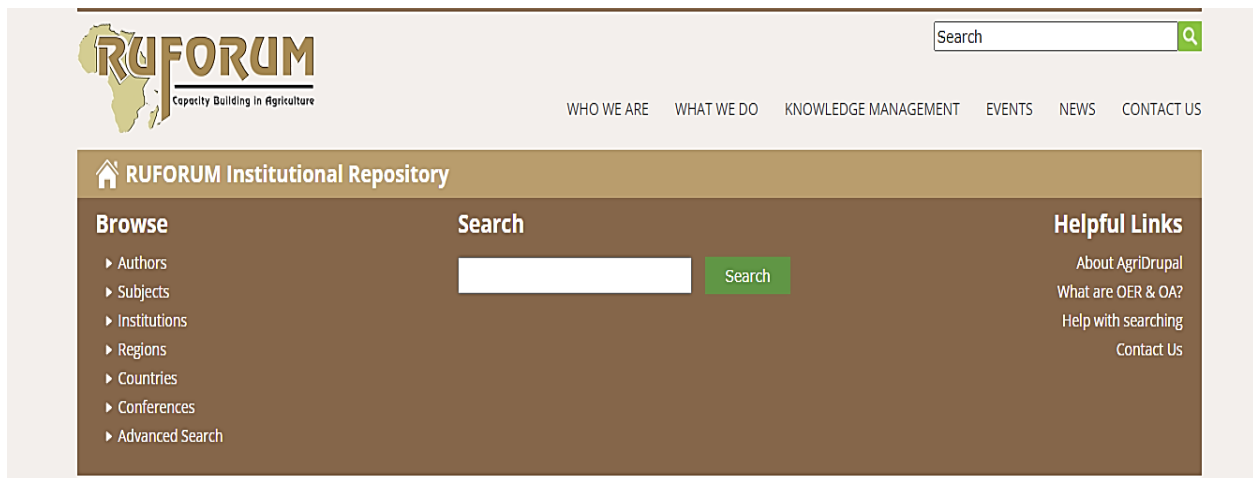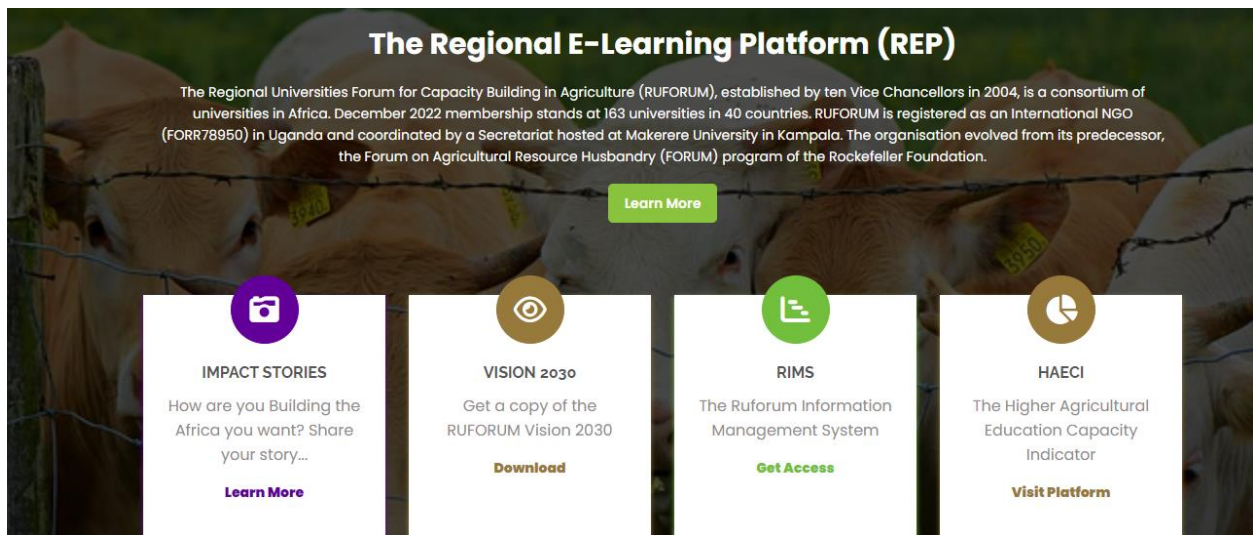# RUFORUM-WACREN Open Science Initiative
Policy Brief

Background

The UNESCO Recommendation on Open Science (OS) advocates a set of principles and practices as an international standard for sharing and advancing scientific discoveries at significantly reduced or no costs while maintaining transparency and credibility. Similar, calls have been made for immediate and affordable access to knowledge on the global and intergovernmental stage. With the recent Nelson memo from the United States, European Union Council conclusions on open science publishing and research assessment earlier in the year, and the prioritisation of a campaign on "**open science for global resilience**", to help lower-income countries access knowledge in the United Kingdom's new international development initiatives.

As member states, African governments and institutions must seize this opportunity and establish research infrastructures that align with this movement. Strengthening the capacity of research and higher education institutions contributes to the fulfilment of United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), such as SDG 4, "Quality Education", which encourages countries to *'promote lifelong learning opportunities for all'* (UN DESA, 2022), thus underscoring the significance of lifelong learning (LLL) in achieving a sustainable future. Transforming higher education institutions (HEIs) into lifelong learning institutions is pivotal in realising this objective. Research and higher education institutions hold a unique position in promoting sustainable societies through their expertise in knowledge generation, skill development, and academic exchange. Other SDGs, such as those related to food security (2) and health (3) that address local challenges, can also be impacted by fostering research outputs that address local challenges.

In light of this, RUFORUM, West and Central African Research and Education Network (WACREN) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to enhance scientific and scholarly communication in Africa through the AfricaConnect3 project and the LIBSENSE initiative. Establishing an open agricultural data repository and open educational resources (OER) to train users in research data management forms part of this MOU.

This cooperation will help our native agriculture researchers' access valuable open resources for scientific discovery. This is expected to support and facilitate universities in acquiring relevant and practical data/information/knowledge for adopting ICT in teaching and learning. By doing so, the network universities can train through innovative and creative ICT-enabled techniques that deliver and enhance the student learning experience.

RUFORUM Agricultural Data Repository

The Agricultural Data Repository will offer RUFORUM member universities convenient and cost-free access to data related to agriculture and associated fields within the RUFORUM network. To establish this repository, RUFORUM and WACREN have undertaken several activities to ensure its functionality and effectiveness, including

- Developed a needs assessment survey and piloting it with identified RUFORUM community members.
- Validated the needs assessment pilot results in a joint workshop during RUFORUM AGM 2022 in Harare, Zimbabwe.
- Organised a joint Webinar on *"Understanding Open Science and Research Data Management: International and Local Perspectives"* to inform the RUFORUM community about the project and Data Management.
- Collected data from the need assessment survey from the RUFORUM community
- Analysed the need assessment survey results.

The Way Forward

Following the completion of the needs assessment survey, RUFORUM and WACREN will present these findings in a joint workshop scheduled for November 1, 2023, as part of the RUFORUM AGM 2023 in Yaoundé, Cameroon. Additionally, this workshop aims to introduce key principles of Research Data Management (RDM), raise awareness among participants regarding the need for appropriate RDM policies, showcase state-of-the-art RDM practices in accordance with international standards, and explore the outcomes of the needs assessment survey.

Recommendations

Therefore, RUFORUM and WACREN seek advocacy from RUFORUM Governance, partners and stakeholders to support the development of the repository to ensure its functionality, effectiveness and efficiency.

For additional information, see contact below.

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