

Institutional capacity assessment and development for RUFORUM network members

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Abstract

The POCA/DOSA (Participatory Organisational Capacity Assessment/Discussion-Oriented Self-Assessment Index Tool) was used to assess the performance of the RUFORUM Secretariat and seven sampled Universities in relation to six capacity dimensions: governance and oversight; leadership style and management practices; external relations and partnering; service/program delivery practices; financial management practices and human capital development practices. The POCA assessment exercise for organisations serves a variety of purposes. The main objective is to facilitate a process where staff, leaders and beneficiaries of the network get an opportunity to identify the strengths and shortcomings of the organization and to establish possible intervention strategies. It is also a diagnostic instrument to determine the measure of the existing structure and capacity that may serve as a point of comparison for subsequent assessments. The assessment therefore determines the stages of the organizational growth and specific changes that may be needed to strengthen its performance. The performance of individual components was summarized by simple tabulation and graphical illustration. Classification using a 5-level Capacity Maturity Framework (CMF) identified the areas of weakness to be targeted for capacity development. The analysis generally indicated relatively stabilised processes that are being consolidated, although the scores varied from one component to another. Of interest is the fact that the RUFORUM and its member universities have a comparatively low sustainability rating because of donor and/or government dependence for funding and narrow income base. Strong institutions, the formal and informal rules that structure and constrain human behavior and interaction, help RUFORUM and the member universities focus on relevant actions, fully engage with partners and stakeholders in the teaching, research and outreach processes and the subsequent use of products and services to achieve outcomes. However, many challenges still exist for both the Universities as individual entities and for RUFORUM as a network. Critically important is the low level of resourcing and low investment in activities to strengthen and/or reform processes that can seriously impair the sustainability and credibility of the supported grant and regional training programmes. The Secretariat is intervening directly through grant support for skills development of staff and researchers, while for others it focusses on influencing policy and internal processes for creating, adopting, leading, implementing and sustaining change initiatives towards achievement of objectives. It is generally recommended that RUFORUM and its member universities adopt the POCA methodology and strive to maintain the strong elements identified through these

assessments and seek for opportunities to address the identified weaknesses.

Key words: Capacity Assessment, Capability Maturity, Capacity Development, RUFORUM, Universities

Résumé

Les outils d'évaluation des capacités organisationnelles participatives (POCA)/ et d'auto-évaluation (DOSA) ont été utilisés pour évaluer la performance du Secrétariat du RUFORUM et de sept universités échantillonnées par rapport à six dimensions de capacité: gouvernance et surveillance; style de leadership et pratiques de gestion; relations extérieures et partenariat; pratiques de prestation de services / programmes; les pratiques de gestion financière et les pratiques de développement du capital humain. L'exercice d'évaluation du POCA pour les organisations sert à diverses fins. L'objectif principal est de faciliter un processus où le personnel, les dirigeants et les bénéficiaires du réseau ont la possibilité d'identifier les forces et les faiblesses de l'organisation et d'établir des stratégies d'intervention possible. Il s'agit également d'un instrument de diagnostic permettant de déterminer la mesure de la structure et des capacités existantes pouvant servir de point de comparaison pour les évaluations ultérieures. L'évaluation détermine donc les étapes de croissance organisationnelle et les changements spécifiques qui peuvent être nécessaires pour renforcer sa performance. Les performances des composantes individuelles ont été résumées par une simple tabulation et une illustration graphique. Une classification basée sur un cadre de maturité des capacités a identifié les points faibles à cibler pour le développement des capacités. L'analyse a généralement indiqué des processus relativement stabilisés qui sont en cours de consolidation, bien que les scores varient d'une composante à l'autre. Il est intéressant de noter que le RUFORUM et ses universités membres ont une cote de durabilité relativement faible en raison de la dépendance des bailleurs de fonds et / ou du gouvernement pour le financement. De grandes institutions, les règles formelles et informelles qui structurent et restreignent le comportement humain et l'interaction, aident RUFORUM et les universités membres à se focaliser sur les actions pertinentes, à s'engager pleinement avec les partenaires et les parties prenantes dans les processus d'enseignement, de recherche et de sensibilisation et l'utilisation ultérieure des produits et services pour obtenir des résultats. Cependant, de nombreux défis existent toujours pour les universités en tant qu'entités individuelles et pour RUFORUM en tant que réseau. D'une importance cruciale, le faible niveau de ressources et d'investissement dans les activités de renforcement et/ou de réforme des processus qui peuvent compromettre la durabilité et la crédibilité des subventions et des programmes régionaux de formation. Le Secrétariat intervient directement à travers les subventions pour le développement des compétences pour le personnel et des chercheurs des universités, et dans l'influence des politiques et processus internes (pour d'autres acteurs), pour créer, adopter, diriger, mettre en œuvre et soutenir les initiatives de changement vers la réalisation des objectifs. Il est généralement recommandé que le RUFORUM et ses universités membres adoptent la méthodologie POCA et s'efforcent de maintenir les éléments solides identifiés lors de ces évaluations et recherchent des opportunités pour remédier aux faiblesses identifiées.

Mots clés: évaluation des capacités, maturité des capacités, développement des capacités, RUFORUM, universités

Introduction

It has been widely acknowledged that insufficient capacity of organisations hinders sustainable development. This problem however cannot simply be defined in terms of gaps in human resources, financial resources or training. The issue is a function of several aspects: limited sense of local ownership of the development processes; excessive dependency on external resources and technical assistance; inadequate considerations of broader environmental or systems factors; and poor integration and co-ordination of multiple development initiatives. There has been much debate and research on the issue of capacity building, leading to better understanding of development processes and the changes necessary to make development initiatives more successful and sustainable. The concept of “capacity development” instead of “capacity building” was then born. Capacity Development is a process of enabling individuals, groups, organizations, institutions and societies to sustainably define, articulate, engage and actualize their vision or developmental goals building on their own resources and learning.

In the context of RUFORUM (Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture) and University systems, technical capacities are required in the broad areas of teaching, scientific research and outreach to enable member universities carry out all technical tasks required to build the requisite human capital capacity to meet national development objectives. The functional capacities enable members and partners to plan, lead, manage and sustain change initiatives to ensure that technical know-how is embodied in local systems and processes in a sustainable way. The technical and functional capacities, which are in themselves inter-related, exist across three dimensions of enabling environment, organizations and individuals. The dimension of enabling environment relates to political commitment and vision; policy, legal and economic frameworks; budget allocations and processes; governance and power structures; incentives and social norms. The organizational/institutional dimension relates to: strategic management functions, structures and relationships; operational capacity (processes, systems, procedures, sanctions, incentives and values); human and financial resources (policies, deployment and performance); knowledge and information resources; and infrastructure. Organizational capacity - the ability to do, experience, or understand something - stems from the interaction among the resources, processes and values (including the organizational culture and mission) of an organisation. The resources are the people and physical assets the organization can command. In general, resources can be hired, bought or built. The processes, whether formal or informal, define how the organization transforms inputs into products. Routines (often tacit) are an important component of processes, while the values define what the organization should do and guide the everyday, independent decisions of its members. Organizational culture is an important element of an organization’s values. In new organizations, skills reside in resources, especially its human resources. In time, the skills in successful organizations are transferred to processes and values.

RUFORUM capacity development interventions target – first and foremost - individual capacities: the ability of researchers and graduates to do, experience, or understand agricultural innovation that results from the combination of innate and acquired abilities

including talent, task commitment, creativity and education. Because individual capacities result from the interaction between innate and acquired abilities, each individual is good at a few things and not as good at all things. These individual capacities collectively come into play in determining the capacity and eventual performance of the members and organisations that employ these RUFORUM-trained individuals. The second aspect of RUFORUM capacity development interventions is institution strengthening of its member universities, for both technical and functional capacities. Apart from skilling individuals, the secretariat must develop internal capacity and also influence the member universities in the following functional capacity domains:

- (i) strategic leadership involving the strategies and niche management by the leaders that set the direction for the network and its constituent members, with a focus on its regional programmes,
- (ii) program management in terms of the ability of the Secretariat and member universities to carry out their mandated institutional roles,
- (iii) process management that examines the way the Secretariat and members manage their human relations and work-related interactions,
- (iv) structure that identifies the links between how the RUFORUM network is governed and its mission, as well as the roles that human resources and finance play in the organization's day-to-day activities, and
- (v) inter-institutional linkages that describes the ability of RUFORUM and its members to manage their external relationships.

