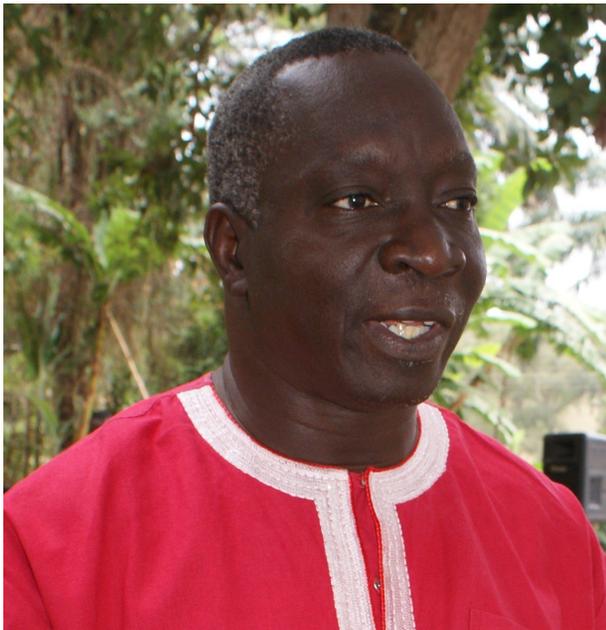


RUFORUM Celebrating 10 years as a Network and 22 years supporting Agricultural Higher Education

Celebrating RUFORUM@10



Prof. Adipala Ekwamu,
Executive Secretary - RUFORUM

In 2014, the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) celebrates 10 years as a network of universities and 22 years of addressing tertiary agricultural education issues in eastern, central and southern Africa. The Network was created to provide university support to the implementation of the Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Program (CAADP), an initiative by African Heads of States and Governments to revamp the agricultural sector and ensure food and nutrition security on the continent. During this period, RUFORUM has worked with universities, small farmers, policy organs and other partners to ensure high quality graduates and research that is relevant to sustainable agriculture and rural development in eastern, central and southern Africa. 2014 marks the tenth anniversary for both RUFORUM and CAADP.

RUFORUM has grown under the guidance of senior African professionals, from a crop-based Rockefeller Foundation programme (FORUM) into a regional broad-based consortium of 32 universities in 18 countries in eastern, central and southern Africa (see Box 1). Its strategic goals are based on two assumptions. First, development is more likely to occur where there is an active, well-informed critical mass of locally based agricultural professionals to conduct relevant problem-solving research. Second, the results of such research are more likely to be applied when based on strengthening a demand-driven research agenda – via linkages to smallholder farmers, community organizations, service agencies and policy makers to ensure research relevance and impact on the one hand and matching training and education to the potential job market on the other.

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Box 1: Key Milestones in RUFORUM's Evolution

- 1988: Rockefeller Foundation recognized that food and nutrition security, as an emerging challenge to Africa, would involve more than just productivity increases in staple crops. It would require a strong national base of university graduates and national institutions.
- 1992: Rockefeller Foundation launched the FORUM (Forum on Agricultural Resources Husbandry) to revitalize graduate (MSc) training in 10 universities in eastern and southern Africa. The goals were: 1) train a pool of MSc scientists in required disciplines and 2) create a pipeline for PhD training to strengthen agricultural faculties in target countries.
- 2004: Vice Chancellors, in an African-led initiative, created RUFORUM, a metamorphosis of FORUM into a collectively owned instrument, aligned with CAADP processes, as a platform for networking, advocacy, and resource mobilization for food and nutrition-related faculties.
- 2008: Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) provided key core support that helped other donors invest in RUFORUM as it provided new services and expanded the breadth of its network.
- 2012: A review of BMGF support confirmed RUFORUM's important role and the Foundation identified continued support to 2018.
- 2014: RUFORUM revised its strategy and business plan to support its current 18 member countries, 32 member and 5 associate-member universities and to serve as a voice for Higher Education in Agriculture in Africa.

The RUFORUM Secretariat, hosted by Makerere University, provides the basic platform upon which activities are built. Its unique core program structure consists of three MSc and seven PhD regional collaborative degree programs¹. These programs benefit from rigorous quality assurance measures; competitive grant programs, including hundreds of MSc graduate research grants, associated field attachments program awards, community action research programs and institutional strengthening grants and support by advanced work on ICT and M&E. Through these initiatives, RUFORUM ensures that postgraduates have relevant experience and skills, not only to meet the needs of national agriculture systems, but also to become individual entrepreneurs, active in the private sector and NGOs. Overall guidance of the network is provided by its Board², who are Vice Chancellors of member universities, and five external representatives.

¹RUFORUM's regional programs are designed as rigorous, innovative and experiential learning degrees, which encourage mobility across Africa, and address critical gaps in skills demanded by employers and farmers.

