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

1. University World News

College to university – Evolution shows national ambitions (Botswana)

As government authorities in Botswana envisage seeing their country becoming an education hub for Southern Africa, both private and public colleges within the country are slowly but steadily transforming themselves into universities, with four colleges evolving into fully-fledged universities over the last 19 years. The new universities include BA ISAGO University, now based in the capital Gaborone, a private university that was called BA ISAGO University College until 2015. Another is Botho University, also based in Gaborone, the country's largest private university. It was formerly a franchise of India-based learning institution NIIT, becoming Botho College in 2009 and a university in 2013. In the public sector, the Botswana Open University (BOU), also based in Gaborone, was until 2017 the Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning. Finally, the public sector Botswana University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (BUAN), based in Sebele, north of the capital, became a university in 2013, having formerly operated as the Botswana College of Agriculture. This new status has given these institutions the right to award their own degrees, rather than having to offer degrees certified by outside bodies, as in the past. But the authority to award degrees is not the only benefit of achieving university status. To be recognised as such, an institution must demonstrate they operate by a set of norms and standards delivering quality higher education. Botswana Qualifications Authority (BQA) spokesperson Selwana Pilatwe-Koppenhaver explained: "An education and training provider which is duly registered and accredited can award qualifications as long as the learning programme was accredited and based on a registered qualification. The accreditation process will have established that the provider has the necessary resources to offer and award the qualifications." The BQA spokesperson said education and training providers awarded university status should among other things have a minimum number of students, a minimum number of faculties and a proportion of academic personnel qualified at the professorial level. "This means the university will have diverse offerings, conducted at the highest levels," said Pilatwe-Koppenhaver. She said the transformation of colleges into universities was generally driven by an institution's management, when they decide to increase their ambition and go for growth. "These providers will then apply to increase their scope," she said, with the BQA acting as the key gatekeeper deciding if a college can become a university, and validating these plans against Botswana criteria for registering and accrediting higher education providers. Applicants would also need to be assessed against more specialised norms and standards in the category of learning and subjects for which they wish to be recognised, she said. Having worked through such assessments, public universities require the additional step of being established by an act of Botswana's parliament. Regardless of any move to university status, Botswana's private higher education institutions cannot tap government funds for their operations. Maybe partly as a result, 74.5% of the country's tertiary education is offered through public institutions, while the private sector accounts for 25.5%, according to the Human Resource Development Council.

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2. University World News

SATN joins forces with government to boost PhD capacity (South Africa)

The South African Technology Network (SATN) has partnered with the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) to launch a Staff PhD Capacity Enhancement Programme designed to raise the number and quality of PhDs coming out of universities of technology and previously disadvantaged universities in South Africa. The programme, which launched in Johannesburg in June, gives 50 aspiring PhD students across 11 South African universities of technology (UoTs) and previously disadvantaged universities the opportunity to complete their studies with the help of top lecturers and professors in the country and abroad. Emphasis is placed on ensuring that candidates complete their PhD studies in the prescribed four-year timeframe rather than the national average of eight years. The programme is structured towards reducing the dropout rate of PhD candidates in South Africa, a figure which currently stands at an estimated 60%. The three- to four-year structured programme is coordinated by SATN, a consortium of universities of technology in South Africa and the Southern African Development Community region, and is funded by the DHET. According to SATN, the content, curriculum and model of programme have been designed to respond to the urgent need to increase the number and quality of academic staff that hold doctorates. Candidates will be expected not only to produce cutting-edge research and published work, but also train the next generation of doctorate holders in South Africa. "Pursuing a PhD can be a lonely and isolating process so one of the chief benefits of this programme is the cohort model, which allows candidates to learn from peers who happen to be in similar or different disciplines," said Dr Anshu Padayachee, chief executive officer of SATN. Candidates began Module One of the programme in June and Module Two in July. Over the five-day period of Module One, candidates engaged in dynamic and interactive sessions that addressed aspects related to research integrity, proposal writing and ethical principles in research. Local and international facilitators were invited to share their knowledge and skills to encourage robust, rigorous and innovative research. So far, candidates are optimistic and full of praise for the programme, with some saying the sessions helped them to reconsider their research topics, have a better understanding of what was expected of them through each stage of the PhD, and clarify theoretical and conceptual frameworks they were unsure about. The second module, which began on 15 July, focused on principles related to research design and methodologies. Based on a cohort model, the model builds on the idea of collective engagement, and seeks to create opportunities for regional, national and global networking, said Padayachee. The programme aims to contribute to the creation of a collective community of practice, which includes candidates, supervisors and facilitators from multiple disciplines to foster inter- and trans-disciplinary engagement. With an eye on transformation and the need to address gender and racial disparities in South African academia, 79% of the candidates are African Black females.

