

## Leadership for Development: Re-shaping Higher Education Futures and Sustainability in Africa

Mpine Makoe and Don Olcott, Jr.

*University of South Africa*

**Abstract:** Leading change in higher education has been a major challenge in countries of limited resources, such as those in Sub-Saharan Africa. Most African universities have struggled with this transition mainly due to lack of the requisite information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure, inadequate expertise for online pedagogies and inability to provide computers to their students and staff. When faced with the recent changes, caused mainly by the COVID-19 pandemic that forced every person to work and learn remotely, many academic leaders were completely ill-prepared to deal with changes of this magnitude. The aim of this paper is to provide recommendations for shaping the future of higher education in Africa going forward. This will be done by analysing trends and opportunities created by these changes with the aim of accentuating the need for a renewed Pan-African Ubuntu that embraces the future, respects the unique dignity, cultures, languages and heritage of nations pre- and post-colonialism, and inspires the African Union Agenda 2063, The Africa we Want.

**Keywords:** leadership, Africa, higher education, Ubuntu, digital technologies.

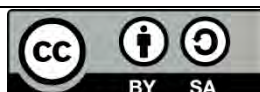
### Introduction

*If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.*

African Proverb

Higher Education institutions in Africa have been increasingly faced with complex challenges including the digitisation of education caused by the rapid development of emerging technologies (Nowrie, 2012), increasing demand for higher education (Roser, 2020; Mwangi & Horrell, 2020); and inadequate finance and funding for public education and government support (Ayee, 2014; Wangenge-Ouma & Kupe, 2020). The global pandemic has further exacerbated the range and depth of economic, educational, political, social and health crises across the world (Bozkurt et al, 2020). The level of instability and disruption created by these continuing crises are unprecedented since World War II.

Moreover, this pandemic has been particularly difficult in African nations where many challenges such as sluggish economic growth leading to extreme poverty, shortage of high-level skills to service emerging economies, and massive demands for higher education were already pervasive, prior to the pandemic, relative to education. Education, as a system, is expected to capacitate people with the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes to address social and political ills such as poverty, ill-health, climate change, slow job-creation, slow economic development, threats to peace and fragmenting social cohesion. Indeed, we cannot underscore the fact that education is at a crossroads across the African continent given the myriad of challenges on the higher education horizon.



## **The African Context**

In the past thirty years, higher education institutions have been going through many challenges created by disruptive technological changes that have impacted heavily on their operations. This is taking place at the forefront of the African educational landscape that is faced with a massive digital divide due to uneven access to digital technologies. Moreover, emerging research from the pandemic may suggest the digital divide is actually more severe than earlier estimates in both developing and developed countries (Bozkurt et al, 2020). In most Sub-Saharan African countries, Internet access, particularly in rural communities, is limited and unreliable. There are severe limitations on the amounts of data that can be seamlessly and instantly accessible online, yet slow Internet access/speeds make the educative process fragmented and frustrating for students and faculty.

The low socio-economic levels of students further exacerbates the near impossible barriers facing students and rural communities in particular. This context was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic which hit the continent so that almost overnight people were forced to work remotely and learn remotely in an attempt to curb the spread of the virus. Teachers everywhere were expected to move their classrooms into an online space. This was done irrespective of whether the teachers were ready for it or not. Most teachers had very little knowledge or experience of teaching online and when they were faced with a transformation of this magnitude, they found themselves confused, frustrated and demoralised.

Most African universities struggled with this transition mainly due to lack of the requisite information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure, inadequate expertise for online pedagogies and inability to provide computers to their students and staff. Many academic leaders were completely ill-prepared to deal with changes of this magnitude. On the one hand, they had to ensure that teaching and learning occurred irrespective of whether people were ready or not. On the other, they had to provide resources to support the transition. And yet, amidst all of these challenges and even the pandemic, there is one fact that has provided a unique opportunity for all social institutions.

