



The Seventh African Higher Education Week and RUFORUM Triennial Conference

6-10th December 2021 Cotonou Benin

Call for Action on Higher Education for Innovation, Industrialization, Inclusion and Sustainable Economic Development in Africa adopted at the Ministerial Roundtable Meeting held on 7th December 2021 at the Golden Tulip Hotel, Cotonou, Benin.

Universities in Africa under the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Africa (RUFORUM) network, adopted the African Higher Education, Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy (AHESTI)/ Vision 2030 as a guiding framework for strengthening universities' contribution to Africa's development. This was premised on the realisation that universities and their constituents have a significant role towards sustainable development of the AU Agenda 2063 and the Global SDG targets. In exploring the potential pathways for engagement, and realisation of this mandate, RUFORUM has undertaken studies, hosted ministerial round tables and dialogues. Emerging from these discussions were seven (7) fundamental opportunities that should drive the 'Call to Action' that has been put forward as the focus during the 7th Higher Education Week and Triennial Conference in Cotonou Benin. The seven are:

1. Putting **higher education at the service** of the development of Africa through adoption of strategies for evaluating the capacities and curricula that meet the needs of national developing aspirations, economic growth and employment markets
2. Investing in **home grown institutions** and interventions to provide local solutions with more appropriate application to local contexts

3. Harnessing **science solutions and agro-innovations for growth** by making significant investments in key agricultural productivity enhancing innovations including, harnessing competitive advantage.
4. Improving **labour productivity** through skilling and Science Technology Innovation solutions to meet local to global skills to create opportunities for increasing rural incomes and participation in the cash economy;
5. **Strengthening the capacities of smallholder producers and youth owned/led MSMEs** to generate effective demand for science, technology, and innovation in order to ensure sustainability of agrifood systems. Make agriculture attractive for the youth.
6. Forging inclusive **partnerships** that provide equitable opportunities for all through co-development, co-ownership and joint implementation of initiatives that positively drive the development process.
7. Promoting **knowledge sharing and mobility** across the continent and across the different levels of education, between universities & research institutions and university & private sector

NOTING that:

1. Africa is home to diverse agricultural value chains and countries have competitive advantage in the production of agricultural products.
2. Vibrant Agri-food-systems and institutions engaged in the agricultural value chain, from food production to food consumption, are key to delivery of the continent's development Agenda 2063, *The Africa We Want*, and to meet the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
3. The African Union Commission designated [Committee of 10 \(C10\)](#) with mandate to champion higher education on the continent agreed on an Action plan that has been in operation since 2018 and that RUFORUM is

among the institutions designated to operationalise the provisions of the [Action Plan](#).

Deriving from the issues raised above, the action points outlined below were considered by Technical Experts from the Countries of **Benin, DRC, Cameroon, Liberia, Malawi, Togo, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, and Uganda** represented at the meeting held on 6th December 2021 and presented to the Ministers Meeting held on 7th December 2021.

Focus Area	Commitment	Approach (Required Action)
<p>Strengthen linkages within and across the education and other sectors and align university education to the national development priorities.</p>	<p>Increase investment in the education value chain, across universities and TVETs to leverage secondary and primary education to upgrade the skill levels of young people entering the labour force and ensure that university education is relevant to the national development priorities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include differentiated higher education institutions (e.g. Technical universities) and strategies to increase Science Technology Engineering Agriculture and Mathematics (STEAM) enrollment at appropriate levels of education in the National Development Plans with an view to committed investment
	<p>Universities should collaboratively commit and work with other actors, in and outside Africa, to marshal the needed capacity to strengthen Africa’s food systems and to scale up best practices, including for, but not limited to: increased value addition, reduction in high post-harvest losses, agricultural practices that create decent green jobs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish platforms for regular consultation between Universities, responsible ministries and potential partners • Task universities to identify entry points and areas of intervention for value addition and decent green jobs
	<p>Pursue the requisite partnerships to further design and implement the continental initiatives recommended in the Cape Coast (Ghana) African Ministers Communique of 5th December 2019, i.e. Strengthening Africa’s Science Technology Innovation and Entrepreneurship Capacity for Agricultural and Economic Development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Countries develop targeted concept notes and proposals to take forward the chosen initiative

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	(SASTIE); and for Building Africa's Science, Technology and Innovation Capacity (BASTIC)	
	Task and provide incentives for universities to intensify their contribution to the national and continental development agenda by commercialising research outputs and engaging the private sector in support of agricultural sector development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and/or adopt existing policies for university- private sector engagement, within a framework of Intellectual property and private sector contribution towards funding of research • Mobilize resources and explore opportunities for setting up Incubation hubs and technology parks that link universities to the private sector and the market
	Support of Agenda 2063 vision of quality education and gender equality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through the AU-HRST agenda setting process, lobby the AU-C10 to commit a special fund to facilitate the training of female university members of staff and women in general to PhD level; • facilitate increased academic mobility schemes across the network, and intensify staff capacity development

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Partnerships for strengthening Agricultural Education at all levels and Food & Nutrition Security and sovereignty	Facilitate African universities to actively engage in the design and implementation of continental initiatives being negotiated with Development Partners:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support and mandate RUFORUM as a trusted representative and voice of African Universities to engage on behalf of member countries in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ the EU-AU Partnership on Food, Nutrition Security and Sustainable Agriculture ○ the AU-EU Research and Innovation Partnership on Climate Change, Green Circular Economy and Sustainable Energy; the ○ Global Research Alliance on Agriculture Greenhouse Gases (GRA);
	Leverage partnerships and mobilise resources to mitigate the effects of the COVID -19 pandemic on the HAE sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance knowledge sharing, communication and advocacy and the use of digital platforms • Create a continental repository for knowledge and technologies generated so as to enhance accessibility and scaling
High level policy commitment by African Ministers, Heads of State and Government to strengthen agrifood systems	Strengthen research and innovation; foresight capacity to direct how Africa leverages its production resources; generate relevant technologies, test and incubate, and transfer/commercialise; and, protect the Intellectual Property	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocate for investment and resource allocation (e.g. at the AUC including under the joint Africa-EU Strategy); • Engage private sector in supporting research and innovation at universities and making knowledge and technology solutions from the universities visible to the users.

