

Covid-19 mitigation and policy responses in Uganda: How the application or non-application of equity principle affect students and staff of Uganda Christian University

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Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic has ravaged the world. It has made, for the first time in many years the world to face a common dreaded enemy. People across the world joined forces to fight a battle with a known enemy but amorphous frontline. Whether weak or strong, advanced in technology or not, every nation used the same tactics to attack the enemy, namely, washing or sanitizing hands regularly with soap or hand sanitizer, not touching soft parts of the body like nose, eyes, and mouth, maintaining the social distance, avoiding crowded places, and not shaking hands. Besides, one country after another instituted lockdown where free movement is disallowed. Given that the virus does not discriminate, both old and young, rich and people around the globe became ardent observers of the laid down strategies. Since the virus struck without prior notice, many people found themselves caught unawares. As such, different countries took different steps in addressing the emergency that came about due to the storm of the Coronavirus. This paper, using desk research approach plus minimal key informant interview and questionnaire, reviewed relevant literature, policy documents and reports, so to systematically reconstruct, document, and analyse if the government of Uganda and Uganda Christian University took the principle of equity into account in policy responses and interventions during the Covid-19 pandemic. This was done to assess how the application or non-application of the same affected the staff. The data collected showed that Covid-19 pandemic indeed affected people in Uganda adversely, especially when schools were closed down.

Keywords: Coronavirus, Covid-19, equity, mitigation, policy, response, Uganda Christian University

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Introduction

Covid-19 (Coronavirus), caused by Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-COV2), was first reported as a cluster of disease in China Wuhan Province In late December 2019 and it has now spread across the world, except Antarctica (Tinku and Ashkan, 2020). The early symptoms of Covid-19, including fever, myalgia, and fatigue might be confused with malaria and other febrile infections (Mwebesa 2020: 4). Given its fast spread the devastating effect, on 30th January 2020, it ‘was declared a public health emergency of international concern’ (Migisha et al. 2020: 2). Consequently, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared it as a pandemic on 11th February 2020, the same day it announced that the navel Coronavirus would be called “COVID-19” (Raofi et al. 2020). The declaration came at a time when there were approximately 118,000 confirmed cases and 43000 deaths globally (Migisha et al. 2020: 2). While the elderly persons with co-morbidities are more affected, the virus, spread mainly via respiratory droplets has not spared young people. To the extent, severe cases have a mortality rate of 2.3 to 5% (Tinku and Ashkan 2020). As the situation in the initially most hit countries, including China, Italy, Spain, United Kingdom (UK) and others are receding, the number of infected people in many African countries is on the rise.

Consequently, on March 13, 2020, given the swift spread of SARS-CoV-2 to other countries of the world, the government of Uganda instituted multiple measures to prevent entry and spread. Then between the 18th and 30th of March 2020, the president of Uganda- with the approval of the National Task Force and the Cabinet, imposed a total of 35 restrictions (Museveni, 20th September, 2020) so to help contain the spread of Covid-19 in Uganda. Some of the guideline included symptom screening at the airport, isolation and testing for symptomatic persons, and a mandatory 14-day institutional quarantine and testing of travellers from high-risk countries (Migisha et al. 2020: 2). In attempt to curtail community infection from all persons entering the country from low-risk countries, they were asked to self- quarantine for 14 days. Such category of persons are not supposed to be tested unless if they presented with symptoms on arrival. The travellers in quarantine were required to test if they developed symptoms or on Day 14 of quarantine, regardless of symptoms.

Effective March 23, 2020, the country implemented a ban on all international travel, and closed both schools and universities. A day later, the Ministry of Health requested all travellers entering Uganda from the United Arab Emirates

in the past two weeks to self-present for testing. Subsequently, all persons who had travelled from any international destination into Uganda since March 7 were asked to self-present for testing. On March 30, 2020, the country instituted a complete lockdown, banning all public transport and public gatherings. On March 21, 2020, Uganda confirmed its first SARSCoV-2 infection in a Ugandan traveller from the United Arab Emirates. Between that and April 15, 2020, 54 cases had been reported in country. By the end of 2020 over 10,000 people contracted the virus. Hence, given the rapid increase in cases, the country started to implement thorough contact tracing for all infected persons (Migisha et al. 2020: 3).

