



AAU PRESS RELEASE ON THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC (COVID-19)

Disruption of Educational Activities and Proposed Responses

The Association of African Universities (AAU) has observed with growing concern developments related to the outbreak of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The life-threatening nature and rapid transmission of this disease has been felt globally - its significant impact on the global education systems is also being felt, especially in African countries. Numerous African higher education institutions (HEIs) and other educational institutions have been ordered to close in order to contain the spread of COVID-19. UNESCO (2020) monitoring estimates that 776.7 million children and youth worldwide will be obstructed by the closure of schools resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

HOW AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES ARE RESPONDING TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The AAU is also pleased to note various initiatives by African Universities to actively participate in high-end research towards finding a cure for COVID-19. Examples of universities involved in COVID-19 research include the African Centre of Excellence for the Genomics of Infectious Disease (ACEGID) at Redeemer's University, Ede, Nigeria that is leading the way in fighting COVID-19 in Africa ([Read More Here](#)). The University of Ghana Health Services and Noguchi Memorial Institute for Medical Research formed a Joint Emergency Response Team (UG ERT) to bring education and awareness on preventive measures and diagnosis of COVID-19 at the University of Ghana campuses ([Read More Here](#)). Makerere University in Uganda has developed a dedicated website to provide Africa with [facts and research based information on COVID-19](#). Numerous African universities have also established COVID-19 emergency response teams. The University of Cape Coast in Ghana is highly applauded for being one of the first African universities to take decisive actions in a bid to contain the spread of the virus. The University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa has launched a "[WAR ROOM](#)" for confronting the coronavirus outbreak. Additional responses by universities in South Africa [can be found here](#).

THE OPPORTUNITIES PRESENTED BY COVID-19

The COVID-19 safety measures that have been announced by African governments in relation to the closing educational institutions and banning gatherings have a negative impact on the continuation of teaching, learning and research activities of HEIs. Even though this appears to be a negative outcome we see it as an opportunity that African universities can explore to introduce technology-based platforms for teaching, learning and research. Based on our ongoing assessments of technology adoption by African universities we are aware that a significant number of the African universities have implemented some kinds of eLearning management systems. However, we are also aware that most African universities had not yet enforced technology-supported teaching and learning – this includes those that do have eLearning management systems installed on their campuses. This is the appropriate moment for our HEIs to move decisively to institutionalize technology-based teaching and learning.

Several universities in Africa are collaborating with telecommunications companies to facilitate the provision of affordable or free access to the internet for as long as the students are accessing education-related websites and information. Wits University in South Africa is collaborating with Vodacom, MTN and Telkom to offer [zero-rated access to specific educational websites](#). The Ashesi University (Ghana) IT Office is [offering 10GB monthly data bundles](#) to all students who need it to switch to the online classes.

PRECAUTIONS RECOMMENDED BY THE AAU

Though most universities in Africa, have taken measures to mitigate the negative impact of the pandemic, the AAU is adding its voice and encouraging African HEIs to take the necessary steps to reduce the impact of COVID-19. The AAU therefore urges all African HEIs to consider the following:

1. Abide by the public notices and advice issued by their Governments and other relevant authorities, in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. Activate their Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery Plans proportionate to the current circumstances and to review these plans as the situation changes.
3. Urgently move to implement alternative methods of delivering teaching and learning using technology and other distance learning techniques.
4. Plan for bigger disruptions – so that HEIs are prepared if the COVID-19 pandemic takes longer to contain.
5. Teach and learn about the COVID 19 virus. This includes engaging with communities (via non-physical means) to educate them on preventive measures and correct the *growing misinformation about the pandemic*; educate various stakeholders against COVID-19 related discrimination and provide support for students and faculty in isolation.
6. Ensure all electronic channels of communication are always activated and fully functional to facilitate ongoing engagements with the universities' communities.

WHAT THE AAU IS DOING AS A RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The AAU wishes to assure all its Member Universities, other African HEIs and stakeholders that it remains committed to its mandate and will provide the necessary support and advocacy to mitigate the impact of the COVID pandemic on education in the continent and help ensure that the COVID-19 impact on education is minimal.

The AAU is doing the following as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic:

1. We are conducting a brief assessment on the preparedness of African universities to adjust to the COVID-19 safety measures introduced by African governments. We request that Vice Chancellors, Deputy Vice Chancellors or their appointees complete this brief survey from here: <https://www.research.net/r/COVID19AAU>
2. The AAU is organizing an **Online Teaching & Learning Webinar** on the 30th March 2020 as one of AAU's direct support to the African Higher Education community. The webinar will discuss the *Effective Integration of Online Education* and our guest speaker will be Professor Safary Wa-Mbaleka who is currently the Director of the Adventist University of Africa Online, based in Nairobi, Kenya. Please register for this webinar here: https://www.aau.org/webinars/aauregis.php?webinar_id=23
3. AAU has postponed its face to face capacity building initiatives that were scheduled for the month of March and April 2020 in various African countries. We are putting measures in place to continue these programs using online delivery methods.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

1. Various resources are provided by the World Health Organisation (WHO) (<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/technical-guidance>)
2. National Centers for Diseases Control in African countries (e.g. Nigeria Centre for Disease Control is on [Twitter via @NCDCgov](#))
3. The Commonwealth of Learning various Resources and Tools on the COVID-19 crisis: <https://www.col.org/news/press-releases/keeping-doors-learning-open-covid-19>
4. Free access to the scientific literature on COVID-19: <https://pages.semanticscholar.org/coronavirus-research>
5. EDUCAUSE Resource Web Page on COVID-19: <https://library.educause.edu/topics/information-technology-management-and-leadership/covid19>
6. The Chinese Experience in Maintaining Undisrupted Learning in COVID-19 Outbreak: <https://iite.unesco.org/news/handbook-on-facilitating-flexible-learning-during-educational-disruption/>
7. African Union Commission Briefings on COVID-19: <https://au.int/en/videos/20200319/press-briefings-coronavirus-disease-outbreak>

ABOUT THE ASSOCIATION OF AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES (AAU)

The Association of African Universities (AAU) is an international non-profit, non-governmental organization created by African universities to promote cooperation among themselves on the one hand, and between them and the international academic community on the other. AAU is the Implementing arm of the African Union Commission on Higher Education matters and the Coordinator of The Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA-16-25). Created in 1967, the AAU is the ***Voice of Higher Education in Africa***. It aims to improve the quality of African Higher Education, and to strengthen its contribution to Africa's development by supporting the core functions of higher education institutions and facilitating critical reflection and consensus building on issues affecting Higher Education in Africa.



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