



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

*Building Africa’s Human Capital for Accelerated Rural Development*

A meeting of Ministers and Universities to discuss Higher Agricultural Education in Africa convened during the RUFORUM Biennial Conference and Fifth African Higher Education Week

*“Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world”*  
Nelson Mandela

*“Universities must become a primary tool for development in the new century”*  
Kofi Annan

## Concept Note

### Introduction & Background

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. To harness the advantage this youth dividend can bring, the higher education sector must not only expand significantly, but also transform its approach. It must match the development needs on the Continent by equipping this burgeoning number of youths with the kind of skills that will be the engine for achieving Africa’s Agenda 2063. Realising this potential will require investment, commitment and advocacy. 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> It has been 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

<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).

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percent increase in GDP (AAI 2015). 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). These are higher than returns to investments in other sectors, including to secondary and primary education.

The knowledge economy which drives the modern world cannot be accessed without these skills. Universities play a pivotal role in generating the skills, the research and the policies necessary for Africa to be competitive. Countries need to invest in universities and also to position them so that the universities play a full and active role working closely with local communities, national, African and global institutions.

Africa needs “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 that work closely with producers, consumers, communities, businesses, development and service providers and local and national governments.

The 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;
- 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 ;

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<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 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.

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- 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 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 for transformation and to the provision of high quality, inclusive and relevant human resources, research and societal engagement.

RUFORUM’s work has demonstrated that coordinated efforts around an African owned strategy for building university capacity for capacity building and research can yield great returns and is able to impact at scale. Their engagement in advocacy for both reform and greater investment in higher education brings together universities and senior policy makers to enhance these efforts.

### Purpose and Rationale of the meeting

### The Road thus far

Working together with other networks and institutions a number of steps have been taken. In the Seychelles in March 2008, the COMESA Ministers of Agriculture mandated a high-level policy meeting to respond to the challenge of building the high-level skills needed for Africa. At a Conference for Higher Education in Africa in Uganda (2010) organized by RUFORUM and CTA (Technical Centre for Agriculture and Rural Cooperation) 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

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

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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 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

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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 Ministerial Round-Table Meeting at the RUFORUM Biennial

The overall objective is to consider how governments can strengthen universities 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:

1. Bring together a small group of senior African policy makers to discuss the findings from the Biennial meeting and consider how best governments can support efforts to transform the access and quality of universities in Africa;
2. To consider priorities and constraints to African development, and in particular the integration of universities into society in ways that make better use and retention of the high-level skills it needs for sustainable and inclusive growth;
3. To build on the commitments made by earlier meetings of Ministers and agree on key action points to be presented to the Committee of Ten Heads of State Meeting in November 2016 in Malawi to discuss ways of operationalizing these good intentions.
4. To expand the number of Champions for higher education in Africa and deepen their involvement;
5. To discuss the ways in which the cause of Higher Education in Africa can be better championed in future.

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### Approach and Methodology

The meeting of Ministers and university representatives will be held in parallel with the RUFORUM Biennial Conference in Cape Town, South Africa on the 21st October, 2016. The meeting will be hosted by the South African Minister of Higher Education with technical input from RUFORUM. 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.

The following policy makers have been invited to participate;

1. South Africa: Minister of Higher Education
2. Mauritius: Minister of Higher Education
3. Malawi: Minister of Education, Science and Technology
4. Egypt: Minister of Higher Education, Science and Technology
5. Senegal: Minister of Higher Education, Science and Technology
6. Kenya: Cabinet Secretary, Ministry of Education
7. Uganda: Minister of State for Higher Education
8. Sweden: Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs

### Venue and Participants

**Venue:** Crystal Towers, Cape Town, South Africa. This will be followed by a Closing Ceremony in the afternoon where key recommendation of the side event will be presented.

**Date:** Friday 21 October, 2016

**Time:** 1130-1330

### Side Event Organizers and Contact

The Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM)  
P.O Box 16811 Wandegeya - Kampala, Uganda  
Tel: +256-417-713-300 (Office)  
Professor Adipala Ekwamu, Executive Secretary  
Email: [e.adipala@ruforum.org](mailto:e.adipala@ruforum.org)

### References

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