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# Efforts to Preserve Educational Access, Research, and Public Service Relevance at the University of Dar es Salaam in the Age of COVID-19

Lulu T. Kaaya, William A. L. Anangisye, Bonaventure Rutinwa, and Bernadetha Killian

## Abstract

The first case of COVID-19 was reported in Tanzania on March 16, 2020 after it was declared pandemic by the World Health Organization on March 11, 2020. Following restrictions by the Government of Tanzania (GoT), the University of Dar es Salaam closed on March 18, 2020, the action which affected the University almanac. Following the lifting of restrictions by the GoT, the University of Dar es Salaam reopened on June 1, 2020 under a recovery and operationalization plan. The plan included various adjustments to allow core functions of the university while safeguarding the health of staff and students. Adjustments on teaching and other academic activities included rearrangement of the teaching hours to the statutory minimum and setting teaching arrangements to minimize the spread of COVID-19 in the context of teaching and examinations (wear of masks in classes, handwashing facilities outside classrooms and minimize of contact hours between classes). Adjustments on research and practical interventions involved the special University financial support to multidisciplinary COVID-19 related research and innovation on social and health, prevention and screening, business and financial, human behaviour and traditional/herbal medicines. The above combination efforts enabled the University of Dar es Salaam to ensure and sustain its core functions of teaching, research and public service while ensuring health safety during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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# The University of Dar es Salaam in the Age of COVID-19

## Background

The World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic outbreak on March 11, 2020. Tanzania reported its first case of COVID-19 on March 16, 2020, and thereafter the number of people infected in the country started to grow. The Tanzanian government took a variety of measures to contain the disease such as closing universities and schools, imposing restrictions in public transport, restricting large public gatherings in order to observe social distancing, as well as practicing hand-washing hygiene. As a result, the University of Dar es Salaam partially closed on March 18, 2020. The closure of the University affected activities that were scheduled under the 2019–20 Almanac of the University of Dar es Salaam, including registration for the continuing students, teaching and examinations, long vacations, practical training/fieldwork, teaching practice, supplementary examinations, the three yearly visits by external examiners, and graduation ceremonies. These activities were scheduled to take place between March 23 and October 31, 2020. As conditions in terms of the number of COVID-19 cases began to improve, the government began lifting restrictions and announced the reopening of higher learning institutions on June 1, 2020. The University of Dar es Salaam was officially reopened under a recovery and operationalization plan as directed by the Government of Tanzania. The plans ensured access and inclusivity to all university students, such as making sure that activities of the second semester did not spill over into the next academic year by compressing the semester (from fifteen to twelve weeks) and ensuring that courses were taught in such a way that the content and substantive learning outcomes were substantially the same as those in the full semester. They

also strictly observed measures directed by the government for the control of the spread of the coronavirus disease. Adherence to the mentioned measures ensured smooth running of the semester and successful completion of the 2019–20 academic year. The university further, through its main functions of teaching, research, and public service, undertook various activities to support the nation in minimizing the spread of the pandemic. Thus, in this article, we reflect on the various efforts the University of Dar es Salaam made to ensure education access to its students and to sustain the relevance of its research activities and public service.

## Adjustments to Teaching and Other Academic Activities

The regular academic year of the University of Dar es Salaam is seventeen weeks, fifteen for teaching and two for examinations. The 2019–20 second semester was scheduled to start on March 23 and end on July 18, 2020. The closure of the university led to a loss of nine of seventeen academic weeks. Several measures were undertaken in order to ensure that courses were taught in such a manner that the content and substantive learning outcomes of the courses taught were the same as those in a full semester without causing the activities for the second semester to spill into the next academic year. The main measure was the rearrangement of the teaching hours to the statutory minimum. Normal teaching contact hours during a semester are three per week or forty-five hours over fifteen weeks. However, Regulation 3.1 of the General University Examination Regulations of the University of Dar es Salaam considers a student to have satisfactorily attended a course and be eligible to sit for examinations if he or she attends a minimum of 75 percent of