The pandemic has provided a window of opportunity on one level to do a strategic reset (Olcott, 2021; McGreal & Olcott, 2021) and re-think our educational systems and how we can navigate the current barriers and shape our universities and schools to be innovative, adaptable social and humanitarian institutions for the future. The issue at hand is what it means to be a higher education institution in Africa and how this should shape the institutions, curriculum, scholarship and how students should be funded. This is a complex terrain within which university executives are expected to lead and manage. All over the world this strategic reset is affording leaders of institutions and organisations an opportunity to consider: What were we doing before the pandemic that worked, what didn't and what changes can leverage our capacity to adapt and thrive in the future? And indeed, it is critical that we analyse these within the African context and its diverse and complex landscape.

## **The Landscape Drivers**

The starting point of responding to this question is to examine how higher education leaders handled dramatic changes caused by the pandemic with the aim of strengthening what worked well, eliminating what didn't work and taking forward what is likely to thrive in the future. The futures research methodology of Trends and Emerging Issues Analysis was used to determine trends and issues that arise to determine their development over time and how academic leaders responded to

these changes. Although the process of identifying both Trends and Emerging Issues are similar, Trends Analysis focuses on issues that have fully emerged and might develop into a problem or an opportunity later while Emerging Issues “are potential problems or opportunities in their earliest stage of development ... that might eventually become a problem or opportunity,” (Dator, 2018, p. 6).

Analysing current trends will provide information on what will happen if the trend continues and may cause the trend to change (Inayatullah, 2013). Trends are an important part of futures thinking because “they show ways in which the past and the present give rise to the future by forecasting what might happen if a trend were to continue” (OECD, 2019, p. 45). In this paper, Trends Analysis will focus on the pre-pandemic trends such as globalisation, demographics, the use of technologies that enable flexible working environments, mobile Internet, artificial intelligence, open education practices and micro-credentialing. While academic leaders were trying to deal with all these trends, the COVID-19 pandemic emerged with its own set of challenges that needed to be addressed immediately. The response to the changing environments calls on academic leaders to be visionary to move the institution forward.

Because change is highly unpredictable, it is often affected by current events that influence our thinking such as the technologies, economic, social and political pressures; as well as the COVID-19 pandemic. When faced with these challenges, leaders were left with no choice but to react to the situation as it presented itself. Reaction is a response to an urgent need to respond, however, this is different from action, which requires anticipations (Kotter, 2021). The lack of preparation for many eventualities tends to be the biggest challenge for leaders in general. This is further exacerbated in African higher education where leaders tend to focus on operational rather than strategic matters. The role of an academic leader is to provide a vision that stimulates hope and gives people a positive sense of direction (Inayatullah, 2013). Roser (2020) argues that the leadership practices of the past, as well as the current approaches, are no longer enough to meet future challenges. Adapting new approaches and applications of leadership will be imperative.

## **Scope and Purpose**

This paper discusses key issues including leadership, vision, digital technologies in the 4th Industrial Revolution, credentialing options, change management, online and open education, academic quality and other issues. The next section will target the game changers — the key issues that many observers see as most critical to reshaping the future of education in general, and higher education in particular, particularly across Africa. Trends and Emerging Issues analysis tries to take something obvious in the present which could grow into an opportunity in the future (Dator, 2018). These emerging issues will be discussed in a synergistic manner to demonstrate key interrelationships and implications for institutions. The final section of this paper provides leaders with recommendations for going forward with reshaping their institutions, risk assessments, and contingencies for remaining agile and adaptable to changing markets and conditions.

## **Pre-Pandemic Emerging Trends**

Without question, many major trends were occurring in higher education prior to the pandemic. We were seeing shifts in economic power globally moving greater influence out of Europe and the US towards China. We were seeing international higher education facing new challenges where a new global regionalism was occurring with institutions and foreign students looking more closely at their

educational options in their own region rather than the US, UK, and Australia — the typical big three of international host institutions. Higher education has not been spared from the impact of these global changes.

