



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

## *Regional Meeting of African Experts*

### Meeting of African Technical Experts to identify key issues for dialogue by African Ministers on Strengthening Higher Education in Africa

#### Concept Note

#### Introduction & Background

The strong need for context specific innovations and technologies in Africa to support increased competitiveness of African value added products in the global market is now clearly recognised (Beintema & Elliot, 2016). Africa needs to move beyond mere adaptation of existing technologies, towards greater knowledge generation and application of science and technology (S&T) in support of economic growth and development. Over the last decade (2000-2010) a spurt in gross domestic product (GDP) growth in Africa (averaging close to 5% across the continent) has been shown to have resulted from growth in a few sectors, such as the mobile telephony and the banking sectors. Key sectors that would facilitate inclusive growth such as the agricultural sector have shown slow, if any. Growth has come from expanding land under production, rather than benefits from technology and improved practice. Thus, the needs for skills at all levels needs to be urgently redressed, including at its source: the need for higher education systems in Africa to target critical needed skills in relevant industry demanded areas.

Inability to act now will have far reaching consequences. Within 25 years, Africa will have over 600 million people entering the workforce. Without adequate skills and engagement, this energetic group will place their energy and labour towards activities that could negative impact on growth and development. It is the role of the higher education sector to support these 'youth' to realise their potential within the formal and informal workforce in Africa through the inculcation of skills, knowledge and attitudes and empowerment of this cadre to support Africa's growth.

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Currently only 6% of Africa’s youth are enrolled in universities relative to over 60% in OECD countries and a global average of 26%.<sup>1</sup> This low enrolment rate and quality challenges within the higher education sector are limiting Africa’s ability to harness its young workforce. However, these figures present already high growth with the higher education due to the low starting point.

Nonetheless, there is evidence that investment in higher education pays. A recent study by AAI (2015) estimated that a one-year increase in average tertiary education levels would raise annual GDP growth in Africa by 0.39 percentage points, and eventually yield up to a 12 percent increase in GDP. Montenegro and Patrinos (2013) reversed their earlier findings to confirm that indeed returns to higher education would have greater returns than secondary and primary education in Africa, a finding that has now been reconfirmed (World Bank, 2015; USAID, 2014).

Africa needs a strong higher education sector with strong “Innovation Universities” that use new communications technologies and that combine research, teaching, societal service, and commercialization as their core functions. Universities that will be integrated into national and regional policy institutions; and Universities that are anchor institutions which help to set the agenda and will infuse knowledge into collaborations with producers, consumers, communities, businesses, development and service providers and local and national governments.

The Higher Education Sector however, is faced with deep rooted challenges, including:

- a) Pressure on the limited high-level skills<sup>2</sup> so necessary for universities to fulfil their teaching, research, innovation and societal roles;

<sup>1</sup> In spite of rapid enrollment growth of some 15% per annum, Africa’s higher education gross enrollment ratio (GER) remained the lowest in the world, trailing South Asia (10%), East Asia (19%), and North Africa and Middle East (23%). (<http://www.arp.harvard.edu/AfricaHigherEducation/Economics2.html> ; Peter Materu, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Low number of qualified faculty members (PhD level staff in most universities range between 20-40% of academic staffing) are likely to be stretched further to meet the teaching and other demands of the expanding education systems

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- b) Inadequate frameworks to enable governments to leverage the high-level skills that do exist in universities and develop them as anchor institutions for policy and development;
- c) A skills mismatch between current university programs and the needs of the private sector, industry, NGO, CSO and government sectors ;
- d) Insufficient post-graduate programs essential both to expand higher education access and contribute to innovation and development.<sup>3</sup>
- e) African research output remains alarmingly low (less than 2% of global output);
- f) Insufficient opportunity to engage and share skills and research across the continent

### The Role of RUFORUM

RUFORUM is an Africa wide platform that works 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 RUFORUM Vice Chancellors platform brings together Vice Chancellors of African universities committed to working collaboratively to transform Africa’s higher education sector for greater relevance to African society and meeting the demand for high-level skills. The 60 Vice chancellors that make up RUFORUM all believe in the need to strengthen the responsiveness of African universities to the needs for transformation and to the provision of high quality, inclusive and relevant human resources, research and societal engagement.

