

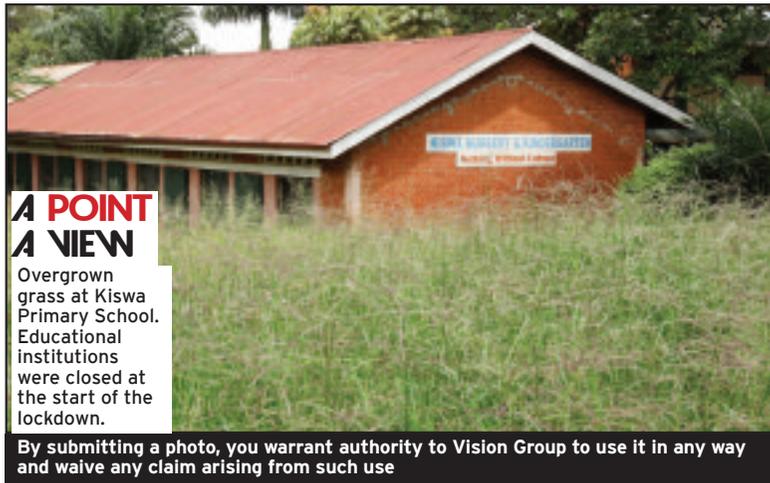
PHOTO BY BADRU SULTAN KATUMBA

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NEWS ITEM: UPDF has started reaching out to families affected by the recent landslides in Kigezi. Lt Col Robert Nahamya, is leading a team in clearing some of the areas affected by the weekend's heavy rains.
Nak Mic: This is how modern forces have been trained. From logistics to humanitarian tasks.

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A POINT A VIEW

Overgrown grass at Kiswa Primary School. Educational institutions were closed at the start of the lockdown.

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The lies about China

LETTER OF THE DAY



Mubarak Mugabo

EDITOR: A Chinese proverb states: "He who blames others has a long way to go on his journey, He who blames himself is halfway there and He who blames no one has arrived."

Unlike with Ebola or SARS outbreaks, the coronavirus (COVID-19) has not only exposed the inefficiency of some systems and weak healthcare, but featured an unprecedented blame game and lies as more lives are lost. The blame and lies about COVID-19 are mostly about accusing the Chinese authorities of under-reporting the cases and deaths, especially when the outbreak was first reported in the city of Wuhan, central China.

This followed US' decision to cut funding to the World Health Organisation for allegedly siding with China in this fight. US President Donald Trump and other politicians claim China was dealing with the epidemic more than a month earlier before the world learnt about it. Many people in the world have unfortunately bought into these theories. Some media houses in Asia even ran stories alleging how the Chinese "set the world ablaze" while Chinese are resuming work and producing COVID-19 masks and other logistics.

The Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson, Hua Chunying rubbished all these recently. China has always been open, transparent and responsible in all its efforts. Can the few US individuals accusing China tell the world, if the outbreak had hit the US first, would it have handled the situation better than the Chinese government?

From a Ugandan and African view, if it was first reported in Africa, how would the rest of the world have treated it?

The myth already spread in Africa that "superpowers" are on top of every situation, but what we see now, the emperors are naked! As of April 30, the US has already surpassed a million cases as European countries are in a total lockdown. By imposing restrictive measures, the pandemic has been effectively prevented and controlled in China, with latest figures showing that rarely are any locally transmitted cases recorded.

Chinese enterprises are now reopening for work, have expanded their production capacity and are producing medical supplies to reinforce other countries.

Wouldn't it have been far better, if we paid more attention to scientific debates on the genesis, vaccine, transmission and cure of COVID-19? As WHO's Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said on April 8, "Don't politicise the virus or we will have many more body bags."

Uganda's COVID-19 cases are still below 100 as those others in the region have already surpassed 200.

These are worrying figures and calls for a more drastic approach. Fortunately, Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni is employing China-like measures and so far there are reports of suggesting that the country could have succeeded in breaking the chain of transmission.

