

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

1. British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)

Uganda Makerere University fire: 'Ivory Tower' gutted (Uganda)

A fire has gutted an iconic building at Uganda's Makerere University, which is a prominent landmark in the capital. Known as the "Ivory Tower", an overnight blaze has left its distinctive white walls with blue-shuttered windows blackened. Police in Kampala have started an investigation into the cause of the fire at one of Africa's oldest and most prestigious universities. The vice-chancellor described the destruction as unbelievable. "It is a very dark morning for Makerere University. Our iconic Main Administration Building caught fire and the destruction is unbelievable. But we are determined to restore the building to its historic state in the shortest time possible," Vice-Chancellor Barnabas Nawangwe tweeted. Fire officers fought the huge fire from around midnight, reports the BBC's Patience Atuhaire from Kampala. Though most of it had been put out by early on Sunday afternoon, some parts of the building were still smouldering and smoke could still be seen, our reporter says. Huge cracks can be seen on some of the outer walls, most of the roof has been burnt off and many of the windows are completely burnt out, she says. Initial reports indicate that the fire may have started from the roof, spreading to floors that house the finance and records department. A historian of East Africa, Derek Peterson, says the fire is a disaster for Uganda and for East Africa. "The building holds student records, and the basement is full of archive files spanning the whole history of the institution," he tweeted, adding that he had been intending to help organise a project to catalogue the collection. Makerere was first established in 1922 as a technical school and has grown into a widely respected university.

Read more [here](#)

2. University World News

University rankings don't measure what matters (Global-South Africa)

International rankings of universities are big business and big news. These systems order universities on the basis of a variety of criteria such as student to staff ratio, income from industry, and reputation as captured through public surveys. Universities around the world use their rankings as marketing material and parents and prospective students make life choices on the basis of them. But the methodology underpinning the Quacquarelli Symonds and Times Higher Education ranking systems and others like them would be unlikely to pass as a third year student's research project. And yet high-status universities around the world spend time and money competing in this extravaganza rather than pointing out that the 'emperor is wearing no clothes'. Why would they when the rankings reinforce their position as institutions of choice for those who can afford their fees? As a researcher of higher education, I find it worrying that we're held captive by these glitzy spectacles. Imagine if a student indicated that their research project would be to develop a ranking of all universities. They would allocate 20% to whether current students and the general public thought the university was prestigious, 5% for the number of Nobel Prize winners on the institution's staff, 30% for the number of research publications, and so on. Any academic advisor would throw the proposal out. Some of these criteria are subjective. The weightings are arbitrary, important aspects of many universities are missing and the averaging of unrelated aspects to a final number is simply poor science which does not tell us much about the institution at all. And yet this is exactly how rankings are determined. The methods behind the international university ranking systems vary but the underpinning methodology is identical. Convert proxy measures of a few academic activities into numeric metrics, add these together and come up with a ranking of institutions.

The criteria may be entirely unrelated to each other or may be poor proxies of the academic activity being measured. Reputation surveys and student throughput, for example, probably tell you more about how wealthy, and therefore selective, the university is than anything about the quality of their teaching.

Read more [here](#)

3. Study International

What can be done to better support women pursuing their PhDs in Africa? (Africa)

A Doctor of Philosophy – commonly known as a PhD – is the highest level of academic training. It allows the degree holder to teach the chosen subject at university, conduct research or practise in the specialised area. However, in many African countries like Kenya there are gender gaps when it comes to women enrolling in, and completing, their PhD studies. This subsequently affects their recruitment into university teaching and research positions. Women make up just 30% of Africa’s researchers. There are various reasons for this. For instance, a study covering several African countries found that barriers include sexual harassment, a lack of mentors – with some male faculty mentors unwilling to act as mentors for junior women – and difficulty finding a balance between career and family. A study by the African Academy of Sciences reported similar challenges faced by women scholars in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) disciplines. It found that the success of women already working in STEM was highly influenced by the work environment, the recruitment process and gender relations. More has to be done to help women overcome gender-based challenges. To support postgraduates in further education, several initiatives offer PhD fellowships – a merit-based scholarship – in Africa. My colleagues and I from the African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC) wanted to examine one of these and how it catered for women. Our case study was on the Consortium for Advanced Research Training in Africa (CARTA). This is an initiative that was formed in 2008 and is jointly led by the APHRC, based in Kenya, and the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa. We focused on CARTA for our study because it tries to build the capacity of individual PhD scholars – who focus on public and population health – using doctoral fellowships and research grants. CARTA also tries to get member universities to institutionalise good practices. By the end of 2019, CARTA had graduated 87 of its 209 active PhD fellows. These individuals produced peer-reviewed publications and some fellows were promoted in their academic careers. Of the active fellows, 55% are women. We found that the programme caters well for women looking to complete their doctorates. For instance, it recognises that women need special consideration when it comes to pregnancy and in the care of newborn babies, and that they may have different responsibilities when it comes to domestic chores and the care of the family. All of these are factors could have previously prevented them from enrolling in, or completing, their PhDs. It’s important that other institutions offering fellowships replicate aspects of this model to better support Africa’s women academics.

