



## The Fifth African Higher Education Week and RUFORUM Biennial Conference 2016

### Conference Communiqué

Issued 21 October, 2016

#### **Conference Theme: Linking Agricultural Universities with Civil Society, the Private Sector, Governments and other Stakeholders in support of Agricultural Development in Africa**

The Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) Fifth Africa Higher Education Week and Biennial Conference was held 17 -21 October, 2016 at the Century City Conference Center in Cape Town, South Africa. The aim of the Conference was to strengthen higher agricultural education in Africa with emphasis on identifying and enhancing strategies to leverage resources and capacities of key stakeholders' institutions including the private sector, governments, and civil society organizations to transform knowledge into innovations and drive economic growth.

The overall theme of the Conference was *“Linking Agricultural Universities with Civil Society, the Private Sector, Governments and other Stakeholders in support of Agricultural Development in Africa”*.

The Conference was co-organized by RUFORUM, the Agricultural Research Council (ARC) of South Africa and the six RUFORUM member universities in South Africa with support from national, regional and international partners. Several pre-conference events were held from 14-16 October including the 15<sup>th</sup> RUFORUM Board Meeting, the 12<sup>th</sup> RUFORUM Annual General Meeting, the meeting of African Principals and Deans, trainings on Gender and Leadership among others.

Ms Rita Roy, President of The MasterCard Foundation addressed the Conference Participants and highlighted the important role of education in supporting development, and transformation of education on the continent to produce graduates who will harness agribusiness opportunities and create wealth.

The African Higher Education Week was attended by over 850 participants from 73 countries including four Ministers responsible for higher education, science and technology; 65 Vice Chancellors; 120 Principals and Deans and over 250 Masters and PhD students. Other stakeholders including the private sector, farmers, research, science and technology institutions, civil society and other non-governmental organizations and development partners were represented. The meeting was officially opened by HE Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, Chairperson of the African Union (AU)

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Commission who addressed the meeting. The Conference Keynote address was delivered by HE Mrs. Ameenah Gurib-Fakim, President of the Republic of Mauritius.

Seven plenary sessions along the Conference thematic areas, and 49 parallel sessions were organised during the week.

Noting that:

1. RUFORUM has worked with senior African policy makers to champion support for higher education and implementation of STISA
2. The fact that RUFORUM has transformed into a continental organization with membership spanning all the five geographical regions of the African Continent;
3. RUFORUM is continuing to stimulate the generation of functional models which are ensuring that universities produce proactive graduate that will innovate state-of-art research and products responsive to the demands of end users in Africa.
4. In retrospect, African universities are recognizing the need to engage in the delivery of more intensive agribusiness flows of research and knowledge among stakeholders as a stimulant of a more robust knowledge based economy
5. Links within the thematic context will need to be built upon well planned key pillars that are integrative, consultative, strategically driven by a knowledge based economy and life-transforming research drivers
6. African Heads of State and Government in its July 2015 Summit agreed to constitute a Committee of 10 Heads of State and Government to Champion Education, Science and Technology in Africa.

Cognisant that:

- Higher Education plays a critical role in driving innovations and economic development. However, Africa gross enrollment is only 6% access compared to 32% world average and over 40% in developed countries.
- Increased massification of Universities in Africa without corresponding increase in required funding, infrastructure and staffing.
- The inadequate funding for post graduate training yet it is increasing research output and knowledge for driving development
- Investing in capacity building on youth of all gender is a primary priority as a matter of course for national, regional and global development interventions.
- There is need for flexible and adaptable universities that will produce critical thinkers and change agents needed to meet demands of the rapidly changing world

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Appreciated:

- (a) The Vice Chancellors commitment to train **325** PhD students through the RUFORUM Graduate Teaching Assistantship Program as part of beefing up PhD qualified academic staff and promoting academic mobility in Africa;
- (b) RUFORUM Community Action Research approach has resulted in establishment of multi-disciplinary collaborative research teams and academic mobility schemes as an effective way of engaging the entire RUFORUM network and across Africa.
- (c) RUFORUM has increased the pool of women graduates in Agricultural sciences and facilitated the retention of those trained within the continent who are contributing to technology development and deployment.
- (d) The dedicated effort by national, regional and global leadership to create enabling environment for socio-economic development. The Continental 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 and regional economic integration and investment developments. These frameworks are linked to the Global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

**In consideration of the above, the Conference welcomed the offer by the AU Commission Chairperson and the President of the Republic of Mauritius to participate in the First Convening of African Heads of State and Government with Private Sector and Academe to be held in Mauritius 19 – 21<sup>st</sup> March 2017.**

The RUFORUM Biennial Conference **recommends that:**

Universities

- 1. Universities in Africa to innovate proactive curricular reforms and delivery taking into account the rapidly changing global academic landscape in demand and supply;
- 2. Universities should form alliances with non-public and nongovernmental agencies (NPNGs) involving stakeholders such as entrepreneurs, business community and farmers as a way of working together toward a common goal of transforming institutions and quality and a way of life

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3. University position themselves to be relevant as a trusted player and also position themselves to remain viable and sustainable
4. Universities to strengthen private sector links/partnerships/collaborations as enablers for transforming African higher education quality and relevance with a view to uplifting agribusiness institutions and lives of peoples of Africa

#### Governments:

5. African Governments raise their domestic investment in support of the agricultural sector focusing on capacity building for Higher Agricultural Education, including training and research to generate knowledge to leverage R&D for supporting Africa's development;
6. African Development Bank support efforts to mobilize funding for Higher Education in Africa, especially in Agriculture, Health and Science Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) areas
7. African Governments commit to strengthen postgraduate training programmes and increase intake from 6% to 20% by 2030
8. Called upon African Private Sector and High Net Worth Persons to invest in Higher Education
9. Improve equitable access to higher Education across socio-economic quintiles and across gender;
10. Strengthen use of ICTs to improve the decentralization of teaching and learning, enhance access to the wider public, and also reduce the costs of education in Africa;
11. Improve the relevance, quality, governance and community impact of higher education institutions, including putting in place relevant frameworks.

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 on the 21<sup>st</sup> day of October 2016 at Cape Town, South Africa**

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