This requires a broad understanding of the formal and informal rules that structure and/or constrains human behaviour and interaction. Institutions include the legal rules (e.g. laws and regulations), social norms and ideologies, contractual arrangements, accepted and established practices, ideas that govern organizations, policies and processes, and management strategies that influence choices and decision making. The institutional environment is the fundamental set of rules, both formal and informal, that govern production, exchange and distribution of knowledge and services within systems. Institutional arrangements, on the other hand, are specific arrangements between parties to a contract that govern the way the parties co-operate and/or compete. The RUFORUM strategy is to foster processes and actions that encourage healthy competition but largely collaboration and collective action amongst member universities.

This paper discusses the RUFORUM capacity development strategy, focusing on an approach that capacitates member Universities from within rather than from the outside, starting from where the individual University stands on the capability maturity scale and creating change from within.

Results-focused capacity development: A literature review

Results-focused capacity development is a strategic approach that emphasizes the use of knowledge and learning in empowering local agents to advance change. It extends beyond individuals and organizations to collective action across society in strengthening organisational capacity in support of a development goal. Such a framework emphasizes

the empowerment of all sectors of society through knowledge, learning and innovation to advance results. At the framework's core is a results focus, which enables setting objectives and measuring achievements while encouraging flexibility and innovation in the change process. RUFORUM as a network of African Universities is focused on bringing innovation (new products, new processes, and new forms of organization) into use in the areas of higher agricultural education and learning (HAEL), agricultural research for development (AR4D) and the wider agricultural science, technology and innovation (AgriSTI) landscape, together with the institutions and policies that affect the behavior and performance of the members and partners. The RUFORUM mission is "to strengthen the capacities of universities to foster innovations responsive to demands of smallholder farmers through the training of high quality researchers, the output of impact-oriented research and the maintenance of collaborative working relations among researchers, farmers and national agricultural research institutions". The network focuses on assisting member universities develop organisational capacities, competencies and capabilities through collaborative arrangements with each other and other formal or informal organisations over a sustained period.

Capacity in current contemporary international development terminology is defined as "the ability of individuals, organizations or society as a whole to manage their affairs successfully" – the organizational and technical abilities, relationships and values that enable organizations, groups and individuals at any level to carry out functions and consistently achieve results that resemble what was originally aspired. It is the ability of individuals, groups, institutions and organizations and society to use their resources, systems and processes they develop to support them in identifying and solving problems and performing their work over time. Competence is a legal term that can be defined as being "duly qualified: having sufficient capacity, ability or authority" - in practice competence is the quality or state of being functionally adequate or having sufficient and demonstrated background, knowledge, strength and skills necessary to practice a profession. Competence is often used as an essential principle when, for example, recognizing that management and leadership are all about getting the right people in the right place at the right time. On the other hand, Capability is a collaborative process that can be deployed and through which individual competences can be applied and exploited – usually manifest in the form of resources (e.g. infrastructure, human capital, technology, finances) within a society that influence the type and scale of activity undertaken by individuals and organizations. Capacity is an attribute internal to people, organizations and groups or systems of organizations - encompassing the overall system, environment or context in which individuals, organisations and societies operate and interact. It is the process by which individuals, groups, organisations, institutions and societies increase their abilities to: (1) perform core functions, solve problems, define and achieve objectives; and (2) understand and deal with their development needs in a broad context and in a sustainable manner.

Capacity development, then, is a change or transformation process from within. Capacity development has traditionally been associated with knowledge transfer and training of individuals, yet it is a complex, non-linear and long-term change process in which

no single factor (e.g. information, education and training, technical assistance, policy advice, etc.) can by itself be an explanation for the development of capacity. It contributes to addressing specific needs of actors across three interlinked dimensions - individual, organisational/institutional and enabling environment. Capacity development involves the empowerment of societal actors through learning, knowledge, information and innovation to effect transformational and sustainable change in institutions, which in turn supports the achievement of the development goal. It goes far beyond the transfer of knowledge and skills through training, and cuts across multiple levels. Capacity development can be seen as transforming the culture and structural designs of organisations to become real learning organisations. It is a continuous and reciprocal process of adjusting people's attitudes, values and organisational practises while building up appropriate knowledge and skills among various stakeholders in a partnership – to strengthen each partner's ability to make effective decisions about their own lives and to take full responsibility of the consequences of such decisions (van Geene, 2003).

Capacity issues can be analysed at three levels – the individual, the organisation or entity and the broader system. Often capacity development is only addressed at the individual and organisational level. However, capacity should be understood at the systems level as well. The system is a regularly interacting or interdependent group of items forming a unified whole. All three levels must be included when assessing and planning capacity to create meaningful change. Dimensions of capacity at the Systems level include:

- Policy Dimension: systems have a purpose to meet certain needs in society, including value systems.
- Legal/Regulatory Dimension: includes rules, laws, norms and standards which govern the system, and which sets boundaries for an entity (e.g. University).
- Management or Accountability Dimension: defines who 'manages' the system, or who is responsible for potential design, management and implementation, co-ordination, monitoring and evaluation etc. of development initiatives in the system of the entity.
- Resource Dimension: (human, financial, information) that may be available within the system to develop and implement the entity's initiatives.
- Process Dimension: the inter-relationships, interdependencies and interactions amongst the entities, including flow of resources and information, formal and informal networks of people and supporting communications infrastructures.

An entity or organization can be thought of as a system of related components that work together to achieve an agreed-upon mission. Unlike traditional capacity building and organisational strengthening which focuses on human resources, processes and organisational structures, a more comprehensive approach to capacity development examines all dimensions of capacity at entity level, including its interactions within the system. Dimensions of Capacity at the Entity level include:

- Human Resource Management: the most valuable of the entity's resources and upon which change, capacity and development primarily depend.
- Financial Resource Management: both operating and capital, required for the efficient and effective functioning of the entity, including resource mobilisation and general fund-raising.

- **Equitable Participation:** involvement of local knowledge and stakeholders related to access and benefit.
- **Sustainability of Program Benefits:** impact of the entity's work looking at different aspects like environmental, economic, political, institutional and cultural factors.
- **Partnering and networking:** collaboration with other primary national-regional-international actors in the business area of the entity, donors, policy makers, civil society, and private sector entities in alliances and networks to improve scope and effectiveness the organization.
- **Organisational Learning:** teamwork, information-sharing and capacity for generating information that leads to improvement of current practice, systems to enhance resource use, including financial management system, human resource management system, knowledge management and learning, information systems, administrative procedures, decision-making, problem-solving, communication
- **Strategic Management and Governance:** leadership, board practices, strategic planning, commitment to goals, mission/vision and strategy (purpose and direction of the organization), philosophy or culture, constituency, organizational structure, lines of authority, communication mechanisms.

Conceptually, capacity development strategies and interventions are increasingly based on enhancing the technical and functional capacities of organisations, which are prerequisites



Figure 1. Universalia-IDRC Institutional and Organisational Assessment (IOA) Model
 Source: <http://reflectlearn.org/discover/universalia-institutional-and-organizational-assessment-model-ioa-model>

to achieving goals and objectives. The performance of an organisation is often viewed as the balance between its effectiveness, relevance, efficiency, and financial viability (Lusthaus *et al.*, 2002). This commonly used model (Figure 1) also posits that organisational performance should be examined in relation to the organisation's motivation, capacity and external environment. Indeed, organisations change: in response to factors in their external environment, because of changes in their internal resources (e.g., financial, technological, human), and as a result of fundamental shifts in values within the organisation, which in turn affect the organisational climate, culture and ways of operating.

The individual level is a major dimension of capacity – people, including small interpersonal networks of individuals. The individual level includes the involved management, professionals, support staff but also those who are beneficiaries or are otherwise impacted by the entity's work (e.g. specific client groups, segments of society, etc.). This level addresses the individual's capacity to function efficiently and effectively within the entity and within the broader system. Often, capacity building has traditionally focused on individual skills and knowledge needed to perform job descriptions or positions. Increasingly, the dimensions of accountability, performance, values and ethics, incentives and security are becoming more important at this level.

Participatory capacity assessment

Organizational capacity refers to the internal organizational structures, systems and processes, management, leadership, governance and overall staff skills and competences that enhance the performance of an organization. Improving performance, the balance between the effectiveness, relevance, efficiency, and financial viability of the member Universities, is at the centre of the RUFORUM capacity development strategy. It defines the purpose for the interventions. Consequently, understanding the performance and capability rating of the Secretariat and the university system in the key capacity areas is fundamental to the development of the intervention strategies. Measuring institution capacity is an important aspect of a broader program in institutional strengthening; it helps in strategic, operational, or funding decision-making; it helps explain institutional strengthening activities and related performance.

