



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

**Building Africa’s Human Capital for Accelerated Rural Development**  
A meeting of Partners to discuss Higher Agricultural Education in Africa convened during the RUFORUM Biennial and Fifth African Higher Education Week

*“I am convinced that the social and economic transformation of the African continent will happen only when higher education, better access to health care and greater emphasis on knowledge becomes central to the development debate”* President of Mauritius Ameenah Gurib-Fakim, May 2016

## Concept Note

### Introduction & Background

The underinvestment in higher education has been shown to constrain development in Africa contributing to high unemployment, increasing inequality and limiting economic growth. Economic migration and the exodus of both skilled and unskilled Africans is one of the results of Africa’s declining relative position in the world economy with impacts both inside and outside Africa. Despite significant economic growth in Africa over the last two decades, Africa’s poor actually increased by close to 100 million (World Bank, 2016)<sup>1</sup> largely due to high population growth. The demographics in Africa highlight the urgency to ensure that Africa’s youth can be harnessed to be more productive and drive sustainable economic growth on the Continent. Africa has close to 200 million people aged from 15-24, a number that is expected to more than double by 2050. By 2040, Africa will have the world’s largest workforce, surpassing China and India. The over 600 million children born at the beginning of this Century will be entering into the workforce over the next 15 years. The higher education sector must not only expand significantly, but also transform its ability to skill this population to match evolving technology and employment demands by equipping this burgeoning number of youths on the Continent.

<sup>1</sup> K. Beegle, L. Christiaensen, A. Dabalen and I. Gaddis (2016) Poverty in a Rising Africa, World Bank, Washington DC. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/22575>

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Available global and regional frameworks and targets<sup>2</sup> make major assumptions on the availability of high-level skills. They assume that there will be the required human resources to support implementation of emerging plans that are underpinned by greater use of science, technology and innovation for accelerating sustainable and inclusive economic growth in Africa. Realising Africa’s potential will require investments in skills, institutions, and infrastructure in order to capitalise on the job creation and economic growth potential that exists on the continent. Skills that enable it not only to carry out research but that also ensure the sharing, uptake, and commercialization of new technologies and approaches. Africa needs “Innovation Universities” that use new communications technologies and that combine research, teaching, social service and entrepreneurship as their core functions; and Universities that help to set the agenda, are integrated into national and regional policy institutions and work closely with stakeholders. Universities that use a shared learning approach where the communities are also the researchers and implementers working alongside faculty and students.

The past decade has shown that Africa can make changes with its strengthened economic performance across the continent. But to do this it needs to significantly increase, and then retain, its skilled human capital. The strong continent-wide growth in the higher education sector<sup>3</sup> has raised further concerns related to quality and the inadequate resources to meet the expansion. However, despite the massive increase in uptake, gross enrolment ratios remain low, with only 6% of Africans enrolled in universities compared to 40% in Latin America and over 60% in OECD countries. There is thus an urgent need to invest in higher education and for higher education to transform itself to produce the quantity and quality of graduates and knowledge needed to achieve the African Union’s Agenda 2063. The Sector however, is faced with deep rooted challenges, including:

<sup>2</sup>Including the Sustainable Development Goals and the African Union Agenda 2063 and relevant nested plans such as the Science, Technology and Innovation Strategic for Africa (STISA) 2024, the Malabo declaration and the Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Program (CAADP)

<sup>3</sup> The Higher Education Sector in Africa grew from 1.6 million to 4.9 million graduates between 1999 and 2009 alone but Africa still lags far behind

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- a) Low number of qualified faculty members (PhD level staff in most universities range between 20-40% of academic staffing) with the situation deteriorating given expansion of universities without parallel increase in investment (Materu, 2006)<sup>4</sup>. This affects the quality of teaching and their ability to carry out research and influence policy;
- b) A skills mis-match between the needs of the private sector, industry, NGO, CSO and government sectors and current university training programs;
- c) Inadequate focus on education, research and outreach for sustainable and inclusive growth
- d) Few of the estimated 1500 public and private universities offer graduate programs (Hayward and Ncayiyana, 2014)<sup>5</sup> and research output remains alarmingly low (less than 2% of global output);
- e) Inadequate opportunities for training at MSc and PhD level with even more limited exposure to field research working directly with stakeholders;
- f) Weak monitoring and evaluation frameworks that do not adequately link the performance of universities to funding frameworks.
- g) Inadequate systems to broaden student recruitment and lack of support to those from marginalized backgrounds

### Rationale & Purpose of the Side Event

Studies have demonstrated strong benefits from investments in the higher education sector. Recent studies have shown that returns to investment in higher education are around 20%, and in Africa closer to 30% (Montenegro and Patrinos, 2013; USAID, 2014)<sup>6</sup>. These are higher than

<sup>4</sup> Materu, Peter, 2006 “Higher Education Quality Assurance in Sub-Saharan Africa” World Bank Working Paper 124, Washington DC

