research and development programmes, nurturing innovation and learning from shared experiences. According to a media release, the meeting will provide a platform for the centres to obtain guidance on project preparation, exchange information on their respective programmes, and build networks and forge partnerships to ensure the successful implementation of the project. It will also create an opportunity for the new ACEs to interact and learn from existing centres. ACE I centres will also have the opportunity to discuss ongoing activities and progress, share experiences and strengthen their impact on the continent’s development challenges, as they work towards the closing of the ACE I project, it said. The first Africa Higher Education Centres of Excellence (ACE I) project was launched in Western and Central Africa by the World Bank in 2014 to support higher education sectors specialising in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), agriculture and health. In 2016, the second ACE project (ACE II) was launched in Eastern and Southern Africa. The ACEs are an innovative regional response to make higher education more relevant to Africa’s development. As part of ACE I, 22 centres have been financed by the World Bank in a total amount of US$165 million. These are currently being implemented in universities in Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d’Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal and Togo. ACE II has 24 centres across Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia, financed by a further US$148 million. ACE I is currently in its final year of implementation. Based on its successes, the World Bank and the French Development Agency (AFD) in collaboration
with the African governments, have conditionally identified 44 ACEs (26 new ones and 18 from ACE I), five emerging centres, and five colleges and schools of engineering for funding through a new phase called 'ACE Impact' which is awaiting World Bank and AFD approval. ACE Impact will be implemented in universities in 12 countries, all nine participating countries under ACE I with three additional countries including Djibouti, Guinea and Niger. ACE Impact will strengthen postgraduate training and applied research in existing fields and support new fields that are essential for Africa's economic growth. In addition to the areas of postgraduate training offered by the existing 22 ACEs, the new ACE Impact also covers the following: sustainable cities; sustainable power and energy; social sciences and education; transport; population health and policy; herbal medicine development and regulatory sciences; public health; applied informatics and communication; and pastoral production. 

Read more here

4. University World News

26 universities face probe over unapproved courses (Kenya)

Kenya is investigating 26 universities for offering unapproved courses after revelations by the sector regulator that have rekindled concerns over the country’s higher education quality. The regulator, the Commission for University Education (CUE), said the universities were offering 133 degree courses which are yet to be approved for varying reasons, exposing over 10,000 students to disruptions in preparations for their careers. This came to the fore as the Kenya Universities and Colleges Central Placement Service (KUCCPS) – the agency that manages enrolment to various universities – was in the process of completing the 2019 admissions exercise. This has raised questions over the validity of the programmes the continuing students are pursuing, while throwing into a spin and compromising those planning to join universities after the distribution that is expected to end on 23 February. While CUE has maintained that there was no need for the affected students to panic as this was a “normal finding”, educationists see this as a major indictment of the country’s education sector that has for years attracted praise and criticism in equal measure. The revelation was the subject of intense social media attention over the past days, with the focus shifting onto why the regulator allowed the universities to continue offering the programmes without prior approval. The University Act, the law that governs Kenya’s higher education sector, requires that every university must seek clearance from CUE before rolling out programmes. CUE is also expected to conduct regular checks on universities to ascertain the quality of courses being offered and whether institutions are compliant with the covenants they signed up to, before receiving approval for the programmes. In this particular case, the regulator has admitted that the programmes are already being offered by the institutions without proper clearance. “We are settling the matter with the universities. Some of the courses were not submitted to us and in others we used feedback received from universities about their capacities. We used our standards and calculated capacities for programmes against the information the universities declared,” CUE Chief Executive Mwenda Ntarangwi said on Monday, a day after the report became public via a KUCCPS disclosure. As a result of the intense public outcry over the revelations, CUE has come out to defend its position while assuring continuing students that their studies will not be disrupted. CUE, through its Chairman Professor Nyaigoti Chacha, said on Wednesday this week that the Commission was working closely with the affected universities on the compliance issues raised. The universities have
however been allowed to admit new students for the courses. The regulator also said it has suspended approval of new courses for all universities until the outstanding compliance gaps are addressed. CUE said it is also reviewing the depth and substance of university programmes to eliminate unit duplication and shallow course content.

Read More [here](#)

