

**The Seventh African Higher Education Week and RUFORUM Triennial Conference**

**Date:** 06-10 December 2021

**CONCEPT NOTE**

**Theme: Operationalising Higher Education for Innovation, Industrialisation, Inclusion and Sustainable Economic Development in Africa: A Call for Action**

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

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**Background**

Africa has seen tremendous growth in the last decade. However, living standards continue to remain low for many people, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa. Further, a widening inequality that is leading to erosion of social cohesion in many countries is on increasing trend. This calls for a more inclusive and sustainable model of growth and development. The Sustainable Development Goals are crafted with a fundamental principle of leaving no one behind. Realising this principle requires that poverty eradication is accelerated, and that fairer income distribution and social progress over the next ten years are sustained. This also requires that decent employment is generated through advancement of innovations and the transformation of production, export structures and services in Africa. Education has a catalytic function in increasing form, function and competitiveness of economies by driving innovation, skills and productivity, leading to expanded employment and opportunities. Further, education is one of the most important denominators for reducing poverty, as it provides an equalizer and inclusion opportunities across individuals, communities and countries.

A growing and inclusive economy is critical for delivering income and employment to all people regardless of gender, ethnicity and race, among others. Quality jobs are an important facet and enabler for affording basic needs, as well as building wealth. Africa, under the recently launched African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), exposes a GDP of \$3.4 trillion benefiting an estimated 1 billion people. For Africa and its people to benefit from the opportunities the AfCFTA brings in this decade, innovation, skills, entrepreneurship, and responsiveness of institutions will

be critical for success to happen. Higher education and particularly universities are at the forefront of shaping and delivering innovations, skills, and entrepreneurial graduates. However, universities in Africa need to do more to rapidly achieve technology integration and human capital investments that are essential for enhancing productivity and economic performance.

African universities under the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Africa (RUFORUM) network, recognised the inherent contribution universities play in development and appreciate the gaps within the higher education sector that need to be addressed to support the continent's development needs. Accordingly, in 2018, the African universities adopted the African Higher Education, Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy (AHESTI) as a guiding framework for strengthening universities' contribution to Africa's development. The 2018 Ministerial meeting held at the Sixth Africa Higher Education Week and RUFORUM Biennial Conference challenged African Universities to develop regional investment programmes for enhancing human capital development. African universities responded to this call with five continental initiatives notably (i) the Strengthening Higher Agricultural Education in Africa (SHAEA); (ii) Building Africa's Science, Technology and Innovation Capacity (BASTIC); (iii) Strengthening Africa's Innovation and Entrepreneurship Capacity (SASTIE); (iv) Regional Initiative to Strengthen Staff Capacity and Increase the Pool of Women Scientists in Africa (RISSCAW); and (v) the African Digital Agricultural Platform (AfriDAP). While these initiatives respond to the requisite human capital needs, skills and innovations required for Africa's economic development, they must be operationalized to realise the intended outcomes.

### **The seventh Africa Higher Education Week & RUFORUM Triennial Conference, 2021**

The Seventh Africa Higher Education and RUFORUM Triennial Conference is set under the theme **“Operationalising Higher Education for Innovation, Industrialisation, Inclusion and Sustainable Economic Development in Africa: A call for action”** that responds to the urgent needs for the African governments, development partners, private sector and citizenry to take actions to invest in higher education. This Triennial conference is convened with the following objectives:

1. Catalyse investment in Higher Education for human capital development in Africa
2. Promote international linkages and partnerships for excellence in Higher Education
3. Strengthen collaboration and mutual learning to spur innovation and industrialisation for economic transformation in Africa
4. Promote youth employment and skills acquisition for development
5. Strengthen University-Private sector business linkages

## APPROACH

### Participation, Venue and Date:

The First RUFORUM Triennial Conference, the 16<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting and 7<sup>th</sup> African Higher Education Week will be held in the Republic of Benin at **Centre International de Conférences and Palais des Congres de Cotonou, Benin** from 6<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> December 2021. The five-day conference will bring together policy makers including Ministers and Technical Experts, Higher Education Leaders in Africa, development partners, private sector leaders, researchers, innovators, students, and farmer organisations, among others. Approximately 1000 delegates are expected from across the world.

### Conference organization

With the recognition that the previous RUFORUM conferences have mainly been hosted in Southern and Eastern Africa, the 2021 Africa Higher Education Week and RUFORUM Triennial Conference will be held in the Republic of Benin, West Africa. The Triennial conference and related events will be co-hosted by the Government of Benin through the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, the University of Abomey-Calavi, the University of Parakou, National University of Agriculture and the RUFORUM Network. It is envisaged that His Excellency Patrice Talon, President of the Republic of Benin and the designated Chair of the African Union Commission will grace the conference.

