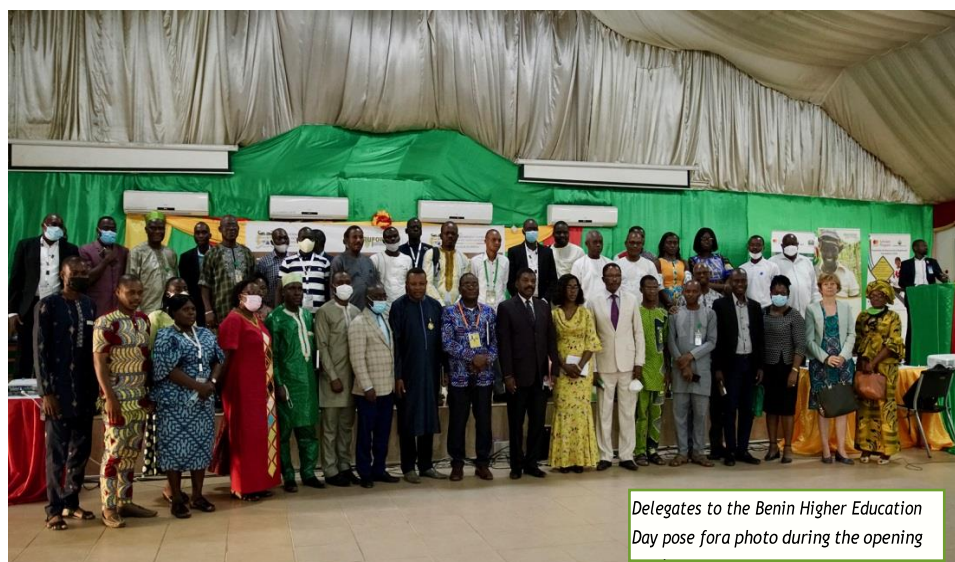




Conference Bulletin

The 7th African Higher Education Week and RUFORUM Triennial Conference 2021 in Cotonou, Benin

Benin Hosts African Higher Education Week.....



Delegates to the Benin Higher Education Week pose for a photo during the opening

...as Ministers Challenge Universities to Change Research Approach

African ministers for Education, Science and Technology want the continent's academia to change their model and approach to research, if they want to be guaranteed enhanced State funding. They want the researchers to change and re-design their research models and relook at research objectives, to demonstrate to policy-makers and justify why more budgetary allocations should be made to support their work. Research work in many countries was unlikely to catch the attention of bureaucrats so long as it was not geared towards addressing pressing national challenges, and when it was not designed to achieve a tangible objective or goal. In what appeared to be a determined effort in defence of governments over persistent calls for them to meet their obligations and ensure at least 1% of the GDP went to funding Re-

search and Development (R&D) particularly in Science Technology and Innovation (ST&I), ministers from Uganda, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Ghana, Liberia, Benin, Sierra Leone, Mozambique, Cameroun and DR Congo, faulted researchers for doing research to produce knowledge for "the sake of it", without clear benefits for the larger society. Speaking during the Seventh African Higher Education Week and RUFORUM Triennial Conference 2021 in Cotonou Benin, the leaders were of the opinion that impact-focused research work would compel governments to avail funding, as it would help the State make meaningful development strides.

"We need to challenge our academia to change their research models and start doing research that ends in a product out there in the market,

>>>> Continues to Page 2

In Brief.....

Numbers soar....
despite OMICRON Variant of
Covid-19



Page 9

Publish or perish.....
universities warned



Page 11

RUFORUM Picks Prof Nkenji as
its New Board Chair



Page 3

African Development Bank
Outlines Plans for Higher Edu-
cation



Page 10



Benin Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research Prof Eleonore Ladekan Yayi in the middle with former Mauritius President Prof Ameenah Gulib-Fakim.

Ministers challenge University dons

>>>> From Page 1

or a business start-up. That is what happens in many countries that have relied on knowledge production to achieve development," declared Dr Monica Musenero, Uganda's minister for Science Technology and Innovation.

Universities she said had a lot of prototypes produced over the years that had not been developed into products for commercialisation, mainly because the model used by researchers was not meant to produce an innovation or product destined for the market.

The time had come for academicians to move from the era of "publish or perish" to a new one of "produce or perish". Researchers must take the next step to develop and patent their innovations and grow them into products.

Africa, she said, was facing the 'paradox' of doing research but not showing results of the same, in the form of tangible products or businesses, while in other cases people were doing research and producing knowledge only to

'store' it later.