Different frameworks exist for assessing organizational capacity, each specifying a number of interrelated areas that underlie an organization's performance. The different frameworks are underpinned by different philosophies and theories of organisational change. The most appropriate method for Capacity Assessment is self-assessment or participatory assessment. This is a process whereby an assessment team with representatives of the organisations goes through an assessment exercise that provides information about the capacity of their organisation. Self-assessment has the advantage of organisational learning and building of ownership of the capacity development and change processes. The Participatory Organisation Capacity Assessment (POCA) presented in this paper uses the "Discussion-Oriented Self-Assessment" (DOSA) tool of the "Participatory, Results-Oriented Self-Evaluation" (PROSE) methodology (EDC/Pact, 1998; USAID, 2000; UNDP, 2002; van Geene, 2003; Pact, 2010). PROSE is a method that has the dual purpose of both assessing

and enhancing organizational capacities using discussion questions and individual questionnaire items in facilitated focus group discussions. It is designed to compare capacities across a cohort group of peer organizations, which allows for benchmarking and networking among the organizations. An assessment team is led through a number of questions referring to a common set of events, policies, conditions or incidents that have happened to their organisation in relation to capacity dimensions. Each member of the assessment team then “scores” the level of capacity, based on discussions and their own views and experiences. The discussion questions minimize bias when group members’ individually assess those issues on an ordinal scale. Typical Capacity Dimensions used by POCA/PROSE are Human Resource Management, Financial Resource Management, Equitable Participation, Partnering, Organisational Learning and Strategic Management/ Governance. Other dimensions might be added when appropriate.

A self-assessment survey was conducted for the RUFORUM Secretariat in seven (7) Universities in East, Southern and West Africa.¹ Sufficient questionnaire returns were received from the Secretariat and three Universities – Lilongwe, Cape Coast and Abomey-Calavi. The few forms from the other four universities were combined into another cluster for the analysis. The exercise was undertaken to: i) introduce a Participatory Organization Capacity Assessment (POCA) tool that can be adopted for conducting and monitoring organizational growth experienced by RUFORUM member Universities; ii) have an objective measurement of the capacities at the Secretariat and sampled Universities and the degree of consensus about this level of capacity; and, iii) identify areas of strength and weakness as a basis for elaborating the institutional capacity development strategy of RUFORUM. Through a series of facilitated group discussions interspersed with individual responses to questionnaire items, participants representing a cross-functional, cross hierarchical sample responded anonymously to a questionnaire, selecting the best response to statements about the practices of their organisation in six capacity areas: governance and oversight; leadership style and management practices; external relations and partnering; service/program delivery practices; financial management practices and human capital development practices. Additional data collection methods used in this assessment included: individual and group interviews, literature review and analysis of various documents/reports associated with the implementation of RUFORUM activities. The team also used informal interaction with staff and other respondents either seeking for clarifications or triangulating some facts. To ensure free and informal dialogues during the assessment, the facilitation team explained the objectives of the assessment to respondents. It was emphasized that the assessment was essentially a learning process for both parties and was by no means judgmental. It was further emphasized that the responsibility for filling any gaps that would be identified through the assessment lies with both parties.

After interviewing the respondents, and collecting the relevant information/data and questionnaires, the findings were transferred to the DOSA assessment sheet and rated in relation to the six component capacity dimensions: governance and oversight; leadership style and management practices; external relations and partnering; service/program delivery practices; financial management practices and human capital development practices. The six

¹Makerere University, Kyambogo University, Uganda Martyrs University, University of Nairobi, Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources, University of Abomey-Calavi, and University of Cape Coast.

capacity areas constituted the key process areas that generically represent the management and service delivery functions of the organisation. Each component or key process area has different categories (sub-capacities/common features) and elements (key practices) that, when collectively addressed, accomplish the goals of the key process area. The scored questionnaires were further analysed by simple tabulation and graphical illustration.

The use of numbers (ordinal scales) and statistical analysis to represent capacity are useful in ordering by rank along a continuum. The ordinal numbers are however, relative and not absolute measures. The ordinal scores generated by DOSA require interpretation using a common framework. The Capability Maturity Framework (CMF), an adaptation of the Capability Maturity Model (CMM) (Paulk *et al.*, 1995; USAID, 2000; Curtis, 2007; SEI, 2010) layered in five maturity levels that mark evolving capability of organisations was used. The CMM provides a framework that represents the key components of productive organisational process architecture. Applying a CMM to an organisation enhances the overall odds for success of an entity's operational architecture by identifying weak areas and providing a defined evolutionary path to improving the overall architecture process. The CMM identifies the levels through which an organization must evolve to establish a culture of excellence in the related capacity domain. Processes without the proper foundation fail at the very point they are needed most – under stress – and they provide no basis for future improvement. The CMM presents a maturity framework that focuses on continuously improving the management and development processes - an evolutionary improvement path from ad hoc, inconsistently performed practices, to a mature, disciplined, and continuously improving development of the knowledge, skills, and motivation of the workforce and practices that enhance strategic business performance. Using this framework, member universities can successfully address their critical capacity issues.

After completion of the first draft of the report, a joint debriefing session with management team and professional staff of the Secretariat involved in the interviewing process was conducted. The debriefing session served two purposes. One was to provide feedback of the outcomes from the analysis of information to the respondents and to verify or check accuracy or obvious omissions. The second was to provide an initial synopsis of how the Secretariat and sample member Universities were assessed and to show the status of capacity maturity at each category. Additional information for clarity and factual corrections were made on specific areas of the report.

Analysis of the findings

The analysis allows for ranking to compare organizations with each other and rolling up results to report on a group of organizations together. The results therefore are presented in a manner that depicts the differences between the Secretariat and the Universities and within the Universities. The analysis produced two types of scores and accompanying graphics. The first was a capacity score, which indicated how each staff perceived the strengths and weaknesses of the institution in each of the capacity (key process area) and sub-capacity (common feature) dimensions as averaged from scores for each of the questions (representing the key practices). The second was a derived average consensus

score showing the degree to which the assessment team members agreed on their evaluation of the organization's overall capacity maturity level and in each of the capacity and sub-capacity areas. The consensus score acts as a check on the perceived capacity scores from individual members and also helps identify capacity areas that all members agree need immediate attention.

General findings on capacity levels for the components. The overall consensus scores, and in each of the capacity areas, are presented in Figure 2, while the perceptions of Deans and Principals of some of the functional capacities are presented in Figure 3. The results of the analysis depict that the RUFORUM Secretariat is in all aspects, except human capital, at a higher capability maturity level than its member Universities collectively, with an overall score of 3.75 points against 3.41 points out of a possible 5 points. Generally, from overall scores, both the Secretariat and member Universities are in their expansion, consolidation and quantitatively-managed capacity maturity stage. Each entity has a track record of achievements that are recognizable by stakeholders and other actors who have a similar focus in the same services. Practices for specific process areas are further stabilized and guided by high-level organizational directives, measured and controlled. There are however some noticeable differences both in overall ranking and in the rankings for each capacity area between the sampled universities. One entity in particular was ranked for most components as being in the development stage where, although processes are defined and characterised, institutionalised and proactive, and tailored from organisation's standards there are many noticeable deficiencies and performance gaps that require substantial improvement. Capacity for managing external relations and partnering, leadership and management style and governance was perceived as better developed than for financial capacity and program management and delivery. The overall rankings indicate that practices for most process areas are generally perceived as close to being institutionalized, more complete and no longer being performed irregularly or are not ad hoc in their implementation. Practices are documented, stakeholders of the practice are identified and often involved but inadequate resources are often provided to support the process (people, funding, and tools). Standards and/or guidelines exist to guide the implementation of most of the practices although the levels of adherence vary.

Specific findings per component

Governance and Management. The assessment found the Secretariat and member Universities to be organizationally strong in a number of issues (Figure 4) partly because they are legally registered/established entities and complied with all legal regulations governing organisations of their nature in the respective countries of operation. RUFORUM as a network has a well-defined membership and is perceived as adequately addressing the needs of most of its client segments. The vision and mission of RUFORUM and the sampled Universities were in place, well shared and purportedly understood by members and the constituency. Further, governance organs and structures existed with both geographic coverage and gender consideration, as appropriate. The organizational structures offered clear lines of command and responsibilities for respective groups of actors. The members of governance and management teams and staff were perceived to be aware and knowledgeable on issues relating to the core functions, services and products

of RUFORUM and their own organisations. The network has networks with like-minded organizations and coalition with other stakeholders at different levels. Team spirit was observed and the network was in good touch with its relevant stakeholders, in terms of information sharing and use. RUFORUM has adequate planning capacity and is guided by a strategic plan which was developed in a participatory manner and approved by the Annual General Meeting of Trustees (AGM) focusing on a succinct capacity development framework. Forums to share program information were in place including for example staff meetings, management meetings, AGM, Board and specific task forces. Monitoring and evaluation, especially at the Secretariat but rarely with universities, was done using different formats as demanded by respective donors but largely based on the corporate results framework. The capacities of member Universities are varied and non-uniform for many common features. Some exhibit high capacity levels in all facets of governance and management while others showed having some capacities developed and vivid in a few areas while some practices and processes are in place but often implemented in reactive or ad-hoc manner. Information dissemination mechanisms were generally weak and in most cases were characterised by delayed response and feedback. The RUFORUM initiated programmes are sometimes viewed as not being core programmes of the implementing Departments at the University and are very much donor dependent.