Read more [here](#)

4. University World News

Higher Education reforms – Preparing graduates for life and work (Africa)

The changing and competitive workplace demands more highly skilled workers with competencies such as empathy, communication, critical thinking and problem-solving skills. The world over, and specifically in Africa, universities need a third wave of education reform aimed at ensuring that graduates entering the workplace are nimble and have the competencies demanded by the job market now and in future.

The first wave of university education reform in many African nations focused on university access for more qualified high school graduates enrolling in public and private universities. The second wave of the reforms focused on student success and ensuring the production of quality graduates. The third wave of university education reform in Africa now needs to focus on creating a university education system that is able to

adapt to the needs of the learners, employers and society at large, a system that is able to respond to the needs of the labour market and workforce needs. Investment in university education involves huge financial spending, hence the need for universities to respond to signals from society to ensure that desired job qualifications and the degree programmes offered are in alignment. While a university degree has both private and social returns, the reform agenda should move from supply-driven to demand-driven degree programmes.

Read more [here](#)

5. Borgen Magazine

How TVET is changing the Landscape of Poverty in Kenya (Kenya)

In Kenya, there exists a stigma around Technical and Vocation Education and Training (TVET) programs. People who attend TVET programs as opposed to universities are generally perceived as unintelligent and incapable. However, these programs are essential for poverty reduction and increased productivity in developing nations. The Kenyan government recognized the potential of TVET programs in improving the country's economy, and in 2013 it created the TVET ACT in an attempt to rebrand TVET in Kenya and ensure increased enrollment in these programs by 2030. Technical and vocational training programs are crucial in alleviating poverty in developing nations because they allow young adults to enter a workforce where there are a lot of jobs immediately available. As unemployment is a leading cause of poverty, providing young people with the training and education employers are looking for can help break the poverty cycle in Kenya. TVET programs provide graduates with employable skills and are often shorter than university programs so they can enter the workforce sooner. The Permanent Working Group on TVET, a group dedicated to improving TVET employability in Kenya, states that TVET programs "recognize education and vocational training as central pillars of youth employability and sustainable enterprise development in Kenya." To increase enrollment in TVET programs in Kenya, the government has started a rebranding campaign to change the stigma in the country surrounding careers in technical and vocational fields and entice youths to choose a career path in these industries. The Kenyan government is now calling TVET the "preferable option" for higher education for young people. Additionally, in 2018, Kenya's National Treasury increased the allocated funding for TVET by 30% from the previous year. By doing this, they were able to reduce the yearly cost for students in TVET programs from \$920 to \$564. For many Kenyans struggling economically, this lowered cost is hugely appealing. The government is also offering tax rebates to private companies who hire interns from TVET programs to strengthen the link between technical training and the private sector in Kenya. The government's attempts to rebrand TVET are working. In 2018, more than 2,500 students chose to enroll in TVET programs despite academically qualifying to attend college. TVET students are referred to as "TVET Champions," and the number of TVET student enrollment has increased by nearly 1,400 between 2017 and 2018. The Kenyan education ministry said in a 2018 statement that "the growing number of these TVET Champions is a clear indication that concerted efforts to improve enrollment in TVET courses are yielding fruits." Student enrollment from those who do not qualify for college is up as well, proving that TVET programs are becoming more popular across the board.

Read more [here](#)

6. University World News

Pressure to publish – Are quality and relevance at stake? (Africa)

Academics in Africa need to interrogate what value their publications actually contribute to society and focus on the quality of research rather than hyper-prolific scholarship, according to Professor Tade Aina, executive director of the Nairobi-headquartered Partnership for African Social and Governance Research.

