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#### **Transforming African Universities and Epistemic Cultures in the Post-COVID-19 World**

Paul Tiyambe Zeleza

**Themes:** Systemic deficiencies and inequalities  
exposed and exacerbated by COVID-19;  
Transformative directions and trajectories;  
Sustainable transformation

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# **Transforming African Universities and Epistemic Cultures in the Post-COVID-19 World**

PAUL TIYAMBE ZELEZA

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## **Bio**

Paul Tiyambe Zeleza is the Vice Chancellor (President) and Professor of the Humanities and Social Sciences at the United States International University-Africa. His most recent books include *The Transformation of Global Higher Education, 1945-2015* (2016) and *Africa and the Disruptions of the 21st Century* (2020).

## **Abstract**

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and exacerbated the systemic deficiencies and inequalities in healthcare systems, economies, businesses and educational institutions at all levels around the world. African universities have been particularly affected. What does this portend for the future of these universities, and for the production, consumption and dissemination of scholarly knowledges?

In this paper, Paul Zeleza argues that universities face various alternative and overlapping futures involving three interlinked scenarios: restoration, evolution, and transformation. The scenarios encompass every aspect of university affairs from the modalities of teaching and learning, financial models, leadership skills, and institutional governance systems to modes of external engagements. In this context, it is critical to interrogate the desirable transformative trajectories for African universities and African studies as a constellation of knowledges on, about, and for Africa.

Constructing new futures for African universities and knowledge economies entails institutional, intellectual, ideological struggles and negotiations, and different ways of studying and assessing the value proposition of universities not only for students and other internal stakeholders, but also for African countries and societies and African diasporas in their complex national and transnational dimensions, articulations, and intersection.

## **Introduction**

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and exacerbated the systemic deficiencies and inequalities in health care systems, economies, businesses and educational institutions around the world. African universities have been particularly affected. What does this portend for their future and for the production, consumption and dissemination of scholarly knowledges?

In the paper, I argue that universities face various alternative and overlapping futures ranging from restoration, to evolution, to transformation. These interlinked scenarios encompass every aspect of university affairs from the modalities of teaching and learning, financial models, leadership skills, and institutional governance systems to modes of external engagements. In this context, it is critical to interrogate the desirable transformative trajectories for African universities and African studies as a constellation of knowledges on, about, and for Africa.

Constructing new futures for African universities and knowledge economies entails institutional, intellectual, ideological struggles and negotiations, and different ways of studying and assessing the value proposition of universities not only for students and other internal stakeholders, but also for African societies and diasporas in their complex national and transnational dimensions, articulations, and intersections.

## **Challenges Exposed and Exacerbated by the Pandemic**

The outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic in early 2020 forced universities around the world to confront unprecedented challenges that simultaneously exposed and exacerbated existing deficiencies and dysfunctions. Six stand out. First, in terms of transitioning from face to face to remote teaching and learning using online platforms. Second, managing severely strained finances. Third, ensuring the physical and mental health of students, faculty and staff. Fourth, reopening campuses as safely and as effectively as possible. Fifth, planning for a sustainable post-pandemic future. Sixth, contributing to the capacities of government and society in resolving the multiple dimensions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Universities in Africa were among the most affected and least able to manage the multi-pronged crises because of their pre-existing capacity challenges that centered on ten dimensions, namely, institutional supply, financial resources, human capital, research output, physical and

technological infrastructures, leadership and governance, academic cultures, quality of graduates, patterns of internationalization, and global rankings.

The first refers to the inadequate number of universities on the continent (8.9% of the global total in 2018) and low enrollment ratios (about 13% compared to the world average of 38%). The second concerns inadequate financing, declining public investment, and limited philanthropic support for higher education. The third is about the insufficient availability of faculty and lessening attractiveness of academic careers because of the devaluation of academic labor. The fourth points to low levels of research funding and productivity in which Africa accounted for only 1.3% of global R&D and 2.6% of scientific publications in 2014, compared to 39.5% for Asia. The fifth alludes to the poor state and maintenance of physical and technological infrastructures.

The sixth touches on external interference and politicization of university executive appointments, corporatization, and lack of leadership development opportunities. The seventh suggests growing social conflicts with the pluralization of internal and external constituencies and erosion of academic freedom. The eighth signifies persistent mismatches between graduates and the needs of the economy that results in high levels of unemployability. The ninth implies the durability of coloniality, intellectual dependency, and unequal international engagements. The tenth indicates the low standing of African universities in world rankings, notwithstanding the problems with rankings as instruments of global academic capitalism.

