

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

1. University World News

COVID-19 – A triple threat to food security (Africa)

Food insecurity in Sub-Saharan Africa is not news – the region is widely recognised as the world’s most food insecure. And, as participants to last week’s webinar highlighted, the COVID-19 pandemic is just the latest of three threats in as many years to the region’s food systems, following as it does the devastating fall armyworm and desert locust invasions in 2018 and 2019. Such destruction comes over and above the ongoing instability caused by drought and climate change. Of course, the situation has been compounded by COVID-19 containment measures such as border closures, lockdowns and curfews – all of which, somewhat ironically, are intended to prevent the loss of life, but which have radically disrupted food supply chains. In addition, massive job losses and the contractions of economies have meant that, according to IMF statistics quoted by webinar moderator Professor Paul Zeleza, 240 million people are going hungry in the region and in some countries, over 70% of the population have problems accessing food. This regional vulnerability is something that African countries deal with on a regular basis. In his contribution to the discussion on “The economic, food security, and livelihood impacts of COVID-19 in Africa: Lessons learned and policy responses”, Professor Samba Mbaye, who heads the department of plant biology at Cheikh Anta Diop University, said the food system in Senegal has long been affected by the “vagaries of climate”, but COVID-19 had brought physical limitations on imports and exports, and disruptions to the food supply chain. While he conceded that COVID-19 was causing suffering, he said it was also an opportunity for the country to explore, among other things, a greater emphasis on food sovereignty, self-reliance and to explore diversification of crop production activities and underutilised crop species. There was also an opportunity for greater emphasis on women and youth empowerment, he said, and for the university to improve its contributions to local communities and strengthen higher education and stakeholder relationships in Senegal. Dr Godfrey Bahigwa, director of the department of rural economy and agriculture in the African Union Commission (AUC), also had a message for universities, which he referred to as “powerhouses of knowledge...which share their views unhindered without political considerations”. Universities, he said, need to “work with their governments to design policies and strategies that will then help those countries to recover and come out stronger from the COVID-19 pandemic”.

Read more [here](#)

2. World Economic Forum

What will higher education in Africa look like after COVID-19? (Africa)

As of 8 June, Africa has recorded more than 88,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19. In response to the coronavirus outbreak, many African governments took the decision to close educational institutions to contain the disease. As a result, higher education institutions are having to rethink their approach, becoming more digitally led, and shifting to online platforms. The coronavirus pandemic has exposed the unpreparedness of many higher education institutions in Africa to migrate online. When the virus first hit the continent, many African governments were scrambling to figure out how best to

handle the myriad of challenges it would pose on the socio-economic growth of their countries. Many African governments have had to temporarily close educational institutions in an attempt to contain the spread of COVID-19 in their respective countries. Egypt was the first African country to report a case of COVID-19. Since then, Africa has recorded more than 88,000 cases with 2832 deaths and 33898 recoveries. The closures of schools and universities is said to have impacted over 70% of the world's population. Nevertheless, recent developments indicate a recognition that education has experienced a significant shift. The leadership and managers of higher education institutions across Africa have become fully aware that empowering students to prepare for a future where pandemics such as COVID-19 and other disruptions might become a part of our daily lives also means embracing change in learning and teaching. What does this mean, and is this the right time to start? Now may be an excellent time for higher education institutions in Africa to rethink what the future of education would look like and take practical steps towards adopting a blended learning approach in education to improve access and equity. Several universities across Africa, including the ones in countries such as Egypt, Ghana, South Africa, and Rwanda among others have moved some of their programmes to online platforms and partnered with Telco's to zero-rate these platforms. In some instances, these universities have made data packages and laptops available to some students to improve access. Currently, with an estimated 1650 higher education institutions in Africa and access for the relevant age group currently at 5%. Africa is said to have the lowest regional average in the world, about one-fifth of the global average of about 25%. However, despite the efforts to ensure smooth teaching and learning via migration to online platforms, students continue to face several challenges. According to UNESCO, 89% of students in sub-Saharan Africa do not have access to household computers and 82% lack internet access. This means that these online classes cannot cater for all students.