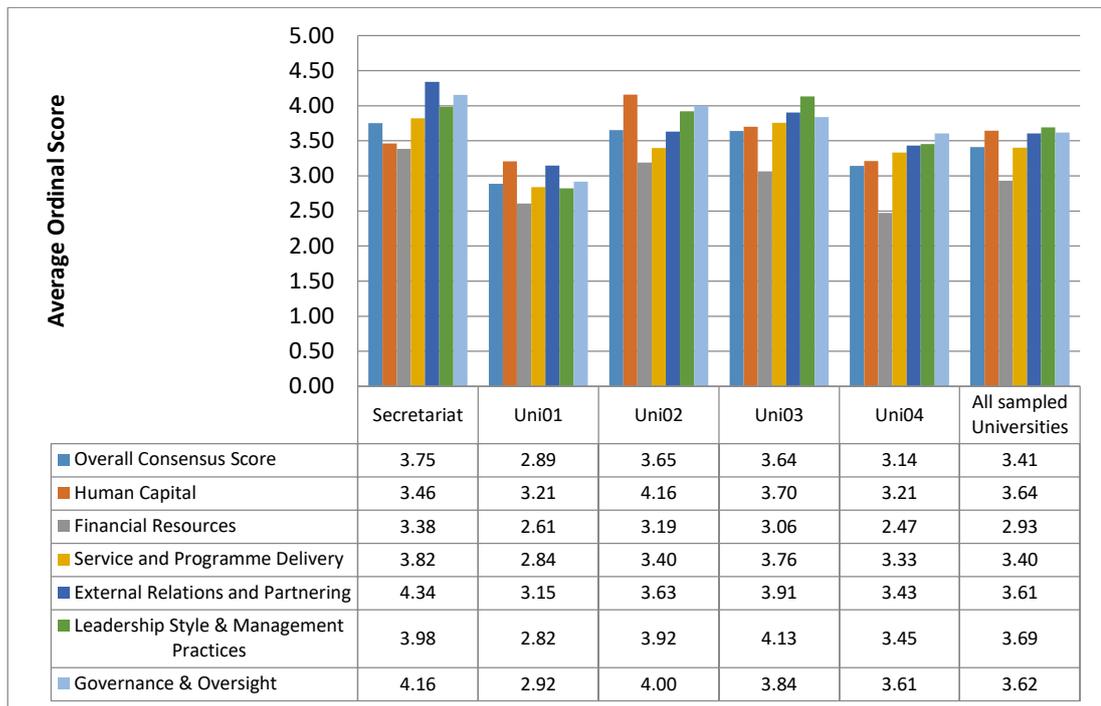


Figure 2. Consensus and aggregate scores for six capacity areas

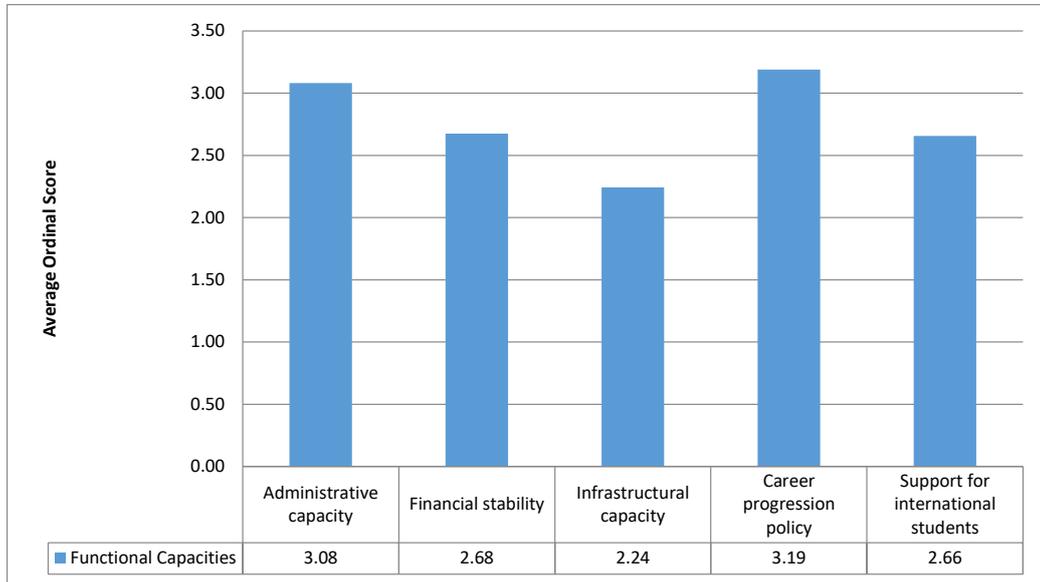


Figure 3. Functional capacities as assessed by Deans and Principals of RUFORUM members universities

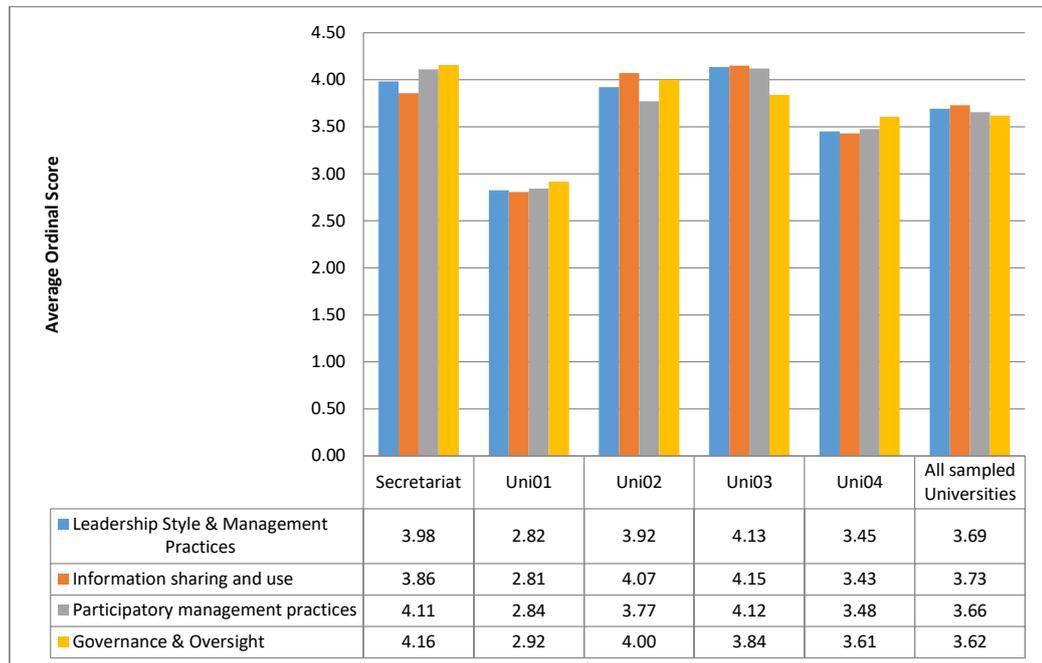


Figure 4. Ordinal scores for capacity in Leadership, Management and Governance

Human Resources. RUFORUM Secretariat was found to have a simple and clear organizational structure in place indicating the required positions and responsibilities of each staff. Further, roles and responsibilities were clearly defined to all members of staff and existing staff have adequate skills and experience, and are very much motivated to learn and participate actively in organizational matters. RUFORUM and its members have near optimal staff capacity (numbers and skills) to execute their mandated responsibilities for research, teaching and outreach (Figure 5). Both the Universities and the Secretariat have well laid out recruitment systems for staff and for communication between the management and staff, well developed personnel policies and procedures, and engage and utilize human resources from their partners and members, in diverse degrees and proportions, in the discharge of their functions and services. RUFORUM focuses on mobilising human and institutional capacity for research to generate knowledge; for education to advance the communication of the knowledge; and for outreach, incubation and innovation to bring the knowledge to practical use and application. The nature of capacity mobilization and development activities may range from supporting educators to teach contextualised subjects and supervise graduate research students and other young scholars through mentoring and on-the-job training, seminars, workshops and conferences. It was, however, observed that linkages between different positions and units in the Universities, though clearly defined, were not functioning adequately. It was also reported that most staff had adequate academic qualification, but many lacked modern research and teaching skills, among others. Skills for information collection, documentation and sharing were also low. However, there is a strong awareness within the Universities in relation to the need of diversifying professional aspects of staff.

