



## Reflections on RUFORUM 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Biennial Celebrations

by

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AUC Commissioner for Human Resources, Science & Technology, Distinguished Colleagues, my reflections led me to consider four critical issues and pose four direct responses/conclusions. In doing so, I approached the reflections through the lens of my collaborations with RUFORUM over the past 10 years - (i) CTA as a RUFORUM partner connecting RUFORUM within the continent, across the other CTA regions (Caribbean and the Pacific) and in Europe; (ii) as a member of the International Advisory Panel of RUFORUM; (iii) as Executive Secretary of the European Forum for Agricultural Research for Development and (iv) in my own professional and personal capacity.

However, before sharing my reflections, I must respond to the previous speaker because although progress has been made in some African universities and with RUFORUM as a network, there is still need to consider the “hardware” and infrastructural needs of several African universities. For example, today, a dean shared with me, the details of some of the challenges confronting his university.

- (a) Student numbers in the faculty of agriculture had grown from 100 to 1,200;
- (b) A science laboratory which was built to accommodate 40 students per week for 15 hours of lab work, now had to service 450 students which significantly delayed completion of the academic programme by two months and computer facilities were inadequate,
- (c) Inadequate computer labs - one computer to four students.

The lack of “hardware” and inadequate infrastructure for pursuing science are factors which must be considered as we celebrate. Now to my reflections.

### 1. Time Span – Has RUFORUM come of age?

I asked myself, should I base my reflections on 10 years of RUFORUM or the last 6 days of intense dialogue; sharing of knowledge, experiences and best practices; of learning, visioning the future and repositioning higher education in agriculture in the wider continental policy process and of charting an agenda for change. This led to the conclusion -

**African universities must be more responsive to societal challenges and more accountable for Africa’s progress.**

### 2. AUC – African Union Commission Recognition: RUFORUM has come of age!

I was impressed with the high level representation and the demonstrated commitment of AUC officials as represented by H.E. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, commissioners and other AUC officials to raising the profile of higher education in the AUC policy agenda and bringing higher education to the attention of Heads of State at the earliest convenience. RUFORUM and its member universities and partners have struggled to gain the attention of policymakers. This AUC commitment is a major achievement (10 year anniversary gift). But to whom much is given, much is expected. The AUC has signalled its priorities:

- (i) Africa must leapfrog.
- (ii) Africa needs a skills revolution.
- (iii) Africa must own its agenda, know what it wants and communicate its position to the rest of the world.

I can conclude **that Universities must be proactive. Make your input/contribution and the AUC will ensure that it is reflected in policy.**

### **3. African universities - interrogate yourselves. Several burning questions were asked during the week.**

- (i) Have universities been (are universities) on the wrong path?
- (ii) What will you tell the rural woman today? How has her life changed? Mrs Graça Machel.
- (iii) How many scientists/engineers/researchers/technicians does Africa need now and in the future to bring about the revolution?
- (iv) How can the tremendous intellectual capital be used to unlock /open vast rural economies? What is the science and technology linked to if not to produce goods and services for society? What is the impact on the market?

My conclusion - **Universities must refocus, re-strategize, reposition /realign, act boldly. What does the continent / country (your university is based in) need? What do governments and the people need? Human capital and modernization of agriculture to include production, processing, marketing and distribution.**

### **4. Old & New Challenges: Bright spots / role models - Windows to the future**

**Challenges** – Funding! Funding! Funding; limited / ancient infrastructure; outdated curricula and teaching methods, but also competition, lack of diversity (inclusion of women) and youth and inter-connected thinking.

**Bright Spots / Role Models and there were many but I shall focus on two**

- (i) **Rwanda Agricultural Board** – Young leader – results oriented, accountability to society and government. Track progress. Demonstrate and communicate results. Show impact. Partnership with all actors across the board.
- (ii) **Kenyatta university** – Female leader – passionate and driven, start with what you have, innovate, demonstrate results. Government and private sector will join.

My conclusion - **Donot be weighed down by all the challenges – Leapfrog into the future.** RUFORUM has come of age, much has been achieved, we can celebrate but much more still needs to be done.