



THE EDUCATION  
COLLABORATIVE



EVENT REPORT

## BEYOND RANKINGS: DEFINING SUCCESS FOR AN AFRICAN UNIVERSITY

**THIS REPORT CHRONICLES KEY INSIGHTS FROM THE PANEL  
DISCUSSION AT THE EXECUTIVE CONFERENCE. THE EXCERPTS  
HAVE BEEN EDITED FOR LENGTH AND CLARITY.**

UNIVERSITY EXECUTIVES CONFERENCE 2019



**THE EDUCATION  
COLLABORATIVE**



## CONFERENCE SYNOPSIS

According to the UN World Population Prospects, by 2050 more than half of the world's population growth will occur in Africa. The continent's population is estimated to double to 2.5 billion, and over 60% of Africa's population will be under age 25 (United Nations, 2017)

*“ As Africa prepares to become home to the fastest growing youth population in the world, how can the continent's education systems work to prepare its leadership? [...] It will depend on productive citizens, and the enlightened effective leadership necessary to create an enabling environment on the continent. Developing such citizens and leaders is the business of Education. ”*

**- Dr. Patrick Awuah, Founder and President, Ashesi University, Ghana**

How are African universities preparing to meet the estimated increase in student admissions, the demand for quality education, educators, educational policies, and structures? Are higher education institutions ready for this challenge to shape the future of the continent?

Through collaborative efforts, Ashesi University convenes African universities and educators under the Education Collaborative initiative to share, co-create, innovate, and learn new techniques in university teaching and management with the goal of increasing collaboration among African institutions.

We achieve this through annual conferences and workshops, and by staying connected throughout the year through research collaborations, mentorships, faculty and administrators immersion programs.

The 2019 Education Collaborative Executive conference was the first gathering of directors and senior leadership of institutions in the network since its inception in 2017. Under the theme, Collaborating on Strategies for University Governance in Africa, the day-and-half conference set the platform for conversation on developing institutional competencies for data-driven strategy and collaboration in the face of exponential population growth, technology, and globalization.

Present were Vice-Chancellors Presidents, Directors, Deans, and governance teams from 10 Universities across the continent.

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### **ESTABLISHING MEASURES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO AN EFFECTIVE RANKING SYSTEM FOR THE AFRICAN UNIVERSITY**

This section responds to important questions arising from the quest of universities to be the best at developing students. What are the key drivers of the top university ranking systems, and what collaborations or competitions do they foster?

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### **[2.1] DEFINING THE SUCCESS METRICS FOR AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION**

Universities across Africa are diverse and unique within themselves so what should count towards success for African Universities? Would a new standard better capture the need on the continent, or should there be a push to conform to the current measurement system for universities worldwide?

### **[2.2]. AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES WITHIN WORLD RANKING SYSTEMS**

Most ranking systems which includes African Universities are created by non-African organizations and may be based on what's relevant to their context. Are global ranking systems adequate for African Universities?

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## PANELIST



**Prof. Baylie Damtie Yeshita** is the Vice-Chancellor of Kepler in Rwanda. Before joining Kepler, he was the President of Bahir Dar University, one of the largest universities in Ethiopia, for seven years (2011-2018). He also served on the boards of several federal and regional governmental and non-governmental institutions in Ethiopia. His educational background includes a Ph.D. in Space Physics from the University of Oulu (Finland), MSc in Space Physics from Tromso University (Norway) and a BSc in Physics from Addis Ababa University (Ethiopia).



**Araba Botchway** is a member of the Executive Committee (Management Team) at Ashesi. Araba has 18 years of experience in scholarships and grant management within the Higher Education Sector in West Africa, as well as recruitment of students across Africa. Araba joined Ashesi in 2013 as the Director for Development and later moved into her current role.



**Dr. A.B. Assensoh** is an Emeritus Professor/Courtesy Emeritus Professor of Indiana University and the University of Oregon, respectively. He has a wide range of experience with rankings, which also includes rankings done by Africa Watch Magazine of New York, USA, and of Ghanaian Parliamentarians. He is an author and co-author of several other published books as well as refereed Journal and popular published articles.