"When we will stop using wrong research models we will start seeing technologies and innovations coming out of our work. We will produce knowledge and be proud of it," Dr Musenero opined.

A similar hardline stance was taken by her Malawi counterpart Agnes Makonda Nyalonje, who decreed that while there wasn't much money available for research, there was enough cash to produce appropriate knowledge to enable Africa move ahead.

While the Government of Malawi had demonstrated the political commitment to fund ST&I, it was concerned about the need to align the research with the national priorities of the Southern African country, said Malawi Education Minister.

The inadequate funding of research she explained could be blamed on failure by the research sector to demonstrate the "capacity to

solve national problems", she told the opening session of the conference on 8 December. "The reason why scholars across Africa were underfunded was because most of the time their work failed the relevance test, in solving national problems," she claimed.

According to Professor Amon Murwira the Minister for Higher and Tertiary Education, Science and Technology Development in Zimbabwe, financing and money for research were not a big issue where good ideas were available. All scientists needed to do was to come up with 'revolutionary' ideas, and funding would be easy to mobilise.

[Read more on the Seventh African Higher Education Week and RUFORUM Triennial Conference 2021](#)

New Era as RUFORUM Picks Prof Nkuo-Akenji as its New Board Chair



Prof Theresa Nkuo-Akenji RUFORUM
new Board Chair

The 20th Annual General Meeting of RUFORUM network has appointed Prof Theresa Nkuo-Akenji as its new Board Chair effective 8 December 2021, replacing Prof George Kanyama-Phiri who has served in the position over the past three years.

Until her election Prof Nkenji who is the Vice Chancellor of the University of Bamenda in Cameroon, served as the Deputy Chair of the Board and will serve in the position until 2024. "I am delighted to become the new Board Chair of this network. I have worked closely with RUFORUM for many years and look forward to continuing to partner with the outgoing Chair Professor George Kanyama-Phiri, the Board of Trustees, the International Advisory Panel, the Technical Committee, the Principals and Deans Committee, the Secretariat and all stakeholders to enhance the capacity of this great network." said the new Board Chair. Her elevation will mean a smooth transfer of power and seamless functioning of the board and its oversight duties, since in her deputy position, she attended and chaired some of its meeting under delegation from the outgoing Chair.

Taking up her place is Professor Avlessi Felicien, Rector of Benin's University of Abomey Calavi, the second time an official from French-speaking countries is taking up such a senior position in RUFORUM. Professor Avlessi Felicien is a professor of

organic chemistry, and his election is meant to deepen and cement RUFORUM's foothold in his region, and in Francophone Africa

On the other hand, Prof Kanyama-Phiri is the former Vice Chancellor of Malawi's Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR).

Zimbabwe will host the RUFORUM Annual General Meeting in December 2022, while Namibia is set to host the Triennial conference in 2024, according to RUFORUM head Professor Adipala Ekwamu. The move will be in tandem with the network's tradition of rotating not only its leadership on regional basis, but the hosting of its main events as well.

"I am delighted to become the new Board Chair of this network. I have worked closely with RUFORUM for many years"



Newly elected RUFORUM Board Chair Prof Theresa Nkuo-Akenji and Executive Secretary Prof Adipala Ekwamu pose for a photo with some of the Vice Chancellors at the conference.

17 More Universities Sign Up to RUFORUM Network

The membership of the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) continues to grow in leaps and bounds, with 17 new universities joining the network during the RUFORUM Triennial Conference in December 2021.

The universities from Southern and Central Africa regions confirm the growth of RUFORUM from a ten-member organisation at founding in 2004, to becoming one of the largest higher education associations in Africa, with over 140 institutions.

“The Secretariat received applications for membership from universities across Africa. This shows a continuous demand for RUFORUM activities across the continent”, said a briefing note shared by the Secretariat. “Since the Board meeting of 13 August 2021 held virtually over Zoom Platform, a total of 17 universities applied for membership of the network”, it added. Following due diligence check, applications from the Universities were submitted to the Board Executive Committee for consideration who recommended them for membership approval by the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the 10 December on the sidelines of the Triennial in Cotonou, Benin.

Notable new entrants include Somalia’s City

University of Mogadishu and South Africa’s University of Kwazulu Natal. Others included Ain Shams University from Egypt.

Also joining in bigger numbers and in increased frequency are institutions from French-speaking Africa with Congo’s Université Espoir du Congo, Université De Kinshasa and the University of Lubumbashi being the latest entrants.

