

## RUFORUM IN 2032



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### Background

The Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM), established by ten Vice Chancellors in 2004, is a consortium of 155 African universities operating within 38 countries spanning the African continent. RUFORUM is registered as an International Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) and has a mandate to oversee graduate training and networks of specialization in the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA). Its activities are coordinated by a Secretariat hosted by Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda. The organization evolved from its predecessor, the Forum on Agricultural Resource Husbandry (FORUM) program of the Rockefeller Foundation. In 2014, RUFORUM signed a cooperation agreement with the African Union Commission (AUC) to support implementation of the AUC Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa, 2024 (STISA 2024). RUFORUM is also a key implementer of the Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP). RUFORUM supports universities to address the important and largely unfulfilled role that universities play in contributing to the well-being of small-scale farmers and economic development of countries throughout Africa. In 2002, the Kenya Government introduced free primary and secondary education and is today pursuing 100% transition from primary to secondary as well as from secondary to tertiary colleges, including University education. In 2016, Malcolm Blackie envisioned the creation of the new African university, which would attract the bright, motivated, but poorly educated student and young women into higher education. African universities are being challenged to produce 'job creators' not 'job seekers', and, in response, entrepreneurship courses are being cascaded into degree programs. This is the reason why the World Bank is funding the ENABLE youth programs in most African countries, including Kenya, where the Outreach center of the University of Eldoret is one of the agribusiness incubation centers.

### Suggested Thrusts for RUFORUM towards 2032

1. Appropriate and effective industry-university linkages: industries bring issues and challenges to universities for development of solutions and providing feedback on their future labour requirements. This is the weakest link in university research programs/activities in Africa and RUFORUM can play a prominent role to catalyze this relationship. The industries would not only assist with attachment and internship places but be engaged in developing innovations and incubating the same. This will provide the universities with not only relevant research areas but also the much needed research funds.



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2. Research to solve farmers' problems: this is best achieved through development of continuous engagement of farmers, end users, industry and policy with researchers. The Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA) is the apex continental organization responsible for coordinating and advocating for agricultural research for development (AR4D). FARA serves as the technical arm of the Africa Union Commission on matters concerning agriculture science, technology and innovation. In this, RUFORUM is complimenting the activities of FARA and the National Agricultural Research Institutions (NARIs) by supporting quality research and importantly by facilitating and supporting programs that increase the production of quality researchers and development practitioners. RUFORUM does this by supporting creation and development of regional centers of Academic excellence and improved academic processes in the universities. In doing this RUFORUM is pursuing its vision of 'a vibrant agricultural sector linked to African universities which produce high-performing graduates and high-quality research responsive to the demands of Africa's farmers for innovations and able to generate sustainable livelihoods and national economic development'. While doing this RUFORUM mirrors AGRINATURA, which is a grouping of European universities and research organizations with a common interest in agricultural development and higher education.

3. The African farmer is unable to adopt new technologies ostensibly due to poverty. They appreciate the technologies and know that these will help them achieve increased productivity. However, this is an egg and chicken situation; which one comes first? Dr Yemi Akinbami (2022) believes that economic development is an important success factor in ameliorating food insecurity and undernourishment, but it must be complete and provide opportunities for improving the livelihoods of the poor. To achieve the social and economic impact, research agenda should be set with an insight into the future and should create opportunities for social and technological innovation, which would eventually lead to social and economic change. African Governments must ensure economic growth to improve the wellbeing of their citizens; then they will be able to have money to fund improved agricultural technologies because these require more inputs to succeed. A parallel priority to achieve this goal is the enhancement of people's capacity to deliver high quality research, and this is where organizations such as RUFORUM become important.

4. Long term funding of research would produce better results and have greater socio-economic impact. Research grants obtained through the RUFORUM Graduates Research Grants (GRGs) created more excitement and competition among universities but the RUFORUM has become more of a brokerage firm than a funds sponsor. RUFORUM is moving away from short term GRGs to programs like the Community Action Action Research Programme (CARPs) that are longer term and support for centers of excellence. This is the way to go in order to achieve lasting results that produce impact at the farm and household levels.

5. RUFORUM to continue intensive diplomatic activities with the African Governments and philanthropists (like Zuckerberg, Dangote) and with AUC to support its activities. The universities should be encouraged to pursue and develop endowment funds and Foundations to diversify their revenue streams. RUFORUM can expand its revenue base by pursuing support and experience from countries in the Scandinavia, China, South Korea and Japan in East Asia; India, Russia and Brazil, amongst others.

6. What would happen if RUFORUM becomes an AUC organ? With RUFORUM expanding to all corners of Africa, maybe it should be treated as an affiliate or organ or agency of the AUC, with regional structures. This will strengthen it politically, financially and even socio-culturally; it would solve agricultural and economic issues with continental lenses. This will put RUFORUM in a better position to



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help tackle poverty in the continent; improve inclusivity in Higher Agricultural Education (HAE) for poor but motivated students and women; and help solve the challenges brought about by the bulging youthful population.

### Concluding Remarks

I see an increasing role for RUFORUM. It must continue to champion agricultural transformation for enhanced food and nutrition security in the continent. It must work with its member Universities to enhance value addition to agricultural products and develop mechanisms to reduce post-harvest losses. RUFORUM must work with other partners to build Africa's Science, Technology and Innovation capacity. To do this RUFORUM will need to continue to build human capital to support development processes in the continent. Further RUFORUM and partners need to develop Africa's science capacity to respond to current needs and emerging challenges such as climate change. In doing so RUFORUM needs to support efforts to increase women participations in R&D and leadership, and make deliberate efforts to build capacity for less endowed National Agricultural Research and Extension Systems.

In doing the above RUFORUM needs to strengthen its platform for engaging capacity of Africa's Universities to support Africa's development agenda. I therefore see a vibrant RUFORUM Network in 2032 delivering Science Solutions in the continent, and a Network informing Africa's development trajectory and policy.

### References

- Yemi Akinbimajo (2022). RUFORUM AGM 2022 THOUGHT PIECES: Issue 1. Accessed from <https://ruforum.wordpress.com/2022/07/28/thought-piece-actualization-of-the-sdgs-by-2030-for-food-and-nutrition-security-of-africa-the-perspective-of-research-and-innovation/>
- Malcolm Blackie (2016). Theme: "Linking Universities to Private sectors, Government and other stakeholders in support of Agriculture development in Africa". 5th Higher Education week, RUFORUM Biennial Conference 2016 – Cape Town, South Africa. Website: [www.ruforum.org](http://www.ruforum.org)

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Prof Julius Onyango Ochuodho is a Professor of Agriculture specialising in Seed Science and Technology at the University of Eldoret in Kenya. He has been the Dean of the School of Agriculture and Biotechnology, was a member of RUFORUM Technical Committee; and spearheaded the creation of the Outreach center at the University of Eldoret where the currently champion Resource mobilization for the University. He has supervised many postgraduate students, published widely and examined for many universities in Kenya and outside. He is currently supervising students from Uganda, Senegal, Liberia and Botswana on varied crops and diverse areas of plant science. His major area of interest is improvement of seed quality and seed supply systems in the informal seed sub-sector, focusing on underutilized indigenous crops mostly grown by smallholder farmers. He holds a PhD in Plant Science (Seed Physiology) from University of Natal in South Africa, an MSc in Plant Pathology, and a BSc in Agriculture, both from University of Nairobi in Kenya. He obtained a Six-month post-doctoral research; and Post Graduate Diploma in Seed Pathology from DGISP in Copenhagen in Denmark. He has a certificate in Seed Production and Seed Technology, and IAC from Wageningen in Holland.





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