## **Vision Making**

The volatile higher education landscape that needs to meet the challenges of globalisation needs to develop leaders who are able to drive the institutions into the future. While the higher education institutions in other parts of the world are strategically positioning their institutions to address challenges that are brought in by new trends, many African academic leaders are continuing with business as usual forgetting that the success or failure of an institution is often attributed to its leader (Kotter, 2021; Olcott, 2021). Without a compelling vision of what higher education should look like, the institution may not reach its goal. It is the responsibility of a leader to ensure that there is a well-founded vision that will take the university forward (Olcott, 2021). Visioning focuses on the potential change that is likely to make a fundamental difference in higher education in the future. It requires African academic leaders to move beyond political expediency and lead from the trenches with those who will support their vision (Kotter, 2021; Olcott, 2021).

## **Demographic Realities**

The African Higher Education landscape has been affected by the drivers of change in the political, social and economic environment. One of the drivers of change is changing demographics. Currently, the continent is faced with an explosion of a growing number of young people who are in desperate need of a university qualification. About 60% of students in Sub-Saharan Africa will be younger than 25 years in 30 years, according to UNESCO (2021) projections. The economic growth and the development agenda of the “African we Want” is in the hands of these young people, according to the African Union Agenda 2063 which sees them as the best resource for the continent (Agenda 2063, 2015). If Africa’s young people receive the right education and training, they will be able to drive the development of the continent with sustainable and long-term custodianship of their own resources (Agenda 2063, 2015). To reach this goal, higher education leaders need to start planning to ensure that these large numbers of young people have access to equitable quality education as their basic human right (Roser, 2020). The growing trend of young people who seek spaces in higher education is forcing universities to expand the system from an elite model to a mass model.

## **The Digital Revolution**

In the past thirty years, there have been profound and pervasive changes brought in by technology. The permeation of technology in every aspect of human life that has transformed the way people communicate, socialise, buy and sell, teach and learn. While educational institutions used to be the only ones that produced and disseminated knowledge, now the Internet has revolutionised how knowledge is developed and communicated. Virtually any person could be a developer or a producer of knowledge.

The use of ICTs in education cannot be underestimated. Every dimension of the higher education space has been touched by technology. The tension happens when society cannot catch up, when power relations do not change (Inayatullah, 2013). It has made it possible that education resources developed everywhere and anywhere in the world can be picked up and used for teaching and

learning for free. The adoption of these emerging technologies in higher education has impacted on the pedagogy, the processes and support systems and structures.

Hülsmann (2016), however, reminds us that digital tools — ICTs — can also be the Achilles heel for lower socio-economic and disadvantaged groups. These groups often spend close to 25% of their personal income (4-5% in developing countries) on technology, which is a large percentage given that the personal income amount is low to start. Hülsmann (2016) further suggests that ICTs may, in fact, exacerbate the ‘digital divide’ which makes this a particularly acute problem for Sub-Saharan Africa and other regions on the continent.

These changes also affect the way the university is managed. To ensure that technology is used optimally in the higher education sector, academic leaders need to come up with plans and strategies that ensure that no person is left behind. The increased demand for technologies in the education space “requires higher education leaders to possess a broader and more sharp set of skills than in the past” (Odhiambo, 2014). Academic leaders are expected to lead change by predicting what is essential for their institution in order to develop appropriate policies and implementable strategic plans that enable them to adjust and adapt to the new environment (Nworie, 2012). Academic leaders who are going to make it through these rampant changes are those that are resilient, dynamic and have the ability to apply flexible and creative approaches to navigate through hurdles posed by online learning (Kotter, 2021; Olcott, 2020, 2021; Reed, 2018).