²All Vice Chancellors pay membership fees to RUFORUM on behalf of their universities and cover their own travel costs to meetings. While this revenue generation is insufficient to cover RUFORUM operational costs, it reflects the worth that Vice Chancellors accord RUFORUM in adding value to their agricultural training and research programs

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The Deans' Committee, International Advisory Panel and a Technical Committee oversee quality assurance and together with National Forums, help to frame the agenda of research and training activities.

RUFORUM is a regional platform that fosters economies of scope and scale in improving both the relevance and quality of post-graduate education and research in member universities³. The Board is very committed. The ability of RUFORUM to strengthen collaboration and the exchange of ideas is unique. RUFORUM regularly hosts gatherings where almost all of the Vice Chancellors of 32 universities and over 200 Deans are represented. To date RUFORUM has engaged over 2,340 faculty and provided grants to over 1020 students⁴. Of the student grants, some 40 percent have been awarded to women and RUFORUM has a strong commitment to gender equity. Their graduates play a key role in transforming production prospects, incomes and food security in rural areas. Gender mainstreaming is encouraged in the universities and within the project grants and research approaches.

As a research and training network organization, RUFORUM also plays an important regional public goods role that enables and facilitates the spill-over of innovations and improvement within and across its constituent members, their countries, the region and internationally. Through its learning network and conferences, RUFORUM has had impact on attitudes, research, curricula, and pedagogy and on university partnerships with both smallholder farmers and a wide assortment of agricultural development agencies. RUFORUM, by virtue of its innovative demonstration programs and established regional convening power, is an effective advocate for the transformation of pragmatic agricultural science training and research to serve poor rural communities. This platform has the potential for long-term sustainability to advocate for increased and effective interest in higher agricultural education and training.

RUFORUM has led the transformation of agriculture and related faculties in eastern, central and southern Africa, so that universities are in a better position to produce graduates with the skills and commitment to improve livelihoods in rural communities. In addition to its rigorous methodology, RUFORUM has encouraged universities to adopt more experiential, life-long and facilitative

³RUFORUM improves the quality and relevance of post-graduate training and research by standardizing and upgrading core methodology courses and making course and research offerings relevant to users. It fosters economies of scale and scope in the delivery of education and research outputs by specialization and concentration on a regional basis. There are several innovative technologies that have been generated including macro-propagation of bananas, passion fruit disease control, artificial insemination for pigs to control disease, innovative work on soyabean and sorghum value chains. Some examples are highlighted in Fitzgerald and Lindow, 2013.

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⁴1020 MSc and 155 PhD scholarships and support to a range of other students

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approaches to learning. This results in graduates who are more creative, entrepreneurial, able to communicate well with different audiences and bring their technical competence to address the problems of smallholder farmers along the full value chain. RUFORUM has provided opportunities for faculty and students to carry out participatory action research. In contrast with 1992, at the inception of FORUM when most research was carried out in isolation in laboratories and on university farms – today most research is out in the field in partnership with farmers and a range of service agencies.

RUFORUM is a strong advocate for investment in universities and has played an active role in providing space for dialogue on the factors that affect human capacity development. RUFORUM hosted CHEA, a conference of Ministers of Agriculture and Education, who committed to increase investment to higher agricultural education as part of the CAADP investment plans and to strengthen national, regional and international partnerships to support transformation. Senior policy makers and technocrats are included at all the RUFORUM Annual General Meetings (AGMs), significantly increasing awareness and commitment. RUFORUM Biennial Conferences have become a de facto continental forum for higher agricultural education.

RUFORUM has not done this alone – it has received very strong support from its members, from the national research institutions, from farmers and community associations, from many local and international NGOs, from the African Union, COMESA, NEPAD, FARA, regional research centres (ASARECA and CCARDESA), from other tertiary agricultural education networks including ANAFE, and from the CGIAR centres. Universities and research centres in other African regions, Europe, North America, and Costa Rica, have worked to share their lessons and partner with some of our programs. In the future we expect to have more contact with universities in Australia, Brazil, China and India. The multilateral and bilateral development agencies and charitable foundations have been particularly important to RUFORUM over the years and we look forward to continued partnerships as RUFORUM increasingly becomes the regional reference point for developing the highly skilled and locally relevant human resources so important to Africa's future.

RUFORUM will be celebrating its 10 years at the Biennial Conference in Maputo in July 2014. This will be part of the wider celebrations of the 10 Years of CAADP and the African Union declared African Year of Agriculture and Nutrition Security. These celebrations will coincide with the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) International Year of Family Farming (IYFF). We invite you to read more about RUFORUM and the 4th Biennial Conference at www.ruforum.org. Please visit the RUFORUM institutional repository, which showcases the research of the RUFORUM network, at <http://repository.ruforum.org>.

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