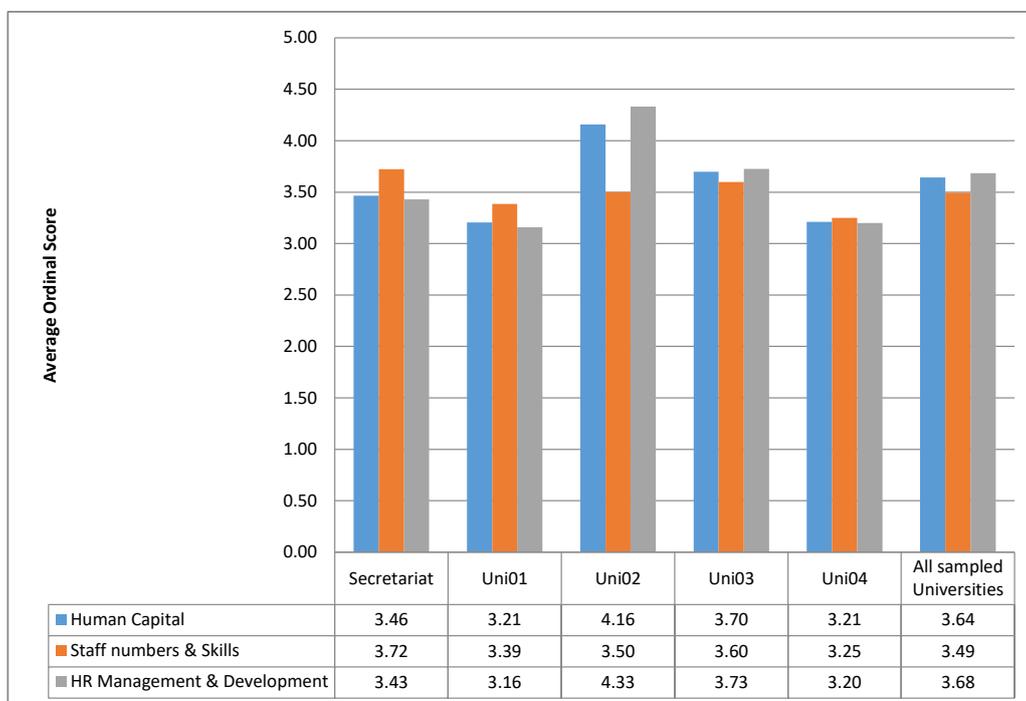


Figure 5. Ordinal Scores for Human Capital capacity

Financial Resources. The Secretariat was found to be relatively strong in terms of financial management (Figure 6). The observed strengths included existence of opportunities to mobilize resources from donors, flexibility for re-allocating activities under funded programs, flexibility to incorporate activities in programs, integration of budgets into annual plans and participatory budget processes where each STU is responsible for developing their own priorities, within the confines of the overall Strategic and Business Plan. It was also observed that both at the Universities and the Secretariat accounting procedures were in place and followed. Financial and administration policies existed and were followed and internal checks and balances were in place and occasionally used for recording purposes. Transparency in financial management to key stakeholders existed through sharing of activity and financial reports and audits. Procurement systems and procedures were in place but often viewed as too bureaucratic especially at the universities. Generally, annual budgets reflect the strategic plan and activity budgets are very specific. The management ensures that activity budgets are strictly adhered to. The situation with the universities is diverse, especially with regard to priority setting and flexibility. However, RUFORUM as a network is weak in terms of being very much donor dependent – making its programmes financially vulnerable. The member Universities are also largely dependent on Government for funding. Local funding opportunities have not been fully explored, just like there are no clearly defined fund raising strategies. The Secretariat has progressively moved from being an implementer of projects to a coordination and facilitation forum for activities undertaken by some of its members. With capacity building of its members, a good number of programmes are being directly managed by members while the Secretariat serves to coordinate its members towards intended outcomes. This gives some leverage for members to use the Strategic Business Plan (SBP) and regional programmes for fund raising purposes. Budget allocations are constrained by availability of financial resources. Resource mobilisation is admittedly a key weakness, severely affecting the viability and sustainability of implemented initiatives. Training in fund raising and proposal writing should help partners develop the culture of preparing fund raising strategies and resource mobilisation in a more systematized way.

Partnering and External Relations. RUFORUM and its member universities have linkages and networks with diverse local, regional and international organizations, with which they share programming (Figure 7), although the frameworks for engagement may or may not be clearly defined. Linkages and partnerships with strategic policy decision makers, government functionaries, and private sector have significantly improved (Figure 8) in recent times but need further improvement. The Universities, unlike the Secretariat, to very diverse levels exhibit limited interactions, collaboration and partnering with other actors at the operational level. Further, there is also an inherent weakness in terms of lack of systematic approaches to monitoring and reviewing the impact of collaborative work. Other weaknesses included lack of clear strategies for engaging the private sector in programme delivery and resource mobilization, and on existence of formal feedback mechanisms to government on the implication of policy issues to the higher agricultural education and learning (HAEL) and AgriSTI sectors.

