

Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture Secretariat Quarterly Report

1st October- 31st December 2020

Summary

This report highlights key achievements and progress made during the period 1st October-31st December 2020 (the second quarter of the Financial Year 2020/2021, and the third year of implementing the [operational plan-2018-2022](#) of RUFORUM [Vision 2030](#)). The Operational Plan is designed around four (4) flagship programmes underpinned by activities to support regional collective action and learning to give stimulus to achieving the RUFORUM vision for *vibrant transformative universities catalysing inclusive agricultural development to feed and create prosperity for Africa*. The four flagship programmes are:

- Transforming African Agricultural Universities to meaningfully contribute to Africa's Growth and Development (TAGDev) largely supported by the Mastercard Foundation seeks to transform African agricultural universities and their graduates to better respond to developmental challenges through enhanced application of science, technology, business and innovation for rural agricultural transformation.
- Cultivating Research and Teaching Excellence (CREATE) seeks to realign universities' research and teaching functions into a more integrated model with a focus on problem solving and enhancing the capacity of the entire university academic practice and outreach system mainly.
- Regional Anchor Universities for Higher Agricultural Education (RANCH) seeks to escalate the setting up of a network of linked universities as African anchor universities/African centres of excellence and academic leadership in agricultural higher education and learning.
- Knowledge Hub for University Networking, Partnership and Advocacy (K-Hub) builds on RUFORUM's convening power and facilitates the creation, capture, organising, sharing and refining of information and content across teams and geographic locations – thus increasing access to latest evidence based information and knowledge.

Activities for this second quarter in financial year 2020/2021 have continued to be implemented within the constraints imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. **Below are the highlights of progress across the flagships:**

- a) RUFORUM convened the 16th Annual General Meeting (AGM) virtually. As agreed in Cape Coast Ghana in 2019, the AGM was hosted by Mohammed VI Polytechnic University, Benguerir, Morocco. A total of 528 participants from over 36 countries including Vice Chancellors, Principals, Deans, University staff, students and key stakeholders in the agricultural and higher education sectors and Development Partners participated in the event. The event resulted into commitment to strengthen online teaching and learning and sharing of resources amongst the Member Universities and with knowledge centers.
- b) Research teams under the RUFORUM network received funding to a tune of EUR 2.7 million from the European Commission- Intra Africa Academic Mobility Scheme to support implementation of two projects. RUFORUM Secretariat supported the constitution of the research teams, development and submission of proposals.

- c) RUFORUM awarded eight Graduate Research Grants (GRGs) through funding by the New Zealand Government under the Global Research Alliance on Agricultural Greenhouse Gases. The grants were awarded to five universities in Benin, DR Congo, Kenya, South Africa and Uganda.
- d) The Republic of Zimbabwe signed the RUFORUM Charter, becoming the sixth African Nation to sign along with eSwatini, Ghana, Liberia, Mali and Sierra Leone.
- e) The Secretariat coordinated a side event on *strengthening the role of African Researchers in the European Union-Africa Research and Innovation partnership on Food & Nutrition Security and Sustainable Agriculture* (FNSSA) to gather opinions on how African research institutions and individuals could effectively participate and benefit from the European Union and African Union research and innovation Partnership platform. The event highlighted the need for African researchers to take advantage of existing structures and networks and align research to continental frameworks, national and institutional research agenda.
- f) The Secretariat supported dialogue on realignment towards online teaching and learning in universities that recommended linking African universities together through knowledge centers for online teaching and learning.
- g) RUFORUM renewed the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) for additional three years. Another MoU was signed with the Uganda Ministry of Science Technology and Innovation (MOSTI) to implement projects of mutual interest.

INTRODUCTION:

The narrative below elucidates RUFORUM Secretariat's activities progress and the achievements made during the period 1st October- 31st December 2020, the second quarter of the financial year 2020/2021. The report is arranged by Flagship Programmes of the RUFORUM [Vision 2030](#).

Flagship programme: TAGDev-Transforming African Agricultural Universities for Africa's Growth and Development

- a) ***Design and roll-out online adapted academic training programmes at early adopter universities***
During the quarter, Gulu University in Uganda trained 30 academic staff in online-mediated learning to facilitate delivery of four prioritized graduate programmes including MSc. Agrienterprise Development; MSc. Food Security and Community Nutrition; MSc. Environment and Natural Resources Management; and, MSc. Animal Production and Marketing. Together with the previously developed five online-adapted programmes at Egerton University in Kenya, this brings to a total of nine programmes supported for online delivery that will benefit initially 150 graduate students before scaling out to other universities.

