

RUFORUM Quarterly Report for the Period January-March 2017

Summary

The Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) is a network of 66 African universities in 26 countries across the Continent with a 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'. This report provides a summary of Secretariat's achievements during the period 1st January- 31st March 2017.

The key activities implemented during the reporting period were;

1. Undertook an internally commissioned and facilitated organization performance review on the implementation of RUFORUM's Business Strategic Plan (SBP) 2015-2020 to assess progress and provide recommendations for improving programme quality and delivery. The review also recommended some shifts in RUFORUM's key thrusts for the upcoming period (2018-2022).
2. Monitoring visits were made to Tanzania, Kenya, Malawi, Sudan, Rwanda and Uganda as part of on-going technical support and backstopping for quality research and ensuring timely graduation of postgraduate students. The monitoring visits also reviewed client demands for research and possible emerging partnerships with industry to stimulate uptake.
3. Issued a restricted call for proposals for the Community Action Research Programme (CARP+) for university led research teams to undertake research along the value chain that will deliver impact on specific geographical zones and include strong links between universities with vocational institutions (TVET). The call was restricted to Gulu and Egerton Universities. A total of five proposals were received. A follow up call is expected in the second half of 2017 open to all RUFORUM member universities.
4. Attended the inaugural African Economic Platform (AEP) meeting convened March 20-22 by the African Union Commission in Mauritius whose objectives are to bring together African Heads of State, the Private Sector and Academia (represented by RUFORUM) to influence continental policy by engaging directly with African leaders on matters of mutual interest. A key outcome of the AEP was the call for a tripartite meeting between Heads of State, Academia and the Private Sector with specific focus on higher education. The AEP is a new annual platform for constructive multi- stakeholder dialogue around common themes for Africa, led by Africans.
5. Published two issues of the African Journal of Rural Development (AJRD) to provide an outlet for African scientists, researchers, development practitioners and Academia to publish and disseminate their research in a reputable open access journal and make this accessible widely. Similarly, engagements are ongoing with FAO to host RUFORUM publications on AGORA and AGRIS to increase their visibility and use, and build capacity of university librarians in the use of these platforms

Introduction

RUFORUM's works to strengthen the capacity of member universities to contribute to solving development challenges in Africa. The current Strategic Business Plan (2015-2020) guides the implementation of activities of the organisation. During the reporting period (1st January- 31st

March 2017), RUFORUM undertook a number of activities: Below is a summary of achievements under each of the strategic action areas for RUFORUM SBP 2015-2020.

1. DEMAND DRIVEN TRAINING AND RESEARCH

a) Competitive Research Grant (GRGs)

During the reporting period, the Secretariat supported research teams across the network to engage in collaborative project development, exchange and nurturing partnerships with industry. This initiative is part of ongoing efforts to strengthen outcomes of the previously awarded 55 research grants with strategic focus on mentorship, quality assurance, and tightened follow up of students to secure timely completion. To strengthen dissemination by students of research findings to end users and grounding skills in community engagement, 17 Field Attachment Programme Awards (FAPA) were awarded. Six of the 17 were internships undertaken within the ICRISAT-RUFORUM partnership to enhance engagements with the CGIAR system in improving university research and training quality.

During the reporting period, RUFORUM initiated collaboration with Enterprise Uganda and African Agri-business Incubation Network to support capacity development for Secretariat staff and faculty in business incubation and enterprise development and Excel Hort Consult for students' placements in Agribusiness incubation opportunities. The purpose of this partnership is to train staff and students across the Network on business incubation, provide mentorship and translation of research into business for faculty. Under the Agriculture and Business Research Fund of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, RUFORUM mobilised two private sector organisations to work with Makerere University to submit proposals for chicken value chains development in Uganda and Malawi. Further, as part of ensuring that RUFORUM research is addressing the needs of smallholder farmers, mobilised two local farmer organisations to respond to the African Food and Business Research of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The two organisations are composed of women farmers and have had a long standing partnership with RUFORUM member universities, private sector organisations and agricultural research. During the reporting period, RUFORUM initiated a review of the National Forum guidelines. National Forums have potential of setting the national agricultural research agenda and most importantly, provide space for universities to effectively participate in policy engagements.