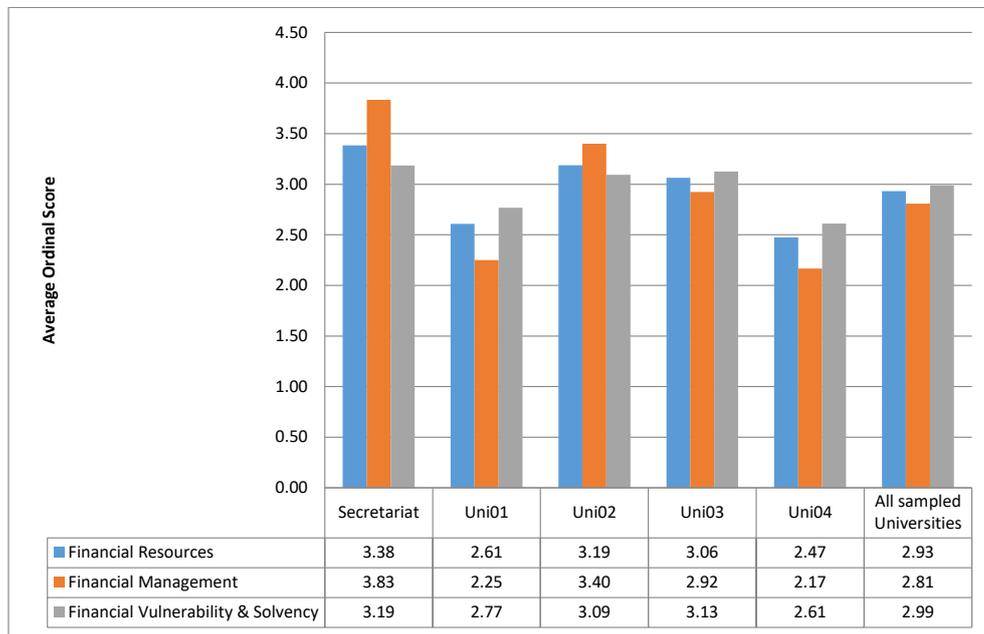


Figure 6. Ordinal scores for financial capacity

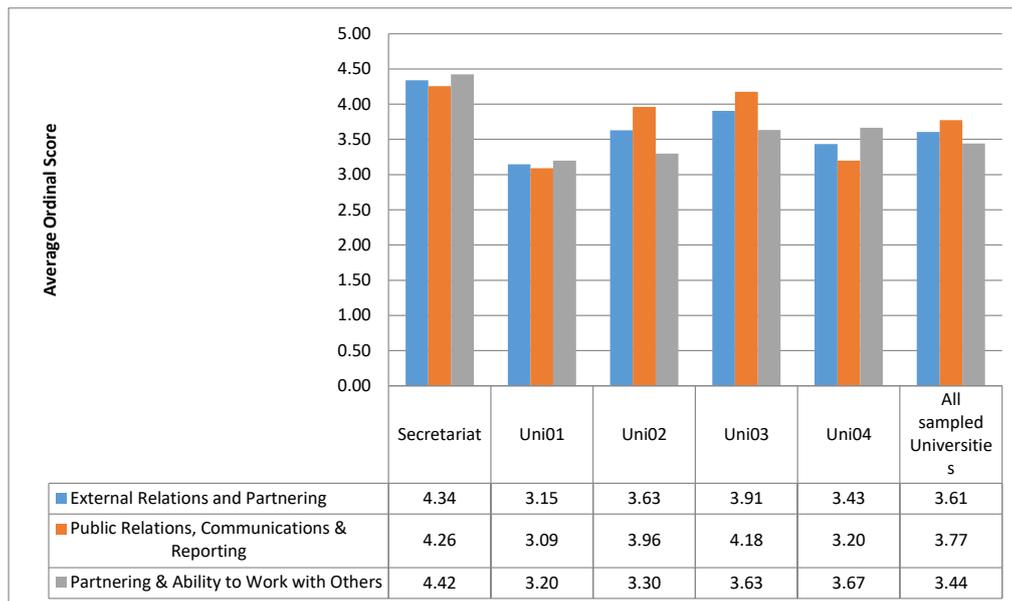


Figure 7. Ordinal scores for capacity for partnering and external relations

Actual service and programme delivery. RUFORUM and the University system in general appreciate the importance of addressing issues relating to agricultural research and education and its capacity development needs in a holistic way and some of the members have substantially reviewed their curricula and drastically changed their methods of delivery. Consequently, capacity for teaching, research and outreach, and partnerships are rated above functional capacities (Figure 9).

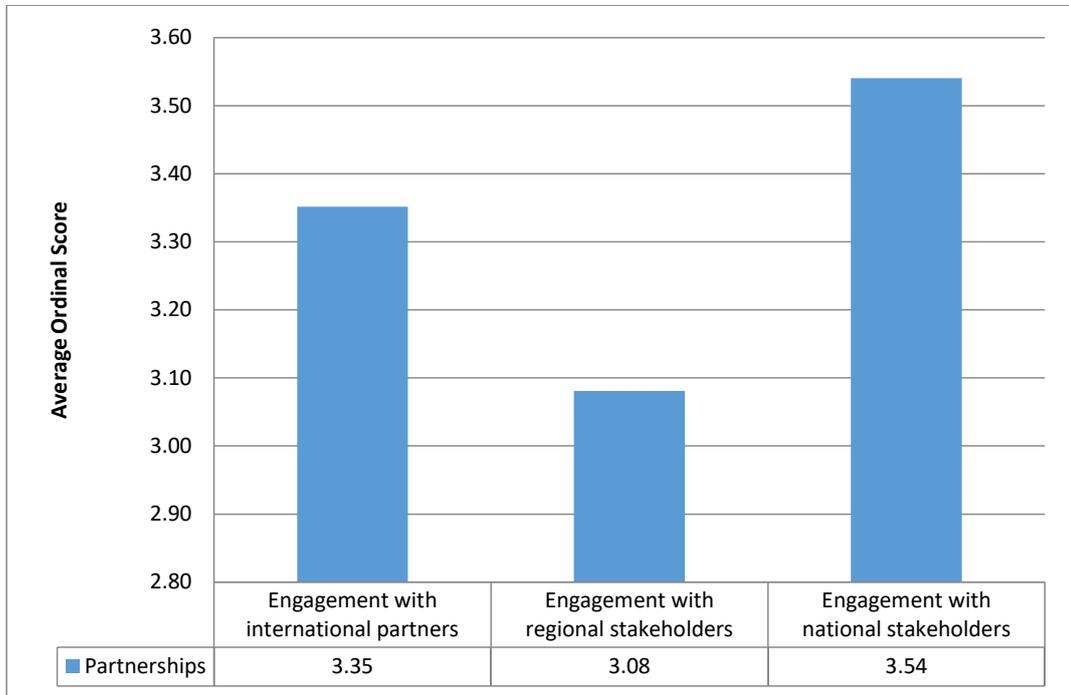


Figure 8. Capacity for partnering as assessed by Deans and Principals of RUFORUM members universities

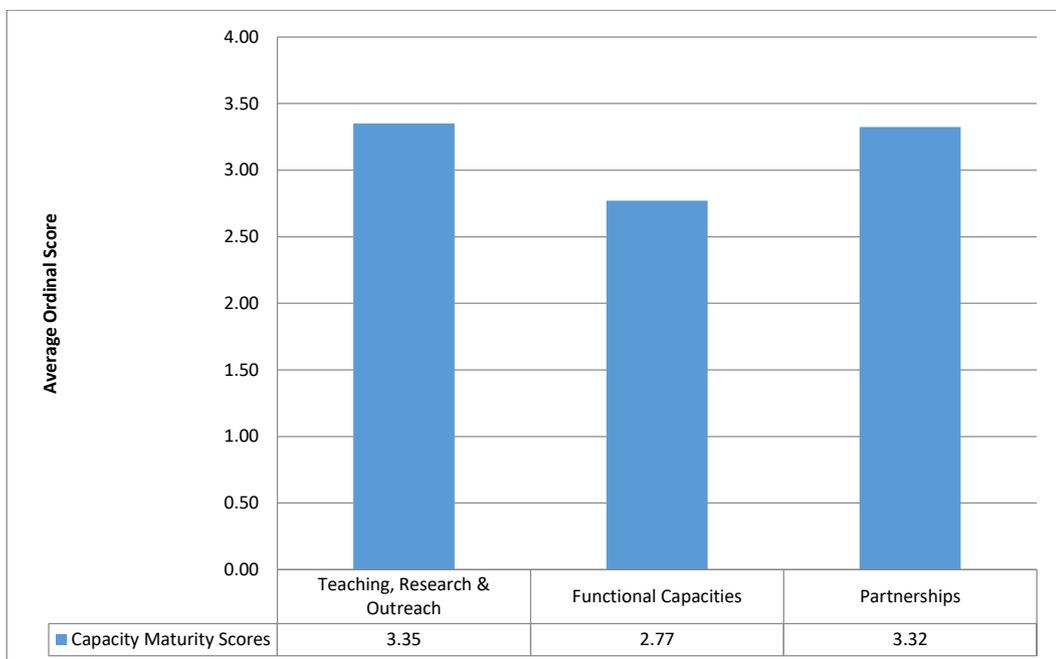


Figure 9. Capacity maturity scores as assessed by Deans and Principals of RUFORUM members universities

Further, the network realizes the importance of carrying out well researched and evidence-based advocacy and has diversified sources of researched information including e-library, partners, internet connectivity and interpersonal communication. The low overall score for program management and delivery at some Universities despite a high score in human capital capacity (Figure 2) indicates that although the staff are often academically highly qualified, they often lack some of the soft and technological skills being demanded of the new teaching and research practices. Figure 10 presents ratings for delivery of quality education, teaching effectiveness, research productivity and community engagement.

Figure 11 shows the rating for service and capacity delivery as assessed from the perspective of planning and programme practices and monitoring and evaluation. Weaknesses are demonstrated by not having done a comprehensive mapping and analysis of the constituency of boundary partners, low capacity to scale-up research findings and recommendations, low capacity to develop consistent public dialogue forums, weak mechanisms for feedback from and to the public, and limited ability to mobilize constituency to contribute to develop alternative policies. The network and its members still faces an uphill task of addressing ever-increasing and changing capacity needs for which it has to constantly improve both its technical and functional capacity and of its members, steep up the participatory impact monitoring and evaluation of its programmes and have elaborate strategies for partnership and interactions with target groups. For purposes of sustainability, links with strong coalitions, networks and partners with similar interests and willing to mentor and coach weaker partners, existence of a diverse array of skills and competencies within the network that could be exchanged, involving other actors and spreading the responsibilities, having constituencies which are easily available for mobilization especially when there are