Some of these institutional deficits directly affected the ability of universities to manage the pandemic and to plan for the post-pandemic future. Most crucial are the technological, financial, and research capacities, and the state of institutional cultures and leadership. Many African universities suffered from limited digital infrastructure, capacity, and connectivity, which made it difficult for them to transition online for education, research and administration. The digital divide was evident among and within countries and institutions in terms of access to broadband, electronic gadgets, data costs, digital literacy and preparedness for administrators, faculty, staff and students. Digital inequalities reflected and reinforced the prevailing differentiations of class, gender, age, race, location, disability, and other social markers.

The technological challenges were compounded by worsening financial strains. University revenues from auxiliary services plummeted following campus closures; student enrollments and ability to pay tuition dropped sharply as economies went into recession and unemployment for parents or guardians rose; government funding declined; and philanthropic donations fell and were

increasingly diverted to emergency healthcare. Universities were forced to undertake severe budget cuts including job furloughs, reductions in salaries and pensions, suspension of capital projects and renegotiation of service contracts. Some stared at the brink of bankruptcy and permanent closure. Under such circumstances new investments in electronic infrastructures were difficult to support and sustain.

The financial crisis was of course not confined to African or developing countries. A report by UNESCO (2020), *COVID-19 and higher education: Today and tomorrow. Impact analysis, policy responses and recommendations* opens with a stark statement: “To say the least, we were not prepared for disruption of this magnitude. Almost overnight, schools and universities around the world closed their gates, affecting 1.57 billion students in 191 countries.... Regardless of the level of education, the paramount danger is that learning inequalities will widen, marginalization will increase, and the most disadvantaged students will find themselves unable to pursue their studies.” (UNESCO 2020). It urged governments to include higher education in stimulus plans for economic and social recovery, and for universities to ensure teaching continuity and guaranteeing equity.

For its part, a report by the European University Association, *The impact of the Covid-19 crisis on university funding in Europe: Lessons learnt from the 2008 global financial crisis*, (2020) “The coronavirus pandemic that has swept over Europe and the rest of the world has posed unprecedented challenges for all sectors of the economy, and higher education is no exception.” It noted, all sources of university income would be affected in some way in the short to medium term—public funding, tuition fees, research contracts, philanthropy and other sources of income were all in decline, universities would have limited options to reduce their costs, and the need for ambitious, coordinated action at European level was greater than ever.

Major markets for higher education were not spared. In early February 2021, it was reported from Australia that “Australia’s financially troubled universities have been forced to slash the jobs of more than 17,000 staff after losing an estimated AU\$1.8 billion (US\$1.37 billion) in revenue.... The higher education sector is estimated to lose a further 5.5%, or at least AU\$2 billion, in 2021”(Maslen 2021). In the United Kingdom, the BBC announced universities were facing an estimated “£11bn loss, amounting to a quarter of the sector's annual income.... Without significant redundancies, which would impact on teaching quality, universities are unlikely to be able to claw back much of the losses through cost savings,” and out of the country’s 165 higher education

institutions, 13 universities “will not be viable in the long run without a government bailout or debt restructuring” (Burns 2020). In Canada, universities were expected to lose as much as \$3.4 billion in 2020 “due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Statistics Canada has projected.” (Fragasso-Marquis 2020). A *Maclean’s* magazine wondered with alarm, “The pandemic piled on top of an already delicate situation raises an almost unthinkable question: will Canadian universities survive COVID-19?” (Ansari 2020).

In the United States, the higher education sector was already in financial crisis before COVID-19 struck, as evident in the astronomical \$1.6 trillion student debt, which was higher than credit card debt. In October 2020, the *New York Times* observed, “the pandemic has cost colleges at least \$120 billion, with even Harvard University, despite its \$41.9 billion endowment, reporting a \$10 million deficit that has prompted belt tightening” (Hubler 2020). In December, 2020, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* reported, “Preliminary estimates suggest that a net 560,000 fewer workers were employed by America’s private (nonprofit and for-profit) and state-controlled institutions of higher education in October, compared with February, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistic.... Put another way, American universities and colleges have shed at least 12 percent of the workers they employed at the start of the pandemic” (Bauman 2020). This was the largest loss of jobs in the sector since the Bureau started keeping statistics in the late 1950s.

