



UR MONTHLY

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Amidst COVID-19, UR staff defends PhD thesis via zoom



Yvonne Umulisa, PhD
Graduate from Jönköping University, Sweden

Following the country's orders to limit mobility due to the spread of COVID-19 global pandemic, Yvonne Umulisa managed to defend her PhD thesis virtually. Umulisa has been pursuing her doctoral studies at Jönköping University in Sweden. Her research is titled "The Prospects for the East African Monetary Union, An Empirical Analysis". She adds to a growing number of PhD graduates under the existing partnership between Rwanda and Sweden which is coordinated by the UR-Sweden Program and funded by Sida. The research is a com-

pilation of 4 research papers whose findings give key considerations for the project of monetary union among the East African Community (EAC) partner states. During her research, Umulisa tested a series of criteria that countries must fulfill prior to forming a monetary union. All her papers seem to favor forming a monetary union among the EAC partner states. Hence, her empirical findings are important for EAC policymakers, as they decided to participate in a monetary union by 2024.

Amongst, the research shows that EAC membership has a positive and significant effect on intra-trade among member countries, she, hence, further suggests that trade integration among EAC countries may continue to lead to a more synchronized business cycle, as these countries are expected to integrate more through the full implementation of the protocol on the establishment of the monetary union.

Nevertheless, to improve the likelihood of creating a more sustainable

monetary union, Umulisa recommended that EAC members primarily focus on the full implementation of both the customs union and common market protocols. According to her, the main priority should be for countries to resolve trade disagreements by removing all nontariff barriers that could slow down or hinder the levels of bilateral trade among them.

News Inside

- | | |
|--|---|
| UR don calls for more innovative actions to save Rwanda's economy from COVID-19 | 2 |
| Meet Uwinyange, a sign language interpreter on television - instrumental during COVID-19 and Kwibuka 26 | 3 |
| Even COVID-19 lockdown could not stop UR from celebrating Earth Day | 7 |
| An impact analysis of population growth on energy-water-food-land nexus for ecological sustainable development in Rwanda | 6 |

The call was made in a research paper “Indicative Socio-Economic Impacts of the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Outbreak in Eastern Africa: Case of Rwanda” by Prof Alfred R. BIZOZA, a University of Rwanda staff and Simeon SIBOMANA as co-author. The paper discusses the potential effects of COVID-19 on international trade, small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and agriculture in Rwanda and proposes some policy actions to address short to medium socioeconomic impacts in these particular sub-sectors.

The paper is among the few emerging case studies for Africa and addresses the case of Rwanda. It documents the on-going policy response measures and the anticipated short to medium socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 with a focus on external merchandise trade, small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and agriculture.

Results indicate that despite promising stepwise policy measures taken by the government of Rwanda and how the population is positively responding to these measures, these sub-sectors will be negatively affected by the COVID-19 though at different levels. The external merchandise trade and SMEs are expected to be more affected than the agriculture sector.

“The policy response will need more innovative actions beyond monetary and fiscal measures to addressing immediate effects such as liquidity constraints but seed for resilience of long-term effects of the pandemic as well as the recovery of the entire economy in Rwanda” the research observed

The paper provides a narrative description of some of the proactive and stepwise policy responses to COVID-19 by the government of Rwanda and the short-term impacts of these measures in order to reflect on possible entry points for the recovery period after the pandemic. These measures include monetary and fiscal measures, health treatment, social protection measures for people affected by the pandemic, and other measures meant to contain the negative impacts



UR don calls for more innovative actions to save Rwanda's economy from COVID-19

of the spread of COVID-19.

Small and Medium Enterprises are supposed to be affected in terms of labor productivity, offset of salaries and wages, and increased financial burden for loan repayment after the pandemic because of the closure of businesses. The paper demonstrates that the measures taken so far by the government are in line with monetary and fiscal facilitation for operating businesses will provide short term response.

According to the research, the government in collaboration with partners will need both protective and capital enhancing policies such as highly subsidized financial credits, tax-based subsidies during the recovery period, and other innovative policy incentives to support SMEs recover quickly and re-employ more people. This shall in turn reduce the potential social burden for the government as a result of likely employment chocks.

