



## The Seventh African Higher Education Week and RUFORUM Triennial Conference 2021

Proposal development for academic purposes and Responding to calls for grant proposals

**Virtual: 8<sup>th</sup> November – 12<sup>th</sup> November, 2021**

**Face to Face: 28<sup>th</sup> November – 2<sup>nd</sup> December, 2021, Cotonou, Benin**

**Registration Link: <https://bit.ly/3ATTYGZ>**

### Concept Note

**Title** Virtual training course for Early-Career Scientists (PhDs and Postdocs on Proposal development for academic purposes and Responding to calls for grant proposals

**Background** The Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) is a network of 129 universities in 38 African countries spanning the African continent. RUFORUM was established to promote the integration of member universities into Africa's development processes, particularly within the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP); provide a platform for networking, resource mobilization and advocacy to transform universities for relevance towards inclusive sustainable development; and to rationalize resource use and enhance economies of scale and scope. The RUFORUM Network is mandated to strengthen the quality and relevance of postgraduate training and research in African universities. Especially in agriculture, science, technology, and innovation—through activities designed to improve the capacity of African universities and research centres to generate knowledge relevant to Africa's development challenges.

The Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) in partnership with RUFORUM member universities in Benin has organised a 10 day training on proposal development for early career scientists.

**Context of the training course** Being in an early stage of career, it is time to explore the possibilities of applying the skills acquired through training and the first research projects undertaken. Whereas a classical career in research would encompass deepening in a field of specialisation — often the one of the PhD training or the one of the first employer — in order to become a subject-matter specialist, the correlation with other specialisations, other domains and current or future societal needs is often neglected or suppressed in a twilight zone. Apart from curiosity-driven research, research can also be

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founded on demands from a wide and varied spectrum of stakeholders across society.

Today's demands for scientific and technological solutions are piling up, ranging from understanding the effects of climate changes and knowing how to control or adapt to these changes, exploring ways to maximise yields with as little (in)organic inputs as possible, diversifying agricultural produces for economic and health reasons, to genetic engineering and automation of processes along agricultural value chains. Solutions requiring scientific support are put on the political agenda because of their emergency nature at various levels in society or of concerns about the planetary health. The third decade of this century is characterised by a hunt on evidence-based solutions in a high gear with the accompanying request for quick delivery.

A 21<sup>st</sup> century researcher must be equipped with more skills than those received during training at tertiary education institutes. Responding adequately to societal needs means upgrading of the specialisation glasses to a 360° multi-layered lens with zooming in/out features. But though the demand for science-based solutions is high, the availability of research funds to identify solutions is limited and fragmented, resulting in tough competition among scientists. To survive in this research desert require adaptive skills, networking and systems thinking. Not surprisingly, the world is talking nowadays in terms of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), food systems and agricultural transformation processes. Hence, it is time to adapt to the evolving policy environment.

### **Aims and objectives of the training course**

The overall aim of the training course for Early-Career Scientists (PhDs and Postdocs) is to enhance their skills in developing project proposals for academic purposes and responding to calls for grant proposals issued by national or international donors. The training will present an opportunity for participants to leave their comfort zone, zooming in and out on their area of expertise, exchange ideas with peers from various disciplines and team up to produce proposal deliverables within a condensed timeframe.

### **Approach and methodology**

The 5-day virtual training will be a facilitator-led meeting and in order to allow for active engagement, the facilitator will use plenary sessions, group work (in- and outside training hours) and peer review. The use of visual aids including PowerPoint presentations and videos will enable to revisit the training materials.

It is expected that all invited participants are willing to fully engage in the 5-day virtual training course which is subdivided into the following sessions:

- The first day will be used to introduce the participants and the concept of project cycle management, research cycle management and society-wide thinking, followed by the analysis of an ongoing Call for research proposals (Fund for Innovation and Development, FID). Depending on the number of participants,

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groups will be identified to form project-proposal-partnerships (PPPs) around agreed research themes.

- The second day, the analytical tools 'Situation analysis', 'Needs assessment' and 'Stakeholder analysis' will be introduced, after which the PPPs will apply these tools on their research project. The day will be completed with a peer review session on the produced deliverables of a selected number of PPPs.
- The third day, the analytical tool 'Problem analysis' will be introduced, after which the PPPs will apply this tool on their research project. The day will be completed with a peer review session on the produced deliverables of a selected number of PPPs. As homework, the PPPs will determine the problems to be tackled in their research project.
- The fourth day, the research problems and related questions of a selected number of PPPs will be formulated and plenary discussed. Hereafter, the concept of the 'Logical Framework' will be introduced, after which the PPPs will apply this design tool on their research project. As homework, the PPPs will complete the Logical Framework of their research project.
- The fifth day will commence with a peer review session on the produced Logical Frameworks of a selected number of PPPs. Hereafter, the participants will be challenged to discuss on common project management language and the role they play as a project member within the project, and on sustainability, risk analysis and time management. At the end of the day, a roadmap will be made whereby the PPPs will complete the Logical Framework of their research project, as well as the full application form within an agreed time frame. Instructions to complete the application form will be provided too.

After the training course, the PPPs will elaborate on the full proposal and drafts of the full proposals will be sent to RUFORUM and the trainer for comments. Hereafter the proposers will submit their proposals to FID.

For participants from Benin, there will be an opportunity to finalise their project proposals and hold peer review sessions on proposal drafts during the 5 days at RUFORUM's triennial conference in Cotonou, Benin.

The exchange of experiences and ideas, and the various interactions will be very useful for the improvement of understanding the various angles of a research project from the point of view of a donor, a researcher and beneficiaries in the sphere of societal relevance with the ultimate goal to satisfy societal needs and to contribute to inclusive and sustainable development.

## Outputs/ outcomes

The training course will deliver the following outputs and outcomes:

1. An improved understanding of donor needs and requirements.

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2. An improved understanding of embedding research ideas in a cross-disciplinary environment.
3. A different view on result-oriented research planning.

The participants will be experimenting their newly acquired drafting skills. Some of them will submit their proposals in an attempt to acquire a grant in order for the implementation of a research project.

**Venue and participants**

Early-Career Scientists (PhDs and Postdocs) from African Universities and Research Institutions are especially invited to participate.

**Training course organiser and contact**

The organiser is Gerard den Ouden, independent consultant, research programme manager and trainer in proposal development, strategic planning, project management and systems thinking.  
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