Coming closer to home, in Kenya, in December, 2020 the *Daily Nation* published a sobering story, “Kenyan universities: We’re broke, send us what you owe.” It noted, “Universities are facing an acute financial crisis due to inadequate funding from the government, a situation that could lead to mass layoffs when the institutions open in January.... The universities have cumulatively requested Sh20 billion additional funding to get them out of their financial woes as well as cushion them from debt... The universities want the government to support them and help them recover from the financial effects of the pandemic... The total statutory deductions debt owed by universities by September 2020 is about Sh37.3 billion.” (Nyamai 2020). In February, 2021, the other Kenyan daily, *The Standard*, carried a story with a headline, “Thousands of non-teaching staff in varsities to be laid off to ease the institutions’ financial burden.” (Sanga 2021).

African universities were expected to undertake biomedical and socioeconomic research to manage the pandemic. As I noted in an article in *University World News* summarizing a series webinars I moderated, some universities produced hygiene products and personal protective equipment including hand sanitizers, masks, ventilators, EpiTents for patient isolation and mobile

hospitals, testing kits, and robots for delivery of food and medicines to patients. Others undertook research on the epidemiology of the coronavirus and biomedical treatments and the socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic, provided advisory services to government, developed software to monitor the pandemic's spread, and sought to raise awareness and provide psychosocial support to their constituents and the wider society (Zeleza 2020).

However, most African universities and firms stood on the sidelines as their societies waited for the development of vaccines in the global North, China, and India. At best, a few collaborated with overseas universities, research establishments and networks, and hosted clinical trials, although they were “unable to secure a fair pricing agreement.” For example, despite participating in clinical trial of the AstraZeneca vaccine, South Africa ended up paying US\$5.25 per dose, “more than double the US\$2.6 per dose paid by European Union countries to AstraZeneca.”( Moodley and Rossouw 2021) Weak research and drug manufacturing capabilities have made African countries vulnerable to vaccine nationalism, while democratic deficits have led to the securitization of mitigation measures gravely undermining human rights in several countries. (Okech, Mwambari & Olonisakin 2021)

COVID-19 should be a wake up call to African universities and countries to strengthen their research capacities, science, technology and innovation systems, manufacturing capabilities, and inter-institutional and interdisciplinary collaboration through existing consortia, such as the African Research Universities Alliance and new ones. (Sawahel 2021a) Beyond being involved in quality control and to have an important role to protect the continent “from being used as a testing lab for COVID-19 vaccines,” some believe African universities “should join forces with the pharmaceutical industry and funding organizations to manufacture COVID-19 vaccines in the continent.” (Sawahel 2021b).

Funding for research by governments, the private sector and the universities, and collaborations among the three needs to be enhanced. Despite innovations made in some universities, “the scale of collaboration with the industry that takes headline-making innovation beyond the walls of an institution is conspicuously missing. These collaborations can also provide an opportunity for further validation, and a path to widespread adoption and commercialization.”(Oganwale 2021).

How many African countries have followed the example of India, already the largest producer of vaccines in making new investments and increasing budgetary allocations to research



and development since the pandemic? The “rollout of COVID-19 vaccines and involvement in ‘vaccine diplomacy’ around the world has led to a significant boost in health spending and scientific research... Some INR500 billion or US\$6.9 billion over five years was announced in the budget [in February 2021]” (Sharma 2021).

## **The Agenda for Reform and Transformation**

A crisis, the saying goes, is the flip side of opportunity. The bigger the crisis, the more profound the lessons to be learned, and the greater the imperatives for transformation. African universities are likely to pursue three scenarios. The restore scenario will be focused on reclaiming the institution's pre-pandemic financial health, while the evolve scenario applies to “institutions that will choose to incorporate the impact and lessons of the pandemic into their culture and vision,” and under the transform scenario institutions will “use the pandemic to launch or accelerate an institutional transformation agenda.” (Grajek 2020).

For some universities what is at stake is survival, for others stability, and for many sustainability. Institutional survival is a precondition for stability which is essential for sustainability. Confronting the entire higher education sector is the question of its *raison d'être*, its value proposition in a digitalized world accelerated by COVID-19.

