



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

## Strengthening Research and Scholarly Capacity of RUFORUM Graduate Fellows

### 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 10 visionary African Vice Chancellors in 2004 as a change agent organisation that will champion the integration of African universities in the continent’s development processes. RUFORUM founders envisioned an organisation that will lead to ‘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’. To deliver on this vision, RUFORUM supports Network Universities to build effective human capital to engage in research, policy, service provision, and the private sector, as well as translate knowledge into innovations for sustained economic growth and food and nutrition security. It also focuses at ensuring that there is a delivery of top notch agricultural scientists with quality postgraduate education armed with both technical and transferable skills. The graduates should also have commitment to improve rural livelihoods and the heart of going back and giving back to society as an illumination of training in Africa for Africa.

RUFORUM operationalises its vision through its mission that seeks 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’. At the center of these mission achievement are the Doctoral, Graduate Masters students and senior faculty (principal investigators). In the last 10 years RUFORUM has succeeded in training 1373 Masters graduates and 315 PhD students and made available up to

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300 technologies, innovations and management practices (TIMPs) to communities, researchers and development practitioners in Africa.

RUFORUM continues to support graduate training in Africa and has projected to train additional 500 PhDs and 600 Masters by 2020 in the Regional Programmes and through Graduate Research Grants respectively. RUFORUM is on course in achieving these targets; at present there are 116 Masters Students and 85 PhD students undergoing training. This forms part of the African graduates trained in Africa to lead innovation and change processes in Africa. This crop of researchers and change agents require the utmost skills and exposure to strengthen their research and scholarly skills to better communicate their research output to different audiences.

### The need for Research and scholarship skills enhancement

RUFORUM started capacity building efforts through supporting the training of University Faculty and Researchers that quickly went back to their positions in universities and research institutes. However, gradually there is an increased number of RUFORUM graduates that serve in the private sector and development agencies. Research communication to different audiences has therefore become a critical component in training this breed of African innovators and change agents. This calls for a sharpened focus on scholarship skills<sup>1</sup> that help drive leadership among young researchers and change agents. RUFORUM acknowledges the recent shifts in pedagogical processes to focus attention away from the first generation towards second generation understanding of creativity. The first generation creativity locates the creative enterprise as a complex set of behavior and ideas exhibited by an individual, while the second generation creativity locates the creative enterprise in the processes and products of collaborative and purposeful activity. Second generation creativity has therefore gained importance for a number of reasons: firstly, it is acknowledged as significant driver in the new or digital economy; recent clarification of the notion of ‘creative capital’ in immense; the stated commitment of a growing number of universities to ‘more creativity’ as part of their declared vision for their staff and students is a coveted and targeted

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<sup>1</sup> Scholarship skills are also often referred to as generic skills, employability skills or, often referred broadly as transferable skills.

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opportunity that it helps in realisation<sup>2</sup>. This therefore allows more space for engaging with creativity as an outcome of pedagogical work in higher education.

This day side event will focus on theory and practice related to the development of such scholarship skills specifically needed to increase creativity of graduate fellows in their practice of academic writing, text production and audience and community/stakeholder engagement. In addition, the side event will seek to strengthen graduate students competency in research; including among others their ability to propose innovative and/or original research that can connect to various research disciplines, critically evaluate methods and theory and demonstrate their ability to think outside the box; strengthen their capacity to articulate their line of opinion. Further, RUFORUM seeks to increase the volume and quality of scholarly articles published by the supported students in internationally recognized scientific journals. This side event will therefore serve to communicate the RUFORUM strategic direction in terms of scholarly demands.

**Objectives of the side Event**

The overall objective of this side event is to bring together RUFORUM current supported Masters and Doctoral students to a research and scholarships strengthening event. The specific objectives of this side event include:

1. Create a network of RUFORUM students that know and link to each other as a mechanism to build a stronger and networked RUFORUM training experience and alumni base.
2. Train supported students in selected transferable skills to prepare and set pace as change agents and leaders.
3. Train students in research and academic skills and prepare them to take leadership in transformative research in Africa.
4. Train students in publishing in internationally recognized journals such those hosted by Elsevier, Taylor and Francis, SAGE etc.

<sup>2</sup> McWilliam, E., & Dawson, S. (2008). Teaching for creativity: Towards sustainable and replicable pedagogical practice. Higher education, 56(6), 633-643.

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**Approach and Methodology**

This research and scholarship strengthening side event training will take place at the RUFORUM Biennial and the Africa Higher Education Week Conference to be held in Cape Town from 17-21 October, 2016. There will be a number of events 15 and 16 October with a focused concluding session, the focus of the side event on Tuesday 18 October 2016.

**Suggested Content**

- ✚ Transferable skills for graduate students and change agents
- ✚ How to publish in scholarly journals
- ✚ Academic-practitioner collaboration; achieving relational scholarship of integration
- ✚ Professional networks as learning, quality assurance, promoters and change makers

**Expected Outputs**

- ✚ RUFORUM supported students get to know each other and form a communities of practice;
- ✚ Sharpening of graduate students research and scholarship skills;
- ✚ Graduate students positioning and commitment to scholarship with a target to publish in internationally recognized journals;
- ✚ A report of activities and training process including areas that need further focus by RUFORUM.

**Venue and Participants**

**Venue:** Century City Conference Centre, Hall A

**Date & Time:** Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> October 2016 from 0830-1300

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**Side Event  
Organizers  
and Contact**

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## Side Event Programme

SESSION:		
MAIN THEME	Strengthening Research and Scholarly Capacity of RUFORUM Graduate Fellows	
Time	Sub Theme	Responsible
08.30 - 8.40	Welcoming remarks	Dr. Osiru Moses
08.40-8.50	Opening Remarks	Dr. Wanjiru Kamau
08.50-9.15	Motivational Speaker	Prof. Olive Mugenda
09.15 - 10.15	Self-Introductions and registration	Ms. Sylvia Chindime
10.15 - 11.00	Transferable Skills for Pro-active Graduates	Facilitator
11.00 - 12.00	How to publish in scholarly journals	Facilitator
12.00 - 12.30	Academic-practitioner collaboration	Facilitator
12.30 - 13.00	Professional networks as learning and change makers	Facilitator
13.00 - 14.00	Lunch	All Reporters

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