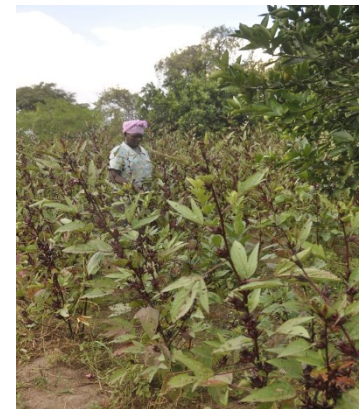
The RUFORUM Secretariat together with Mohammed VI Polytechnic University (UM6P) in Morocco organised an online-based entrepreneurship and innovation training that attracted 657 participants from 38 countries from within and outside Africa.

b) Recruit students to complete graduate studies in agricultural sciences in Gulu University, Uganda and Egerton University, Kenya

The Secretariat continued to support 413 students (25 PhD, 205 MSc, 183 undergraduate) undertake studies with support from the Mastercard Foundation. An additional 34 undergraduate students were recruited for study at Ndejje University in Uganda under nurturing support. A services satisfaction assessment conducted targeting feedback on: academic supervision; support and enrichment services of RUFORUM; own academic performance; and, curriculum and training delivery methods established satisfaction indices at 84%, 80%, 79%, and 78%, respectively. While these are relatively high satisfaction indices, the task is on addressing the gaps that the students have pointed for ensuring effective delivery especially a stronger focus on fieldwork and practical/applied research to strengthen their grasp and translation of theory into practice.

c) Support community action research teams of supported students and faculty at each university to engage with communities and strengthen commodity value chains for smallholder farmers

During the period, 16 Community Action Research Projects (CARPs) supported by the Mastercard Foundation and operational in Botswana, Benin, Ghana, Kenya, Namibia, South Africa, Sudan, Uganda and Zimbabwe continued to strengthen smallholder farmers through capacity building in group dynamics, agribusiness, crop agronomy and post-harvest handling. To-date, 48,098 smallholder farmers (translating to 218,723 beneficiaries) have benefited through increased acreages (for instance 70 hectares of hibiscus, 31 hectares of sorghum, and 36 hectares of cassava as alternative commercial crops). These have attracted investments from both the private and public sectors to promote governance and production processes such as registration of local seed businesses; value chain upgrading into seed production; [processing and value addition](#); and, improved post-harvest handling technologies such as rice parboiling technology adopted from West Africa. Additionally, two grants were awarded to Mbarara University of Science and Technology in Uganda and Université Sine Saloum El hadj Ibrahima NIASS (USSEIN) in Senegal under the Sharing Innovations and Experiences from Korea for Higher Education Transformation in Africa (SIKET) project funded by the African Development Bank. The grants will support establishments of two agri-business incubation projects.



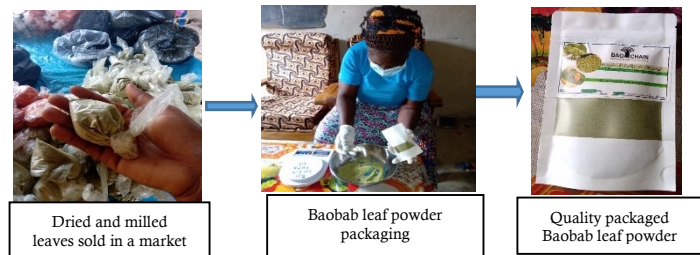
Farmer in her hibiscus garden

d) Support the development, scaling-up and commercialisation of innovations emerging from agribusiness incubation centres for greater impacts

Despite challenges imposed by COVID-19 on the start-ups under nurturing in the various agribusiness incubation hubs supported by the Mastercard Foundation, several student-led enterprises have continued to thrive, further creating jobs. The Start-up Valley hub at the University of Abomey Calavi, Benin is supporting 13 enterprises that have created 47 jobs focusing on production of vegetable based yoghurt; production and commercialization of tomato powder; production of young baobab leaves; and, production and commercialization of *Dioscorea dumetorum* biopesticide for efficient post-harvest management of food in Benin amongst several other enterprises.

