

RUFORUM Webinar Series (2020)

Introductory Note for Webinar 2

Date: 19 June 2020

Time: 15.00-17.00 East African Standard Time

Re-imagining higher education in Africa in the ‘new normal’

Global pandemics by their very nature are disruptive and trigger radical social and economic changes. The COVID-19 pandemic has certainly been disruptive to higher education globally. Projections indicate medium to long term implications of the COVID-19 pandemic ranging from five years to beyond with immediate near-term disruption effects already felt extending to at least two years to stabilize. Based on the previous SARS out-break, it took higher education at least two years to recover, yet the devastation was not as extensive to economies and systems as COVID-19 has done in the present. Depending on the region, predictions show a 15%-25% potential decline in total enrolment in the higher education sector in the near term¹.

Certainly, the odds have been real, economic fallout from the virus has already affected staff remuneration with some universities suspending staff contracts; affecting positions of casual, adjunct and temporary workers. Private led universities and higher education institutions have been most affected as they are largely dependent on tuition as the main revenue streams. Within this melee, universities and other learning institutions have had to rapidly adjust albeit at differentiated rates but students as well as parents have equally had to redefine the ‘classroom’ and responsibilities in the ‘new learning space’ besides either finding new jobs or maintaining the existing ones. For now, many institutions are still reacting to the challenge, the reality of transformation is taking shape and/or awakening those that felt that there will be a return to normal. In the last couple of weeks, universities have started providing academic staff with crash training in online teaching². This rush begs the question, universities are centres of innovation, what have they been up to since the advancement of internet and competitiveness of the fourth industrial revolution?

Innovations in response to COVID-19 are strongly needed from all spheres including in higher education to overcome the current and project constraints that the ‘new normal’ is converging on humanity. This reactivates the central role played by the universities in producing the caliber and diversity of graduates that are needed in the economy today and tomorrow. Considering that tertiary education is an important aspiration for many young people and a critical instrument for employment in the global knowledge economy, current disruptions imposed by COVID-19 call

¹ Dennis, M. 2020. Higher education opportunities after COVID-19.

<https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20200507152524762>

² Parker, S. 2020. COVID19: How the coronavirus could transform higher education.

<https://home.kpmg/au/en/home/insights/2020/04/coronavirus-covid-19-education-sector-transformation.html>

for reimagining the state of higher education. It is critical to reimagining the current higher education to recast the future to in particular be resilient of future disruptions but also to minimize the potential social, political and economic challenges that an ineffective tertiary education systems breed. This is because the current COVID-19 pandemic and other potential epidemics and pandemics to come will create societies with disengaged and deprived youth and graduates.

This webinar on reimagining higher education in Africa in the ‘new normal’ explores issues on: (i) innovations for teaching and learning and closing digital divide; (ii) resourcing higher education institutions-university finances; (iii) innovations for engaged universities-redefining university-community-private sector-policy engagement; and (iv) identifying immediate and long-term opportunities for universities to respond to disruptions in education systems and institutions.

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Moderator: Dr Lucy Heady, Executive Director, Education Sub-Sharan Africa

Panelists

1. Dr. Albert Nsengiyumva, Executive Secretary, ADEA, Addis Ababa- Ethiopia
2. Prof. Amon Murwira, Minister of Higher Education, Harare- Zimbabwe
3. Prof. Adam Habib, Vice Chancellor, WITS
4. Dr Halil Dundar, Education Practice Manager, World Bank, Washington-USA
5. Prof. Tanko MOUHAMADOU, BRIDGIN Foundation, Brussels-Belgium

Discussant

1. Dr. Frannie Léautier, Senior Partner, SouthBridge Group, Kigali-Rwanda

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