



## The Sixth African Higher Education Week and RUFORUM Biennial Conference,

Date: 20 – 21<sup>st</sup> October, 2018

**Building a Pool of Professional Public Relations Officers in RUFORUM Member Universities to promote information gathering and visibility of Universities in Africa**

### Concept Note

#### Background

Universities generate a lot of knowledge through faculty and students' research which is needed for society and national development. Further, due to the increasing demand, universities are also engaged in research for development and community outreach which are beneficial for national development. Universities also provide a lot of social services to society. However, the visibility of African universities' contribution to society development, and policy formulation in particular, is not that visible to the general public, especially policy. This is partly because university scientists and researchers have challenges in communicating the information they gather and the knowledge they generate for informing decision making and consequently national development. Yet the knowledge based on independent, quality-assured information such as that from universities empowers people and helps them to develop ideas, engage in discussions, influence policy and make decisions that can improve the quality of life in general. The demand for easy to understand, up-to-date information is growing. This demand comes from policy makers, researchers, students, Media and from civil societies who are increasingly urging for full transparency on information from both public and private Universities. Alongside this development, the rapid evolution in new information technologies provides tools to communicate more effectively.

Because of the increasing need for information and the existing communication gap between what universities do and the demand of the communities/countries they serve, universities continue to be labelled as "Ivory towers" or irrelevant to community or national development. The result has been the isolation of universities as institutions, from national development framework consultation processes, decline in funding in some countries, lack of trust from governments and loss of prestige as

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“knowledge and innovation centres”. Restoring the lost glory requires adaptation of universities to the current needs and aggressively communicating every action to adapt. At international level, African universities are competing to be world class yet African universities continue to lag behind in global ranking. Information used for ranking is based on communicated information such as online publications, stories published, and electronic resources available, among others. While University top management is responsible for making strategic decisions on how the universities should operate, it is the role of Public Relations and Communication Officers to package their universities as successful institutions and worth investing in. Information on graduate quality and employability, the research being done and its outputs and how the community and national economy will benefit among others, is a key role for Communication and Public Relations Officers to articulate and make widely visible.

Some universities have excelled in information packaging and communication and thus are perceived as excellent universities while many others in Africa have not promoted their visibility that well, and are seen as less performing. While the level of activity in the community and nationally is low for emerging universities, twining of such universities with the established ones will provide a platform for lesson sharing and learning from each other to enhance performance and visibility of African universities. Accordingly the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) has organised a lesson sharing and learning event for Public Relations and Communication Officers of the member universities. The event will facilitate information sharing amongst the Officers and a team of resource persons on best practices for promoting visibility and marketing of universities.

**Purpose and Rationale**

The purpose of the event is to build a Community of Practice (CoP) of professional Public Relations and Communication Officers in RUFORUM member Universities. The CoP will facilitate identification of gaps that exist within Universities in the Public Relations and Communications offices regarding information sourcing, sharing and dissemination, review of member university websites, improvement of the traffic flow and visibility, increasing access to research done at universities as well as engaging more with beneficiaries such as alumni.

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**Objectives of the Side Event**

To increase visibility of what Universities do using the various tools of mass communications. Specifically, the objectives of the event are to;

- Bring together the member University core PRO teams and communications resource persons to discuss the best practices for promoting visibility and marketing of African Universities
- Create a Community of Practice for continuous sharing of best practices
- Provide opportunity for the Public Relations and Communication Officers to profile their universities during the 22-26 October 2018 Sixth Africa Higher Education Week.

**Expected out comes**

- A database of RUFORUM member University PROs and Communications Officers created
- A community of Practice (CoP) for furthering discussions and sharing formed
- Enhanced visibility of Member universities in various platforms and to the general public

**Proposed Approach and Methodology**

- Engages panelists ahead of the actual session and give them exercises relevant to the training.
- Provides an overview of the session.
- Trainer encourage participatory and dynamic exchanges among the trainees
- Provides a detailed report of key issues and recommendations for actions

**Venue and Participants**

University of Nairobi  
Public Relations Officers and Communications Officers of RUFORUM Members Universities

**Side Event Organizers and Contact**

**CO-ORGANISERS:**





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