

RUFORUM Vision 2030

Consultations with Deans and Principals

Duration: 23 October 2017

Venue: Bingu International Conference Centre, Lilongwe, Malawi

Concept Note

About RUFORUM

The Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) is a network of 66 Universities in 26 African countries. RUFORUM's work focuses on strengthening the capacities of universities to foster innovations responsive to demands of smallholder farmers in Africa and agribusinesses. RUFORUM delivers this through the training of high quality researchers, the output of impact oriented research and the maintenance of collaborative working relations among researchers, farmers, national agricultural research institutions, governments, and regional and continental higher education stakeholders. Established in 2004 to promote the integration of member universities into Africa's development processes, particularly within the Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Program (CAADP), RUFORUM has unequivocally delivered on this mandate. RUFORUM now serves as a lead agency for implementation of the African Union STISA 2024 Priority One on reducing poverty and ensuring food and nutrition security. Importantly RUFORUM is today a lead advocate for strengthening Higher Education and Science and Technology development in the continent.

Background

RUFORUM is currently implementing its 2015-2020 Strategic Business Plan. The current strategic plan recognises the need for RUFORUM to strategically evolve into an established organization ready to serve a wider mandate in relation to the vision of the Africa Union Commission (AUC) for agricultural higher education, science, technology and innovation on the continent. In this context, trends indicate that the higher education landscape is rapidly changing with mixed renewed interest in the sector and the affirmation of African Union that higher education is a critical driver for achieving Africa Vision 2063 as well as guaranteeing food and nutritional security for African people. Global corporations active in the developing world are also approaching higher education as a strategic asset, spending millions in support of technical education, high-end research, internship programs, and strategic initiatives with multiple institutions and collaboration both in the continent and in other parts of the world. There are also trends in the global higher-education environment that higher education in Africa needs to consider:

- (a) A global trend towards differentiation within systems of higher education. Some institutions are viewed as research-intensive, others have a more modest expectation for research but a high

expectation of addressing societal workforce needs, and still others are expected to provide technical education in trade, technology, and entrepreneurship.

- (b) Greater emphasis on the metrics of academic access and academic success. To increase these rates in Africa will require greater variety among African educational institutions, so that students can pursue degrees that are more closely related to their unique talents and interests as well as workforce requirements. It will also require that post-secondary training be affordable to students and that counselling be available to help students enrol in appropriate programs and succeed. Long-term, it will also require a stronger pipeline from secondary schools, which will in turn require more and higher-quality tertiary teacher training and work skill development programs, both to increase the pool of teachers and enhance their expertise, and to increase employability of graduates.
- (c) Increased scrutiny of African universities with respect to independent governance and public accountability. In African institutions, governance and accountability are evolving slowly. The most serious risk is that the African standards will become complex and arcane in an effort to prevent corruption, account for resources, and enhance credibility to outsiders. Although these are all important goals, excessive or awkward rule-making and various external controls on institutions will snuff out the creativity and discourage initiative that needs to be part of a transformation process.
- (d) Human resources remain a key issue for universities and other institutions worldwide. In Africa, the number of faculty openings at universities may be expanding more rapidly than the pool of teachers who have conventional qualifications to teach at the university level. Because economic growth brings new and more attractive job opportunities, if the teaching profession remains unattractive, economic growth can paradoxically reduce the pool of teachers that the economy needs, by driving current teachers to other jobs that pay more and by discouraging new entrants into the profession.
- (e) Financial aid to poor students remains a major challenge in all countries. Nations that in the past provided free or low-cost education are now under fiscal stress, and are seeking ways to share the cost burden that will be imposed by greater quality and access. Other countries are facing a growing concern, even among the middle class, about affordability. In Africa, there will be no expansion of higher education without considerable financial aid, whether it comes in the form of government bursaries or other forms of assistance. Sharing the responsibility (among government, students, and families) has not been effectively addressed, and it remains a challenge in Africa.
- (f) In Africa and in other parts of the developing world, the proportion of inadequately prepared students has risen as college enrolments have grown faster than the quality of secondary education. This has made it very difficult for tertiary institutions to elevate their academic quality. Colleges are forced to choose between rejecting many applicants and not meeting enrolment requirements, or, as is more often done, admitting them without providing resources to help them catch up academically.
- (g) Academic collaborations have greatly increased over the past two decades. International peer-reviewed academic journals are more numerous, faculty and researchers are more mobile, and

global teaming is more common in major research projects. One result of this trend has been the forging of an international consensus on best practices: standards of academic quality, standards for research and professional practice, and the general structure of an advanced academic program.

