

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

1. University World News

African Scientists Directory fosters collaboration, counters populism (Africa)

The obstacles facing budding scientists in Africa are exacerbating a brain drain of some of the continent's top minds. Poor coordination within and among national scientific communities has damaged mentorship opportunities, impeding the development of the next generation of academics and researchers. It has also led to duplication of efforts, with scientists working in silos oblivious of each other's research. Political, cultural and geographical barriers, particularly between Anglophone and Francophone, as well as Lusophone African countries, have aggravated the lack of communication among scientists. They often simply don't know where to look for potential collaborators. In addition, public debate is devalued in the absence of a pool of readily available scientific experts who can provide factual, informed comment on issues of the day – and help stem the widespread distrust of science which has mounted with the rise of populism globally. In response, the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf) and the International Science Council Regional Office for Africa (ISC ROA) have launched an African Scientists Directory, which aims to forge inter-institutional engagement across the continent to train future scientists and foster joint research efforts. "Collaboration is required to prevent the loss of thousands of professionals to developed countries," Richard Glover, a programme specialist at ISC ROA, told a webinar organised by ASSAf as part of Open Access Week, internationally observed from 19-26 October. Hailed as a new online 'yellow pages' for African scientists, the directory initiative, which is co-funded by South Africa's Department of Science and Innovation, acknowledges the increasing importance attached to collaboration in the international academy, both in producing multi- and inter-disciplinary research and as a funding requirement. "Collaboration also helps mobilise political support for research and the development of African solutions to African problems," Glover told the webinar. The collaboration fostered by the directory, which seeks to promote an open science approach, also has the virtue of improving the relationship between academia and society at large, enabling the general public to understand the benefits of science, which is often funded with taxpayers' contributions. Adopting the ethos, "if you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together", the directory offers a pan-African platform to identify and mobilise scholars in the natural and social sciences, humanities, engineering and mathematics, as well as technologists, with the goal of supporting the continent's sustainable socioeconomic development.

Read more [here](#)

2. University World News

Challenges and solutions as learning moves online (Togo)

In the West African state of Togo, universities have been relying on the internet to engage students in academic activities as remote learning has replaced in-person teaching under lockdown measures to curb the spread of COVID-19 – a new system that has not always been rolled out smoothly. Indeed, tertiary education examinations have nonetheless had to be held in physical facilities because of limitations within the country's online infrastructure. "It is possible that some assessments will be done online, but generally the assessments will be done in person," said Komla Sanda, president of the University of Kara, this Francophone country's second largest public university. This was in July after a meeting between the then prime minister Komi Klassou and heads of Togolese public and private universities. Klassou resigned in September. Other institutions attending included representatives of Togo's largest and oldest public university, the University of Lomé, as well as the University of Kara, and private Togolese higher education institutions. These include the University of Science and Technology of Togo; the Catholic University of West

Africa – University Unit of Togo; and the ESA Business School. The meeting agreed that examinations would go ahead and that once they are concluded, universities and other tertiary education institutions (public and private) could reopen physical facilities – a process that has only just started to happen. An academic from the ESA, who requested anonymity, described the situation at his institution: “Online courses started at the beginning of May and ended at the end of July. The courses are given by extensive explanation and audio, and only ambitious students participate.” He said, participation was so low in some instances that courses ended up being delivered by a WhatsApp group. “Overall, the online courses were not that easy to run, as our students were not used to digital course work.” These difficulties are all the more serious given that Togo higher education institutions initially went into lockdown on 20 March, with most students being sent home.

