

RUFORUM Summary of Progress on Activities for the Financial Year 2015/2016

Summary: This report presents a summary of progress, key achievements for the year 2015/2016 and targets for the coming period for the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM), a network of 60 African Universities with a Secretariat at Makerere University in Uganda. The work is anchored on the recently approved RUFORUM Strategic Business Plan (2015-2020) which guides overall RUFORUM activities along its mission.

In the concluded Financial Year, RUFORUM reports the following key achievements:

1. Finalised and launched the RUFORUM Strategic Business Plan (2015-2020) that is currently guiding all RUFORUM operations. The Plan is adaptable to support programmatic choices and realign to emerging realities. A refresh will be undertaken mid-way the five year period.
2. Expanded programmatic (community engagement, entrepreneurship, policy work) and geographical scope of the Network with presence in each of the eight African regional economic communities of the African Union.
3. Developed a continental implementation plan and a flexible reporting framework for Priority One of the Science, Technology Innovation Strategy for Africa (STISA 2024), as per agreement with the African Union Commission.
4. Secured a USD27.1 million grant from The MasterCard Foundation to support university education and the transformation of curricula to better respond to developmental challenges through improved university community engagement, entrepreneurship and inclusive rural agricultural-led growth;
5. Strengthened engagement with African national governments and thus the networks role as a platform for university engagement with African agriculture, science and technology stakeholders, continent wide.

A key challenge during the period continued to be the escalating demand for RUFORUM membership without significant increase in the resource base to effectively service the extensive network.

Key focus for the financial year 2016/2017 will be:

1. Synthesising emerging lessons, university community engagement and platform activities to inform strategies for improving the quality of agricultural higher education in Africa in line with calls for greater use of university knowledge in driving development;
2. Strengthening tracking of university performance including through 1) a book on agricultural higher education in Africa; 2) a new online open access data portal on human capital, student population and research investment portfolio of the member universities; and 3) student outreach activities to inform policy, among others;
3. Initiate pilot activities for greater university support to technical vocational education and training (TVET) and entrepreneurship in Africa including an Africa wide scoping study to guide engagement.



Introduction

This report presents a summary of progress, key achievements for the year 2015/2016 and targets for the coming period for the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM). RUFORUM, established in 2004, is a network of 60 African Universities 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'*. The Report highlights key achievements during the year and documents important challenges facing the network during the period of reporting. The work is anchored on the recently approved RUFORUM Strategic Business Plan (2015-2020) which guides overall RUFORUM activities along its mission. The report is arranged along the following areas:

- a) Demand-driven training and research that is farmer and market relevant
- b) Human capital development and academic mobility
- c) A knowledge hub for Agricultural Higher Education Training and Research in Africa
- d) Enhancing tracking of university performance and program implementation
- e) Partnerships and policy advocacy
- f) Strengthening organization governance and management

Details of the activities conducted and progress towards the milestone set by the Board during the 2015 Annual General Meeting (AGM) in Windhoek, Namibia and proposed target milestones for the Financial Year 2016/17 are included below and in Annex 1 and 2, respectively.

a) Demand-driven training and research that is farmer and market relevant

During the Financial Year (FY) 2015/16, RUFORUM continued to support university postgraduate training and demand driven research through provision of oversight and support to 55 Graduate Research Grants (GRGs) and three Community Action Research Projects (CARPs). The GRGs and CARP projects have strong farmer focus and allow universities to engage with communities. The CARPs in particular have strong farmer focus, with each CARP reaching on average 5000 smallholder farmers. The projects are all implementing research along value chains and over 120 Masters and four PhD students are currently being supported. To enhance experiential learning 94 Field Attachment Program Awards (FAPAs) have been awarded and are at different stages of internships with prospective employers. The FAPAs are designed and allocated to deserving students to follow through with dissemination of their research and enable them link more closely with agencies working in the areas where their research was conducted.

The Competitive Grants program has led to important outcomes:

1. Transformation of agricultural higher education and training within Member Universities through these pilots. For example, Makerere University in Uganda, Mekelle University in Ethiopia and Nelson Mandela Institute of Science and Technology in Tanzania are all working across value chains with engagement in multidisciplinary teams, across the agricultural innovation system, and with functional collaborations across universities,



countries and sub-regions impacting over 15,000 small scale farmers. The emerging best practices from these pilots will provide important lessons for future activities at the universities and for the network.