The outbreak of the covid-19 revived interest in literature on epidemic diseases that spread globally in a short while after its outbreak. While people have taken less attention on some disease outbreak, the outbreak of the coronavirus has made many people to draw lessons from such so to see how to respond to it. The literature from the First Affiliated Hospital of Zhenjiang University Medical School, entitled “Handbook of Covid-19 prevention and treatment”, edited by Tingbo Aliang (2020) offers advice and provides reference for medical staff around the world on how to treat the new coronavirus. The book highlights key issues in prevention and control management, diagnosis and treatment, and nursing. Another edited book by Tinku Joseph, and Mohammed Ashkan (2020), entitled “International Pulmonologists’ consensus on Covid-19” also highlight key issues on prevention and treatment of Covid-19. The easy-to-read volume explored mode of transmission, epidemiology, clinical features, diagnosis, initial treatment, treatment options, prognosis, and prevention. The volumes dealt on issues related to attending to patients and how to prevent contracting the virus, but it does not concern itself to formulation and administration of policies. However so, it gives a good background in the discourse of Covid-19.

Baldwin and di Mauro (2020), looking at coronavirus from the perspective of other influenzas that broke earlier, think there is a danger of subsequent waves of infection, as was the case with the Spanish Flu that hit most nations in three waves from 1918 to 1920. This, according to them, is because “a recent simulation study of Covid-19 by epidemiologists at Britain’s Imperial College suggests as much.” Based on the “simulation analysis, the team at Imperial projected the epi curve for Britain and the US without any containment policies and with various combinations of public health measures.” to surge (Baldwin and di Mauro 2020: 5). Indeed, their guess became true when countries like

Britain, Germany, Belgium, China, and others did report reinfection cases. Such reinfection could have been due to the fact that, as Sara Elizabeth Richards and Nsikan Akpan (2020) assert “A new mutation appears in SARS-Cov-2 every 15 days, on average”. Though other countries are yet to report reinfection referred to, the emergence in Britain, parts of Europe, South Africa and also seen in Nigeria (Moriku 2020: 1) of two new variants of Sars-CoV-2, which are potentially far more infectious versions of the virus, has prompted widespread concern (AFP 2021). Thus, it has made other countries to start preparing for any emergency response in case they spread.

In another edited book by Ranabir Samaddor (2020) entitled “Borders of an epidemic: Covid-19 and migrant workers” discusses both economic and social issues brought about by covid-19 pandemic. Revolving around four themes, namely implication in terms of global economy, and its logistical aspect, labour-particularly migrant labour, care and economy, and race, caste, and gender, the work shows the fault line in the time of an epidemic. The chapters in the book, among others, by Palat (2020), Bandopadhyag (2020), Basu and Basu (2020), and Ghosh and Chandhery (2020), give cogent analysis of both economic and social concerns that surrounds covid-19 pandemic. In discussing the implication of the coronavirus pandemic for global capital economy, Palat (2020) wonders if there will be a new system, a new economy after the covid-19 pandemic given the shutdown has affected many economies and people. Focusing on migrant labour, Bandopadhyag (2020) throws an insight to looking at vulnerable people in urban areas. From the perspective of Chandigarh- Mohali, he observes that the issue of informal labour sits at the heart of a logical resuscitation of economy, whose future is now uncertain in the wake of the pandemic. While the writers wrote in the context of India, since Uganda is within the international system, what happens in India could help in evaluating the situation in Uganda with reference to labour and economy.

Unlike the authors in the above paragraph that looked at covid-19 pandemic from economic perspective, Basu and Basu (2020), and Ghosh and Chandhury (2020), approached it from the vantage point of care. By linking the notion of care with general theme of labour in the time of coronavirus, one could make a clear sense about Covid-19 and the economy. Accordingly, Ghosh and Chandhury’s (2020) reflection on the possible meaning of care during and epidemic, brought out the picture of migrant workers becoming just commodity of neglect and related to irrelevance. Their statement “if the idea of citizenship has any misery left at the time”, raises a fundamental concern that requires

giving due attention to. Firstly, it makes one to question what the state has done to secure the interest of their citizens within and abroad. Secondly, it raises the question if citizens express concern of their “other”.

Writing about the “impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on family planning and ending gender-based violence, female genital mutilation and child marriage” the United Nation Population Fund (UNFPA) (April 2020) highlights a number of pertinent issues. According to the report, the pandemic threatens achievement of the transformative results committed to by UNFPA to inculcate the idea of family planning, and fight gender-based violence, female genital mutilation, and child marriage. This therefore, means covid-19 will drastically scale down the so far achieved successes. If governments do not take care to using equity principle in the application of guidelines, there will be a surge in the incidences of gender-based violence, female genital mutilation, and child marriage. Whereas governments across the world seem to be doing one or two things, but what stands to be inquired is if there was practice of equity principle in mitigating and policy responses to the challenges of Covid-19.

