



25 March 2020

**APPEAL TO AFRICAN MINISTERS OF HIGHER EDUCATION: OPPORTUNITIES FOR BUILDING
RESILIENT EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS**

I bring you warm compliments from the Association of African Universities (AAU) and hope you are keeping well in the face of this troubling period the whole world is currently facing.

The Association of African Universities (AAU) is a 53-year-old network of over 400 African Universities and has representation from the 5 regions of Africa. The AAU was established by African Vice Chancellors to support universities to improve the quality of higher education in Africa. The AAU is also the implementing arm of the African union Commission as it pertains to higher education issues in Africa. In line with this mandate, the AAU hosts the Higher Education Cluster of the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16-25).

Following the unprecedented coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and its associated impact on the African educational systems, I write to appeal to the Ministers of Higher Education in Africa to use this as an opportunity to strengthen our educational institutions by making them much more resilient to unforeseen crises. This is a great opportunity to communicate clear messages to our African governments on the urgent need to strengthen our educational institutions and systems by making them future-ready and able to survive and thrive in a world of uncertainty.

The AAU has noted with concern that most of our African educational institutions are not able to continue their business of teaching, learning and research after the closure of the institutions as a precautionary measure in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.



Our African institutions must be able to cope and survive such a crisis as COVID-19 or other unforeseen crises that threaten the continuity of teaching, learning and research activities. In comparison, most of the educational institutions in the Americas, Asia and Europe have quickly transferred all their business of teaching, learning and research to their existing online platforms. Meanwhile our African educational institutions are grappling with how to move forward and keep their teaching and learning activities going on.

African educational institutions need more support from our governments in order to adopt resilience as a strategic function. I therefore appeal to Ministries of Education in Africa to consider the following as they make investments to transform our educational institutions to be more resilient:

1. Even though African governments have done some tremendous work towards improving connectivity in African countries - in most of cases, the infrastructure is still concentrated in towns and other urban areas. We appeal that African governments prioritize the “*last-mile*” internet infrastructure investments and facilitate connectivity for all the citizens.
2. Strengthening the National Research and Education Networks (NRENs) is a key starting point. A National Research and Education Network (NREN) is not only an internet service provider for educational and research institutions,— but also able to offer platforms for content sharing, collaboration and research. Most African countries have established NRENs but these NRENs have not been supported to become mature so that they become effective service providers for educational and research institutions. We appeal that African governments invest towards strengthening their NRENs because they will solve the connectivity challenges faced by African students, academics and researchers.



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3. Leadership training and development is also very fundamental for building resilient African educational institutions. Such training should be ongoing and targeted at the top leaders of educational institutions.
4. Students and staff need continuous training for the eLearning environment. The eLearning tools are continuously changing. We appeal that African governments provide budgets and ongoing training programs for the educational communities in their countries.
5. Building effective ecosystems to support and continuously improve the African educational institutions requires that African governments create enabling conditions, promote industry partnerships and facilitate ongoing collaborations.

Yours in the service of higher education in Africa

Prof Etienne Ehouan Ehile

SECRETARY GENERAL