Media Monitoring: Extract of Press News on Higher Education in Africa

1. University World News
Low number of scholars impedes regional economic growth (Africa)
Sub-Saharan Africa will struggle to catch up with the rest of the world in economic expansion due to its comparatively low contribution to research and innovation, according to speakers at the recent Young Scholars in Africa Conference hosted by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). “Africa produces alarmingly few junior scientists and other young scholars. This is contrary to most countries’ political and economic aspirations to become middle-income and knowledge societies,” DAAD President, Professor Margret Wintermantel, told the gathering. At least 150 participants from 23 African countries and Europe, most of them former recipients of DAAD scholarships, attended the meeting in Nairobi from 1-3 March aimed at finding avenues to overcome the challenges facing young African scholars and at promoting scholarly careers. One of the major factors inhibiting growth in research is the relatively small budget allocation to research and development by national governments. At 0.5%, expenditure on research and development in the region is far below the world average of 1.68%, according to DAAD figures. Of this funding, the government bears the biggest share of research and development expenditure in the region. However, over the past few years, a growing number of countries such as Kenya and Senegal are tapping foreign sources for their research and development spending. South Africa has a comparatively high proportion funded by the business sector. In the Sub-Saharan region, research output is dominated by natural science subjects with health sciences forming the largest share, while social sciences (including arts and humanities) and life sciences take the smallest share. “Government funding for higher education in general is under strain, with institutions prioritising funding for their undergraduate provision. The proportions of university budgets allocated to research and PhD provision are low,” according to a DAAD paper tabled at the conference. Read more here

2. University World News
The power of scholarships in a time of poor research funds (Africa)
By reaching a higher level of education, scholarship holders increase their chances of appropriate employment and obtaining a leadership position. Therefore, Africa needs to overhaul its higher education systems to foster research in universities, attract quality scholarships and reduce over-reliance on government funding. This was the verdict of researchers, policy experts, lecturers and education sector investors drawn from across the world who attended the Young Scholars in Africa Conference organised by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) on 1-3 March in Nairobi, Kenya. The DAAD conference was geared towards promoting young scholars at universities to become the scientists, lecturers, researchers and professionals of tomorrow. The participants, most of them former recipients of DAAD scholarships, explained ways in which government and private sector players can help overcome the challenges that young African scholars are facing in unleashing their full potential. To raise the status of Africa’s higher education systems in the global arena, speakers at the conference said there was a need for governments and private financiers to provide seed funding to students to continue with research after attaining their PhDs. This would effectively
help them translate research work into publishable work in recognised journals. “We need to address institutional barriers that hinder the success of early career scientists. Tailoring funding to meet the needs of early career scientists will enable them to attend scientific conferences,” said Professor Axel-Cyrille Ngonga Ngomo, who teaches Data Science at Paderborn University, Paderborn, Germany. To support this demand, DAAD is looking at enhancing scholarships as well as promoting collaborative projects of German universities with partner institutions abroad. This will see more investment going into curriculum development, staff training, addressing the sustainable development goals in teaching and research and creating a stronger link between universities and industry. According to DAAD President Professor Margret Wintermantel, young academics as future university lecturers, researchers or professionals play a key role in research and the development of education systems.

Read more [here](#).

3. University World News

**New online course helps to plug doctoral supervision gap (Africa)**

A new online course for doctoral supervisors is aimed at building the capacity of higher education staff in the face of growing demand for PhDs throughout the African continent and concomitant low completion and high student dropout rates. The Centre for Research on Evaluation, Science and Technology (CREST) and the Centre for Higher and Adult Education, both at Stellenbosch University in South Africa, and the Centre for Higher Education Research, Teaching and Learning at Rhodes University in South Africa joined forces to develop the course. “If you want PhDs, you need supervisors,” Professor Jan Botha, one of the training facilitators based at CREST, told University World News. Africa’s enhanced participation in the global knowledge economy calls for many more talented Africans who have been educated to the highest academic levels, and individuals who understand the socio-economic challenges of African countries, and are committed to the development of the continent, he said. Botha said the link between the availability of high-level talent, PhD graduates and enhanced socio-economic development has been argued convincingly by academics such as Spanish sociologist. Several African countries, including Kenya and Nigeria, have introduced policies requiring a PhD for employment as an academic staff member at a university, moves which have triggered increased enrolment into PhD programmes, resulting in the need for more well-prepared doctoral supervisors at African universities, said Botha. “We chose online learning for this course because professors do not have time, it saves a lot of money as people do not have to travel across the continent to come to the university for training, and it is flexible,” he said. The idea for a doctoral supervisor’s course was mooted at the Dialogue on Innovative Higher Education Strategies Programme organised by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) in collaboration with the Inter-University Council for East Africa in Nairobi in September 2016.