The edited book by Kristi Mair and Lake Cawley (2020), entitled “Healthy faith and coronavirus crisis: Thriving in Covid-19 pandemic”, provides spiritual approach to addressing the covid-19 pandemic. The contributors of the volume seem to think that in treatment, care, and preparation for afterlife, God is at the centre because He knows people before, during and after life. This holistic approach of dealing with Covid-19 pandemic gives one to rethink about life in general, right from birth to death and hereafter. Whereas it does not concern itself with policy application, but it gives a practical guide on how to live during an outbreak of such a dreaded disease.

A report by World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) entitled “Considerations for school-related public health measures in the context of COVID-19...” addresses itself to education specific concerns. The report asserts, “Based on the best available data, COVID-19 appears to have a limited direct burden on children’s health, accounting for about 8.5% of reported cases globally, and very few deaths” (WHO 2020: 1). However, in relation to school closure, it says “In contrast, school closures have clear negative impacts on child health, education and development, family income and the overall economy.” (WHO 2020: 1). Whereas in terms of health the report seems to have looked at only young people, the challenges it did

highlight in as far as school closure is concerned is somewhat comprehensive and therefore pertinent to the analysis of the current study.

In a Policy Brief on “Education during COVID-19 and beyond”, the UN (2020: 2) notes:

The crisis is exacerbating pre-existing education disparities by reducing the opportunities for many of the most vulnerable children, youth, and adults – those living in poor or rural areas, girls, refugees, persons with disabilities and forcibly displaced persons – to continue their learning. Learning losses also threaten to extend beyond this generation and erase decades of progress, not least in support of girls and young women’s educational access and retention. Some 23.8 million additional children and youth (from pre-primary to tertiary) may drop out or not have access to school next year due to the pandemic’s economic impact alone.

Looking at what is taking place around the globe, the above assertion, if no equitable policy application is ensured, will become a reality. This paper, therefore, used the information to help analyse if the policy application in Uganda followed the principle of equity and how that affected the people.

Methodological approach

The paper followed a qualitative approach where data was derived from desk research, key informants’ interview, and questionnaire for data collection. Desk research is a form data collection that involves analysing a range of secondary data without necessarily going to the field. It is a form of non-empirical data in existing literature in form of published reports and statistics. Three major reasons informed the writer’s decision to adopt this form of data collection, namely, it is economical given the short time within which the paper was to be submitted, there is available breadth of data out there, and the information so included in the work involves employing expertise and professionalism (Boslaugh n.d).

In the case of key informants’ interview, the researcher identified key covid-19 task force members at the national and university levels. Interviewing such select people helped to uncover the behind the scene issues that underlies operations during Covid-19 emergency response. The major challenge that was encountered with this method of data collection was that locating some of the key persons became hard given the sensitivity of the issues involved. However,

the researcher was able to use some persons who had easy access to those who were at the centre of the Covid-19 response task force and thereby managed to get the required information from them.

The questionnaire was designed a given to a few staff so to elicit their mind on whether the principle of equity was applied in the operation of the country and the university in the face of covid-19, and how such application or non-application of the principle affected them. In doing so, ethical procedure was duly followed in that the respondents were assured of confidentiality and all information collected from authors and informants are be acknowledged.

Through the above methodological approach, information on Covid-19 pandemic in Uganda, the response of the state and university to the covid-19 outbreak, if the principle of equity was applied or not during such response, and how the application or non-application of the principle of equity affected staff and students of Uganda Christian University was collected. The data generated from the different sources was then analysed using hermeneutical processes, where all the data collected from different sources were put in context of the topic under study while retaining the original flavour of the sources.

Results and discussion

The findings of the study were arranged under four sub-headings, namely, Covid-19 pandemic in Uganda, the response of the state and university to the covid-19 outbreak, if the principle of equity was applied or not during such response, and how the application or non-application of the principle of equity affected staff and students of Uganda Christian University.

