

## 18<sup>th</sup> RUFORUM ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2022

**Theme: Strengthening Africa's Agri-food Systems in the Post COVID-19 Era – Opportunities and Challenges**

**BRINGING OUR SOILS BACK: ENHANCING SOIL HEALTH AND FRAGILE ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND AFRICA**

**A JOINT ICBA-RUFORUM CONVENING CONTRIBUTION TO THE WORLD SOIL DAY**

**Date: 23<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> November 2022**

**Time: 15:00-18:30 EAT**

**Venue: Virtual**

**Registration (Link): <https://bit.ly/3EpBF1d>**

**Concept Note**

**Contact: Professor Majaliwa Jackson Gilbert Mwanjalolo at [m.majaliwa@ruforum.org](mailto:m.majaliwa@ruforum.org)**

### Background

The maintenance of soil health is essential for biomass production, maintenance of biodiversity, reduced pollution of soils & fresh waters, provision of the physical basis for infrastructure development, preservation of cultural heritage, the sustenance of the food value chains and for ensuring environmental sustainability (Blum, 2005). This is particularly important for the Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) region which has been experiencing slow progress towards food security due to the low productivity of its agricultural systems & food value chains, high demographic pressure, political instability, among others. Beyond the African region, the Middle East, given its geographic location and arid climate conditions, is one of the most vulnerable regions to climate stresses such as rising temperatures and water scarcity. Further, the majority of agricultural ecosystems in both Africa and the Middle East continue to experience steady declines in soil fertility due to continued nutrient mining, soil erosion and poor soil management. Soil health sustainability therefore remains the centerpiece in the life of SSA and Middle East food systems. Without addressing soil health issues, smallholder farmers cannot equitably benefit from yield gains offered by improved plant genetics and other agronomic practices.

To date, huge amounts of scientific effort and investment have been made to address long-term soil fertility losses and land degradation as well as the negative effects of climate change. These efforts notwithstanding, there has been limited scale-up and adoption of soil management and

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conservation technologies for impact. There is a need to re-examine the current soil management strategies & practices, and to consider indigenous knowledge & beliefs in order to enhance soil health and functions while leveraging on communities of practice, participation of researchers, extension services & farmers, and the commitment of policy makers ([Fossey et al., 2020](#)).

The Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) has been supporting human capital development in soil science and related fields through regional training programmes and research grants. In the same vein, RUFORUM is participating in the development of an African Union Commission conceived Soil Initiative for Africa (SIA) spearheaded by the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA) and the other CAADPX4 agencies (AFAAS, ASARECA, CCARDESA and CORAF). SIA is Africa's owned ambitious effort to improve the condition of the continent's soils to bring our soils back. To further contribute to efforts to reclaim our agricultural lands and enhance their productivity, RUFORUM in partnership with the International Center for Biosaline Agriculture (ICBA) is organising a webinar "**Bringing our soils back: Enhancing soil health and fragile ecosystems management in the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa**" to be held on 23<sup>rd</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> November 2022 using the Zoom video conferencing platform. The event is being organized as part of World Soil Day celebrated worldwide on 5 December every year.

### Objective of the webinar

This webinar will bring together leading academics, researchers and policy makers from the African continent and beyond with the aim to identify priority intervention areas, targeted stakeholders and the responsibility of the different actors in soil health and fragile ecosystems management in the Middle East and Africa.

### Webinar approach and expected outcome

The webinar is conceived as a dynamic multi-stakeholder and multi-disciplinary forum aimed at deliberating the best approaches and strategies to manage soils and natural ecosystems for improving their productivity, enhancing food & nutrition security, and strengthening the resilience of communities and natural ecosystem in Africa and the Middle East.

### The expected outputs and outcomes

#### a) Outputs

- The updated status of the soil health and fragile ecosystem management in the Middle East and Africa;
- Lessons shared between scientists from the Middle East and Africa;
- Creation and strengthening of partnership between RUFORUM and ICBA on soil health and fragile ecosystem management training;
- A road map for reviving soil health and fragile ecosystem management training on the continent;

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- Role that networks (e.g. RUFORUM, ICBA), universities and other actors need to play to revive soil health science and fragile ecosystem management training and extension.

## b) Outcomes

- Increased visibility of soil health science, fragile ecosystem management research and development outputs from Africa;
- Improved methods for increasing the uptake of soil health and ecosystem management research results by other stakeholders (dissemination strategies);
- Reduce land and other natural resources degradation, increased soil productivity and improved food and nutrition security among smallholder farmers on the continent;
- Increased restored land and adoption of sustainable land management practices/technologies by farmers;
- Increased availability of raw materials for agri-food industries;
- Prevent displacement by improving preparedness and early warning systems for drought and other natural disasters;
- Increased collaborative research between ICBA and RUFORUM member universities.

