**ACCESS SUMMER SCHOOL**

**Opening Ceremony at KIGALI, 5th February 2024**

Welcome Speech by the Vice-Chancellor of INES-Ruhengeri:

**Universities and Businesses as Agents of Change**

ACCESS SUMMER SCHOOL

*Presentation:*

*Director General of HEC*

*The Representative of the German Embassy*

*Professor Robert Kappel, the Founder of SEPT and Representative of the University of Leipzig*

*Delegations from Sister Universities from Germany, Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria, Tunisia, and Benin.*

*Leaders of Universities and IPRCs*

*Public Policy Officer, US Embassy*

*Country Directors of SPARK, RTI Hanga Akazi, STEM Power*

*Leaders in the Industries*

*Distinguished Guests*

*INES-Ruhengeri staff members,*

*Ladies and Gentlemen*

Distinguished guests, esteemed colleagues, and all who have gathered here today,

It is with immense pleasure and a profound sense of occasion that I welcome you to this groundbreaking forum. INES-Ruhengeri is honored to host this ACCESS Summer School, and it is our pleasure and privilege to be with you this day and the next four days at INES campus.

Today, we stand at the crossroads of two powerful forces – the academic rigor of universities and the dynamic dynamism of business. This convergence, fueled by the spirit of collaboration and innovation, holds the potential to be a catalyst for transformative change for peace and prosperity. With academia and commerce, the world became more and more connected.

University exists to advance knowledge not necessarily to pass on knowledge. The University of Berlin advanced this idea and other universities across the globe borrowed from this concept. For sure, the 19th Century was a German Century as far as universities are concerned. The 20th Century was a century of American Universities till now; probably the 21st Century will be a century of Chinese universities seen the amount of money China is dedicating to academia and research. What is here to remain is that University exists to create knowledge by bringing students and faculty together to create talented researchers and teachers through the unity of teaching and research. Arts and sciences are condemned to be in harmony, creating people who are independent in mind, who know what they do not know and how to find it out.

University excellence asks for autonomy to set its standards not dictated by the market, the state or other external agents. This allows the possibility for research, which means substantially the creation of knowledge, the advancement of science. At a Higher Education Institution, the wind of freedom must blow for intellectual activities. For this, needed funds are necessary. Without human and financial capital nothing can be done.

University is the first mover for economic growth and cultural advancement since the digital world is not about technology but about people, for their spiritual wellbeing and economic flourishing. Hence, we need mostly to look at purpose not interest knowing that freedom and trust rather than orders bring performance through moral leadership, which passes through empathy, creativity, collaboration and innovation. To lead in the world means to lead in education. When people know the “Why” they figure out the “How”.

Today, universities create the content and companies create the content; universities consume the content and companies consume the content: we need to link universities and companies. In teaching, the blended mode or hybrid mode is here to stay especially for lifelong learning. For this, there is always the possibility of linking academia and industry in order to have the skills we need. Without skills, you are useless. We have to build trust between employee and employer; reconciling social life issues and professional work in order to retain the right skills we need.

The theme of this Summer School, **"Universities and Businesses as Agents of Change: Embracing Transformational Learning**," speaks a lot about our shared aspirations. We live in a world struggling with complex challenges, from climate change to social inequality, and the solutions demand a fundamental and paradigmatic change. We must move beyond traditional boundaries, forge new alliances with strategic partnerships, and embrace a learning paradigm that empowers both students and professionals to become architects of a brighter future. In this line, INES-Ruhengeri decided in 2010 to become a University of Applied Sciences/Fachhochschule. A lot has been achieved through partnerships with European and African universities in consortia and projects like ACCESS Project; but the journey is still long. It is a great occasion for us to celebrate 10 years of partnership between INES-Ruhengeri and the University of Leipzig.

Universities, for centuries, have been the custodians of knowledge, nurturing critical thinking and shaping minds. Today, Universities are called upon to evolve into incubators of innovation, equipping students with the skills and mindset to tackle real-world problems. Businesses, on the other hand, are engines of progress, translating ideas into tangible solutions. They possess the agility and market understanding that can propel research and development into the domain of impact. Conciliating the traditional university and the new concept of the university is leading us to a coherent identity of the university we want for the World we want: Creating knowledge and transferring knowledge within a collaboration between Academia and Industry to impact positively our world.

This confluence of purpose is not a simple chance encounter; it is a strategic imperative. By joining forces, universities and businesses can co-create knowledge, bridge the gap between theory and practice, and foster a culture of continuous learning. Imagine a world where cutting-edge research finds its way into sustainable products, where student projects become the seeds of groundbreaking enterprises, and where academic rigor fuels the engines of economic growth.

This is not a utopian dream; it is a tangible possibility within reach. The partnerships forged here, the ideas exchanged, the collaborations initiated – these are the sparks that will ignite the fire of transformation. In the coming days, let us engage in open dialogue, challenge assumptions, and forge new paths. Let us embrace transformative learning, not as a concept, but as a way of life.

Let us stand together, universities and businesses, as agents of change, shaping a future where knowledge empowers, innovation thrives, and the world benefits from the collective wisdom of academia and industry.

Ladies and Gentlemen, on this note, it is a great pleasure for me to announce this International Summer School OPEN.

Thank you.