I. Covid-19 pandemic in Uganda

The available literature and data from the population show that Covid-19 is a reality in Uganda. For, the country has many confirmed cases of people who contracted covid-19. As of 5th January 2021, the country has registered 36,050 cases. Of these, 12,267 people have recovered and 274 have since died (MoH, n.d.). Initially, when covid-19 was first reported in China's Wuhan area, it looked so distant to many people in Uganda. However, when the virus begun to spread to other parts of the world, the people of Uganda started to ready themselves to face its reality given that at the time of the outbreak, many Ugandans were outside the country, and people from other countries were also

coming to Uganda. The confirmation of the cases in Egypt on 14th February 2020, Nigeria on 28th February 2020, and Kenya on 13th March 2020 (MoH-timeline, n.d.) brought the reality even closer to Uganda.

On 21st March 2020, when the first case was reported in Uganda from a returnee from Dubai, the reality of Covid-19 became so vivid that people of all walks of life in Uganda started to prepare on how to live with this reality and or avoid becoming victims. For quite a long time, the number of the infected people stagnated below 100. At that time, the majority those infected were truck drives from the neighbouring countries of Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Tanzania, and South Sudan. Consequently, as the number of the infected people kept surging, on 21st May 2020 the government, through the Ministry of Health, decided to delete the figures of foreign truck drives from the list of confirmed cases in Uganda, thus drastically reducing the numbers of confirmed cases from 264 to 145 (MoH-timeline, n.d.).

Given the health team were able to contain the disease from causing fatality, the President of the Republic of Uganda expressed confidence in the health team manning the covid-19 patients in the different hospitals (Museveni, 2020). However, on 23rd July 2020, when the first death case from Covid-19 was reported in Uganda, it drove a shock wave across the country. This is precisely because at the time people never expected the virus to have spread to a community far from where a surge in numbers was reported from. It even became more scaring because the first person to succumb to Covid-19 was a youth who was a village health Team (VHT) worker, and a support staff at Wasungui Health Centre II in Namisindwa District- Elgon Sub-region of Uganda (Aceng 2020: 6). At that time, the Minister for Health says Uganda had reached the third stage, where there was a cluster of community transmission and deaths in the country (Aceng, 2020, 2).

Whereas Covid-19 is a reality in Uganda and there is evidence to show this, some people still think it is a political gimmick that the state has effectively used to curtail the operation of other political players (UCU Covid-19 Task Force member, OI 8th January 2021). If such is a position of many people, then in a short while the numbers of people affected will continue to surge beyond control. However, in spite of this, in response to the outbreak of Covid-19 generally, the government of Uganda took drastic measures that the university management followed suit, as shown under the subheading below.

II. The response of the state and Uganda Christian University to Covid 19 outbreak

Owing to the rapid spread of Covid-19 across the world, the initial response of the government of Uganda was to put systems in place to alert the population and contain it. The Ministry of Health and in collaboration with WHO and UNICEF, championed the creating awareness about Covid-19 by designing leaflets, brochures, fact sheets, and posters explaining what Covid-19 is, how it is spread, signs and symptoms, prevention, what the sick should do, treatment and vaccine unavailability. This initial awareness creation displayed in public places, run on radios, Televisions, and new papers helped to spread the information across board. Then in April 2020, the Ministry of Health came up with a comprehensive “National Guideline on Management of Covid-19” (Mwebesa 2020).

With no presently standardized treatment or vaccine available for Covid-19, Uganda, like other countries took to containment and prevention as the best option to manage the pandemic. For example, when the Ministry of Health reported the first case of the virus on 19th March 2020 in one patient, the state took drastic steps by issuing series of guidelines so to contain the spread of the virus. Among others, the government ordered for closure of learning institutions, places of worship, and borders, quarantining suspects and those coming from outside countries, lockdown, and so forth (The Independent 2020; Museveni 2020). Accordingly, Yuweri Kaguta Museveni asserts;

On account of those tough measures, we limited the spread of the infections and the few imported cases were closely handled by the medical staff so that all of them recovered and we never had a single death from Covid-19 until the 21st of July, 2020. This was a period of about 126 days of battle with the Corona-19 virus without a single death. (Museveni, 20th September 2020).

Such public appreciation of the health team manning the Covid-19 pandemic by the president helped to build people’s confidence in the health workers and also it made the health workers to commit to their work, in spite of the risks involved.

In a way of easing people’s livelihood, the government directed food relief to people living within the city metropole; landlords not to demand for rents, and no disconnection of water plus electricity, and also called upon well-wishers to

support her initiative to addressing the challenges of Covid-19. This call to help, attracted contributions from many people in terms of cash, food items, vehicles, and medical equipment. In response to the same, the university administration also extended food relief to all fulltime staff (Senyonyi, 16th July 2020) and students who remained around the university premises. While this act drew a huge criticism from part-time staff, it helped to make the university management express solidarity with her fulltime staff.

