Learning in Crisis:

COVID-19 pandemic response and lessons for students, faculty and Vice Chancellors in sub-Saharan Africa
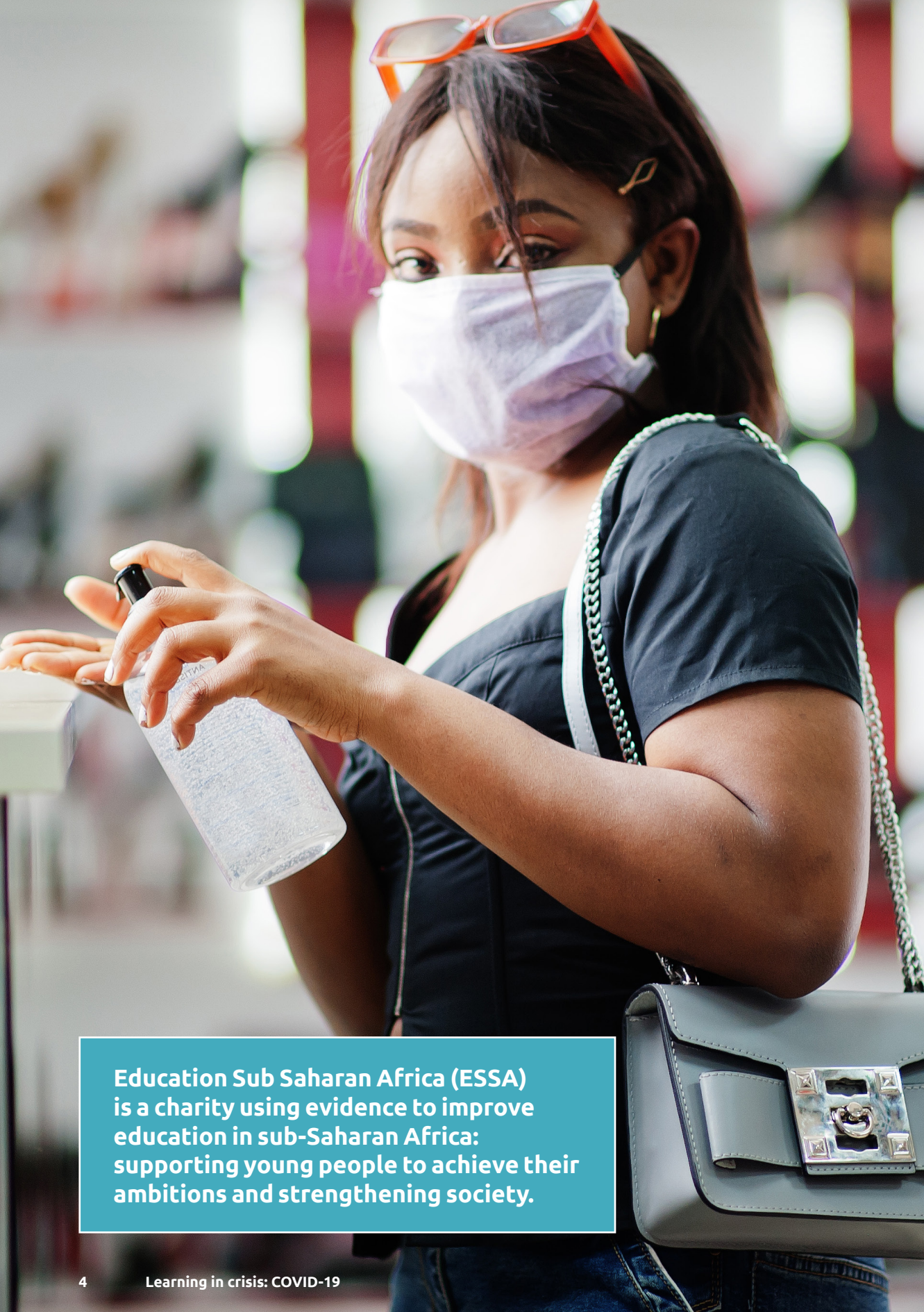

Education Sub Saharan Africa

Contents

Education Sub Saharan Africa (ESSA)
is a charity using evidence to improve
education in sub-Saharan Africa:
supporting young people to achieve their
ambitions and strengthening society.

Executive summary

COVID-19 has left no aspect of modern life untouched, and higher education is no exception. The pandemic has created an unprecedented test on the rigidity of education systems across the globe.

In sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), it has challenged the higher education sector in many new and unexpected ways. The prolonged school closures combined with wide-spread socio-economic hardship and digital inequalities has adversely affected the sector and its stakeholders – particularly, students, faculty and institutional heads (Vice Chancellors).

As higher education institutions (HEIs) in the region adapt to this 'new normal' while implementing rapid changes to meet changing government regulations and recommendations, they are forging new paths in crisis management. This brings both challenges and opportunities to African universities, in particular in relation to digitalisation of teaching and learning, open science, research, quality assurance, funding and community engagement.

This report takes stock of the current state of higher education systems in the SSA region. It highlights some of the pressing changes, consequences and lessons of the responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The report also highlights lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic response in SSA for higher education students, faculty and Vice Chancellors.

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Top lessons from the pandemic response for students, faculty and university and college Vice Chancellors - summary

Top 4 lessons for students

The crisis has upended many aspects of 'normal' life of students. With university and college campuses temporarily closed, students have readjusted their daily lives to lockdown situations at home, where they face new challenges and miss out on the daily experience of university life.

1. Mental health must be taken seriously
Long periods of self-isolation can have a negative impact on the psychological wellbeing of students; especially those who live alone and international students who are not in their place of origin.

2. The digital divide must be closed
Attempts to continue learning through technology has introduced serious equity and logistical concerns among students. This sudden move occurred with little time for students to prepare; to acquire the necessary equipment; or to improve their ICT, digital, or social media skills.

3. Opportunities to study abroad have narrowed, but this could have benefits for young people and their communities
Many aspects of internationalisation in the higher education sector in sub-Saharan Africa have been, and will continue to be, severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, most of all regarding inbound and outbound student and faculty mobility.

4. Students are looking for alternatives to traditional education to get skills
A general decline in higher education is highly probable due to the pandemic. As the rate of unemployment and underemployment rise, household income of many families is likely to decline. Given the global nature of the economic crisis, even households that rely on remittances are likely to see their incomes decline as a result of the pandemic.

Top 4 lessons for university and college faculty

Faculty, like students, have been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Technological aids, infrastructure, and access concerns, as well as increased workload and the anxiety accompanying moves to online platforms, dominate reporting. Recent budget cuts, hiring freezes and furlough announcements have heightened faculty concerns about the stability of their jobs and their current and future workloads.

1. Faculty need more training to deliver online learning
The unprecedented switch to online learning due to COVID-19 health protocols immediately impacted faculty members' workloads. Most faculty members were required to do significantly more work to move courses online, rethink curriculums and assessment, learn to use software and technology for teaching and learning; and make sure that all their students are included and are coping. However, like students, the sudden move has occurred with little time for faculty to prepare; to acquire the necessary equipment; or to improve their ICT, and digital skills.