e) Support Student field attachment to communities and mentorship for Cohort I, II, III and IV undergraduate and Cohort II and III post-graduates

During the quarter, eleven students supported to undertake the field attachment have continued with technologies, innovations and management practices dissemination among farmers and knowledge users. This includes: training nursing mothers and resource persons in Benin in [complementary food supplement formulation](#) to help eliminate micro-nutrient deficiency among under-five year's old children especially in rural areas of Benin; and, production and packaging of young baobab leaves. The attachments have further catalysed establishment of farmer cooperatives and associations amongst smallholders for better incomes through enhanced product quality. Additional 11 field attachments were commissioned, four of which focus on innovations, products and markets and the other seven focusing on knowledge dissemination and capacity building of smallholder farmers.



f) Provide additional psychosocial support and learning options for continuing students to enable them manage the COVID-19 pandemic

RUFORUM Secretariat in partnership with Gulu University in Uganda and Egerton University in Kenya continued to provide psychosocial services to students including [internet bundles](#) to facilitate participation in online classes, online training sessions, and counselling services; and provision of air travel for international students. As part of ensuring that students continue to act as agents of change at family and community level, each supported student has been tasked with home and community based activities.

g) Document, synthesize and share lessons emerging from the TAGDev programme

During the quarter, students continued to document and share experiences and lessons emerging from academic and business enterprise undertakings. These included;

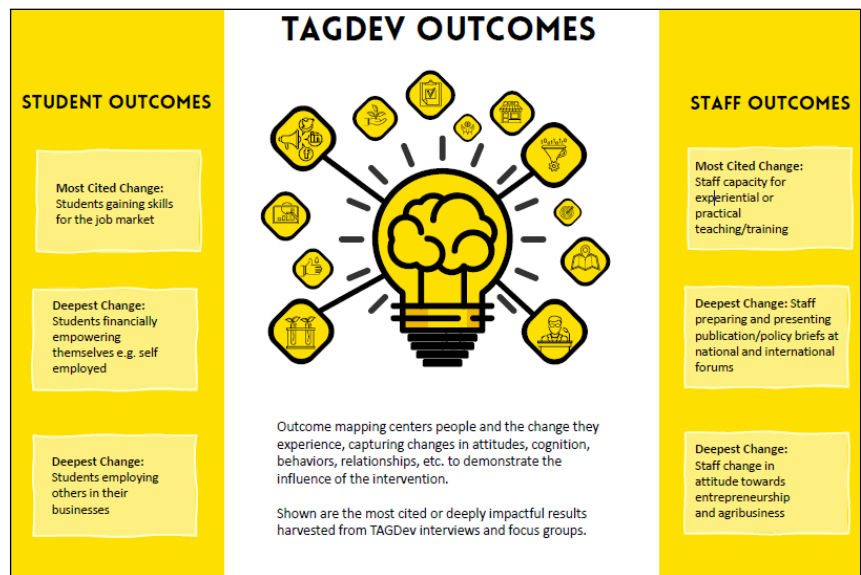
- i. [Returning home during COVID-19 was a blessing in disguise](#)
- ii. [I looked at the good side of the lockdown, now I'm reaping from it](#)
- iii. [COVID-19 lockdown kick-started my passion in pineapple farming](#)
- iv. [My farm is now a demonstration centre for the community](#)
- v. [I started a blog to share business tips](#)
- vi. [My chicken project is thriving because of support from RUFORUM](#)
- vii. [I started a business selling clothes and shoes](#)
- viii. [Piggery and tree planting are keeping me busy](#)
- ix. [I was offered an opportunity to provide advisory services to farmers](#)
- x. [I bought a piece of land that I will transform one day](#)
- xi. [After a successful harvest, I plan to start a demonstration farm](#)
- xii. [Selling handmade crafts helped me earn extra income during lockdown](#)

- xiii. [I have spent the lockdown running a piggery](#)
- xiv. [Here is how my smart gardening is working](#)
- xv. [What being a TAGDev scholar has taught me](#)
- xvi. [I started laying bricks during my stay at home](#)

