

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

1. Daily Maverick

Our universities need to change for an as yet unimagined future (South Africa)

South Africa needs to build national capacity for an economy that needs skills that are radical and complex. In order to facilitate this, we need to ‘decolumnise’ campuses from the grand colosseums to a vibrant, insightful, smart network of decentralised partners. Here is something that should scare and excite you in equal measure; in two years’ time, 27% of our economy will consist of new types of jobs that we can’t even imagine yet – not counting the ones whose extinction will be speeded up by Covid-19 and 4IR. But here’s the thing, our universities can’t imagine them either. The truth is that our education system is archaic, designed for an economy that has changed very little over the past 20 years and as a result, is neither as diversified nor resilient as economies that were far inferior to South Africa’s over the same time frame. The system is in gnarly dysfunction. The universities could change, and many want to, but it would take them between 10 and 15 years. South Africa doesn’t have that luxury — and the advent of Covid-19 has just shortened that time frame considerably — but it does have a raft of TVET colleges across the country; 50 of them registered public institutions operating at 364 campuses across the country that could pivot to do this in anything from 12 to 24 months. TVET stands for Technical and Vocational Education and Training. The colleges provide vocational, occupational and artisan education across an incredibly diverse scope; some TVET colleges offer more than 300 courses from NQF levels 1-8, while what we term higher education, i.e. the universities and universities of technology covers NQF levels 5-10. The TVET system is funded to the tune of R8-billion a year and yet most colleges are defective and ineffective, but none of them need be. We have rampant unemployment, with figures that are expected to skyrocket later this year after the impact of the Covid-19 lockdown, but the greatest problem remains the NEET, that cohort of persons Not in Employment, Education and Training. In the last quarter of 2018 that amounted to 3.2-million people out of the 10.3-million in the 15-24 age bracket. They are not just unemployed; they are left unemployable in a world that is changing as we speak. Modern learning is based on three facets: qualifications, credentialisation and lifelong learning. Qualifications traditionally open the door to jobs, but what jobs? It once took 15 to 20 years for the technical skills you learnt to become obsolete, now that’s been cut to two to five years. We’re losing plenty of jobs in the formal sector through Covid-19 attrition on the one hand and the much-storied disruption of the Fourth Industrial Revolution on the other. There’s also a high barrier to entry in terms of both cost and geography to universities and universities of technology.

Read more [here](#)

2. University World News

Higher education – The lifeblood of development (Africa)

We are in the midst of a crisis – the crisis of COVID-19 – that has seen Africa lock down, right from Cape Town in South Africa through to Cairo in Egypt; from Djibouti through to Dakar in Senegal. There is a sense in which this crisis is ‘giving back’, one of which includes our inclination to begin to interrogate the role of education in our affairs going forward. And this has come about because during this crisis Africa’s underbelly has been exposed in a number of areas. In the field of health, we have been forced to remind ourselves that notwithstanding the decision of African heads of state in Abuja several years ago to dedicate 15% of national budgets to health, that has not happened, with the consequence that we have seen that our health facilities are below par. It has also demonstrated to us that notwithstanding the position taken by African heads of state in Maputo in Mozambique that we would dedicate 15% of national budgets to agriculture, Africa cannot feed herself. It has also demonstrated that many African governments have in the last many years not regarded science and research and development as key components of development. The net effect is that we have had to rely on other countries to support us even in the provision of things as mundane as masks. I think that this legitimises the conversation we are having today. Post-coronavirus, what is the role of higher education in Africa’s development? And when we talk about development, we must understand development in its broadest sense. Will higher education help to address Africa’s perennial problems which we have stated and restated numerous times? Will it help us to address the problem of hunger? Will it help us to address the problem of the disease burden? Will it ensure we embrace technology and our diffidence of the fourth industrial revolution age? Will it ensure we create opportunities for our young men and women to innovate and to invent? Will it ensure we use our various resources in the areas of art and performance? In a nutshell, will it help Africa to realise the goals that are identified under the African Agenda 2063 so that Africa will be a mid-level economy which is no longer famous for having people live from hand to mouth? In order to do justice to that conversation, it is incumbent upon me to look back to the past. Because when we look back, we are going to recognise that Africans and African leaders have always understood that education is at the very heart of development. I remember as a young man, institutions within the African continent were identified for their excellence – institutions such as Fourah Bay [College] in Freetown, Sierra Leone, which was referred to as the essence of Africa and was famous for its contribution to engineering; institutions such as the University of Ibadan in Nigeria; institutions such as Makerere University in Uganda, the University of Fort Hare and a series of other universities – and when I talk about that history I remember two important events that took place in Ghana in 1961.

