



The Sixth African Higher Education Week and RUFORUM Biennial Conference,

Date: 21st and 22nd October, 2018.

Enhancing the quality of graduate students in Africa

Background

Evidence shows African universities have the potential to lead the changes needed for development but the quality of educational systems and research are severely constrained by the lack of highly qualified staff. The situation is exacerbated by the low number of PhD qualified faculty. For example, Nienke and Stard (2017) reported that only 40% of total staff in Sub Saharan Africa have PhDs, a majority of which are aging. The bulging numbers of students at undergraduate due to massification of higher education has also caused decline in quality of graduates due to shortage of infrastructure and limited time to closely mentor students. Research outputs are low within universities due to high teaching and examination loads.

Enhancing the quality of teaching and research at African Universities will require a new cadre of change agents who are capable of visioning, strategizing, creating, empathizing, mobilizing, training and empowering people to take charge of their destiny and “every leader must be a change agent or face extinction”.

Much of the effort have been directed towards accelerating the training of a critical mass of faculty in Africa and ensure that they are retained locally to support teaching and research. Yet Africa is still struggling to maintain high rates of retention of graduates due to lack of incentives and opportunities that could enable graduate students to reach their goals; growing both their careers and strengthening their institutions. Upon completion of studies, these PhD graduates are often in environments that are very short-staffed, with limited capacity to mentor newly qualified faculty, and the graduates. Coupled with this are limited opportunities to access resource funds, limited connections and time to raise resources for research or develop new curricula and teaching approaches. It should be noted that teaching is a calling, but the environment has to be conducive and provide opportunities for growth. These high-level human resources are also essential to growth in Africa and are well positioned both to contribute to the global knowledge commons, and to inclusive, sustainable growth.

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The Post-Doctoral Fellowship program Initiative by Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture with funding support from Carnegie Cooperation of New York offers several pathways for incentivising graduate students to increase retention at universities in addition to honing skills and enhancing the careers of the newly graduated students. One of the key pathways is strengthening their soft skills through intensive coaching and mentorship programs by both higher education and technical specialists. Another is providing them with networks and opportunities to share ideas.

Accordingly, RUFORUM is organising a side event at the 6th Higher Education Week to bring together the Post-Doctoral fellows and other graduate students who will interact with each other as well as well-recognized scientists from within Africa, from the diaspora, and other international partners.

Rationale and Purpose of the side event

The demands on the newly graduated faculty staff after completing their doctoral training is strikingly higher than expected. The graduates are expected to transform the knowledge imparted during their training into practical ideas for shaping their institutions within a short period of time. The myriad teaching and managerial responsibilities assigned to them and the complexity of their institutions can be both exhilarating and overwhelming. Almost overnight, these newly graduated faculty are confronted with teaching overload, academic student research supervision, departmental engagements and how to fit their own research and teaching ambitions in the institutions. It is often tormenting to the new graduates and many end up leaving their institutions due to frustrations. Such faculty are often at cross roads. Furthermore, these challenges and tasks stretch beyond their capacity or skills to manage.

The purpose of this side event therefore is to enhance the quality of graduates to teach and provide quality assurance and supervision through mentorship and coaching. This will be achieved by exposing students to experienced researchers and practitioners to share their experiences, provide live examples of success and challenges, provide some hands on exercises, and provide them with links and networks for support going forward.

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Objectives of the side Event

The objectives of the side event include the following;

- To provide a platform for interaction and sharing of key selected topical issues that relates to the young faculty staff development and career advancement.
- Share mentoring and experiences to help the professional development of the post doc fellows
- Discuss the way forward towards achieving goals and training objectives with mentor and donor guidance.

Venue and Participants

The side event will take place on 19th and 20th October 2018 at the University of Nairobi. A number of distinguished researchers and practitioners from the region will participate in this event. The invited speakers will each have allocated time to deliver a seminar on a selected topics, giving live examples of challenges and successes. This will be followed by discussions, and hands-on exercises for the graduate students, where possible and necessary. The RUFORUM Graduate students, Post-Doctoral Fellows will be expected to participate fully.

Expected Outputs

- Increased knowledge and understanding on key selected topical aspects as related to training and research at institutions
- Opportunities for strengthening the post-doctoral research and training objectives to advance graduate training and professional development

Day 1

Facilitator – Dr Sylvia Chindime Mkandawire

Time	Activity	Responsible
10:00-10:15	Introductions	Ms Molly Akello
10:15-10:30	Welcoming remarks	Prof Adipala Ekwamu
10:30-10:45	Remarks from Carnegie Cooperation of New York	Andrea Johnson
10:45-11:00	Objective of the meeting	Dr Sylvia Chindime Mkandawire

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11:00 – 11:30	Group Photo session and Tea Break	
11:30 – 13:00	Post-Doctoral students sharing their work on and how their postdoctoral experience is going	Ms. Molly Akello
13:00 – 14:00	LUNCH	
14:00 – 15:00	Post-Doctoral students sharing their work on and how their postdoctoral experience is going <i>Question and Answers</i>	Ms. Molly Akello
15:00-15:15	Presentations on Advancing Quality Assurance in Training and Research <i>Question and Answers</i>	DAAD
15:15-15:30	Presentation on how to be an effective supervisor <i>Question and Answers</i>	Prof Owiny
15:30-15:45	Insights on mentorship and coaching of graduate students <i>Questions and Answers</i>	AWARD – Dr Michelle
15:45-16:00	How to attract funding for research and infrastructure development <i>Questions and Answers</i>	Prof Linus Opara – Stellenbosch
16:00 – 16:30	TEA BREAK	
16:30- 16:45	Writing for Policy Advocacy	TBD
16:45- 1700	Wrap – up	

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Day 2

Time	Activity	Responsible
08:30 -09:45	Recap for Day 1	
09:45:10:45	Partnerships and networking for skills enhancement and career advancement <i>Questions and Answers</i>	Prof Kay
10:45:11:00	Integrating ICT in Teaching and Research <i>Questions and Answers</i>	Prof Jude Lubega
11:00-11:30	Tea Break	
11:30 – 12:30	Mentor & Mentee Interactions to plan for the project activities	All
12:30 -1300	Next steps and Closing Remarks	Dr Sylvia Chindime Mkandawire
13:00 – 14:00	LUNCH	

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