

**Comments from Prof. Adipala Ekwamu, Executive Secretary, RUFORUM at the Joint Meeting of the SADC Ministers responsible for Education and Training and Science, Technology and Innovation on**

**22 June, 2018.**

Honorable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen, all protocol observed

I am pleased with this opportunity to speak before this august house.

The Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) operates in all SADC countries except Seychelles. We hope that Seychelles will soon become a member.

RUFORUM, a member based organisation of 85 universities in 36 African Member States, was founded by the Vice Chancellors of its member universities to enhance the contribution of African universities to economic development in member countries particularly through agricultural led growth.

Since 2016, this has been broadened to a focus on science, technology and innovation. Having listened to the deliberations, I note that the issues being discussed are very pertinent to what RUFORUM does. What I would have wished to hear more of, is how we can implement these important decisions on the ground. I applaud you for your work.

I humbly propose the following areas to which RUFORUM could make a contribution: In the area of agriculture and industrial development, RUFORUM would be pleased to contribute to the SADC Agricultural and industrial frameworks. Most specifically in:

1. Increasing the pool of women scientist in area of STEM, which is a key thrust at RUFORUM. I am pleased to inform you that RUFORUM has within its own programs been successful at enhancing the proportion of women in agriculture postgraduate training from 4% in 1992 to 45% today. We need to do this also for STEM.
2. Secondly, we listened to the presentation on the SADC ITC platform. We inform you that we have been working with the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) to develop a portal on higher agricultural education indicators.

We have been asked to broaden this to STI and we believe this is an important area that we can collaborate in.

3. RUFORUM has experience in developing and supporting centers of leadership/specialization in Africa. We have done so across our 36 African countries. In the SADC region, one example is the regional center of excellence for aquaculture and fisheries at the Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources in Malawi. We are also in the process of discussing support to Botswana to establish a center on dryland resource management and beef management. In other regions, Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT) has been the lead center on data management and there is a regional center on statistics and biometrics at University of Abomey Calavi in West Africa. We wish to work with all of you in this effort and are currently in dialogue with the National Research Foundation of South Africa (NRF) on this effort.
4. More recently, working with the World Bank RUFORUM will support establishment of “regional anchor universities” in 6-7 African countries, two of which are in the SADC region, - Malawi and Mozambique. This will be a \$250 million dollar investment by the Member States and the World Bank and other partners.
5. We are also in dialogue with the NRF to assist in scaling out the research chairs initiative across Africa, possibly in collaboration with IDRC and other partners such as OCP Morocco to enhance STI on the continent. We wish to collaborate in this area.
6. RUFORUM has experience in promoting academic mobility: We feel that it is important to have a new generation who know and believe in our continent. This calls for greater exposure of our young people to other countries in order for them to become ambassadors for those countries and provide strategic guidance to their own countries. It also enhances inter-regional trade and cooperation
7. Ladies, gentlemen and policy makers; the demand for higher education is going to continue to increase and governments have done well. But more attention needs to be given to increasing staff capacities and we seek to see how to work to strengthen staff capacities in African universities to deal with the escalating number of students while ensuring quality and relevance of university education.

8. We need a regional platform for regional dialogue to see how universities can contribute better to development issues in the continent. We seek to create a platform for regular dialogue with SADC, other RECs and Member States policy makers. Once every three years, RUFORUM organizes a platform to bring together key stakeholder to deliberate on issues affecting the STI sectors. We were privileged to host in 2016 Minsters of Education, Science and Technology in Cape Town, South Africa who highlighted the importance of building Centers of Excellence and enhancing, staff capacity in African Universities. We invite you to the next meeting 22-23 October 2018 in Nairobi, Kenya, where we will report to the Ministerial round table on how bests universities can be better engaged to support attainment of Agenda 2063.