5. **City Press**  
**Government to regulate university fees – Minister (South Africa)**  
Citing costs having escalated to the point of unaffordability, education minister pledges to change the institutional autonomy decree. In the wake of national student protests regarding university registration fees, the clearance of historic debt, accommodation and other issues, the department of higher education and training wants to regulate tuition fees at universities. If this move succeeds, it will be a victory for those advocating fee-free higher education. On Friday, Higher Education Minister Naledi Pandor told City Press on the sidelines of a media briefing in Pretoria that a legal framework was on the cards to regulate tuition fees at 26 public universities in the country. The changes, set to come into effect next year, will eventually do away with an autonomy decree, which allows universities to determine their own fees. The autonomy of universities was among the points contested during the 2017 commission of inquiry into the feasibility of fee-free higher education, which was chaired by retired judge Jonathan Heher. The commission was appointed by former president Jacob Zuma following violent #FeesMustFall and #OutsourcingMustFall protests, which took place at historically white universities in 2016. The commission’s report made various recommendations, including suggesting a way to obtain funding through a cost-sharing model of government guaranteed income-contingency loans sourced from commercial banks. However, in December 2017, at the ANC’s national elective conference in Nasrec, Johannesburg, Zuma announced that government – through the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (Nsfas) – would subsidise students from poor and working-class households with a combined annual income of up to R350 000. This would be phased in over five years, starting with the 2018 first-year intake. Pandor said having regulatory legislation for university fees was necessary because fees had escalated to levels that were unaffordable for the poor.

Read more [here](#)

6. **AL-FANAR MEDIA**  
**Government shuts down all universities as protest mounts (Sudan)**  
Mounting protests against President Omar al-Bashir’s government in Sudan have resulted in the government closing all of the country’s universities. Al-Sadiq al-Mahdi, Sudan’s Minister of Higher Education, announced the suspension of study at 38 public universities and about 100 private higher education institutions after the outbreak of popular demonstrations against the country’s punishing economic conditions and the increased cost of living. Sudan has lost three quarters of its oil production since the split of South Sudan in 2011 and continues to be affected by the remnants of economic sanctions. Al-Mahdi’s decision was confirmed by Mohammed al-Khair Abdul Rahman, director of Sinnar University, who explained in a statement to university students that the disruption was “to alleviate the suffering of students in the current circumstances,” according to SUNA, the state news agency. But Mohamed Yousif, a professor at Khartoum University’s Faculty of Economics,
disagrees with that view. He says the country is closing its universities due to the government’s fear of a revolution. “It will be difficult to suppress student protests by university guards, and it will be difficult for university guards to control or prevent incidents of violence because of their weak equipment,” said Yousif, who is also the spokesman for the Sudanese Professionals Association, a nongovernmental union with many academic members that was founded secretly after the country’s protests in September 2013 and went public last August. In 1964, clashes between police and students at the University of Khartoum eventually escalated into a protest movement that toppled the military dictator Ibrahim Abboud, in power at that time. All Sudanese now face steep inflation. An end to government subsidies has resulted in sharp increases in the cost of bread, cooking gas, and fuel. Although the United States has lifted economic sanctions on Sudan, it still lists the country as a state sponsor of terrorism, and that status continues the economic isolation that is strangling the Sudanese economy.

Read more [here](#)

### 7. The New Dawn

**Students cite poor learning conditions at universities (Liberia)**

Students from various universities and colleges here have made several suggestions aimed at improving the learning environment of students in Liberia. Their suggestions were made recently in Monrovia during a one-day engagement dubbed “Youth Speak Forum 2019.” In their suggestions to the government, the students call for the creation of avenues to provide vocational and technical education for young people that lack careers.

The students want government to focus more on the development of technological advancement of students in universities and colleges through the introduction of technology as part of their studies. They believe that when students acquire these skills, they will have the opportunity to compete with other students in other parts of the world. The students acknowledge that government cannot do everything for the student population here, making further suggestion that private companies and institutions operating here help the government to employ qualified young people.

Meanwhile, the Secretary General for Program at the Federation of Liberian Youth (FLY) Mr. Ernest Duku Jallah has argued that there are dozens of qualified young people who are in dire need of jobs. According to Jallah, private entities can assist government by hiring their services, noting that the young people can actively contribute to the social and economic development of the country when they are employed by private companies and institutions.

Read more [here](#)
8. Regional Week

The education quality evaluation in the public higher institutions has been officially launched (Burundi)

The Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Mr. Gaspard Banyankimbona, proceeded, in the premises of the University of Burundi on Monday, February 18, 2019, with the official launch of evaluation of the education quality provided in public higher education institutions. The assessment began on Tuesday, February 19, 2019, by the University of Burundi. In the missions entrusted to him by the Burundian State, Minister Banyankimbona has the latitude to make this assessment, given that the quality of university education or public higher education institutions is not negotiable, adding that a team of 50 evaluators was put in place to do that work for seven days. Mr. Banyankimbona further stated that the evaluation will focus on teaching staff, procedural manuals and the number of titles assigned to heads of different departments. The minister also said that after the assessment, the National East African Community Council and the Malagasy National Council will come to gauge the quality and relevance of the lessons taught in Burundi. Mr. Banyankimbona also said that this official launch comes six months after the beginning of the diagnosis of higher education in Burundi which began in August 2018 by the evaluation of private higher education universities. He specified on that occasion that universities must constantly learn to reinvent themselves, integrate new knowledge and take advantage of new technologies, in order to cover the needs of the country and ensure competitiveness at national, sub-regional and even international level, through an affluent exchange of students from the world.

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