From personnel training to university transformation: RAFU presented the results of its work at the «Russia — Africa» forum

05.11.2026

Universities – members of the consortium of the Russian-African Network University (RAFU) under the coordination of Peter the Great St. Petersburg Polytechnic University took part in the III Economic and Humanitarian Forum «Russia — Africa», which is being held on 28–29 October in Moscow. Chairman of the Presidium of RAFU, Rector of SPbPU, Academician of the Russian Academy of Sciences Andrey Rudskoy summed up the results of the consortium's three-year work — the transition from academic exchanges and individual educational initiatives to large-scale projects for the modernization of higher education, the training of national personnel and the joint technological development of African states.



Opening the discussion, Deputy Minister of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation Konstantin Mogilevsky emphasized the fundamental task of Russian education in Africa: «Our goal is not to retain foreign minds here. We provide education and invite students to return to their homeland. This is a contribution to strengthening friendship with African countries».

Andrey Rudskoy became one of the key speakers of the panel session «Vectors of Development of Educational Cooperation between Russia and Africa», dedicated to the training of national personnel, the development of university partnerships and the formation of new mechanisms for educational cooperation.

It was precisely this logic — the training of specialists who will work for the development of their own states — that became the basis of Andrey Rudskoy's speech. In 2023, at the Second Summit «Russia — Africa» in St. Petersburg, Polytech assumed the coordination of RAFU. Over three years,

the number of consortium participants has tripled. Today it unites more than one hundred Russian universities and scientific organizations, about 80 universities from 20 African countries, as well as industrial partners.

However, the Rector of SPbPU emphasized, the main result is not measured by the number of participants or events held. Over these years, RAFU has formed a large-scale network platform capable of uniting the educational, scientific and technological competencies of Russian universities to solve specific tasks of African states.



It is fundamentally important that the initiative for transformations increasingly comes directly from African partners. Ministries and universities determine the priorities of modernization, the necessary competencies and the expected results. The task of RAFU is to gather under these requests the capabilities of Russian universities, scientific organizations and technology companies, to form comprehensive programs and ensure their implementation.

One of the most striking examples of such work was the transformation of the consortium's flagship project — the RAFU Summer Multidisciplinary University. Over three years, the SMU has evolved from a format of short-term educational courses into a system of targeted professional retraining and advanced training of national personnel, including university rectors, management teams and specialists from ministries of African states.

Today, SMU programs are developed for specific requests of partners and implemented with the involvement of the competencies of various Russian universities. Over three years, more than 1200 representatives from 37 African countries have completed training under 70 programs — from university management and engineering to medicine, agriculture and rational environmental management. At the same time, programs for leaders who will have to carry out transformations in national education systems are acquiring particular significance.



«We are not just training specialists. We are training the leaders of African countries — those who will shape the policy of technological development and modernization of national education systems», — stated Andrey Rudskoy.

Another strategic direction was the formation of a unified infrastructure for access to Russian education on the African continent. On the initiative of RAFU, Days of Russian Education were held in eight African countries, information centers were created, and digital educational resources are being developed. An important new instrument was the International RAFU Olympiad, held for the first time in 2026: about 1500 applications from 40 African countries, 20 winners who have already enrolled in Russian universities under a dedicated quota. Thus, the consortium is building a system of support for talented young people — from acquaintance with Russian education to the training of future specialists and researchers.

Separate attention in the speech was devoted to the integration of education, science and industry. RAFU universities together with African partners are developing research in the fields of energy, new materials, agriculture, medicine, ecology and digital technologies. Russian technology companies are joining this work, including «Rosatom», «RusAl», «Roscosmos» and «RusHydro». The next task is the transition from individual research initiatives to comprehensive technological projects in which personnel training is directly linked to the needs of the economies of African states.



One of the most large-scale examples of such an approach was the project for the modernization of the national higher education system of the Republic of Mali, which Polytech coordinates at the request of the Malian side. Nine Russian universities prepared teaching and methodological materials for 29 educational programs, more than 70 teachers and university leaders from Mali completed advanced training at 12 Russian universities. The most important component of the project is the development of the Bandiagara Polytechnic University as a future center for training national engineering personnel. On the sidelines of the forum, SPbPU signed an agreement with it on cooperation in the field of science and education.

In parallel, Polytech, together with the Moscow Aviation Institute, is implementing a professional retraining program for the National Center for Artificial Intelligence and Robotics of Mali, helping to build its own national competencies in advanced technologies.

Honorary Consul of the Republic of Mali in St. Petersburg, Ambassador of Russian Education Issa Togo emphasized the significance of this work: «The partnership of SPbPU with Mali, actively developing since 2017, — is a direct investment in the country's human resource sovereignty. Working on the principle of „training the trainers“, we help young specialists from Mali master artificial intelligence technologies in Russia for subsequent management of development at home».

Summing up the speech, Andrey Rudskoy outlined the main tasks of the new stage of RAFU: the transition to systemic training of national personnel, the modernization of university systems at the request of African partners and the implementation of large-scale scientific and technological projects with the participation of industry.



The final chord of the first day of the forum was the ceremonial presentation of certificates and advanced training credentials to the heads of universities of the Republic of Mali. It took place in the presence of the Minister of Mining of the Republic of Mali Amadou Keita and the Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of the Republic of Mali to the Russian Federation Seydou Kamissoko.

The documents were received by rectors and heads of national institutes of Mali who completed the author's program of SPbPU «Digital Research Leadership» within the framework of the RAFU Summer Multidisciplinary University. The program was specially developed for leaders of higher education and was dedicated to modern approaches to university management, digital transformation and the development of research activities. During the training, participants worked on development strategies for their own educational institutions, drawing on the experience of Polytech and modern tools for managing university transformations.

«The completion of the advanced training program precisely on the sidelines of the forum „Russia — Africa“ emphasizes the special status of our partnership with the Republic of Mali. During their studies at Polytech, our Malian colleagues not only immersed themselves in the best practices of digital transformation and university management, but also formed development strategies for their educational institutions. We see in them not just listeners, but partners with whom we are creating a new image of higher education in Africa», — noted Vice-Rector for International Affairs of SPbPU Dmitry Arsenyev.



On the sidelines of the forum, a memorandum on joining RAFU was signed between Roman Gorbunov, Director of the Shirshov Institute of Oceanology of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and Alla Mazina, Head of the RAFU Project Office.

The completion of the three-year period of RAFU coordination by Polytech marks the beginning of a new stage in the development of the consortium. Coordination functions pass to Kazan Federal University, which will continue the development of the large-scale cooperation network, educational mechanisms and joint initiatives formed over these years. SPbPU remains an active participant of RAFU, preserving and developing partnership with African universities primarily in the field of engineering education, scientific and technological projects and comprehensive modernization of higher education. The accumulated experience and created mechanisms become a solid foundation for further joint work of Russian and African universities on tasks of strategic importance for the development of the continent.