Further, the Secretariat published an additional issue of *Voices from the Field*, sharing experiences from the implementation of the cassava CARP at the coastal Kenya; and, the TAGDev Stories Series book: *Young Africans Seeding Agri-Entrepreneurship in African Universities*” exploring anecdotes of students developing innovative businesses in the potato, cassava, rice, dairy and many other value chains.

h) *Mid-term review of the TAGDev programme*

During the period, preliminary Midterm assessment of progress of the TAGDev project implementation established that the programme has triggered transformation at individual, institutional and community levels through: job creation from agribusiness and entrepreneurial start-ups; adoption of new farming practices by smallholders; deeper involvement of students in the realities of farming; skills



development for students and lecturers/researchers; changes in agricultural curricula and mode of teaching at both universities and Technical and vocational education and training (TVETs) institutes; increased university-community engagement; and, increased collaboration between universities and TVETs. The mid-term review recommends need for more persistent and consistent consideration of gender as well as other inclusion issues.

i) *Feasibility Study on Youth employment, entrepreneurship and agro-innovation development in Uganda*

The feasibility study on youth employment, entrepreneurship and agro-innovation development in Uganda has continued to be implemented. The economic and social survey study and value chain analysis that are part of the feasibility study have established the status of youth agro-sector engagement in Uganda. An inter-ministerial meeting was held at the Ministry of Science, Innovation and Technology to mobilise inter-ministerial harmony around the project. Further, in order to receive youth input into the process, a special webinar on youth and employment was held with a total participation of 187 youth from 17 African countries. The consulting team

continues with the assignment. The Feasibility study is funded by the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa

Emerging lessons and issues

- The COVID 19 pandemic has greatly hindered smallholders' participation in several interventions including capacity building. Mind-set change on the expectation by the smallholders (including handouts) has to be reengineered. A strategy for handling training of smallholders will need to be developed.
- Investing in young and dynamic university graduates and supporting scaling start-ups started from within university environments has potential to enhance university community engagement as well as job creation and youth employment.

Flagship programme: CREATE-Cultivating Research and Teaching Excellence

a) Facilitate Academic Staff Development (ASD) Graduate Teaching Assistantship (GTA) programs

Under the Graduate Teaching Assistantship Programme (GTA), an initiative by African University Vice Chancellors to increase the pool of PhD trained faculty in their universities, five students were recruited from five universities: Botswana University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (1), Catholic University of Mozambique (1), Koforidua Technical University (1), Njala University (1) and University of Port Harcourt (1) to undertake studies in five other African universities.. This brings the total to 132 (40 female, 92 Male) GTA students undertaking Masters and PhD studies in 32 RUFORUM member universities. Two hundred and seventy six (276) nominated staff from Member Universities are awaiting placement.

b) Support Regional Academic Mobility for academic and administrative Staff in Africa to promote access to quality academic programmes, strengthen inter-regional, inter-cultural exchange and collaboration in the field of higher agricultural education and research

With support from Carnegie Corporation of New York, RUFORUM awarded one staff exchange fellowship to Makerere University Regional Center for Crop Improvement (MaRCCI), One to Haramaya University and another to Uganda Martyrs University African Higher Education Centres of Excellence to enhance faculty-teaching, research and collaboration amongst RUFORUM Member Universities. The Secretariat further supported two research teams coordinated by Eduardo Mondlane University (Mozambique) and Moi University (Kenya) to secure funding worth EUR 2.7 million from the European Union [Intra-Africa Academic Mobility Scheme](#). This will support training of 59 masters, 23 PhDs and facilitate exchange of 11 academic and administrative staff.