University World News spoke to Fatima Peters, a lecturer in the psychology department at the University of Venda in Limpopo province, who said she feels blessed to have been selected to participate in the programme.

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3. University World News

Higher Education financing reforms – Intentions and realities (Ethiopia)

The Ethiopian higher education sector is growing in leaps and bounds thanks to the aggressive expansion scheme the government has embarked upon in the last two decades. Among other achievements, the expansion scheme has created many new institutions and a sizeable student population that has reached nearly a million. With further expansion under way, Ethiopia is set to join the list of countries with the highest number of university students on the continent in the next half a decade. As I argued in an earlier article, the challenge presented by a growing system is making available resources that can match the growth. So far, the major burden of financing the sector has been shouldered by the government with little assistance coming from foreign sources and internal income generation schemes that appear to be still in their nascent stages. Government funding of the sector has, among other things, produced the needed infrastructure for many of the new universities built from scratch. However, the amount of money dedicated to the sector has had little impact in delivering the envisaged quality of education. Higher education institutions continue to be blamed for churning out half-baked graduates who perform far below expectations and are shunned by the job market. The sustainability of a financial strategy that is fully dependent on the government has also been questioned in the light of competing national developmental needs. In response, government has sought to facilitate a diversification of resources. For example, in addition to introducing a cost-sharing scheme within the public sector, higher education institutions have been encouraged to set up their own research and innovation funds, engage in consultancy and supplementary activities and establish income-generating enterprises. However, despite some encouraging moves, the limited financial autonomy given to Ethiopian public institutions has become a serious challenge that conspires against the success of any efforts along these lines. Currently, Ethiopian universities receive government budget allocations that are based on criteria such as student and staff numbers, programmes and previous annual budgets. And once they receive their annual budget, they have to strictly follow the budget line allocations which have been defined a priori. Moving one budget line to another when the need arises is nearly impossible, necessitating a lengthy and bureaucratic procedure which is discouraging for many of the institutions. Having experienced the various limitations of this inflexible policy, Ethiopian public universities have been calling for financial reform. The most promising initiative directed towards this end has been the block grant system that was promised through the higher education proclamation of 2009. According to this scheme, higher education institutions would be given the right to adapt and allocate the funds they receive from the government on the basis of institutional objectives and particular needs. The 2009 higher education proclamation stipulated that the block grant system of funding will be based on a strategic plan agreement with the government. The agreements that individual institutions will have to establish with the Ministry of Education (now Ministry of Science and Higher Education) take into account a variety of considerations, including: Read more here

4.   University World News

How can disadvantaged universities attract more funding? (South Africa)

It is five years since Inyathelo, with the support of the Kresge Foundation (a primarily domestic American foundation), first asked Dr Sean Jones of EduActive Solutions to conduct the Annual Survey of Philanthropy in Higher Education (ASPIHE). This series of research reports was the first in South Africa to document philanthropic funding of higher education institutions. It aimed to establish a baseline on philanthropic support to South African universities and it was also hoped that it would be a stimulus for similar research studies of other areas of third stream income in South African higher education. Until then, no reliable national perspective on philanthropic giving to universities existed, and few universities collected comprehensive data of this kind. The 11 universities in this latest survey received a collective total of ZAR1.71 billion (US$122.7 million) in philanthropic income in 2017 – ZAR978 million higher than recorded for the 10 universities taking part in the first survey in 2013. Median annual philanthropic income was ZAR108 million in 2017, which is significantly higher than the median of ZAR23 million in 2013. The proportion of income from South African sources was 72%, which is 35% higher than in 2013. International donors contributed 28% of philanthropic income but comprised only 10% of donors. The background to this growth in local contributions is that the Kresge Foundation also began partnering with Inyathelo to build 'Advancement' capacity at some South African universities from 2006. At that time virtually no institutions employed experienced, or even trained, Advancement professionals. With 'Advancement', the goal is to create a climate that positions an institution for ongoing donor investment. Inyathelo's training focuses strongly on the relationship management aspect of fundraising, rather than the transaction. It addresses issues around strategy, leadership, corporate governance and more, as well as the relationship building blocks of identification, cultivation, solicitation and stewardship. Inyathelo proved that with the right structures, training and approaches, diverse institutions could raise private funds. The latest ASPIHE findings show that while the largest proportion of philanthropic funding now comes from trusts and foundations, this has been declining from 61% in 2013, to 42% in 2017. It is matched by increased levels of giving by the private sector and individuals. Private sector entities contributed 25% of philanthropic income in 2017 compared with 14% in 2013, while individual donors' contributions increased from 4% in 2013 to 20% in 2017. This indicates that the #FeesMustFall impact on universities was understood as an issue of national concern, with South African philanthropists stepping in to support universities. (#FeesMustFall was a student-led South African protest movement to stop increases in student fees and push for increases in government funding of universities.) The challenge, however, is the distribution of the support across the sector and to understand the reasons for this particular pattern. While noting the encouraging progress in philanthropic funding overall, the report adds that it "obscures some extremely significant and severe differences and inequalities" and "a considerably less rosy picture emerges when the universities are disaggregated along the lines of historical advantage and disadvantage". In 2013, 94% of all donor income to the participating institutions went to historically advantaged institutions (HAIs) and 6% to historically disadvantaged institutions (HDIs). This equalled ZAR622 million for HAIs versus ZAR37 million for HDIs. The difference was even greater in 2017 when 96% of funding went to HAIs and 4% to HDIs – ZAR1.6 billion for HAIs versus ZAR73 million for HDIs.

