

The GLOCEPS

Special Brief

Universities Through Covid-19: Strategies For Recovering and Surpassing Pre-Pandemic Performances

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Prof Noah Midamba with former President of Nigeria and Chancellor Cavendish University H. E. Dr Goodluck Jonathan

It is my privilege to be here with you at Cavendish University, Uganda on such a great happy occasion for the class of 2022 and their families and friends.

Good morning Vice Chancellor Prof Mugisha, the university Council members led by my friend Prof Olubayi and the University Advisory Council led by Lady Justice Lillian Tibatemwa, faculty, parents, family and friends of the class of 2022. Congratulations on your graduation and thank you for giving me the honor of being a part of it.

Let me first congratulate H.E former President of Nigeria Dr. Goodluck Jonathan and mama Patience Jonathan for their dedication and substantive contributions to African Development efforts. Guest of Honor, Cabinet Ministers, Directors of Maarifa Education Holding, Excellencies Ambassadors and members of the Diplomatic Corps, Executive Director National

Council of Higher Education, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

My assignment today is to offer a few reflections on the Universities through COVID-19: Strategies for recovery and surpassing pre-pandemic performance. That is an awesome assignment.

We assemble here at a time in history when the world is going through tumultuous time. From the comments of astonished pundits on radio, television, in print and online, to conversation with worried students, families, friends and colleagues, the question seems unavoidable and amazing. What is going on? What is happening to the world?

The state of socio political and economic world, spotlighted in this continuous contest between Russia, Ukraine and the West, the political challenges surrounding China, Taiwan contest, North Korea potential nuclear war, Brexit, Iran in the final stages of the development of their own nuclear weapon, terrorists exploring new ways to perform chilling acts of brutality and murder, level of corruption in Africa and the rest of the world, climate related famine in Africa, fires in Europe, North America and the impact of COVID-19 around the world.

It is as if this earth we live in is being visited by horsemen of apocalypse with war, famine and natural disaster.



As extraordinary as these times may seem to us, the world's history reminds us that we have been here before. We have fought two world wars and COVID-19 related diseases with devastating impact. It is in some way reassuring on this commencement that we are sending out to the world, graduates who are well trained, tested and ready to meet those challenges we face in Africa.

African economies have been massively battered and the revenue base of governments have sharply shrunk, forcing the redistribution of meagre resources to more urgent needs and sectors, such as agriculture, food security and COVID-19 related health care and, in the process postponing or even cancelling commitments to higher education in vital areas such as: capital development, research and innovation facilities among others.

When most of the governments in Africa decided to close all types of educational institutions on the immediate outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020, sending over 9 million African colleges and university students home, the news did not come as a surprise to many of the private universities that had been following global events and watching similar measures being taken around the world.

Private medical colleges across Africa immediately went into action enlisting their medical students to be deployed by governments to increase capacities of full time professionals in hospitals and health facilities to combat the pandemic.

Despite general directives given by governments to shift all forms of teaching to online, the physical absence of students from campuses meant in the case of private universities the absence of revenue on which the existence of most institutions depends as their survival is contingent upon income generated from enrollment.

Coronavirus caused tremendous suffering for many students particularly in Africa. It highlighted the disparities in our communities: those who can stock up on food and those who

cannot. Those who can work from home on their computers and those who must rely or depend on other sources to receive and send information.

There are seven major issues facing higher education beyond COVID-19 pandemic that I would like to outline but not go into depth as the time will not allow us:

First, Vision planning which will co-exist and compliment strategic planning: Significant investment in digital infrastructure will be necessary due to the emergence of online and distance learning for us to meet African Union agenda 2063.

Second, Replacement of antiquated business model with differential pricing structure: Targeted programs could be offered to bridge gaps with students living in households and those who face difficulties in accessing technology.

Third, Supply chains: We need to create capacity and promote diversification in local, regional and international spectrum.

Fourth, Online learning: African Higher education must accelerate the digitization of curricula and establish culture of online learning. At the height of COVID-19, only 29% of African higher education were able to move to online compared to 85% for Europe.

Fifth, Changes in recruitment and admission practices: To pursue recruitment through business model such as a clear and sustainable graduate employability rate.



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Sixth, Enrolment choices: In 2017, the world average enrolment was 38% compared to 9% for Africa. African Institutions need to intensify students diversity ,enhance access to equity, retain excellent academia staff and pursue cutting edge research and high quality teaching. And;

Seventh Issue is University's leadership: The University leadership must commit to building capacity in research, science, technology and innovation in close coordination with African diaspora scholars across all disciplines. That is how China, Taiwan, Korea and Singapore sustained their technological edge.

As we anticipate the future, the demand for private education is not likely to diminish in Africa post COVID-19 assuming that tuition fees of private universities and colleges will remain competitive and that individual income of employees at both public and private enterprises will not be seriously affected.

COVID-19 has highlighted problems that private universities with entrepreneurial minds can solve: Pinterest, Square, Stripe, Uber and WhatsApp were all founded during the 2008 financial crisis in America. Many businesses have emerged during COVID-19 from yoga teachers offering online classes to restaurants providing take-out. The students are making money by tutoring or helping communities or neighbors with errands.

May I now say a parting words to our graduates: When I was nine years old, my father taught me these words and my family has engraved them on his tombstone:

"My son, God will always be there with you. Do not let anyone define you and your future. If they close your doors, go through the window. If they close the window, go through the wall, and if they close the wall, go through the roof."

The extraordinary time we face in our society and the world calls for extraordinary action, by people of integrity. It is these attributes that often define the greatness of a man or a woman. Mother Teresa, Nelson Mandela,

Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King Jr., and Barack Obama are revered as icons of integrity.

Integrity is the very core of our being. It is who we really are when all the scaffolding is removed. It is our integrity that both defines us and identifies us.

Now is the time, like Steve Jobs once said, **"To live your dream, follow your heart. Your time is limited, so don't waste it by living someone else's life."**

Now is the time, to move from a protected environment to an environment where you have to learn and listen because your whole world is going to be learning and listening. Your success is going to depend on your humility.

Now is the time, like Bill Gates once said, to write down what you want to be remembered for. That page in your life may be a very important page in the book of history.

Now is the time, to separate the benefits of failure and the importance of imagination. We do not need magic to change the world. We carry all the power we need inside ourselves already.

Finally, now is the time, to pursue your own dreams, to listen to your own hearts and to create your own journey. Choose what you must and embark on it right now.

May God bless everyone here, May God bless the Republic of Uganda and may God bless the Eastern African Community. Thank you every one for listening.

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