

Update from the Training and Quality Assurance Unit 2014/2015

Briefing Note

23 March, 2015

Introduction

RUFORUM Secretariat through the Training Unit continued to invest in building a critical mass of Africa's next generation of agricultural scientists who are high performing and are able to engage in relevant research and support agricultural innovations at different levels. RUFORUM has done this successfully over the years through mobilizing regional capacities and engaging in international partnerships.

Guided by RUFORUM's theory of change, the TQA Unit has been facilitating the institutionalization of improved training in faculties/schools of agriculture and related sciences. When this is effectively done these faculties produce proactive and skilled graduates. Our goal is that these alumni become pro-active and dynamic change-makers in the agricultural sector and our member universities become strong institutions and shape the agricultural sector in positive ways.

Therefore, this brief update report highlights the achievements made regarding the implementation of innovative regional postgraduate training programs, the skills enhancement trainings, the academic mobility, and quality assurance mechanism spearheaded by the TQA unit.

Core Area 1: Demand Driven research, Community action, and institutional strengthening grants

a) Implementation of Regional Programmes

Through funding from developmental partners, RUFORUM supported the placement of students at various universities. The students are now at different levels of training ranging from course work to thesis writing. The table 1 below provides details of the funding support that has been given during 2014/2015 financial year.

University	Post Graduate Programme	Number	Country represented
Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, Kenya	MSc Research Methods	14	Ethiopia, Namibia, Kenya, Malawi, Uganda, Sudan, Rwanda, Burundi
	PhD Food Science and Nutrition	7	Uganda, Kenya and Sudan
Mekelle University, Ethiopia	MSc Drylands Agronomy	10	Uganda and Ethiopia
Haramaya University, Ethiopia	AICM AICM	10	Ethiopia, Uganda, Botswana and Tanzania
Makerere University, Uganda	PhD Plant Breeding and Biotechnology,	4	Ethiopia, Zambia, and Zimbabwe
Makerere University, LUANAR, University of Zimbabwe, Egerton University, Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, Kenyatta University	Feed the future Priority MSc Trainings (MSc Food Science, MSc Crop and Plant Protection,	12	Tanzania
Total		57	

b) Facilitating Academic Mobility for staff and students

i. Graduate Teaching Assistantship Mechanism

The GTA academic mobility rolled out in September 2014 with a call of advisement prepared and circulated widely. At-least **40 interested applicants** have applied through the RUFORUM online application systems. Out of these, 3 have been successfully placed by January 2015. The rest of the applications are being processed. Some of the notable milestones for GTA include:

- Guidelines for the implementation of the mechanism were developed and publicized
- Most frequently asked questions were developed and publicized
- The GTA contract is now operational and is being used as an agreement among sending and hosting universities, the GTA student, and RUFORUM.

Table 1: Statistics of the successfully placed GTA applicants

Sending University	Receiving University	Name of the Beneficiary
Makerere University	Stellenbosch University- PhD Horticulture	Anthony Mwinje
University of Swaziland	LUANAR – PhD Agriculture Resource Economics	Daisy Dhlamini
Kyambogo University	Egerton University- PhD Animal Science	Stephen

ii. Staff Exchanges to RUFORUM universities

One staff exchange has been facilitated for this reporting period. Dr Omony Jimmy from Netherlands supported the teaching of a module at Makerere University – PhD Plant Breeding and Biotechnology.

Core Area 2: Activities to guide and support research and institutional grants

a. Mentorship and Professional growth support to the graduate students

- A regional meeting was organized and coordinated by the RUFORUM secretariat on 23rd of July 2014 at the 4th RUFORUM Biennial Conference in Mozambique. Over 100 RUFORUM graduate students and staff from various universities participated in this meeting. The meeting aimed at mentoring and inspiring the students through planned guest talks shared by some of the RUFORUM Alumni who have been successful in their careers.

- Thirty six - MSc and PhD students were supported to present their research findings during the 4th RUFORUM Biennial Conference in Maputo. The students shared their research findings through oral and poster presentations. Each of these 36 students submitted abstracts which were published in the 4th Biennial conference proceeding as one way of sharing these research outputs.

b. Skill Enhancement Training Courses

- One Scientific Data Management has been confirmed for 30th March – 3rd April 2015, Morogoro Tanzania. The training is aiming at enhancing the student's research skills in Data analysis and interpretation. The training is targeting students supported by iAGRI through RUFORUM. The second Scientific Data Management course will take place in May 2015 at Venda University in South Africa.

c. Quality assurance for graduate training in network universities

- A regional meeting on Quality Assurance mechanism has been postponed to May 2015 due to funding arrangements. This meeting is scheduled to take place back to back with the World Bank Activity slated for May. Additionally as part of operationalization of the TQA document, RUFORUM is partnering with GOPA – EU Education and Employment promotion Department to ensure that the handbook is refined and published.

Core Area 3: Strengthened Monitoring and Evaluation

- Monitoring visits to check the progress of the implementation of the regional programmes have been done to Malawi – Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources, 4 Kenyan Universities namely, Egerton University, Kenyatta University, Jomo Kenyatta University and University of Nairobi, University of Zambia, and University of Zimbabwe. The aim of the visits were to check on the progress of the regional programmes

Core Area 5.5: Strengthen the Secretariat capacity for resource mobilization

- A total of 3 proposals were developed and submitted to Carnegie cooperation of New York, DAAD, and IDRC to support the regional training programmes. The unit is waiting for feedback. The TQA Unit also spearheaded the team mobilization to respond to the upcoming calls of World Bank (ACE), Erasmus +, and AUC.
- Funding has also been obtained from ICRISAT to support three research grants and 3 field attachments. This is one initiative that aims at strengthening the collaboration among the universities and research institutions. Accordingly, calls for applications were sent out in March 2015. By the end of April 2015, the successful applicants will be informed of the selection outcome.

Next steps

- Funding for the operationalization Quality Assurance handbook and related activities is still a challenge. RUFORUM plans to resubmit the Quality Assurance proposal to EU to get funding. at the moment, partnerships are being sought to assist in the operationalization on this booklet
- The unit plans to upgrade all training curricula that were not developed using the regional approach so that they all meet the regional quality assurance standards.
- An internal meeting to reflect on the RUFORUM Capacity Building framework. This is aimed at soliciting feedback from all the staff before engaging external reviewers.

Conclusion

The Regional programmes are helping to rebuild the capacities of the member Universities. There is positive feedback concerning the contribution of the graduates to their member universities. This was as authenticated by the tracer study concluded in April 2014.

As RUFORUM grows both in scope and operations, there is a dire need to address the issue of lower publication rate which is attributable to some extent to untimely feedback of supervisors to students' work. RUFORUM is organizing a training on postgraduate supervision but universities need also to improve their M&E concerning lengthy periods of time it takes some supervisors to give their feedback to students.