Examining the deeper implications of the technological trends in Africa reveals that many people, especially those who live in remote, rural areas, are not fully benefiting from the affordances of technologies. Online learning was increasing all over the world but the actual geographic uses of online teaching and learning remained regional, national and local. There is no evidence that 100% online global higher education was or is expanding. Despite the capacity to ‘go global,’ most institutions across the world, including open universities, have a very small geographical service region even in the digital online era (Olcott, 2021).

### **Micro-Credentials and OERs**

Micro-credentials are increasingly gaining momentum amongst universities for re-thinking their credentials base (Brown, Giolla Mhichil, Beirne & Mac Lochlainn, 2021; FutureLearn, 2020; McGreal & Olcott, 2021; Olcott, 2021). Are degrees and certificates the best options for putting students to work? Perhaps new micro-credentials that give students greater options for entering the workforce must be a first priority going forward? Of course, there must be jobs in the first place but a better balance may serve both the educational and employment needs of students and society.

In concert with emerging micro-credentials, we have also seen greater interest in OERs despite their advocacy not achieving what was hoped for in the 2012, 2017 and 2019 UNESCO Recommendations ([www.unesco.org](http://www.unesco.org)). The fact is that the growth has been slow during the last ten years and most faculty, students, and other stakeholders still lack awareness about the basics of OERs and how they can be value-added to students and to themselves. OERs do have potential to increase access and lower costs going forward but we have to move beyond simplistic notions that MOOCs are the yellow brick road to Oz (Pickard, 2018).

These emerging pedagogical practices, and ICT, enables communication that radically reduce constraints of distance and time in the academic space. New technologies have the capacity to augment what universities have been doing over the years by offering new ways of exploring and applying knowledge and creating learning communities. However, the implementation of these innovative practices in higher education requires “innovation, risk taking, and continuous learning; and new skill sets that traditional strategies of the past are not sufficient to address” (Mrig & Sanaghan, 2017, p. 4).

## **Emerging Issues during the Pandemic**

Olcott (2021) summarised the response of education to the global pandemic. He wrote:

During the pandemic, educational institutions across the world responded by going online but were not agile enough do it fast with efficiency, quality and consistency (Bozkurt et al, 2020; Olcott, 2020).

The response was fast but there was only one other option to a lockdown — go online (or do nothing). It is likely that the post pandemic assessment will provide data that shows uneven successes with this response. Academic leaders didn’t really have to make any decision other than go or not go. It was an international health crisis and failure to respond was not an option. There was only one option — lockdown = online. (p. 6)

In general, and validated by Bozkurt et al (2020), the vast majority of schools and higher education institutions across the globe lacked the training for faculty, student and faculty support services, technological infrastructure, and, most importantly, the planning and leadership necessary to lead effectively during a crisis. This is a primary example of why leaders fail to lead effective change — no vision, no contingencies, no preparations of key human resources, and an unwillingness or inability to see the forest for the trees. Academic leaders that don’t plan for the future, will fail in the present. Indeed, these same issues have remained on-going challenges for African schools and universities.

Jean-Louis (2021) was even more candid about the emerging challenges during and post pandemic. He suggested inequality amongst various groups in terms of access and resources was significant; racism and the lack of diversity in many areas appeared more pronounced; social trust in sources of informal and knowledge were now questioned more than ever; the digital divide is larger than we expected, including amongst some of the groups we were already aware of in developing countries; some nations and universities are highly dependent upon international students to the point of economic vulnerability; the mental health of remote working and the pandemic adversely affected a majority of the population; many jobs we thought were essential are not secure whilst others considered mundane are now essential; and climate change continues to wreak havoc upon the planet. Most of these observations can also be attributed to the African continent and higher education systems.