Read more [here](#)

3. All African

Blended Learning? Here Are the Rules (Kenya)

Universities will now be required to seek accreditation for all their blended and online programmes from the Commission for University Education (CUE) before offering them to students. The commission’s chair, Prof Chacha Nyaigotti, said there is need to ensure that universities are offering quality education as most of them shifted to virtual learning following the Covid-19 pandemic. Nyagotti also said that the commission has developed protocols for implementation of the Open, Distance and e-Learning (ODEL) in universities which requires universities to have their programmes inspected, approved and accredited. "Reviewing of university guidelines is ongoing, and our aim is to ensure that the quality of teaching is high and the mode of learning is appropriate. The commission wants to ensure that our education standards do not drop as a result of the shift to e-learning," said Prof Nyaigotti. CUE Chief Executive Officer Mwenda Ntarangwi encouraged universities to embrace innovative multidisciplinary interactions, and to establish personalised and self-directed learning. "This pandemic has taught us to be versatile, and to adapt to every situation," said Prof Ntarangwi. A survey conducted by CUE on university students showed that 75 per cent of them preferred blended learning. The requirements that every universities must have before implementing the ODeL programmes are: The programmes must be approved by CUE, institutions should have adequate IT staff and appropriate infrastructure, reliable internet connection on campus to support live streaming of lectures, and a functional Learning Management System (LMS) which is hosted in a secure data centre, anti-plagiarism software and tools for access to e-library. Further, they should establish quality assurance mechanisms in the delivery of online examinations, and ensure proper management and monitoring of the ODeL programme.

Read more [here](#)

4. The New Vision

50% of universities cleared to switch to online lectures (Uganda)

Uganda's universities which have switched from traditional to online teaching, with clearance from the National Council for Higher Education has now grown to 25 out of 50. This means that these universities, after inspections and re-visiting of their programmes, can now teach and assess students online, shifting substantially completely to remote delivery of their courses. The state minister for higher education Dr. John Chrysostom Musingo says, "Universities, are taking this move, because of the COVID-19 restrictions and will also be expected to maintain the teaching even after this pandemic era. " Teaching online means that students do not have to get to the universities physically to study, and will rely on web assisted applications to interact with their lecturers, to teaching and assessment. So if universities are online, will students still attend lectures? So many universities claim that, on average, 70% to 80% of their students are

set to start online classes; that the rest will fall in line, with time. There are other seven higher, but non-degree awarding institutions of learning which have also been cleared to lecture online. The executive director of the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) Prof. Mary Okwakol says the Government plans to have all universities, private and public, cleared to lecture online. This means that these universities, after inspections and re-visiting of their programmes, can now teach and assess students online. She says that she is aware that some students are still struggling to meet the costs of online education, but she hoped that universities can agree with their students, to work out modalities of ensuring that no one is left behind. Some universities have reduced the tuition fees and some are providing their students with internet; and there are those which are taking both these measures.

Read more [here](#)

5. Nature

Africa's people must be able to write their own genomics agenda (Africa)

Genomics on the continent is finally getting the attention it deserves from international donors — but more funding needs to come from national and regional sources, too. An extensive study of genomic data from people in Africa has revealed more than three million previously undescribed genetic variants, many of them in populations whose DNA had never been sampled before. The study is a milestone in genomics research. It begins to fill a gaping hole in the world's DNA databases, which have until now contained little data from Africa's people. At the same time, most of the study's authors are based at institutions in Africa. Both of these facts are to be welcomed. The gap in the data should not be so wide. Africa, the most genetically diverse continent, is where modern humans, *Homo sapiens*, originated. Populations on other continents are descended from groups that migrated out of Africa many tens of thousands of years ago. These groups represent a fraction of the genetic diversity found on the African continent, and yet dominate studies of DNA — often with damaging consequences. For many years, for example, researchers erroneously thought that the genetic disorder cystic fibrosis, which severely shortens life, was not present in African populations¹. As a result, diagnostic kits looked only for genetic variants found in European populations, missing many other variants found in African populations.