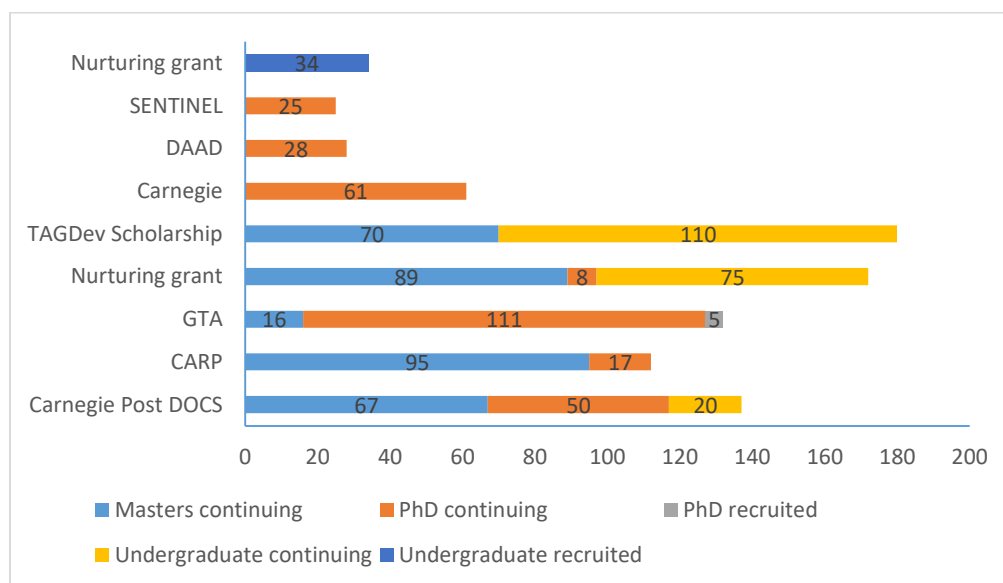
c) Support participation of women in science and technology-related training and research activities in all institutions benefiting from RUFORUM schemes

During the quarter, interventions for increasing participation of women in science, technology and innovation continued to be integrated in several RUFORUM initiatives. Under the Graduate Research Grants awarded with support from the Global Research Alliance on Agricultural

Greenhouse Gases (GRA), two of the eight awarded grants are headed by female principal investigators from Maseno University (Kenya) and the Evangelical University in Africa (DR Congo). Each of the grant projects is to train two Masters students, of whom at least one must be a female

d) Provide opportunities for Doctoral training to increase the pool of science, technology and innovation (ST&I) leaders in Africa with a focus on fragile States

The five PhD students recruited under the Graduate Teaching Assistantship programme, bring the total of continuing Doctoral students to 300. The satisfaction survey of continuing students with supervision processes; own academic performance; support and enrichment services of RUFORUM; and, training and curriculum delivery was undertaken as part of the feedback from supported students. Results indicated satisfaction rate ranging between 84% - 78%. Students recommended upgrading research infrastructure to facilitate online learning.



Number of continuing students under the different granting portfolios of RUFORUM

Support postgraduate training and research for small and fragile states

A total of 211 students from ten fragile States (Burundi, Cameroon, Congolese, DR Congo, Liberia, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Zimbabwe) continued to pursue PhD (74) and Masters (137) studies in the different RUFORUM Member universities. In addition, 16 undergraduate students from Cameroon, DR Congo, Liberia, Nigeria and Zimbabwe were funded to undertake studies.

e) Support RUFORUM Post- Doctoral Fellows undertake thematic research to strengthen agri-food systems, inclusivity and environmental sustainability

Following the award of 10 Post-Doctoral fellowships with support from the Carnegie Cooperation of New York, an Online orientation training session was held on effective Project

implementation practices. The discussions focused on implementation process, student selection, selection of mentors, mentorship and supervision process, training approaches and publications requirements.

f) Support thematic research to strengthen agri-food systems, inclusivity and environmental sustainability

During the quarter, under the Global Research Alliance on Agricultural Greenhouse Gases (GRA) of the New Zealand Government, RUFORUM awarded eight Graduate Research Grants to six Member Universities including Evangelical University in Africa (DR-Congo); Maseno University (Kenya); Makerere University (Uganda); University of Abomey Calavi (Benin); University of Eldoret (Kenya); and, University of the Free State (South Africa). These were selected from 64 proposals submitted by applicants from Member universities. The Graduate Research Grants are intended to support graduate training in the field of greenhouse gas emissions in Africa.

Under the Letter of Agreement with the Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), RUFORUM completed a study on the agricultural innovations and challenges that family farmers in East and Southern Africa face in accessing them.

Emerging lessons and issues

- Student support and engagement is still a key feature for the success of the graduate programmes under RUFORUM.
- Continuous engagement and encouragement for female applicants is critical in ensuring that they seize existing opportunities that will enhance their careers and increase the pool of women scientists on the continent.