- (h) More than ever before African universities in particular are being challenged to transform for development relevance, and to produce more relevant and market ready graduates. They are also expected to generate innovations to support industry while at the same time being business-oriented. Belatedly, they are expected to provide the human resource and technology advances to drive the attainment of Agenda 2063.

Although some of these factors may seem daunting, there are mitigating circumstances that offer genuine hope that higher education in Africa can be transformed. The higher education sector is evolving rapidly on the continent with renewed commitment for universities to produce relevant and market ready graduates with capacity to cause development on the continent. At the same time, there is urgency to cause the much needed transformation of livelihoods of the majority of rural communities who are dependent on agriculture for their livelihoods. Universities are well placed to train industry ready and innovative graduates and human resources personnel relevant to Africa's transformation agenda.

Amidst the growing list of stakeholders' demands for a transformative agricultural and higher education sectors, there are emerging questions;

- (a) What new thrust areas should RUFORUM focus on beyond what is currently being done?
- (b) What does it mean for RUFORUM in terms of operation scale and scope?
- (c) What will be the effective business model in terms of geographical footprint?
- (d) What will organisational success look in mix of multiple demands requiring RUFORUM to think and act differently?

RUFORUM, drawn by a common agenda to strengthen the capacities of universities to foster innovations responsive to the transformation needs of Africa has set-out a process to develop a comprehensive 2030 agenda on Agricultural Higher Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (AHESTI). To guide the development of a comprehensive and inclusive agenda, RUFORUM seeks to engage in consultations to with RUFORUM Member Universities' Deans and Principals to solicit for their expert views and opinion on what will be the critical levers that knowledge networks like RUFORUM should engage in to stimulate the much needed actions to accelerate agricultural transformation in the continent and more responsiveness from Higher Education institutions in the transformation process and policy agenda.

It is against this background that RUFORUM is convening a consultative meeting, a pre-AGM event to scope for transformational ideas, identify potential roles and organisational orientation to support the realisation of Vision 2030. To fully comprehend this transformation, there is need to reflect and visualise how a typical transformed rural African smallholder farmer will look like in 2030 and beyond. Secondly, this would require to also develop concrete strategies and actions that will lead to this

transformation. In this transformation, it will be important to articulate the role of universities and their strategic partners will play to realise the forecasted Africa's vision.

The specific objectives are to:

- (a) Reflect on a Vision for African Agriculture (in 2030) and the potential role of African universities and their partner in supporting the realisation of this vision
- (b) Formulate key strategies and actions relevant to the transformation processes of universities to meet the vision, and
- (c) Map out complementary actions that would need to be undertaken to achieve the vision, including the strategic partners and actors relevant in the transformation agenda.

The impetus for this strategic visioning is derived from lessons from RUFORUM's work and the trajectory outlook of national, regional and global development frameworks. It also builds on requests from the wider development community for RUFORUM to think ahead of time and position itself to play a greater role in the sphere of AHVESTI through galvanising continental voices on higher education.

As part of the visioning process, a one-day consultative meeting will be held at Bingu International Conference Centre, Lilongwe, Malawi on the 23 October 2017. The meeting builds on the earlier convened regional consultative meetings held in Nairobi 19 -21 June 2017 and Gabarone, Botswana, 25-29 July 2017. Additional meetings were held with FARA, CORAF, CARDESA, ASARECA, AWARD, and ICRISAT (among other CG centers). These meetings supported the crafting of draft propositions for RUFORUM Vision 2030 that will be shared and further articulated. This meeting will also take the process a step further by facilitating RUFORUM to come up with draft strategic document that will be shared with the stakeholders and the wide audience before final endorsement by the Board.

The immediate contact person for this consultations is Mr Charles Owuor (c.owuor@ruforum.org), the RUFORUM Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Manager.