Read more [here](#)

6. Wired

The world could learn a lot from how Africa is handling Covid-19 (Africa)

A young population, high burden of infectious diseases and expertise gained from HIV left Africa well-placed in the fight against Covid-19. Two months after it opened, Khayelitsha Field Hospital abruptly closed. The facility, constructed in a sports hall in early July on the outskirts of the South African city of Cape Town, had been constructed in anticipation of a wave of Covid-19 deaths. But the infections and deaths that have overwhelmed healthcare systems across the world never came. Almost a year into the pandemic Africa has mostly been spared from a crisis that has brought much of the world to its knees. It wasn't meant to be this way. In April, as Covid-19 shut down country after country, the United Nations issued a stark warning: Africa might be next. Officials said Covid-19 could directly kill at least 300,000 people in Africa and possibly as many as 3.3 million. In May, with infections and deaths still surprisingly low, the World Health Organisation revised that prediction down to between 83,000 and 190,000 deaths. To date, just over 40,000 Africans have lost their lives to Covid-19. "Very few cases were identified," says Gilles Van Cutsem, a senior HIV and tuberculosis adviser for Médecins Sans Frontières at the Southern African Medical Unit in Cape Town. There is no single reason for Africa's seemingly remarkable escape. For one, Africa isn't a homogenous lump of land. Its 54 countries are ethnically and socially diverse. Yet, across the continent, there are some trends that hint at why deaths from Covid-19 remain so low. The median age in Africa, where more than 60 per

cent of people are under the age of 25, is about half of that in Europe. This has played a significant role, says Denis Chopera, a public healthcare expert at the Africa Research Institute in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. He also points to Africa's warm climate and the potential of pre-existing immunity in some communities. "Africa has a high burden of infectious diseases, including coronaviruses, and it is possible that there is some cross-immunity which protects Africans from severe Covid-19," Chopera says. The WHO has made similar suggestions. Across the continent, high rates of tuberculosis, HIV, polio and Ebola, have also ensured a wealth of well-trained medical professionals and, crucially, the infrastructure and expertise to handle a pandemic. "The experience has come in handy, especially in countries such as South Africa where contact tracing already existed for tuberculosis," says Chopera. "These were repurposed to combat Covid-19." To date, the continent has recorded 1.7 million infections. The number, as is the case across the world, is likely much higher. One study conducted by researchers at the University of Cape Town collected 2,700 samples during the city's pandemic peak in late July and early August. A startling 40 per cent of the people tested had Covid-19 antibodies.

Read more [here](#)

7. University World News

Foreign students struggling amid scholarship shock (Africa)

African students at the European University of Lefke in Northern Cyprus have been left stranded following a decision by the university administration to revoke, without prior notice, all scholarships awarded on the basis of meritorious grades. This is one of a 'host of problems' that foreign students have raised with the institution. Undergraduate and associate students who have studied at the university for two semesters and have a Grade Point Average (GPA) of 3.50 and a cumulative GPA of 3.00 and above, are rewarded with a scholarship within the framework of the university regulations regarding scholarships. The GPA indicates how well a student did on average in various courses. However, at the beginning of the 2020 winter-fall semester, the administration introduced a new system in which all scholarships based on excellence were nullified. Students were informed about this only in October. According to a press statement by the International Students Union (ISU), the move to revoke scholarships by the institution, which has forced many African students to put their studies on hold, was made more than two months ago. However, students could not prepare for these changes as they were notified about them only when universities reopened. Many guardians of learners studying abroad have been forced to withdraw their financial support citing loss of income due to the coronavirus pandemic. This has left hundreds of foreign students, some of them from poorer countries, struggling to sustain themselves, let alone meet tuition costs. In the 2018-19 academic year there were about 90,000 international students in Northern Cyprus, including from mainland Turkey. Of this group, 20,000 were from Africa, the majority from Sub-Saharan African countries such as Nigeria, Zimbabwe and Cameroon.

