

Research Application Summary

**Catalyzing change in African Universities : Developing transformational leadership and management capacity in African Universities**

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**Abstract**

Higher Education is key to shifting African economies from resource to knowledge based economies. African universities' leadership and management need to reposition their universities to play this role. Despite various trainings on leadership and management, complaints from industry and policy on incompetency of graduates and irrelevant research still voice up in Africa signaling underperformance by universities. The Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) has adopted a tripartite approach to address this issue; Engagement of University leadership and management in development and review of continental development frameworks; refresher training for all leadership levels at university, and training potential leaders (PhD students) to prepare them for leadership roles and linking them to senior leaders for mentorship. Significant outcomes signaling success of the approach have been registered. Engagement with policy has resulted into an MoU between RUFORUM and the African Union Commission (AUC), and alignment of University programmes to support implementation of continental agenda especially the Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa (STISA 2024) and the Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP). As such university leaders have been engaged in dialogue platforms to give them exposure to key policy frameworks guiding the continental development agenda, including Agenda 2063- Building the Africa We Want. Reflection meetings and targeted skill enhancement courses have been arranged for various levels of university leaders on issues of institutional leadership and management. For many universities PhD Training now also integrates training in social skills and personal mastery, and indeed issues of leadership and management. While recognizing that change takes time, and there is need for regular refresher training and exposures, the annual review meetings of the Vice Chancellors of 66 RUFORUM universities have provided a platform for reflection learning, mutual support and catalyzing institutional reforms in the member universities.

Key words: African universities, CAADP, leadership and management, STISA

**Résumé**

L'enseignement supérieur est essentiel pour faire passer les économies africaines des économies fondées sur des ressources aux économies fondées sur le savoir. Le leadership et la gestion des universités africaines doivent repositionner leurs universités afin de jouer ce rôle. En dépit de diverses formations sur le leadership et la gestion, les plaintes de

l'industrie et la politique sur l'incompétence des diplômés et les recherches non pertinentes se font encore entendues en Afrique signalant un rendement inférieur par les universités. RUFORUM a adopté une approche tripartite pour aborder cette question; Engagement du leadership et de la direction de l'Université dans le développement et l'analyse des cadres de développement du continent; Une formation de recyclage pour tous les niveaux de leadership à l'université ; et la formation des dirigeants potentiels (étudiants de doctorat) pour les préparer aux rôles de leadership et de les relier aux hauts dirigeants pour le mentorat. Des résultats significatifs indiquant le succès de cette approche ont été enregistrés. L'engagement avec la politique a abouti à un protocole d'accord entre le RUFORUM et la Commission de l'Union africaine (CUA) et l'alignement des programmes universitaires sur la mise en œuvre du programme continental, en particulier la Stratégie pour la science, la technologie et l'innovation pour l'Afrique (STISA 2024) et le Programme détaillé pour le développement de l'agriculture africaine (PDDAA). En tant que tels, les dirigeants des universités ont été engagés dans des plateformes de dialogue pour les exposer aux principaux cadres politiques qui guident le programme de développement continental, y compris l'Agenda 2063 - Bâtir l'Afrique que nous voulons. Des réunions de réflexion et des cours ciblés d'amélioration des compétences ont été organisés à différents niveaux de dirigeants universitaires sur les questions de leadership institutionnel et de gestion. Pour de nombreuses universités, la formation au doctorat intègre désormais la formation aux habiletés sociales et à la maîtrise personnelle, voire aux questions de leadership et de gestion. Les réunions annuelles d'examen des Recteurs de 66 universités de RUFORUM ont permis de réfléchir à l'apprentissage, au soutien mutuel et de catalyser les réformes institutionnelles dans les universités membres, tout en reconnaissant que le changement prend du temps et qu'il est nécessaire de se recycler régulièrement.