the prescribed contact hours for the course. In terms of weeks and contact hours, this translates to twelve weeks and thirty-six hours, respectively. In light of the lost time, the teaching period was reduced from fifteen weeks and forty-five hours to twelve weeks and thirty-six hours, respectively. However, each course was given an extra hour each week for tutorial seminars and coursework assessments. This hour could also be used for teaching or any other academic activities at the discretion of the lecturers. Thus, the cumulative contact hours over the twelve weeks were forty-eight hours.

Another important adjustment related to COVID-19 control measures was intended to ensure access and safety during academic activities. These involved adjusting teaching arrangements to minimize the spread of COVID-19 in the context of teaching and examinations. Every lecturer was required to spend five to ten minutes of the first lecture explaining to students the various measures everyone needed to employ to prevent the spread of the virus. Water and soap were placed at entrances to lecture halls and other academic facilities and students and lecturers were required to use them any time they entered the facility. Students and staff were required to wear masks during lectures and seminars. However, individuals who had health reasons that prevent them from wearing a mask were exempted from this requirement. Instead, sufficiently distanced sitting space is reserved for such individuals. The class timetable took into account the need to minimize any contact during lecture sessions. Whenever possible, students belonging to a particular college, school, institute, or department are scheduled to the nearest venue(s) to reduce the walking distance between lectures and hence minimize contact between students.

## Research and Practical Interventions

In addition to making adaptations to the teaching enterprise, the University of Dar es Salaam also made several adaptations to its research endeavors. For example, the institution supported multidisciplinary research teams composed of academics from various units to conduct applied research on alternative indigenous medicines to treat symptoms associated with COVID-19. Indigenous medicines are derived largely from plants and are used to treat disease and enhance general health and well-being. Some plants have ingredients that have the same strength as pharmaceutical medications. This team of experts has developed a steaming essential oil product known as Fukiza UDANOL. This is essentially from plant sources that were analyzed to determine their chemical profiles, which revealed approximately thirty-five different compounds. These compounds are reported to exhibit various medicinal properties, including antimicrobial, antiviral, antibacterial, antifungal, anticancer, antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, anticoagulant, analgesic, and anesthetic, among others.

The University of Dar Es Salaam supported other research endeavors through its COVID-19 research fund. This funding has enabled UDSM researchers to investigate cross-cutting issues related to COVID-19 in order to increase awareness of and minimize the spread of the disease. Funded research areas have included social and health interventions, human behaviors, business and financial aspects, and prevention and screening (see Table 1).

In addition to its research investigations, UDSM, through its College of Engineering and Technology, has also designed and developed various machines and products

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**Table 1. List of COVID-19 Related Research Investigations Funded by UDSM**

1	<b>The College of Social Sciences</b>	<b>Social and Health Interventions</b>  Effectiveness of healthcare systems in protecting people at high risk (health workers; pregnant women; people with chronic diseases such as diabetics, respiratory diseases, etc.) during the pandemic.  Preventive measures against the spread of COVID-19 in the context of scarcity and collective cultures in Tanzania. These research initiatives will inform UDSM guidelines on the current and future control of pandemics.
2	<b>The College of Humanities</b>	<b>Use of the Fabric Masks during the COVID-19 Pandemic</b>  This study examined fabrics of masks as materials, styles, and functions. The study also assessed the extent fashion designs contribute to the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic in Tanzania.
3	<b>The University of Dar es Salaam Business School</b>	<b>Business and Financial Perspectives</b>  This study explored the perception of bankers with regard to how COVID-19 affected the banking sector. In particular, the study examined the contagion effect of COVID-19 pandemic risk on banking activities and strategies utilized by the bankers to manage the risk. The study recommends that banks need to create awareness and review their business continuity plan by including measures to handle pandemics, such as COVID-19. To attract and maintain savings, banks are advised to waive some charges/fees and strongly entice customers to utilize digital solutions and alternative delivery channels.
4	<b>The Mbeya College of Health and Allied Sciences</b>	<b>Prevention and Screening</b>  Researchers conducted studies on interventions against COVID-19; the impact of obligatory sanitization and face masking against the COVID-19 pandemic on other infections within the Southern Highlands; and community awareness and clinical screening for COVID-19 suspicion in Tanzania. The studies aimed to facilitate further prevention of COVID-19's spread and reduce mortality rates attributed to the SARS COV-2 infections in Tanzania.