2. Academic staff layoffs, and hiring and salary freezes to minimise costs, are putting faculty at risk
Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, non-permanent teaching and research staff on contracts have been dismissed by their institutions to cut costs. In some countries in sub-Saharan Africa, these include academic and non-academic staff on fixed-term contracts, such as visiting lecturers, researchers, and student affairs professionals.

3. Adapting to the changes in the education sector could benefit staff in the long run
The financial implications of the pandemic have extended from immediate concerns about students and faculty welfare to longer-term, sector-wide concerns about the rigidity of the region's higher education system to recover from the economic effects of the pandemic.

4. Mental health issues for faculty can't be ignored
Over the past few months, there has been a steep rise in staff needing mental health support. With little support, over 375,000 faculty members within the region are experiencing stress and anxiety, besides coping with their confined lives, increased workload, and job uncertainties. This may further impact teaching quality.

Top 4 lessons for university and college Vice Chancellors

As the pandemic continues, it is becoming increasingly clear that this challenge will be a fixture in our lives for some time to come. As the harbinger of the future, flexibility and innovation will be pivotal pillars for many universities – institutional heads (Vice Chancellors) need to be well informed to drive innovation.

1. Teaching and assessment have fundamentally changed, but infrastructure is struggling to keep up
Universities have inevitably been affected by the lockdown, causing institutions to rapidly move to online formats and methods. This transition has exposed the huge digital divide that exists among universities, the majority of which do not have adequate infrastructure to deliver entire programs online.

2. Universities and colleges can harness the increased visibility and use of research
Sub-Saharan Africa is the region with the lowest research capacity and output in the world. According to Elsevier, currently, the region contributes less than 1 percent to global research. Between 2012 and 2016, the region has greatly increased both the quantity and quality of its research output with the number of academic staff papers growing by almost 43 percent.

3. Enrolment rates need to be understood and planned for
The temporary migration of face-to-face teaching and learning to online platforms, which could extend beyond what was initially planned, will increase the risk of student dropout, which is already a formidable challenge.

4. The quality of education has dropped, but it must quickly and transparently improve to meet students' needs
For university and college leaders in most SSA countries, one of the main challenges of the swift transition from face-to-face delivery to remote teaching and learning is the weakness of quality assurance of such educational delivery. This issue is exacerbated by a general distrust in the quality of remote learning, accompanied with the fact that the regulatory environment is not yet sufficiently aligned with online learning.

Section 1: Background

1.1 Introduction

COVID-19 is arguably one of the most disruptive pandemics in recent years to afflict our societies.

Having already affected every aspect of normal life, the pandemic has exacerbated poverty, discrimination, and inequalities in many sectors of the world's economy (Blundell et al., 2020; van Dorn et al., 2020). While health services have been impacted most severely, the consequences for tertiary education are also quite overwhelming. A recent World Bank publication reveals that over 220 million post-secondary students –13 percent of the total number of students affected globally – have had their studies ended or significantly disrupted due to COVID-19 (World Bank, 2020c).

With an estimated 1,650 tertiary education institutions[1] (TEIs) closed and approximately 8.4 million students having their studies ended or significantly disrupted, the challenge that COVID-19 poses on sub-Saharan Africa's tertiary education system is profound.

Despite the huge efforts deployed to transform and improve the SSA tertiary education sector, experts project that the impact of the COVID-19 crisis will destabilise the sector, with serious consequences on equity, quality, relevance, and efficiency (Mohamedbhai, 2020).

A lot has been written and said about how lockdown has forced universities to swiftly change their way of teaching, and how students and staff have been adapting to the new situation imposed by the pandemic.

With this review, we aim to contribute to the discussion, by recording how the various stakeholders within the sector responded to the pandemic and highlighting the real and estimated effects of the pandemic on tertiary education institutions. It highlights some of the pressing changes, consequences and lessons of the responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.2 Review strategy

This review assesses accessible research articles, reports, policy briefs, blogs, and online recourses on subjects relating to impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on education in SSA.

The search included computer-assisted sourcing in Google Scholar, news articles as well as the websites of key higher education stakeholders in SSA. Keywords used in the search included 'Sub-Sahara,' 'Africa' 'COVID-19,' 'higher education,' 'impact,' 'online learning' and 'pandemic'. In addition to these keywords, 'impact of COVID-19 on higher education in Africa', 'impact of COVID-19 on student' and 'response to COVID-19 pandemic' were searched.

The various studies and resources on the topic were reviewed until the findings became repetitive. This happened after reviewing about 35 research reports and publications, and approximately 50 news articles and blog posts. The review process employed a code structure technique which made it easy to analyse and save the resources for referencing. The findings from the analysis of the literature are presented and discussed in section two.

Region	Out-of-school tertiary education students	Total tertiary education students	Percentage
East Asia and Pacific	72,391,442	73,538,139	98
Europe and Central Asia	36,948,926	38,030,033	97
Latin America and Caribbean	27,007,997	27,111,868	100
Middle East and North Africa	14,282,666	14,282,666	100
North America	20,640,820	20,640,820	100
South Asia	40,468,782	40,468,782	100
Sub-Saharan Africa	8,399,127	8,533,188	98
World	220,139,760	222,605,496	99

[1] Available at: https://www.globalpartnership.org/blog/challenges-and-prospects-africas-higher-education

Section 2: Response

2.1 Response by government and public organisations

I. Temporary closure of educational institutions.

Since the report of the first few cases, many countries in the SSA region took significant steps to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic by imposing countrywide lockdowns starting in mid-March. Egypt was the first African country to report a case of COVID-19. Since then, Africa has recorded 1,232,030 cases with 27,684 deaths[2]. Except for Burundi, all SSA countries have declared a general quarantine and temporarily closed educational institutions. Approximately 98 percent of tertiary students – roughly nine million young people – had their studies disrupted by the COVID-19 health protocol.

Recent reports indicate that countries across the region have been easing lockdown restrictions and testing the phase-in approach to reopening universities and colleges. In Ghana, final-year university students resumed classes to take their exit examinations. Similar approaches have been adopted in South Africa, Rwanda, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Malawi and Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

In South Africa, the Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation, Dr Blade Nzimande, announced at a virtual news briefing the further easing of lockdown restrictions and that all university students and staff could return to their campuses from 1 October, including those who were outside South Africa[3]. In Rwanda, universities and higher education institutions will reopen in mid-October. According to the Rwandan Minister for Education, Dr Valentine Uwamariya, final-year students will be the first group to attend classes when institutions resume teaching and learning[4]. Also, in Uganda, the students and faculty members welcomed the government's move to reopen higher education institutions on 15 October, albeit only for final-year undergraduate and graduate learners[5]. Likewise, Universities in Zimbabwe have opened their doors for conventional learning but only for

first-year students and those writing end-of-first and second-semester exams[6].

