RUFORUM Webinar Series (2020)

Re-imagining higher education in Africa in the 'new normal'

Webinar 2: Synthesis Report

Introduction:

The COVID-19 pandemic has been disruptive to higher education globally. Projections indicate that medium to long term implications of the COVID-19 pandemic ranging from five years to beyond with immediate near-term disruption effects are likely to emerge. 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. Private led universities and higher education institutions have been most affected as they are largely dependent on tuition as the main revenue source. Within this melee, universities and other learning institutions have had to rapidly adjust albeit at differentiated rates. Students as well as teachers have had to redefine the 'classroom' and responsibilities in this 'new learning space'.

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. 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 for reimagining the state of higher education. It is critical to explore future disruptions and resilience to minimize the potential social, political and economic challenges.

The second RUFORUM webinar focused *Re-imagining higher education in Africa in the 'new normal';* this report covers points of action and emerging issues.

The Problem:

COVID -19 has highlighted the need for flexibility and resilience of higher education systems across the globe.   Universities in Africa have been operating curriculum and other aspects based on higher education systems that reflect the colonial/ European education systems with limited reference to the local development needs. It will be important to reconfigure their processes to meet emerging challenges. As higher education institutions search for solutions to the current issues, there is need to demystify the existing trend of applying global solutions to all emerging challenges. African Higher Education Institutions and indeed systems need to explore local solutions to global challenges such as the effects of the COVID -19 pandemic on higher education.

Webinar Objectives:
    (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

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(iv)   Identifying immediate and long-term opportunities for universities to respond to disruptions in education systems and institutions.

The webinar was moderated by **Professor, Lucy Heady**, Executive Director, Education Sub-Saharan Africa, the presentations and discussions were given by:

1. Dr. Albert Nsengiyumva, Executive Secretary, ADEA, Abidjan- Cote D'Ivoire;
2. Prof. Amon Murwira, Minister of Higher Education, Harare- Zimbabwe;
3. Prof. Adam Habib, Vice Chancellor, WITS, South Africa;
4. Dr Halil Dundar, Education Practice Manager, World Bank, Washington-USA; and
5. Prof. Tanko MOUHAMADOU, BRIDGIN Foundation, Brussels-Belgium

Key Learning and Action Points:

1. Genuine Global and Regional Strategic Partnerships
   a. Create a network of learning institutions that allow movement of knowledge between the local and the global contexts and institutions
   b. Rethink the internationalization of higher education model and develop Joint programs and joint research – transforming the education configuration and locate the global collaboration where learning happens- strengthen higher education institutions on the African continent and as appropriate nodes to promote education relevant to local needs but meeting international standards.
   c. Strengthening Intra-African partnership to build African internal capacity
   d. Share experiences among countries with similar problems for example between Africa and South America which have been characterized as emerging/developing economies

2. Strategic and significant investments by National Governments through public Private Partnerships
   a. Investments in higher education facilities and resources is essential for reimagining higher education. Developed Countries in Europe and the USA have made extensive resources available as response to the impact of COVID. Most of the proposals for reimagining higher education will require substantial financial injection. Even within a public- private partnership model.
   b. African governments need to invest in higher education institutions to position them for resilience, governments should develop and provide resourcing for e-learning. It is the financing of universities that provides a framework and basis to reimagine how we access global education
   c. There is need for a change of mindset to rethink and place a convincing case for investment in higher education through different avenues including using the Public Private Partnership model.
   d. Advocacy for resourcing higher education from continental and regional bodies for example allocation of 10% of EU grants to the African Union to higher education for impact building

3. Recalibrate Higher Education and align it to innovation and industrialization to address national development needs
    a. Higher education should be designed as the solution provider for development needs. This will be the basis for innovation, industrialization and job creation
    b. Establish the right mix between teaching and research in order to promote innovations
    c. Universities should review curriculum and pedagogical practice to promote education for development as opposed to education for knowledge.

4. Digitisation, ICT and online learning
    a. Learning from the COVID-19 pandemic, universities should review their e-learning processes and digitization with equity and access considerations and develop mechanisms to support their ICT and online capacity.
    b. It is important to adopt a blended learning model that combines on-line with face to face to capture the aspects of education that are not picked from the classroom but from association and for being part of a university community, examples of this the creation of networks that more often than not are lifetime associations
    c. Strengthening the capacity of the sector and of the institutions to promote equality and access to higher education in the digital world should be a key consideration.
    d. Partnership with the private sectors especially telecom countries will promote access to Higher education. Through market segmentation, telecom companies will provide band width and internet services to university communities

5. Strategic planning and explore alternative business models for the operations of the university
    a. How can the momentum that has been generated for online learning during COVID-19 be maintained – how to create effective scholarly communication platforms.
    b. Consolidate existing networks to make them responsive and create early warning systems
    c. How do universities create business models that will ensure sustainability and response to shocks such as COVID? Planning for universities for the future bearing in mind the current situation, a SWOT analysis needs to be undertaken to prepare for future shocks and run financially sustainable institutions
    d. Digitization requires a growth mindset to ensure that the current HEI leadership has the capacity and willingness to drive this change?

6. Local Human capital-capacity building through Partnerships and Investment
    a. We have to build the local capacity and human resource on the continent to address the challenges experienced not only for COVID-19 but to meet the unique development needs on the continent.
    b. We have to upscale African laboratory and science infrastructure and where shortfalls exist explore partnership with the developed world- to create the foundation for sustainable human capacity development.

c. We don't have adequate infrastructure, we have not trained academics to handle the training and this can be addressed through partnership. Adopt a model of intra Africa co-creation with other universities outside the continent.

d. The need for HE is increasing, we need to adopt new technologies to access learning outside the conventional modes. Alternative solutions to physical classes.

Conclusions:

The COVID -19 Pandemic has demonstrated the need for higher education systems to create resilience and safety nets to disruptions. While universal solutions exist and provide a foundation for adaptation. It is important that universities adopt solutions that respond to the unique challenges in the local context. In this perspective, universities need to broker partnerships, with international agencies, universities at local and international level as well as with the private sector to leverage resources and capacities. Meaningful partnerships with international agencies, private sector, and community organisations have to be brokered. Agencies such as RUFORUM can broker intra-Africa and Euro- Africa partnerships in collaboration with other continental based associations. These will ensure that the response capacities of higher education systems/institutions are adequately developed to meet the unique facets of each local context. While RUFORUM member universities have the obligation to share best practices, national governments have the responsibility to promote investments in higher education to mitigate disruptions.

RUFORUM Secretariat, 19 June 2020