### Conference arrangements

As part of the Triennial convening, a number of events will be held, notably (i) a series of skills enhancement training for undergraduates, post-graduate and post-doctoral Fellows; (ii) exhibitions by academia, private sector and others to profile and showcase their activities, innovations, products and services; (iii) poster session and scientific presentations; (iv) specific convening to discuss topical issues affecting science, technology and innovation in Africa; (v) meetings with policy and private sector leaders; and (vi) RUFORUM governance meetings. The details of the schedule of these events are indicated in the draft overview programme ([Link](#)). More information about the exhibitions ([Link](#)), scientific presentations ([Link](#)), posters ([Link](#)) and submissions for the Young Innovators Competition ([Link](#)) and Outstanding upcoming Scientists ([Link](#)) Awards for Benin can be found in the respective calls

For further details about the Triennial Conference, visit [www.ruforum.org](http://www.ruforum.org)

### **Conference organizers**

#### **Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research-Republic of Benin**

The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (<https://enseignementsuperieur.gouv.bj/>) is one of the 24 ministries of the current government of the Republic of Benin. It plays the overarching role of leadership, guidance and quality assurance to higher education and research related entities in Benin, such as the four interdisciplinary and thematic universities in Benin, the General Directorate of Higher Education, Benin Agency for valorization of research outputs and innovations, the National Funds for Scientific Research, Technology and Innovation, among others.

#### **University of Abomey Calavi**

University of Abomey Calavi (in French: Université d'Abomey-Calavi; <https://uac.bj/>) was established in 1970 as "University of Dahomey", which became the National University of Benin in 1975, with a vision to promote equality and equity and produce quality human resources and research outputs adapted to the needs of development of the country and nations. Currently, the University of Abomey-Calavi has 32 training establishments and 86,694 registered students. It is a multi-disciplinary institution, which provides training leading to officially recognised higher education degrees such as certificates and diplomas, bachelor degrees, master degrees, doctorate degree in various disciplines such as health, agricultural sciences, arts and humanities, law, economics and business. It has considerable Africa-wide and international partnership projects that contribute into the realization of its mission and vision

#### **National University of Agriculture**

National University of Agriculture (<http://www.una.bj/>) is a thematic university recently established by the Government of Benin to provide training in Agriculture from undergraduate to postgraduate level. It has a General Agronomy Cycle and 10 schools, notably, (i) school of science and techniques for food preservation and processing; (ii) School of plant and seeds production; (iii) school of animal husbandry systems; (iv) school of agricultural engineering; (v) school of tropical forestry; (vi) school of horticulture and management of green spaces; (vii) school of aquaculture; (viii) school of agribusiness and agricultural policy; (ix) school of rural sociology and agricultural extension; (x) doctoral school of agronomic sciences and water. The mission of the UNA is to ensure the adequacy between research, training and employment in the agricultural field and the development needs. It aims to stimulate and support the development of a strong agricultural economy and is committed to creating a new generation of scientists and technicians capable of promoting technological innovations.

### **University of Parakou**

The University of Parakou (<http://www.univ-parakou.bj/>) is a 20 years old multi-disciplinary university in the Republic of Benin. It currently has 11 training establishments and around 20,000 registered students. Its missions are the followings: (i) produce specialized executives for the needs of the economic, social, intellectual and cultural development of the Nation; (ii) participate in the development of scientific, fundamental and applied research; (iii) provide training that meets the needs of the job market and that takes into account the constraints and context of globalization; (iv) link teaching and research to productive work; (v) promote and strengthen the adequacy of the training of students to the requirements of development and professional life; and (vi) ensure continuous scientific, technical and technological development of the nation through active cooperation between training and research establishments and companies, both at national and international levels.

### **Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture**

The Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) is a network of 128 universities in 38 African countries. It was established in 2004 to (i) foster integration of African universities into the national agricultural innovation systems; (ii) provide a platform for training quality graduates to support development processes in Africa; (iii) rationalize resource use and enhance economies of scale and scope; and (iv) provide a platform for networking, resource mobilization and advocacy for agricultural higher education in Africa. RUFORUM envisions 'vibrant, transformative universities to catalyze sustainable, inclusive agricultural development to feed and create prosperity for Africa'. The RUFORUM Network has been making significant contribution towards Africa's development through its transformative agenda for Agricultural Higher Education, Science, Technology and Innovation, in line with Agenda 2063, the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP), the Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa (STISA 2024) and Science Agenda for Agriculture in Africa (S3A).

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