Religious affiliated universities are also not left out. Top among them being the Islamic University in Uganda.

However, it is Malawi that brought in the largest number of entrants, nearly all of them religiously inclined, including Lilongwe-based African Bible College, the Catholic University of Malawi, Malawi Adventist University and the Malawi Assemblies of God University.

Other new members from the Southern Africa country are Kamuzu University of Health Sciences, Malawi University of Business and Applied Sciences, the University of Livingstonia and UNICAF University.

Other institutions from the region that have joined the network are Zambia’s Kapasa Makasa University and Namibia’s International University of Management based in Windhoek.

“This shows a continuous demand for RUFORUM activities across the continent”



RUFORUM immediate former Board Chair Prof George Kanyama-Phiri 3rd left with Prof Adipala Ekwamu, RUFORUM Executive Secretary posing for a photo with other delegates.

E-Learning Platform Launched for African Agriculture Universities



Dr. Francis Otto, the Manager - Knowledge Hub (K-HUB) at the RUFORUM Secretariat.

“Although many higher education institutions world-wide have moved towards adoption of e-learning, many universities in Africa still lag behind and have been severely affected by especially the COVID-19 pandemic,”

The Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM), has launched a regional e-learning platform that will

help facilitate universities use ICT to improve teaching and learning among the continent's higher learning institutions.

The organisation made up of 147 universities in 38 African countries, is piloting the platform in universities spread across the countries of Uganda, Malawi and Zambia, and is targeted at priority agriculture education course programmes.

The platform is the first and one of the pillars of the Africa Digital Agriculture Programme (AfriDAP), an initiative meant to harness digital technologies for agricultural transformation of Africa, and enhance higher agricultural education in the continent's universities. The Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa (BADEA) is supporting the digital learning platform, with a number of co-funders also coming on board to supplement the bank's seed money, said Dr Francis Otto Knowledge Hub manager at RUFORUM. “Although many higher education institutions world-wide have moved towards adoption of e-learning, many universities in Africa still lag behind and have been severely affected by especially the COVID-19 pandemic,” he told the Seventh

African Higher Education Week & RUFORUM Triennial Conference 2021 taking place in West African country of Benin.

Some 13 universities both public and privately owned have been picked for the pilot, explained Dr Otto.

“From the needs assessment survey conducted, 13 institutions were identified for strengthening infrastructure to operate e-learning platforms as they have demonstrated the need to implement e-learning”, he explained on selection of the pilot universities.

The Commonwealth of Learning, Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Mastercard Foundation, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation are the other co-funders of the platform, he disclosed.

So far promoters of the platform have developed blended educational material, and even more important, identified and selected “market-demanded courses” for different universities, to be offered on the platform.

A total of 13 courses have been selected in research, science, ICT, project management, and in agriculture fields, for inclusion in the e-learning platform. They include Research Methods, Scientific Data Management, and popular agriculture fields such as Plant Breeding, Agri-business, Climate-smart Agriculture and in Biotechnology and Seeds Systems.

RUFORUM is working with two ‘focus’ universities Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources of Malawi and Uganda's Makerere University and 10 others to support capacity building in online teaching and learning for both staff and students, Dr Otto disclosed.

Going forward the official noted, training a pool of content developers will be escalated and as well as that of course instructors. Skills development training in use of digital technologies for university administrative staff will also be conducted.

Deployment of ICT for remote learning has become urgent in Africa since the advent of COVID-19. However numerous challenges including lack of electricity, poor broadband connectivity, lack gadgets and low human capacity to conduct online teaching has impeded this.

RUFORUM to Open Regional Nodes as Numbers Grow



Prof. Adipala (extreme right) discussing the RUFORUM expansion strategy with the new RUFORUM Board Chair, Prof. Nkuo –Akenji (center), Prof. George Kanyama-Phiri, Outgoing Board Chair (Second Left), Prof. Joy Kwesiga, Vice Chancellor, Kabale University, Uganda (extreme left), and Dr. Mary Shawa, RUFORUM Board Member from Malawi (second right).

The Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture is set to open two nodes in Southern and West African regions of Africa, to act as the network's focal points in response to growing interest.

One of the countries with the highest number of member universities, Malawi will host the Southern Africa node, while Benin, one of the earliest West Africa African countries to show interest in the network will host the regional office of the network.

This was agreed on after a decision of the network Executive Board in 2021, which was subsequently endorsed by the Annual General Meeting during the Triennial conference in Benin.