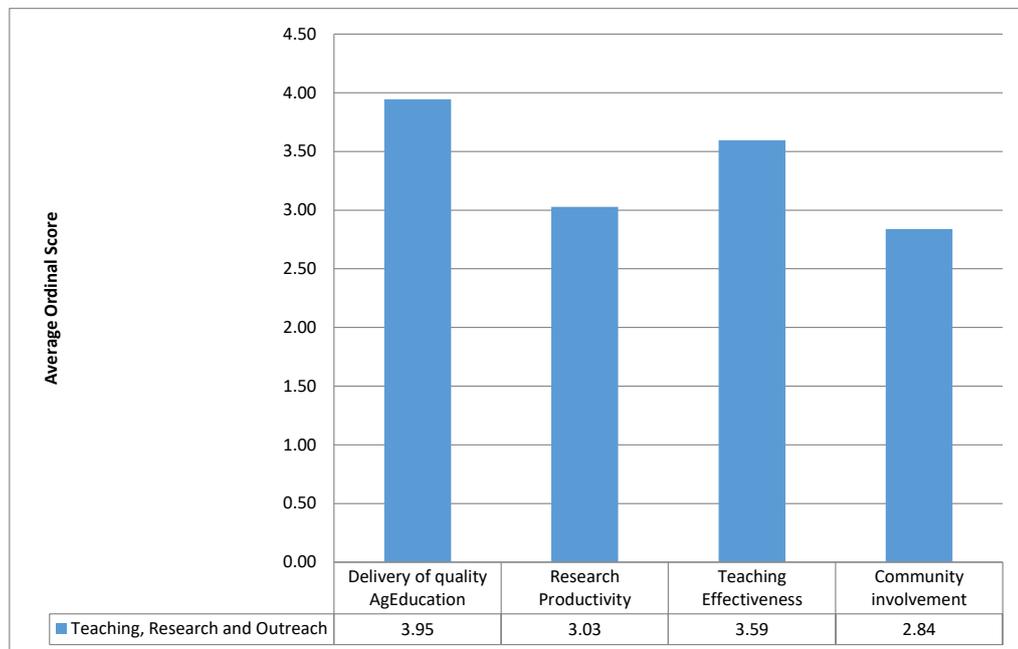


Figure 10. Capacity for teaching, research and outreach as assessed by Deans and Principals of RUFORUM members universities

funding shortfalls, maintenance of local resource persons to fill up skills gaps are critical capacity elements that significantly affect ability to deliver services to its members and constituents. Additionally, each university needs to not optimally build internal capacities for its staff and critical partners, have a strong ownership of the initiatives perceived by some members to belong to “RUFORUM”, reduce donor dependency and devise income generating activities of its own, prop up local level fund raising, have strategies to minimize risks and adequately internalize gender and youth dimensions of HAEL and AgriSTI.

Capacity Maturity Levels. The capacity maturity framework is useful for characterising the maturity of workforce practices, establishing a program of continuous workforce development, setting priorities for improvement actions, integrating workforce development with process improvement, and establishing a culture of excellence to become an employer and service provider of choice. From the analysis each component was assessed to fall into one of the following stages of growth:

1. *Initial/nascent/chaotic stage:* Scores of categories and components that range from 0 – 1.0 are classified into this stage. The salient features of this stage are that the organization is at the earliest stages of development. Some structures and processes are at rudimentary stage, while others are non-existent at all, unpredictable, poorly controlled and reactive.
2. *Emerging/managed stage:* A component or category will be under this stage if it has scores ranging from 1.1 – 2.0. This stage is characterized by having some capacities developed and is vivid in some areas. Deliberate structures such as the governance organs and structures, human resources and management practices are in place, but some processes are often reactive or ad-hoc.
3. *Development/defined stage:* This stage runs from 2.1 – 3.0. Processes are characterised for the organisation, institutionalised and proactive; and tailored from organisation’s

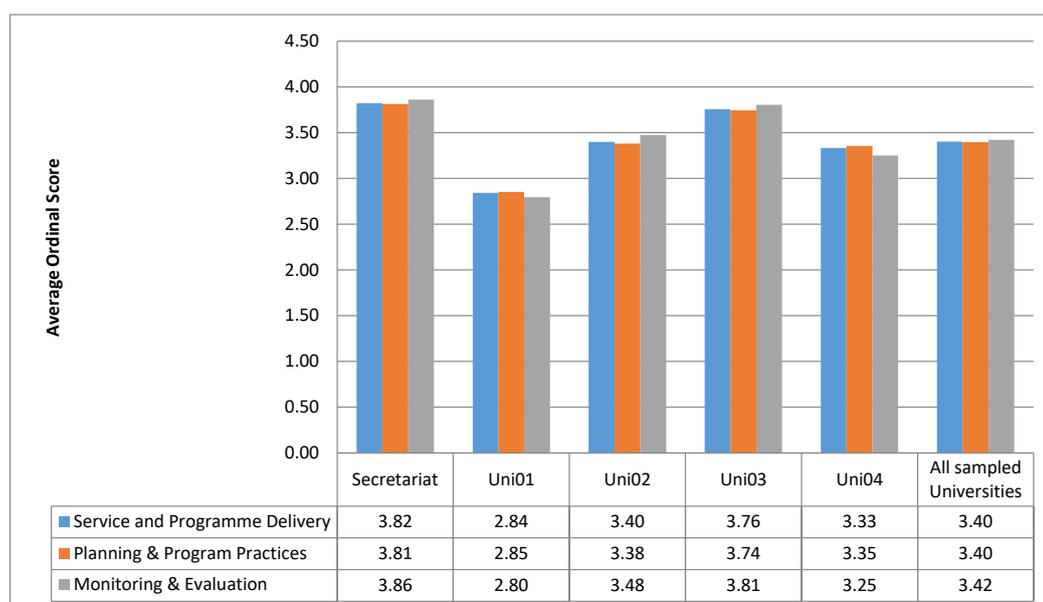


Figure 11. Ordinal scores for capacity for service and programme delivery

standards. However, many noticeable deficiencies and performance gaps that require substantial improvement still exist.

4. *Expansion/consolidation/quantitatively managed stage*: This stage runs from 3.1 – 4.0. For a component to be in this stage there has to be a track record of achievements that are recognizable by stakeholders and other actors who have a similar focus in the same services. Even with such achievements, the organization will still need to improve in some areas. Practices for specific process areas are further stabilized and guided by high-level organizational directives, measured and controlled.
5. *Mature/sustainability/optimising stage*: This is the highest stage of an organizational growth. It ranges from 4.1 - 5.0. The organization in this stage is fully functioning, with most of its components at a sustainable stage. It has a diversified resource base, varied partnerships and existing networks at local, national and international levels. Focus is on process improvement - internal evaluation of practices, change management practices, and tracking workflow to capture and manage deviations.

The performance of individual components from the rating exercise is summarized in Table 1 below. The analysis has revealed that the Secretariat as an organization is in its expanding and consolidating stage in most components although the score varies from one component to another. Highest scores were observed in the governance and management component, in managing external relations and partnering, and in the use of participatory management practices, which are in the final stage – maturity and optimising. This confirms the fact that RUFORUM is a networking organization with well-established governing organs and laid down management structures and procedures. The expanding and optimising stages signifies the fact that the organization has a track record of achievements that are recognizable by stakeholders and other actors who have a similar focus in the same services.

Table 1. Average scores for six capacity dimensions and their common features

Capacity area	Secretariat	uni01	uni02	uni03	uni04
Human capital	3.46	3.21	4.16	3.70	3.21
Staff numbers and skills	3.72	3.39	3.50	3.60	3.25
Hr management and development	3.43	3.16	4.33	3.73	3.20
Financial resources	3.38	2.61	3.19	3.06	2.47
Financial management	3.83	2.25	3.40	2.92	2.17
Financial vulnerability and solvency	3.19	2.77	3.09	3.13	2.61
Service and programme delivery	3.82	2.84	3.40	3.76	3.33
Planning and program practices	3.81	2.85	3.38	3.74	3.35
Monitoring and evaluation	3.86	2.80	3.48	3.81	3.25
External relations and partnering	4.34	3.15	3.63	3.91	3.43
Public relations, communications and reporting	4.26	3.09	3.96	4.18	3.20
Partnering and ability to work with others	4.42	3.20	3.30	3.63	3.67
Leadership style and management practices	3.98	2.82	3.92	4.13	3.45
Information sharing and use	3.86	2.81	4.07	4.15	3.43
Participatory management practices	4.11	2.84	3.77	4.12	3.48
Governance and oversight	4.16	2.92	4.00	3.84	3.61
Overall consensus score	3.75	2.89	3.65	3.64	3.14

The Universities clearly fell into two groups – one group comfortably in the expanding stage with a few processes in the consolidating stage, and the other in the developing stage with most processes characterised, institutionalised and proactive but with many noticeable deficiencies and performance gaps that require substantial improvement. Particular areas of weakness were in the areas of financial management, vulnerability and solvency; planning and programme practices; monitoring and evaluation; and leadership and management practices. Some universities returned high scores for human resource management and development; public relations and information sharing; use of participatory management practices and general governance and oversight. The universities indicate appreciable HR administration and management processes while also being acknowledged as having relatively clear staff development practices and processes giving them a higher human capital index than the Secretariat. Staff development is an area that RUFORUM has been actively engaged in, and its contribution is widely acknowledged in these universities. Practices for leadership process areas are also perceived as being institutionalised and proactive, although there seem to be issues with information sharing at the Secretariat and participatory management at the Universities. The general perception at the universities is that organizational guidelines exist in the form of prescribed policy/plans (verbal or written), but these are often either deliberately ignored/flouted or not adequately communicated and understood by those supposed to adhere to them. The use of obsolete communication channels (circulars on noticeboards) leaves many administrative decisions unnoticed by staff and students who now largely use social media. Performance in the area of financial resources is lowest – in all the three facets of financial sustainability and viability, management and resource mobilisation.