Read more [here](#)

3. University World News

Universities do what they can to keep learning ticking over (Mozambique)

The higher education sector of Mozambique has been thrown into disarray by the COVID-19 pandemic, with colleges and universities closed since 1 April when President Filipe Nyusi approved a state of emergency decree, imposing movement restrictions that have been extended to 30 June. Some universities have been trying to keep operations going through online classes, with privately-owned universities leading in this area, partly to keep fees being paid by students to help finance lecturer salaries and prevent a total shutdown. As elsewhere in Africa, state-owned universities in Mozambique have lagged in developing online services and many have cancelled classes entirely. As yet there is no reopening date, and the academic year ends in December. Even where online services have been provided, many Mozambican university students in rural areas have struggled to access them, having no steady access to electricity or the internet. Only those staying in cities have access to such services and many of these urbanites have also struggled because internet services are very expensive in Mozambique. For private universities such as Universidade Técnica de Moçambique (UDM – Technical University of Mozambique), Instituto Superior de Transportes e Comunicações (ISUTC – Higher Institute of Transport and Communications), Universidade São Tomás (USTM – University of St Thomas) and the Universidade Católica de Moçambique (UCM – Catholic University of Mozambique), online classes are being delivered via Zoom, WhatsApp, NoodleTools,

Google Classroom, G Suite and other online platforms. “The classes transmitted by radio and television channels and other digital platforms only serve to occupy students and consolidate the knowledge acquired before the closure of schools in the scope of the state of emergency, in the face of COVID-19,” she said, in an answer to questions about the effectiveness of online classes. The state-owned Eduardo Mondlane University (UEM or Universidade Eduardo Mondlane), based in the capital Maputo and the largest in the country with approximately 40,000 students, stopped contact classes on 23 March and since then has been trying to operate online classes without much success. As with private university students, poverty is a problem, with many students dependent on scholarship fees and lacking their own computers or smartphones for research. Normally they rely on university libraries and computer rooms, which are now closed.

Read more [here](#)

4. Ghanaian times

Impact of COVID-19 on Higher Education in Africa: The Transition to Online Teaching and Learning (Ghana)

As we are all well-aware, COVID-19 has changed our way of live and experts have labelled the pandemic as the most crucial global health calamity of the century and the greatest challenge that the humankind faced since the 2nd World War. What started as a regional health crisis in late 2019 had, by March of 2020 grown into a global pandemic never seen for a century. As at June 20, 2020 there have been 8,766,035 confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 462,691 deaths, reported by the World Health Organization (WHO). According to the WHO data, within the same period, Africa has 287,385 cases reported, with 7,708 confirmed deaths and 132,959 recoveries. Despite the relatively lower number of COVID-19 cases in Africa compared to Europe and other parts of the world, the virus has now spread to every country on the continent, and remains a major threat to the continent’s health systems. A new study by WHO predicts that if containment measures fail, even with a lower number of cases requiring hospitalization than elsewhere, the medical capacity in much of Africa would be overwhelmed. Almost all African countries have responded by putting in place lockdowns and public health measures to promote physical distancing, wearing of mask, good hand hygiene, isolating cases and testing and tracing of contacts of people with COVID-19. Even though these measures have helped slowed down the spread of the pandemic in Africa, it has affected every aspect of life and changed the world as we know it. It will be recorded as not only one of the most pressing issues of our time, but also as an occurrence which has most acutely highlighted the fault lines in our society. Within academia, COVID-19 has exposed some of the weaknesses on our campuses. In response to the pandemic, almost all governments in African decided to shut down educational institutions to help minimize the spread of the disease. To ensure academic continuity, most universities were mandated to make a transition from face-to-face teaching to the virtual environment. So, most universities went online on a scale never seen before. This decision was abrupt, hasty, and rapid without any contingency plans in place. This exposed a number of challenges for most of the institutions. Most institutions lacked the capacity to move to the virtual environment/ The technological infrastructure as well as Internet connectivity for most of the schools was a challenge. In addition, there was lack of adequate faculty preparedness, inadequate technical support, as well as students who lacked access to connecting devices as well as reliable

Internet connectivity. According to UNESCO, 9.8 million African students experienced disruption in their studies due to the closure of their institutions.