Below are some of the stories from member universities and alumni showcasing emerging best practices in postgraduate training;

- [Timely completion of graduate studies at African universities: Eduardo Mondlane University on track](#) (*Eduardo Mondlane University, Mozambique*)
- [Skilling graduates to support multidisciplinary research – RUFORUM trains 100](#) (*MSc Research Methods*)
- [Enabling rural women prosper from cassava bioethanol production through university-community engagement](#) (*Community Action Research Programme*)
- [A mathematician's passion for simplifying science to catalyse innovation](#) (*RUFORUM Alumni*)
- [Neglected Insects as a remedy for food insecurity: the case of crickets](#) (*RUFORUM Alumni*)

b) Community Action Research Programs (CARPs)

Through the support of The MasterCard Foundation, RUFORUM issued the 2017/2018 restricted call for proposal on CARP+¹ that calls for inclusion of university support to TVET institutions to enhance the agricultural education value chain. The call was restricted to Gulu and Egerton universities. Five proposals were received and are under review by the RUFORUM Technical Committee. The CARP+ call required proposals to clearly demonstrate partnerships with Tertiary Vocational Education Training Institutions (TVETs) as part of the emerging need to vocationalise agricultural higher education training. The CARP+ is informed by the emerging lessons from implementing the on-going CARP projects that demonstrate a need to strengthen partnerships with industry. As part of this process, RUFORUM undertook a rigorous stakeholder mapping to support research teams form strategic partnerships for collaborative adaptive research and create opportunities for research uptake and scale up of initiatives.

c) Collaborative Regional MSc and course-based PhD Programs

As part of RUFORUM on-going efforts to champion innovative regional approach to graduate training with broader ambition of building research and training capacities of member universities, the following activities were implemented during the reporting period:

- i. Through The MasterCard Foundation, in partnership with BRAC, an international non-governmental organisation with experience in deserving students' identification and placement, we developed a protocol to facilitate student recruitment using tested set of indicators and criteria. In the first cohort, 30 students (20 undergraduates, 10 masters) at Gulu and Egerton Universities will be recruited and placed.
- ii. Identified priority areas and programmes that strengthen training of graduate students for community engagement and greater university-research impact. The priority areas include: agribusiness, community nutrition and food security, and animal and livestock production. This necessitated a review of the current university curricula which will be initiated next financial year in collaboration with the universities' leadership.
- iii. With support from the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), expanded opportunities for PhD training through the RUFORUM regional training programmes by providing 8 PhD scholarships to strengthen training in Life Sciences, Food Science and Nutrition, Plant Breeding and Bio-technology and Agricultural Rural Innovations.
- iv. In the past five years, the USAID Innovative Agriculture Research Initiative (iAGRI) sub-contract through Ohio State University to RUFORUM provided opportunities for a phased placements of 31 young Tanzania Scientists to pursue Master of Science degree training at nine selected RUFORUM member universities in the Eastern, Central and Southern Africa region. By the end of this reporting quarter, which also marked the project end date, 18 Tanzanian students graduated and returned home where they are effectively contributing to the development of Tanzania's Agricultural sector. See the link below for evidence of alumni contributing to the Tanzanians agricultural productivity.

[https://blog.ruforum.org/?utm_source=RUFORUM+Mailing+List&utm_campaign=6f50c6db46-1_29_2015&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1fcfbb8a0b-6f50c6db46-318847473&ct=t\(1_29_2015\)&mc_cid=6f50c6db46&mc_eid=bb840e9bb2\)](https://blog.ruforum.org/?utm_source=RUFORUM+Mailing+List&utm_campaign=6f50c6db46-1_29_2015&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1fcfbb8a0b-6f50c6db46-318847473&ct=t(1_29_2015)&mc_cid=6f50c6db46&mc_eid=bb840e9bb2).

¹ CARP+ describes an expanded community action research programme that involves; university led research team (faculty, students, technicians) working closely with TVET institutions to undertake research with communities.