Mots clés: Universités africaines, leadership et gestion; PDDAA, STISA

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## **Introduction**

The need for transformational leaders and managers of African Higher Education institutions is of immense importance given the importance of Higher Education in transformation of African economies (USAID, 2014). The underpinning for the need for innovative leaders are three important challenges that the 21st Century universities are facing; - increasing need for innovative human capacity, and need for technological and social innovations that address emerging challenges that are facing today's society. As a result the global paradigm is towards knowledge based economies where knowledge and technology will be the primary solution to the World's problems (Cloete and Maasen, 2015). This is based on evidence from emerging economies such as South Korea, Malaysia and Singapore which have had universities at the center of their economic transformation in term of producing knowledge through research and innovations and producing the right human resource to address the prevailing challenges. However, for universities to be relevant, they must understand the prevailing challenges and tailor their services and products to addressing these challenges (USAID, 2014; Cloete and Maasen, 2015). The

challenges are usually mapped out in development frameworks which the globe/Continent responds to as a team of actors and universities should be engaged in understanding, reviewing and implementing these frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Agenda 2063, The Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP), Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa (STISA), among others. Universities, however, have been working in isolation and a majority of them do not know these frameworks, yet they train the human resource who, after leaving university, lead the implementation of these frameworks. This has been manifested in the poor performance of African universities evidenced by limited labour-market preparedness of graduates, limited research outputs and influence of universities in the communities in which they are located. This has largely been blamed on the poor leadership and management, and non-responsiveness of universities to development needs.

Most University leaders and managers are scholars who have risen over the ranks to attain such positions and do not have sufficient skills and competencies to transform universities to operate in the new era of development relevance and quality outputs. They have either attended short term leadership trainings giving them merit to be where they are or have not attended any. This agrees with the common adage that “An institution cannot rise beyond its leadership”. Recognizing the need for transformational leadership and management in African universities, the Carnegie Cooperation of New York in the last ten years has supported several short course trainings for top and midlevel University leaders and managers both at Continental and Country level through National Higher Education Regulatory Bodies and Continental bodies such as Association of African Universities (AAU), Centre for Higher Education Transformation, Trust Africa and Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (Fritteli, 2015), among other initiatives they support in the Continent. Needs assessments conducted identified trainings on leadership of academic institutions, strategic planning and reform management, human resource management, resource mobilization, management of research projects and intellectual property rights, quality assurance practices, student governance, ethics of management, gender analysis and skills competencies and ICT for institutional prosperity (Mouton *et al.*, 2015). These areas of leadership and management capacity development emerged in RUFORUM trainings in 2010 and continue to emerge in the recent RUFORUM convenings and trainings showing that they cut across universities in the continent. After trainings, Muriisa (2014) and Mouton *et al.* (2015) highlight two issues, sustainability and institutionalization of trainings and managing transitions in leadership and management at Universities. Having learnt this over the last 10 years in its Convenings of the Vice Chancellors as Board of Trustees and the Principals and Deans, RUFORUM posed the question “What can be done after training to make leadership and management in African universities versatile and adaptive in steering the universities to meet the current development needs in the era of knowledge based economies? The response to this question or approaches to building leadership and management capacity were hinged on RUFORUM’s core role of catalyzing change in its Network of now 66 universities in 26 African countries. Thus, RUFORUM provides a platform for peer learning among its member universities and for piloting new ideas and

initiatives. Actual implementation is by the member universities.

**About the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM).** The Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) is a Network of 66 universities in 26 African countries. Its governance is constituted by a Board of Trustees who are the Vice Chancellors of the member universities and representatives of policy, research bodies, private sector and Non-Government Organisations, an International Advisory Panel constituted by eight (8) members, four (4) from Africa and four (4) from outside Africa, the Principals and Deans' Committee constituted by Principals and Deans from the Colleges/Faculties of agriculture and related sciences, an eight member Technical Committee which advises the Network on its technical interventions and the Annual General Assembly, as the supreme governance organ. The Network is serviced by an operational arm – the Secretariat which technically represents the Network in activities and events. All these organs work in tandem to steer universities, through their leadership, to produce the competent human resource, technologies and innovations that contribute to Africa's development.

**Approaches to leadership and management capacity development by RUFORUM.** RUFORUM and its member universities deployed a tripartite approach to capacity development in University leadership and management; 1) Engagement of University leadership and management in development and review of Continental and national development frameworks, and curving out the niche for universities in achievement of framework objectives. This was aimed at incorporating university roles and value add in Africa's development agenda and curving out the niche Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in achievement of the objectives of the continent's and national development agenda. 2) Refresher trainings for all levels of university leadership to remind them of their roles and responsibilities in steering universities as well as reorienting new and existing leaders and managers to the 21st century demands from industry and policy. 3) Preparing potential leaders and managers for leadership positions to address the issues of succession in higher education leadership and management. Leadership positions in HEIs are assumed by senior Professors and Lecturers or PhD holders. Preparing them before they assume leadership positions or while doing PhD studies will allow them gain experience and exposure for effective management of university core business of managing transition challenges (Fritteli, 2015).

