1. University World News

**Pandemic spotlights need for greater Research and Development investment (Africa)**

Despite their current shutdowns, universities are dispensing their other core functions of research and community engagement in response to managing and finding a cure for COVID-19. The Johns Hopkins University in the United States makes daily headlines as, arguably, the frontrunner university in calling accurate and up-to-date statistics on the global infection rate of COVID-19. Africa has not been left out and in the weeks just past, universities in Zimbabwe have responded to their government’s overture of US$1.3 million to provide personal protective equipment for the country. One of them, the Harare Institute of Technology, has already developed a ventilator and indicated its capacity to produce 40 per day. In Kenya, a group of 16 students from the faculties of biomedical engineering, electrical engineering, pharmacy, medicine and nursing at Kenyatta University under the guidance of two supervisors have invented a prototype ventilator, TZBA-VENT, at the University’s Chandaria Business Innovation and Incubation Centre. While commending African universities for shining the light of higher education on the continent, we can do more with more resources. Research is not cheap, and research that does not lead to innovation is a non-starter. In the global economy, when countries are said to be competitive, it is not actually governments that are competitive. Rather, competitiveness is bolstered by a vibrant productive sector which draws from research and development (R&D). In our universities, R&D follows a certain trajectory: idea generation, actual research, discoveries, actualisation, and the commercialisation of innovations. Innovation does not happen by chance. It has to be nurtured and funded and it is not surprising that renowned universities steeped in R&D cultures benefit tremendously from research grants. Without funding, innovations remain prototypes and this kills the creativity of researchers in many universities.

Read more [here](#).

2. World Bank Report

**For Sub-Saharan Africa, Coronavirus Crisis Calls for Policies for Greater Resilience (World Bank Report)**

The COVID-19 (coronavirus) outbreak has set off the first recession in the Sub-Saharan Africa region in 25 years, with growth forecast at -5.1% in 2020 from a modest 2.4% in 2019, according to the latest Africa’s Pulse, the World Bank’s bi-annual analysis of the state of the region’s economies. “Due to deteriorating fiscal positions and increased public debt, governments in the region do not have much room for wiggle in deploying fiscal policy to address the COVID-19 crisis,” said Albert Zeufack, Chief Economist for Africa at the World Bank. “Africa alone will not be able to contain the disease and its impacts on its own; there is urgent need for temporary official bilateral debt relief to help combat the pandemic while preserving macroeconomic stability in the region.” The Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) region paid $35.8 billion in total debt service in 2018, 2.1% of regional gross domestic product (GDP), of which $9.4 billion was paid to official bilateral creditors (about 0.7% of the regional GDP). Given that the region may need an emergency economic stimulus of $100 billion—including an estimated $44 billion waiver for interest payments in 2020—the report notes a debt moratorium would immediately inject liquidity and enlarge the fiscal space of African governments. The analysis estimates the pandemic could cost the region between $37 billion and $79 billion in terms of output losses for 2020. The impact on household welfare is expected to be equally dramatic with welfare losses in the optimistic scenario projected to reach 7% in 2020, compared to a non-pandemic scenario. Additionally, COVID-19 has the potential to create a severe
The Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM)

food security crisis in the region, with agricultural production contracting between 2.6% and 7% in the scenario with trade blockages. Food imports would decline substantially (as much as 25% or as little as 13%) due to a combination of higher transaction costs and reduced domestic demand. These fallouts result from a combination of influences, including the disruption in trade and value chains affecting commodity exporters and countries with strong value chain participation; the reduced foreign financing flows of foreign direct investments, foreign aid, remittances, tourism revenues, and capital flight. The disruptions also stem from containment measures imposed by governments and the response of citizens.

Read more [here](#)

