

Catalyzing agricultural transformation in Africa: What are the institutional arrangements and partnerships needed to make it happen?

A Dialogue by the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) during the 4th EAFF Congress

**Speke Resort Munyonyo, Kampala, Uganda
8:30 – 10:00 am, Thursday 14th September, 2017.**

Introduction

Africa is on the threshold of a significant transformation. Over the last decade, the continent was home to six of the world's 10 fastest growing economies, and has been highlighted in foresight reports by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, the outlook for the region remains bright. Strong growth in Africa's middle class is expected to continue on the back of better economic policy and governance, coupled with more business-friendly policies and improved demand for structural transformations in the Agricultural Sector which remains critical for sustainable development. The sustained increased in consumer spending, combined with population growth and rapid urbanization, means that today's markets offer better opportunities for African smallholder farmers if they can meet demands related to larger volumes, consistency of supply and quality/standards.

The East African Farmers Federation (EAFF) is a key stakeholder to RUFORUM. Both the EAFF and RUFORUM have in the past worked closely to design and implement joint undertakings. Through the PAEPARD Project, RUFORUM has had opportunity to capacitated EAFF and its subsidiaries at the grassroots levels. The engagements with EAFF has helped among others to strengthen demand articulation and ensure that Research Teams at RUFORUM member universities address relevant research questions and work with communities to develop appropriate agricultural technologies that are suited to context. Through the joint EAFF-RUFORUM engagements, many innovative approaches and strategies for promoting competitive business models in agricultural sector while addressing challenges of integrating small producers and processors in their different groupings of Farmer-based Organizations (FBOs) are being implemented and scaled up for adoption.

The RUFORUM Network appreciates the fact that participation in market-oriented can improve the livelihoods of many rural households through diversified nutrition, employment and enhanced incomes. The producers and consumers, smallholder farmers are key actors in the agricultural sector in Africa. Besides constituting a critical component of backwards and forward linkages to other economic sectors, their contribution to rural labour-force and food supply is essential to the transformation of the rural economy, especially at the lowest income levels of the society. The importances of the sector notwithstanding, there are numerous challenges in the efforts to promote growth incomes and bringing about commercialization in smallholders agriculture, through farmer organization (FBOs) of different forms.

The EAFF has made a commendable effort in bringing together the different FBOs. The strategic plans and activities of these different forms of FBOs that constitute the EAFF memberships demonstrate the fact that

agriculture and farmers in sub-Saharan Africa more than the rest of the World, continues to face challenges that have hindered its capacity to spur economic growth. In addition to biotic constraints, resource poor farmers are also faced with inadequate information, lack of strong organized groups, low motivation, low literacy levels, lack

of access to productive inputs, low technological know-how among others that stand as stumbling blocks to entering the cash economy.

Objectives

The challenges for smallholder farmers are numerous, they range from the provision of services to development of business skills to deal with new circumstances, and extremely difficult to address individually. This underpins the importance of partnerships in the agricultural sector and the academia remains a key partner in delivering the much needed human capital as well as knowledge co-creation to generate relevant research outputs.

As part of efforts to plan and implement undertakings among universities and FBOs in Africa RUFORUM considers the theme for the 4th EAFF Congress as critical. The theme of the Congress “Organizing Smallholder Farmers to Harness New Investments: Partnerships and Innovations to Enhance Value Chain Ownership, Productivity and Market Integration” is very timely for the RUFORUM timely and links with the current effort related to mapping out and visioning the role of universities in attainment of continental and global goals. In this agenda, RUFORUM is crafting a Vision 2030. The objectives of the proposed dialogue include:

- (a) Reflect on a Vision for African Agriculture (in 2030) and the potential role of African universities and their partner in supporting the realisation of this vision
- (b) Formulate key strategies and actions relevant to the transformation processes of universities to meet the vision, and,
- (c) Map out complementary actions that would need to be undertaken to achieve the vision, including the strategic partners and actors relevant in the transformation agenda.

Approach

The dialogue will be held a side-event and contribution to the 4th EAFF Congress. It will be conducted as a parallel session and participatory seminar starting 8:30 – 10:00 am on Thursday 14th October 2017. It will be a facilitator - led session to ensure participants are engaged and focused to deliver desired outputs. The subject of the dialogue is very broad and has potential to generate several ramifications and in order to keep focus the facilitator(s) will engage participants to address the following structured questions in plenary and small group discussions.

Area	Main Question	Supplementary Question
Introduction	Brief overview of RUFORUM-	RUFORUM activities and Rationale for Visioning Has the EAFF benefited from RUFORUM activities before and how? What should be the focus of RUFORUM in the next 10 years to catalyse the transformation of Africa's agriculture?
Relevance	Expectations from the Agriculture education system- How can we make the graduate relevant for Agricultural Development in Africa? How can we strengthen universities to make them relevant to the membership of the Farmers Federation?	What should be the attributes of the University graduate from a practioners' perspective? How should they link with other service providers?
Partnership	How can RUFORUM use EAFF platform to further agricultural development in Africa?	How can RUFORUM facilitate farmer integration across the region? What would be the areas of focus? What should RUFORUM look out for?
University community engagement	What role would be the role of the EA Farmers Federation in this initiative?	Knowledge transfer partnerships- the symbiotic relationship between the university and the farmers/communities

Outputs/Deliverables

1. A comprehensive report with aspirations of FBOs with respect to FBOs-Academia partnerships as part of promoting demand articulation;
2. Strengthened partnerships between FBOs and the RUFORUM/Universities Network in Africa that will always serve as a stringboard to mutual interactions