Read more [here](#)

8. The Standard

Why youth unemployment problem require more than a strait jacket solution (Kenya)

The youth unemployment and underemployment in Kenya is now an undisputed fact. Statistics from Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) indicating that about 1.7m more people have lost jobs due to Covid-19 pandemic wiping away some of the informal jobs and also triggering a slowdown in the economy, it is expected that the problem is going to get worse with the level of unemployment expected to double to 10.2 per cent in Kenya. Despite all these challenges Africa best opportunity lays in its youthful populations and with the statistics showing that the median age in Africa is approximately 19.7 years while here in Kenya is about 20.1 years, the continent still is in a pole position to becoming an economic giant if the energies of

these youth is optimally utilised. While this is the case, the problem of unemployment in Kenya is not new and neither needs a one straight jacket solution. This is because the problem manifests itself in different ways catalysed by education levels, social status and the environment in which they live. First, we have a group of unemployed youth who never pursued education due to different challenges in their upbringing. They have no skills and in our education-oriented system that has little options for other capabilities such as talents, this means they have limited opportunities in the formal sector. It, therefore, means that the interventions needed to help these youths to harness their capability is either helping them to employ themselves through the apprentice system and the vocational training institutions training. This category suffers the same predicament with the youth who never pursued education beyond primary school and the only route to gain skills is through apprentice courses in vocational colleges which are available at the county level. The second category are those youths who have a high school education but are not able to join tertiary colleges. While the government has created a system where these young people can benefit from government incentives by offering them money to pursue skills-oriented courses both at the TVETs and county-based tertiary institutions, this information seems not disseminated well for them to take advantage of the offers.

Read more [here](#)

9. University World News

Public University Bill on hold until December election (Ghana)

Ghanaian lawmakers have listened to public criticism against the Public University Bill 2020 that was tabled in parliament and have decided to put it on hold, because there is the need for further consideration, ranking member on the education committee of the house, Peter Nortsu-Kotoe, has said. Parliament is preparing to go on recess in preparation for the 7 December 2020 national election and this means that the bill will not be considered until a new parliament resumes in 2021. Even so, considering the wide-ranging criticism, the new government may opt to withdraw it. Minister of Education Matthew Opoku Prempeh, who introduced the bill in April 2019, said it was meant "to provide the procedure for the establishment of public universities, [set out] principles for the management of public universities, [determine] the legal status of public universities, the procedure for financing public universities and administration and supervision of the activities of public universities and related matters". However, education committee member Nortsu-Kotoe said the committee had looked at the bill and recommended that "in view of the criticisms and the number of petitions that we have received, it will be better for the government to hold on with the passing of the bill because there is the need for greater consultation. So, it will not feature [as part of] the bills we are considering for this meeting of parliament".

Read more [here](#)

10. The New Vision

Analysis: Why public, private varsities are divided over online exams (Uganda)

Much as some private universities are set to conduct end of semester online examinations, the public ones say this will not be possible and students may have to wait for COVID-19 to get contained. All universities (as it was with schools) were closed in March and seven months later, they have been re-opened for candidates and finalists. The Government allowed universities to offer online lectures and 50% of the 51 universities, according to the National Council for Higher Education, have made the switch. The online examination system is a digital platform that relays exams to students, which are later marked and scored by lecturers. In certain cases, the system scores the students. In this case, students, from wherever they are, are expected to sit for examinations on their laptops, with software-controlled applications. Eventually, with online lecturing becoming the new normal in Uganda's universities, protecting the integrity of exam and exam data

are becoming key areas of concern too. But experts and educationists say there is a way out. Five private universities of the 25 total universities cleared to conduct online lectures have already had online assessment systems. However, most public universities say that online assessments are expensive, takings long to be accurate and credible and that most of their students do not have the required gadgets such as laptops, to effectively have all of them on these online assessment systems. Officials from public universities, whom New Vision talked to, plan to opt-out of end of semester examinations, and only hope the COVID-19 pandemic can end soon. Some private universities have embraced online examinations; and these include ISBAT University, Ndejje University, International University of East Africa, Victoria University, and Clarke International University.

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Name:	Corporate	Email:
Maureen Akena	Communication	& communications@ruforum.org
	Advocacy Officer	