As an institution of learning within Uganda, Uganda Christian University administration followed whatever directives that were coming from the government methodically. As such, in response to the call to close schools and institutions of learning, the university management and administration sent students home, save for a few international students that remained on campus given the closure of the international airport and borders found them around. Since this closure came two weeks to the start of end of semester examinations, to facilitate students' progress, the university administration thought of running examinations in "take-home" format. If some students had not drawn the attention of the parliament of Uganda that stopped the giving out of the take home examination (Okello, April 2, 2020), Uganda Christian University would have been the first university in the world to give examination to all her students through that format.

In keeping the university's internal process running during the lockdown, a few critical staff were allowed to continue working. However, with time, even those who should have been working were kept off the university premises except those who stay on campus. With the continued lockdown, the university had to suspend staff contracts effective 1st June 2020 (Senyonyi, 22nd May 2020). Initially, this was thought to be a temporary measure. However, in August when the university administration's request to run online studies was not cleared, the Vice Chancellor extended suspension of staff contracts indefinitely (Senyonyi, 26th August 2020). This was because, as a private institution that operates on fee collection from students, remaining closed for the past five months without collecting fees from students could not facilitate payment of fulltime staff salaries.

With time when the government allowed candidate classes in Primary Seven, Senior Four and Six, plus final year students in institutions of higher learning to resume studies, Uganda Christian University ceased the opportunity. In keeping attuned with the required Standard Operation Procedures (SOPs) issued by the Ministry of Education and Sports (2020) for opening education institutions, and

Ministry of Health (2020) for conducting church services, the university opened her gates to the students. The management ensured that everyone entering the university wash “their hands with the help of tippy-taps placed in different locations (gates, classroom blocks, residence halls, etc.), No person is allowed to access the University before washing or sanitizing their hands” (Huston-Holm, 7 January 2021). For the students who studied on campus, none was allowed in lecture rooms, examination rooms, and during worship without facemasks (Huston-Holm, 7th January 2021; KII 5, 8-1-2021). Observing such guidelines helped to create confidence and security to the students and staff.

As for the continuing students, the university management with clearance from the National Council for Higher Education, rolled out online learning. With a ready e-learning section, the university management called back full time and few parttime teaching staff to start online lectures. However, before starting to teach, all the teaching staff underwent rigorous training in preparation to the task ahead of them. Then on 10th November 2020, when the online platform was getting jammed due to many lectures running concurrently, the office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs (DVC AA) issued fresh guideline so to help the university measure to the required standards. The guideline required;

- a. All lectures and tutorials must be conducted using the Big Blue Button on the e-learning platform....
- b. All lectures and tutorials must be pre-recorded and uploaded on the e-learning platform before the one-hour virtual class. The one-hour virtual class must be a consultative one, and not used mainly for teaching.
- c. All lectures and tutorials which have been conducted, but were not pre-recorded, should be recorded and the same uploaded on the e-learning platform. (DVC AA, 10th November 2020).

The above directive that called for lecturers to record their lectures and upload on the module platform enabled learners who had failed to log onto lectures to access the lectures that were held in their absence. The recorded lectures also enabled learners to access lectures at any time.

III. Whether the principle of equity was applied or not during such response

Equity is an elusive term. In an attempt to explain the term, Hepburn (2001) asserts that “it must be borne in mind that there is no single, definitive answer” about the concept of equity given different disciplines attribute different meanings to the term. Accordingly, the common conception of the term from the social, ethical or legal contexts see equity as: “symmetry, balance, harmony, morality, justice, fairness, a form of property interest and a recognised and established legal principle” (Hepburn 2001: 3). Therefore, simply put, “equity is primarily associated with justice” (Hepburn 2001: 3). A set of tenets or maxims guide the application of the principle of equity, namely: equity will not suffer a wrong to be without a remedy, equity follows the law, he who seeks equity must do equity, he who comes to equity must come with clean hands, and delay defeats equity. Furthermore, equality is equity, equity looks to the intent rather than the form, equity looks on that as done which ought to have been done, equity imputes an intention to fulfil an obligation, equity acts in personam, where equities are equal the first in time prevails, and also where the equities are equal the law prevails (Ayush 2020; Hepburn 2001: 10-11). Therefore, looking at the series of guideline and policies devised during the Covid-19 pandemic, the application or non-application of such maxims are clearly seen in few areas, as highlighted below.