Of the 88 cases Uganda has registered, over 52 have recovered. The developing world should concentrate on joint fight against the virus rather than getting consumed by lies being peddled by the West. Otherwise, more lies and blame will cost us more time lives.

The writer is a journalist at Vision Group and a China-Africa Press Centre Fellow 2019

COVID-19: Universities have capacity to contribute to national development

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic continues to ravage countries, especially in the West, Europe and Asia. Beyond health, economies have been hit hard as well. Some authors have termed COVID-19 "a global health crisis that has turned into a global economic crisis".

In fact, when COVID-19 is contained, its real impact will be recorded across all spheres of life. Africa has not been spared either, although the gravity of the epidemic has been less compared to earlier doomsday predictions. In Uganda, COVID-19 has largely been contained (at least for now) – thanks to the team at the Ministry of Health and all health professionals and volunteers involved at all levels, all under the leadership and command of President Yoweri Museveni.

The timely preventive measures announced by the President and implemented by an assembled team of professionals from various fields, were critical in slowing down the spread and curtailing a community transmission phase which would have been worse for Uganda. The President has also rallied the population behind the fight and made everybody appreciate why the measures were necessary. The President's experience regarding epidemics is unrivalled, dating back to the days when HIV/AIDS was at its peak. Something else has attracted my attention in the Uganda COVID-19 fight: the untapped capacity that Ugandan universities have to contribute to Uganda's development and social transformation agenda. To make this argument, let's reflect on two issues:

First, the composition of the National Task Force (Technical). For starters, the NTF, among other members, has at least 17 professors from Makerere University alone, from multiple disciplines, leading several sub-committees or participating in several sub-committees. This team has provided technical and policy guidance in the fight against the coronavirus. The School of Public Health, under its dean, Prof. Rhoda Wanyenze, has demonstrated that public health continues to be central to human survival. This is part of the immense capacity housed in our local universities.

Secondly, COVID-19 has exhibited a "latent" capacity to innovate, across various

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quarters. Four examples at Makerere University are worth noting: First, KIIRA Motors in collaboration with team from the College of Health Sciences (CHS), College of Engineering (CEDAT) and the Resilient Africa Network (RAN) at Makerere University, has embarked on developing a low-cost ventilator to help in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU).

This will significantly reduce costs and increase access to this service. Second, a Rapid Diagnostic Test Kit for COVID-19 is being developed by a team led by Dr. Misaki Wayengera, at CHS, who initially developed an Ebola RDT Kit. The kit will mitigate the time and costs of PCR tests.

Both the ventilator and the RDT innovations are at the prototype stage, and could be available in the coming months.

Third, a team at RAN under the coordination of Prof. William Bazeyo has designed an EpiTent to help in emergencies and epidemics. The EpiTent has already been approved by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

Fourth, one of the CHS laboratories led by Prof. Moses Joloba has received accreditation from Government to start testing for the coronavirus, and will contribute significantly to the fight against the coronavirus.

Beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, Ugandan professors have made their mark on other global pandemics.

The global fight against HIV/AIDS right from the 1980s involved names such

as Prof. Nelson Ssewankambo, Prof. David Sserwadda and Prof. Moses Kanya, among others. These are but a few examples in the area of public health and infectious disease, but the list is long if we reflected on other fields of scholarship.

The above examples, demonstrate that universities can contribute significantly to addressing not only the current society challenges, but also tomorrow's. Universities, are not only symbols of national pride, but can also be a hub for a nation's intellectual and innovative capacity. Universities can play a crucial role in Uganda's growth and transformation path. Universities should not only be confined to the dissemination of knowledge through teaching, but should also invest in creation of new knowledge and expansion of the existing knowledge base through research and innovation. Most importantly, universities will become even more relevant if the knowledge and innovation they produce addresses local and global society challenges. This, however, requires deliberate and strategic investment in universities by the Government and development partners.

The Government has recently partnered with Makerere University to establish a research and innovation fund (MakRIF) and committed five years of funding. This is a positive gesture in the context of harnessing the immense capacity at Makerere University. A framework for other universities to benefit from similar initiatives should be explored.



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