Distance and online learning seem to be the only viable option that offered flexible ways for delivering content and resources while enabling interaction amongst students and teachers during the pandemic. However, as noted above, most institutions lacked the basics to employ online delivery given this delivery mode requires heavy investment in ICT infrastructure (hardware and software), digital capacity, learners and teachers’ capabilities to engage in teaching, learning and assessment practices (Bozkurt et al, 2020). This was a major challenge because many African countries do not have

a stable electricity supply, let alone appropriate devices and Internet connectivity that can enable teachers and students to engage in online teaching and learning. In addition, the costs of data in some countries are prohibitive for most students and teachers. Almost all institutions struggled with this transition. Without these basic necessities, students from underserved, marginalised and poverty-stricken communities did not have access to the digital devices that are required for remote online learning. Therefore, efforts should focus on expanding access to all learners and teachers irrespective of their environment. It is important that solutions for developing countries should ensure that no learner is left behind.

The disruptive events due to COVID-19 have prevented and continue to prevent students and teachers from meeting face-to-face and, as such, require alternative delivery modes of teaching and learning. Teachers were not only expected to adopt online delivery options to ensure that learning occurs during lockdowns, they had to teach while working from home. For the first time in the history of higher education, large numbers of students and teachers who were used to studying in a defined classroom environment had to move their teaching and learning online without the necessary competencies, training, support services and digital tools to do so.

In an attempt to move teaching to an online environment, many higher education leaders neglected to recognise that classroom-based teaching is fundamentally different from online teaching. In a classroom, an educator teaches a group of students who are congregated in one place. However, in an online learning environment, an educator teaches an individual student who is sitting alone in a house that may be full of other people who are not involved in learning. In this context, the educator uses different approaches to ensure that students that are isolated are motivated to learn and participate in online activities. The place and time in which teaching and learning take place is a critical component of the education transaction. Adopting technology for teaching and learning remotely changes the dynamics of practices and the systems needed to support students. These changes did not only alter processes and practices in the ODL context, they subsequently affect how people lead this change in ODL (Nworie, 2012). It was therefore critical that teachers were provided with the necessary knowledge and skills so that they were empowered to teach online.

Given there was very little time to design and develop online content and prepare learning materials for online teaching, some institutions looked for technical assistance and support from distance education communities (Olcott, 2020). Working in collaboration with other experienced online institutions and international partners assisted universities to upskill and equip lecturers/teachers with appropriate skills to teach through this mode of delivery. Instead of developing new programmes which may take time, OER and MOOCs licensed under Creative Commons 4.0 International share alike that had been developed elsewhere were used to speed up the process of staff training and development of online course content. This was done in some institutions that recognised the need for trained teachers. However, the success of these training programmes depended on solid strategic plans and policies which guide the implementation of online learning.

Although many campus-based universities struggled with moving to distance online learning, the distance learning mode of delivery is not new on the African continent. The University of South Africa (UNISA), the first university to offer higher education courses through correspondence, is based on the continent. In light of prohibitive costs of building new higher education institutions to accommodate more school leavers, post-graduates and working adults in universities, education

policy documents in most African countries refer to distance and online education as the solution to address the growing need of students who seek access into higher education at reduced costs.

However, the uptake of online learning over the years has been very slow. It is only recently, when the deadly COVID-19 virus led to the closure of educational campuses, thereby compelling students to stay at home, and resulting in governments being forced to consider remote online teaching, that adoption of this mode accelerated. These changes did not only affect the teaching and learning practice but also affected where teaching and learning took place. Working in an unfamiliar environment created its own set of challenges. People had to negotiate between a working and a home environment. This “tidal wave of change will soon make the way we work almost unrecognizable” to higher education leaders’ who had to manage people who were working away from the office (Coetzee et al, 2021).