Read more [here](#)

3. Business Daily

2020 admissions leave 22,298 empty slots at Universities (Kenya)

Kenyan universities have been left with 22,298 unfilled places after candidates who sat the national entrance exams last year were selected for degree courses. The Kenya Universities and Colleges Central Placement Service data shows that the 68 public and private institutions admitted 122,831 students against available space for 145,129. This is, however, an improvement from the previous

year when the institutions were left with 55,852 unfilled places. Of the 689,007 candidates who sat the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education examination in 2019, 125,463 scored C+ — the minimum entry grade to university — and above. Admission to public universities of nearly all students who scored C+ and above over the past four years has reduced the pool of learners available to private universities and parallel degree programmes in public universities. This has hurt the universities' cash flow, forcing them to shed jobs and freeze expansion plans. "Following the successful completion of the placement process, 122,831 candidates have secured placement to degree courses in universities while 88,724 got placed in TVET institutions," said Education Cabinet secretary George Magoha. The admissions data shows several private institutions including Daystar, Kabarak, KCA, Riara Universities enrolled students to all available slots. The Technical University of Kenya is the only public university that filled 100 percent of its slots. The institution got 1,667 students against a declared capacity of 1,662. The Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology leads in the number of students selected at 6,006, representing 95.5 per cent of its 6,291 capacity for freshmen.

Read more [here](#)

4. University World News

Governments urged to bail out struggling universities (Africa-Global)

Governments should provide financial assistance to those universities that are experiencing loss from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. This was one of the issues raised by Professor Tawana Kupe, vice-chancellor and principal of the University of Pretoria in South Africa, at a webinar titled "Educational access at higher education institutions in the age of COVID-19". The event, held last week, was organised by the Alliance for African Partnership (AAP) in partnership with the African Studies Center of Michigan State University (MSU), United States. University World News was a media partner. The AAP was formed in 2016 after MSU consulted with 14 African leaders to create a partnership for more sustainable and mutually beneficial forms of collaboration. AAP member institutions include MSU, Egerton University, Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Makerere University, Université des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines de Bamako, United States International University-Africa, Université Cheikh Anta Diop, University of Botswana, University of Dar es Salaam, University of Nigeria, Nsukka and the University of Pretoria. Kupe reminded participants that in the United States the government bailed out banks and major companies during the global financial crisis of 2008 when they were in financial dire straits, and the same should apply to universities during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. "It is universities that produce economists and accountants." Dr Samuel Stanley, president of MSU, said some of the small private colleges "are already in trouble" due to the effects of COVID-19 and his university is experiencing a US\$60 million loss this fiscal year. It is expecting a reduction of between US\$130 million and US\$300 million in its revenue in the next fiscal year, which starts in July. This is related in part to a decline in the number of international students, who cannot get visas. "This reduction is a significant loss," he said. Kupe said the University of Pretoria was not caught off-guard in the rush to move to online learning when the South African government announced a lockdown due to the pandemic. "We were better prepared for the crisis, as during the #FeesMustFall protests we had to resort to something similar." The university was able to create its UP Connect portal because it had invested ZAR100 million (US\$5.8 million) in its IT infrastructure last year. This portal enables

students to access learning resources at no data cost. Furthermore, the university has a hybrid teaching and learning model that entails complementary contact and online learning, and 96% of its undergraduate modules were already online. Read more [here](#)

5. University World News

Government abolishes quota system for university selection (Malawi)

Malawian universities have, since May, been admitting students on merit and affirmative action based on gender, disability and albinism after the controversial quota system was abolished earlier this year as part of what government claims are measures to improve overall access to tertiary education. The quota system for university admissions was based on students' district of origin, rather than only merit. It was first introduced by Malawi's first president, Kamuzu Banda, in the 1960s and acted as a form of affirmative action for students from the country's central and southern regions due to their perceived regional underrepresentation at universities. However, some academics, clergymen and political activists argued that it was discriminatory against the north where the minority Tumbuka are based. Malawians from the north are seen as advantaged due to the establishment by missionaries of quality schools such as the Livingstonia Mission named after Scottish explorer David Livingston. In 2008 University World News reported that in 1993 the High Court of Malawi reversed the government's decision to implement the policy and the courts upheld the decision in 2008 following an appeal. The court argued that the policy "was discriminatory and in violation of the fundamental right of Malawian citizens". In 2009 the government of the late president Bingu wa Mutharika reintroduced what it termed the "Equitable access to higher education" policy, also based on regional quotas. His brother Peter Mutharika, the incumbent president, was still enforcing it before the latest policy change. In terms of the quota selection system, "the top 10 qualified candidates from each district are offered places and, thereafter, the rest are selected based on merit and the size of the population of the districts they originate from". Under the new policy, admissions are now based on merit and affirmative action based on gender, disability and albinism.