Universities in Kenya are likely to remain closed until January 2021 as they are not COVID-19 compliant, according to the Education Cabinet Secretary George Magoha[7]. In Nigeria, staff resistance threatens reopening of universities due to unpaid salaries, and ongoing (four-month-old) strike of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU)[8].

II. Cut in budget of tertiary education institutions

There is evidence that some countries are already cutting their education budgets to make space for the required spending on health and social protection.

In Kenya, the government has reduced higher education budget by 26 percent from a planned expenditure of US$1.53 billion to US$1.13 billion (Nganga, 2020). The Kenyan Commission on University Education has also reallocated KSH272 million (US$2.5 million)[9] of its development cash to a COVID-19 emergency fund. In South Africa, the South African Higher education department has reallocated R4bn to Covid-19 activities[10]. The budget cuts mean the South African Department of Higher Education, Science and Innovation will spend less on infrastructure grants and operational subsidies at TVET colleges and universities. In Nigeria, the federal government plans to cut ₦50.76 billion (US$130 million) from the education sector to support their pandemic response initiatives (Oladimeji, 2020).

Conversely, the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology in Tanzania has endorsed TSH 1.3 trillion (US$560 million) budget for the 2020/21 fiscal year. Seventy percent of the funds are allocated for development projects in the education sector. For the higher education sector, it plans to enable the Higher Education Student Loans Board (HESLB) to provide loans to 15,000 more students than the last fiscal year (Oladimeji, 2020).

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[2] https://www.afro.who.int/publications/situation-reports-covid-19-outbreak-sitrep-33-14-october-2020
[3] https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20201001080921424
[4] https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20200928144812336
[5] https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20201012093436196
[6] https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20200908112515811
[7] https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20200804074206133
[8] https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20200930090949672
[9] https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2020-04-22-coronavirus-ruins-uhuru-legacy-plans
[10] https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-07-15-higher-education-department-reallocates-r4bn-to-covid-19-activities/#gsc.tab=1

III. Postponement of high-stakes university entrance examinations

For many students across SSA, the end of the secondary school year is associated with high-stakes university entrance examinations. These examinations certify student achievement; they enable objective and transparent student placements into the job market, universities, and for scholarships; and they offer a summary measure of the effectiveness of a country's education system[11]. Further, these examinations play an important equity role in limiting the effects of patronage and opening up access to educational opportunities for students from relatively disadvantaged backgrounds[12].

In March 2020, the West African sub-region harmonized and standardized pre-university assessment entrance examinations [West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE)] were suspended across Anglophone West Africa due to the threat of COVID-19.

In East Africa, the Tanzanian education authorities announced, in April 2020, the cancellation of the national Advanced Certificate of Secondary Education Examination which was scheduled for May 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic[13]. In Kenya, the Government has decided to cancel the 2020 Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) and Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) exams. This implies that the 2020 school calendar is considered a lost year as a result of COVID-19. Kenyan students in primary and secondary schools will, therefore, lose a full year and start all over again in January 2021[14].

In Southern Africa, universities are navigating their way around the intake of prospective students for 2021, considering the effect lockdown has had on future students. The use of National Benchmark Tests (NBTs), the results of which are usually used by universities in their acceptance or rejection of prospective students, are up in the air as a result of COVID-19. After

careful considerations, several South African Universities – University of Cape Town[15], Stellenbosch University[16], Wits University[17], among others, have announced that the National Benchmark Tests (NBTs) will not be used as a requirement for undergraduate admissions.

2.2 Response by higher education institutions

I. Temporary migration of face-to-face teaching and learning to online platforms

Since the school year for most of the TEIs programs usually runs by quarters or semesters, the sudden massive TEI closures in mid-March 2020 have led to ad-hoc (emergency) distance learning and mitigation strategies.

Several universities across the SSA region, including the ones in countries such as Ghana, South Africa, and Rwanda, among others, have moved some of their programmes to online platforms. Some universities that had adequate digital infrastructure have been swift in transitioning to online teaching and learning. For example, the University of Ghana rolled out their online programme starting April using the Sakai Learning Management System platform[18], and Ashesi University in Ghana[19].

The transition to online learning has laid bare the digital divide within the African continent – between those countries that have better ICT infrastructure than others; between higher education institutions within the same country, with some being far better equipped and experienced than others; and between students within the same institution; the rich who live in urban areas; and the poor in rural areas who can barely afford to access the internet, when and if it is available (Mohamedbhai, 2020). To mitigate the challenges that come with the digital divide, some TEIs in SSA countries such as Ghana, South Africa, and Rwanda among others, partnered

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[11] https://www.cgdev.org/blog/covid-19-has-forced-exams-be-suspended-across-west-africa-should-they-be-overhauled-they
[12] https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/32352/9781464814181.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y
[13] https://newsghana.com.gh/tanzania-cancels-national-exam-over-covid-19-pandemic/
[14] https://uonresearch.org/blog/implications-of-cancelled-kcse-2020-exams-on-the-financial-viability-of-public-universities/
[15] http://www.students.uct.ac.za/students/applications/admission-requirements/national-benchmark-tests
[16] http://www.sun.ac.za/english/maties/Pages/Admissions-NBTs.aspx
[17] https://www.wits.ac.za/schoolsliaison/nbt-updates/
[18] http://ug.edu.gh/announcements/update-university-ghana-online-teaching-and-learning
[19] https://www.concordia.net/press/covid-19-and-higher-education-in-africa-ashesi-university-provides-strong-examples-in-its-response/

with Telco's to zero-rate these platforms[20]. In some instances, these universities made data packages and laptops available to some students to improve access[21]. For example, the public University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa and private universities such as Ashesi University in Ghana are offering data bundles to their students and staff (Aborode et al., 2020).

The outbreak of the virus and lockdowns at the national level could be used as the best test for the education technology interventions for distance learning. Unfortunately, few systems arrived at this point fully prepared. An International Association of Universities (IAU) survey in April 2020 revealed that two thirds of TEIs in Africa were unprepared to move teaching online. A similar result was found in a quick survey conducted by the Association of Africa Universities (AAU) in April 2020. Out of the 78 universities that responded to the AAU survey, 21 universities expected to fully teach remotely, 41 expected to partially teach remotely and 16 universities had no capacity to teach remotely.

There are only a few fully online universities in SSA, including the African Virtual University (AVU)[22], the Kenyatta Digital School of Virtual Learning[23], Laweh Open University[24], the Open University of Tanzania[25], and the University of Rwanda's e-learning platform[26]. According to the World Bank, these institutions have the existing capacity and experience to offer online programs, but they are mostly targeted toward students who want to upgrade their skills while they are already employed, though their mandates continue to expand (World Bank, 2020a).