Flagship programme: K-HUB-Knowledge hub for university networking, partnership and advocacy

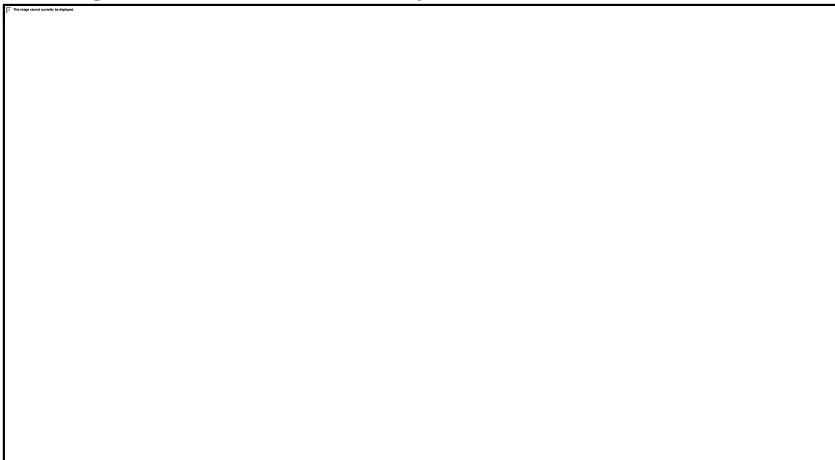
a) Organize national forum meetings to link universities (students and staff) to national agricultural innovation system actors for demand articulation and exposure to the needs of the sector

During the quarter, the Morocco National Forum meeting was hosted on 19th November 2020 as part of activities for the 16th RUFORUM Annual General Meeting hosted by the Mohammed VI Polytechnic University (UM6P). The meeting that attracted 252 participants including policy makers, private sector and higher education institutions introduced Morocco and RUFORUM Member universities in Morocco: Mohamed and Institute Agronomique et Veterinaire Hassan II to the RUFORUM Network. The event provided insight into the agricultural and tertiary education sectors of the Kingdom of Morocco and, the contribution of UM6P and Institute Agronomique et Veterinaire Hassan II to research, innovation and entrepreneurship in Morocco and Africa at large.

b) Integrate RUFORUM online platforms to facilitate and enhance systematic access to information

As part of efforts to facilitate and enhance systematic access to information by the Network, the Secretariat continued to update online platforms including the [Impact platform](#), RUFORUM [website](#) and [TAGDev](#) website. The 16th RUFORUM Annual General Meeting [website](#) was developed to guide the participation of delegates in various AGM events. Through these platforms, the Secretariat reached out to 17,947 stakeholders with relevant information about RUFORUM and other opportunities. The Secretariat further revamped the [RUFORUM Information Management System](#) (RIMS) with eight additional modules to support the implementation of the Vision 2030 through collation, storage, verification and analysis of relevant higher education data.

As part of showcasing the visibility of RUFORUMs' interventions, the number of online followers continued to increase. The RUFORUM [website](#) registered 3881 new visitors mainly from Uganda, United States, Kenya, South Africa and China as indicated in the figure below



c) Foster dialogues on emerging global issues for collective action together with specific focus groups for a needs-oriented network

To keep the network visible and engaged, build capacity and galvanize dialogue on topical issues, the Secretariat coordinated dialogue on Universities' partnerships for addressing emerging development challenges. The events that attracted over **2,500** participants that underscored the need for participatory action research, innovation and community engagement to jointly generate solutions to problems facing smallholder communities.

In the face of COVID-19 and the need to reposition RUFORUM Member Universities' academic delivery, the Secretariat organized dialogue focusing on [realignment towards online teaching and learning in universities: learning from each other](#) to provide a platform to discuss advances and opportunities of integrating digital technologies, especially in terms of teaching and learning. The event attracted 331 participants from 35 countries across the globe and recommended: linking African universities together through knowledge centers for online teaching and learning; and, capacity building for online teaching and learning including but not limited to human resources, infrastructure, policies and strategies

