



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

**Side Event 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: 7<sup>th</sup> 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](mailto:e.adipala@ruforum.org))**

### Private Sector Partnership Discussion

The primary objective of this side event is to strengthen understanding of the opportunities for collaboration between universities and the corporate sector. RUFORUM, a network of universities with a focus on agriculture, rural development and the environment, has a strong track record of programmes that link smallholder farmers, rural entrepreneurs and service agencies through post-graduate student research and training. RUFORUM is also engaged in supporting innovation hubs aimed especially at empowering new and emerging rural micro enterprises. Universities need to better understand how they can collaborate and assist the corporate sector to deliver on their ESGs – environment, social and governance corporate goals. Addressing and mitigating climate change and biodiversity loss, reducing poverty and improving equity, and increasing transparency are core to the future of Africa. See the background provided below the programme for more depth on the importance of strengthening African universities and partnerships.

The first Session of the morning is aimed at providing universities with a better understanding of their potential to support corporate ESGs while at the same time building capacity, increasing knowledge and stimulating rural development. The second Session looks in particular at what key representatives of a range of private sector agencies would find most useful when collaborating with universities and addressing sustainability. The third Session is focused specifically on strengthening SMMEs and supporting ESGs through multi-stakeholder platforms of engagement established and facilitated by RUFORUM universities to scale out innovations and support small business through their learning, research and innovation approaches.

At the end of the Session some proposed actions will be suggested in how best to take forward a process that will strengthen private sector -university collaboration.

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## Draft Programme

**Facilitator: Christiaan Vorster**

**Rapporteurs: Dr. Anthony Egeru and Mr. Emmanuel Okalany**

Time	Agenda item	Proposed speaker
<b>Session I: Understanding the Private Sector's emerging ESG landscape and the role of universities</b>		
<b>Session Chair: Director Higher Education, Ministry of Education and Scientific Research, Benin</b>		
9:00 – 9:10	Welcome Remarks	Dr. Florence Nakayiwa, DES, PMM
9:10 – 9:30 (20 mins)	<b>Key Note Speech:</b> A Corporate Perspective – Incorporating ESG into corporate strategy as a response to stakeholder and sustainability reporting requirements	Loshni Naidoo, Project Director, Sustainability and Integrating Thinking, South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (Virtual)
9:30 – 9:40 (10 mins)	<b>University response:</b> How universities engage with the corporate sector and what RUFORUM network universities can offer	Prof. Paul Katamba, Vice Chancellor Bugema University
<b>Session II A: Exploring opportunities and mechanisms for collaboration between universities and the Private Sector, with emphasis on supporting sustainability and engaging with universities to deliver on Corporate ESG (support capacity building, rural linkages and scaling out rural innovation across Africa, providing ESG accounting using the various well-established RUFORUM instruments)</b>		
<b>Session Facilitator: Christiaan Vorster</b>		
9:40 – 10:30 (10 each)	<b>Panel Speakers:</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Potential Role of Universities in collaboration with the Private Sector to achieve their Corporate Strategies especially the ESG goals</li> <li>What does the private sector need from universities to let them research, pilot and scale innovations in Africa?</li> <li>Potential models for strengthening collaboration between universities and private sector, specifically in</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Prof Frans Swanepoel, University of Pretoria (in person)</i></li> <li><i>Dr. Franck-Philippe N'Dia, Nestlé Research &amp; Development (Virtual)</i></li> <li><i>Dr. Andrew Ward, Director of Stewardship, CropLife International (virtual)</i></li> <li><i>Dr. Sarah Elaine Lewis, Senior Director for Innovation at The Sustainability Consortium (Video message)</i></li> <li><i>Mr. Hassan Baloui, Head of Networks and Alliances, UM6P, Morocco (Physical)</i></li> </ol>

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	agriculture for improved sustainability	
10:30 – 11:00 (20 Min)	Plenary discussion	Christiaan Vorster
11:00 – 11:20	Health break/ RUFORUM Video	RUFORUM Secretariat

**Session II B:** Exploring opportunities and mechanisms for collaboration between RUFORUM and the Private Sector with a special focus on research, supporting SMMEs and taking innovations to scale in ways that are sustainable and support the SDGs