Due to the challenges of delivering online education, some universities and colleges within the sub-region are proposing the adaptation of a blended learning approach. One blended response that is gaining ground is that of the virtual laboratory. An example is the Remote and Virtual Education Laboratory at the University of Fort Hare in South Africa. Launched in October last year, the initiative allows students

to work remotely on coding and robotics and collaborate with people in different countries[27]. Further, there are some reported successes in South Africa about the experimentation and adaptation of a customised blended learning model by the Nelson Mandela University in Port Elizabeth. This model involved a combination of online and offline interactive resources with pre-installed apps that are aligned with the South African school curriculum.[28]

It is important to note that the AAU in partnership with e-Learning Africa, has played a key role in supporting TEIs to migrate their programme offering to online.

II. Training modules for faculty members on online teaching

To effectively deliver to online education, some TEIs in the region are conducting training for their faculty members on how to use online platforms for teaching. For example, the University of Nairobi organised training for its staff members on how to use the various online platforms to enable them to conduct their duties from the safety of their homes[29]. The Kenya College of Accountancy (KCA) also trained their staff and students on using an online platform for teaching and learning.[30]

III. Change in research focus

Universities across the sub-region have responded positively, intensifying research to find solutions, assisting their governments in developing ways to contain the pandemic, and finding other channels to deliver on their mandate.[31]

Scientists at the University of Ghana have successfully sequenced the genome of the coronavirus in Ghana. The feat, which was achieved through collaboration between scientists from the Noguchi Memorial Institute

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[20] https://www.pulse.com.gh/bi/tech/telcos-in-ghana-offer-free-packages-to-support-fight-against-covid-19/y2k5hkh
[21] http://www.uct.ac.za/sites/default/files/image_tool/images/328/media/releases/2020/2020.04.20_DataForStudents.pdf
[22] https://avu.org/avuweb/en/.
[23] http://www.ku.ac.ke/dsvol/.
[24] https://www.laweh.edu.gh/
[25] https://www.out.ac.tz/
[26] https://elearning.ur.ac.rw/
[27] https://oxfordbusinessgroup.com/news/covid-19-and-higher-education-how-universities-emerging-economies-are-responding-crisis
[28] https://theconversation.com/education-post-covid-19-customised-blended-learning-is-urgently-needed-138647?utm_term=Autofeed&utm_medium=Social&utm_source=Twitter#Echobox=1591011956
[29] https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20200716062706283
[30] https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20200511100801516
[31] https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20200420091917110

for Medical Research and the West African Centre for Cell Biology of Infectious Pathogens. The Noguchi Memorial Institute, which is one of two facilities initially designated for testing COVID-19, remains Ghana's primary testing facility for all suspected COVID-19 cases, accounting for over 80 percent of tests nationally.

The University of Pretoria in South Africa, by its participation in the World Health Organization's multi-centre clinical trial for Africa, is working towards the project objective of accurately estimating the effects of antiviral treatments on in-hospital mortality.

At Addis Ababa University in Ethiopia, a COVID-19 research working group comprising faculty from different colleges and research institutes has been allocated an amount of ETB10 million (US$307,000) by the state.

Furthermore, research conducted by Makerere University in Uganda has detected coronaviruses in bats that live near humans in Rwanda, while studies by researchers at the University of Nairobi in Kenya have found that 10 percent of bats carry coronaviruses.

2.3 Response by regional, continental and international higher education institutions

National, regional, continental and international higher education bodies such as the Councils of Tertiary Education, the Inter-University Council of East Africa (IUCEA), the Association of African Universities, Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), the Regional Universities' Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM), the Southern African Regional Universities Association (SARUA), UNESCO, the International Association of Universities (IAU), the World Bank, among

others, have played key roles in supporting TEIs and governments to respond to the impact of the pandemic through training, collecting data and monitoring the impacts of COVID-19 on higher education, hosting resource pages, recommending policies, and providing support materials for governments and other higher education stakeholders.

I. Technical assistance on migrating to online learning

The AAU, eLearnAfrica, and WILEY Education Services partner to support African Universities, expedite their migration to online education. The AAU also offered a resource page to help higher education institutions[32] plan for possible campus disruption by COVID-19.

UNESCO and the World Bank developed portals on COVID-19 educational disruption and response[33] to provide immediate technical support to countries and institutions as they work to minimise the educational disruption and to quickly prepare and deploy inclusive distant learning solutions, utilising hi-tech, low-tech and no-tech approaches.

Both UNESCO and the World Bank issued policy notes covering key topics related to the COVID-19 education response. These notes provide evidence of good practice, practical tips and links to important references to mitigate the short and longer-term impact of school closures. They also provided a selection of digital learning resources that governments, universities, teachers, and parents can use to open opportunities for learners unable to attend school.

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[32] Resource page to help higher education institutions
[33] COVID-19 Educational Disruption and Response

II. Thematic knowledge-sharing workshops, training and webinars

The AAU, IUCEA and the World Bank played a significant role in boosting the capacity of ICT directors and faculty members to teach effectively online. More than 1,500 university lecturers from 13 African countries received training.[34] The association also offered several online webinars aimed at training institutional heads on educational technologies.[35]

Likewise, UNESCO and the World Bank organised webinars for minister of education officials and other stakeholders to share information about country efforts to maintain the provision of inclusive education in different contexts.[36]

Similar webinars and stakeholder dialogues have been undertaken by regional bodies such as RUFORUM and the IUCEA to share experiences, and develop common strategies and protocols that can facilitate a return to normal in the education sector and minimise the negative effects of the pandemic on the education systems of the partner states.

III. Monitoring the impacts of COVID-19 on the African higher education sector

On tracking the impact of COVID-19 on the higher education sector in Africa, the AAU conducted a brief survey to assess the preparedness of African universities to adjust to COVID-19 safety measures introduced by African governments. Also, Mawazo Institute, a non-profit research institute based in Nairobi, Kenya, drew on responses received from 501 individuals who were surveyed on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their learning and ongoing research. The institute found that disparities in access to e-learning is based on respondents' region, gender, and age. Notably,

only 17.2 percent of West African respondents reported being at institutions with e-learning options, compared to 43.1 percent of East African respondents and 40.5 percent of Southern African respondents.[37]

Furthermore, the IAU is closely monitoring the various impacts of COVID-19 on the higher education community. The association has issued two surveys on the impact of COVID-19 on higher education.

A positive trend highlighted in the first survey is the incredible innovative approaches to issues faced and the resilience of the higher education sector.[38] The World Bank traces in real-time the closure of schools by country and proposes key resources to address the health crisis.[39]

2.4 Response by the private sector

I. Partnership to support higher education institutions to migrate to online learning

Private companies, particularly telecom companies, are increasingly partnering with TEIs and government to overcome the critical challenges by negotiating zero-rated access to specific educational and information websites. For example, in Senegal, dominant ICT player Sonatel has moved to address this issue, giving students the chance to activate a free 1-GB education pass. The plan provides access to educational content via partners including the Virtual University of Senegal, the Virtual University of Tunisia and the National Centre for Distance Learning.[40] Similar partnership agreements have been made between telecom companies and universities in countries such as Ghana, South Africa and Kenya.