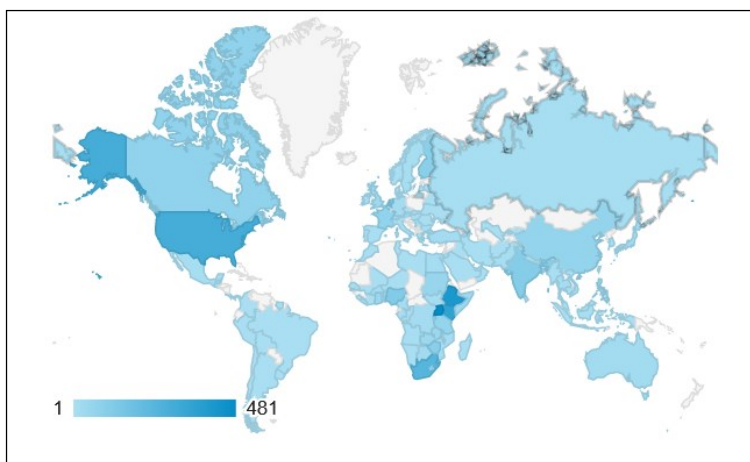
A dialogue focusing on [*strengthening the role of African Researchers in the Europe-Africa Research and Innovation partnership on Food & Nutrition Security and Sustainable Agriculture \(FNSSA\)*](#) was convened to gather opinions on how African research institutions and individuals could effectively participate and benefit from the African Union-European Union Research and Innovation Partnership platform. The event that attracted 547 participants from 57 countries across the Globe [recommended](#): engaging existing African research and other user networks as entry points in building the Africa-Europe International Research Consortium with specific reference to the FNSSA domain

d) Facilitate universities to create knowledge platforms, knowledge hubs and knowledge management units to better respond to the knowledge demand by their stakeholders and partners

As part of the Long-term European Union-African Union Research and Innovation Partnership for Food and Nutrition Security and Sustainable Agriculture (LEAP4FNSSA), RUFORUM is participating in the development of a Knowledge Management System composed of a database of projects and a machine learning based Knowledge Extractor Pipeline System (KEOPS). RUFORUM supported Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Wageningen University and Centre for International Development (CIRAD) to populate the database.

e) Strengthen knowledge use through dissemination of knowledge products and services, providing easy-to-access on-time information and using specific feedback mechanisms to gauge client satisfaction.

To promote access to and use of new publications from RUFORUM supported research and experiences, several articles were shared in the network's [Weekly news digest](#) and in the [RUFORUM Institutional repository](#) that currently has 3022 users distributed across the globe as indicated below.



Global distribution of users of the RUFORUM Institutional Repository during the quarter

The Secretariat further published several items including;

- i. Media Monitoring extracts ([Link](#))
- ii. Press releases ([Link](#))
- iii. Gender based Assessments study ([Link](#)),
- iv. Proposals selected for funding under the Intra Africa Mobility scheme ([Link](#))

Emerging lessons and issues

1. Online engagements have demonstrated the power of technologies in mitigating challenges to face-to-face convenings amidst crises including the COVID-19 pandemic. The number of stakeholders reached through various virtual undertakings has been significantly higher than physical convenings
2. Universities are at different levels with regards to online technologies and other research infrastructure. This calls for greater collaboration amongst universities.

Flagship programme: PROGRAM SUPPORT – Technical, administrative and logistical support

a) Convene dialogues to advocate for political commitment to support and increase investment in higher agricultural education, science, technology and innovation

During the reporting period, Governance meetings of RUFORUM were held as stipulated in the RUFORUM Constitution, and amongst these included;

- The 1st Principals and Deans Sub-Committee meeting held 19th October, 2020
- The 17th Technical Committee meeting held 26th October, 2020
- The 28th Finance and Administration Committee meeting held 28th October, 2020
- The 1st Audit Committee meeting held 30th October 2020
- Principals and Deans Committee meeting held 2nd November 2020
- The 20th Board Executive Committee meeting held 6th November, 2020
- The 19th Board Meeting held 11th November, 2020
- The 16th RUFORUM Business Meeting held 20th November, 2020

The 16th RUFORUM Annual General Meeting held 16-20 November, 2020 under the theme; “Higher Education- Private Sector Partnership: Harnessing Opportunities for Agricultural Transformation in Africa” attracted 528 participants. The event resulted into: admission of five new Member Universities thus expanding RUFORUM membership to 129 universities in 38 African countries; approval of the financial year 2020/2021 work plan for the Secretariat; approval of the financial year 2019/2020 financial report and budget for the 2020/2021 financial year; appointment of PKF as the External Auditor for financial year 2020/2021; commitment to expand the RUFORUM Graduate Teaching Assistantship Programme; commitment to strengthen online teaching and learning and sharing of resources amongst the Member Universities and with knowledge centers; and, re-confirmation of the decision to host 2021 AGM and Triennial Conference in Benin.