This change of managing a dispersed and geographically separated workforce is likely to be the norm in the future. Transformation of this magnitude may result in confusion, frustration, low morale and low motivation for the people involved. It is precisely during this period that leaders have to be innovative in addressing these challenges. However, leaders in higher education institutions have mostly been reactive in dealing with challenges impacting their institutions and slow at producing proactive solutions. By and large, leaders failed to seize the opportunities created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **The Game Changers: What Leaders Must Empower Across Africa**

Indeed, one of the most powerful revelations to emerge from the global pandemic is the reality that academic leaders can blend power, empathy, humanism and compassion into the decision-making processes that translates to effective and transformational leadership (Friedman, 2020). The examples are all around us. Jacinda Ardern, Prime Minister of New Zealand and Angela Merkel, Chancellor of Germany, are two primary examples. Conversely, perhaps the lighter side of these examples accentuate that rhetoric, money, political standing and influence are seldom as important leadership attributes as sound judgment and common sense – both which they don’t teach you in graduate school or on the job. The US and the UK are two cases in point on this score who managed the pandemic with disastrous results and were both led by male leaders.

### **Resetting the Stage: A Pan-African Philosophy for ‘Ubuntu’**

The humanistic philosophy and concept of Ubuntu is a proudly South African philosophy based on people’s relation to others, that is, *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* – “I am what I am because of others.” As a result, Ubuntu discourages the view that an individual takes precedence over the community, thus, making the value of identifying with others and responding to their needs as important. Focusing on people’s allegiances, discourages the view that the individual takes precedence over the community. “Ubuntu relates to communities, which, whether poor or thriving, cannot survive on individual efforts” (Makoe & Shandu-Phetla, 2019, p. 132). In modern South Africa, this unique philosophy is expansive, often drawing upon essential moral ideals, working together, empathy and empowering a collective humanity. Nelson Mandela writing in the preface of Richard Stengel’s *Mandela’s way: Fifteen lessons of life, love and courage* (2009) referred to Ubuntu as an African concept that means “the profound sense that we are human only through the humanity of others; that if we



are to accomplish anything in this world, it will in equal measure be due to the work and achievement of others.”

Inevitably, the mix of interpretations makes a universal definition problematic — or does it? At the heart of Ubuntu is the restoration of dignity and humanism in the modern era — the coming together of a pre- and post-colonial heritage and history that defined the African experience, spirit and moral foundations. More precisely, this heritage combined with Mandela’s words above, reflect the idea that ‘we are in this together’ long before it became a popular sound bite for the current pandemic. We must now move beyond the rhetoric and translate how this pan-African view of Ubuntu can become the centre of African education going forward.

Ubuntu is linked with the notion of education as a common good which reflects social and cultural practices that engender participation, cooperation and reciprocity. Therefore, the context of coming and working together for the common good is essential to paving the future for education. The new Ubuntu for education first and foremost must become apolitical. Political appointments to lead institutions must be abolished. University leaders must be trained, certified and experienced leaders, not part-time political administrators. Innovative public schools and universities need seasoned and experienced leaders of complex organisations. Indeed, politics cannot and should not be eliminated altogether but must be in the roles that support education in the best ways — policy making, funding allocation and accountability, quality, and employment generation.

Pan-African Ubuntu must be built on the educational context, continuity, cooperation, communication, and community across the continent. African leaders can borrow and adapt best practices from other nations, developed and developing, but at the end of the day, the African Union Agenda 2063 of the Africa we Want should drive decisions about translating external strategies into local and regional pan-continental adoption. Leaders at all levels must empower this spirit of Pan-African Ubuntu for navigating education into the future.

### **We are in this Together! Pan-African Imperatives for Education: A Macro View**

A Pan-African philosophy of Ubuntu in and of itself is not enough to transform African education. A very courageous, realistic and pragmatic mindset will be necessary for transformation and it has to start with leadership. Despite our best intentions, hope is not a strategy and what will be needed is decision making that may in fact produce pain before gain. Without question, any renewal will require strong leadership in at least the following areas.