**Ato Micah** is the Managing Principal of Maverick Research, a technology-oriented research company that counts the World Economic Forum (Davos), Borderless Alliance, The World Bank, and Dentsu Aegis as clients. Ato has 19 years of work experience across Market and Social Research, Brand Management and General Management.



**Professor Angela Owusu-Ansah** is the Provost at Ashesi University. Prior to joining Ashesi, Angela was a Professor of Doctoral Studies, and a Faculty Chair of dissertation research, at Concordia University, Portland, Oregon. She also served as a national commissioner for the Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), a major accrediting agency of over 700 higher education institutions

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## INTRODUCTION

The youthful population of Africa is increasing exponentially, and so is the need for higher education. Universities over the centuries strategize to distinguish themselves as one of the best. With the new dynamism in population growth, innovation, technology, and globalization, how do we define the successful African University now and in the future?

The panel discussion focused conversation on whether current rankings systems are enough as a measure of success for African Universities. And if not, what measures of impact and success should be used to define the progress of an African educational institution. How does higher education on the continent do this and still remain competitive globally.





# SECTION 1

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## ESTABLISHING MEASURES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO AN EFFECTIVE RANKING SYSTEM FOR THE AFRICAN UNIVERSITY



**Angela:** With the new dynamism in population growth, innovation, technology, and globalization, how do we define a successful African University now and in the future?

**Prof. Damte:** Whatever is used to measure universities should be based on its contribution to the economy. For instance, a good KPI in the case of students would be the number of graduates who not only graduate but also get good job postings. In the case of professors, we could consider the number of publications that have made any impact.

**Araba:** Education is a means to an end and so this end needs to be defined. The main goals of a university are research, teaching, learning, and community engagement yet it seems a lot of focus is put on research to the detriment of the others. A ranking system of relevance is needed. I propose mission-driv-

en evaluations; that an institution should be evaluated based on how well they are doing towards their mission.

**Ato Micah:** Africa has its problems which need African solutions. I read an article titled Africa Rising and a key lesson I took from it was that foreign companies failed to solve any African problems because their frameworks were not suitable for the context. It is important for us to take a step back to define the problem before we can successfully measure success. The ranking system should be defined and measured to ensure relevance.

**Rev Assensoh:** There is an issue of wrong priorities. Any relook at a ranking system should be devoid of them. Ranking should be honest, straightforward, and transparent. I believe that Africa needs to form its own ranking system.



### CONCLUSION

The world is changing at a fast pace with challenges, needs, and systems becoming more volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA). A good education system must be responsive to this dynamism in innovating and generating suitable outcomes that move in tandem with the changing world (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2018). With the anticipated population growth, innovation, technology, and globalization, a success metric in this era must fit the context and take cognizance of a future which is complex and yet uncertain.

Amidst the strong belief that global ranking provides benchmarks and forces institutions to conform and maintain an excellent reputation and standards (Higher Education Policy Institute, 2016), the greatest fear in the end is that African university leaders may fall for the bait of making strategic decisions only to meet these indicators but will fail to satisfy the dire needs of students and the continent as a whole. It is imperative to put Africa's challenges and prospects for development in perspective before determining appropriate ranking systems and benchmarks.

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## SECTION 2

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### [2.1] DEFINING THE METRICS FOR AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION RANKING



**Angela:** Looking at how diverse Africa is, how would the continent be able to derive its own metrics for the rankings?

**Araba:** We need to use education as a means of solving our problems. This could be done by considering the major problems on the continent and then measuring how best the various universities are helping to solve them.

**Prof. Damtie:** We can measure success by looking at how many people have jobs within six months of graduating from university. The measurement may be done practically on a country basis with a common metric.

**Ato Micah:** Collaboration between institutions across the continent could help achieve this. I am optimistic that Africa's success in education can be measured through effective collaboration. Data collection and management needs to be transparent to ensure efficient research.