b) Broker alliances and partnerships to assist universities establish delivery networks for scaling-up research outputs, knowledge products and innovations

The final webinar on the 2020 RUFORUM Webinar Series focused on [Global universities partnerships for addressing emerging development challenges](#). The Webinar brought together

continental Higher Education, Agriculture, Development, Science Technology and Innovations networks including Association of African Universities (AAU), Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), the European Alliance on Agricultural knowledge for Development (AGRINATURA), Association of Public and Land Grant Universities (APLU), the Belt and Road/South-South Cooperation Agricultural Education, Science and Technology Innovation League (BRSSCAL), Indian Agricultural Universities Association, (IAUA), International Agricultural Technology and Seoul National University-Korea that shared their experiences and emerging models of higher agricultural education and research that are transforming societies and economies (See [report](#)). Other achievements with respect to partnerships included;

- i. RUFORUM signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Uganda Ministry of Science Technology and Innovations. The MoU focuses on the deployment of science, technology and innovations for poverty reduction, rural livelihood improvement, entrepreneurship and job creation to enhance national development.
 - ii. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), headquartered in Rome, on 24th October 2020 renewed the Memorandum of Understanding with the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) for another three (3) years. The overall objective of the partnership is, *to strengthen the capacities of RUFORUM member universities to better contribute to the improvement of food security, nutrition, increasing sustainability, inclusiveness and resilience of agricultural and food systems, adapting to the climate change for the member states towards the achievement of the SDGs, FAO's Country Program Frameworks, Regional Initiatives, Strategic Programs through better access and exchange of knowledge and expertise in the technical, scientific and academic fields.*
 - iii. Together with the Long-term Europe-Africa Research and Innovation Partnership for Food and Nutrition Security and Sustainable Agriculture (LEAP4FNSSA) project partners, the European Forum for Agricultural Research and Development (EFARD) and RUFORUM organised a Pre [2021 United Nations Food Systems Summit](#) (UNFSS) entitled *Working together for resilient food systems: towards a Europe – Africa platform for research and innovation*. The pre event fits within the [“Bold Actions For Food as a Force for Good”](#) (in support of UN Food Systems Summit 2021).
- c) **Convene dialogues to advocate for political commitment to support and increase investment in higher agricultural education, science, technology and innovation**
RUFORUM Secretariat continues to engage and dialogue with Member University Governments, the African Union Commission and other regional partners. These are part of efforts to promote engagement of African universities in the policy dialogue and to profile contribution of African Universities in research and development process. As such RUFORUM Secretariat hosted dialogue platforms that involved Senior African Member States Government officials, two Commissions at the African Union Commission (Human Resource and Science and Technology & Rural Economy and Agriculture) Programme (CAADP) and European Commission.

d) Undertake External audit

The External Audit for the year ending 30 June 2020 was finalized and the report approved by the 16th Annual General Meeting on 20th November 2020. It was an unqualified report.

e) Prepare and submit at least 10 proposals to support implementation of the RUFORUM Vision 2030

During the quarter, the Secretariat submitted several proposals to various development agencies focusing on accelerating Africa-USA youth innovativeness, agribusiness and entrepreneurship development to drive Africa's industrialization; consultancy service for University-TVET agri-led rural transformation for shared prosperity in Uganda (UniTRAST).

f) Recurrent Secretariat operations while mainstreaming operations in line with COVID 19

To minimize the spread and impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the workflow that arises due to staff congestion and to improve on staff wellbeing, staff continued working in shifts from home and office.

g) Strengthen Secretariat staff capacity

During the period Selma Ndapewa Nghituwamhata from Namibia was appointed Technical Specialist, Research and Innovation.

Planned activities for the period Jan-March 2021

Activities under the RUFORUM [operational plan](#)-2018-2022 of RUFORUM [Vision 2030](#) flagship programmes will continue. Specific focus will be made to:

1. Recruit the 5th and last Cohort of students to undertake Masters studies at Gulu and Egerton Universities with funding support from the Mastercard Foundation
2. Resource mobilisation for the RUFORUM Network
3. Advocacy for the RUFORUM Network
4. Plan for the RUFORUM Triennial Conference slated for 6-10 December 2021 in Cotonou, Benin