Read more [here](#)

5. University World News

[Universities to start phased reopening, but is it too soon? \(Zambia\)](#)

The Zambian government's plan to start reopening universities on 1 July has sparked concerns among lecturer unions and students that the move comes too early, and could see COVID-19 spread like wildfire among the student body and academics. "We are going ahead opening universities by July 1; it will be done in phases and manner based on the preparedness of universities," Dr Brian Mushimba, the higher education minister, told University World News, adding that the government had given universities a month's notice of its plans. "It appears COVID-19 is here for a long time, so we need to embrace the new normal. Our policy on education in this time of COVID-19 is that online learning will continue to be used as an integral part of the learning process for graduating students and those in other years," he said. "Universities and colleges will adopt virtual graduation tools amid the coronavirus [pandemic] and students who paid tuition fees for [the past] semester [where they] needed a physical presence in the university, will be refunded." President Edgar Lungu announced the reopening of physical classes on 1 June, saying classes for graduating students preparing for examinations should be opened first. Classes had been closed under a lockdown starting on 20 March. Sitali Wamundila, registrar at the University of Zambia (UNZA), disclosed that the institution would ease its lockdown according to guidance from the Ministry of Higher Education. "Graduating students will be the first to commence lessons and write their exams based on an approved calendar. International students and all other students will continue with online learning," he said in a statement. Dr Kelvin Mambwe, general secretary of the University of Zambia Lecturers and Researchers' Union (UNZALARU) in the capital Lusaka, warned that the government and universities needed to be very cautious about lifting the lockdown. "COVID-19 will explode if government ends the lockdown. In fact, at UNZA there is poor sanitation, no water, and social distancing is not possible because we have a lot of students in classes. We have an accommodation crisis: students are squatting because of a lack of bed space at the institution,"

Read more [here](#)

6. The North Africa Post

[Towards development of scientific research, digitization of education \(Morocco\)](#)

Morocco is stepping up efforts to promote scientific research and innovation and upgrade digitization of education. To this end, the departments of National education and Higher Education & Scientific Research, the OCP Foundation, and the Mohammed VI Polytechnic University (UM6P) have signed in Rabat on Saturday a framework agreement setting up a strategic partnership in this field. This partnership is part of the efforts made by the three partners to strengthen the development of scientific research and innovation in Morocco, enhance the results of research, and promote digitalization and distance education. This partnership provides for the launch of a new R&D fund aimed at boosting applied research as well as the creation of a "National Center for Digitalization and Distance Education", banking on the know-how and resources developed by the UM6P. This partnership will evolve around priority themes for Morocco mainly creation of wealth

from results of scientific research, and will help fulfil Morocco's ambitions in the sectors of education and research and innovation. The framework partnership agreement was signed by Minister of National Education Saïd Amzazi, Junior minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research Driss Ouaouicha, and President of the OCP Foundation and the UM6P Mostafa Terrab.

Read more [here](#)

7. University World News

Quality assurance is key to sustainable blended learning (Africa)

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, university campuses across Africa have been urged to shift their teaching and learning online to stem the disruption to learners caused by nationwide lockdowns of institutions. As restrictions ease across the continent, institutions that have quickly adopted online and blended learning interventions in the first half of 2020 are presented with an either-or conundrum: retreating to a singular focus on classroom-based teaching or continuing and further investing in wholly online or blended learning offerings. Other emerging world contexts are grappling with similar issues, including large population countries such as Brazil, India, Indonesia and Pakistan. The consensus seems that blended learning is the most likely change among institutions, which by most accounts is defined as up to 79% of teaching and learning being conducted online. Over time, naysayers have lamented that online learning lacks engagement, is impractical (for example, there are no lab-based activities), requires large and costly bandwidth (connectivity) and brings more problems than solutions to a resistant and disincentivised faculty. Not surprisingly, many of these issues have resurfaced in the present day, with uneven connectivity being particularly relevant. Connectivity issues notwithstanding, important voices in higher education including Philip Altbach and Hans de Wit and John Daniel have rightly remarked that online learning is not, nor never should have been, deemed an overnight solution. Online learning requires institutional vision and investment, proper pedagogical training, thorough (contingency) planning, varied instructional design, technology-oriented learning outcomes, reliable infrastructure and ample learner support. Put another way, online learning requires good quality assurance.