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Meet Uwinyange, a sign language interpreter on television - instrumental during COVID-19 and Kwibuka 26



At this time when Rwandans mark the 26th commemoration of the Genocide against the Tutsi while joining the entire world in fighting against the global pandemic COVID 19, sign language interpretation services to the deaf and hard of hearing communities are critical. Taking cognizance of this situation, the University of Rwanda's School of Inclusive and Special Needs Education - SISNE enables community in Rwanda to access information on Genocide commemoration and COVID-19 pandemic. We met Beate Uwinyange, an academic staff in the SISNE and she took us through her experience as a renowned sign language interpreter at Rwanda Television. We talked to her and learned every thing about her journey so far.

You have been interpreting sign language on Rwanda Television during COVID-19 and Kwibuka 26 ; how did you get there ?

Well, I got official instructions from SISNE officials to respond to RTV (Rwanda Television) and NCPD (National Council for People with Disabilities) urgent calls. The latter assigned me to provide Sign Language interpretation service on RTV during COVID -19 pandemic and Kwibuka 26. Then I realized that the target groups are of utmost concern in the community and had to do my best to respond to this important national call.

How did you react when invited by RBA for Sign Language interpretation service?

I am not new to RTV, because I have worked there before. Thus my reaction was positive, particularly because I love providing support to marginalized persons. I am devoted to the promotion of their rights and improved lives. As a

Sign Language teacher, I felt happy, because I was going to serve a large community of persons with hearing impairment.

What is Sign Language in comparison to spoken languages?

Sign Languages are like all languages used by humans, for it carries the same information. However, it is a visual gestural language used by members of the Deaf Community. It observes grammatical rules, lexical organizations, and adheres to the cultural norms of the users' community. In other words, I communicate through Rwandan Sign Language (RSL), which is the language of the Rwandan Deaf community.

What is the importance of Sign Language interpretation?

Sign language is as important as any other language, because it is also a channel of information and communication between people, and is not a favour for the Deaf Community but a right. Therefore, it must be used in education and health services; in judiciary, meetings/conferences; TV programs among many others. Ideally it enables free interaction with and participation of the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing citizens. The importance of Sign Language interpretation is therefore to enable deaf persons and hearing persons to communicate and interact with each other.

What is the relevance of Sign Language on RTV during COVID-19 and Kwibuka 26?

Under the threat of COVID-19 pandemic, all groups of the population must access reliable information, because it has been made clear that we are all depend on each other. We can infect or contract from each other irrespective of our conditions, nationality or background. The only protection is having appropriate information on the disease symptoms, its mode of transmission and prevention by all including those with the minority mode of communication. Besides, since the outbreak of the disease has coincided with the 26th commemoration of the 1994 Genocide against the

Tutsi, RTV used the opportunity to communicate the related information to the Rwandan Deaf community.

Do all persons with hearing impairment know Sign Language?

All persons with hearing impairment do not know Rwandan Sign Language or any other. However, they communicate through Simultaneous Communications, or 'Sim-Com'. It combines lips movements, hand signs and finger spelling that they see around them. It is leap-reading when they get information by observing leaps of a speaker, or Sign Language of Locality when using own hand signs.

Did you receive any feedback from target audience?

I was getting different messages of appreciation through my mobile phone, saying that they are very happy to follow RTV programs like other Rwandans.

There are also other persons who were curious to know how I learnt Sign Language yet I am not a Deaf. I just told them that I am a teacher and wanted to assist children with hearing impairments who were unfairly marginalized. I therefore decided to learn Sign Language so that I can help in solving the problem.

to turn what we learn in something worth for our community. If you are not part of the problem, you can be part of the solution ; influence home grown solutions for home protection."

At last, I would like to recall the word of HE Paul Kagame during the youthkonekt "To go fast go alone, to go far go together but it is possible to go far and fast altogether." We don't have to underestimate the power of unity, team and common vision.