I would like to focus on four critical dimensions: promoting progressive digital transformation, effective leadership, strong institutional cultures, and sustainable funding for African universities. For the first two I propose a dozen strategies for each, and for the last two seven strategies for each, respectively. Given the limitations of time, I'll only give broad outlines of the various proposed initiatives.

As a scholar of intellectual history—the history of ideas and knowledge producing institutions—I'm only too aware knowledge production is framed by certain crucial dynamics, what I call the 4Is: first, intellectual, which refers to the prevailing paradigms ; second, ideological, in terms of the dominant and competing ideologies at a given moment; third, institutional, as far as the nature and organization of an institution is concerned; and finally, individual, one's social biography with reference to gender, race, nationality, class, religion, politics, etc.

Institutional change occurs in the intersections of these dynamics, out of concrete social struggles within and outside the academy, among the university's ever expanding and shifting constituencies. Change, in short, does not emanate from analytical prescriptions or rhetorical

declarations, however compelling. However, constructing desired futures is not a wasteful exercise; it can inspire action for ideas constitute an indispensable part of praxis.

In a forthcoming co-authored paper with Paul Okanda, USIU's ICT director, in the *Journal of African Higher Education*, whose abridged appeared in *University World News* on February 11, 2021 a twelve-point agenda is proposed for the digital transformation of African universities. First, they need to embed digital transformation in institutional culture, from strategic planning, organizational structures, to operational processes. Second, invest in digital infrastructure by rethinking capital expenditures that historically favored physical plant. Third, develop online design competencies both individually and through consortia. Fourth, entrench technology-mediated modalities of teaching and learning encompassing face-to-face, blended, and online.

Fifth, embrace pedagogical changes in terms of curricula design and delivery that involves students as active participants in the learning process rather than passive consumers. Sixth, develop holistic and innovative curricula that impart skills for the jobs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Seventh, adopt and use educational technologies that support the whole student for student success going beyond degree completion. Eighth, develop effective policies and interventions to address the digital divide and issues of mental health disorders and learning disability.

Ninth, as learning and student life move seamlessly across digital, physical, and social experiences, universities must safeguard data protection, security, and privacy. Tenth, in so far as the market for online programs is transnational, universities must pay special attention to international students who face unique barriers. Eleventh, they should develop meaningful partnerships with external constituencies and stakeholders, including digital technology and telecommunication companies to close the glaring employability gap. Twelfth, universities will increasingly be expected to anchor their research and innovation in the technological infrastructure that supports and enhances the opportunities of the Fourth Industrial Revolution for Africa.

As for effective leadership, I also see twelve areas for improvement. The multi-pronged health, economic, financial and social crises of COVID-19 have underscored the importance of strategic and smart institutional leadership at all levels.

First, it requires ensuring that appointment for institutional heads and governance boards are based on verifiable leadership competencies, passion and understanding of the higher education sector. All too often, their selection reflects misguided political considerations, expectations of donations which are hardly honored in African universities, or preferences for alumni wedded to

institutional nostalgia and stasis. Second, university leaders at all levels from department chairs to deans, vice chancellors to board members must undergo leadership development training specifically tailored for higher education.

Third, university leaders must possess and sharpen their financial acuity. In addition to managing complex institutional budgets, they now need to develop ability to manage reductions in staffing, programs, and space. Fourth, cultural competency is more critical than ever. University leaders must go beyond making statements on valuing diversity and inclusion and articulate and exhibit deeper awareness of systemic injustice, inequality, and privilege and show boundless compassion and commitment for promoting an inclusive institution.

Fifth, they must display technological deftness. In an increasingly digitalized academy, it's no longer enough for university leaders to be comfortable using emerging technologies but to model and promote institutional technological savviness and competence, and develop analytics expertise to promote data-driven decision-making. Sixth, the pandemic has shown that crisis management is essential. Besides preparing for traditional natural and security threats, leaders are currently forced to manage physical and mental health crises, emergency preparedness and business continuity, and leading in times of uncertainty.

Seventh, leaders need an entrepreneurial mindset. More than ever universities want leaders who are calculated risk-takers, innovative entrepreneurs, and effective in promoting the university mission as they create beneficial external partnerships and revenue generation initiatives. Eighth, political savviness is an important asset as university leaders are increasingly required to work in uncertain and politically polarized times at national, regional, and global levels that challenge them to pursue and promote advocacy and institutional discourse that is calm, informed, and respectful.