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5. University World News

Academics call for more action over dissertation mills (Algeria)

Academics say the practice of ordering and paying for ready-made theses is growing among students at all levels in Algeria, but such fears are not being taken seriously by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. Last month, the national coordinator of the National Council of Higher Education Teachers (CNES), Abdelhafid Milat, claimed on his Facebook page that a private institution in Algeria was selling its thesis-writing services to students at all levels, including masters and PhD levels. He alleged that the student needed only specify the title and discipline and pay a specific amount in advance (not less than half of the total fee) in order to commission a thesis.

He said the amount of money being requested by the "institution" ranged between DZD50,000 (US$420) and DZD200,000 (US$1,670) depending on quality of service, educational level, and the period of time taken to deliver the requested thesis. Milat said CNES had a person pretending to be a student call the institution advertising the services to order a masters-level thesis in media and communication. "The private institution asked him to come to the headquarters and pay the payment …. and give them only the title of the masters thesis. The private institution said the masters will be ready before the deadline," he wrote. However, on approaching the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, University World News was told via FB Messenger that "there is no such thing possible in a country like Algeria". According to Charif Benboulaid from the general inspectorate of pedagogy at the Algerian Ministry for Higher Education and Scientific Research, the matter has been "over-exaggerated by the media for selling purposes". "The shop offers word processing and printing services," Benboulaid said. "To the best of my knowledge, I think this has been done to support students who are not computer literate and help them digitise their written research," he said

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6. University World News

Grappling with graduate unemployment (Rwanda)

Following her graduation from the University of Rwanda in 2014 with a degree focused on business and administration, 29-year-old Christine Mulisa hoped to land a job in her field within a few months. "I was among the best performers [in my programme] and was positive that I could get a job quickly. I started applying straight away and sat for over 50 written tests, but I am still searching," she told University World News recently. "Sometimes I passed the written tests, but I was often among hundreds of applicants all hoping to secure just one position," she said. Mulisa's story is similar to that of other graduates – even those with more practical training. Prudence Habimana graduated from a polytechnic in 2015 with a diploma in electronic engineering. "*I pursued TVET studies because I believed it would make it easier to get a job or create one*," he said. While he sometimes gets casual work, he has not been formally employed since graduation. Mulisa and Habimana are among thousands of unemployed graduates from both universities and polytechnics, although figures suggest that university graduates are slightly more likely to be employed. A Ministry of Education tracer survey report released early in May put the employment rate for graduates of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programmes at 50% while the general employment rate for university graduates (mainstream) was 63.4%.

According to the same report, the underemployment figure for TVET graduates was 39.5%, while for higher learning institutions it was reported to be 18.5%. The survey also revealed that graduates from both TVET institutions and universities lack additional skills and professional experience. Entrepreneurial and business skills were also limited. The findings are likely to be seen as a blow to government efforts to create 200,000 off-farm jobs annually. The survey was carried out last year between June and December and covered a sample of graduates who had completed TVET education, including polytechnics, between 2015 and 2016, and those who had graduated from university between 2014 and 2015.