**Session Moderator:** Mr. Emmanuel Okalany

**Rapporteur:** Mr. Yamungu Alongo Boniface

10:20 – 12:20 (10 mins each)	<b>Panel Speakers:</b> 1. Strengthening entrepreneurship through partnership with universities and commodity associations: Potential for multi-stakeholder agri innovation hubs at universities 2. What does the private sector need from universities to let them research, pilot and scale innovations in Africa? 3. Potential models for strengthening collaboration, specifically in agriculture for sustainable rural innovation and support to SMMEs	1) Mr. Omri van Zyl – AgriSA (Physical) 2) Ms. Isolina Boto, Head of Networks and Alliances at COLEACP (virtual) 3) Brett Robertson Health med Training Solutions, UK (virtual) 4) Mrs Marlène Théodora Falone FANOVI, Administrative assistant, representative of APSONIC AGBON Machinery company (Physically)
12:20 – 12:50	Plenary Discussion	Christiaan Vorster
12:50 – 13:00	Summary and follow-up actions	Christiaan Vorster
13:00 – 14:00	LUNCH	

## Background Information

The Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture ([RUFORUM](http://RUFORUM.org)), a Network of 129 Universities in 38 African countries, mobilises its member universities and their students and researchers to respond to smallholder demands and needs. This is achieved through relevant research, innovation and outreach that

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strengthen inclusive, sustainable innovation in the agri-food value chain. Strong linkages have been formed with farmers, communities and small rural entrepreneurs<sup>1</sup>. Emerging as a weak link in RUFORUM's work with African universities is the linkage with the corporate sector<sup>2</sup>. In countries across the world that have developed rapidly, there has been strong collaboration between the private sector, government and the universities; the partnerships acting as a fulcrum for knowledge and product innovation. This is particularly evident in South Korea with government enabling multi-stakeholder platforms hosted at universities to build a strong knowledge economy. Such partnerships are mutually beneficial and reinforce sustainable development.

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 innovations to scale in ways that serve small, remote producers and consumers. But Africa needs to invest much more in building the skills, and the 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 universities working directly with other stakeholders. At the same time the universities need to focus much more on ensuring that their research and graduates respond to society needs; that 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 convening platform and network at local, national and regional levels.

The commercial and financial sectors globally now recognise the strong role that they have to play in forging an environmentally sustainable and inclusive society which is important for their own success. Environmental, Social and Governance goals, as they relate to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, are now an important component of corporate strategy. This is a new area for much of Africa. RUFORUM has been actively promoting entrepreneurship and rural innovation hubs to support small businesses. This is an area of focus that RUFORUM would like to intensify and expand going forward. The focus of this Side Event is to promote collaborative research with the private sector at all scales, support for capacity building, sustainability and achieving corporate ESG goals, and strengthening relationships between universities and business.

A collaborative partnership between the private sector and African universities will:

- 1) Strengthen agri-food systems by increasing agricultural productivity, commercialisation and food security throughout Africa
- 2) Enhance joint agricultural research that works with smallholder farmers and entrepreneurs for far reaching social impact and environmental sustainability that is locally adapted to the needs of Africa
- 3) Reinforce African universities and research institutions capacity to raise human capital, increase local knowledge and directly impact rural communities and African economies
- 4) Support agricultural entrepreneurship and SMMEs in multiple countries

<sup>1</sup> See as example the [TAGDev](#) programme or other films on the RUFORUM [Impact Platform](#)

<sup>2</sup> Private sector sponsorship of research by universities is evident, mainly for the large-scale agricultural sector e.g. in South Africa and also in Morocco.

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- 5) Explore mechanisms to see how such partnerships can deliver on corporate ESG goals and allow the network to provide a reporting metrics service.

RUFORUM has the continental reach, academic rigor and established relationships with governments and other stakeholders to facilitate innovation. Partnerships with corporate entities that require specific information or research within the African Agricultural ecosystem, can lead to mutually beneficial joint initiatives. RUFORUM's extensive network has research results that 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 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 this academia-private sector dialogue to explore opportunities and mechanisms for collaboration. The aim of the dialogue is to inform universities of some of the potential areas of collaboration so that they better understand how to better identify and frame mutually beneficial initiatives. These would enable the RUFORUM member universities to strengthen their core mandate of capacity building, research, and partnering to stimulate rural innovation and the 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.

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