

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

University World News

1. Region is not reaping rewards of Higher Education investment – Study (Africa)

Universities in Sub-Saharan Africa have failed to equip the region's fast-growing youth population with market-driven skills needed for prosperous and equitable societies, and the region's countries are not reaping the rewards of their investment in tertiary education, according to a new study by the World Bank. The report, *The Skills Balancing Act in Sub-Saharan Africa: Investing in skills for productivity, inclusivity, and adaptability*, argues that despite massive university education expansion in the last decade, most countries in the region are losing ground when it comes to providing access to higher education. According to Omar Arias, lead researcher of the study and manager for global knowledge and innovation at the World Bank, and his associate Indhira Santos, a senior labour economist, the average gross enrolment ratio in tertiary education stands at about 10% in Sub-Saharan Africa, but in some countries it is much lower. "In more than a third of countries in the region, university enrolment is below 5%," noted the two researchers. Although university enrolment in Sub-Saharan Africa has historically lagged behind other global regions, what is worrying observers and stakeholders is that enrolment has taken an elitist path, effectively being rationed to a subset of youth from richer backgrounds. According to the study, the selection process has been persistently skewed in favour of the richest 20% of the population. For instance, in Malawi, the study shows that only 1% of students enrolled in universities come from households in the bottom 20% of the income distribution, while another 3% come from the second poorest quintile. "In contrast, 80% of university students in Malawi come from the richest 20% of the population," said Arias. Overall in the region, gross enrolment ratios in tertiary education stand at 16% among the richest quintile of the population, but at only 2% among the poorest. In urban Kenya, having both parents with secondary education makes a person 3.5 times more likely to attend university. In this regard the report is urging African countries to break with the past and start making smart investments in university education geared towards developing skills aligned with goals of productivity growth and social inclusion, in order to accelerate development. What is emerging is that the region is not getting value from its investment in tertiary education. On average, Sub-Saharan Africa is spending US\$2,445 per student per year, which is three times more than what other low- and lower-middle-income countries spend. But despite such heavy investment in higher education in the last 30 years, building of skills by the universities has almost collapsed. "Systems for building skills have fallen short, and these shortcomings have impeded economic prospects," stated the report. The report is pushing African countries to look afresh at the expansion of university education that had been going on in Sub-Saharan Africa in the last two decades. According to the report, while expanding access to higher education is commendable, there is urgent need to start managing university education more carefully.

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2. [To fill capacity gaps, universities need to work in synergy \(Africa\)](#)

A recent study by the Africa Capacity Building Foundation has revealed that the continent has only about 55,000 engineers against an estimated 4.3 million required, Secretary General of the Association of African Universities (AAU) Professor Etienne Ehouan Ehilé has said. Speaking at the opening of the 20th AAU Conference of Rectors, Vice-Chancellors and Presidents of African Universities (COREVIP) in Cairo on 8 July, he said there was therefore the need to produce over 300,000 every year until 2023. Ehilé said similar capacity gaps had been found in other areas, 10 years after the implementation of the Africa Union's Agenda 2063. "We have about 21,000 geologists against an estimated 174,000 needed and about 82,000 agricultural scientists out of an estimated 152,000 required," he said. Agenda 2063, which comprises five 10-year plans launched in 2015, is a strategic framework for the socio-economic transformation of the continent over 50 years. It builds on, and seeks to accelerate, the implementation of past and existing continental initiatives for growth and sustainable development. In light of the capacity gaps, he said there was a need for African institutions of higher learning to become innovative and work in synergy to establish stronger networks among themselves in the spirit of South-South collaboration. Ehilé commended Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt, which he said is a high-ranking institution that has opened its doors to Africa and the world, enrolling more than 40,000 international students, describing it as "a remarkable achievement in this era of internationalisation". Ehilé said the AAU is committed to ensuring that higher education institutions on the continent deliver "education that is capable of producing the high quality human capital and research needed for accelerated socio-economic development of our society". "This commitment is what guided us in organising this COREVIP, whose key rationale is to promote intellectual engagement by interrogating the contributions of African higher education to the achievement of the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16-25)," Ehilé said. Ehilé said CESA 16-25 remains one of the three main pillars of the African Union's Agenda 2063, which outlines Africa's colossal development issues and the need to fully tap into the youthful population in order to reap the demographic dividends for sustainable development. "The obvious message from CESA 16-25 is the need for the higher education sector in Africa to understand, own and fully commit itself to the continent's drive for sustainable development solutions."

