



**When special and scientific minds meet
together for a common purpose the outcome
is a long lasting and permanent
establishment**



It was in 2003 when the like minds were mobilised to give birth to a child called “**The Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture**” (FORUM) from the Rockefeller Foundation Programme which had come to an end. The meeting brought together people from the academia, government, private sector, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and farmers to think outside the box and come up with an organisation which will develop higher education in Africa; link academic work with policy and private sector; harness the technologies and innovations developed in Africa universities; and create centres of excellence that will address Africa’s nutrition, hunger, poverty, health, youth dividends problems and create wealth; be a pivotal centre for leadership in the **Africa We Want, Agenda 2063** while contributing to **Agenda 2030 the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**.



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How did it start?

Universities in five countries namely Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Uganda, and Zimbabwe conceived the FORUM baby and changed its name to RUFORUM to accommodate the wider African Region needs for social capacity and human development. To date it is the fastest growing, a thought leader, that has demonstrated to retain 98% of its trained man power within Africa most of whom are in leadership positions; and close to attaining the 50% gender parity currently at above 40%. The RUFORUM train has to be asked to slow down its growth in order not to frustrate the network members and beneficiaries while balancing regional representation. The RUFORUM setup is very conducive because it gets its funding from the Universities through subscriptions; grants from donors; contributions of member universities to the staff mobility project; partnerships and cloud resource mobilisation. It is through the

RUFORUM lens that the thought piece paper is envisioning the future of Africa and the needed action. In order to put the thought piece into context the situation of African education need to be analysed.

Current Africa situation

Sub-Saharan Africa is home to more than **1 billion people, half of whom are under 25 years old by 2050**, is a diverse continent offering human and natural resources that have the potential to yield inclusive growth and eradicate poverty in the region; enabling Africans across the continent to live healthier and more prosperous lives. With the world's largest free trade area and a 1.2-billion-person market, the continent is creating an entirely new development path, harnessing the potential of its resources and people.

The region is composed of low, lower-middle, upper-middle, and high-income countries, 20 of which are fragile or conflict-affected. Africa also has 13 small States, characterized by a small population, limited human capital, and a confined land area.

The economic impact of the COVID-19 shock in Sub-Saharan Africa is severe but the countries in the region are however continuing to weather the storm. Economic activity in Sub-Saharan Africa is estimated to have contracted by 2% in 2020, reflecting a slower-than-expected spread of the virus and lower COVID-19-related mortality in the region; strong agricultural growth; and a faster-than-expected recovery in commodity prices. COVID-19 has however plunged the region into its first recession in over 25 years, with activity contracting by nearly 5% on a per capita basis. It has also exacerbated public debt vulnerabilities, which are high and continue to rise in many countries. Vulnerable groups, such as the poor, informal sector workers, women, and youth, suffered disproportionately from reduced opportunities and unequal access to social safety nets. The situation is likely to push up to **40 million people into extreme poverty**, erasing at least five years of progress in fighting poverty.

In Eastern and Southern Africa, the growth contraction in 2020 was estimated at -3%, 0.9 percentage point less than projected in October 2020, mostly driven by South Africa and Angola the two largest economies. **Growth in Western and Central Africa contracted by 1.1% in 2020, less than projected in October 2020** partly due to a less severe contraction in Nigeria. Real gross domestic product in the subregion is projected to grow by 2.1% in 2021 and 3.0% in 2022. Fragile countries in the region are expected to experience a strong decline in growth as COVID-19 (coronavirus) exacerbates the drivers of fragility.

Sub-Saharan Africa's growth is projected to rebound to 1.4% in Nigeria, 3% in South Africa, and 0.9% in Angola. Nigeria, South Africa, and Angola, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Botswana and Guinea, are expected to see robust growth in 2021 driven by a rebound in private consumption and investment as confidence strengthens and exports increase.

Faster progress on vaccine deployment along with credible policies to stimulate private investment would accelerate growth to 3.4% in 2021 and 4.5% in 2022 in Sub-Saharan Africa. Alleviating the debt burden will release resources for public investment in areas such as education, health, and infrastructure. Investments in human capital will help lower the risk of long-lasting damage from the pandemic, Reforms that address digital infrastructure gaps and make the digital economy more inclusive ensuring affordability and building skills for all segments of society are critical for improving connectivity, boosting digital technology adoption, and generating more and better jobs for men and women.