Ninth, empathy and respect is essential as mental stress and financial insecurity rise among university constituencies, leaders are expected to demonstrate empathy and respect for all their internal constituencies. They must reveal their humanity, even in decision-making. Tenth, multi-genre communication skills are indispensable. Further to strong written and verbal communication skills, leaders are now increasingly expected to provide efficient, timely, clear and persuasive messages and stories to diverse constituencies using multiple platforms including social media.

Eleventh, possessing high emotional intelligence is a must. Additional to the ability to demonstrate confidence and empathy, leaders are more and more expected to demonstrate self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, and social skills, rather than egotism, impulsivity, and

prone to bullying and micromanagement. Finally, agility is necessary. On top of well-established professional knowledge and experience, success increasingly depends on a leader's ability to be flexible in the face of many changes, have the capacity to learn and assume new and more responsibilities, and show fortitude, unflappability, and moral compass.

Building strong institutional cultures requires adherence to seven critical values. First, is academic freedom, which in most jurisdictions embodies two dimensions, the freedom of inquiry for faculty and students and the procedural and substantive autonomy of institutions. In the first instance, a faculty member should be able to teach or express scholarly views without fear of reprisals, and in the second an institution has the right to determine for itself on academic grounds how its core business of teaching and research is conducted. In many African countries and universities academic freedom in both senses is contested and often breached by pervasive authoritarian interventions and impulses by the state, administration, and governing boards.

Second, is shared governance, which refers to the participation and demarcation of rights and responsibilities in decision making between faculty, management, and governing boards. Typically, faculty is expected to exercise authority on academic matters such as the curriculum, instruction, and degree requirements. As universities have become more complex and demands for accountability increased, democratic organizational processes have been eroded, replaced by what critics call corporatization and managerialism. It is critical to balance the management of the university as a complex organization and the traditions and ethos of collegiality, participation, and distributed power by maintaining what is called in South Africa cooperative governance.

Third, is diversity, equity and inclusion. Given their critical role as pathways for social mobility and leadership across all sectors, universities are increasingly expected to promote diversity, equity and inclusion at all levels and for all their constituencies. Inequalities of access, support, and success are deeply entrenched across Africa's and the world's multicultural, multiracial, and multiethnic, gendered, and class societies that are also marked by other forms of difference and discrimination. By providing opportunities for underrepresented groups and creating and sustaining an inclusive climate through their mission, values, policies, and practices, universities promote inclusive excellence for institutional and national progress.

Fourth, civility and collegiality. The academic bully culture, as Darla Twale and Barbara De Luca call it in their book (2008) by that title has grown. Incivility and intolerance in universities has several manifestations. At a macro level it reflects the frictions of increasing diversification of

university stakeholders, growing external pressures for accountability, and the descent of political discourse into angry populisms. Student and faculty incivility are also fueled by rising sense of entitlement, consumerist attitudes, emotional immaturity, stress, racism, tribalism sexism, ageism, xenophobia, social media, and other pervasive social and institutional ills that universities must confront and address to foster healthier institutional climate.(Knepp 2012; King & Piotrowski 2015).

Fifth, universities must maintain their role as generative spaces in the rigorous search for truth. The “posts” and the movement for decolonizing knowledge has vigorously and rightly contested the epistemic architecture and metanarratives of the Eurocentric academy and its hegemonic knowledges. However, as we pluralize knowledges and universalisms, remake intellectual cultures, and transform our universities, we must resist the relativism of alternative facts, the nihilism of anti-science, the solipsism of self-referentiality beloved by populist demagogues, many of them products of the world’s leading universities, as some critics noted with the neo-fascist Trumpist and Ivy-League educated Senators Cruz and Hawley in the US who led the assault against certifying President Biden’s election based on the lie of election rigging.

Sixth, effective communication is essential for building cohesive communities out of the university’s disparate constituencies that have divergent interests, priorities, and preferences. Internally, there are students, faculty, staff, administrators and governance boards, and externally prospective students and employees, alumni, parents, government, regulatory agencies, competitors, institutional partners, donors, the media and general public. This requires developing multiple communication channels, messages, and styles tailored for different audiences to create dialogue and understanding. Good, transparent, and regular internal communication fosters a sense of community, efficiency, and the collective pursuit of institutional mission, vision, and goals.