**Prof. Assensoh:** Uniformity would be a problem as universities themselves are not uniform but it could be done through collaboration between campuses to help disseminate ideas and share. Outcomes for society should be taken into consideration when determining metrics. We must strive to collaborate on determining the metrics for measurement even though we may not come up with one uniformed ranking system.

### CONCLUSION

By 2030, one out of every five people in the world will be African. And by 2050, more than half of the world's population growth will be happening on the continent, doubling the current population from 1.2 billion to 2.5 billion. The Africa Learning Barometer, for example, identifies 12 countries including Nigeria and Ghana- where more than 30% of children do not meet a minimum standard of learning by their third and fourth grades. The quality problem is especially vivid in higher education, with many graduates taking years to find their first formal job, and employers reporting that graduates are unprepared to effectively take up many of the career opportunities that exist (Awuah, 2019). Therefore, a successful metric will set an expectation on quality of education on the continent as we work towards scaling access.

### REFERENCES

Awuah P. (2019). How can education foster ethical citizens? Filmed at We the Future: Talks from TED, Skoll Foundation and United Nations Foundation





## SECTION 2

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### [2.2] AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES WITHIN WORLD RANKING SYSTEMS

**Angela:** Does the Times Higher Education (THE) Impact rankings meet the needs of Africa by measuring success in relation to the SDGs? Or can any ranking system of that nature be a good substitute measure for the continent's higher education institutions?

**Prof. Damtie:** We should not focus on competitive rankings but rather kill the attitude of 'I am better'. I am of the view that ranking should not breed unhealthy competition and that a lot of attitudes need to be changed in that regard.

**Araba:** I would propose that universities engage in mission alignment rankings which would measure the success of a school by evaluating if it did what it set out to do.

**Angela:** University rankings should always have their methodologies scrutinized and impact questioned, but the right data understood effectively are a vital tool in supporting institutional missions. The question is what data are most important in an African context? And what should African leaders understand – and what might they ignore – from comparisons in a global market?

**Rev. Assensoh:** We should refrain from the western ranking system and form our own. The current ranking systems is bias to different context which also makes it inadequate. In summary, ranking is necessary and African universities need to do them on their own terms.

#### CONCLUSION

THE's Impact Ranking is an initiative to measure universities' success in delivering the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It uses a metric system that evaluates a university's policies on academic freedom, its use of secured employment contracts and its share of female academic staff. These are based on 11 of the 17 SDGs. At the end, this initiative assesses the impact of universities on societies rather than just measuring the performance of research and teaching as observed in the current ranking system (THE, 2019). A ranking system such as this reinforces the idea of an impact-based ranking system. Such an approach for the continent will make its development central to the university's strategies for growth and impact.

Exclusive focus on a broad and single world-wide goal such as the SDGs can be considered though it is limited where the entire continent's development is concerned. How about considering goals such as is outlined in the Africa-specific Africa Union Agenda 2063?

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Time Higher Education. (2019). THE University Impact Rankings 2019: methodology. Retrieved August 7, 2019 from <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/methodology-impact-rankings-2019>

## SECTION 3

### AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

**Patrick Awuah:** Ranking could be modeled against the format of the consumer report where the same product is evaluated in different categories based on the different types under the one product. This is an answer to my own rhetoric question that should universities be ranked? But then should they all be ranked the same way? We need to go to society (stakeholders) to find out what universities should be ranked by.

**Isaac Fokuo:** I see nothing wrong with the current ranking systems. In my opinion, it measures all that is desired to be measured, and it serves as a good baseline to be built upon as some basic paradigm must be stuck to. Rankings work for institutions across the world, why do we think there's a need to change it for us? We should just try to live up to it as much as we can and pick and choose which ones we live up to. To me, the fact that we could not perform up to it did not mean we should move the target to suit us, because we also need to think about being "global".

**Patrick Awuah:** It is important to rethink what African institutions use; my reason for this is that the current ranking system is fixed. The current system is insufficient as a true measure of/for universities in Africa. We can't just take what already exists because we need a system that propels institutions to aspire to produce graduates we need, and that leads stakeholders to "demand" right by the institutions. Africa's reality and need must determine what universities should measure themselves against.