The remaining students are in final stages of completion and are expected to graduate in August 2017.

d) A Graduate Teaching Assistantship Program (GTA)

RUFORUM Secretariat initiated implementation of the RUFORUM Board of Directors resolution made during the 12th Annual General Meeting in Cape Town, South Africa to recruit and train 325 PhDs by 2021 under the GTA programme. Under the GTA arrangement the hosting university waives fees and provides accommodation for the GTA student, while the sending institution provides for travel, upkeep and some research support. RUFORUM is partnering with the African Higher Education Centres of Excellence (ACE) to support internationalisation of ACEs through facilitating students' mobility and placement, and explore opportunities for research funding. This effort provides complimentary opportunity to institutionalize the GTA programme in African Universities. The ACE and GTA initiatives have overlapping focus in member universities, and as such, the joint effort serves a strategic purpose to formalize and strengthen collaboration between these two complimentary continental initiatives. Overall, 36 GTAs have been fully placed and additional 57 nominated by their respective universities and are undergoing placement at host universities. Accordingly, since the launch of the GTA programme in 2014, a total of 96 GTA placements have been made. The GTA programme is contributing to RUFORUM strategic objective of escalating PhD training to strengthen faculty training and research capacities, and promoting vibrant intra-African academic mobility and regional integration.

e) Institutional Strengthening Grants (ISG)

RUFORUM Secretariat awarded two ISGs to provide training for 20 Masters Students at University of Gezira in Sudan and 7 PhD students at Gulu University in Uganda. The ISG, which provide partial grant support, are used to broaden participation of member universities in RUFORUM activities and to address emerging gap areas.

2. SERVICING THE NETWORK

a) Communication and Information Technology

RUFORUM's continues to tailor its communication products to reach diverse stakeholders to increase visibility of interventions being made in strengthening agricultural higher education in Africa. During the reporting period, the following activities and accomplishments were made;

- i. With support from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, RUFORUM received in-kind support from a Public Relations and Communications Consultant ([Patience Ukama](#)) who shared her insights on how to increase online engagement and visibility of RUFORUM products and services. Moving forward, RUFORUM will develop tailored messages for various platform and run promotional campaigns.
- ii. As part of staying connected and better serving the Network, RUFORUM launched an online Communication Survey to better understand its audience and their needs. Overall, 104 respondents participated in the survey. The survey results indicate that most of RUFORUM audience is between 25-34 years old with 5% in the range of 55-64. Of these, 72% are seeking for scholarships support, while 64% seek to network through RUFORUM

events. The above demographics indicate the need for RUFORUM to develop products that are appealing to the youth who access through the following channels; The Weekly (65%), Blog (45%) and website (35%). During the reporting period, we developed and launched The MCF@RUFORUM website (<http://www.ruforum.org/MCF/>) providing a one-stop centre for all updates, on scholarship calls, grants and news under the MasterCard Foundation at RUFORUM initiative. The launch of this site has increased traffic to the RUFORUM online platforms.

b) Knowledge hub for Agricultural Higher Education

The thrust of RUFORUM's Knowledge Management actions is to enhance the impact of postgraduate research by increasing visibility, accessibility and uptake of knowledge products by clients and stakeholders. During the reporting period, the following were accomplished:

- i. Produced five editions of the RUFORUM news digest (<http://us2.campaign-archive1.com/home/?u=8da7957c2a43545cd0f6b3c57&id=1fcfbb8a0b>) to keep network members updated on news, available funding opportunities and new publications.
- ii. Enhanced opportunities for African scientists to publish their research in reputable open access journals by securing support of the BMGF open access publishing service (Chronos) that guides in selection of reputable journals and covers publishing costs for BMGF funded research work. Similar engagements are ongoing with FAO to feature RUFORUM publications on its AGORA and AGRIS databases in order to increase their visibility and use, and build capacity of university librarians in the use of these platforms.
- iii. Initiated production of the RUFORUM Quarterly Magazine; a publication presenting analysis of current issues and emerging trends, and sharing best practices in higher education and agriculture in Africa. The first edition will be published in the next quarter
- iv. Provided access to over 1900 publications from both academia and practice through the RUFORUM institutional repository (<http://repository.ruforum.org>). The collection continues to grow, with addition of publications from RUFORUM funded research and other activities. However, efforts are underway to expand the scope of the repository and include publications from other institutions and networks that are relevant to higher education and agriculture in Africa.
- v. As part of deepening the sharing of knowledge on aspects of sustainable rural development, published [Volume 1 Issue 3](#) & [Volume 2 Issue 1](#) of the African Journal of Rural Development (<http://www.afjrd.org/jos/index.php/afjrd>). These editions were themed on university outreach programmes and strengthening research capacity of African agricultural higher education institutions, respectively. A total of 24 papers were published, sharing case studies from ten countries across Africa as well as regional perspectives on the thematic areas.
- vi. Maintained and facilitated discussions in online Communities of Practice (CoP) for different stakeholder groups particularly Social Media Reporters, Principal Investigators and RUFORUM Alumni. The online CoPs are a valuable platform for knowledge exchange on topical issues.

c) Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

During the reporting period the following activities were conducted

- i. Commissioned two (2) internal reviews on the implementation of Business Strategic Plan (SBP) 2015-2020 to assess progress, provide recommendations for improving programme quality and delivery, and develop RUFORUM thrusts for up to the year 2022 - two years beyond the life of the current SBP.
- ii. Conducted monitoring visits to Tanzania, Kenya, Malawi, Sudan, Rwanda and Uganda as part of provision of on-going technical support and backstopping to research teams to ensure timely completion of studies by postgraduate students. These support visits provide ground for learning and knowledge exchange among research teams. Broadly, the monitoring visits provided opportunities for field based learning, and lesson sharing with wide range of stakeholders beyond the research target niche thus supporting the alignment of university research priorities to stakeholder needs.

A Success story of impact of university research
Students on a GRG project in Gulu University completed on time and developed a success narrative on uptake of university research products at scale through the adoption of nutritionally improved cassava porridge in over 12 primary schools in six districts in Northern Uganda; the poorest region in the country. Through this seed grant there is an emerging women-led initiative in value addition enterprise producing cassava chips, flour, gari and cakes to supplement household incomes and nutrition.
- iii. Documented the proceedings of the 5th Africa Higher Education week and RUFORUM Biennial 2016 highlighting key outcomes from the different sessions and offering opportunities for learning and informing the on-going preparation for the upcoming 2018 Biennial. The report will be availed online in the next quarter.
- iv. Finalised the monitoring, evaluation and learning framework for The MasterCard initiative at RUFORUM and made iteration to benchmark baselines of farm attachment and community engagement processes.
- v. Finalized an online platform showcasing the impact RUFORUM is making in the lives of smallholder farmers in form of short films. Some of the videos showcasing universities engagement with Communities and proactive graduates trained are showcased on this platform. A link to the platform is available at <http://ruforum.org/impact/>

3. NEW PARTNERSHIPS AND POLICY OUTREACH

a) Research and training partnerships

The following activities were conducted;

- i. Strengthened partnership with the Agricultural Research Cooperation of Sudan (ARC) where a tripartite agreement between RUFORUM, ARC and the Member University of Gezira to co-fund two CARPs was developed. In this partnership, the role of ARC in this initiative is to co-supervise and mentor RUFORUM supported students at the University of Gezira and University of Khartoum and to participate in community relevant research.
- ii. Signed a MoU with 'Partnership for African Social Governance Research (PASGR)' to collaborate in policy, social research, leadership and management training for RUFORUM faculty and university leaders and managers. First training will be conducted in Malawi in October 2017. Further, RUFORUM signed a MoU with Moscow State University as part of operationalizing RUFORUM's Strategic Business Plan to strong work with the BRICs nations.

The MoU will strengthen advancement of research, training and mobility of staff and students.

- iii. Formalized partnership with Ghent University in Belgium through a MoU for collaboration in staff exchange and joint research
- iv. Initiated formal engagements with civil societies: BRAC Uganda and Restless Development International to support student recruitment and training especially at undergraduate level and Tertiary Vocational Education Training in Uganda and Kenya, respectively. Under TVET, collaboration with Kenya Technical Training College is confirmed and activities will be initiated in the next quarter.
- v. Below are the emerging partnerships that RUFORUM is exploring;
 - a) Alliance for Green Revolution in Africa to enhance reach to farmers, agricultural research and agricultural financing.
 - b) With FAO to increase visibility of RUFORUM publications and strengthen capacity of university students and staff through e-course, MOOCs and professional field placements.

b) Cultivating partnerships with African Union Commission and other continental or regional bodies.

The following activities were implemented

- i. RUFORUM continues to engage in policy advocacy for higher education. Meetings were held with State Minister of Higher Education of Uganda, Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research of Sudan and Minister of Agriculture of Sudan. These were follow on meeting on the commitment made during the Africa Higher Education Week in October 2016 on strengthening higher education in Africa. The Government of Sudan, through the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, committed to support training of Sudanese students within and outside Sudan and students from other African countries to be trained in Sudan.
- ii. Engaged in preparations for the Summit of the 10 African Heads of State championing Higher Education, Science and Technology. The planning meeting will be hosted by the Government of Malawi from 2nd to 4th May 2017 in Lilongwe
- iii. Attended the inaugural African Economic Platform (AEP) meeting convened by the African Union in Mauritius whose objectives² are to bring together African Heads of State, the Private Sector and Academia. A key outcome of the AEP was the call for a follow up tripartite meeting involving Heads of State, Academia and the Private Sector with specific focus on higher education in Africa.