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[34] https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20200909161135324
[35] https://www.aau.org/webinars/aauregis.php?webinar_id=23
[36] https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse/webinars
[37] https://static1.squarespace.com/static/57d0650220099eacd505d3fc/t/5eb2ced6d9b0e76c64e29834/1588776690884/6_5_COVID-19+Survey+Report+Final.pdf
[38] https://www.iau-aiu.net/IMG/pdf/iau_covid19_and_he_survey_report_final_may_2020.pdf
[39] https://www.worldbank.org/en/data/interactive/2020/03/24/world-bank-education-and-covid-19
[40] https://oxfordbusinessgroup.com/news/senegal-turns-ict-combat-covid-19

Section 3: Top lessons

This section summarises key lessons based on the real and estimated effects of the pandemic on students, faculty and Vice Chancellors. These implications are the result of the combination of the pandemic response strategies, pre-existing challenges in education in sub-Saharan Africa, and the preparedness of students, faculty and Vice Chancellors to provide and participate in distance education.

3.1 Top 4 lessons for students

The crisis has upended many aspects of 'normal' life for students. With university and college campuses temporarily closed, students have readjusted their daily lives to lockdown situations at home, where they face new challenges and miss out on the daily experience of university life.

Some students (especially those from lower economic groups) have lost essential facilities and services such as dormitories, on-campus jobs, healthcare, access to a computer and internet access due to the closure of campuses. While the scale and quality of campus provision varies widely across the region, countries, and institutions, for many students, it is their home.

Young people in higher education are the most affected by the pandemic. Approximately nine million students are having their studies ended or significantly disrupted.

Like other regions in the world, four main implications are emerging as a result of the temporary closure of universities and colleges in sub-Saharan Africa and the migration to online learning.[41]

I. Mental health must be taken seriously

Long periods of self-isolation can have a negative impact on the psychological well-being of students; especially those who live alone and international students who are not in their place of origin.

Kant (2020) and Pragholapati (2020), concluded that long weeks of isolation (lockdown) and restrictions are creating psychological and emotional problems among students. The anxiety that comes with the loss of valuable tuition, multitasking, and loss of social contact and socialising has inevitably affected students' mental health.

For international students, the situation has been particularly challenging. Many were, and continue to be, stranded on campus due to lockdown and travel restrictions. These students are socially isolated, lonely, and anxiously waiting for school activities to resume.

According to the World Bank (2020), most of these students have remained in their dormitories, adhering to strict social distancing guidelines, with varying levels of support from their institutions (World Bank, 2020a).

Valery Chelsie Brown, a second-year Hospitality Management student at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Ghana, on the impact of the lockdown on her mental health: *"Although I am home and supposed to be relaxed, this period has been very stressful with lots of school assignments and household chores. Honestly, I feel mentally burned out."*

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[41] https://blogs.worldbank.org/education/covid-19s-immense-impact-equity-tertiary-education

II. The digital divide must be closed

Attempts to continue learning through technology has introduced serious equity and logistical concerns among students. This sudden move occurred with little time for students to prepare; to acquire the necessary equipment; or to improve their ICT, digital, or social media skills. As a result, students within the region have faced several challenges learning online. These include the lack of access to internet/WIFI and lack of sufficient bandwidth in student households, lack of hardware such as tablets and laptops for student use at home and limited digital skills of students to access and learn online.

Many low-income students lack computers or reliable access to broadband internet. According to the World Bank (2020), only 30 percent of university and college students in sub-Saharan Africa have access to the internet at home, and only 42 percent own a personal computer (World Bank, 2020a). Most of this access is restricted to the most privileged members of society.

Anecdotal evidence so far seems to point to the fact that, while students from better-off households and those enrolled in elite institutions are able to access digital resources and to use them to maintain some continuity with academic work, disadvantaged students (first-generation college-goers, women, tribal youth, economically disadvantaged and those at non-elite institutions) suffered deeper learning losses.

Student bodies across the region have called on governments and universities to stop online learning in universities until a resolution between students and university authorities had been reached. For example, in Zimbabwe, students rejected online learning when data costs were hiked by 225 percent.[42] In Ghana, the National Union of Ghana Students (NUGS) through a petition has requested that universities should stop demanding fees from students seeking access to online learning platforms.[43] The union also called on universities to refrain from conducting any examinations or assessments during the lockdown period. *"Conducting such exams and assessments would disadvantage the many students who, by no fault of their own, were unable to participate in the e-learning process,"* the union statement said.

III. Opportunities to study abroad have narrowed, but this could have benefits for young people and their communities

Many aspects of internationalisation in the higher education sector in sub-Saharan Africa have been, and will continue to be, severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, most of all regarding inbound and outbound student and faculty mobility.

The number of regional students, lecturers, and researchers going abroad, as well as international students, lecturers, and researchers moving to the region, will be severely reduced due to travel restrictions and new travel policies, health and safety concerns, and financial hardships as a consequence of the economic shutdown.

The suspension of most international travel and school closures will likely reduce the enrolment of international higher education students, a phenomenon that has been steadily growing in recent years and is highest in Ghana with a

Florence, 3rd year student at the University of Cape Coast (UCC), Ghana: "I and my colleagues are lacking important concepts related to our fields of studies due to not being able to read and understand the entire course materials shared on the school's portal all by ourselves. The lack of feedback from lecturers may have drastic impacts on our future."

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[42] https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20200504142003239
[43] https://citinewsroom.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/NUGS-PDF-562.pdf

total inbound international mobility of students declining from 15,683 in 2014 to 6905 in 2019.[44] As per UNESCO Institute for Statistics data, student inflows from other West African nations to Ghana have surged over the past decade. The number of international students in the country skyrocketed by 838 percent between 2007 and 2015, from 1,899 to 17,821 students. Since then, a downturn in student inflows from Nigeria has reduced the total number of inbound students to 12,978 by 2017 and to 6905 in 2019.

Study abroad programs, in which students participate for a semester or even shorter periods, may encounter significant issues, as students assess possible risks and challenges related to such experiences and might face funding difficulties. Also, the limiting of both short-and long-term international mobility bears additional major implications for prospective students (for example, reduced choice of high-quality higher education institutions to attend) and for the institutions (for example, loss of tuition revenue), as well as logistical hurdles – for example, repatriating or locally housing international students and staff, as many countries have introduced new travel policies which require heavy health investments (in terms of insurance and COVID-19 testing).

This could have positive effects on local universities, with more students staying closer to home – either within their country or the region. If young people learn, develop their skills and give back locally, the effects could strengthen their local communities and benefit wider society.