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7. University World News

Valuable lesson on impact of education on societal change (South Africa)

Postgraduate education students from New York University (NYU) and Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey in the United States are learning invaluable lessons in the teaching sector through a one-month programme based in South Africa. The programme, on education and social reform in South Africa, is spearheaded by Professor of Higher Education at NYU, Teboho Moja* (who is herself South African). The programme has been running at NYU since 1999 and in South Africa for the last 19 years. Hosted by the National Research Foundation in South Africa for the past four years, the annual visit to South Africa serves as "an exposure and learning opportunity for [American] graduate students (masters and doctoral) in higher education," Moja told University World News during a visit by her group to private distance higher education provider MANCOSA in Durban on 10 July. The visit was aimed at "opening up" discussions about future partnerships with all institutions and to give her students an idea of the full range of higher education institutions in South Africa, including private institutions, and came ahead of the recent launch by MANCOSA of its School of Education in South Africa. In addition to visiting universities during their time in South Africa, the US students also visit schools and rural and urban communities to gain an understanding of the challenges faced by their leaders and policy-makers in addressing social transformation and educational reform. "South Africa is a good case study for students to learn about transformation and the links between societal changes and education as well as the impact of education on society," said Moja. As part of their studies, the students examine how reform priorities are set and work to develop field-based projects and this culminates in formal papers on transformative learning based on their experiences. For the last three years the initiative has involved a joint initiative between NYU and Rutgers. This year, 21 students from NYU (Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development) as well as from the Rutgers Graduate School of Education, South Africa Initiative will participate. Based mainly in Pretoria, they either embark on a research project or an internship. This year, nine students are conducting research, while 12 are in internships at the Department of Basic Education, the Ikamva Youth Project and the University of Pretoria Student Affairs Department. The Ikamva Youth Project enables disadvantaged youth to pull themselves and their peers out of poverty and into tertiary education or employment.

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8. University World News

University of Witwatersrand takes quantum leap for Africa's 4IR aspirations (Africa)

Africa must participate collectively as a continent and not miss out on the potential of the fourth industrial revolution (4IR), warned Professor Zeblon Vilakazi, deputy vice-chancellor for research and postgraduate affairs at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) in South Africa. "As a continent and developing world, Africans have missed out on the first, second and third revolutions, which is why we must make sure we don't miss out on the 4IR," he said, adding that Wits University is determined to lead the way on the current technological wave. Using the Apple watch as an example, Vilakazi said it measures the steps you take, and if you are connected to the phone, the device knows your entire profile through facial recognition. "It has given us a new understanding of data. Data becomes everything. This is the 4IR, which has already changed the way we relate and interact. We cannot be passive players … [we] must play a role in knowledge production, ensuring we become drivers, not passengers," he said. As the first African partner on the IBM Quantum Computing (IBM Q) Network, Vilakazi told University World News Wits plans to become the focal research hub for academics across South Africa and for the 16 universities belonging to the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA). Scholars from Wits and ARUA institutions* will be able to conduct research using a 20-qubit IBM Q quantum computer with advanced quantum computing systems and software for teaching quantum information science and exploring early applications.

The latest collaboration between Wits and IBM Research raises to a new level a partnership forged in 2016 – when IBM opened its second lab in Africa at the Wits University's Tshimologong Digital Innovation Precinct. "To expand the IBM Q Network to include Wits will drive innovation in frontier technologies and benefit African-based researchers, academics and students who now have access to decades of quantum computing capabilities at the click of a button," said Vilakazi. He said putting resources into the study of quantum technologies can help leverage the next level of discovery research to tackle the challenging problems. Technologies such as enhanced medical imaging, efficient light harvesting materials (clean energy) and secure optical communication networks (cybersecurity) have led to the development of exponentially faster computers (quantum computers) which are integrated with technologies such as artificial intelligence and machine learning, and are considered a core security component of devices that will drive the 4IR, he said. Quantum computing is focused on developing computer technology based on the principles of quantum theory, which explains the nature and behaviour of energy and matter on the quantum level. Asked to explain quantum computing to a lay person, Vilakazi said in your cellphone you have billions of transistors which are much more powerful than the computer that put man on the moon. "The more you compress, the more electrons become closer, and that's why you can see the quantum effect. "Basic architecture at the heart of a computer is a microchip, transistors that go on and off, like Morse code, allowing us to harness the power of computing – these binary codes, 1 and 0. Binary code allows us to produce numbers no normal numbers can reach, and write languages using software that machines can produce at a faster pace," he said.

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