

**Remarks from Dr. Alice Mutiti Mweetwa, RUFORUM Deputy Executive Secretary, Programme Development and Implementation during Webinar 11 – African Universities in Post COVID-19: Assessing the Opportunities and Challenges of On-Line Learning, 16<sup>th</sup> September, 2020**

Good afternoon Excellences, Honorable Ministers, Vice Chancellors, distinguished Webinar panelists, participants, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen.


Thank you to our Moderator for Webinar 11, **Mr. Rafiq EL ALAMI, of Mohammed VI Polytechnic University, Morocco**. It is a great pleasure and honour for me to welcome you to the eleventh in a Series of thirteen RUFORUM Webinars.

Today's Webinar ***African Universities in Post COVID-19: Assessing the Opportunities and Challenges of On-Line Learning*** has been motivated by the need for a high level conversation, especially at this time of the COVID-19 Pandemic, on the future of on-line learning at universities in Africa. We are keen to learn about opportunities for ICT readiness in our universities and partner institutions for knowledge sharing and for supporting innovations in delivery of agricultural services, supporting SMEs and other business innovations, for promoting inclusivity, and for enhancing capacity for generating data for policy decisions. How best could we collaborate among African Universities and with other regional and global knowledge centres?

Ladies and Gentlemen, today, the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) as a Network of 129 universities across 38 African Countries recognizes the urgent need to build the online learning and teaching capacities in its member universities, especially with the advent of COVID-19 and the glaring digital divide. The time has now arrived to consider the challenges and opportunities for universities on the continent for online learning, teaching and research for both today and tomorrow.

The spread of the COVID-19 across the globe has brought with it several effects that have hit most tertiary education institutions. Shutting down classrooms, laboratories, libraries, and other teaching and learning facilities as well as sending students home, were some of the immediate actions by higher education authorities. The non-discriminatory nature of the disease required that world-class universities, technical colleges and anything else in between follow suit in the response to the instituted containment measures, alike. Some higher education institutions quickly reorganized their systems or simply transitioned to already existing alternatives to in-classroom and in-laboratory instruction to ensure continuity. Unfortunately, other institutions, especially those in low income countries, have up until now remained behind and have lost much of academic calendar time for teaching and research.

Distinguished panelists, ladies and gentlemen, you will agree with me that much discussion has so far surrounded the need for the education system to shift from traditional approaches to the use of remote delivery methods. There is also a call for higher education institutions to reconfigure their existing curriculum to fit the new delivery methods. There is a very strong recognition and urgent call for the retooling of education/teaching staff to acquire skills to deliver



education in the 'new normal'. It would be realistic, at this point, to accept that COVID-19 will be with us for a while, and that necessary adjustments in the teaching and learning methods are imperative.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am pleased to inform you that in looking ahead, RUFORUM in 2019, developed the **African Digital Agriculture Programme (AfriDAP)** as one of the regional initiatives. One of the pillars AfriDAP is *digital learning and sharing technologies to support effective teaching and learning experience ubiquitously within agriculture*. I am also pleased to inform you that at their Ministerial meeting held on 5<sup>th</sup> December 2019 in Cape Coast, Ghana, African Ministers responsible for Agriculture, Education, Science, Technology and Innovation endorsed this initiative for domestication on the African continent. As a follow-up to this endorsement, RUFORUM is urging African Governments and Development Partners to increase the financial and human capital investment in ICTs in universities and the digitalization of the agricultural value chains to support the roll-out of this initiative.

This Webinar, seeks a dialogue on possible ways in which the COVID-19 crisis has increased access to on-line learning tools in response to the lock-down in Africa; challenges, and current and future opportunities for universities; research, teaching and learning changes that have so far taken place on the continent; and required changes in policies, regulations and resources from Governments to ensure greater uptake of on-line teaching and learning as alternatives to traditional methods, among other issues.

Join me to thank our Moderator and Panelists for today's Webinar. And to all of you participants, we at RUFORUM greatly appreciate your participation this afternoon. I implore you to join in the discussion and pay keen attention to the propositions the Panelists make. Kindly note that this Webinar is being transmitted to you in English, French and Arabic, and that you can make your comments in the Chat facility of the platform, as well as ask questions in the Question and Answer Box.

Allow me this opportunity to also invite you to join us on the 30<sup>th</sup> September 2020, for yet another very exciting webinar on: ***Students connecting globally to visualize and re-engineer universities for a better world post COVID-19.***

I thank you.