Read more [here](#)

6. University World News

University to conduct online defence of research theses (Kenya)

Online learning during the COVID-19 lockdown has had its challenges for universities, but one institution is not giving up, announcing that the defence of masters and PhD research theses are to be conducted online. Kenyatta University said that defence of all theses due during the closure period will be conducted via the digital platform Zoom, making the institution among the first in the region and one of the few on the continent, to venture into untested territory. "Due to the pandemic of COVID-19 which has disrupted normal teaching in many institutions, Kenyatta University is conducting defence for both masters and PhD via Zoom," said a university announcement attributed to the dean of the Graduate School, Elishiba Kimani.

"Extraordinary times call for extraordinary measures and Kenyatta University staff has opted to go digital and offered to conduct defence through digital platforms," it said. Sessions will take between two to three hours, with a panel in attendance, asking questions as would happen in face-

to-face sessions. The statement did not say if the online defence was optional for those who may experience technology or access-related challenges. The associate dean of the university's graduate school will serve as both session administrator and moderator, it added. Zoom was chosen because the platform allowed for multiple users and was user-friendly, the university said. Esther Ngumbi, originally from Kenya and now an assistant professor of entomology at the University of Illinois in the United States, described it as a step in the right direction, as long as the sessions did not put the student or the advisors under strain in terms of the use of and access to technology. "I think the most important thing is to ensure that the students and the advisors have access to the technology – both the hardware and the software, and that there is room for adjusting since we are facing a pandemic, and the students may be unwell or a member of their family may be unwell. I would not wish on anyone to defend their dissertation with an unsettled mind," she said. While online dissertation presentation and assessment is new in Africa, it has been widely deployed since March by universities in the developed world, including the United States, online research shows.

Read more [here](#)

7. University World News

Ministers announce plans for resuming higher education (DRC)

Ministers in both the Republic of the Congo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) have announced steps aimed at reopening higher education institutions – closed because of the coronavirus pandemic – with proposals to introduce distance courses at the Republic of the Congo's only public university, Marien Ngouabi University in Brazzaville, and instructions to university heads in the DRC to start measures first in areas free of the infection. Bruno Jean-Richard Itoua, higher education minister of the Republic of the Congo, said: "In university lecture halls, first degree students number 2,000 or more. So it will be difficult to respect keeping a metre's social distancing. To be able to reopen courses in one or two months, it's inevitable to consider distance education," reported the Agence d'Information d'Afrique Centrale (ADIAC). Marien Ngouabi University is the Republic of the Congo's only state-funded university, and comprises 11 faculties, institutes and schools with more than 30,000 students and 800 teacher-researchers. Itoua said the ministry had been setting up a plan to digitalise courses and to create a virtual university during the past four years. "Technologically the project is ready; it only remains to implement it, that's to say putting in place certain structures, redeployment of teachers, internet access for teachers, students and others. Two months would be enough to start this project if we have the funding," ADIAC reported him as saying. Nine of the 11 institutions in the Republic of the Congo had completed the first of two semesters for the year, and the government was working towards starting the second semester in September, said Itoua.

Read more [here](#)

8. Daily Nation

Low number of the coronavirus cases in Africa baffles scientists (Africa)

