



The Fifth African Higher Education Week and RUFORUM Biennial Conference 2016

Strengthening Higher Education Partnerships towards a Food and Nutrition Secure Africa

A convergence of higher education networks at the at the Fifth African Higher Education Week
and RUFORUM Biennial Conference

Concept Note

Background & Introduction

Background

The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda¹ agreed to by global leaders at the 70th General Assembly of the United Nations in September, 2016 calls for a transformation to save our planet and basic human rights for all, through 17 interlinked goals. SDG 1 calls for 'ending poverty in all its forms everywhere' and goal 2 to 'end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture'. Although Africa demonstrated strong economic performance during the last decade, with average GDP growth at over 5%, extreme poverty has grown with number of poor increasing from 280million in 1990 to 330 million in 2012 (World Bank, 2016). Impacting African rural farm based communities, which form the majority of Africa's population will require renewed strategies, underpinned by a new cadre of professionals that will be able to understand contexts, including the challenges and constraints that rural farmers face. The workforce will need to support farmers to generate and or/access new knowledge to raise productivity in a sustainable way while at the same time, to reduce on- and post- farm losses. Commodity value chains will need to be more competitive and more value needs to be added locally before sale, to ensure increased incomes to rural households in Africa, through the greater application of science, technology and innovation in the Continent. Higher Education has a strategic role in skilling graduates and to support context specific knowledge generation that supports the empowerment of rural farmers.

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

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Education, and particularly, Higher education is increasingly recognized as an important component of rural development strategies in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Education has been shown to explain a high proportion (over 40%) of overall inequality. The important role of higher education in nation building through research and innovation capacity in a highly competitive and increasingly globalised world is critical in enabling and maintaining economic growth and development. Studies on higher education and its benefits have demonstrated that increasing access to higher education will have broad impacts on society, including by moulding citizens to participate more effectively in civil programs, improving individual incomes, enhancing nutrition and family wellbeing and strengthening workplace performance and effectiveness. At the same time, investment in higher education have high rates of return. USAID (2014) highlighted that private rates of returns to schooling are significantly higher in sub-Saharan Africa than any part of the world (USAID, 2014). Higher education institutions are therefore being called upon to be more responsive to development needs, and as the sector develops, there are more calls for their differentiation to serve diverse needs of growing economies. Higher education can play a critical role in harnessing current growth, which has soared in Africa at 4.5% annual average GDP growth on the continent for close to two decades (World Bank, 2016).

Introduction

Higher education partnerships are important enabling mechanisms for African agricultural tertiary education institutions to be more relevant in fulfilling their mandate. The need for partnerships is underscored by both the current inadequacy for the higher education systems in Africa to provide quality training, particularly at graduate (Masters and Doctoral) level and to harness regional, continental and global lessons/ experiences. Although a multitude of African universities have been established in the last four decades in many African countries, most are grappling with quality issues, inadequate resources, weak curriculums, and inadequate contributions to national development aims. Enrollment, at the same time has drastically increased beyond the capacity of higher education institutions to effectively absorb². Further, net emigration continues to

² The World Bank report (2009) notes that quality of tertiary education can be correlated with national economic growth.

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remains a key issue and will continue to challenge capacity development in the region, unless rewards and incentive systems are revamped. Net emigration from SSA was 0.57 million in 1995; fell to 0.29 million in 2000; and then rose to 1.07 million in 2005 (World Bank, 2009). The role of higher education networks will remain critical to enhance cross border/ cross institutional learning and to synergise current and future activities by leveraging regional, continental and global expertise for advancement. There exists a number of networks, associations and higher education institutions in Africa that collectively have a wealth of experience that could be shared for strengthening higher education performance in Africa.

Lessons from other regions of the world have shown the importance of partnerships in strengthening agricultural education and training (Eicher, 2010). In Africa, there have been a number of training programmes and approaches, involving sandwich programmes, full term training in advanced countries and other models that have resulted in human resource development at M.Sc. and PhD level. However, in many cases for Africa, unlike the Asian and other models, majority of the training was undertaken in northern institutions for various reasons. Recent reports indicate the need to strengthen not only human, but also institutional capacity of African institutions for research, training and education. This will require strengthening strategic alliances among African Higher Education and Learning Institutions, and with other actors within and outside the Continent. Higher education networks and associations will have important lessons to share to advance this work. There is need for closer collaboration between the higher education, research and the private sector and this requires additional and different capacity at African universities (African Commission, 2009; Eicher, 2010) which can be facilitated by Higher education networks.

Purpose & Rationale of the Side Event

Over the last few years, various networks and initiatives have emerged with focus on Africa that bring together actors either within or across thematic areas in support of higher education in Africa. These networks have diverse missions and activities but with often overlapping areas where synergies need to be identified and magnified. Some of the university associations and networks, in addition to the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) include the African Network for Agriculture and Agroforestry Education (ANAFE),

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African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA), the Association of African Universities, Conseil africain et malgache pour l'enseignement supérieur (CAMES), the Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA), the Southern African Regional Universities Association (SARUA), among others.

Objectives of the side Event

The main purpose of the side event will be to improve the synergies and collaboration between African Higher Education networks in Africa to enhance impact of these networks on African higher education. It also aims to network African Higher Education Institutions and networks with others from outside Africa.

Approach and Methodology

A one day meeting will be organized at the Fifth African Higher Education Week and RUFORUM Biennial Conference to be held at the Century City Conference Center in Cape Town. The meeting will involve plenary discussions, following a keynote paper on higher education in Africa and role of higher education networks. Specific networks will be provided opportunity to share lessons with the meeting on their experiences and best practices. Group work sessions will be used to ensure achievement of the meeting objectives and to identify recommendations for actions going forward.

Expected outputs

1. Review of existing higher education networks in Africa and key activities and objectives;
2. A framework for strengthening collaboration and synergy between and amongst higher education networks in Africa, and also with other global networks;
3. Sharing of lessons from higher education network activities;
4. Identification of areas for collaboration

Venue and Participants

Venue: Century City Conference Center, Meeting Room 6

Participants: Higher Education Networks and others attending the Biennial Conference

Date: 20 October 2016

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Time: 1115-1730

**Side Event Organizers
and Contact**

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