

Interactive Session for Selected Leaders with emerging Scientists

In African culture, there is a saying: “buy a big person if you don’t have a big person” of course big not in terms of age or size, but in aspects like experience, wisdom, expertise, leadership, and knowledge. People normally seek advice from “big people” whether in the community, academic, workplace and sport and in many other fields. The expertise and advice people get from such ‘big persons’ support them during their careers and family lives. Currently, people still do use this advice and wisdom from elders to guide them during their life spans. In the last decade mentorship has gained popularity in many fields including academia, scientific, public practice and traditional or family practices.

The definition of mentorship varies depending on context. In academic field, mentorship refers to a relationship between two people where the individual with more experience, knowledge, and connections is able to pass along what they have learned to a junior individual within a certain field. The more senior individual is the mentor, and the junior individual is the mentee. Mentorship is widely used in universities during supervision to open space for sharing experience and expertise between a supervisor and students to enhance learning.

During the period 2-6 December 2019 as a side event of the 15th Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) Annual General Meeting (AGM) at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana, the Forum for Women Vice Chancellor in Africa (FAWoVC) held a mentorship interaction session with upcoming scientists. The session was attended by nine mentors who are senior scientists or senior administrators or senior present and past policy leaders and 86 mentees (50 Female, 36 Male) as a part of the 3rd Symposium of FAWoVC. The mentorship interaction session was organized to bring outstanding scholars, and researchers to interact with emerging scientists and postgraduate students. The objective of this session was for the mentors to share their personal, policy experience, life experience, teaching and research experiences, expertise, knowledge and wisdom with the young generation of African scientists (mentees). This aimed at giving guidance, enlightenment and enrichment in mentees academic and personal lives.



During the mentorship session, the interaction and debate was very exciting, enriching and valuable to both the mentors and mentees. The mentees freely asked varied questions and some of the key points discussed were: 1) how to balance academics, family and society needs; 2) how to build networks from infancy and to cherish your support system – friends, colleagues, family members and be supportive to others; 3) How to sign up

and complete taskse ; 4) preparing for transit from 1st degree to 1st job; 5) ways in which to work toward being an innovator, being an employer or managing your own Company or initiative within your professional area; 6) lobbying for conversations with peers and mentors; and 7) how to empower men and women in communities that are male dominated.



Some suggested approaches to dealing with the issues were: 1) a mentee should discover himself/herself in terms of interest, purpose, practice and hope; 2) delaying some activities like marriage to accomplish

your dreams; 3) praying and choosing well a partner who will support you in your life choices including career; 4) mentee should tap into mentors' experience; 5) avoiding "conflict" and/or "fights" instead work towards harnessing diversity among people; 6) challenge yourself, in order to make gradual improvement and make yourself fit and/or relevant in society; 7) balance your relationships at every level - the family, spouse/partner, academics and work; 8) reward your partner for the support to your academic life, appreciate whatever little they do; 9) negotiate with your partner; 10) be reliable, hardworking, deliver, believe in yourself, and be smart, this will make people look for you; 11) prioritize your activities, know what you want, take yourself seriously and avoid laziness – you will be left behind; 12) men should support their women to grow in their carriers and to reduce family conflicts; 13) educate your husband and sons how to make the wife's life easier; 14) supervisors should give audience to their students. 15) choose well supervisors who can support you- do not keep quiet if there are challenges with the Supervisor.

The session also come up with recommendations which included: 1) mentoring mentees should be on-going activity to empower mentees; 2) female-female mentorship should be cherished and nurtured; 3) mentor-mentee fora should be regular undertaking to enable impactful progress, it shouldn't be a one-off meeting; 4) universities should train Graduate Fellows instead of recruiting Teaching Assistants; 5) a mentee should consider the type of job they want and do work that improves their knowledge and skills towards it; 6) universities should provide day-care centres at places of work; 7) interest staff in your Unit to share what you/they have to do; 8) FAWoVC should document action points and/or roadmap on female empowerment and this should be shared amongst the RUFORUM Universities; and 9) RUFORUM to continue championing increased recruitment of female graduate students, facilitating increased mobility of students and staff in Africa; and advocating for higher education in Africa.

The session was funded by the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) through the project "Strengthening Gender Inclusive Participation in Science, Technology and Innovation in Africa" implemented by Busitema University and the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM). The mentorship interactive session was organized to implement one of the project objective toward achieving the enhancement and building the emerging scientists and postgraduate students' careers, skills and leadership so as to contribute to Africa development.

We greatly thank the following Mentors who participated in the Session: Prof. Mary Okwakol, Chairperson, FAWoVC and Executive Director of National Council for Higher Education (NCHE), Uganda (Female); Prof. Stella Williams, NiWARD, Nigeria (Female); Prof. Mabel Imbuga, Former Vice Chancellor, Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT), Kenya (Female); Prof. Patrick Rubaihayo, Former Minister of Agriculture, Uganda (Male); Prof. Peter Mbatia, Deputy Pro-Vice Chancellor, Botho University, Botswana (Male); Prof. Alice Pell, Former Vice Provost, Cornell University, USA (Female); Dr. Goretti Nabanoga, Deputy Principal College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences Makerere University, Uganda (Female); Prof. Luisa Santos, Eduardo Mondlane University, Mozambique (Female); and Prof. Mick Sikaenyi Mwala, University of Zambia, Zambia (Male).

This report was prepared by Ms. Nada Siddig Abdalla Musa, email: m.nada@ruforum.org; Technical Specialist responsible for Knowledge Management at RUFORUM Secretariat (www.ruforum.org). Nada comes from Gezira State in Sudan.

RUFORUM Secretariat, 11 May 2020