The webinar will include keynote addresses, breakout rooms and interactive sessions.

## Draft Programme

| Time  | Activity   |
|---|--|
| <b>Day 1 (23/11/2022)</b>   |  |
| <b>Moderator: Dr. Rebbie Harawa</b> , Regional Director for East and Southern Africa, ICRISAT |  |
| <b>Session 1: Opening and Setting the Scene</b>   |  |
| 15:00 – 15:10   | <b>Welcome Remarks: Prof Adipala Ekwamu</b> , Executive Secretary, RUFORUM   |
| 15:10 – 15:25   | <b>Opening Remarks:</b> Dr. Augusto Becerra Lopez-Lavalle, Chief Scientist, International Center for Biosaline Agriculture (ICBA)  |
| 15:25 – 15:40   | <b>Keynote Address 1: Soil health, environment, climate change and biodiversity interconnections: Prof. Rattan Lal</b> , Director of the Carbon Management and Sequestration Center at Ohio State University |
| 15:40 – 15:55   | <b>Keynote Address 2: Soil and land resources for agricultural production: general trends and future scenarios - African perspective. Dr. Yemi Akinbamijo</b> , Executive Director, FARA, Ghana              |
| 15:55 – 16:10   | <b>Keynote Address 3: General trends of agricultural ecosystems in Middle East: Dr. RK Singh</b> , Programme Leader on Crop Diversification and Genetics   |
| 16:10 – 16:30   | <b>Discussion</b>  |
| <b>Session 2: Soil Health, Ecosystem Management and Livelihoods</b>                           |  |
| 16:30 – 16:45   | <b>Fragile Ecosystems: Building resilience for complexity and changes- Dr.</b>   |

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|   | Ravi Prabhu Director General World Agroforestry (ICRAF)   |
| 16:45 – 16:55   | Q&A   |
| 16:55 – 17:10   | <b>Management of Soil Health and Fragile Ecosystems in a network society-</b><br>(Dr. Shamie Zingore, African Plant Nutrition Institute)  |
| 17:10 – 17:20   | Q&A   |
| 17:20 – 17:35   | <b>Improving communities' livelihoods through sustainable Soil Health and Fragile Ecosystem management-</b> Dr. Ahmed H. El-Naggar, Soil Management Scientist, ICBA             |
| 17:35 – 17:45   | Q&A   |
| 17:45 – 18:00   | <b>Summary of emerging issues and way forward-</b> Dr. Alice Mweetwa, Deputy Executive Secretary, Programme Development and Implementation, RUFORUM                             |
| 18:00 – 18:10   | <b>Closing Remarks by the Session Chair</b>   |
| <b>Day 2 (24/11/2022)</b>   |   |
| <b>Moderator: Dr. Khalil Ammar</b> , Programme Leader on Sustainable Natural Resources Management       |   |
| <b>Session 1: Human capital, infrastructure and investment for soil health and ecosystem management</b> |   |
| 15:00 – 15:10   | <b>Welcome Remarks: Prof Adipala Ekwamu</b> , Executive Secretary, RUFORUM  |
| 15:10 – 15:25   | <b>Keynote Address 1:</b> Policy Frameworks for Soil Health and Fragile Ecosystem Management, Dr. Nkonya Ephraim, IFPRI, Washington   |
| 15:25 – 15:40   | <b>Keynote Address 2:</b> Investment for Soil Health and Fragile Ecosystem Management, Prof SinSin, Former Rector, University of Abomey Calavi                                  |
| 15:40– 15:55  | <b>Discussions</b>  |
| <b>Session 2: Policies, Agricultural Extension and Advisory Services</b>                                |   |
| 15:55 – 16:10   | <b>Agricultural Extension and Advisory Services for Soil health and Fragile Ecosystem management (IITA)</b>   |
| 16:10 – 16:20   | Q&A   |
| 16:20 – 16:30   | <b>Human capital development for Sustainable Soil Health and Fragile Ecosystem management-</b> Dr. David Nielson, Chairperson of the RUFORUM International Advisory Panel (IAP) |
| 16:30 – 16:40   | Q&A   |
| 16:40 – 17:00   | <b>General Discussions</b>  |
| 17:00 – 17:15   | <b>Summary of emerging issues and way forward-</b> Prof Majaliwa Mwanjalolo, Manager, Regional Anchor Universities, RUFORUM   |
| 17:15 – 17:30   | <b>Closing Remarks by the Sessions Moderator</b>  |

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