Read more [here](#)

8. University World News

Quality assurance of doctoral education is now urgent (Africa)

It is widely acknowledged that one of the major causes of poor research output from Africa is the very low number of PhD graduates on the continent. A reflection of this is the fact that the proportion of academic staff having a PhD in African universities rarely exceeds 40% and, depending on the country and the subject, can be as low as 20%. This also has an impact on the quality of undergraduate education which is why, at the 2015 African Higher Education Summit in Dakar, a commitment was made to ensure that 100% of academic staff in universities have a PhD by 2063. In South Africa, which has one of the best higher education systems in Africa, the goal is for 75% of academic staff to have a PhD by 2030. Several African countries (for example, Kenya, Nigeria and Senegal) have already specified that all university lecturers must have a PhD within a prescribed period. The need to increase the output of PhDs in Africa has long been recognised. Indeed, almost all African universities have responded by making an effort to enrol PhD students, and there has been a significant increase in doctoral enrolment in almost all countries over the past decade. Also,

several major initiatives, funded by United States foundations, the German Academic Exchange Service DAAD, the African Union, the European Union and the World Bank, among others, have been launched in Africa over the past decades to promote research and postgraduate education in universities, and all of them have a strong component of PhD training. But as PhD enrolment increases, the inevitable issue of the quality of the doctoral education arises. This is because in African universities, doctoral supervision is inadequate, a research environment is lacking, funding is insufficient and research facilities, especially for STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), are not always available. African universities are in fact experiencing a similar challenge to that of massification at undergraduate enrolment – they do not have the capacity to cope with the increasing doctoral enrolment. The key issues related to PhD enrolment in Africa are captured in the comprehensive 2018 survey of doctoral education in six African countries (Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal and South Africa) undertaken jointly by the British Council and DAAD. There are known cases all over Africa of a supervisor being assigned far too many PhDs to supervise, or of a supervisor having no research expertise in the PhD topic, or even of a supervisor not holding a PhD. It is hardly surprising therefore that the PhD graduation rate in most universities is very low, the dropout rate high and the time to completion often more than twice the prescribed time, although this is sometimes due to the PhD being undertaken on a part-time basis. Plagiarism, essay mills and falsification of research results in doctoral dissertations are not uncommon, not only in Africa but all over the world. The news that the Commission for University Education of Kenya expressed serious doubts regarding the quality of over 100 PhDs awarded by a leading public university in Kenya is also disturbing. All of this makes it clear that there is an urgent need for quality assurance of PhD programmes in African universities.

Read more [here](#)

9. The Elephant News

Let's Keep Universities but Do Away With Degrees (Kenya)

If we divorce training for the workplace from university education, universities can return to being sites of knowledge that are open to the public and that benefit society. After two decades of the neoliberal gutting down of Kenyan universities, Kenya's president has now gone for universities' jugular. He has cut off the university as a route for social advancement among the non-elite class. The slicing of the jugular came with the recent university admissions when the government announced that more than a half of them would be turned into technical programmes and institutions. At first, the government announced this move as a choice of the students themselves, but later on, it became evident that many students were caught by surprise. Kenyan universities have maintained a semblance of independence from direct patronage by Kenya's aristocracy. As long as universities have existed in Kenya, and especially after the expansion of university education by Kenya's second president, Daniel arap Moi, a child from a village had a shot in the Kenyan imagination of becoming next in line to the presidency. (For the moment, the integrity of the process is not considered here.) Now that President Uhuru Kenyatta has ditched his deputy, he has got his bureaucratic robots to slice the jugular of Kenya's schooling system and let it bleed to death. As is to be expected, the Kenyan media has celebrated the event, thus becoming the conduit for fairly unbelievable stories that clothed Kenya's feudal politics in the parlance of employment and The Market (as opposed to the regular markets that we all love). Like clockwork, the media

published headlines such as “Are degrees no longer hot?”, wrote op-eds justifying technical and vocational education and training (TVET) as a better alternative to a regular university degree, or held town hall meetings that gave a semblance of public participation by fielding questions from youth who had clearly not understood that they are pawns in a system that just does not care about them. This move will not surprise anyone with knowledge of the aristocratic class system in Kenya and the neoliberal turn of the 1980s. It has been a long time coming. Since colonial times, the Kenyan state has been hostile to Africans receiving any type of formal education that does not bend to imperial interests.

Read more [here](#)

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