**Robert Bennin:** Rankings are instituted in order for the universities to aspire to something, a focused "African index" would be more beneficial to the continent.

**Magali Rheault:** Rankings in themselves are based on competition. We need to identify what the end goal and purpose for the rankings are, define them, and attain a measure for them within the African context and then to the broader global world.



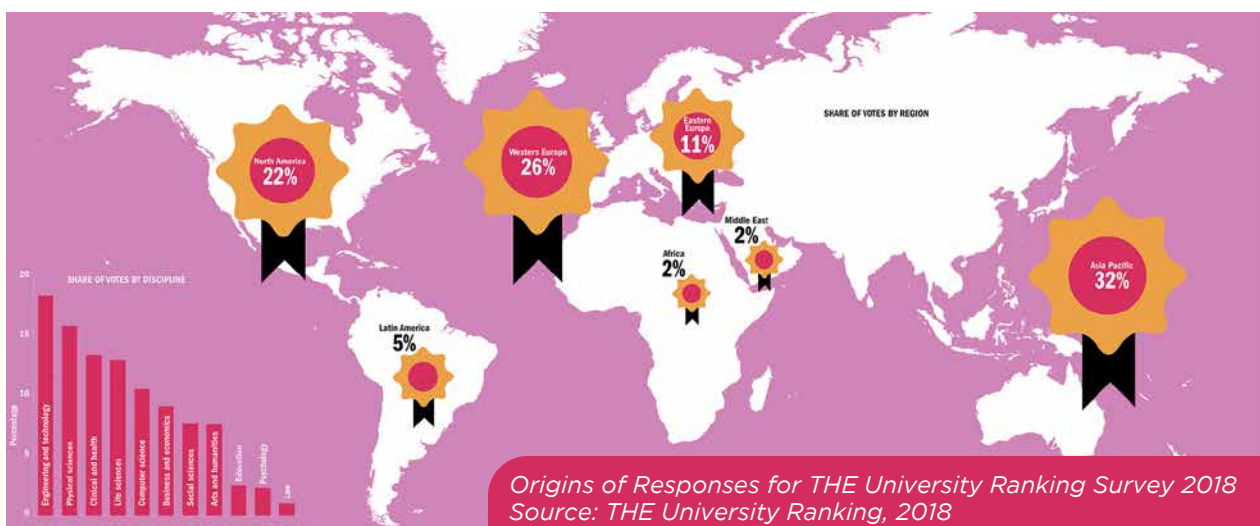
## SECTION 4

# SUMMARY: THE RANKING SYSTEM AND AFRICAN HIGHER-EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Globally, university rankings base metrics and weightings on indicators of teaching, quality of faculty, research, and alumni strength at varying degrees based on their relevance in higher education. Notable world rankings include Time Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings, QS World University Rankings, and Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU).

THE World University Ranking (THE World University Rankings, 2018) uses performance indicators grouped into teaching (the learning environment), research (volume, income, and reputation), citations (research influence), international outlook (staff, students and research), and industry income (knowledge transfer). The QS World University Rankings, on the other hand, evaluates universities on a six-factor metric: Academic Reputation 40%, Employer Reputation 10%, Faculty/Student Ratio 20%, Citations per Faculty 20%, International Faculty Ratio 5%, International Student Ratio 5% (QS World University Rankings, 2019). ARWU, on another hand, uses an award indicator and considers every university that has Nobel Laureates, fields medalists, highly cited researchers published in Nature or Science. It ranks based on quality education and staff (alumni and staff who have won a Nobel prize, research output, and per capita academic performance of an institution. (The Academic Ranking of World Universities, 2018).

These organizations have similar success indicators, prioritized differently, suggesting rankings are based on priority, need, and context. Given that regions across the world differ, broad ranking systems though useful miss contextual differences and unique needs of extreme regions. Whereas rankings may be about reputation in some parts of the world, in other parts, the contribution of outcomes to impact and development need to be weighed more in measuring the success of Universities. Africa is not much represented in most current ranking systems, evident in the insufficiency of African input into the research that determines the best





universities. For instance, the 2018 THE university rankings collected a total of 10,162 responses from 138 countries.