Despite the challenges the **top 10 Most Developed Countries in Africa - 2020 HDI** recorded the fastest growth and according to Global Data **Nigeria's** GDP amounted to US \$514 billion highest; Egypt's GDP was worth US \$394 billion; Mauritius - .804 (Very High); Seychelles - .796 (High); Algeria - .748 (High); Tunisia - .740 (High); Botswana - .735 (High); Libya - .724 (High); South Africa - .709 (High); Egypt - .707 (High); Gabon - .703 (High); Morocco - .686 (Medium). The real GDP in Africa is **projected to grow by 3.4 percent in 2021**, after contracting by 2.1 percent in 2020 and this is underpinned by a resumption of tourism, a rebound in commodity prices, and the rollback of pandemic-induced restrictions.

Why is Africa not developing?

Africa is a very unique continent because all the world continents can fit into the map of Africa; it is one of the few continents; where the mineral wealth still remains; gave birth to the 2021 richest billionaire and 60% of the population are young people below the age of 25 years yet it is home to some of the poorest people. The latest estimates show that the regional poverty rate decreased by 1.6% between 2015 and 2018 translating to **40% of the population living below the US\$1.90-a-day poverty line in 2018** and Sub-Saharan Africa accounting for two-thirds of the global extreme poor population. Poverty in Africa is caused by **corruption and poor governance**, poor land utilisation and land tenure system, civil wars and unending political conflicts, poor infrastructure, diseases and poor health facilities, the World Bank and IMF policies, among others. But among the many causes of global poverty, one factor stands out: education. It should however be noted that “Not every person **without an education is living in extreme poverty**”.

What needs to be done!!!!!!!!!!!!!!?

Investments in human capital development is key for Africa's development; harnessing youth dividend; science, innovation and technology are critical solutions. Africa has the **highest rates of educational exclusion** in the world. Over one-fifth of children between the ages of 6 and 11; and one-third between the ages of 12 and 14 are out of school. Almost 60% of children in sub-Saharan Africa between the ages of 15 and 17 are not in school. **Africa is in the midst of an education crisis because today**, roughly half of the world's young people, including some 400-million girls are not being educated to succeed in the workplace of the future and children in extreme poverty lack education.

Challenges

Africa spends less than 0.5% of its combined GDP on research, as a result, accounts for less than 1% of the world's research output, and a meagre 0.28% of citations (the Trust Africa/Mail & Guardian report again). According to UNESCO statistics, [the current tertiary enrolment rate across Africa stands at just over 12%](#) which is below the global average of 32% with a variation. In Egypt, tertiary enrolment stands at 33%; South Africa it is 20%, Ghana and Nigeria 14%, while Tanzania is only 4% and in Niger 2%. Across the continent, [total enrolment grew by around 170% between 1999 and 2002](#), according to ICEF Monitor (referencing a Trust Africa/Mail & Guardian publication). The rise from 3.53 million students in 1999 to 9.54 million in 2012 helped the African Higher Education Summit, in March 2015 to double and set the target at 50% enrolment by 2063.

Improved access at primary and secondary level; upper-secondary enrolment stood at close to 40% in 2013, a massive rise from 27% in 1999, while primary enrolment has risen from 83% to 100% due to growth. Over 380,376 African students, accounting for 10% of all students study abroad according to the 2013 French Governmental Report especially from better off families; 29.2% chose to study in France and South Africa at 28.8%. In South Africa, it has been suggested that only one in four students who qualify for university would be able to get a place at a university while [in Nigeria, it is only one in five applicants](#), regardless of being Africa's two richest countries.

Quantitative improvements in higher education are not matched by quality

Findings from Inter-University Council for East Africa regulatory body in 2014 revealed that across Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda, [over 50% of graduates were ill-equipped for the workplace](#). In Sub-Saharan Africa as a whole, there are around 50% more students per lecturer than the global average. Due to space constrain and increased demand private institutions have cropped up and [66 PhDs awarded between 2011 and 2013 by Kampala International University were declared invalid](#) by authorities. Yet the country had only 1,000 doctorates degree holders. [A British Council report shows that a shocking 40% of South African students dropped out in the first year of higher education](#) despite being a highly developed and wealthy nation in the continent. The more focus on higher education on teaching than research, with the humanities and social sciences taking precedence over more technical and research-based subjects leaves Africa susceptible to imbalance and consequently skills gap that often results in the importation of skilled workers from overseas.