International cooperation among countries and higher education institutions is needed as now as much as ever. As a result, countries like South Africa recently announced the reopening of their universities and borders to welcome international students.[45] Also, to encourage outbound students' mobility to China, at least three of the country's top universities have cancelled entry examinations for overseas students.[46]

Recent reports indicate that over 70 percent of prospective international students, who are aiming to pursue studies in the United Kingdom, want to start the academic year, even if it means reverting to online courses.[47]

IV. Students are looking for alternatives to traditional education to get skills

A general decline in higher education is highly probable due to the pandemic. As the rate of unemployment and underemployment rise, the household income of many families is likely to decline. Given the global nature of the economic crisis, even households that rely on remittances are likely to see their incomes decline as a result of the pandemic. In many households, particularly poor households, the declines in household income will reduce their investments in young people's education.

With many jobs lost due to the crisis, students may be unable to afford the direct and indirect costs of enrolling or re-enrolling in higher education, such as tuition and other attendance fees, textbooks, and room and board. Many will have to look for alternative ways to gain vital skills and work opportunities, however the higher education sector must adapt and find ways to support students to do this.

Philip Adu Gyamfi, a Physician Assistantship student, Ghana:
"For most students, relationships are our strength, our support in the uncertainties of life, interacting with friends on campus is extremely important to our happiness so curtailing our social side goes right to the heart of who we are as students."

[44] http://uis.unesco.org/en/uis-student-flow
[45] https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20201001080921424
[46] http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/506241590701178057/EAP-TE-and-COVID-19-FINAL-26May20.pdf
[47] https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20200522140411693

for alternative ways to gain vital skills and work opportunities, however the higher education sector must adapt and find ways to support students to do this.

3.2 Top 4 lessons for university and college faculty

Faculty, like students, have been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Technological aids, infrastructure, and access concerns, as well as increased workload and the anxiety accompanying moves to online platforms, dominate reporting. Recent budget cuts, hiring freezes and furlough announcements have heightened faculty concerns about the stability of their jobs and their current and future workloads.

I. Faculty need more training to deliver online learning

The unprecedented switch to online learning due to COVID-19 health protocols immediately impacted faculty members' workloads.[48] Most faculty members were required to do significantly more work to move courses online, rethink curriculums and assessment, learn to use software and technology for teaching and learning; and make sure all their students are included and are coping. However, like students, the sudden move has occurred with little time for faculty to prepare; to acquire the necessary equipment; or to improve their ICT, and digital skills.

This has been coined 'Emergency Remote Teaching' or, 'Corona Teaching' which has been defined as the process of *"transforming classes to a virtual mode, but without changing the curriculum or the methodology"*.[49]

Classes are being delivered via Skype, WhatsApp, Telegram, radio, phone lines or Zoom, which compromises the quality of learning and classroom participation, and limits the capacity for collaborative and innovative teaching practices.

Programmes that require access to laboratory experiments are continuing without them; using virtual laboratory programs where available but otherwise reverting to lectures and independent study efforts, without hands-on lab work. This pattern is reflected in all practical subjects. According to UNESCO, this sudden move to online learning without training is resulting in sub-optimal results and frustration, and can be overwhelming for staff. So far, anecdotal evidence seems to point to a significant increase in the teaching quality gap, based on how well faculty members have been trained in distance learning.[50]

II. Academic staff layoffs, and hiring and salary freezes to minimise costs are putting faculty at risk

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, non-permanent teaching and research staff on contracts have been dismissed by their institutions to cut costs. In some countries in sub-Saharan Africa, these include academic and non-academic staff on fixed-term contracts, such as visiting lecturers, researchers, and student affairs professionals. For example, the University of Technology and Arts of Byumba (UTAB) in Rwanda has suspended about 40 staff members during the pandemic.

Some private universities and colleges within the region have also suspended staff salary payments due to financial constraints. For example, at the University of Kigali, a private institution in Rwanda, the salaries of both teaching and administrative staff (a total of

> **Welpuo Waris Samuel a second-year Doctor of Pharmacy student at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST):** *"My parents see the lockdown as an opportunity to get me and my siblings to support the family business. Instead of joining remote classes, I support the family business at home."*

[48] https://er.educause.edu/blogs/2020/4/educause-covid-19-quickpoll-results-the-technology-workforce
[49] https://er.educause.edu/articles/2020/3/the-difference-between-emergency-remote-teaching-and-online-learning
[50] http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/347151590785257483/COVID-19-Impact-on-Tertiary-Education-in-Middle-East-and-North-Africa.pdf

200 people) were reduced and staff received 70 percent of their salary for March.[51] In Ghana, some private institutions were not able to pay staff salaries for March and April 2020 due to 50 percent unpaid student fees (Kokutse, 2020). Other human resources management measures taken by some institutions within the region include a hiring freeze.

In the longer term, government budget cuts due to the economic shutdown and resulting revenue shortfalls may reduce public funding for higher education. This may lead to staff cuts at public universities, and private universities may cut their staff due to the loss of tuition revenue.

II. Adapting to the changes in the education sector could benefit staff in the long run

The financial implications of the pandemic have extended from immediate concerns about students and faculty welfare to longer-term sector-wide concerns about the rigidity of the region's higher education system to recover from the economic effects of the pandemic. It is projected that the cuts in government budget on education across the region will adversely affect the public provision of higher education. This will have a significant impact on faculty skills and the methods of teaching.

According to the World Bank (2020), public higher education systems that are already

fiscally constrained will have to make some trade-offs to increase efficiency (World Bank, 2020b). This includes laying off faculty and staff and/or freezing salary increases, shortening and consolidating academic programs, and reducing investments in research and student support services to redirect more resources to online or blended learning tools and resources. While this will present some challenges for the sector and its staff in the short and medium-term, these actions may have benefits for the system in the long run.

IV. Mental health issues for faculty cannot be ignored

Over the past few months, there has been a steep rise in staff needing mental health support. With little support, over 375,000 faculty members within the region are experiencing stress and anxiety besides coping with their confined lives, increased workload, and job uncertainties. This may further impact teaching quality.[52]

In addition to their workload and job uncertainty, many university staff lack clear guidance and information on institutional operations during the pandemic crisis. These staff-related issues are complicated even further by the grave situation most faculty members find themselves in, endangering both teaching and research continuity.

Fred AkaPhari Awaah, lecturer at the University of Professional Studies, Ghana: *"Students recommended that the admission process should be streamlined in a way that it is fully online. This should include uploading relevant documents on the portal without having to go to the study centres. They further desired that information on the estimated cost of fees for each course should be available on the NOUN website, and graduates within the age range of NYSC should be allowed to undertake the scheme to further boost the esteem of the institution and make its alumni more marketable."*

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[51] https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20200422115630505
[52] Data from World Bank Education Statistics (EdStats); https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=1159&series=SE.TER.TCHR#.

3.3 Top 4 lessons for university and college Vice Chancellors

How has the sub-Saharan African higher education sector been affected in delivering its core mandate? What are the implications of this for Vice Chancellors?

