

The Seventh African Higher Education Week and RUFORUM Triennial Conference 2021

Theme: Enhancing the Knowledge Economy in Africa through Universities - Private Sector Partnership

Venue: Centre International de Conférences et Palais des Congres de Cotonou, Benin

Date: 7th December 2021

Time: 9:00 to 14:00 West Africa Standard Time (GMT+1)

Link: <https://bit.ly/2ZzMiwc>

Contact: Prof Adipala Ekwamu (e.adipala@ruforum.org)

Background

The Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture ([RUFORUM](#)), a Network of 129 Universities in 38 African countries mobilises its member universities' students and researchers to respond to smallholder demands and needs through relevant research, innovation and outreach to strengthening inclusive, sustainable innovation in the agri-food value chain. Strong linkages have been formed with farmers, communities and small rural entrepreneurs. Emerging as a weak link in RUFORUM's work with African universities yet strategic for enhancing productivity and profitability of Africa's food system and consequently economic development is the linkage with private sector¹. In countries across the world that have developed rapidly, there has been strong collaboration between the private sector, government and the universities, the partnership acting as a fulcrum for knowledge and product innovation. This is particularly evident in South Korea where there has been strong investment in higher education and research with a focus on building a strong knowledge economy centred on multi-stakeholder platforms hosted at universities. The partnership offers a great opportunity for researchers to innovate knowledge and products to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of goods production and service delivery for private sector, improving incomes and purchasing power for goods and services.

Africa has the resources to trigger massive agricultural and agribusiness growth and to feed itself and the world. New technologies provide the opportunities to take the innovations to scale and to reach, aggregate and serve small, remote producers and consumers. But Africa needs to invest much more in building the skills and locally relevant knowledge and innovation to take advantage of its significant natural and human capital. For this to be effective, it is important that both the private sector and government build capacity by engaging with their own universities instead of relying on knowledge and experts from outside Africa. Where knowledge is transferred, it needs to be tested and adapted to local environmental and social conditions. This should be carried out in our

¹ Private sector sponsorship of research by universities is evident, mainly for the large-scale agricultural sector, in South Africa and this can inform the way forward.



universities working directly with other stakeholders. The universities need to focus much more on ensuring that their research and graduates respond to society needs, they are entrepreneurial and are flexible and adaptable to changing situations and potential. The RUFORUM network has shown significant impact on the ground with rural communities and has developed a strong network at local, national and regional levels.

The commercial and financial sectors globally have recognised the strong role that they have to play in forging an environmentally sustainable and inclusive society that is important for their own sustainability. Environmental, Social and Governance goals, as they relate to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, are now an important component of their corporate strategy. A collaborative partnership with universities could help to achieve these goals by allowing for action across countries and by directly impacting on:

- 1) Strengthening Agri-food systems by increasing agricultural productivity, commercialisation and food security throughout Africa,
- 2) Enhancing joint Agricultural research that works with smallholder farmers and entrepreneurs for far reaching Social Impact and Environmental Sustainability and locally adapted to the needs of Africa,
- 3) Strengthening African universities and research institutions to raise human capital, increase African knowledge and directly impact rural communities and African economies,
- 4) Supporting Agricultural Entrepreneurship and SMMEs in multiple countries.

RUFORUM has the continental reach, academic rigor and established relationships with Governmental and other policy makers to conduct continuous agricultural enhancing research throughout Africa. A liaison with corporate entities which may require specific information and research, within the African Agricultural ecosystem, can lead to mutually beneficial joint research initiatives. RUFORUM's extensive development and research initiatives throughout the African continent continuously led to innovative products, operational systems as well as other outcomes. These have the potential to be monetized for the benefit of entrepreneurs and RUFORUM. A partnership between Universities and the Private Sector can assist potential investors and business developers to nurture these opportunities from incubation to strategic upscaling with the aim to create financially sustainable enterprises.

Developing a working mechanism providing win-win outputs and outcomes for the private sector and universities is important. The RUFORUM Secretariat has therefore organised an academia-private sector dialogue to explore opportunities and mechanisms for collaboration. The aim of the dialogue is to identify mutually beneficial initiatives that that enable private sector partners to achieve 'on the ground' impact, enhancing not only an organization's profitability and sustainability footprint, but also their profile as a responsible corporate citizen. Universities through their students and staff would benefit from feedback on their curricula, appropriate research agenda and closer interaction with private companies for internships and job opportunities and research consultancies.

Meeting Objectives and Approach

This meeting provides the opportunity to initiate dialogue for the universities to understand the needs of the private sector, how they can meet these needs, and integrate them into their day-to-day work. It will also provide the private sector, the opportunity to appreciate the capacities available at the universities and how they can take advantage of these capacities to increase profits, sustainability and cooperate social responsibility.

CO-ORGANISERS:



Equally this platform allows the RUFORUM network to showcase what it can offer to assist in deepening and strengthening the private sector reach at community level. The outcome expected is to show, how together, an improved knowledge economy can generate value for the corporate sector while at the same time enhancing the RUFORUM universities' commitment to serve the needs of the smallholder sector, national development goals and the African Agenda 2063.

Draft Programme:

Facilitator:

Rapporteurs: Dr. Anthony Egeru and Mr. Emmanuel Okalany

Time	Agenda item	Proposed speaker
Session I: Strengthening Links with the Private Sector		
Session Chair: Director Higher Education, Ministry of Education and Scientific Research, Benin		
9:00 – 9:10	Welcome Remarks	Dr. Florence Nakayiwa, DES, PMM
9:10 – 9:30	Key Note Speech: The Future for Africa and how collaboration with universities could trigger an engine for sustainable, inclusive growth	Sam Parker, Director of the Shell Foundation
9:30 – 9:50	University Respondents: How can universities work with the corporate sector and what the universities need and can offer	Prof Thandi Ngwebi, Deputy Vice Chancellor for Research, Innovation and Internationalisation, Nelson Mandela University, South Africa Prof. Kiama, Vice Chancellor, University of Nairobi
9.50 – 10:05	Open Discussion	Facilitator
10:05 -10:25	Health Break	FOR the Zoom participants show RUFORUM film
Session II:		
Session Facilitator: Christiaan		
10:25 – 12:25	Panel Speakers: 1. What does the private sector need from universities to let them pilot and scale innovations for rural communities' transformation	Yolanda Cuba; Vice President, MTN East and Southern Africa



	2. Benin based or other African large corporate – or from France: Research and innovation lessons that universities can learn from private sector	
	3. The importance of sustainability in Corporate Strategy and the potential role of universities	Alexey Rostapshov, Head of John Deere Labs and Sustainability Jill Kolling, Vice President Global Sustainability at Cargill
	4. Strengthening entrepreneurship through partnership with universities and commodity associations: Potential for multi-stakeholder innovation hubs at universities	Christo van der Rheede Exec Director, AgriSA Omri van Zyl, the CEO AgriSA Enterprises
	5. Partnering with the private sector for digital learning and support to innovation hubs	Brett Robertson HealthMed Training Solutions
12:25 – 12:45	Perspectives from Europe 1. Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) 2. AgriPreneurship Alliance 3. DESIRA-LIFT team	Facilitator
12:45 – 13:00	Summary and follow-up actions	Facilitator
13:00 – 14:00	LUNCH	