"The RUFORUM network has grown into a big organisation in terms of membership, from only ten universities in five countries to the 147 universities in 38 countries at the moment, necessitating the opening of regional focal points," said Prof Adipala Ekwamu RUFORUM Executive Secretary. "Since 2016 it has become obvious that RUFORUM was becoming too big but planning issues took time," he added.

In view of the expanded membership, he added, a "stronger foot print" was needed in different corners of the continent. Besides being among earliest members of RUFORUM in West Africa Benin was critical as node host,

it being a Francophone country. On the other hand, Malawi was strategic in that it represented the region with the highest membership in the network.

The two countries have consistently expressed willingness to host the nodes and the Board had allowed them to send their offers for review and evaluation, the Executive Secretary added. Once the Letters of Offer are submitted RUFORUM Secretariat will evaluate the technical details and send feedback to the two countries.

Some of the basic requirements for hosting the regional offices include providing space and seconding one or more people to work full-time, overseeing and coordinating the nodes activities working hand-in-hand with the head office, Prof Adipala disclosed.

"We will work hard to ensure that the nodes are established and become operational by the end of 2022," he further disclosed.

RUFORUM, he said will strive to remain an independent Africa-wide Non-Governmental Organisation that works closely with governments for the good of the people.

He singled out the former Chairperson of the African Union Commission and South Africa's Cabinet Minister Nkosazana Ndlamini-Zuma, as having been very instrumental in encouraging and supporting the growth of RUFORUM into a truly continental organisation.

"We will work hard to ensure that the nodes are established and become operational by the end of 2022,"

Countries Give RUFORUM a boost by Endorsing its Charter



The number of countries that have signed to the Regional Universities for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) Charter has grown to 11 giving the organisation the momentum it needs to become a continental inter-governmental body.

The 2020-2021 annual report tabled during the Annual General Meeting shows that the drive to endorse the charter was picking up pace with countries particularly in West Africa and the Southern Africa region embracing the document.

The countries that have signed the Charter include Benin, Ghana, Mali, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Cameroon and DR Congo in West and Central Africa. In the Southern Africa region Eswatini, Zimbabwe, and Malawi have endorsed the document while Sudan is the only country in the Eastern Africa region that has signed it. Other countries in the Eastern and North Africa region are yet to ratify it.

Ratification of the charter would mark an important milestone in the evolution of RUFORUM, as it would see its officials granted diplomatic status and enjoy some tax exemptions according to Executive Secretary Prof Adipala Ekwamu.

“Besides the stated advantages it opens the way for an organisation for possible financial support from the government since a charter on its own is a legal instrument,” said Prof Adipala. The plan was for RUFORUM to have not less than 20 countries sign the charter by the end of 2022, he further disclosed.

He singled out Malawi for praise saying that the country which had been chosen as a host for RUFORUM’s Southern Africa node had proven itself as a big supporter of the network.

The RUFORUM network he emphasized will remain an independent Non-Governmental Organisation that nevertheless works very closely with governments and other partners for development of agriculture and agriculture education in Africa.



Prof Adipala Ekwamu RUFORUM
Executive Secretary

TAGDev Hailed as Revolutionary Model for Agriculture Education

The Transforming African Agricultural Universities to Meaningfully Contribute to Africa's Growth and Development' (TAGDev), one of the flagship programmes of the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM), has received praise as a revolutionary approach to agriculture education in higher learning institution.

The programme supported by the Mastercard Foundation has also received positive reviews from different actors who unanimously see it as one of the most development effective programmes currently being managed by RUFORUM.

Focused on attracting and supporting youth into agricultural education to acquire skills for employability and entrepreneurship, TAGDev runs initiatives which have received positive feedback.

In the annual report presented before the meeting by Deputy Executive Secretary Dr Florence Nakayiwa featuring feedback collected by respondents including partners rated the programme design, relevance, coherence, effectiveness and sustainability among other key attributes.

For example, the Community Action Research Programme (CARP+) and

RUFORUM Enterprise Challenge Programme (RECAP) projects under TAGDev were widely recognised and judged successful due to their guidance of Mastercard scholarship beneficiaries in choosing their courses and in linking them with appropriate supervisors for their research projects.

On coherence the independent consultant noted that "there was consensus across all respondents that TAGDev programme is aligned with and contributing to many national and continental policies and priorities".

The consultant also returned similarly positive feedback with regard to relevance, reporting that partners unanimously agreed that the programme was contributing to their own "strategic priorities".