[The World Bank's Claudia Costin called for greater public and private investment at the African Higher Education summit in April](#) because the education investment yields higher than anywhere in the world with returns at 21% in Africa's ROI which is crucial. The World Bank will also be contributing to 20% investment around \$600m on top of the US\$1 billion to higher education to facilitate the development of programmes which will produce a better graduate for the job market. The rapidly growing IT sector is stepping in to address potential

shortages in skills by [running courses in tandem with universities](#). In North Africa, Tripoli University has partnered with the Governmental [Tripoli Business Incubator Centre](#) to attract investment from business to encourage students and graduates to engage in entrepreneurial activities, widen participants' skillsets and provide employment opportunities.

Role of RUFORUM

The above scenario stimulated the founding of RUFORUM, a network of 147 universities from 38 countries of Africa. Its aim is to share expertise, experiences, technologies, innovations, create centres of excellence, grow and solve Africa's problems.

- RUFORUM catalyses investment in Higher Education for human capital development in Africa
- Promotes international linkages and partnerships for excellence in Higher Education
- Strengthens collaboration and mutual learning to spur innovation and industrialisation for economic transformation in Africa
- Promotes youth employment and skills acquisition for development and
- Strengthen University-Private sector business linkages

Vision 2030 Strategy

The RUFORUM Vision 2030 Strategy seeks to harness the discovery, engagement and learning of 'vibrant, transformative universities to catalyse sustainable, inclusive agricultural development to feed and create prosperity for Africa'. The predominant attribute of a vibrant university is agility, meaning the ability to quickly respond to unexpected changes, rapid advancements or sudden shifts in the circumstances taking place in the market. The Operation Plan is built around the three strategic objectives of RUFORUM which are:

- ✓ Building synergy from networks of specialisation to develop quality human resources and capacity required to intensify and increase Africa's agricultural productivity and competitiveness;
- ✓ Ensuring the products, processes and knowledge developed through university research directly respond to and are used by value chain actors in the agri-food system to catalyse transformation; and,
- ✓ Marshalling resources and strategically allocating them to enable African universities to transform into viable institutional entities responsive to national aspirations and conditions through intensive knowledge-sharing and collective action.

Linkages and contribution to major continental and global

Reforming and transforming higher education systems in Africa to energize and unlock the minds for brighter economic prospects is currently at the core of strategies for increasing Africa's competitiveness while ensuring sustainable, inclusive systems. This requires the provision of the needed expertise in science and technology, including intermediate and higher level academic, vocational and technical skills. The RUFORUM Operational Plan 2018

- 2022 (OP) is based on a conceptual hierarchy of objectives that identifies the targets for ensuring that Vision 2030 is able to achieve its long-term objective of establishing “vibrant, transformative universities to catalyse sustainable, inclusive agricultural development to feed and create prosperity for Africa”. These universities will work closely along commodity and education value chains, strengthening technical and vocational skills that will foster an innovation system that promotes adoption and adaptation to local environments. These initiatives underpin Africa harnessing its youth dividend, its women, and abundant natural resources to improve productivity, incomes and create jobs.

A key thrust of RUFORUM operations is to mobilize resources for continental initiatives that support human capital development that increase Africa’s capability in research, innovation and entrepreneurship for:

- The sustainable use of the continent’s rich plant and animal genetic diversity for increasing productivity especially of small holder farming systems in a changing climate while reducing the negative impact on the natural resource base;
- Increased value addition, reduce high post-harvest losses, and preserve nutrient content of indigenous African foods - crops, livestock, fish and promote the nutritional value and health benefits for addressing poverty and malnutrition;
- Supporting governments, universities and industries to comply with international rules e.g., Intellectual Property Rights and compliance with biosafety protocols and food safety, sanitary and phytosanitary requirements for increasing market access for smallholders and SMES to trade in national, regional and international markets and ensure that food produced and sold locally is safe for domestic consumption;
- Leveraging the fourth industrial revolution technology and advances in science including artificial intelligence, digitalization and genomics for increasing effectiveness of tertiary education, research and innovation as well as efficiency in production, marketing and distribution of fresh and processed foods within and across borders such that Africa gains traction in the wider global food systems.

Another thrust is to ensure that the results of investments in university education, training, research, innovation, and outreach programmes in particular the highly skilled alumni and technologies generated, are integrated and used to stimulate local and continental wide economic recovery and socio-economic development.