When the government closed the boarders and institutions of learning, stopped people from gathering in places, and eventually instituted a total lockdown on the country, the directive was applied to majority of the people in the country, save for the health officials going to work, security forces and some government officials. On the part of the university, the closure of institutions of learning saw the management and administration responding by stopping lectures and sending all students, except a few international students who remained on campus for a while. Since both the government and university did this in good faith, and somewhat equity principle was applied given that it followed the guideline to contain Covid-19 (OI 5, 12-12-2020). However, on the other hand, especially in regard to restriction of transport means and restriction of gathering, some enforcers of the guideline did not apply the principle of equity because, while other people who could access government vehicles moved freely others were not. This, according to a staff (OI 7, 12-12-2020), in a

way presented a double standard on the part of the government, thus affecting those of them who did not have the opportunity negatively.

In extending food relief to the vulnerable, both the government and the university addressed basic need of humanity. However, well intended though, the fact that people in other towns were not extended food relief yet they had undergone similar situations with those in Kampala Metropole made some of the staff who had travelled upcountry to question the criteria used to giving food items (OI 6,12-2020). On the part of the university, when the first food relief was only extended to the fulltime staff, the part time staff saw a sense of segregation, thus did not believe that equity principle applied (OI 1- 4, 12-12-2020). However, when the second food distribution was rolled out by the university to all fulltime and parttime staff on or off session (OI 14-17, 4-1-2021), the staff thought equity principle was applied by the university.

The administration of take-home examinations by the university was one other sticky area. When the idea was first hatched and guideline given by the university management (Senyonyi, March 25th 2020), it was with all the good intentions. However, the debate on accessibility due to internet network coverage in the country brought in a mixed feeling (Tumwesige, 2020, 7). While it that was meant to help students progress with their studies (OI 13, 27-12-2020), some students saw it as a way of not giving equal opportunity to all students since some of them stay in places where internet coverage is poor (OI 20, 8-1-2021). However, nevertheless when all was sorted after the initial restrain by the state, the admission of take-home exams made some students to get excited, especially the graduating class. According to a respondent (OI 19, 6-1-2021), this helped them to get given after the exams they able allowed to graduate.

Retaining and recalling staff back to work was an area that attracted mixed feeling from the staff of the university. While insufficiency of cash flow at the university was the basis the management used “to engage a limited number of staff to offer essential services for business continuity” (Senyonyi, 20th June 2020) and recall others after institutions were cleared to reopen, a closer look at this too gives a feel of application and non-application of the principle of equity. Equity was applied in that the life of the university beyond Covid-19 was taken into consideration. However, when one looks at the parameters used to choose certain individuals as opposed to others made some people think it was a flout on the equity principle.

Concerning allowing final year students to study on campus and continuing students to student online, some continuing students felt the government did not put equity into consideration (OI 8 & 9, 13-12-2020). That aside, since not all finalists were not invited to be on campus, those who were made to study online did join the continuing students to think they were treated as though they were not finalists (OI 10-12, 15; 18; & 24-12-2020). Even though the university did this to avoid crowding, some of the students could not understand the criterion that was used to make such choices (OI 12, 24-12-2020). Hence students whose faculties were not considered to be on campus felt, by not following government directive, the university fell short in applying equity principle because if equity is equality, how equally were they treated?

IV. How the application or non-application of the principle of equity affected staff and students of Uganda Christian University

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, as reflected above, the action of both the government and the university did and did not employ the principle of equity. As a result, both positive and negative outcomes were realized, as discussed below.

The lockdown of the country and closure of institutions of higher learning afforded the opportunity for students and staff, who were able to get home, to stay with their family after a long while. Some students did confirm that since they have been in boarding schools right from the primary through to the university, they have not had the opportunity to keep their parents and sibling for a long time. Some of the staff did argue the same. One of them in particular say “when schools were one, I have not had time with my children. However, the closure of schools helped me to teach my own children and thereby bond with them” (KII 3, 26/12/2020). Another staff also say “COVID time taught me the importance of planning and preparing for my physical and spiritual needs” (Q 8, 11-1-2021). This made “some staff to think outside the box” (Q 5, 24-12-2020). Meaning, if it were not for the crisis, people would not have learnt certain things. In a way, the implementation of the lockdown helped to make people utilize hidden skills to their advantage thus implying that if the lockdown was not imposed, people would have continued to sit on such skills. Thus, to some extent the lockdown gave justice to the different families where the students and staff came from. However, on the other hand, the application of the lockdown guideline created fear of loss of friends, jobs, and income thus making many

staff not to be sure of how to survive (Q 2, & 3, 23-12-2020; Q 6, 26-12-2020). Another staff say “another challenge was engaging in casual or blue color jobs for the sake of earning a living to stay afloat. This affected my esteem, especially it caused discomfort and sort of embarrassment with fear of my students coming to know the kind of life I was living” (Q 1, 23-12-2020).