- Develop digital infrastructure: Internet access, and training for online delivery for students, staff and faculty must be the continent’s primary strategic goal. Societal infrastructure, economic expansion, and workforce development and internationalisation depends on infrastructure. Eighty-two percent of people in Sub-Saharan Africa do not have Internet access, mostly those living in rural communities. Without this educational highway for the future, African rhetoric bravado will remain empty platitudes. This is the primary game changer that leverages every other social institution across the diverse African landscape.
- Re-commit to long-term planning with short-term goals and milestones to reflect progression towards an agreed-upon long-term vision (Kotter, 2021). The challenges are immense and no

matter from what vantage points we observe African education, the inherent limitations on resources result in poor judgment and decision making.

- Recognise societal impacts and the future are linked to ensuring a robust K-12 elementary-middle-secondary-tertiary-lifelong education system. Sound bites or League Table progress for universities are more platitudes than impactful leadership. The fact is the vast majority of student leavers arriving on the steps of Africa's universities are not prepared for university study. This in turn places immense burdens upon university faculty who may spend as much time on remedial education as they do providing these students with a viable and springboard credential into the world of work.
- Reorganise university strategic goals by starting first with funding agencies and political leaders. The resource challenges facing African educational institutions at all levels has received ubiquitous coverage across the scholarly landscape. The leadership problem here is not the challenges per se, it's the continuous deployment of similar strategies and practices that do not result in positive outcomes and impacts. The insanity principle — doing things over and over the same way and expecting different outcomes is counterproductive. Within this challenging landscape, the game changers for African higher education in the future will require laser-focused decision making and judgment.
- Embrace the concept of the Pan-African Ubuntu as a foundation for the complex transformations of the future of higher education across Africa. TIA (This is Africa) respects pre-colonial histories, cultures, customs, languages, humanism, and dignity. It celebrates Africa as a unique 'frontier of knowledge' for the world, not simply for Western nations nor colonial powers who in the main have retained power over many key societal systems and infrastructure (Thompson, 2020).
- Prioritise organisational structures and models that prepare school leavers for university study from the primary and secondary school levels.
- Leverage credentials by shifting away from a credential focus on degrees and certificates and re-organise the university towards micro-credentials for skills-based preparation for faster school-to-work programmes. Degrees and certificates are not being abandoned, they are being repositioned for societal impacts that lead to economic and workforce development (Brown et al, 2021; McGreal & Olcott, 2021; Olcott, 2021).
- Build partnership models that collectively focus on economic development and workforce development. Political, business and university leaders must work collaboratively and invest funds targeted at economic initiatives that increase the public goods available to the majority of society. Increasing the number of degree completers at the top ten universities will not do this. Education must be tied to work and careers and create opportunities for all students' post high school. In sum, not all students are meant or suited to attend university.

These game changers form the core values of a continent-wide Pan-African Ubuntu meant to reframe the entire educational landscape. Academic leaders of this transformation will require courage and resiliency where collective societal welfare supersedes political agendas, corruption, and self-interests.

It is a long-term vision but one that must be embraced if productive and sustainable change is to occur across the African educational sector.

## **Recommendations for University Leaders**

Within the context of a new Pan-African Ubuntu described above, the following recommendations are intended to focus on institutions. Some of these build upon current initiatives whilst others challenge the status quo for post-colonial norms that have been ineffective. They are the prerequisites for managing the game changers outlined above. Indeed, this is a strategic reset for leaders.