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3. [Female-friendly approaches can bridge digital gender divide \(Africa\)](#)

Analysis of female university student participation in learning and use of software packages conducted by a Nigerian university shows that women have a higher success rate than men, and points to the need for female-friendly learning approaches to overcome participation constraints and close the gender ICT gap. The analysis was outlined in a paper entitled "Female participation in learning and use of software packages in Nigeria: Case of SAP ERP software in University of Ibadan, Nigeria." The paper was presented at the Conference of Rectors, Vice-Chancellors and Presidents of African Universities (COREVIP) that was held in Cairo, Egypt, from 8-11 July under the theme "The

Role of Higher Education Institutions in Promoting the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16-25)". The analysis used data obtained through a structured questionnaire and analysed using descriptive statistics for all participants (male and female) from 2015-17 at the University of Ibadan, one of 13 partner universities in Africa for the delivery of the Enterprise Systems Education For Africa (ESEFA) initiative. ESEFA aims to address the shortage of enterprise systems skills in Sub-Saharan African countries by enabling local universities to produce highly qualified information and communication technology (ICT) and enterprise resource planning (ERP) professionals through high quality enterprise system education programmes. The two-year study conducted from 2015-17 had 143 (23.1%) female participants from different course backgrounds. Over the years, the female participants achieved an 80% success rate and an overall success rate of 86% – higher than the 81.6% success rate for all participants and the 80.2% success rate for male participants. Lead author of the study Olubunmi Alawode, a lecturer in the department of agricultural economics at the University of Ibadan, said, as the study notes, the young women "did not lack confidence in their capacities in a male-dominated environment ... The female participants were fewer but more successful in the use of the software". SAP ERP (Systems Application Products Enterprise Resource Planning) is a German enterprise-wide information system software designed to coordinate all resources, information, and activities needed to complete business processes and measure performance. "In Nigeria, the expectations of female participants were very high and they were involved in the learning and use of SAP ERP software to give them a competitive advantage, diverse job responsibilities and higher positions in the workplace," the paper noted.

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4. **Fostering partnerships but not brain drain – A fine balance (Tunisia)**

Close links between Tunisian and German higher education systems are boosting Tunisia's higher education system, but both sides agree on the importance of encouraging Tunisian graduates to return home after exchange studies. The opening of a new German library at the faculty of arts, literature and humanities (FAHM) at Manouba University in Tunis on 28 May is a key example of Tunisian-German collaboration in higher education. Launched by the German ambassador, it was a public "declaration of renewed support", said FAHM Assistant Dean Professor Abderrazak Sayedi. He added that the purpose of the library, that was in part funded by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), was to give students the academic materials needed "to better study language, literature and culture". Stressing the importance of German-Tunisian academic links, Sayedi said: "For us the visit was very important; it was almost historic." The library is the last in a long line of German-Tunisian academic collaboration projects, which started before Tunisia's 2011 revolution that ushered in democracy. According to director of the Tunisian office of DAAD, Renate Dieterich, a lectureship teaching German at Manouba University has been in place since the late 1980s. The post is currently held by Dr Martina Moeller. The agency, funded by the German government, delivers various programmes supporting countries including Tunisia and was a principle source of funding for the new FAHM German library. Dieterich stressed the importance of DAAD's seven-year-old German-Arab Transformation Partnership aimed at democratic transition in North Africa and the Middle East. A portion of its funds are spent on higher education, with DAAD's total budget being

about €6 million (US\$6.75 million), and with Tunisia a key beneficiary along with Morocco, Libya, Jordan and Yemen. The majority of the support given is to fund exchange and scholarship programmes, increasing the number of Tunisian students taking up places in European Union (EU) Erasmus exchanges, from around 659 in 2012 to 965 students in 2018. Dieterich said in 2017 there were some 4,489 Tunisian students enrolled in German universities. One of the more innovative programmes has funded students to pursue post-doctoral research projects in their home countries, something that DAAD hopes will counter the risk that Tunisian students pursuing studies in Germany will not return home upon graduation. Tunisian universities are in sore need of the academic talent that returning graduates would bring, given that austerity measures within the government's 2018 finance bill cut higher education spending, sparking public protests. FAHM's German department has certainly felt the effects of austerity. Senior linguist and German language professor Dr Maïke Bouassida told University World News: "A few years ago we lost four teachers in a natural way, to retirement. What is not natural though is the fact that no replacement of these retired colleagues has taken place until today."

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5. [China takes steps to implement vocational education plan \(Africa-China\)](#)