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without parallel increase in investment. This affects the quality of teaching and their ability to carry out research and influence policy. Urgent need for PhD training with attrition through retirement and globalization.

<sup>3</sup> Few of the estimated 1500 public and private universities offer graduate programs (Hayward and Ncayiyana, 2014)

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## Purpose and Rationale of the meeting

### The Road thus far

There have been some progress in redefining policy in Africa to strengthen higher education in the continent. Most recently, the 26<sup>th</sup> Session of the African Union Heads of State and Government in January 2016 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia adopted the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 2016-2025). CESA has been developed to support the creation of a transformative education and training system in Africa and will support overall the response to the Sustainable Development Goal Four.

At a Conference for Higher Education in Africa in Uganda (2010) organized by RUFORUM and CTA (Technical Centre for Agriculture and Rural Cooperation), the World Bank and FARA (Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa), twenty (20) Ministers of Education, Agriculture, related sciences and Finance, committed their governments among other things to greater “emphasis by African governments on restoring the quality of higher education in agriculture. This will require special focus on higher degree training to produce the required capacity for delivering high quality teaching and learning experiences at African universities and colleges”. The recognition of the importance of investing in Higher Education has gathered momentum with a number of special events at the African Union and these outcomes were articulated in the Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2016-2025 with greater emphasis on the importance of Tertiary Education and research.

The African Higher Education Summit in Dakar, Senegal held in March 2015 concluded that it is essential to “develop a high quality, massive, vibrant, diverse, differentiated, innovative, autonomous and socially responsible higher education sector that will be a driving force to achieving the vision outlined in Agenda 2063”. The need to take urgent action to strengthen the higher education sector to underpin the use of science, technology and innovation for Africa’s transformation was emphasized at a side event at the UN in New York (September 2015) Chaired by HE Prof. Arthur Peter Mutharika, the President of Malawi and this was then reaffirmed in Lilongwe, Malawi in October 2015, when twelve (12) African Ministers of Higher Education, Science and Technology

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agreed that it is important to produce “liberally educated, scientifically literate and professionally prepared, creative and entrepreneurial graduates with integrity and ethical human values”. They committed that to achieve this they would support “building capacity and pursuing excellence in Research, Science, Technology, and Innovation in teaching and learning, research and scholarship, and public service”. They also recommended advocacy for a continental commitment and strategy to strengthen higher education in Africa. At the African Union level the Heads of State agreed to create a Committee of Ten Heads of State to Champion Education, Science and Technology development in Africa, as a fulcrum for achieving Africa Vision Agenda 2063.

These efforts are complemented by a number of international initiatives including the recently established Commission for Financing Global Education Opportunities co-convened by President Arthur Peter Mutharika of Malawi, Prime Minister Erna Solberg of Norway, President Michelle Bachelet of Chile, President Joko Widodo of Indonesia, and the Director-General of UNESCO Irina Bokova. The Going Global Conference on Higher Education held in Cape Town, May 2016 stressed “how higher education can play a role in positive social and economic change” and noted that Africa must respond to the education, knowledge and communications revolutions and mobilise knowledge and science as major drivers of growth.

### Objectives of the Meeting

The overall objective is the meeting of technical experts will be to dialogue on how African governments can strengthen the higher education sector in Africa to ensure transformative, high quality and accessible higher education in Africa that contributes to economic growth and inclusive, sustainable development.