2. RUFORUM partnership with EARTH University (Costa Rica) has enabled sharing of best practice in community engagement, curricula update and re-orienting faculty to effectively link training and research to communities' needs. It has also equipped graduates with practical skills in entrepreneurship and leadership.
3. RUFORUM strengthened agribusiness/ agri-enterprise development training as well as incubation support with pilots at Egerton University (Kenya) and Gulu University (Uganda).
4. RUFORUM launched the young (<40 years) African Entrepreneurs Competition that attracted over 750 applications from graduates and alumni across the continent to show case their innovations and agri-business ventures. The best 10 applicants will be recognised and given opportunity to present their business ideas during the 5th Africa Higher Education week and the RUFORUM Biennial Conference in October 2016, Cape Town, South Africa

b) Human Capital Development and Academic Mobility

In a knowledge intensive and increasingly globalising and competitive world, Postgraduate training in Africa is increasingly recognised as an important need for growth. RUFORUM's was able to:

1. Further enhanced its operational efficiency through development of a Capacity Development Strategy in consultation with Member Universities. The Strategy will guide capacity development thrusts in response to university needs and that of key implementation frameworks such as the STISA 2024, Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Program (CAADP) and the Science Agenda for Africa Agriculture (S3A).
2. With support of the member universities RUFORUM was successful in mobilising African governments to sign up to participate in the World Bank supported Phase II Project – the African Higher Education Centres of Excellence Project (ACE II). It also supported proposal write shops for the universities that led to submission of over 30 proposals of which 18 were among the 24 selected for funding. All the nine selected agriculture proposals are part of the RUFORUM Network activities. The Projects in Eastern and Southern Africa will receive coordination support from the Inter-University Council of East Africa.
3. Facilitated the development and mounting of ten (10)¹ new PhD and four (4)² Master's degree programmes in response to emerging regional capacity demands.
4. Thirty (30) staff of member universities were recruited to undertake PhD training under the RUFORUM Graduate Teaching Assistantship Program (GTA). GTA remains attractive

¹ Eduardo Mondlane- (*PhD in Forestry Resources, PhD in Agronomy (Plant Protection, and Soil and Water) and PhD in Agri-Food Management and Policy*); Busitema University – (*PhD Educational Sciences*), Gulu University- (*PhD Agricultural and Applied Biosciences*), Uganda Martyrs University- (*PhD in Agro-Ecology*), Uganda Technology and Management University- (*PhD Data Sciences*), Makerere University- (*PhD Petroleum Studies in Geosciences Engineering and Environmental sciences*), Uganda Christian University- (*PhD in Agriculture Systems and Value Chains*), and University of Antananarivo – (*PhD Quality Hygiene Safety and Environment*)

² Madagascar (*MSc Agroecology, Biodiversity and Climate Change*), Burundi (*MSc. Rural Economic and Agribusiness, and MSc Plant Breeding*), and in the DRC (*MSc Crop Sciences*)

to Member Universities because of reduced cost of PhD training (staff pay local fees at foreign universities) and ensuring reduced 'inbreeding' of staff being trained.

5. RUFORUM supported 10 postgraduate students to intern at ICRISAT, a CGIAR Centre.

c) A knowledge hub for Agricultural Higher Education Training and Research in Africa

In the efforts to become a true continental knowledge hub for Africa Agricultural higher education training and research, during the FY2015/16 ICT systems were effectively deployed to support and streamline organizational activities and processes. The Grants Module in the RUFORUM Information Management System (RIMS) was strengthened to enhance online Grants compliance, reviews and reporting, while the Training and Quality Assurance module was similarly strengthened to play a facilitating role in the management of student scholarships and progress tracking. Internally, the Secretariat improved automation and business practice within the institution. Internal data recovery systems have been strengthened with configuration of files' synchronization and backup, and revision of the Disaster Recovery Strategy. The appraisal of existing web tools to promote and improve access to the documents in the RUFORUM knowledge institution repository was initiated. This is intended to increase visibility and accessibility of RUFORUM knowledge products in the repository by specialized scholarly search such as Google Scholar.

During the FY2015/16vRUFORUM developed a Communication Strategy to guide the development of information, monitoring performance of the different communication channels and platforms to the different client segments. The implementation of the strategy has since seen increased organizational footprint from the previous year on social media platforms: Facebook with 3,164 likes; Alumni Group, 553 from 548; Alumni members Blog, 2,999 from 2380 followers; Twitter, 1,353 from 1,000 followers.

