



Webinar 10: Opening Remarks by Prof. Adipala Ekwamu, RUFORUM Executive Secretary

Engaging African Universities in Advancing Agricultural and Food and Nutrition Security in Africa: Policy Perspective

Her Excellency Ambassador Josefa L.C. Sacko, Commissioner for Rural Economy and Agriculture (DREA), African Union Commission, Addis Ababa,

Dr. Leonard Mizzi, Head of Unit for Food Security, Directorate General for Development Cooperation, European Commission,

Her Excellency Thoko Didiza, Minister for Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development, Republic of South Africa,

Hon Jeanine Milly Cooper, Minister of Agriculture, Republic of Liberia,

Hon. Lobin Lowe, Minister of Agriculture, Republic of Malawi

Prof. Hamadi Iddi Boga, the Principal Secretary, State Department for Agricultural Research, Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, Kenya,

Dr. Patrick Okori, Country Director, ICRISAT, Malawi,

The Moderator of the Webinar - Dr. Godfrey Bahiigwa – Director Department of Rural Economy and Agriculture the African Union Commission,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

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Allow me to start by recognizing and thanking our distinguished Speakers of today and all the participants of this webinar, where we seek to dialogue on how best to Engage African Universities, together with other actors, in advancing Agricultural and Food and Nutrition Security in Africa. RUFORUM, a Network of 138 universities across Africa, greatly appreciates your participation.

As a Network of African Universities founded specifically to promote engagement of African Universities in National Agricultural Innovation Systems in Africa, we greatly appreciate the African Union and its Member States for all the efforts to improve livelihoods and competitiveness of our continent. We note with appreciation the focussed attention since the 2003 Maputo CAADP Declaration by African Heads of State to improve performance of the agricultural sector as the fulcrum of economic development in the continent. We further appreciate the European Union through its Commission for supporting Africa in its response to addressing Food, Nutrition and Sustainable Agriculture (FNSSA) challenges in the continent. Indeed we are heartened by recent developments including the EU New Strategy for Africa and the EU-AU Africa Policy dialogue on Food and Nutrition Security.

Certainly a lot has been done, progress has been made but like in all development endeavours a lot still needs to be done. Indeed the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) reports increased levels of poverty, and food and nutrition insecurity especially in Sub-Saharan Africa. Moreover, other recent challenges have emerged that will grossly curtail our efforts: climate change and variability and the need for Green transition, need for new skills sets including digital

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transformation, widespread job unemployment especially amongst women and youth, COVID 19 Pandemic, the locust invasion, amongst others. We need to explore opportunities for collaborative action and we see the twin role of research and skill development backed by policy support as critical.

Today's Webinar has been convened by RUFORUM as part of fostering Learning and Galvanizing Collective Action. The African Ministers meeting held in Cape Coast Ghana in December 2019 tasked RUFORUM to mobilize participation of African Universities in national policy frameworks and implementation protocols. Hence, the ongoing EU-AU Policy Dialogue on the new Sustainable Agriculture and Food and Nutrition Security Roadmap provides opportunity for us to learn from EU and Africa Member States on what is ongoing on ground and the proposed initiatives so that we see how best African Universities and their partners, including our European counterpart AGRINATURA, could best contribute to developing and testing some of the needed actions. To EU, AUC and our Member States, I affirm commitment of RUFORUM and its Member Universities to participate in the EU-AU FNSSA and CAADP Implementation protocols and indeed in other related initiatives.

In this regard RUFORUM appeals to EU Commission's Directorate General for International Cooperation and Development (DG-DEVCO) for greater support to Capacity Building and Research in Africa, giving particular attention to Women and Youth. Indeed I affirm interest of

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African Universities to participate in DeSIRA and to support other EU-AU processes.

Finally I call upon the African Union Commission to mobilize support for the five Continental Initiatives and other decisions agreed upon by African Ministers of Agriculture, Education, Science, Technology and Innovation during their meeting in Ghana in December 2019.

Once more, **THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR HONOURING OUR INVITATION**

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