Seventh, embracing social responsibility is vital for universities to eschew institutional naval gazing for the higher purpose of social impact that can mobilize internal and external stakeholders. Universities are well placed to provide evidence based knowledge, solutions and innovations for society. Socially responsible universities need to embed public service in their missions, experiential learning in their curricula, and research that is responsive to pressing local, national, regional and global problems as was stressed at a virtual international conference at the University of Pretoria in early February 2021. They need to enhance their social ownership as

public goods, in tackling social inequities, and embrace research sharing with their communities (Waruru & Kigotho 2021; Kigotho 2021a, 2021b; Mitchell 2021).

Financial sustainability requires pursuing seven strategies as well. First, public funding for higher education needs to be raised substantially if African countries are serious about improving the quality of human capital so essential for integrated and innovative sustainable development, and for them to turn the demographic explosion into a dividend rather than a disaster. The burial of the ghosts of SAPs is long overdue. African governments need to develop innovative allocation mechanisms to universities encompassing clear funding formulas, performance contracts, and competitive grants. The latter two should be open to both public and private universities.

Second, establishing differentiated tuition pricing and targeted student aid. Besides increasing spending per student, which is the lowest in the world, African governments and universities must develop targeted free or low tuition for the neediest students who qualify for university studies, improve student loan recovery schemes, and make them income contingent. Private universities can do this through internal student aid policies and external scholarships.

Third, exercising prudent financial management. As I noted in the Framing Paper for the 1<sup>st</sup> Higher Education Summit held in Dakar in March 2015, financial challenges facing higher education institutions require the adoption of more sophisticated and transparent budgeting models to ensure efficient utilization of limited resources. The specter of corruption that undermines the finances of some universities should also be ruthlessly tackled.

Fourth, diversifying revenue streams. Universities tend to have seven major sources of funding, namely, government subventions, student tuition, auxiliary services, income generating activities, research grants, philanthropic donations, and loans. African universities could increase income from auxiliary services by providing better accommodation for their students rather than leaving them captive to shoddy and dangerous neighborhoods as has become the case on many campuses; undertaking entrepreneurial activities including consultancies, offering executive programs, and establishing enterprises that leverage their expertise and innovations; consistently bringing in large research grants; and raising philanthropic donations from Africa's rapidly expanding middle classes and high net worth individuals, whose numbers reached 200,000 in 2017 with a collective wealth of US\$1.7 trillion.

Fifth, creating institutional mergers. There's no doubt that Africa needs more universities, but they must be financially sustainable. Many of the public and private universities that have

mushroomed in the last two decades are simply glorified high schools. For economies of scale in the higher education sector mergers are imperative even for the fiercely independent and often thinly disguised for-profit private universities. This has to be part of a strategic agenda for diversification and differentiation, accompanied by horizontal and vertical articulation of higher education institutions at national, regional, and continental levels.

Sixth, forging robust inter-institutional collaborations. University consortia will become increasingly necessary to promote quality education, facilitate cost sharing and bargaining in the procurement of expensive technological infrastructures, instructional materials, talent development, and to facilitate the mobility of students, faculty, credit transfer, and the development of inter-institutional innovative programs and practices.

Seventh, strengthening external partnerships with other higher education institutions and non-academic sectors and organizations. Old patterns of asymmetrical internationalization under which Africa was subordinated to Euroamerican institutional and epistemological systems must be replaced by strategic inclusion, mutuality, and co-creation of activities and initiatives, and humanizing internationalization by abandoning exploitation of international students who tend to be treated as “cash cows” (Hudzik 2020).

Also important are partnerships with the private sector which underinvests in skills and needs to complement government funding in promoting high-quality education and reduce the much-bemoaned skills gap. Universities have to be discerning in establishing public private partnerships to ensure they are not exploited as has happened to some universities. Critical players also include African international and intergovernmental agencies that often play second fiddle to their foreign counterparts in funding university activities and formulating policies.

Higher education is too important for Africa’s future to be held captive to haphazard interventions and superficial reforms. What is needed is fundamental transformation thanks, in part, to the massive disruptions of COVID-19. Studies show the return on investment for education are much higher for society and individuals than any other form of investment. This applies to all levels including tertiary, not just primary education as we were told by the misguided missionaries who propagated the neo-liberal assault on universities during Africa’s “lost decades” of the 1980s and 1990s with the connivance of anti-intellectual and anti-developmental African states. I believe we can remake the future of African higher education.

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