

RUFORUM @10

African Higher Education Week: Transforming Tertiary Agricultural Education A Platform for the Way Forward

FOURTH RUFORUM BIENNIAL CONFERENCE

Between 19-25 July, 2014, the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM), Eduardo Mondlane University and the Centre for Coordination of Agricultural Research and Development for Southern Africa (CCARDESA), with support from national, regional and international partners, hosted the RUFORUM Fourth Biennial Conference. Celebrating a decade of RUFORUM's existence as a network of African led and owned universities, the occasion also celebrated The African Year of Agriculture and Nutrition Security under the theme "*African Higher Education Week: Transforming Tertiary Agricultural Education – A Platform for the Way Forward*".

The conference attracted policymakers, academics, students, agricultural researchers, development agencies, agribusiness representatives and development partners from within and outside Africa. The chief dignitaries included H.E. Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, Chairperson of the African Union (AU) Commission, and Mrs Graca Machel, Member of the International Panel of Elders and Former Minister of Education, Mozambique. The meeting was attended by two AU Commissioners of Rural Economy and Agriculture, and Human Resource, Science and Technology, four Ministers; 34 Vice Chancellors, Principals and Deans.

Celebrating 10 years of success, the conference recognised that RUFORUM had:

- a) Worked with African universities to align their programmes to support the continent's development agenda, especially the Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP);
- b) Accelerated graduate training in Tertiary Agricultural Education (TAE);
- c) Increased the pool of women graduates in agricultural sciences;
- d) Facilitated the retention of trained graduates within the continent, contributing to rebuilding Africa's degraded human resource base;
- e) Contributed to technology development and deployment to boost productivity and unlock the potential of the agricultural sector in Africa;

- f) Provided mechanisms for harnessing the rich human resources and knowledge in universities to reach over one million farmers with technologies and innovations;
- g) Established research teams and consortia and mobilised investments to support TAE;
- h) Re-ignited interest in higher education as the fulcrum for development in Africa, as in other parts of the world.

Setting new horizons for the next 10 years, RUFORUM's investment trajectory will be informed by the following factors:

1. The dynamic policy environment in the continent that is guiding strategic investments and growth in Africa. These policy frameworks include, among others, *Agenda 2063 – The Africa We Want: A Shared Strategic Framework for Inclusive Growth and Sustainable Development & A Global Strategy to Optimize the Use of Africa's Resources for the Benefit of all Africans*, the CAADP, the Science Agenda for Agriculture in Africa (S3A), The Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa (STISA) – 2024: *Africa on the Wings of Innovation* – and regional economic integration and investment developments.
2. Major changes in Africa's macro and micro economy as influenced by, among others: climate change, the role of women, youth and unemployment, regional economic integration, and new discoveries of natural resources, especially hydrocarbons.
3. Opportunities and challenges in higher education in Africa that include :
 - Liberalisation of higher education that has led to the creation of several new public and private universities;
 - Demand on African universities for proactive and highly innovative and entrepreneurial graduates;
 - Demand on African universities to intensify engagement in development processes, practice and policy formulation and analysis, including foresight;
 - Demand on African Universities to engage with the private sector within and outside Africa.
4. Lessons learnt over the last decade of existence of the RUFORUM network on how to scale up the benefits of:
 - Shared investment in higher education as an effective mechanism for building capacity at a low cost;
 - Small grants as an effective avenue for providing resources to universities to catalyse training, research and outreach;

- Community Action Research as an effective mechanism to build university-community research teams, engaging with communities, and strengthening rural entrepreneurship;
- Innovations and advances in information communication technologies and science to provide universities with opportunities for catalysing training, research and outreach, and;
- Multi-disciplinary collaborative research teams and academic mobility schemes as an effective way of engaging the entire RUFORUM network and across Africa.

Recognising that the agricultural and higher educational sectors are broad, with several opportunities and challenges, the RUFORUM network has engaged wide stakeholder participation and partnerships. In this regard, the conference **appreciates** the continued support and commitment of various partners working towards a stronger agricultural sector in Africa, and for investing in higher education in agriculture in the continent.

In **consideration** of the above, the conference welcomed the offer by the AU Commission Chairperson to host a special session for African Heads of State and Government focused on **Higher Education, Science, Technology and Innovation**.

The Conference also **welcomed and applauded** the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between the AU Commission and RUFORUM that recognises and mandates RUFORUM to facilitate and coordinate higher education in agriculture in Africa. The Conference **further welcomed and thanked** the AU Commission for mandating RUFORUM to serve as a Key Implementing Agency for STISA 2024. Furthermore, the **conference welcomed** the offer by ICRISAT to work with RUFORUM to facilitate the training of African MSc and PhD students at ICRISAT and other CGIAR centres.

In **consideration** of the above, the Conference **recommends** as follows:

- a) The AU Commission to set up a team involving RUFORUM, FARA and ANAFE and other key actors to plan for the Heads of State Summit;
- b) RUFORUM to provide a position paper on higher education to feed into the *Africa Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want* preparation and deliberately engage in its implementation;
- c) AU Commission to increase support to the Julius Nyerere Intra-ACP Academic Mobility Programme, and support other mobility programmes run by African higher education networks, such as RUFORUM;
- d) AU Commission and African governments to support and invest in regional centres of excellence run by African higher education institutions, and in doing so, increase access to quality higher education across the continent;

- e) African Ministers of Agriculture and Education should work with African Universities and other stakeholders, including national government agencies, for the purpose of developing programmes for university students' field attachments, agribusiness, entrepreneurship and leadership to enhance efficiency in agricultural innovations and extension pathways;
- f) African universities should engage in informing continental, regional and national policy instruments that focus on higher agricultural education, food and nutrition security in Africa;
- g) RUFORUM should transform into a continental organisation;
- h) Over the next 10 years, the RUFORUM Network Strategy should include escalating the training of women scientists and their integration in leadership and science in Africa;
- i) In collaboration with development partners, RUFORUM and African Universities should work towards expanding, strengthening and consolidating pilot initiatives to foster cutting edge research, science and innovation in the agricultural sector;
- j) RUFORUM should continue to develop and implement innovative approaches and increase opportunities for experiential learning and action research, including engaging directly with rural farmers to improve access to available knowledge and its delivery for productivity enhancement and income generation, such as through the Community Action Research Programme;
- k) RUFORUM should engage with ICRISAT and other CGIAR centres to support human capital development through graduate student attachments to CGIAR centres.

Additionally, African governments should:

- l) Increase investment in higher education to address the challenges of youth unemployment, food and nutrition security and wealth creation;
- m) Undertake strategic investments in intellectual infrastructure to increase access to information, knowledge and learning in Africa;
- n) Strengthen the capacities of TAC institutions to produce pro-active graduates with relevant skills to meet the dynamic market place.

The conference further **affirms** the commitment of the RUFORUM network and partners to champion African higher education that generates contextualised agricultural innovations for enhanced food and nutrition security.

This Communiqué was Issued this 25th day of July 2014 at Maputo, Mozambique