3. **University World News**

**COVID-19 – Civility and unity are needed, not racism (Africa)**

The first two weeks of this month were marked by news about two French scientists whose comments on testing a vaccine in Africa drew widespread criticism for being racist. The insidious remarks of the French scientists, one of whom later apologised, have been interpreted as evidence of a colonial mentality that still pervades the Global North. Rejecting the idea of testing in Africa, World Health Organization (WHO) chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said: “The hangover from a colonial mentality has to stop. WHO will not allow this to happen.” Incidents of this nature have a negative impact on the spirit of global cooperation which is critical to combating the coronavirus threat. While resisting racist slurs and similar forms of distraction, Africa should look towards engagements that benefit its people and greater humanity. Equally, the rest of the world should recognise the potential and possible contribution of Africa and the developing world in the fight against COVID-19. Despite the need for global cooperation against the scourge, Africa still remains poorly represented in the clinical trials of the search for COVID-19 treatments. Among the 300 trials launched around the world, many are taking place in China, South Korea and lately in the European Union and the United States, while developing countries in Asia, Latin America and Africa remain underrepresented. The recent initiative of WHO that is aimed at getting treatment for the new coronavirus through a multi-country clinical trial attracted 10 countries, with South Africa being the only one from the continent. Given its genetic diversity, many fear that Africa’s underrepresentation in the clinical trials can have drawbacks on a continent predicted to become the next epicentre of the pandemic. WHO’s call for more participation from the continent is perhaps an indication of this concern. Africa’s experience in the handling and treatment of viral outbreaks like Ebola should be a source of knowledge as to how the world should react to pandemics. The experience is also helpful in the search for vaccines and medicines.

Read more [here](#)

4. **University World News**

**Universities pull their academic weight in fight against COVID-19 (Africa)**

Since the first case of the coronavirus disease in Sub-Saharan Africa was diagnosed in late January by medical researchers at the Centre for Human and Zoonotic Virology of the College of Medicine at the University of Lagos in Nigeria, universities in Sub-Saharan Africa have been proving their capacity to assist in the global response to the pandemic. Led by Christian Happi, a professor of molecular biology and genomics, researchers from the African Centre of Excellence for Genomics of Infectious Disease (ACEGID) at Redeemer’s University in Nigeria carried out Africa’s first genome sequence and molecular arrangement of SARS-CoV-2, the technical name of the coronavirus. ACEGID is part of various university-
based centres of excellence that were set up by the World Bank starting from 2014 to transform science and technology in higher education in Sub-Saharan Africa. According to Professor Crispus Kiamba, a member of the advisory group of the World Bank-affiliated Partnership for skills in Applied Sciences, Engineering and Technology (PASET), ACEGID is a key centre for research in infectious diseases in Africa, as scientists also work on a wide range of infectious diseases that include Lassa fever and Ebola. However, since the current outbreak and global spread of coronavirus, researchers at Makerere University College of Veterinary Medicine have found new forms of coronavirus in Ugandan bats and camels. According to Denis Byarugaba, professor of microbiology and laboratory director of emerging infectious diseases at Makerere University Walter Reed Project, the current outbreak provided researchers an opportunity to screen 500 bats for coronaviruses. “We were able to isolate mass coronaviruses from those bats,” said Byarugaba recently in Kampala. Samples collected from 500 camels in northern Uganda also had coronavirus. “We found 70% positivity in our serological tests,” said Dr Sylvia Baluka, a lecturer at the Makerere University College of Veterinary Medicine and member of the coronavirus research team. ...Still in Kenya, Kenyatta University recently unveiled a prototype ventilator that it said would only cost about US$5,000, a quarter of the cost of a conventional machine. The university’s engineering and biomedical engineering departments will be able to produce 50 every week, according to Vice-Chancellor Paul Wainaina

5. University World News

**Online learning in universities – A missed opportunity? (Uganda)**

When Uganda announced a partial lockdown and the closing of schools and learning institutions due to COVID-19, avid promoters of information and communications technology (ICT), virtual and online-based learning saw it as a golden opportunity that would change the practice of online learning in higher education. The concept of online or blended learning has been on the higher education agenda for close to two decades. There have been varying interventions from a range of sources: bilateral and multilateral agencies and US foundations. At the national level, the Ministry of ICT and National Guidance through the National Information Technology Authority of Uganda has implemented the National Data Transmission Backbone Infrastructure and e-Government Infrastructure Project. This was an effort to connect all major towns within the country to an optical fibre cable-based network. Elaborate infrastructure was put in place that extended to the establishment and roll-out of video conferencing and Voice over Internet Protocol in government ministries, the laying of 1,590 km of optical fibre cable across the country to build the National Data Transmission Backbone, and a state-of-the-art Network Operations Centre to monitor and administer the entire national backbone infrastructure. At the higher education sector level, several investments have been made to promote ICT and online learning, not only in universities but across the entire spectrum of higher education institutions. For example, 5% of 75 units (equivalent to US$100 million) of account in the recently concluded African Development Bank’s Support for Higher Education, Science and Technology Project was dedicated to ICT. This covered both the soft and hard components, and captured issues such as the last mile and the fibre optic cables required to link public institutions not already on the national backbone. Other components included procurement of ICT materials – computers and other accessories – as well as capacity for online programmes. This is against the backdrop of earlier investments in several of the public universities, not to mention the national commitment to a digital vision for Uganda which would see the country create a positive social and economic impact through technology-based empowerment. An opportunity to test
the new ICT capacity presented itself at the time of the abrupt closure of schools and universities as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. 