## **Results and discussion**

**1. Engagement of University leadership and management in development and review of Continental and national development frameworks.** Making universities relevant to development context requires that university leadership at all levels understands the development context and frameworks in which they operate in so that they align their processes and activities and commit to achieve the aspirations of the Continent's development frameworks. As a Network, RUFORUM engaged member university leadership in 25 meetings since 2008 to develop and/or review frameworks and engaged

in dialogue platforms with policy makers (Heads of States, Ministers, Permanent Secretaries and other policy makers) to map out the niche and contributions of universities in achieving the objectives of the development frameworks. In this approach, emphasis was placed on giving exposure to universities leaders on key continental frameworks especially the Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Programme, especially since it guided the founding member universities to create the RUFORUM platform for universities to contribute to addressing food and nutritional security in the continent. As such meetings were arranged with CAADP officials and other leading experts working on the CADDP especially the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA) and the New Partnership for Africa Development (NEPAD). The outcome was that the universities leaders had exposure to the CAADP agenda, and subsequently RUFORUM programmes were aligned to the CAADP process. RUFORUM subsequently developed regional training programmes to build capacity in targeted areas to support delivery of CAADP. The developed programmes took into account the skill gap areas identified under the Framework for African Agricultural Productivity (FAAP). Since 2014 efforts have also been made to respond to issues articulated in the Science Agenda for Agriculture in Africa (S3A), and the African Union Education Strategy for Africa.

Following the signing of the MoU with the African Union Commission for RUFORUM to serve as a lead agency for the implementation of STISA 2024 Priority One on Eradication of Poverty and ensuring Food and Nutrition Security, RUFORUM Secretariat and member Universities have focused attention to developing an Implementation Plan for Implementation of Priority One, and designing and implementing programmes that deliver five outcomes; 1) Enhancing effectiveness of STI in implementing priority areas by aligning with and implementation to advance the CAADP targets and the Africa's Accelerated Agricultural Growth and Transformation agenda; 2) Improving technical competencies and institutional capacity for STI development; 3) Promote economic competitiveness through fostering innovation, value addition, industrial/agribusiness development and entrepreneurship in synergy with other instruments; 4) Protect knowledge production (including inventions, and indigenous knowledge) by strengthening Intellectual Property Rights and regulatory regimes at all levels; 5) Facilitate STI policy reforms, harmonization, science diplomacy and resource mobilization. Reports on progress to date have been submitted to the African Union Commission. A key issue is to provide a mechanism for tracking investments in African universities especially in terms of financial investments and human capital development. Moreover, few countries in Africa have documented human capital development plans and obtaining quality data is a challenge. Accordingly the RUFORUM Vice Chancellors in partnership with the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) have launched an initiative to capture and share data on university investment indicators, that should complement the AOSTI and ASTI data sets, but focusing on African Universities.

These dialogue platforms have resulted into increased policy support to African Higher Education as well as commitment by African universities to deliver on the Continental development priorities. This is evidenced by the following commitments 1) a memorandum

of Understanding between the African Union Commission (AUC) and RUFORUM to champion higher education and research; 2) Partnership between African universities with Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa to implement the CAADP and Science Agenda for African Agriculture (S3A); 3) Designation of RUFORUM Network as a lead agency for implementation of Priority Area 1 of the STISA 2024, and 4) increased utilization of the RUFORUM convenings for policy dialogue on higher education in Africa through the RUFORUM Annual Convening events (Annual General Meetings) and Biennial conferences which have since been transformed into African Higher Education Biennial convenings (African Higher Education Week).

Five Biennial convenings were organized since 2007 for RUFORUM universities to showcase to the stakeholders what universities do so as to develop synergistic actions. Key outputs have been partnerships and collaborations among universities, and universities with other actors such as the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) and National Agricultural Research Institutions (NARIs), the private sector, policy and development partners.

Within the Network, the RUFORUM Annual General Assembly is a platform for the Vice Chancellors, Principals and Deans, Researchers and students to discuss as universities, how they can transform themselves and map out a one year agenda of transformative action that the Network will implement. The Board Meetings and the Principals and Deans' Committee Meetings offer a platform for the two levels of university leadership as peers to share experiences, learn from each other and develop agreed actions to change their institutions and African higher education as a whole. Several bilateral collaborations have emerged from these platforms such as; 1) Makerere University supporting the establishment of a Faculty of Veterinary Medicine at Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources in Malawi, Collaboration between Makerere University and University of Gezira for joint staff training, increased academic mobility and joint students training across the 66 RUFORUM Member universities. A detailed description about the RUFORUM Biennial convenings is provided by Nampala *et al.* (2016). Some key outputs from exposure of universities to Continental development frameworks are summarized in Table 1.