for use by the university and the public to prevent COVID-19. These include automatic and foot-operated hand-washing machines, reusable three-layered face masks, automatic sanitizer spraying tools, automatic ventilator and hand sanitizer, and Essential Oil hand rub sanitizer.

### Conclusion and Way Forward

The combination of measures undertaken by the University of Dar es Salaam in accordance with the Government of Tanzania made possible the safe operation of the University during the pandemic. These measures have ensured that teaching and other learning processes were conducted in safe way that ensured a minimal risk of students and staff transmitting COVID-19. Going forward, the University of Dar es Salaam has a noble obligation to contribute to the national development through teaching, research, innovation, and public services. Guided by its Grand Vision 2061, the University seeks to become a leading center of intellectual wealth, spearheading the quest for sustainable and inclusive development. To realize the Vision, the University of Dar es Salaam seeks to understand how the research and practical interventions it supports can work toward addressing the COVID-19 pandemic, which has led to massive loss of lives worldwide accompanied by serious repercussions to the economy, politics, and social fabric of many countries in the world. The effects of COVID-19 would likely affect developing countries, including Tanzania. Thus, on this basis, the University of Dar es Salaam, for the 2020–21 financial year, set aside research and innovation grants amounting to TZS 1,900,000,000 (US\$830,740) to fund proposals on various research themes including the impact of COVID-19.

### Author Biographies

**Lulu Tunu Kaaya** is the director of internationalization, convocation and advancement at the University of Dar es Salaam and a senior lecturer in lake and river ecology in the School of Aquatic Sciences and Fisheries Technology at the University of Dar es Salaam. She has a PhD in zoology from the University of Cape Town (2014), Masters of Science in aquatic science (2007) and Bachelor of Science in aquatic science and microbiology (hons) (2004) from the University of Dar es Salaam. She is also an expert and has widely conducted research and consultancy in streams ecosystems concepts and stream integrity assessment.

**William Anangisye** is the vice chancellor of the University of Dar es Salaam since December 2017 and a professor of education in the School of Education at the University of Dar es Salaam. He holds a PhD in education from the Moray House School of Education, University of Edinburgh, Master of Arts in education and Bachelor of Arts with education (hons) both from the University of Dar es Salaam. He teaches educational foundational courses, including professionalism and ethics in education, international and comparative education, philosophy of education, sociology of education, and history of education.

**Bonaventure Rutinwa** is the deputy vice chancellor, academic, of the University of Dar es Salaam since December 2017 and associate professor in the Department of Private Law in the School of Law. He holds a PhD in public international law from University of Oxford; master of laws (Queen's University at Kingston, Canada); postgraduate bachelor of civil law (University of Oxford); postgraduate certificate in refugee and humanitarian studies (University of Oxford) and



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bachelor of laws (hons) (dar). Prof. Rutinwa served as a full time senior legal advisor with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

**Bernadeta Killian** is the deputy vice chancellor, research, of the University of Dar es Salaam and associate professor of political science and public administration in the College of Social Sciences. She has a PhD in political science from University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) in 2001; masters in political science from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) in 1998, and bachelor of education from the University of Dar es Salaam in 1992. Prof. Killian has published and provided consultancy extensively in the areas of policy analysis, gender equality, aid management, elections and democracy, and legislative politics and governance.