Read more [here](#).
4. University World News

**One last chance to save a bastion of higher education (South Sudan)**

The University of Juba has been a pole of stability, a bastion of higher education, and a symbol of resilience in South Sudan over the last five years. This is despite the enormous economic, security and political challenges the country has been facing since the outbreak of civil war in 2013. Seemingly defying the downward pull of the gravity, the University of Juba has in recent years witnessed major transformation on several fronts that include, but are not limited to, improved physical environment, academic stability, rising professors and student numbers, and significant expansion in postgraduate programmes. In fact, the number of students enrolling in undergraduate programmes alone at this premier university in March 2019 has risen to 15,000; the highest since South Sudan gained its independence in July 2011. The number of academic staff also rose from a modest 300 in 2014 to about 600 in January 2017, before beginning to decline for reasons to be explained in this article. Postgraduate programmes have grown from about five or six programmes in 2014 to 31 programmes by March 2019; and still counting. What’s more, about 8,000 students have graduated from the university since 2015. That is an average of 2,000 graduates a year. Generally speaking, over the same period the numbers of academic staff and students had been declining in most public universities in the rest of South Sudan, due to the lack of financial support, declining value of staff salaries and stagnant tuition fees, and political interference in the affairs of the universities. However, two things in particular are hurting the University of Juba and the public tertiary education institutions most – the fixed salaries and tuition fees, both of which have been declining in real value due to depreciation of the national currency against the dollar. The cost of operating the university as well as consumer prices have increased 3,000 fold since January 2016, while precious little has changed in the salaries received by the professors at public universities and the tuition fees paid by the students. A medical student paid annual tuition fees of SSP5,000 in 2014 and 2015. This was worth more than US$1,500 at the official exchange rate of the time. At today’s exchange rate, SSP5,000 is worth US$18. In 2016, the University of Juba administration tripled the tuition fees so that medical students paid SSP15,000 which was worth US$200, while social science students were required to pay SSP6,000 (US$80) annually. The government intervened and cancelled the fee rise, fearing student demonstrations.

Read more [here](#).

5. University World News

**Building a higher education sector needs more than high hopes (Botswana)**

Botswana is a relatively new country, gaining its independence in 1966. Unfortunately, in the former Bechuanaland British Protectorate, the previous administrative entity in this territory, there had been no interest in building an educational system. In fact no secondary school had been established during 81 years of British rule. During that period, the country had a meagre total of 677 qualified primary school teachers. Against this backdrop one cannot help but admire the efforts of this brave new nation to move away from a situation of almost complete illiteracy to close to 90% literacy in 2014, according to the National Literacy Survey published in 2016. Until 1982, Botswana did not have its own autonomous higher education institution. In 1964 the common University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland (UBLS) was established and operated until 1974 with its headquarters in Lesotho. Following that, the University of Botswana and Swaziland (UBS) functioned in Swaziland.
between 1975 and 1976. In 1982, the University of Botswana (UB), the country’s first autonomous higher education institution, opened its doors, a development that was made possible through public donations with each family donating as much as it could from their household, including livestock such as cows and goats. At the time of its establishment, UB was entirely focused on the “education of educators”. Today, there are 14 universities recognised by the government. They include both public and private institutions and four are dedicated primarily to education studies. In addition to the University of Botswana, these include Botho University, Limkokwing University and BA ISAGO University College. Like the University of Botswana, specialised institutions such as the Botswana University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (BUAN), originally established in 1991 as Botswana College of Agriculture (BCA), and the Botswana International University of Science and Technology (BIUST), founded in 2005 but operational since 2012, are particularly important. In the case of BUAN, its mandate is to produce “quality graduates for the agricultural sector through innovative teaching and research”. For BIUST it is “to produce world-class research in science, engineering and technology, contributing to industry growth and development of a diversified knowledge-based economy”. It is difficult in such a short period to establish a functional higher education system. First, a country must build a sound pre-university system. There are obvious successes in this enterprise: the number of qualified teachers increased from 677 (only primary school teachers) in 1966 to 5,186 in 1985 and to about 23,000 (primary and secondary school teachers) in 2009.