## **2. Refresher trainings for top and mid-level of university leadership**

When academics assume leadership positions at the universities, they certainly have some level of leadership competencies and experience since the election process is largely based on demonstrated potential leadership attributes. When they assume office, the diversity of tasks sometimes drowns strategic thinking and implementation of strategic actions. They also require additional leadership and management skills to enhance their performance. Interaction with most university leaders revealed that they often move from meeting to meeting and solving administrative challenges and have very limited time for dealing with strategic issues that can better position their universities for international competitiveness and development relevance. Few if any have strong foresight units to inform national priorities including the universities future growth path. There are also often emerging

challenges and changes in development thrusts that require putting in place adaptable and flexible management practices. Some University leaders are managing new institutions with limited institutional structures, processes and guidelines. Certainly a leader is not expected to have all the attributes to respond to the diversity of challenges and issues but need basics in leadership and institutional management. Faces with these challenges some leaders have ended up resigning. Based on discussion with University leaders, RUFORUM has organized a series of reflection meetings and short trainings to refresh the leadership visions of university managers. These meetings adopted several themes either based on demand of leadership category or on current development trends. Table 2 summarizes the numbers and key outcomes of the leadership and management trainings for top and midlevel managers in the RUFORUM Network.

Table 1: Event categories that the RUFORUM Network engages to expose universities leadership to the Continental development agenda

No	Convening Category	Number of events (2008-2016)	Higher level outputs from event
1.	Review/development of Continental frameworks	20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MoU between RUFORUM and AUC</li> <li>• Universities to implement S3A</li> <li>• RUFORUM to lead implementation of STISA 2024</li> <li>• Installation of President of Malawi as champion for Higher Education in Africa</li> <li>• Constitution of Committee of 10 Heads of State to champion Education, Science and Technology development in Africa</li> </ul>
2.	Ministerial meetings	5	Joint actions between universities and the ministries of education, agriculture and science and technology.
3.	RUFORUM Biennial Conferences	5	Continent-wide strategies that promote joint engagement between universities with research, private sector, policy and development partners
4.	RUFORUM Annual General Meetings	12	Priority areas for transformative action in African universities.
5.	RUFORUM Board Meetings	15	Strategic direction and areas of collaboration for RUFORUM member universities in enhancing the delivery and quality of Higher Education in Africa.
6.	RUFORUM Principals and Deans' meetings	13	Research, teaching and outreach approaches that enhance quality of university outputs contributing to development.

In the most recent lesson sharing and training event organized by RUFORUM in Cape Town, South African in October 2016, and attended by 41 African Vice Chancellors and other African Higher Education actors, the issues and recommendations summarized in Table 3 were raised. An action plan for addressing the recommendations was developed together with mapping out the roles and responsibilities of different actors in the African

Higher Education sector right from university leaders to policy makers and university Networks such as RUFORUM.

Table 2: Summary of leadership and management trainings for top and mid-level managers in the RUFORUM Network

No	Training Category	Number of trainings	Key outcomes of the training/action points
1.	Regional leadership and management competency development for senior University managers	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Operate universities as businesses</li> <li>• Set up benchmarks and standards for leadership and management</li> <li>• Start a regular leadership and management training</li> <li>• Sticking to institutional visions and strategic plans</li> </ul>
2.	Academic leadership and management for mid-level university managers	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tailor and manage teaching and training to the needs of the job market and opportunities for self-employment</li> <li>• Design and implement research frameworks that enhance the relevance of university research to community needs</li> <li>• Regularly provide leadership and management trainings for mid-level managers</li> </ul>

In the coming years, RUFORUM will continue to work with Vice Chancellors to lesson learn from each other and periodically hold at institution, country or regional level skill enhancement clinics to strengthen university leadership and management practices. This is especially needed to adopt to changing paradigms and also to take into account the frequent changes in university leadership at various levels.