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	Rights (IPR) of these technologies and the work of academia	
	Invest in youth programs that advance requisite technical skills, entrepreneurship and uptake of digital solutions to expand innovation and employability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Develop programs on Youth Employment, Entrepreneurship and Economic Support and approach Development Partners for support
	Foster global partnerships to develop more sustainable, inclusive and resilient food systems that consider the needs of smallholder farmers, the youth, women and persons with disabilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Adopt policies and priorities for Green Economy that include: (i) supporting environmentally friendly, resilient and adaptive agronomic practices in order to reduce the risks of poverty traps; (ii) testing and scaling up new adaptive, innovative and climate smart solutions in agriculture and food value chains for enhancing resilience and adaptation actions; (iii) exploring better and more sustainable production patterns, able to combine profitability and sustainability to reduce the risk of negative externalities; (iii) promoting investment in infrastructure and digital innovation along the value chains, to improve the sector's image, create jobs and attract more young people into the sectors; (iv) fostering more resilient and shorter food value chains that promote green and circular economy; (iv) creating enabling environments

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		<p>for greening food value chains, supporting small scale food producers and for green start-ups through financial and legislative support, and providing easier access to innovation and technology; and, (v) strengthening government capacity to better develop, monitor, and mainstream green development strategies in public policy.</p>
	<p>Work towards harnessing competitive advantage, improving markets and eliminating trade and non-trade barriers for agri -food products on the continent.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build knowledge capacities or technologies to identify and take advantage of new commercial opportunities; identify which market systems [...the network of buyers, sellers, service providers, rule-makers and other actors that come together to trade in a given product or service, or influence (are relevant for young entrepreneurs and make them understand how the relevant market systems are not working and why, engage these market actors to create/advocate for the conditions for youth, public and private market actors to drive change and find solutions.
<p>RUFORUM Charter</p>	<p>Endorse the RUFORUM Charter to engage RUFORUM as technical advisory agency in the design and implementation of Higher Agricultural</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RUFORUM and member Universities with the assistance of the Technical experts and Ministers in each of the Member Countries to

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	Education, Science, Technology and Innovation Initiatives; and, strengthening of TVET systems and educational value chains in Africa	fast track through the respective country procedures

Declaration:

We, the Ministers, gathered here in Cotonou, Benin on this day the 7th of December 2021, having deliberated on the above, do hereby:

1. **ENDORSE** the actions and hereby attach our signatures committing our respective countries to follow through the actions and report progress at our next, RUFORUM Annual General Meeting in Harare Zimbabwe in 2022 and the convening at the next RUFORUM Triennial meeting to be held in - Windhoek, Namibia in 2024.
2. **RECOMMEND** to the African Governments, the African Union Commission, the European Union and other stakeholders to mobilize support for the recommendations and table them for consideration at the sixth EU-AU summit on 17 and 18 February 2022 and for RUFORUM to represent universities Africa in the further development – or operationalisation- of joint agenda's endorsed during the Summit.
3. **RECOMMEND** that African Governments and EU commit long-term funding for agricultural education, science technology and innovation within the context of bolstering Science, Technology, Engineering, Agriculture and Mathematics (STEAM) at all levels in the education value chain.
4. **RECOMMEND** that African Governments increase Investment in youth programs that advance requisite technical skills, entrepreneurship, financial literacy, and uptake of digital solutions to expand innovation and employability.
5. **RECOMMEND** that African Universities commit to harmonize and align their research and training activities to meet the priorities of their national development agenda provided by their governments.
6. **RECOMMEND** that African Governments endorse the RUFORUM Charter and support and mandate RUFORUM as a trusted representative and voice of African Universities to actively engage in the design and implementation of continental initiatives being negotiated with Development Partners

Signed:

Name	Designation & Country	Signature
Hon. Pr. Eleonore Ladekan Yayi	Minister, Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Republic of Benin	<hr/>
Hon. Muhindo Nzangi Butondo	Minister, Ministry of Education, Democratic Republic of Congo	<hr/>
Hon. Prof. Dr. Khaled Abdel Ghaffar	Minister, Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Arab Republic of Egypt	<hr/>
Hon. John Ntim Fordjour	Deputy Minister, Ministry of Education, Republic of Ghana	<hr/>
Hon. Agnes Makonda Nyalonje	Minister, Ministry of Education, Republic of Malawi	<hr/>
Hon. Prof. Ansu Dao Sonii, Sr.	Minister, Ministry of Education, Republic of Liberia	<hr/>
Hon. Sarjoh Aziz-Kamara	Minister, Ministry of Technical and Higher Education, Republic of Sierra Leone	<hr/>
Hon. Ahmed Ahmednur Osman		<hr/>

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