Read more here

6. Standard Digital

Universities ask staff to take pay cut (Kenya)

A number of public universities have written to their staff asking them to take a pay cut even as unions warned against making this mandatory. Top government officials led by President Uhuru Kenyatta have already taken pay cuts of between 20 and 80 per cent. An April 16 circular released by the Head of Public Service Joseph Kinyua directed other arms or government, constitutional commissions, independent offices and agencies to also implement voluntary salary cuts. At Murang’a University, members of staff have been requested to take a pay cut of between five and 15 per cent. “University management board meeting held on April 20 discussed the rates recommended by the Senate and after considering the great responsibility bestowed upon university staff recommended that staff take voluntary deductions,” wrote Peace Agufana, the university registrar. The internal memo dated April 28 to all staff proposed that workers at grade 20 take a 15 per cent pay cut. Those in job grade 18 are requested to take a 10 per cent pay cut as those who fall between grades 11 and 15 consider a 7.5 per cent pay cut. Workers between job grade 1 and 10 have been asked to consider a five per cent pay cut. “The purpose of the current circular is to request you to signify your consent for deductions from your net (salary) to support the Covid-19 Emergency Response Fund,” reads the memo. At the University of Nairobi, Vice Chancellor Stephen Kiama requested staff to decide the percentage of pay cut they were willing to take. “I request all staff of the university to participate in the voluntary salary cuts by completing an attached consent form and submit it to the office of director, corporate affairs,” said Prof Kiama in a memo dated April 24. Similar communications have been dispatched to staff at the Technical University of Mombasa, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology and Technical University of Kenya.

Read more here

7. University World News

Private universities start suspending staff, cutting salaries (Rwanda)

Barely a month after the country went into lockdown to reduce the spread of the coronavirus, some private-sector universities in Rwanda, citing a lack of funds, have suspended academic and administrative staff and reduced the salaries of others. At the University of Technology and Arts of Byumba (UTAB) located in Gicumbi district in the Northern Province, about 40 staff members were suspended and 60 had their salaries cut by half. Those who will be getting half are those currently helping to ensure that online learning materials are uploaded and that learners can access online tuition, according to the university management. The situation may get worse in the months to come. In partnership with telecommunication companies, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of ICT and Innovation, six universities in Rwanda can now access online platforms, which are zero-rated to help them keep running despite the lockdown.

Read more here
8. Daily Monitor
Prioritise agriculture sector as Covid-19 pandemic bites (Uganda)

Intensifying efforts to contain the spread of Covid-19 is very critical. The world is today focused on saving the lives of people. Economies have suffered effects of quarantines and lockdowns to prevent the spread of coronavirus. Undoubtedly, this comes with enormous strain on the structure, function and performance of market systems, including that of agriculture. Uganda went into a total lockdown on March 26, but essential service providers, including markets for agricultural produce, were exempted although they were required to follow standard operation procedures (SOPs). Nonetheless, on April 3, some food markets, including Kalerwe market, were closed for not adhering to the set SOPs. Although the Covid-19 disease has not affected much food supplies, if coordinated steps are not taken now, the current public health crisis might be worsened by hunger, food insecurity and community malnutrition. This is because in many ways, the coronavirus pandemic has already affected agricultural produce value chains. For instance, by now farmers should have planted crops for the first season. However, due to lack of inputs as a result of the supply chain disruption and uncertainty about the future, it is most likely that many farmers have not planted any crop and some of them are surviving on the would-be seeds for planting. Besides, support services such as extension services and credit facilities have been constrained. This, coupled with weather variation challenge and low farm outputs and farmers productivity, will be greatly disrupted. All this will result in food shortage in the post-Covid-19 crisis. So, while the information about prevention of the spread of Covid-19 is clear to many people, the vulnerable poor in rural and peri-urban areas may not be able to find food to eat. The remedy to the situation would be importation of food. However, Covid-19 is a global pandemic hence there could be export restrictions by countries to guarantee their domestic food availability. This may worsen our food deficit and increase food prices.

Read more [here](#)

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