Read more here.

6. University World News

Universities vs TVET – Are attitudes the problem? (Ethiopia)

Technical and vocational education has become a vital component of many educational systems due to its importance in helping students to develop the technical and practical skills needed to improve their livelihood and to be competitive in today’s ever-changing world. The Ethiopian education system attaches significance to technical and vocational education and training (TVET) as a mechanism for enhancing the country’s development. The main objective of the country’s TVET Strategy (2008) is “to create a competent, motivated, adaptable and innovative workforce in Ethiopia contributing to poverty reduction and social and economic development through facilitating demand-driven, high quality technical and vocational education and training, relevant to all sectors of the economy, at all levels and to all people”. TVET institutions have been identified as the major means of technology adaptation and transfer which can enhance national growth in line with the country’s Science, Technology and Innovation Policy (2012), the mission of which is “to create a technology framework that enables building national capabilities in technological learning, adaptation and utilisation through searching for, selecting and importing effective foreign technologies in manufacturing and service-providing enterprise”. Although TVET enjoys a long history in the Ethiopian education system, more emphasis has been made over the last two decades to develop a strengthened vocational-oriented training system, which has culminated in the development of an outcome-based system with a special focus on eight priority areas: agriculture, industry, economic infrastructure, health, hotel and tourism, trade, mining, and labour and social affairs. As experiences in many contexts would show, the success of TVET can be determined not only by measurement against specific goals but also by a variety of factors that may include....
economic benefits of the training system, quality of training offered and higher qualification routes made available to TVET graduates. There are increasing signs that TVET in the Ethiopian set-up is challenged by deficiencies in all these areas. An equally important hurdle has been the attitude held towards this level of training which requires serious attention. The educational structure in Ethiopia consists of eight years of primary education followed by four years of secondary education that is divided into general and upper secondary cycles. A national exam is given at the end of the general secondary cycle (grades 9-10) to identify students that would continue to a higher level. Those who score better are promoted to the second cycle of secondary school (grades 11 and 12), which is regarded as preparation for college or university.

Read more here

7. University World News

**What can be done about poorly performing universities? (Nigeria)**

Why are Nigeria’s universities in such a sorry state? Some would say it has to do with just one word – money. Sadly this is part of the reason. But not entirely. Nigeria’s universities have been under-funded for decades. Like a talented but under-achieving football team, they fail to achieve goals because the country hasn’t invested enough in their structure, their facilities and their people. Higher education in Nigeria includes universities (federal, state and private) as well as polytechnics (skills-intensive and experiential learning programmes) and colleges of education. With over 160 universities, 128 polytechnics and 177 colleges of education, it constitutes the largest higher education system in Africa. My colleague Professor Val Ekechukwu, the dean of engineering at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and I did a review of Nigeria’s top 12 universities to assess their academic output. This review was undertaken as part of a comparative assessment of Nigerian universities to other emerging global economies (Brazil, Turkey and Thailand). The review hasn’t been published in an academic journal but its contents have been made available to readers interested in the development of tertiary education in Nigeria via news outlets. We found that the country’s universities lag well behind equivalent emerging global economies like South Africa, Egypt, Thailand, Turkey and Brazil. They also lag behind traditional world leaders. We sourced the data for our paper from SciVal. This tracks the research performance of over 10,400 research institutions from 230 countries.