Among other priorities TAGDev aims to support training of 220 students including 110 Masters and 110 under graduates at Kenya's Egerton University and Gulu University in Uganda, training of students jointly with private sector organisations, research institutions and farmers among other actors to nurture "practical-oriented graduates who have an appreciation of entrepreneurship for community transformation".

At Egerton for example, the university has surpassed its target of training 110 and is now training 181 students, according to the university's TAGDev coordinator Prof Nancy Mungai, while speaking at a session on Global Partnership for Higher Education in Africa.

The programme among other aims, is to pilot a new teaching model for agriculture that emphasises on connecting students with farmers, agri-enterprise, engagement of TVETs and mutual learning and lesson sharing.

Its pillars include experiential learning, entrepreneurship and transformation which emphasises on empowering students to transform their communities, she noted. "The programme has influenced policy at the university and especially with communities," she noted. Besides, it also has a component of community engagement and experiential learning achieved via the Community Action Research Program (CARP+) projects, that seeks to strengthen the university linkages with TVET and communities.

[Read more on TAGDev](#)

Conference Defies New Covid-19 Variant to Attract Hundreds of Delegates



Some of participants pose for photos at Palais des Congrès in Cotonou, venue of RUFORUM Triennial.

Some 918 delegates including government ministers graced the event, with another 1,500 from around the world participating virtually.

The Seventh African Higher Education Week and the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) Triennial Conference 2021 taking place in Cotonou, Benin is defying fears of emergence of the latest Covid-19 Omicron variant, to register impressive attendance with few abstentions. The event happened for the first time in a Francophone country and was officially held 6-10 December, 2021 and was preceded by weeklong pre-conference events. Some 918 delegates including government ministers graced the event, with another 1,500 from around the world participating virtually. In attendance were senior government officials, Vice-Chancellors, Deans and Principals of universities, academicians, researchers, innovators, students and representatives from development partners, the private sector and the Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). Dignitaries from the Government of Benin among them the Vice President Prof Mariam Chabi Talata fully backed the conference, with her joining the session on *Promoting Inclusivity in Research and Development* on the fourth day. On the other hand, the country's minister for Higher Education and Scientific Research Prof Éléonore Ladékan Yayi, attended most of the major sessions together with Hon Gaston Dossouhoui, Minister of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, Benin. One notable speaker was Prof Ameenah Gulib- Fakim, former President of the Republic of Mauritius.

was the ministerial roundtable on Tuesday 7th December 2021 and ministerial dinner, where universities engaged ministers, seeking 'recommitment' for policy support from governments in recognition that there was a strong case for institutions to establish an "umbilical link with policy", noted Prof, Adipala Ekwamu, RUFORUM Executive Secretary.

The roundtable hosted ministers of Agriculture, Education & Training, Science, Technology and Innovation from different countries among them Benin, Ghana, Uganda, Liberia, DR Congo, Sierra Leone, South Sudan and Malawi.

The Government of Benin through the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, the University of Abomey-Calavi, the University of Parakou and the National University of Agriculture, co-hosted the conference under the theme "Operationalising Higher Education for Innovation, Industrialisation, Inclusion and Sustainable Economic Development in Africa; A Call for Action". The conference placed emphasis on the need for universities to give students skills that develop their capacity for self-employment. It tackled the importance of building partnerships with the private sector among other external actors.

Also, a major subject throughout the meeting was the question of integrating e-learning in universities, and as one of the pre-conference events, a three-day workshop to review curricular for a number of online courses to be offered through the RUFORUM Regional E-learning Platform, was held.

One of the major highlights of the conference



*Dr. Martha Phiri, AfDB director for human capital, youth and skills development.
Photo Courtesy AfDB*

African Development Bank Outlines Plans for Higher Education

The African Development Bank (AfDB) plans to spend up to US\$700 million in supporting initiatives to build skills for the youth across Africa over the next four years.

The bank will invest the money in different initiatives in the tertiary and higher education sub-sectors between 2022 and 2025, a senior AfDB official Martha Phiri told the Seventh African Higher Education Week and RUFORUM Triennial Conference 2021.

The money will be in addition to the more than US\$990 million the AfDB has spent on higher education institutions and Technical and Vocational Training Education schools over the past eight years, she noted.

"The AfDB is in the forefront in investment in Science Technology and Innovation (ST&I) development in the continent having spent US\$992 million to support the institutions between 2014 and 2021," she elaborated.