China appears to be making good on promises made at the September 2018 Beijing Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) to strengthen China-Africa relations in higher education. A two-day meeting of experts in higher education held in Kampala, Uganda, last week agreed to build a China-Africa vocational education model and community for future interaction and cooperation. The meeting, China-Africa Vocational Education Academic Exchange 2019, discussed the role of vocational education in development and was attended by higher education experts from Uganda, China, Tanzania, Ethiopia and Kenya. John Chrysestom Muyingo, Uganda's state minister for higher education, said Uganda was skilling its young people to create employment and was also upgrading six institutes into centres of excellence to offer training. Ma Bo, the principal of Sunmaker Oil and Gas Institute, a Chinese skills training school in Uganda, said African countries are making efforts to reform the vocational and technical education and training system to meet the market needs. Chen Huixin, a counsellor from the Chinese embassy in Uganda, said the two countries know that education is the foundation for development and attach great importance to it. The meeting, held under the theme "Build a community of shared future for mankind and build a bright future for China-Africa vocational education", was attended by 16 institutes from China and 40 institutes from Africa. Memoranda of understanding were signed between institutes from China and Africa to promote bilateral and multilateral international cooperation. The cooperation will deliver on the outcomes of the Luban workshops, named after the father of Chinese architecture, Lu Ban, from around the 4th century BC, and designed by the Tianjin government. The workshops will be set up in Africa to provide vocational training for young Africans, as announced by Chinese President Xi Jinping at the September 2018 Beijing FOCAC Summit.

The Luban workshops programme was designed to provide technical and vocational training, promote modern vocational education reforms, and enhance collaboration among vocational schools around the world.

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6. [University staff say they cannot afford to work \(Zimbabwe\)](#)

University workers in Zimbabwe say their salaries have been seriously eroded by inflation – so much so they can no longer subsist on them, let alone report for work. In recent weeks, workers' committees at the University of Zimbabwe (UZ), Lupane State University (LSU) and Midlands State University (MSU) have written to their respective university authorities demanding reduced working days, free transport, lunch and free on-campus accommodation. In one such memo, Hlavati Taderera, the workers' committee representative at UZ, said high transport, food and rental costs had left workers in dire straits. To ameliorate the situation for workers, Taderera requested that the workers report for work two days a week until the situation has improved. He also suggested that student accommodation be made available to staff who can no longer report for work. Nkululeko Sibanda, president of the workers' committee at LSU, situated about 100 kilometres from the country's second biggest city Bulawayo, said staff salaries had fallen ten-fold since the introduction of the local RTGS (real time gross settlement) currency early this year, and continued to plummet. Like UZ workers, LSU workers demanded that they report to work once a week. They also called for free transport or a reasonable transport allowance, free lunch and free on-campus accommodation to enable the smooth operations of the university. Sibanda said the issue of poor salaries cuts across all universities in Zimbabwe. "Our salaries have depreciated so badly that, for example, LSU staff with families living in Bulawayo cannot afford to work in Lupane and be with their families in Bulawayo over the weekend," he told University World News. "The purchasing power of workers' salaries has depreciated so badly that what they used to buy with it this time last year, they can only buy a fifth of that, with the same salaries now. It has also to do with the incapacitation of university in terms of funding. Approved budgets for universities are now virtually meaningless. So, at the end of the day, the discharge of duties is affected because people are failing to balance their personal and public lives at work," he said. A memo from MSU staff indicated that lecturers now earned the equivalent of US\$200 per month while another source said the lowest worker could be earning approximately ZWD635 (US\$79) at the interbank rate.

Read more [here](#)

Face2Face Africa

7. [This African university conducts exams without supervisors and cameras \(Ghana\)](#)

It is widely accepted that during examinations, invigilators are needed to check that no one is cheating and to ensure that exams are carried out according to the rules set by authorities.

Providing supervision helps to uphold the integrity of the examination process and to ensure that all candidates are under active surveillance for every moment of the examination. Founded in 2002 by educator and engineer Patrick Awuah, students of the school, who come from several places across Africa, have pledged to "hold themselves to account during exams not to cheat or tolerate those who do." Led by the Ashesi Student Council, the student body voted in 2008 to adopt an Examination Honour Code, the university said on its website. "Under the Code, students pledge to supervise themselves during exams, without any invigilation or external supervisors. The adoption of the Examination Honour Code marked a significant step in the history of Ashesi University. "The

code is intended to build a high-trust community, to put students in charge of their ethical posture and the reputation of their alma mater, and by so doing, to take a significant step in Ashesi’s mission to educate a new generation of ethical leaders in Africa,” the university explained. The novel scheme has since been praised by many people, with other schools looking at implementing same, considering the stress some invigilators take students through during an exam. Generally, exams are already challenging, and this can get worse for some candidates who complain of nosy invigilators standing over their shoulders to stare at what they have on paper. For such candidates, invigilators are a distraction and they would be better off without them. Nevertheless, such a move would require a huge promise from students to remain sincere throughout the process, a unique step Ashesi students took a decade ago. Since March 4, 2002, when Ashesi opened its doors to a pioneer class of 30 students in a single rented building in Labone in Ghana’s capital, Accra, the university, which is now located on a 100-acre campus in Berekuso, is home to over 1,000 students from across Africa. Having experienced immense growth, the school has expanded its degree offerings from Business Administration and Computer Science to degrees in Management Information Systems, Computer Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, Electrical and Electronic Engineering. Its students are also doing tremendously well in various fields of work across the world, an achievement the founder and president of the university, Awuah is so proud of.

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