It is envisaged that Faculty and students will be actively engaged in shaping and leading food systems transformation for the benefit of Africans and the world. As such amongst RUFORUM’s United Nations Food System Summit 2021 Game Changers is that African universities will adopt a holistic, multi-disciplinary, multi-stakeholder approach, to ensure that indigenous knowledge and modern science and technologies are integrated into university teaching, research and innovation agenda to take advantage of opportunities for youth to see the value and prospects in agriculture to overcome challenges in Africa’s food systems.

The Future

Going through the write-up everyone would agree that the establishment of RUFORUM is one of the best thing that has happened in Africa because the cost of training students in Africa is much lower. A scholarship that would cater for training one student abroad will cover training five students in Africa. Moreover, the students are empowered to lead and transform their countries, and communities. Further RUFORUM has a convening power in resource mobilisation, knowledge- and skill-sharing and experiences through the various structured conferences, meetings and management setups.

RUFORUM network member universities must remain relevant and have to address the existing gaps and bring out a new product which all the other academia institutions or networks do not provide. In this regard:

The African Union declared in 2016 the need to burnish the hand hoe to the museum. In order to demonstrate its capabilities RUFORUM needs to embark on an Africa-wide undertaking to produce a replacement of a hand hoe using its member universities. Many of the RUFORUM network members have engineering departments and they need to join hands and produce farm machinery for smallholder farmers that will be cost effective and affordable to a farmer if African agriculture is to increase food productivity and provide nutritious foods on the global market and tables.

The lead RUFORUM took as an implementer of the Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa (STISA-2024) needs to be consolidated with targeted scientific study, which will implement the pillar. Waiting for AU Agenda 2063 to put in place mechanisms to implement it will be a non-starter and the relevance of RUFORUM may not be seen.

Importantly, RUFORUM needs to package and showcase the technologies it has produced from its inception to its conclusion (cradle to grave). If they have been disseminated let them demonstrate the benefits to farmers, countries and Africa in general. Further, the technologies and innovations that can be packaged for sale or marketing need to enter the Africa free trade Market and allow both the innovators, replicators and RUFORUM as a convener gain from them. As such, the emphasis on the value chain, business incubation and establishment should be a key focus for RUFORUM's success especially at transforming beneficiaries lives and livelihoods.

Finally, the Knowledge management and packaging KHUB of RUFORUM needs to be strengthened for the good of wider Africa. The knowledge should assist policy makers with linking knowledge to productivity. The Knowledge should be package to transforms lives; it should assist to harness young people's energy and ensure that it gives them profit or the money they need. In this regard, RUFORUM needs to be a thought leader and should work with the member universities to prepare curricula which empower young people to be more



productive and self-reliant. To achieve the above, RUFORUM should be the epicenter for E-learning for Africa. The pilots in E-learning with funding from the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa (BADEA) should assist the network members to share knowledge, expertise, skills and the relevant platforms to reach many students and address the challenges of limited infrastructures. Also RUFORUM should ensure that its future proposals and products address issues of climate change and related green gas emissions, and promote climate smart agriculture and climate change resilient agriculture in order to walk the talk.

Moving forward linkage to policy will be key. RUFORUM needs to continue to involve Heads of State and Governments as Champions of Higher Education in Africa, use the power of convening, and liaise with AU to ensure that the momentum does not fade off. The unique setup of RUFORUM with the International Advisory Panel, the Board of Trustees, the Board Executive and its various committees and the 147 network members from 38 countries makes it a force to champion the cause of Higher Education in the continent.

About the Author:

Dr. Mary Shawa is the Honorary President of Chanaso Chifundo Malawi. She is a former Principal Secretary in the Government of Malawi. Previously, she served as a Secretary in the Ministries of Health, and the Office of the President and Cabinet for Nutrition, HIV and AIDS, and the Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare, and Transport and Public Works. She has represented Malawi at various fora as a delegate, leader of delegation, resource person, facilitator and presenter. She has been instrumental in negotiating for the United Nation Sustainable Development Goals and African Union Agenda 2063 "The Africa We Want". She is a Member of the RUFORUM Board Executive and Chairs the RUFORUM Finance and Administration Committee.

This is our Fourteenth issue in a series of articles we are releasing as part of the RUFORUM Seventh Africa Higher Education Week and RUFORUM Triennial Conference Digests. More information about the conference is available at <https://www.ruforum.org/Triennial2021/>. Join the Conversation on Social Media using our Official hashtag #AfricaHEWeek2021.

