



Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture

DECLARATION OF DEANS AND PRINCIPALS OF RUFORUM MEMBER UNIVERSITIES ON REVITALIZING HIGHER EDUCATION IN AGRICULTURE FOR AFRICA'S FUTURE

Khartoum, Sudan from 08-10 June 2015

Preamble

We, the Principals and Deans of RUFORUM 46 member Universities in 22 African Countries, having held consultative meetings on Strengthening Higher Agricultural Education in Africa in Entebbe (March, 2014) and Johannesburg (November, 2014) met in Khartoum from 8 – 10 June, 2015 to deliberate on actions required to strengthen the higher agricultural education sector in Africa. The Khartoum meeting reviewed outputs of previous meeting including that of the 1st African Higher Education Summit on Revitalizing Higher Education for Africa's future held on March 10 – 12, 2015, Dakar, Senegal. The 65 Principals and Deans explored issues and mechanisms required to strengthen higher agricultural education in Africa.

1. Recognising that:

- a. African countries have experienced unprecedented economic performance and growth over the last decade, with GDP above the world average. This offers opportunity for poverty eradication on the continent and planned engagement of its young and growing population in line with the global Sustainable Development Goals;
- b. Agriculture continues to play an important role in African economies, employing over 60% of their populations, and contributing on average over 30% to GDP. Agriculture in Africa will continue to play a critical role in national economic growth strategies. However, agricultural productivity remains low, characterised by low use of knowledge and technology;
- c. Higher Education provides high returns to investment in SSA (latest studies show up to 21%), higher than that for primary and secondary education with potential to support future employment for the growing youth population and respond to the need for job creation to boost agribusiness and development;

2. **Cognisant that** The African Higher Education sector is evolving rapidly, now characterised by a proliferation of higher education institutions, an increasing demand for access and a differentiating labour market. Higher Education and the use of science and technology for innovation are a key strategy for achieving African Union's Agenda 2063, as highlighted in the Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa 2024 (STISA 2024);

3. **Acknowledging that** Africa's higher education institutions have innovated in patterns of access, enrolment and equity, systems of management, governance and accountability, financing and budgeting models, quality of teaching and learning pedagogies and infrastructures, levels of training for academic staff and research productivity, and forms of national, regional and international collaborations and partnerships;

4. Aware that:

- a. the Higher Education sector faces critical challenges including low quality, inadequate staffing and infrastructures, outdated curriculum and pedagogies, inadequate funding, low research output, and low global competitiveness;
- b. Africa's Higher Education institutions differ in the nature of their relations with the state, practices of institutional autonomy and academic freedom, linkages with society and industry, and ability to produce graduates needed by the economy;

- 5. Noting that** African governments and Heads of States through the Malabo Declaration (2014) re-committed to the CAADP principles and values including a) enhancing investment finance in agriculture; b) ending hunger in Africa by 2025; and c) enhancing resilience of livelihoods and production systems to climate change and other related risks.

Taking into account:

The RUFORUM Vision of,

a vibrant agricultural sector linked to African universities that can produce high-performing graduates and high-quality research, responsive to the demands of Africa's farmers for innovations, and able to generate sustainable livelihoods and national economic development,

And RUFORUM Mission,

to strengthen the capacities of Universities to foster innovations responsive to the demands of smallholder farmers and value chains through the training of high quality researchers, the output of impact-oriented research, and the maintenance of collaborative working relations among researchers, farmers, market actors, national agricultural research and advocacy institutions, and governments,

And guided by RUFORUM Strategic Business Principles:

- a) Grounding agricultural research in the hands of a well-informed critical mass of locally based professionals
- b) Quality postgraduate training
- c) Relevance of research, training and related services responsive to farmer needs and innovation opportunities
- d) Regionality as a Network of 46 Universities across 22 countries for collective action supported by governments through commitment to regional action
- e) Affordability by maintaining costs and salaries at levels, which are sustainable from regional resources.
- f) Retention of capacity within the region through enhanced regional mobility, acceptance of credentials, farmer and employer demand
- g) Scaling out through joint University programmes, networks and partnerships
- h) Financial Sustainability through recovery of all direct and indirect costs for staff and operations.

Recognising the need for the following specific actions in order to transform the higher agricultural education sector in Africa to better contribute to the vision of African Heads of States and Governments:

1. Increasing investments to higher education, in line with previous commitments, to ensure adequate staffing, infrastructure, and facilities by national governments and the necessary expansion of the sector;
2. Ensuring attainment of gender parity in postgraduate education in agriculture and related sciences;
3. Strengthening regional mechanisms for the rationalisation of existing resources on the continent through the creation of regional centres of excellence and specialisation, increased staff and student mobility, infrastructure and promoting differentiation of higher education institutions;
4. Harmonising support to higher education, including that from development partners and other funders;
5. Developing robust, transparent, and fair systems of assessment to measure student learning outcomes, research, and performance of academic staff, administrators, and other staff for continuous improvement;
6. Promoting the use of ICT for decentralised teaching and learning as well as to enhance quality assurance, accreditation processes as well as to strengthen university responsiveness to community needs.

7. Promoting multi-disciplinary approaches in teaching, research, innovations and outreach activities, and share good research and training practices across universities in Africa and outside
8. Supporting the establishment of an African Credit Accumulation and Transfer System to enhance the internationalisation of the higher education system;
9. Supporting a regional quality assurance mechanism building on experience from other regions of the world and those of national and sub-regional quality assurance agencies.
10. Strengthening policy engagement to effectively sustain efforts in higher education as drivers of agriculture and society development.

The Principals and Deans Call on:

1. The African Union to organise a side session on Higher Education at the next Heads of States Summit to engage African States to take steps to strengthen higher education in Africa;
2. African governments to increase investments in higher education institutions, including through the full implementation of previous agreements as articulated in the CAADP (10% to agriculture) and research and development (1% to research) to strengthen higher education and promote the wider African development agenda;
3. African philanthropists to take a lead role in supporting transformative programs that pilot ‘best practice’ on the continent;
4. African governments to request regional economic communities to enhance sub-regional cooperation to strengthen higher education;
5. African governments to strengthen mechanisms for collaboration between ministries of agriculture and education to strengthen higher agricultural education in Africa;
6. African Union to establish
 - a. A continental ‘accreditation standards and credit transfer system’ to widen their exposure and enhance inter-African cooperation in scientific fields;
 - b. An ‘academic mobility scheme’ and strengthen centres of excellence and enhance mobility, regional level training and enhance economies of scope and scale
7. African governments to support local and international partnerships which address critical capacity needs for sustainable agricultural development. This includes partnerships amongst universities and engagement with communities, private sector and the African Diaspora’s;
8. African stakeholders, including Agricultural Research and Knowledge Institutions, the private sector civil society organisations, and financial institutions, to support the achievement of the provisions of this Declaration.