



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

## Promoting Gender Equality in African Universities to Increase Participation and Voice of Women in Higher Education, Research and Development A Convergence of Higher Education Networks at the Fifth African Higher Education Week and RUFORUM Biennial Conference

### Concept Note

#### Background

According to UNWOMEN, the United Nation’s entity for gender equality, empowering women to participate fully in economic life across all sectors is essential to build stronger economies, achieve internationally agreed goals for development and sustainability, and improve the quality of life for women, men, families and communities. Providing women and girls with equal access to education, health care, decent work, and representation in political and economic decision-making processes fuels sustainable economies and benefit societies and humanity at large.

Women and girls experience multiple and intersecting inequalities. Structural barriers in the economic, social, political and environmental spheres produce and reinforce these inequalities. Obstacles to women’s economic and political empowerment, and violence against women and girls, are barriers to sustainable development and the achievement of human rights, gender equality, justice and peace. The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda<sup>1</sup> agreed to by global leaders at the 70th General Assembly of the United Nations in September, 2015, reaffirms commitment to gender equality as not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world.

The Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM), as continental network of African Universities championing Agricultural higher education, research and development, makes recognition of and responds to the need for women’s empowerment through its fifth organisational strategic goal of “Increased participation and voices of women in education/ training, research and production and marketing of knowledge”. RUFORUM actively promotes gender equity and currently works with organisations championing gender equality at

<sup>1</sup> For more information on the SDGs please see <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs>

#### CO-ORGANISERS:





regional and continental levels such as African Women in Agricultural Research and Development (AWARD) and Forum for African Women Educationist (FAWE), to encourage more women enrolment in African Universities. Over 42% of RUFORUM MSc scholarships are awarded to women, a much higher than the 16% average enrolment in Masters’ programs in Africa (Zseleczyk *et al.*, 2013). RUFORUM, AWARD and FAWE, also support women scientists to build social networks, gain confidence and access professional opportunities that have potential to propel them into domains previously considered only available to men.

**Rationale and Purpose of the Side Event**

Investing in women’s and girls’ education is one of the most effective ways to reduce poverty. Investment in higher education has high rates of return and the return is nearly two percentage points greater for females than for males (Dougherty, 2013). Education is an essential means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to fully participate in the development process.

Strategies to improve gender equality educational access must address not only direct costs of schooling but also take into consideration the wider social factors that impede women enrolment to higher education. Higher education practitioners need to recognise that young women seeking to enrol for postgraduate training face double challenge of meeting societal demands of settling down in a family role with a modest career against a more rewarding higher education path which has stagnated the enrolment rate at 16%. The facilities at most of Africa’s higher education institutions are constructed without minimum consideration of gender equality. The possibility of having young nursing mothers with high scientific and academic potential failing to complete or dropping out of the course due to lack of supporting space within the facilities is a reality. This is coupled with their caretaking roles within families and other responsibilities that limit women’s mobility and hence their ability to benefit from opportunities and exposure that accrue out of these training exchanges.

At the same time, the inclusion of women in research also leads to better quality research outputs. Drawing lessons from the private sector, it is apparent that increased gender diversity leads to a more robust bottom line. According to the latest research by McKinsey, companies in the top quartile for gender or racial and ethnic diversity are more likely to have financial returns above their national industry medians. Companies in the bottom quartile in these dimensions are statistically less likely to achieve above-average returns. (<http://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/why->

**CO-ORGANISERS:**





diversity-matters) similarly, organizations with more diverse research teams benefit from a diversity of views. Indeed women bring unique skill sets, talents, perspectives, insights, personality traits, management, communication and cognitive styles to the table, field and laboratory, and their increased participation in science will lead to more productive teams, improved efficiency and better scientific outputs.

### Objectives of the side Event

The objectives of the side event are;

1. To stimulate conversations on Gender Equity challenges in African universities, share experiences and propose remedial actions that are needed to promote education, training and professional development for women,
2. To appraise RUFORUM’s approach to capacity building and how it empowers women both as students and as future leaders in the Agricultural innovation system.
- 3.

### Approach and Methodology

A half day meeting will be organized at the Fifth African Higher Education Week and RUFORUM Biennial Conference to be held at the Century City Conference Centre in Cape Town. The meeting will include a key note address on the status of Gender and Higher Education in Africa by the Executive Director of AWARD Dr. Wanjiru Kamau-Rutenberg. This will be followed by a plenary discussion and sharing of experiences and best practices among university Deans, Principals and Senior Academicians on what practical steps they are taking to address the gender equality deficits in African institutions of Higher Education. The primary target participants are Deans and Principals from the Member Universities and other actors promoting women education in Higher Education Institutions.

The expected outputs of the side event are:

1. A review of the gender sensitive initiatives in Universities that enhance the retention and timely completion of female students at MSc and PhD levels
2. Sharing lessons of best practices and their potential for scale
3. Understanding of the RUFORUM gender responsive capacity building

### Venue and Date

**Venue:** Century City Conference Centre, Cape Town, South Africa, Meeting Rooms 9 &10

**Date:** Sunday, 16<sup>th</sup> October 2016

**Time:** 0830 -1300

### CO-ORGANISERS:





**Side Event  
Organizers  
and Contact**

Dr. Wanjiru Kamau-Rutenberg (AWARD) Email: [w.kamauR@cgiar.org](mailto:w.kamauR@cgiar.org)  
and  
Mr. Charles Owuor (RUFORUM) Email: [c.owuor@ruforum.org](mailto:c.owuor@ruforum.org)

**Side Event Programme  
Day One**

MAIN THEME Gender and Women empowerment in Higher Education, Research and Development		
Time		
0800-0845	Registration of participants	Mr. Moses Waswa (RUFORUM)
0845-0900	Welcome and Opening Remarks	Dr Moses Osiru
0900-0915	Side event Context and Objective	AWARD
0915-930	Key note Address the AWARD Executive Director, Dr. Wanjiru Kamau-Rutenberg	AWARD
0930-1000	Plenary discussion	
1000-1030	Tea Break	
1030-1230	<u>Group work and feed back to the plenary</u> Working groups with Max of 10 people looking at different but related aspects in terms of a) what are the existing systems, mechanisms and policies that enhance gender equity in African Higher Education Institutions b) what is the reality check of gender equality in African Higher Education Institutions and what should be done differently	AWARD and RUFORUM
1230-1245	Key actions and recommendations	AWARD
1230-1300	Closing Remarks	Prof. Adipala Ekwamu, RUFORUM Secretariat

**CO-ORGANISERS:**