UR staff and medical students boost national effort to beat Coronavirus

It is March 14th 2020, and the Ministry of Health has reported the country's first case of COVID-19. Government has established a Joint Task Force responsible for fighting COVID-19. It is made up of officials and volunteers from various government institutions and non-government organizations. Being a leading medical teaching institution, the UR College of Medicine and Health Sciences staff and students are actively involved in COVID-19 screening, Infection Prevention and Control, trace and track the population who might have come into contact with the virus to contain its further spread.

Olivier Nsekuye is currently in second-year of Master's in Epidemiology and Laboratory Management in the School of Public Health at UR. With colleagues they are part of the established Rapid Response Team where they are involved in active surveillance to enhance early detection of COVID-19.

"We conduct field investigations on confirmed cases either at home or in treatment centers to find out the source of transmission and to determine a list of contacts at risk for being traced and tested" Olivier said. He added that they participate in elaboration of daily COVID-19 update reports.

Among other activities for the Joint Task Force, the College team also contributes to the Infection Control and Prevention (IPC) activities including preparation of quarantine and isolation areas and decontamination of confirmed cases residence areas.

Olivier concluded by pleading to the general public and students who are confined at home to abide with Government's prevention and control measures especially by staying at home. He encouraged students to leverage available online platforms that offer free online professional courses, which can be the best time for them to explore those platforms and also revising the lessons at home.

While there is still much to learn about COVID-19, the University of Rwanda reminds people to keep on day to day measures aimed at preventing the disease. This includes regular hand washing with soap and water; coughing into a tissue or a bent elbow, being sure to safely dispose of the tissue afterwards; maintaining a social distancing of at least one meter; avoiding touching the eyes, nose and mouth; seeking medical attention early if a person develops a fever or cough or both. Last but not least, wearing recommended mask.

UR rallies around the needy amid COVID-19



Following the emergence of COVID 19 pandemic and its high threat to people's health, many countries including Rwanda took drastic measures, top of them a lockdown, in immediate response. The lockdown affected many sectors both public and private such as transport, bars, restaurants and hotels, schools, construction, shops and churches. As a result, many companies have suspended their employees' contracts while others couldn't cope with life since their daily works were suspended. As a result many people, especially those who lived a subsistence life could no longer afford to bring food to the table during the lockdown.

To supplement government effort to feed the affected people, UR-Huye Campus staff collected money amounting to Rwandan Francs 1.3 million to support the needy located in Huye District. They were able to provide commonly consumed food commodities including

675 kilograms of corn flour, 675 kilograms of rice, 540 kilograms of beans and 12 boxes of washing soap.

According to Dr Joseph Nkurunziza, a lecturer at Huye Campus who also coordinated this charity activity, for as long as the lockdown goes on while University staff continues to work from home and receive their monthly salary, the outreach to the needy will remain. Among the beneficiaries include 38 UR students who were unable to return to their families when the lockdown was announced. They greatly appreciated the noble initiative and commended UR's big heart at their hour of need.

Even COVID-19 lockdown could not stop UR from celebrating Earth Day

The UR Center of Excellence in Biodiversity and Natural Resource Management created a video to honor Earth Day which was held on April 22nd, 2020. The video is a compilation of Research Associates and Fellows as well as UR academic staff who delivered recorded video messages related to earth protection and fighting climate change through various thematic areas.



Prof Elias Bizuru from UR College of Science and Technology talked about Climate change and diversity with emphasis on species and ecosystem who are mostly threatened by climate change with very limited options. He noted that species being the victims of climate change ought to shift their distribution and migrate so that they can remain at equilibrium with climate. This is in case species are unable to adapt to climate change phenotypic plasticity or through genetic changes.

He added that the impact of climate change will also affect nutrition as some areas in the world will likely be hotspot of food insecurity while some other regions would face a serious under-nutrition. According to him if nothing is done in Rwanda, the country could be among candidates to experience food insecurity.

Prof Bizuru also revealed that in some areas, climate change is a source of conflict and fierce wars as it is the case in Darfur. He therefore called for contributing towards mitigating or adapting to climate change because not only biodiversity will be affected but security will be at stake as well.