The specific objectives of the meeting will be to:

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1. Discuss key challenges and issues constraining the transformation of higher education in Africa
2. Highlight key options, mechanisms and strategies for improving higher education in Africa
3. Agree on key issues related to Higher Education, Science and Technology that require high level policy support by African Ministers as well as Heads of State and Government to consider for adoption at the January-February 2017 African Union Heads of State and Government Summit.
4. Agree on a draft declaration to table before the Committee of Ten Heads of State championing higher education in Africa and proposed meeting in November 2016 in Malawi to discuss ways of operationalizing agreed actions.

### Approach and Methodology

The meeting of Ministers and university representatives will be held at the RUFORUM Biennial Conference in Cape Town, South Africa on the 20<sup>th</sup> October, 2016 prior to the Ministerial Meeting on 21 October, 2016. The meeting will be informed by a key presentation on the steps taken so far in the high-level dialogue and a presentation of the highlights from the Biennial.

Technical persons from the following countries have been invited to participate;

1. South Africa: Ministry of Higher Education
2. Malawi Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
3. Egypt: Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology
4. Senegal: Ministry Higher Education, Science and Technology
5. Kenya: Ministry of Education
6. Uganda: Ministry of Education and Sports
7. Sudan: Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research

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### Venue and Participants

**Venue:** Manhattan Suites, Cape Town, South Africa.

**Date:** Thursday 20 October, 2016

**Time:** 1115-1300hrs

### Side Event Organizers and Contact

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

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## Annex 1: Key issues for discussion by the Technical Experts, 20 October, 2016, Cape Town, South Africa

1. In light of the high population growth rate in Africa, including likely growth the employment sector by over 600 million in the next 20 years, need to expand access to and transform Africa's higher education to train and skill its young and rapidly growing population to respond to the needs for Africa's inclusive development;
2. Need to increase investments in higher education in Africa, including diversification of funding through cost sharing as a means of transforming the higher education sector. Funding should be used to:
  - a. facilitate development, promote stability, and enhance access and equity through funding and provision of infrastructure;
  - b. provide ICTs as a tool for learning and continued lifelong engagement;
  - c. expand postgraduate and post-doctoral training; and,
  - d. attract, develop and retain excellent academic and technical staff to pursue relevant and provide high-quality research and teaching;
3. Need to improve equitable access to Higher Education across socio-economic quintiles and across gender;
4. Promote postgraduate research through partnerships: south-south, north-south and triangular initiatives. These could be through regional collaborations in Africa to allow centers of excellence to emerge and promote aggregation of resources to enhance quality. Building on RUFORUM's centers of leadership approach and of the on-going Phase Two Program of the African Higher Education Centers of Excellence for Eastern, Central and Southern Africa. There is need to enhance the initiative.
5. The African Union Commission, to put in place mechanisms to improve the movement of staff and students to various African institutions, across the continent. Mobility can be enhanced by providing an enabling environment, reduce the challenges to inter-country mobility.
6. Commit to building capacity and pursuing excellence in Research, Science, Technology, and Innovation in teaching and learning, research and scholarship, and public service for:
  - a. provision of solutions to the development challenges and opportunities facing African peoples across the continent;
  - b. pursuing national development through business, higher education and graduate employability.
7. Accelerate the harmonisation and adoption of qualifications' accreditation frameworks and ranking system at national and regional levels for the achievement of greater compatibility and comparability, increasing the international competitiveness of the African institutions of

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higher education, and assuring the quality of educational provision against agreed benchmarks of excellence.

8. Deepen the processes of political and economic integration and provide funding to facilitate mobility for academic and knowledge exchange allowing people to study, train, and work or volunteer abroad, encourage networking, and increase diversity of experience in teaching and research.
9. Ensure trans-disciplinary scholarship to produce “liberally educated, scientifically literate and professionally prepared, creative and entrepreneurial graduates with integrity and ethical human values”.
10. Intensify cooperation within African institutions, with our development partners, and domestic and foreign private investors to align incoming funds and initiatives to support Africa’s efforts to assume STI competencies and ownership for solving its own problems.

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