The money had gone to establishing, equipping and developing skills of lecturers and tutors in institutions such as the Nelson Mandela Institution for Science and Technology in Tan-

zania, among other universities in Nigeria and Burkina Faso. They have so far benefited with up to US\$30 million.

The continental bank is to partner with the African Union and individual African governments to found an African innovation scheme which will be backed with a US\$120 million Innovation Fund, Phiri who is AfDB's Director for Human Capital Youth and Skills Development, disclosed.

Africa, she noted, must now like other parts of the world leverage on ST&I in order to develop. This however would not be possible unless governments raised their investment in Research and Development (R&D).

Currently only about four African countries have committed to investing the minimum 1% of their GDP in R&D. The average expenditure on the continent remained low at an average of 0.38%, the official told the meeting.

This was a major obstacle to growth of the key sector she observed. As a result, for example the whole of Sub-Saharan Africa was producing about 28,500 research journals a year, less than the European country of Netherlands

which produced 30,000 such publications a year.

"As a result of this only 1% of vaccines for the current pandemic are being made in Africa due to low investment in technologies. Besides limited financing, weak policy is to blame for this state of affairs", the director noted.

In addition, she observed, "too many students" in African universities were enrolled in humanities when compared to those who were studying science related programmes.

One way out of the dearth of investment in ST&I was by forging partnerships that bring together both resources and ideas to get Africa out of the problem. The bank was taking the initiative to build such partnerships with organisations such as RUFORUM.

Other alliances for R&D the bank had entered into included with the African Economic Research Consortium, where the two worked on economic policy research.

Another way of boosting funding the sector was through involvement and partnership with the private sector, she counselled.

Embrace Technology or Perish-Universities Urged

African universities must embrace teaching and learning technologies if they are to avoid being left out in digital transformation of higher education and skills development.

In the past universities in the continent have been left out of important changes in education, and the digital shift in learning necessitated in part by the Covid-19 pandemic could turn out to be no different if urgent steps in the right direction are taken.

Professor John Akec, Vice Chancellor (VC) of the University of Juba, South Sudan observed that African institutions of higher learning remained 'resistant' to shifting their activities online, even though "every other sector has gone digital".

The VC told a session of the Seventh African Higher Education Week and RUFORUM Triennial Conference 2021, in Cotonou, Benin that opportunities for African universities to take advantage of education technologies such as online learning were plentiful. The institutions only needed to make the right investment and start using them.

"As universities we must learn from big companies that have gone under for resisting change. We must not be latecomers in education technologies because these are now widely available," he said. "If we do not learn from our past then we will surely be left out," he added.

Giving the example of the university he heads, the professor noted that prior to the coming of the pandemic, the institution used to host medical students from the UK on campus. The group has since returned home but are still attending classes but remotely.

At the same time American volunteer academics were teaching some courses at the university remotely from the United States, as the university tries to embrace technological advances in education to stay afloat.

"However before using technology in lecture halls we will first need to impress faculty to embrace the new shift. It will certainly take a lot of sensitisation for a professor to leave the chalk behind and start using technology to teach", he was quick to caution.

While technology came with cost implications, building universities in remote places in Africa was certainly more expensive, Prof Kay Muir Leresche, retired professor of Natural Resource



Professor John Akec, Vice Chancellor (VC) of the University of Juba, South Sudan

"As universities we must learn from big companies that have gone under for resisting change. We must not be latecomers in education technologies because these are now widely available,"

Economics and member of the RUFORUM International Advisory Panel, advised.

The Covid-19 pandemic had compelled universities to embrace technology 'prematurely', jumping a stage for capacity building of faculty and support staff for example. This left many gaps in things such as how to effectively administer exams without leaving space for cheating or plagiarism, she observed.

Many lecturers as such did not feel so confident purely teaching online, and some insisted on physically meeting their students and teaching them physically, an indication of lack of confidence in virtual learning.

Training of faculty and support staff was therefore critical so as to build confidence among lecturers and ensure that they delivered under remote teaching and learning. It is also important for universities to allow the teaching staff to experiment, as it is for universities to share best practices under the auspices of intra-Africa collaboration.



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Conference Pictorial

Photos courtesy of [Go Trolley Films](#)



Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM), Plot 151/155 Garden Hill, Makerere University Main Campus. P.O Box 16811 Wandegeya | Kampala, Uganda. Tel: +256-417-713-300 (Office) and +256-312-181-300, Direct Line: +256-417-713-301 and +256-312-181-301.

Website: www.ruforum.org; Institutional Repository: <http://repository.ruforum.org/>