Aloysie Manishimwe is assistant lecturer at the UR College of Science and Technology. She argues that women can contribute in climate change mitigation in various ways as they are responsi-

ble for many activities in their household such as greening and cleaning their homes, cooking and farming.

"If women are to choose planting trees around their home, choose more clean energies or clean cooking stoves that would be a huge contribution against climate change" she said.

In her message, Dr Laine Munir a senior research fellow at UR Center of Excellence in Biodiversity and Natural Resource Management, focused on the relationship between gender and environment change.

According to Munir, climate change mostly affects farmers on the continent as 70% of Africans rely on agriculture for their livelihood. She noted that during environment changes due to climate, agricultural women and men in rural areas are particularly vulnerable because they are statistically less likely to have saving and liquid assets that would support them in an instance of environmental change or financial shock.

"Our research indicates that men and women in Africa are less likely to engage in meaningful decision making about how land is used and overall women tend to have less financial resources than men which would help them to avoid economic vulnerability due to climate change reasons" Munir said.

UR and Unicaf University strengthen ties to boost capacity in e-learning



The University of Rwanda and Unicaf University have agreed to work jointly to develop the UR capacity for online delivery of its programmes. Unicaf's instructional designers are working with UR academics to convert a number of programmes for online delivery through their state-of-the-art digital platform and the Virtual Learning Environment.

At a recent meeting in Kigali between the two universities, it was resolved that the existing partnership between the two institutions be strengthened. Also agreed on was the immediate conversion of the first two UR programmes for online delivery, namely the Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education and a Master's Degree in Health Sciences. Unicaf is making all its technical resources and expertise including its cloud system available in building and supporting the UR's online capacity. It is expected that by June 2020 UR programmes will be available for online delivery through the Unicaf platform.

The agreement with Unicaf allows the UR to expand its reach to students who do not have access to a physical University campus. It is also a fast route to bypass disruptions to campus life caused by global disasters such as the current COVID-19 pandemic, which can bring university operations to a halt. UR is fast switching to online

delivery using Unicaf's tried and tested infrastructure and procedures. UR has reacted swiftly to the current pandemic, which threatens traditional universities worldwide with closures. In so doing, future disruptions to study times with negative consequences for students, staff and university finances shall be avoided.

Unicaf operates one of the largest digital platforms in Africa since 2012. The Unicaf VLE delivers programmes of reputable partner universities in the UK, the USA and Africa, and provides everything a student needs, from enrolment to graduation. The Unicaf digital platform offers students the flexibility to study in their own free time from the comfort of their homes, without putting their careers on hold; online delivery provides easy access to study materials and e-libraries 24/7, using any digital device connected to the Internet; online students can network with professionals in 156 countries and can earn internationally recognized academic or professional qualifications at reduced cost.



An impact analysis of population growth on energy-water-food-land nexus for ecological sustainable development in Rwanda

Katundu Imasiku

Katundu Imasiku's study entitled "An impact analysis of population growth on energy-water-food-land nexus for ecological sustainable development in Rwanda", published on 16 October 2019 in Food and Energy Security Journal has been among the top most downloaded papers.

Katundu is a PhD student at UR's African Centre of Excellence in Energy for Sustainable Development (ACEESD) specializing in Renewable Energy.

The study investigated the effects of disconnected approaches of dealing with energy-food-water nexus projects in isolation with land usage and looks at an integrated approach to these issues.

This study illustrates the basic methods and suggests practical tools which the Rwandan Government can utilize, through its implementing agencies to account for the energy-water-food-land nexus sectors in an integrated manner that provides a clear nexus status for sound decision making.

Food and Energy Security Journal says that among the work published between January 2018 and December 2019, Katundu's appears among the most downloads in the 24 months following online publication. His research pa-

per generated immediate impact and helped to raise the visibility of Food and Energy Security Journal.

Katundu says the recognition of his paper shows that African researchers can influence the thinking of scholars globally.

"As a young upcoming researcher, I would like to encourage other researchers at UR to engage themselves and make more positive contributions in the research world especially on topics that are indigenous to Africa", he said.

"Let's avoid the situation where researchers from Universities outside Africa are the only ones disseminating more impactful research outcomes", he added.

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