The lockdown and closure of institutions of learning further enabled students and staff to utilize the skills in them that they had not exploited before (Q 4, 24-12-2020). For example, given the government allowed those who engaged in shelling food items and agriculture to operate, some students and staff were able to start vending food items (Q 4,24-12-2020), firewood, and others engaged in agriculture. In an interview with one of the staff, she said this time afforded her the opportunity to “utilize the resources at hand to my benefit, just as Moses used the staff in his hand for the good of the people of Israel after God had asked him what is in your hand” (OI 18, 6-1-2021). In a way, if it were not for the lockdown and suspension of the contracts, people would not have had such opportunity to utilize such hidden entrepreneurial skills in them.

Extension of food aid to students who remained around and staff by the government, and also food items given by the university to full time staff showed concern and thereby an expression of justice given the students and staff were in dire need. In a way the families where the students and staff came from got to know that both the government and the university were concerned of the welfare of their kin. However, the fact that food aid was not extended to all made some section of the students who remained around and parttime staff (especially during the first food distribution but he university) to feel excluded and wondered whether the university meant well for them in their dire need for help (KII 5, 6-1-2021). The ambivalent act of the university management had cast a lot of questions in the minds of the part time staff thus making some to think justice was not served in the process.

The re-opening of schools and institutions of higher learning for candidate classes and finalist students, and also allowing online lessons afforded the opportunity for students and a section of the full-time staff to resume studies and work after over five months break. To the students, it helped them to do exams that the closure of the university had robbed them of. Those who were in their last semester were even able to graduate virtually after their results were released. To the continuing students, allowing for online lectures after reopening of the university helped them to progress with their studies thus eliminating the thinking that both the government and the university were more concerned of

finalists (OI 5, 20/11/2020; Q 7, 28-12-2020). The online lectures also enabled students to improve their computing skills, and as one of them say, it ushered “them to the dotcom age” (OI 8, 13/12/2020). On the side of the staff, those who were called back were able to beef up their computing skills and learn new methods of delivering lectures through the online platform (KII 1, 21/10/2020). As one of them say “Online teaching that seemed unpractical is now possible and, in a way, has made life quite easier in both teaching and learning. To this I am forever grateful.” (Q 4, 24-12-2020). Besides, they were able to have their income restored, even though the remuneration were not as they were before the Covid-19 pandemic suspension of contracts (Q 1, 12-12-2020). A fulltime lecture said “for the first time, even if the amount paid is less than expected, the university has paid them for whatever they taught without waiting for the end of the year” (OI 7, 12-12-2020). In a way, this meant that the overload that fulltime staff used to get after the end of the academic year were paid at the end of each month they worked for. This helped them to provide for their families. In a way, if it were not for the Covid-19 pandemic, perhaps such opportunity would not have been afforded to staff.

On the other hand, some of the students and staff thought the non-application of the principle of equity by the government and the university during the Covid-19 lockdown did affect them negatively. For example, by the time the total lockdown was declared by the government after the closure of the university, some students and staff had not reached to where their families were. Their attempt to reach to where their families were, was frustrated by unavailability of transport means thus causing psychological torture to them (KII 3, 26-12-2020). As such, they felt unfairly treated since they ended up remaining in places where they had hard time getting daily provisions.

The closure of institutions of learning, though applied to all, did not work well for many students and staff. While the student’s progress was retarded, the staff lost income since their contracts were suspended given the university was not collecting fees from students, the major source of income (Q 5, 24-12-2020). When the counter parts of the staff in public institutions continued to received their salaries even during the closure of institutions, the non-responsiveness of the government to bail workers in private institutions out made a section of the staff at Uganda Christian University to see the government only concerned of workers in public institutions (OI 4, 12-12-2020), yet they are also contributing to academic progress of the nation.