The Asia Pacific recorded the highest responses at 22%, and Africa responded at 2%, lower than the global average of 14.3%. THE (2018), weighted the responses of countries that were over or under-represented to show their actual distribution of scholars. This data shows that aside from the minute contribution of African scholars in the ranking narrative, it does not capture enough opinions on the output of higher education institutions on the continent, even though the continent has the fastest-growing youth population in the world.

Global ranking metrics are broad because of the need to include institutions across the globe. National ranking systems such as Maclean's University rankings in Canada, and Guardian University Rankings in the UK, try to emphasize context (Higher Education Policy Institute, 2016). Similar to these, the African continent would benefit from a context-specific system inclined towards the development of ethics and leadership, industry, entrepreneurship, employment opportunities, and community outreach programs. A measurement system for Africa should be about the continent's development first. An institution's success should be such that its actions and outcomes contribute to moving the continent's development forward.

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# SECTION 5

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## THE TASK AHEAD

### **CREDIBILITY AND ACCEPTANCE IS CRITICAL FOR THE SUCCESS OF A COMPLIMENTING AFRICA-FOCUSED UNIVERSITY IMPACT MEASUREMENT SYSTEM**

Over the next several months, the institutions present at the Executive Conference have committed to engaging partnerships and stakeholders in exploring the development of a common measure for impact and success of African Universities. From their individual institution experiences, executives present in a followup evaluative comment noted the following be considered in thinking about a fitting system to aspire to

- High ethical standards of students
- Inclusion of relevant stakeholders in decision making such as parents, students, and society
- High impact learning platforms at affordable prices
- Job placement of graduates: Graduates' demonstrated ability to solve the continent's challenges by applying their skill sets in their chosen careers
  - Student retention rates in institutions
- Alignment of each institution's mission with practice
- Campus Safety and inclusion of all students
- The process will be managed by the Education Collaborative project administrators' office and will involve a consulting organization.

## FURTHER READING

The Times Higher Education ( October 26th, 2018). “Best Universities in Africa 2019”, The Times Higher Education’s World University Ranking Data

Lisa-Anne J. (February 18, 2019).. “Global university rankings and the nuance they omit”, Africa-Portal

Razia M. ( July 2018) “World university rankings: Reflections on teaching and learning as the Cinderella function in the South African higher education system”

Damtew T. (September 4, 2015) “Ranking African universities is a futile endeavor”, Quartz Africa





# ABOUT THE EDUCATION COLLABORATIVE

An initiative of Ashesi University, the Education Collaborative is an effort to convene African universities to share, co-create, innovate, and learn new techniques in university teaching and management. The goal is to increase collaboration among African institutions in our effort to develop best practices to train ethical, entrepreneurial leaders in Africa; to cultivate within our students the critical thinking skills, the concern for others, and the courage it will take to transform a continent. We achieve this through annual conferences and workshops, and by staying connected throughout the year through research collaborations, mentorships, and faculty and administrators immersion programs. The mission is to share meaningful insight, stimulate engagement around relevant content, and empower individuals who are passionate about Africa to transform themselves, their surroundings and ultimately, the Continent. Unique to the education collaborative experience is our emphasis on year-round engagement and follow-ups. The connections, sharing, and co-creation of innovative content and practices do not end at the annual in-person conference.

In its third year, the Education Collaborative at Ashesi has continued to see progress in collaborations across African higher education institutions. The initiative has engaged over 30 African universities and 80 educators in conferences and workshops and is mentoring two institutions, impacting over 3500 students in 8 countries.

## OUR PROGRAMS

The Executive Conference

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The Faculty & Administrator Workshop

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The University Stakeholder Symposium

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Ashesi Mentorship Program

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Year-Round Engagements - Communities of practice

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Year-Round Engagements - Customized workshops and training

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Year-Round Engagements - Collaborative Webinar Series

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