In an interview with University World News, Aina said increased emphasis on publication in both the academies of science and arts has adversely affected the quality of research, especially with the rise of predatory journals that drive young scholars in their thirst for mobility. “If a university lecturer produces 70 articles in a year, what else do they do?” asked Aina, formerly the programme director of the Higher Education and Libraries in Africa Program for the Carnegie Corporation of New York. He said a scholar does not need 100 publications to make an impact in a given field. “You can open debate with a few critical publications that give direction, for instance, on policy,” he said. Aina said COVID-19 has challenged Africa to re-imagine its university systems. “This calls for reflection on the balance between excellence in publication and the numbers of publications and their impact on teaching in universities,” Aina said. As the virus shakes the fundamentals of social interaction, knowledge production in universities and mobility of people, he urged universities to narrow their research focus to local needs of the communities in which they operate while still addressing universal questions of healthcare, climate change and the production of and access to energy. According to Dr Fibian Lukalo, director of research and advocacy at the National Land Commission of Kenya, the pressure to publish and its link to promotions is real in Kenyan universities. “This pressure may contribute towards an environment in which the rules get softened, for instance, self-publishing taking place ... or there is restriction of submissions to university-run journals which do not rank highly ... or paying journals to publish one’s work,” said Lukalo, who added that such pressure should be at a system level rather than on individual academicians. Lukalo said academic writing is not a solitary event as it depends on the “thoughts” of other scholars or practitioners, a supportive environment, funding, time for writing or developing thoughts, library facilities, internet connectivity and conferences, among others.

Read more [here](#)

7. Sci Dev

Foreign funding ‘controlling’ African research (General)

Africa Science Focus this week looks at whether African institutions are free to take independent decisions on research in the continent. African governments have not given research the attention it deserves, according to Alhaji Njai, a professor of infectious diseases and toxicology at the University of Sierra Leone and research fellow at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, USA. “African researchers are not in control of the research within Africa because if you are an African researcher...who wants to stay in Africa and do research with relevance and related to Africa, you find yourself at the mercy of foreign donors or foreign support because there isn’t research funds or research grants available for African researchers to tap into, so they tend to look outside”. Joseph Matovu, senior researcher from the School of Public Health, Makerere University in Uganda, says that while Uganda and some other African countries have recently set aside more funding for research and development, African research is heavily influenced by the developed societies such as Europe and North America.

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8. World Economic Forum

How can Africa succeed in the Fourth Industrial Revolution? (Africa)

Africa's under-20 population is projected to be the continent's largest age cohort by 2070.

So it's vital that young people are offered the tools to be successful in a digital-first economy, writes the African Development Bank's Hanan Morsy. Only when Africa can close these education gaps, and set up its society for a digital overhaul, will it reap the benefits of new technologies. Key features of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) – accelerating digitalization, artificial intelligence (AI), cloud computing, robotics, and 3D printing – have obvious and important implications for education, employment, and the future of work. This is especially true for African countries. Over the past decade, the share of the continent's under-20 population has expanded by more than 25%, and is projected to be the continent's largest age cohort by 2070. As Africa meets the 4IR, its youth will be one of its most important assets. But to capture this demographic dividend, African countries must overhaul their education systems to prepare for the coming technological revolution. While automation could increase skills premiums and exacerbate income inequality, it also could increase productivity and create new occupations. As such, the 4IR represents a unique opportunity for African countries to leapfrog over development hurdles with the help of technology. The 4IR will heavily influence which skills are needed in the labor market. Around the world, demand is evolving toward adaptable social, behavioral, and non-repetitive cognitive skills, and away from routine tasks and narrow skills tied to specific jobs. In Africa, demand for software engineers, marketing specialists, writers, and financial advisers is rising, whereas demand for mechanical technicians, administrative assistants, and accountants is falling. Developing such skills starts in early childhood. In addition to strengthening education, African countries need to increase investment in nutrition, health, and social protections for children. Sadly, Africa is home to one-third of the world's stunted children under age five, and that number is still rising. Yet the link between nutrition and a workforce's cognitive capacity is clear. Governments that invest in better nutrition, particularly for the first 1,000 days from conception to age two, will see far-reaching economic – as well as humanitarian – returns.

Read more [here](#)

9. University World News

COVID-19: could the pandemic be an educational accelerator?