### 3. Preparing potential leaders and managers for leadership positions

Leadership succession in African universities is a challenge that needs to be addressed (Fritelli, 2015). It is observed that PhD holders and researchers are likely to become heads of departments, who in turn become Deans, and later become Principals/Provosts, and Vice Chancellors. Preparing them through trainings and exposure to leadership and management events and responsibilities reduces the shocks and challenges for these individuals, when they get into these positions. Preparation of Principals and Deans is explained in Table 2 but the gap remained in the PhD students and researchers not in leadership positions. RUFORUM therefore designed a training programme on personal mastery and soft skills aimed skilling PhD graduates with managing themselves and providing them with skills for teaching and research and working with other people for a common cause of excellence. All recipients of RUFORUM Research Grants undergo training in management of research grants and new approaches to teaching and learning including experiential learning, farmer centered learning, among others, with seven trainings convened since 2008. This has helped many researchers who have risen into leadership positions.

Table 3: Some of the current leadership and management challenges identified by African Universities Vice Chancellors

Issues identified	Recommendations for effective university performance
Dwindling funding for Higher Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proactive role of university leadership in fundraising</li> <li>• Public private partnerships for research and training</li> <li>• Consultancies for research services to industry</li> <li>• Establish university enterprises</li> </ul>
Limited innovations from universities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create centres of excellence for research</li> <li>• Focus on innovations and products development and harness public private partnerships</li> </ul>
Poor relationship with governments, industry and communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular and proactive engagement with government, industry and communities to build trust</li> <li>• Develop a better understanding of priorities, and areas of collaboration</li> <li>• Embrace diversity rather than tribal, racial and political divides</li> <li>• Make footprint at community level to demonstrate impact of universities</li> </ul>
Limited strategic planning capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Base strategic planning on existing long term national and continental development frameworks such as country visions and African Union Agenda 2063</li> <li>• Regularly review strategic plans to adapt to prevailing situations</li> </ul>
Challenges in managing leadership transition universities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop culture of keeping in touch with past in African institutional leadership and knowledge</li> <li>• RUFORUM to allocate adequate resources for refresher trainings on leadership and management in African universities</li> <li>• Twinning established and emerging universities to share best practices and mentorship for leadership and management</li> </ul>
Inefficient functioning and human resources management within universities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Periodically assess leadership and management capabilities in universities</li> <li>• Improve working relationship between Governing councils and management</li> <li>• Enhance accountability through clear division of labour and reporting processes</li> <li>• Reexamine the University structures to establish how they can be more optimally configured to promote stronger efficiencies and better support the execution of the Universities' strategic priorities</li> <li>• Recognize diversities in capacities and personalities and harness these for efficient functioning of the universities</li> <li>• Harness the use of ICTs for university functions delivery</li> <li>• Provide a platform for regular lesson sharing among African University leadership and other actors</li> </ul>
Poor branding and marketing by universities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Package and strongly market services and specialities that universities can offer to non-university actors to attract their participation</li> </ul>
Gender inequity in university leadership and management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deliberately promote gender diversity at all levels of management</li> </ul>

Source: RUFORUM Organized leadership and management training and lesson sharing event for African Universities Vice Chancellors held on 15th October 2016 at Century City Conference Centre, Cape Town, South Africa. The event was attended by 41 Vice-chancellors from across the Continent.

In the coming years, RUFORUM will continue to work with Vice Chancellors to lesson learn from each and periodically hold at institution, country or regional level skill enhancement clinics to strengthen university leadership and management practices. This is especially needed to adopt to changing paradigms and also to take into account the frequent changes in university leadership at various levels.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

Universities are open to learning but they operate in a unit with many disciplines making it difficult to manage. Offering a platform for universities to engage with policy makers and review and input into Continental development frameworks creates an opportunity for universities to break the “ivory tower” syndrome and tailor teaching, research and outreach to the needs of the continent. Furthermore, it enables the universities to curve out their deliverables. This works when universities come together as a team through a network so that they can learn from and support each other, share their experiences, compete for higher quality as well as advocate for support as a single voice and leverage their own resources. For effective performance, benchmark standards for leadership and management need to be set against which universities can be refreshed on annual basis on measurement of their performance against the set standards.

Identified as a major challenge is the distance between academic institutions and industry and policy. Creating a platform for dialogue opened the eyes of many university leaders, industry and policy makers and opened doors for working together. Further, preparing and empowering mid-level managers, i.e., Principals and Deans and Heads of Departments who manage research, training and outreach within the universities will yield significant impact. Regular trainings for all levels of managers of academic institutions will ensure adherence to set leadership standards as well as preparing leaders to take up leadership responsibilities without shocks.

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