The weekly digest which provides a snapshot of current news, events, funding opportunities and new publications both from within and outside the network continues to inform the network. The publication is now also appreciated as a medium for information dissemination as evidenced by a number of requests from network members to profile their activities and publications. During 2015/2016 FY, an international Editorial Board of the African Journal of Rural Development (<http://www.ajrd.info/>) was constituted and two editions published. The journal publishes on both academic and non-academic action research issues for purposes of sharing lessons and experiences on working with rural communities to improve agricultural productivity and livelihoods. The launch of the African Journal of Rural Development is aimed at increasing dissemination of Africa research findings, and to contribute to discourse on rural development issues in the continent, a key focus for RUFORUM.

d) Enhancing tracking of university performance and program implementation

In line with the Board decision during the 12th Annual General Meeting (AGM) in Namibia, RUFORUM renewed its partnership with IFPRI/ASTI to facilitate the tracking of university key research and training indicators in the agricultural field. Statistics on human capacities in agricultural higher education agencies in terms of number of staff, student populations and sources of funding to training units across the continent were collected and analysis is ongoing.



An impact assessment of the 10 year previous RUFORUM Strategic Plan (2006-2015) was conducted to take stock of returns to investment and set benchmarks for the new 2015-2020 Business Strategic Plan. The key findings indicate that still 94% of RUFORUM Alumni live and work in their countries of origin (73% alumni are on permanent or long-term contracts); cumulatively over \$107 Million was mobilized by RUFORUM on behalf of member universities; cumulatively 356 PhD and 1,433 MSc graduates trained; 348 Research grants awarded; and over 500 networking events held over a 10-year period.

During the reporting period an internal organisational review was conducted to; (a) review progress programmatic targets over a 2-year implementation period, 2014/2015-2015/2016, (b) determine the effect of interventions on RUFORUM's undertakings, (c) facilitate learning by reflecting on challenges and draw lessons from each core area, and (d) determine any emerging issues that need to be considered during the remaining period (2017-2019). The review findings indicated that all performance measurement indices indicated the need for minor adjustments to enhance delivery. Overall RUFORUM achieved over and above the targets set under each of the seven organizational strategic areas.

e) Engagements in new Partnerships and Policy Advocacy

During the FY the Strategic Business Plan 2015-2020 was finalised and launched putting increased weight on forging alliances with agriculture development agencies to turn research results into innovations of value to small-scale producers and the private agro-enterprises that serve them. In this respect, RUFORUM engaged with governments to review how best to enhance higher education quality, with a focus on continental and international development frameworks such as STISA 2024.

RUFORUM participated in various high level policy dialogue including: meetings with the Chairperson of the African Union Commission; the President of Mauritius; The President of the African Development Bank; The Deputy President of Kenya; the President of Malawi; various high commissioners/ ambassadors; Ministers from various countries; among others, to discuss higher agricultural education in Africa. In recognition of RUFORUM's continental engagements, the organization was highly commended by the African Union Chairperson Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini on progress made towards the implementation of STISA 2024 Pillar 1. The African Union Commission Chair provided endorsement of RUFORUM to various development agencies.

During the same period, RUFORUM received an Award from the Government of South Africa. The Science Forum South Africa (SFSA) Science Diplomacy Award was presented by South Africa's Minister of Science and Technology, Hon. Dr Naledi Pandor at the Science Forum South Africa, a major public science event, on 8-9 December 2015, in Pretoria.

f) Financing organization's operations

Through the various engagements, RUFORUM won 13 grants amounting to about US\$60 Million for Member Universities and close to US\$30 million for the Secretariat. A grant of US\$27.1 million was provided by The MasterCard Foundation to train, for a period of 8 years, 220 students (110 undergraduates and 110 Masters), and piloting innovations to transform agricultural universities and institutions (TVETs). RUFORUM also received funding of US\$297,703 for the 2016 Biennial conference support from various sources. In addition,

US\$785,500 was provided through existing grants to support participation of graduate students (250) and Principal investigators (60) and Deans and Principals (76) at the 2016 Biennial.

g) Strengthening organization governance and management

All RUFORUM governance organs held their business meetings during the period including the Board and the Annual General Meeting (AGM). The Board through the Board Executive Committee, Finance and Administration Committee, Technical Committee and International Advisory Panel played its oversight role of guiding the Secretariat's activities. RUFORUM received a clean 2014-2015 audit report which was approved by the August 2015 AGM held in Windhoek, Namibia. Since its founding in 2004 RUFORUM has received clean audit reports. The external Audit for the financial year 2015/16 was completed by Deloitte and Touche and the audit report will be presented to the Annual General Meeting on 18 October 2016 in Cape Town, South Africa.