A recent article published in University World News, "COVID-19 pandemic – Years of potential intellectual life lost" by John Richard Schrock, borrows and intelligently applies principles in medical epidemiology to support and drive home the author's thoughts while estimating what could be a potential loss in educational advancement to students, research and academics as a result of the pandemic and its associated shutdown of educational institutions. But I do not share in the author's assertion that a whole generation of institutions and higher education students may face a reduction in their skills and knowledge as a result of the shutdown. I do not blame the author for his line of thought either: the fundamental problem lies with our conception of formal education as the only tool for socialising and enhancing the cognitive development of humans. We need to understand this: education, and, as a matter of fact, learning, does not stop even when a particular medium of transmission and engagement ceases. Learning, just like matter, does not cease but changes from one state to the other. Learning is part of living in a society and only stops when society dies. My assertion about learning, in terms of cognitive advancement, hinges on the fact that society – its people, its tools and modes of interactions – transforms itself through learning in pretty much the same way that learning is transformed by society. In my view, although institutions have shut down, there are different modes of learning that are more contextual and, to a large extent, meaningful and practical than what established educational institutions may be able to offer. It is undeniable that learning in specific subject domains might have been reduced, but integrated learning has improved. Thus, throughout the

pandemic, students – from basic to higher education levels – are learning more about the history of disease control and epidemics, about ways to create virtual spaces for transmitting and receiving knowledge and to do business and rigorous research.

Read more [here](#)

10. The Conversation

Young African migrants are pushed into uni, but more find success and happiness in vocational training (Africa)

For disadvantaged people with disrupted educational trajectories, such as refugees, vocational qualifications can widen access to paid jobs and enhance economic independence. But many still consider vocational education and training (VET) qualifications not as prestigious as university degrees. This is a widespread issue, especially in African communities. Many African parents push their children to go to university regardless of their preparedness or interest. The outcome is dispiriting. Most of them leave university without a degree. They drop out. But African youth I have interviewed for as-yet unpublished research have found VET in Australia to be a supportive environment, where they have been successful. More should be encouraged to consider VET, and policies must be in place to help them get there. For African Australians, higher education attainment is closely associated with migration status. Compared to their non-refugee counterparts, refugee background African youth are less likely to transition to university within five years of their arrival in Australia. The trend has not changed much over the last 25 years. People from the main countries of origin of African refugees (Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan) have considerably benefited from the VET sector. The VET sector provides them with an equity pathway to university. For many students from refugee background, low academic results at school mean a direct transition to university remains challenging. In 2016, there were close to 1,000 Africans from refugee background in the VET sector compared to fewer than 500 in the university sector.

Read more [here](#)

11. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

UNDP Africa releases a special online magazine highlighting 50 young Africans innovating against COVID-19 (Africa)

The UNDP Regional Bureau for Africa today released a special edition of an online magazine, showcasing how young Africans are resourcefully helping fight the COVID-19 pandemic. The magazine – dubbed Africa Innovates, is timely as the world grapples with a response and recovery to a global pandemic. As COVID-19 continues to ravage the world, scant attention is being given to efforts Africans are making to stem the spread of the Coronavirus. The magazine seeks to contribute to a new narrative – one that showcases Africa’s potential and Africans breaking with a wait for solutions from outside approach. Africa Innovates features 50, mainly young innovators, who against all odds, and limited resources, are inventing diverse home-grown solutions which are proving essential in mitigating the effects of the pandemic on their communities. According to Ms. Ahunna Eziakonwa, Assistant Secretary General and Director, UNDP Regional Bureau for Africa, the untapped potential of Africa’s youth creates urgency in rethinking “the way to do development – a way in which the promise frames the approach, and not the problem.” She states: “At UNDP, we believe in Africa’s promise. We are not on a problem solving project. Rather, we are investing in Africa’s abilities and its inherent capacity, if harnessed, to create its own solutions. For this magazine, we found 50 African innovators who saw in COVID-19, the opportunity to solve today’s challenges, lending hope to a future of promise - not despair.” The compilation – which is not exhaustive, was collated by the UNDP Africa Regional Representatives on recommendation from the communities in which they serve, as well as

from industry insiders endorsement and research based on the following criteria: African-produced, innovative, game-changing, scalable, applicable, safe, impactful and can provide a long-term solution post COVID-19. The projects featured say it all – Africa can. From drones to robots; contact tracing apps to rapid and non-invasive testing kits, portable hands-free sanitation chambers to community hand-washing stations that also cater for those less able; oxygen-making machines to genome sequencing, AI-powered healthcare chat bots to online platforms providing health services to those suffering mental health problems triggered by effects of the pandemic – African is managing complexity in the world’s most denting pandemic – through home-grown solutions.

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