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1. *Undertake constructive multi stakeholder dialogues around common themes for Africa, led by Africans and to influence continental policy by engaging directly with African leaders on matters of mutual interest.*
 2. *Establish multi-country multi-sector priorities and plans for common action with clear mechanisms for follow up.*
 3. *Work with African leaders to remove policy obstacles for doing business in Africa, increasing the investment attractiveness of the continent, the implementation of strategies for economic diversification and industrialisation, and domestic and other resource mobilisation.*
 4. *Advocate for the removal of barriers that hamper communication and the flow of goods, people and services across the continent, create common platforms for articulating common African positions on global affairs and increase global awareness of Africa's emerging role in world affairs.*

c) A joint competitive arrangement with several CGIAR Centers/CRPS,

RUFORUM worked with ILRI to develop and submit a proposal to DFID's Strategic Partnerships for Higher Education Innovation and Reform. If successful, this project will provide opportunity for RUFORUM and ILRI to jointly support curriculum reform in livestock and animal post graduate training in Eastern Africa as well as support students' placement for research and internships in ILRI's research programmes.

d) Gradual outreach to West Africa and other Universities

The RUFORUM Secretariat supported the Polytechnic Rural Institute for Training and Applied Research in partnership with Sasakawa Global 2000, Mali country Office to develop and submit a proposal to the Netherlands Agriculture and Business Research to enhance the development of economically viable models of foundation seed production in Mali. Similarly, the Secretariat supported development of proposals for Intra Africa Mobility involving the University of Cape Coast, Ghana as the lead applicant and five other Universities (Abomey Calavi in Benin; Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources in Malawi; Rhodes University in South Africa; University of Eldoret in Kenya; Makerere University in Uganda) to support students and staff exchange involving Western, Eastern and Southern African in aquaculture and fisheries sciences.

4. STRENGTHENING GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

a) Strengthening organization governance and management

RUFORUM Secretariat role continued to grow with wider continental mandate requiring an efficient and effective Secretariat. While this may require strengthening staff Secretariat capacity, the Board recommended that it might be more efficient to reorganize in view of the financial limitations. The Position of Manager Partnership and Business which is very critical for business interest of RUFORUM was filled through internal reorganisation. The former Programme Officer for Training and Quality Assurance was promoted to position of Manager for Training and Quality Assurance effective 01 January 2017. The position of Manager for Information and Technology was re-advertised and is pending recruitment. During this same reporting period, four staff were recruited to bolster staffing capacity at the Secretariat. The recruited staff are from four African countries; Kenya, Uganda, Zimbabwe and Benin. During the reporting period, we finalised a consolidated Secretariat annual work plan taking into consideration the Annual General Meeting of 2016 approved deliverables and staff performance annual work plans.

b) Resource mobilization

As an avenue for strengthening the financial position of RUFORUM, the following resource mobilization activities were undertaken;

- i. Developed and submitted 7 proposals in response to the European Union's Erasmus+ call
- ii. Submitted a Secretariat led proposal to SPHEIR call
- iii. Submitted a proposal for Annual budget Subvention to RUFORUM to the Government of Sudan. There is an ongoing dialogue with the Government of Sudan on the issue.
- iv. Submitted a Proposal to Carnegie Corporation of New York to support RUFORUM Policy engagement activities.

PLANNED ACTIVITIES FOR THE NEXT QUARTER (April-June 2017)

1. Finance and Administration Committee meeting to be held in May 2017
2. Board Executive Committee meeting to be held in May 2017.
3. Convene in May a preparatory meeting for the planned Committee of 10 Heads of State championing Education, Science and Technology development in Africa.
4. Undertake an external review of the RUFORUM SBP 2015-2020 and develop a medium five year period vision 2022
5. Attend a round table meeting of Development Partners hosted by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in Seattle, Washington, USA
6. Visit Sweden and Norway to meet with NORAD and SIDA and attend Agrinatura General Assembly
7. Participate in meeting of Association of Research Universities in Africa (ARUA), April 2017 and Association of African Universities in June 2017