Like most African countries, Kenya has recorded few coronavirus deaths and infections. With 71 fatalities and slightly more than 2,000 cases, Kenya may be lucky even as the pandemic ravages Europe, the United States, South America and other parts of the world. Except for North Africa, where 1,900 deaths have been reported, the other regions – East, West, Central and Southern Africa – had registered 2,394 combined by yesterday. Africa has about 152,500 Covid-19 cases, with 4,344 deaths and 64,047 recoveries. Compared with other parts of the world and initial disease models, Africa is doing well in terms of the number of infections and deaths. And now, researchers say Africa is a unique case. A youthful population and warmer weather are reducing the transmission of the deadly virus, according to a study published in the American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene. The research by a team of Kenyan scientists says a combination of the two factors “is likely to contribute even more to the low transmission and reduced disease severity in Africa”. The researchers reviewed recent studies conducted elsewhere and analysed and compared disease patterns and trends in Italy, the United States, Nigeria and Kenya. “The contrasting trends of the pandemic in countries presented and the studies cited make the combined effects of warmer weather and youthful population a compelling explanation of the low Covid-19 transmission and severity in Africa,” the report says. The study adds that the premise that Africans are not getting the coronavirus or dying from it because of pre-existing immunity from exposure to cross-reacting coronaviruses “is intriguing but requires further studies”. The researchers argue that due to the high transmissibility of Covid-19 in vulnerable populations, the few cases introduced in Africa could have triggered a full-blown local epidemic. But the rate of transmission is still low in Africa, months after the first cases were reported. African countries’ mitigation measures seem less stringent compared with Europe and the US. Read more [here](#)

9. University World News

Ministry announces in-person university examinations plan (Morocco)

Morocco’s Minister of Education Said Amzazi announced on 18 May that university students would begin taking in-person exams starting from September, while students enrolled in professional bachelor degrees and masters degrees would sit exams as early as mid-July. Classes for the 2020-21 academic year will begin in October, he said. All exams will take place according to strict social distancing, hygiene and security measures. Since the closure of universities on 16 March as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, students have been studying remotely through distances classes, educational websites and broadcasted classes on television. “The delay of the exams in universities till September is a very wise decision,” said higher education adviser Yamina El Kirat El Allame, former vice-dean for research and cooperation at the faculty of letters and human sciences of Mohammed V University of Rabat. “Overall and compared to other countries, I think that Morocco has managed the coronavirus pandemic situation with a well-thought-out and realistic examinations plan, and a lot of wisdom. ” While supportive of the decision to hold exams in September, El Allame said the decision to schedule exams for the masters programmes and professional track degrees in mid-July “may be problematic”. “These programmes recruit students at the national level. So students come from very different regions of the country – masters

students in Rabat, for instance, come from Agadir, Tinghir, Taza, Taounate, Al Hoceima, etc – and from far distances. “The students will have to travel and take risks and undergo a lot of stress and pressure to go back to their universities. “I think exams could have been postponed till September as well or could have been organised at a distance ... The groups are very small and the teachers know their students individually, ”

Read more [here](#)

10. University World News

Lockdown creates barriers to learning – and enrolments (Uganda)

Early projections of a worldwide drop in student enrolments as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic were regarded by some African experts as either overstated or applicable largely to the Global North. But they have proved to be correct in Uganda as even those universities targeting local students are struggling to make up their numbers. Almost none of the country’s higher education institutions had concluded, let alone started, their application and admission processes for the 2020-21 academic year when government closed the institutions of higher learning in March. The bigger institutions like Makerere University have extended their application/admission deadline during the crisis – the current extension runs until 12 June – while the ‘smaller’ universities are waiting for a drop in infection rates and for the government to give them a green light to resume normal business before embarking on enrolment. “It is a real dilemma,” said Muhammad Sumare, deputy academic registrar for the Islamic University in Uganda. “We have very few Senior Six leavers who are sending in their applications — maybe because of the uncertainty that is still engulfing the entire sector — and we [universities] cannot make outreaches to communities [which host most of our prospective students] during these hard times.” Almost all 49 universities in Uganda have online platforms that prospective students can utilise to submit applications for admission, which ordinarily would make their work easier, but poor internet penetration means most of the institutions still get the bulk of their students through manual processes whereby students pick up application forms, fill them, and return them. The majority of universities also rely on aggressive outreach activities, sending institutional representatives out into communities and literally ‘scavenging’ for students. But this approach is not possible with lockdown and social distancing measures in place. Sumare said no more than 500 students had completed their applications for admission to undergraduate and postgraduate programmes at the Islamic University for the 2020-21 academic year. “When you compare it with last year, we are still short [in numbers],” he said. “The application process should be at 60% by this time of the year. But it is not.” At the Uganda Christian University (UCU), applications were still open. Its vice-chancellor, Rev Dr John Senyonyi, said: “The majority of our students first come to the university physically before they make up their mind that they would want to study at UCU. They want to first come to the university to have a feel of the environment and institution infrastructure.” Senyonyi said academic counsellors are on hand to help students make decisions based on their scores and temperaments. But with the lockdown and the banning of all public transport, prospective students are not able to travel to the university and counsellors are at home.

Read more [here](#)

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