- **Digital Infrastructure and Online Scaling** — This is your future. The entire world is online with agile and fluid digital infrastructures and online delivery. Without this you are not on the global playing field. Competition will only increase and nearly all providers will be delivering education, training and research online.
- **Harness Human Potential** — This is a paradox. You need digital infrastructure to compete yet you need to harness and foster the best in your human resources. People ultimately are the main resource for change and, therefore, they need to be provided with the training and decision-making autonomy they need to move the institution forward — digitally!
- **Redesign Credentials for Economic Development** — African students need jobs and a source of income. Economic development and stability of your nation requires universities to put students to work — not just give them degrees and certificates. Redesign your credentials base now — by offering more short-term skill based training that links to employer needs and to public service.
- **Quality and Accountability Matter** — Everyone is accountable. Faculty, students, political leaders, funders, private companies, and all other stakeholders in the educational enterprise. Money should reward and follow quality and impacts not simply previous years' budgets. Quality should drive your institution. Even open universities that scale up to thousands of students usually grow too fast and are unable to provide academic quality, well-trained faculty and infrastructure upgrades and student support service at levels that clearly reflect quality. Mediocrity should never be acceptable simply because you expand access.
- **Zero-Based Resourcing** — Visionary and bold university leaders will need to restructure their institutions to go online, create micro-credentials, re-think faculty contractual parameters, expand digital infrastructure and Internet access to students and other stakeholders. Institutional budgets will be transformed and will need to consider new needs rather than old funding patterns that were primarily based upon past funding allocations. Are you a leader that is willing to make every unit in your new university justify now what monies they need and for what purposes?

## **Summary**

Indeed, the challenges facing the future of education in Africa are formidable. Conversely, the pandemic has afforded all nations and universities a period for strategic reset, to shift directions and navigate a new future. Many new 'normals' will emerge, not simply one. This paper accentuates the need for a renewed Pan-African Ubuntu that embraces the future, respects the unique dignity, cultures, languages and heritage of nations pre- and post- colonialism, and inspires a new brand of

'TIA = This is Africa' solidarity that recognises that Africa is its own frontier of knowledge, of wealth, and of opportunities to share with the world and to be shaped by the world.

The future will demand pan-African approaches to many issues. The first and most important is building the digital infrastructure and Internet access for peoples across the continent. This is the first priority because everything flows from this capacity to build societal institutions, compete in the marketplace, create micro-credentials and jobs focused on skills and complemented by degree and certificate seekers — digital capacity enables all of these.

This Pan-African domain will also require a renewed focus on K-12 education so that school leavers arriving at the university doorstep are prepared for university study. Strong universities with weak K-12 systems is the ultimate negative paradox. Africa must build strong systems from K - Lifelong Learning. New partnership models amongst business, education and government must lead this transformation.

At the institutional level, online delivery is not optional for African leaders. Competitors are already online and this is a normative feature for doing business in the future. Universities without online capacity will not be able to compete in the HE educational market. Leaders must harness their human potential with strong training and support systems. Digital infrastructure is only as effective as the people designing, managing, using and supporting the systems.

Micro-credentials will be offered digitally because employers will be able to have their current employees take these online. Leaders must motivate their academics to reorganise their curricula to accommodate the micro-credentials revolution that is already here. Degrees and certificates will still be in high demand but not everyone needs or wants these — they want a job and a university's contributions to society and the nation start with putting people to work even if their degree is not the entry credential. Africa needs micro-credentials and skill-focused training to leverage employment opportunities for job-seeking students.

Leaders must renew their commitment to long-term strategic planning and to ensuring contingency planning is part of that process. Quality and accountability must apply to all stakeholders and universities must defend academic quality as important as unmanaged enrollment growth. More does not always mean better and universities are no exception. High numbers with low quality will be detrimental to universities.

In sum, the future of education in Africa will require courageous, autonomous, and bold leaders who place the public good and the welfare of their nation first and foremost. Leadership must build trust and confidence through empathy and refrain from the blame game. Instead, leaders must reassure people that a bright future is possible despite the challenges that arise. Decision making will require sound judgment and at times firm resolve which in fact can co-exist with empathy, kindness and care for the human condition (Friedman, 2020). A brave new world is waiting for Africa and its future. It is simply a matter of going.

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#### **Authors:**

**Dr. Mpine Makoe** is a Commonwealth of Learning Chair in OEP/OER R at the University of South Africa. Email: Qakisme@unisa.ac.za

**Dr. Don Olcott, Jr.**, FRSA, is an honorary professor at the University of South Africa and President of HJ Associates. He is also an adjunct instructor with Oldenburg University. Email: don.olcott@gmail.com

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