



The Fifth African Higher Education Week and RUFORUM Biennial Conference 2016

Seventh Principal Investigators Orientation Meeting (7th PIOM)

Engaging Principal Investigators of RUFORUM Supported Research Grants for efficient Implementation

DATE: 17th October, 2016

Century City Conference Center, Cape Town, South Africa

Concept Note

Background & Introduction

The Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) is a network of 60 universities in 25 African countries. RUFORUM was formed by visionary Vice Chancellors in 2004 as a change agent organization that will champion the integration of African universities in to the development process. RUFORUM focuses at ensuring that universities play an important role in contributing to the well-being of small-scale farmers and support national and regional development through the output of high quality research and innovative researchers and change agents. Over the years, RUFORUM has further supported the training and capacity development of university faculty as well as strengthened the operational effectiveness and promoted greater sharing and lesson learning among member universities and with other African and international institutions.

The above efforts are in accordance with RUFORUM’s vision for ‘a vibrant agricultural sector linked to African universities that can produce high-performing graduates and high-quality research, responsive to the demands of Africa’s farmers for innovations, and able to generate sustainable livelihoods and national economic development’. In achieving its vision RUFORUM is guided by a well elaborate and articulate mission, that focuses on strengthening 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. In actualizing this mission, RUFORUM implements a range of activities and at the core of these is the Competitive Grants System (CGS). The CGS is directed at the

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increased contribution of graduates from RUFORUM member universities with an objective of producing high-quality innovative and entrepreneurial graduates and dynamic universities that are strong actors in national innovation systems and that champion the production of quality graduates, research outputs and policy information that underpin poverty alleviation and economic growth.

There are five different granting portfolios that award grants competitively through the RUFORUM CGS including: (i) Graduate Research Grants (GRG) for projects that train at least 2 MSc. students; (ii) Community Action Research Programme (CARP) to establish a platform to link universities with communities and other stakeholders in action research and involve 1 PhD and 2 MSc. students; (iii) Field Attachment Programme Awards (FAPA) to intern with prospective employers and work with the clients of their research on uptake, after submitting their theses; (iv) Doctoral Grants that provide a range of scholarships and grants to PhD students; and (v) Nurturing Grants also known as Institutional Strengthening Grants that provide targeted support to address gaps and emerging opportunities. It is through these grants that RUFORUM contributes to improving the quality and relevance of its research and students, to university outreach and to its potential as an impartial national and regional platform for all stakeholders to engage in value chains.

Currently there are 6 CARP projects, 55 GRGs running, 168 FAPAs and 47 Nurturing Grants. Of these PIs to the 3 CARPs and the 55 GRGs are scheduled to attend the biennial. This will present an opportunity to engage on key issues including establishment of thematic working groups and timely project completion.

Why the need for thematic groups and timely project completion

The overall theme under which the ongoing grant were awarded is focused on “Innovation for sustainable crop-livestock systems within value chains that improve smallholder incomes.” This attracted teams that are working along similar commodities as well as similar aspects along different value chains and there is need to initiate efforts that will secure continued collaboration between and among principal investigators as well as the entire research team.

Timely project completion is central to quality and excellence. It is core to grant making, resource mobilisation and assures funders of the excellence of processes as well as builds institutional confidence. It is the single most valuable bargain an organisation can provide to its funders at all times and promotes

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trust. Timely spending, accountability and compliance to grant provisions is one of the criteria that determines future funding levels for any organisation. RUFORUM mobilizes resources on behalf of network member universities and disburses it through a competitive process. As such, there is a double spine process of financial transactions on all the project grants within RUFORUM; universities and principal investigators (PIs) account to RUFORUM and RUFORUM accounts to the donors/funders. In all cases, students and Principal Investigators (PIs) become central to RUFORUM credibility and success. Failure on the part of the PIs and students to deliver on the targets agreed upon in the grant award letter implies a failure on the part of RUFORUM to deliver on its commitments to the funders.

Objectives of the side Event

The overall objective of this side event is to strengthen the awareness and cooperation of principle investigators and students in timeliness of project completion. This is aimed at ensuring that RUFORUM funded projects stay on course in light of the grant award letter commitments. Thus the objectives of the side event are to:

1. Bring principle investigators implementing the 2014 and 2015 projects together and create synergies through establishment of thematic research group; and
2. Undertake review and feedback on the grant awards, create urgency and concerted engagement for timely project completion.
3. Create opportunity for face to face interactions on cross cutting as well as specific issues on grant management.

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Approach and Methodology

This side event is a closed event for the principal investigators implementing the Graduate Research Grants (GRGS), Nurturing Grants (NG) and the Community Action Research Programmes (CARPs) and their students. The programme will be implemented through a presentation and open plenary dialogue and a social dialogue through coffee and tea break sessions. Further guided inquiry and brainstorming will be encouraged during the session that lead to common resolution and strategic actions for achieving timeliness of project completion. The approach will focus on ensuring that the specific objectives of the meeting are achieved as outlined in the below.

Objectives	Activities and Approach
1. Facilitate the achievement of a shared understanding between PIs and RUFORUM Secretariat of the Graduate Research Grants and CARPs in the context of RUFORUM mission and aspirations.	1.1 Focused discussions on the essence and operation of the GRGs and CARPs
2. Evaluate progress of implementation of GRG and CARP grants	2.1 Presentation by PIs on progress of respective grants by PIs 2.2 Strategies for timely graduation of students and project closure
3. Establish a working relationship (Community of Practice, CoP) between and among PIs of the 2014 and 2015 RUFORUM GRG projects	3.1 Inter-disciplinary collaboration and partnerships for impactful R4D 3.2 Cluster research teams in thematic groups and stimulate discussions 3.3 Presentation of created PIs community of practice D-groups
4. Support PIs in timely reporting and accounting for the projects	4.1 Plenary presentation and discussions

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Expected Outputs

- A well-articulated and agreeable positions on timely project completion;
- Issues of concern that need to be handled from the RUFORUM Secretariat side and those that critically need to be addressed by the universities including innovative student examination;
- A network of thematic research groups (TRGs) based on based on value chains as well as increased professional and expertise coordination established.

Venue and Participants

Venue: Century City Conference Centre Meeting Rooms 8 & 9

Time & Date: 830-1730 on 17 October 2016

Side Event Organizers and Contact

The Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM)

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Side Event Programme

RUFORUM Principal Investigators Meeting 17th October, 2016 Meeting Room 8 & 9, CCCC		
MAIN THEME		
Time	Activity	Responsible Person (s)
0830-0900	Arrival and registration	Henry
0900-0910	Introductions	Henry
0910-0930	Objectives of the RUFORUM Principal Investigators Meeting	Paul
	Overview of the RUFORUM CGS and how each research fits in the mission and vision of RUFORUM	Paul
0930-1000	Pitch presentation on progress of CARP	All
1030-1100	Health break	
1100-1230	Pitch presentation on progress of each GRG	All
1230-1230	Tips on effective project management and graduate student supervision	Dr. Maina Mwangi
1240-1310	Discussions	Paul
1310-1400	Lunch break	
1400-1420	Conceptual basis for establishment of thematic groups	Paul
1420-1500	Group work	All
1530-1530	Plenary presentation and discussions	All
1530-1600	Experience with RIMS and support to reporting and accounting on RUFORUM Grants	Henry
1600-1630	Health Break	
1630-1640	Group work on RIMS	Henry
1640-1700	Evaluation	Henry

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