Read more here

8. University World News

**University academic workforce shows little ethnic diversity (Kenya)**

Ethnic patterns in the academic workforce of the public universities in Kenya indicate that most jobs are currently occupied by members of only five major tribes in a country of 43 ethnic groups, according to data from the Commission for University Education (CUE). Analysing the data, Dr Lynette Kisaka, the head of quality auditing at the CUE, in collaboration with professors Ellen Jansen and Adriaan Hofman, both from the University of Groningen in the Netherlands, found that ethnic workforce diversity in public universities has diminished. In a recently published study, “Workforce Diversity in Kenyan Public Universities: An analysis of workforce representativeness and heterogeneity by employee, gender and ethnic group”, the three researchers argue that the public university workforce complies with the one-third rules on ethnic diversity when viewed collectively,
but this is not the case within each university. Under the country’s Constitution of 2010, public institutions are required to observe ethnic diversity and no one ethnic group is allowed to exceed one-third of total employment. “Based on this criterion, out of 22 public chartered universities, only four have complied,” Kisaka told University World News in an interview in Nairobi. When the researchers looked into the proportion of ethnic communities in employment and compared it with their proportion in the national population, they found the Kikuyu, Luhyia, Kalenjin, Kisii and Luo communities to be over-represented in university employment databases, with the Kikuyu accounting for 24.91% of the total academic staff in public universities, followed by the Kalenjin at 16.03%, Luo 15.71%, Luhyia 14% and Kisii at 8.70%. This is in spite of the Kikuyu having a national population representation of 17.61%, Kalenjin 13.21%, Luhyia 14.19%, Luo 10.75% and Kisii 5.86%. According to the study, 13 ethnic groups are heavily under-represented, led by the Turkana at 0.03%, Kenyan Somali (0.05%), Tharaka (0.05%), Samburu (0.23%), Kuria (0.23%) and Mbeere (0.25%). Others include the Pokomo, Pokot, Rendille, Bajuni and Nubians, with most of them having fewer than 10 of their members teaching in the public university education system. The lack of diversity in public universities in Kenya is also expressed in the under-representation of women, despite the fact that the Constitution mandates public institutions to comply with the two-thirds gender rule. Under the rule, no gender should exceed 66.6% of the workforce. “Whereas the collective university workforce complies with the two-thirds gender rule, four public universities have failed to comply,” states the study. At the time of going to press these were Pwani University, Dedan Kimathi University of Technology, the Technical University of Mombasa and Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology.

9. University World News

In the drive for more researchers, do we neglect teaching? (South Africa)

With the current focus on the need for more early-career researchers, has South African academia lost sight of the importance of teaching? Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) at the University of Johannesburg, Professor Angina Parekh, threw a curve ball to her heavyweight collection of peers at the Universities South Africa-Association of Commonwealth Universities early-career researcher symposium last week when she bemoaned the strong emphasis at the two-day indaba on the development of young researchers without any focus on teaching. “From the little I’ve heard [in discussions about early career research], there has been no emphasis on teaching, which to me is an oversight… there has been no connection with teaching. Certainly, what’s missing in the conversation is the teaching-research nexus,” she said. “We can’t be talking about research without talking about teaching,” she said. Delegates at the symposium, held at the University of Johannesburg, included vice-chancellors Professor Tshilidzi Marwala (University of Johannesburg), Professor Adam Habib (University of the Witwatersrand or Wits), Professor Sizwe Mabizela (Rhodes University), and Professor Francis Petersen (University of the Free State). Twenty of South Africa’s 26 public universities, including academics from Nigeria and Zimbabwe, took part in the indaba. Discussions focused on ongoing efforts at several South African universities, including Stellenbosch, Pretoria and Cape Town, to develop early-career researcher capacity. Raising concerns about inadequate resources invested in teaching at the undergraduate level, Parekh said: “How do we focus on it [the teaching-research nexus] at undergraduate research level
and ensure that the curriculum prepares young students for research and teaching from the first year? “We should be engaging them from day one but there’s no money from government to support undergraduates, with the bulk of the money going to support the development of senior academics. We should start there [with undergraduates] and not at postgraduate level,” she said. Turning her attention to the recipients of the South African Research Chairs Initiative established in 2006 by the Department of Science and Technology and the National Research Foundation to attract and retain excellence in research and innovation at South African public universities, she said: “I understand fully and support the need for such a system but find problematic the requirement for professors not to teach. As a result, many students will not be exposed to the country’s top academics.”

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