Even when the government allowed final year students to report to finish their examinations, it became tricky for students and staff who were caught up in boarder districts that at the initial easing of the lockdown were not opened. Some students coming from such districts say transport to bring them back to the university so exorbitant that raising it became somewhat difficult (OI 12, 12-12-2020). Their expectation that the government should provide free transport for them to nearby district where people were allowed to move freely did not bear fruit. According to some, that was not fair on the part of the government since a lot of money was released by the treasury to address Covid-19 related challenges (OI 10, 15-12-2020).

The indiscriminate enforcement of social distancing guideline during political gathering by the security forces did affect some students and staff negatively. In some instances, while throwing tear gas cannisters and canning the purported defaulters of the guideline made some innocent students and staff to experience the brant of the law enforcers (OI 5, 12-12-2020). While some of the students and staffs lost merchandise during such fracas, others found themselves in the middle of tear gas and at the same time got beaten for no good reason (OI 17, 4-1-2021). To them, that was a double loss, especially losing merchandise, getting beaten, and spending more money for treatment.

In relation to the university staff, given the university maintained some critical staff on job even during the time of closure, the choice of who to and who not to be working did draw a lot of criticism from a section of the staff. According to some, the university management did not apply equity principle (KII 2, 26-12-2020). Although among the academic staff the choice of deans and heads of departments was understandable, among the security and other support staff, the choice of who to and who not to be on the Covid-19 contract between June and September was not well received. Some of the staff thought it was done through corrupted means. While there was no evidence to prove the validity of such wild statement, however, the fact that people have liberty to talk whatever they think make others who have not followed up the process of choice of staff to be on the contract to think likewise.

The extension of food aid by the government and first that the university did, according to many students (OI 20, 8-1-2021) and staff (OI 18, 18-1-2021) did not follow the principle of equity. In regard to the food items distributed by the government, some staff claimed to have been segregated during distribution by those in charge. One staff said “while the persons giving out food items gave to my neighbours, they could not give for me, I do not know why” (OI 19, 6-1-

2021). Such non-application of the principle of equity made those affected to feel neglected by their own government thus it made them to look at themselves as second hand citizens. The same reaction was received from the parttime staff of the university when the university gave food items for only fulltime staff during the first food relief distribution. While being on parttime was a by design but not by choice, some of the parttime staff who do not have anywhere they work at felt abused by the institution that they invest their energy to work for. This made some of them to rethink of whether they will ever come back to work for an institution that is only interested about them when they are fine but in their times of distress, the institution abandons them.

Lesson learned

The experience of students and staff during the Covid-19 lockdown period presents a lot to learn from. Firstly, it has exposed the hidden skills that people have that they have not been using over the years. Those who did not know they can do business, farming, and consultancy were able to try it out and it has worked out for them. For, the fact that people were able to retool themselves means even in times of scarcity, people have the propensity to survive.

Secondly, people were able to identify who was a true friend or not during the lockdown period. As one person puts it “during the lockdown, when some people see a phone call, they think a problem or begging is coming, but a true friend could call and talk to you on their own airtime.” This thereby enabled redefinition of friendship.

Thirdly, the period has taught people, especially staff not to depend on pay check for survival but rather have some other things to do so that in case formal employment ends abruptly life does not stop.

Fourthly, people tend to observe health guidelines when there is danger to the extent, adaptation to healthy life style has improved throughout the pandemic period. For instance, through the consistent adherence to the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) like consistent Hand washing with soap or using hand sanitisers, good nutrition etiquette to see our bodies immunity boosted which has enabled the teaching and learning run smoothly (Q 7, 28-12-2020). Thus, it enabled people to know that health is a matter of adaptation and change in habit. Adaptation of habits like hand washing, not touching eyes, mouth, and nose helped to curtail the first spread of Covid-19 in Uganda.

Conclusion

Covid-19 is a reality in Uganda. Many people have been either infected or affected by it and others have since died. The government of the republic of Uganda did respond very fast with issuing out and implementing guideline so to curtail the spread and danger of Covid-19, that the university had followed suit. In doing so, while in some instances the principle of equity was applied during the implementation of the guideline, and in others it was not. The application of the principle of equity had a positive effect on the students and staff of the university but the non-application of it has affected them negatively. This means, the Covid-19 lockdown time has been ambivalent, in that both good and bad effects were realized especially in application of the guideline to curtail the spread of the virus.

That said, the time of Covid-19 lockdown has also taught a lot of lesson which if keep doing so it could help address negative effects should another disaster breaks out. For example, the fact that people were able to utilize hidden skills, identification of true friend, finding alternative survival avenues if maintained even after Covid-19 pandemic, then people will be able to progress without depending on pay cheque.

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