I. Teaching and assessment have fundamentally changed, but infrastructure is struggling to keep up

The first mission of universities and their Vice Chancellors has inevitably been affected by the lockdown, urging institutions to rapidly develop to online formats and methods. This transition has exposed the huge digital divide that exists among the universities, the majority of which do not have adequate infrastructure to deliver entire programs online.[53] There are only a few fully online universities in sub-Saharan Africa; for others, it was unexplored territory. This has been a difficult situation for many Vice Chancellors to manage.

Despite the institutions' immediate adaptation to online teaching, so far universities have been operating in 'Emergency Remote Teaching'[54] mode to minimise disruptions, rather than fully embracing online education. As most universities and colleges in the region plan to reopen, it will be important to explore how online teaching and blended learning will evolve in the months and years ahead to ensure high quality is maintained.

The key challenges governments and Vice Chancellors in the sub-region are facing when overseeing moving courses online are:

- Lack of access to internet/WIFI and lack of sufficient bandwidth in many student and faculty households
- Lack of hardware such as tablets and laptops for student/faculty use at home
- Limited availability of online course content/ limited possibility of moving courses online (for example, due to the nature of the subject, such as lab work in medicine or chemistry)
- Lack of online platforms for teaching and learning
- Limited digital and pedagogical skills of instructors for online teaching, student assessment, etc., and no training in these areas
- Limited digital skills of students to access and learn online and/or lack of focus due to online and other distractions
- Limited face-to-face and social interaction with instructors and classmates, which can lead to decreased student motivation and learning, affecting disadvantaged students more.
- Increased cyber-security threats to universities: the rush to move to online platforms have introduced "vulnerabilities" to African universities using learning management systems.[58]

Beyond teaching and learning, there are serious challenges with exams, admission, and graduation.

Face-to-face exams are not possible within quarantine and confinement situations, so many colleges and universities have rescheduled or cancelled exams, or adopted another means of assessing students. In Ghana, students' unions called on universities to refrain from conducting any examinations or assessments during the lockdown period.[55] A similar request was made by students' in other countries like Kenya, South Africa, and Zimbabwe with the argument that university examinations are a question of means if they require access to ICT equipment and infrastructure.[56]

Between June and July, universities and colleges that have the infrastructure to support online learning and assessment such as the United States International University-Africa (USIU-Africa),[57] the University of Ghana,[58] and Ashesi University successfully conducted examinations. In Ghana, the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) adopted a flexible mean of student's assessment.[59]

[53] World Bank. (2020c). The COVID-19 Crisis Response: Sub-Saharan Africa. http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/109901592405885723/One-Africa-TE-and-Covid-06162020.pdf
[54] Charles Hodges et al. "The difference between Emergency Remote Teaching and Online Learning", EDUCAUSE Review (27 March 2020). https://er.educause.edu/articles/2020/3/the-difference-between-emergency-remote-teaching-and
[55] https://citinewsroom.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/NUGS-PDF-562.pdf
[56] https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20200422075107312
[57] https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20200415124621981
[58] https://www.universnewsroom.com/news/university-of-ghana-starts-online-exams-today/
[59] https://kuulpeeps.com/2020/07/22/knust-take-a-look-at-the-arrangements-for-the-2019-2020-supplementary-exams/

Between August to September, some countries across the region (South Africa, Rwanda, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Malawi and Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) eased the lockdown restrictions and reopened universities for final year university learners' to resume classes and take their exit examinations. Pass/fail assessments, open-note exams, and swapping exams with research papers are all options being considered without the ability to conduct online exams or the opportunity to have students on campus to take exams. Despite the uncertainties and challenges ahead regarding full resumption of universities and colleges, some institutions in sub-Saharan Africa have successfully graduated their final year cohort, these include institutions such as the University of Ghana,[60] Ashesi University, the American University of Nigeria,[61] and the African Leadership University (ALU).[62]

The COVID-19 pandemic affects administrative procedures in universities too. Although many have open online admissions for the incoming cohort, decisions on start dates are yet to be made due to temporary closure of these institutions and uncertainty about entry exams. According to the World Bank, higher education institutions in the region may have to adjust their deadlines or waive some of the requirements, since the end-of-school secondary examinations are also being affected by pandemic closures (World Bank, 2020b).

II. Universities and colleges can harness the increased visibility and use of research

Sub-Saharan Africa is the region with the lowest research capacity and output in the world. According to Elsevier, currently, the region contributes less than 1 percent to global research. Between 2012 and 2016, the region has greatly increased both the quantity and quality of its research output with the number of academic staff papers growing by almost 43 percent.[63]

COVID-19 has brought scientific research in sub-Saharan Africa to the forefront, since the universities across the region have responded positively, intensifying research to find solutions, assisting their governments in developing ways to contain the pandemic, and finding other channels to deliver on their mandate.

African scientists have started receiving a great deal of attention from society and governments. On the one hand, researchers working on COVID-19-related issues have been regularly consulted ahead of important political decisions to tackle the spread of the pandemic and to manage its impact on society, and they are asked to deliver solutions to the crisis in the form of vaccines and other innovation actions. On the other hand, for non-COVID-19 related research, the situation has been different: researchers have had difficulties in accessing labs, libraries, archives, museum

Fionah Umulisa, former ESSA intern and Africa Leadership University graduate, Rwanda: *"Students are being left behind with e-learning, for example the Ministry of Education have put resources on their website, on the radio, and on television, but many students don't have electricity or can't afford data. Teachers and students with internet access also need training to use these e-learning platforms."*

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[60] https://www.ug.edu.gh/announcements/maiden-virtual-congregation-thursday-30th-july-2020
[61] https://www.aun.edu.ng/index.php/news-events/events-office/commencement
[62] https://www.alueducation.com/committed-to-the-bigger-picture/
[63] 20 Africa generates less than 1% of the world's research; data analytics can change that.

collections, etc. and funding opportunities for other areas of research have not increased.

Generally, research funding has been impacted, although there are very few research funding agencies in the region that are Africa-led, such as Pan-African University,[64] African Development Bank, National Research Foundations, according to the world Bank, a significant portion of research funding across the region comes from developed countries and development partners such as the European or American development agencies and other global research funding agencies.

The pandemic has had a hard impact on the United States and some European country economies – who are also major aid donors – leading to budget cuts to their own education and research institutions. For example, in the United States, the Department of Education is expected to see a 12 percent cut in overall funding for the fiscal year 2020.[65] Ultimately, limited support from these countries to global research alliances and inadequate local research funding will lead to slow growth in research across the continent.

Can universities and colleges respond to this challenge by prioritizing research to support the pandemic response, and areas outside of this?

III. Enrolment rates need to be understood and planned for

The temporary migration of face-to-face teaching and learning to online platforms, which could extend beyond what was initially planned, will increase the risk of student dropout, which is already a formidable challenge.

It is not clear how the COVID-19-related closures of universities and colleges will affect general enrolment, especially in the next academic year, as factors that would result in a decline in enrolment could counterbalance other factors that could boost enrolment. This is perhaps the most significant unknown about the pandemic.