The analysis generally indicated relatively stabilised processes that are being consolidated. Strong institutions, the formal and informal rules that structure and constrain human behavior and interaction, help RUFORUM and the member universities focus on relevant actions, fully engage with partners and stakeholders in the teaching, research and outreach processes and the subsequent use of products and services to achieve outcomes. However, many challenges still exist for both the Universities as individual entities and for RUFORUM as a network. Critically important is the low level of resourcing and low investment in activities to strengthen and/or reform processes that can seriously impair the sustainability and credibility of the supported grant and regional training programmes. The Secretariat is intervening directly through grant support for skills development of staff and researchers, while for others it focusses on influencing policy and internal processes for creating, adopting, leading, implementing and sustaining change initiatives towards achievement of objectives.

Discussion

There are marked capacity differences between the Secretariat and the universities, and amongst the universities, and the scores vary from one component to another. The reasons for the differences are diverse and varied. As captured from the discussion questions and other informants, practices for specific process areas managed by the Secretariat (being a

smaller management entity as compared to universities) are close to a relatively stable level because they are guided by high-level organizational directives, such as policy (or other organizational directives) and governance, and are periodically reviewed to ensure they conform to policy. Responsibility and authority for performing the practices are assigned to designated personnel in the Secretariat Technical Units (STUs), who largely through competitive recruitment have adequate skills and knowledge.

Two significant issues came up from the focused group discussions and key informant interviews – i) sustainability of Regional programs beyond RUFORUM intervention; and, ii) compatibility/compliance of the grant programs with established university procedures, especially regarding staff development and implementation responsibility for academic programmes. Views from respondents strongly imply that the long-term sustainability of programmes will largely depend on the ability of RUFORUM to help improve the capacity of implementing universities to continually develop and adapt relevant curricula and infrastructure (staff and facilities) matched to market demands and country development objectives, so as to attract public and private funding and sponsorship. The grant programmes have also to be matched with the University calendars and comply with the staff development policies. Respondents from the administrative support functions of the universities propose that RUFORUM should proactively directly engage with the relevant units of the University responsible for the processes where weaknesses have been exhibited, including skilling the relevant staff, to introduce changes that incorporate the necessary flexibilities that facilitate student admission, staff and student mobility, and cost-sharing. It was also pointed out that academic programs at Universities are run by departments. Whereas RUFORUM largely deals with Vice-Chancellors and Deans/Principles (of Schools/Colleges of Agriculture and related disciplines), the instruction requirements of modern curricula require collaboration and inputs from a wide array of university departments. There was a strong feeling that RUFORUM should help the university systems to develop a strong sense of collective ownership of these programmes and internally develop the incentive systems to encourage participation of the different departments that house the resident expertise and facilities.

Although the results indicate a higher average human capital index for the sampled universities than the Secretariat, nonetheless, the universities do not have full staff establishments and part-timers play an increasingly significant role. There is strong agreement about inadequate staff numbers in some academic disciplines, high academic qualifications but marked deficiencies in some areas of leadership skill, resource mobilisation and management, program delivery especially with respect to participation of stakeholders and delivery mechanisms, and monitoring and evaluation. There is also a strong belief in the existence of well-established human resource management processes and staff development intentions although constrained by limited financial resources. Most practices appear to be defined, characterised and largely institutionalised, but some staff still perceive many of these as rigid, non-proactive and sometimes restrictive.

Capacity building for organizational development can and should be delivered using a range of different delivery modalities. A one-off event or intervention, while often a powerful catalyst for change, is rarely enough to engender systemic change in the capacity

of an organization. Capacity building delivery modalities commonly used include, but are not limited to: training, workshops, technical assistance, consultancies, mentoring and peer exchange. Skills development and enhancing learning at the individual level have been dominated by training approaches. The impactful delivery of RUFORUM interventions requires mechanisms that focus on rationality, regional approaches to delivery, quality assurance, clear and comprehensive understanding of actual impact, and follow-up. Beyond training, skills development should increasingly be supported through innovative approaches and in ways that better bridge individual learning and changes in the environment. Capacity development objectives should promote processes that contribute, in a relevant and sustained manner, to long-term learning and change strategies for sustainable RUFORUM impact on Africa's transformative agenda. Learning is at the core of the processes where people increase their abilities. It goes beyond just having access to knowledge and information ("know-what"). Knowledge production and innovation involves interactive learning where individuals and organizations learn from production, search and exploration to increase skills and competencies ("know-how" and "know-why") while being integrated in knowledge-based networks ("know-who"). Innovation as an interactive process is built on the close collaboration of several actors, such as customers or end-users, suppliers and knowledge organizations through collective entrepreneurship.

Capacity development has two components: human (technical capacities) and institutional (functional capacities). Technical capacities within a University system are required in the broad areas of teaching, scientific research and outreach to enable member universities carry out all technical tasks required to build the requisite capacity to meet national development objectives. In addition, functional capacities enable members and partners to plan, lead, manage and sustain change initiatives to ensure that technical know-how is embodied in local systems and processes in a sustainable way. The individual dimension relates to the people involved in terms of: knowledge, skill levels (technical and managerial) and attitudes that can be addressed through facilitation, training and competency development. There is still great demand for RUFORUM to continue focusing on enhancing knowledge of individuals, but being mindful that the output of individuals greatly relies on the quality of the organizations in which they work. For humans, their knowledge, skills and attitudes of a specific theme can be enhanced; for institutions, their policies, organizational designs, strategies, plans and processes can be improved through capacity development to enable a specific theme to grow and to flourish.

RUFORUM focuses on mobilising human and institutional capacity for research to generate knowledge; for education to advance the communication of the knowledge; and for outreach, incubation and innovation to bring the knowledge to practical use and application. The nature of capacity mobilization and development activities may range from supporting educators to teach contextualised subjects and supervise graduate research students and other young scholars through mentoring and on-the-job training, seminars, workshops and conferences. The capacity of member Universities may be mobilized through a variety of tailored and contextually appropriate capacity development activities addressing areas of functional capacity weaknesses. It is important to note that, usually if a beneficiary has

not willingly chosen to participate in a capacity-building programme, they are unlikely to benefit greatly from the interventions. For this reason, it is always preferable to conduct a competitive application process to select individuals to benefit from capacity building interventions. Beneficiaries accepted based solely on recommendation, for example, are often less motivated to follow through on the actions required of them. In order to ensure that investments made in training lead to organizational improvements, it is important to have participants make written commitments to carry out specific follow-up actions. Additional support should be based on fulfilled commitments.

Conclusions and Recommendations

It is generally recommended that RUFORUM and its member universities should adopt the POCA methodology and strive to maintain the strong elements identified through these assessments and seek for opportunities to address the identified weaknesses. To be useful, the capacity dimensions must be prioritised using the results of the POCA. The entity might choose capacities that are relatively low, focusing on 'weaknesses'. On the other hand it might also want to build on existing strengths in its capacity. After prioritisation specific objectives must be set with regards to the capacities that have the highest priority. These objectives should be designed in a consensus workshop with internal staff, and must be as realistic as possible. Examples of capacity objectives include: improvement of the POCA results in absolute terms; improvement of POCA results in relation to other "cohort group" scores, improvement of consensus score on organisations capacity; decrease of dependency on external funding, etc. After establishing the capacity objectives strategies can be drawn up and applied by training management in new management tools or by consultations of external experts; individual skills improvement through on-the-job training of staff, staff exchange with other universities, regular training programmes; enhancing staff recruitment, staff incentives, and staff career plans; advanced networking with other international partners and government agencies; improving abilities to use information technology and communication, etc. Some strategies require additional resources that need to be mobilised. Other strategies may be implemented within the regular program and with existing means. Universities can also work on collaborative actions in capacity building by developing joint strategies and plans. Keeping track of capacity building activities is very important, in particular when 'non tangible' strategies are chosen like change management. One way to do this is to keep staff informed about the things that are happening, follow-up meetings, regular impact assessments and doing an evaluating POCA exercise with the Secretariat and all member Universities in a 'cohort' to compare the results of capacity development activities.

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