<sup>5</sup> Hayward, F.M. and D.J. Ncayiyana, 2014 “ Confronting the Challenges of Graduate Education in Sub-Saharan Africa” **International Journal of African Higher Education** <http://www.inhea.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Hayward-Ncayiyana-Graduate-Education.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Montenegro, Claudius and H.A. Patrinos, 2013 Returns to Schooling around the World, World Bank

<http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/2014/09/20173085/comparable-estimates-returns-schooling-around-world>

USAID, 2014 African higher education: opportunities for transformative change for sustainable development, APLU

<http://www.aplu.org/projects-and-initiatives/international-programs/knowledge-center-for-advancing-development-through-higher-education/knowledge-center-library/executive-summary-african-higher-education-opportunities-for-transformative-change-for-sustainable-development/file>

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returns to investments in other sectors, including to secondary and primary education. The requirement of a strong network of universities across the continent, fully integrated into the national, regional and global research and development communities, is a core component of a development agenda that is market-led and knowledge-intensive and cannot be disputed. How to sustainably achieve this goal remains unclear. Coordinated strategic investments by both development partners and national partners that build on clear lessons learnt over the past decade are critical.

The Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) is an association of 60 African Universities who recognize the important, but largely unfulfilled, role that universities can play to support sustainable development in Africa. One of the RUFORUM ‘modus operandi’ is to strengthen agricultural development by engaging University actors with primary stakeholders along the whole value chain, including sister organizations and the private sector in mutually beneficial research and training to accelerate delivery of sustainable agricultural science-based innovations. RUFORUM is committed to the transformation of higher education 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 of stakeholders and clients, and particularly connecting universities to rural communities. Significant support has been received from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Carnegie Cooperation and other partners, towards RUFORUM’s Strategic Business Plan (2015-2020) building on the lessons learnt over RUFORUM’s two decades of implementation.

RUFORUM’s work<sup>7</sup> has demonstrated at pilot level that coordinated efforts around an African owned strategy for building university capacity for capacity building such as through the RUFORUM model can yield great returns with capacity to impact at scale. It is critical to provide opportunity for capacity building stakeholders to discuss these issues in an open and

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=teMLEu8h8fU>

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coherent way to agree on how to move the discussion on human capital development in Africa forward.

### Objectives of the side Event

The overall objective of the meeting is to initiate dialogue amongst a small gathering of partners who are closely involved or have an interest in supporting initiatives to address Africa’s high-level skills constraints. The specific objectives of the meeting will be to:

1. Bring together a small group of invited partners attending the RUFORUM Biennial Meeting who are closely involved or have an interest in responding to the current gaps in human capital to meet the agreed targets in Africa;
2. To provide a platform for informal and open sharing of experience and lessons and ideas on the emerging landscape related to human skills development in Africa;
3. To consider priorities and constraints to sustainable and inclusive African development and the integration of universities into society for better use and retention of their high-level skills.

### Approach and Methodology

The meeting of partners will be held in parallel with the RUFORUM Biennial Conference in Cape Town, South Africa on the 19 October, 2016. The meeting will be jointly organized by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and The World Bank with participation from partners that have an interest in high level skills development in Africa<sup>8</sup>. The meeting will be informed by a key presentation on the lessons and experiences from RUFORUM outlining some key challenges. Opportunity will be provided for partners to share their experiences and perspectives on the evolving landscape. A facilitated discussion will be held by partners to identify areas of synergy and to suggest how future actions could be better synchronised.

<sup>8</sup> List of those currently being invited is not intended to be exhaustive: Carnegie, NORAD, USAID, MasterCard Foundation, African Development Bank, National Research Foundation South Africa, SIDA, South Korea, EU and Sweden. The meeting will include some RUFORUM representatives - the aim is to limit the meeting to 25 participants.

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**Venue and Participants**

The meeting will be held at the Manhattan Suites adjacent to the Century City Conference Centre (CCCC), Cape Town, South Africa.

**Date & Time:** Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> October, 2016, 1430-1730

**Side Event Organizers and Contact**

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## Annex 1: Zero Draft Programme

Wednesday 19 October 2016; Time 1430-1730 Session chair: Mr. Leif Christoffersen (IAP, RUFORUM) Rapporteur: Dr. Moses Osiru, Deputy Executive Secretary, RUFORUM		
Time	Activity	
13:30-14:30	Lunch	Julie Aweko: special table at CCCC
15:00-15:20	Opening Remarks by Moderator	Leif Christoffersen
15:20-15:30	The RUFORUM experience and challenges facing high level skills development in Africa	Background presentation: RUFORUM
15:30-16:00	Partner perspectives on high level skills and strategic reforms needed	
16:00-17:30	Discussions	Moderators
18:00-21:00	Cocktail followed by dinner	Julie Aweko

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