Factors that might lead to a decrease in enrolment include:

a. Fewer secondary education graduates may be entering universities due to higher failure rates, since most secondary students in the region missed out on class time in preparation for high-stakes university entrance examinations.

b.Dropout of currently enrolled university students may rise due to financial, phycological and socioeconomic hardships. With the expected increase in economic problems to afford both direct and indirect costs of education and less access to guidance counselling and the

John Mugo, Executive Director of Zizi Afrique. Kenya: *"It is thought that the extended closure of education institutions following COVID-19 could worsen inequity in many ways. Scholars on the continent can use this moment to provide solutions through analysis of the situation and publication. However, the research output of African scholars has been the lowest in the world. Senior scholars can work with junior scholars and graduate students to land on the data, mine knowledge, publish, tell our stories and help improve learning and development for Africa. Investing in rapid cleaning, anonymisation and publishing of data can be possible, as Africa is not low on statisticians. At the same time, creating fellowships is necessary to incentivize analysis, publication and presentation in conferences to share this knowledge."*

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[64] https://ic-sd.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Graham_Harrison.pdf.
[65] https://www.acenet.edu/News-Room/Pages/White-House-Proposes-Significant-Cuts-to-Education-Programs-for-FY-2020.aspx.

environment of university campuses, many students may discontinue their programs. This includes students who are within lower-income brackets, female, of underrepresented ethnic or minority groups, from rural areas, as well as those with mental health or learning challenges or physical disabilities.[66]

c. A survey of five African countries showed that education was among the top four uses of remittances received from outside of Africa (Ratha et al., 2011). Households in Kenya and Uganda devoted 15 percent of their domestic and interregional remittances to fund the education of their family members. And these investments tend to be associated with better education outcomes in many countries. These findings suggest that the forecast drop in remittances due to COVID-19 will seriously reduce education investments by remittance-receiving households. In the US, there are estimates that universities and colleges will experience at least a 15 percent reduction in enrolment.[67] Almost 80 percent of respondents of the IAU surrey in April, believe that COVID-19 will have an impact on the enrolment numbers for the new academic year. Close to half (46 percent) believe that the impact will affect both international and local students.[68]

d. Experts predict that there will be a substantial drop in students' mobility.[69] The number of regional students going abroad, as well as international students moving to the region, will be severely reduced due to travel restrictions (which are likely to continue at least until the end of the calendar year or longer), health and safety concerns, and financial hardships as a consequence of the economic shutdown and oil price shock. The recent IAU survey report indicates that COVID-19 has had an impact on international student mobility in 89 percent of HEIs surveyed. The report further indicated that the type of impact is diverse and varies from institution to institution, but everywhere it has been negative.[70]

Factors that might contribute to an increase in enrolment include:

a. African students currently studying abroad, or outside sub-Saharan Africa may return to local or regional universities, as some households will no longer be able to afford the higher cost of studying abroad.

b.Economic slowdown may create opportunities for graduate enrolment as the job-seeking population seeks price-competitive education as a means of gaining a competitive edge for when the economy returns. The opportunity cost of higher education has declined during the crisis as a result of unemployment and a prolonged waiting period for young people to find jobs. More secondary school students may choose to pursue higher education instead of remaining unemployed, and tertiary students about to graduate may pursue advanced degrees.[71]

Shift in enrolment from private to public universities:

a. With the expected increase in economic problems to afford private higher education, students currently enrolled in local private universities may have to transfer to lower-cost public universities.

b. For private higher education institutions that rely heavily on tuition fees, losses in tuition fees – due to the economic effects of the pandemic – could mean a further reduction in the supply of higher education. As evident in Rwanda and Ghana, most private higher education institutions in the region face the possibility of having to downsize in the short term by reducing the number of personnel and scaling back program offerings. It is also possible that, in some instances, the severe economic recession that is predicted to follow the pandemic could result in the permanent closure of some private HEIs. Consequently, this may lead to lower

[66] https://blogs.worldbank.org/education/covid-19s-immense-impact-equity-tertiary-education
[67] https://www.acenet.edu/Documents/Letter-House-Higher-Ed-Supplemental-Request-040920.pdf?utm_campaign=latitude%28s%29&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Revue%20newsletter
[68] https://www.iau-aiu.net/IMG/pdf/iau_covid19_and_he_survey_report_final_may_2020.pdf
[69] http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/347151590785257483/COVID-19-Impact-on-Tertiary-Education-in-Middle-East-and-North-Africa.pdf
[70] https://www.iau-aiu.net/IMG/pdf/iau_covid19_and_he_survey_report_final_may_2020.pdf
[71] http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/347151590785257483/MENA-TE-and-COVID-19-FINAL-26May20-CLEAN.pdf

overall enrolment in HE. Even if some students shift from private provision to the public system, it will take some time for the public sector to meet the demand for affordable HE.

IV. The quality of education has dropped, but it must quickly and transparently improve to meet students' needs

For university and college leaders in most SSA countries, one of the main challenges of the swift transition from face-to-face to delivery to remote teaching and learning is the weakness of quality assurance of such educational delivery. This issue is exacerbated by a general distrust in the quality of remote learning, accompanied with the fact that the regulatory environment is not yet sufficiently aligned with online learning.

Online learning carries a stigma of being lower quality than face-to-face learning, despite research showing otherwise. However, the pace at which contact courses had to be transformed into remote learning courses leaves space for questions around quality and could seal the perception of online learning as a weak option. Normally, developing online courses requires inputs from a team of experts, including academics and instructional designers. Previous literature indicates that effective online learning results from careful instructional design and planning, using a systematic model for design and development.[72]

However, in most HEIs in SSA, many faculty members and students have resorted to a process of trial and error to work out how to best implement online learning during the pandemic. Aside of the issue of digital divide, other challenges potentially affecting the quality of remote learning during COVID-19 include students' possible lack of self-motivation to learn independently, lack of training for students and staff needed to engage optimally in remote learning technologies, software, and other processes.

The Quality Assurance department of the Association of African Universities (AAU) has issued a series of guidance reports and online training programmes to support the HEIs in their response to the COVID-19 challenge.[73] Despite the effort by the AAU, only a few universities – particularly members of AAU – have benefited from these quality assurance guidelines and training programmes. To have a larger impact, national quality assurance agencies can play an important role in offering guidance and support to institutions on matters such as the transfer to online learning and teaching, alternative assessment methods, and maintaining academic standards and student support services.

Fred AkaPhari Awaah, lecturer at the University of Professional Studies, Ghana: *"Like all educational institutions in the world, some of the students have had their expectations fully met while others have found partial fulfilment of their quest for quality education. The institutional goal is to narrow the gap between expectation and reality in meeting the needs of students for quality education."*

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[72] Robert M. Branch and Tonia A. Dousay, "Survey of Instructional Design Models," Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT), 2015
[73] https://blog.aau.org/aau-webinar-on-quality-assurance-and-the-new-normal-higher-education/

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