



RUFORUM 21ST ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2025

CONCEPT NOTE



The RUFORUM Annual General Meeting will be hosted by the Government of Botswana



THEME

Positioning Africa's Universities and the Higher Education Sector to effectively impact development processes on the continent

Hosts:

**The Government of Botswana and
RUFORUM member Universities in Botswana**

Venue:

Gaborone International Conference Center, Gabarone, Botswana

Dates:

1st - 5th December, 2025

Background

The RUFORUM Annual General Meeting (AGM) is its network annual convening that brings together member universities, policy makers and partners to prioritize, seek guidance, share lessons and experiences on building Africa's human capital, generation of science, technology and innovations, and relevant policy information to underpin development on the African continent. It also serves as a springboard for leveraging resources and fostering strategic partnerships between and among universities in and outside the Network to support university mission delivery.

This year AGM coincides with an important milestone, that is the launch of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program (CAADP) Kampala Declaration. The continent wide strategy covers the period (2026-2035) and focuses on building resilient agri-food systems in Africa. The Kampala Declaration, is the strategy for achieving the continent's development strategy, the Agenda 2063, whose Second Ten-Year Implementation Plan 2024 – 2033 (STYIP) focuses on accelerating economic growth and development. These strategies emphasize the need for Africa's higher education sector, in particular its universities, and relatedly, the agriculture and allied sectors to proactively design, accelerate and deliver at scale the required human capital, as well as knowledge products and services for development. Specifically, STYIP's Aspiration 6¹ targets a five fold (10%) increase in Africa's contribution to global scientific research output with at least 50% of the research output translated into innovations and increased production and productivity. Indeed 2024 was themed Africa's Year of Education. The Kampala Declaration's Strategic Objectives 6² underscores the role of strong institutions and human capital to support its delivery. Since 2021, after the United Nations Food Systems summit, Africa and the rest of the world recognize the need to implement agrifood systems transformation actions. That shifts the focus from sectoral growth and transformation changes to the broader agrifood systems. Thus as RUFORUM starts its 2nd decade of existence, it is imperative that the network (175 members across 40 countries) aligns their missions to deliver the continent's development aspirations that embrace multi-sectoral actions.

¹Aspiration 6: An Africa whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of african people, especially its women and youth, and caring for children

² Strategy objective 6: Strengthening Institutional and Human Capacity at All Levels (National, Regional, and Continental).

RUFORUM provides an opportunity for networking, human capital development, continental mobilization and advocacy to transform Higher Education Institutions of Agriculture and Natural resources for inclusive sustainable development; and to rationalize resource usage while enhancing economies of scale and scope. RUFORUM envisions, “vibrant, transformative universities catalyzing sustainable, inclusive agricultural development to feed and create prosperity for Africa.” It does so by strengthening capacities of African universities to generate innovations that are responsive to demands of the continent’s agricultural communities by producing high quality human capital and science development solutions. Training programmes include both undergraduate and postgraduate education in agriculture and related disciplines, whilst research for development include basic, strategic and translational programmes in topical areas i.e. genetic improvement, sustainable production systems, economics and futures, social sciences, data science and analytics, climate science, and youth and employment. Institutional strengthening and policy is another important portfolio of actions undertaken to support higher education institutions and national to regional public agencies. The RUFORUM network implements these actions by co-creating and implementing them with partners from national to global levels. Annually, the RUFORUM Network and its partners meet to review and draw lessons from past investments through the Annual General Meeting (AGM), hosted on a rotational basis amongst its member countries. The AGM also serves as a catalyst for leveraging resources and mutually beneficial partnerships in and outside the Network.

This year, 2025, Botswana will host the 21st AGM in Gaborone, hosted by the Government and RUFORUM member universities in this country. This AGM, provides Botswana, Africa and partners, an opportunity to spotlight the continent’s contemporary development challenges and opportunities, and to co-create roadmaps for solution delivery. The strategic engagement of member universities across the continent; the African Union Commission; The Southern Africa Development community (SADC) and its agencies; The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Development partners; as well as academic and science networks from the global south and north, highlights the significance of this annual convening. The AGM preparations and hosting is led by Botswana University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (BUAN), in partnership with University of Botswana (UB) and Botswana International University of Science and Technology (BUIST).

AGM Theme

Main Theme: Positioning Africa’s Universities and the Higher Education Sector to effectively impact development processes on the continent

Sub theme 1: Strategic partnerships for growth: Building bridges for the future

This sub theme will explore and leverage collaborations to enhance university capacity and maximize their contributions to Africa’s and global development agenda. The meetings will include multilateral and bilateral (i) south - south collaborations such as Africa-Africa, Africa-China, and Africa-New Zealand; and (ii) North-South collaborations such as Africa-EU, and Africa-North America. Within Africa partnership meetings will include inter-regional and regional meetings such as Regional Economic Communities meetings and RUFORUM Regional Hubs’ meetings. Discussants will analyse how collaborations could be optimized to support university mission and development priorities delivery, as well as mobilize and rationalize resources, promote knowledge transfer, and address shared contemporary challenges.

Sub theme 2: Science for development: Generating contemporary and relevant solutions at scale

Meetings will explore opportunities for strengthening science and innovation capacities of African Universities. Three key sub activities include: (i) Building university-led strategic partnerships for research, training and development; (ii) A scientific conference; (iii) Translating science into development i.e. market transitions for science solutions by enhancing scaling of best practices, business and jobs creation, entrepreneurship, agribusiness and employment, start-up business incubation and communicating science for development impact among others. Digital advances for market transitioning and value chain support; hackathons and investor pitch sessions will also be held for upcoming young entrepreneurs. Case studies of successful science-driven businesses that bridge the gap between research institutions and agricultural communities will be shared.

Sub-theme 3: Capacity sharing to train the next generation of leaders of agrifood systems transformation

The second decade of African Union Agenda 2063 (STYIP) is underpinned by effective science and policy driven agendas that are multisectorial in nature. This conference sub-theme will explore how cooperative capacity development approaches might transcend continental disparities in expertise, facilities, and innovation. Emerging platforms and models such as digital networks and open science platforms for improving access to learning and research infrastructure, joint research and academic mobility programmes that harmonise competencies and foster cross-border learning, and regional centres of excellence and thematic consortia that consolidate talent and infrastructure will be examined for scaling and resourcing. Vice Chancellors' Forum will discuss strategies to enhance capacity sharing among universities within countries, within and between sub-regions to support the implementation of policy frameworks such as STYIP and CAADP 2026-2035.

Sub theme 4: RUFORUM Business Meetings

RUFORUM network is governed by eight (8) governance organs, namely the Annual General Assembly (AGA), the Board of Directors, the Board Executive Committee, the Finance and Administration Committee, the Audit Committee, the Technical Committee, the International Advisory Panel, and the Principals and Deans Committee. As statutory, these governance organs meet at least once a year to review the reports and progress of RUFORUM and guide the organisation in mission delivery. The AGA is the supreme decision making organ which guides the overall orientation of RUFOUM mission and programmes. It brings together both core and associate members of the network. Other stakeholders and partners are welcome to join as observers. Under this sub theme, key meetings such as the RUFORUM Annual General Assembly, Principals and Deans Committee meetings as well as other governance meetings will be held.

Approach and Methodology

The AGM will involve different convenings such as:

Pre-AGM events: including training sessions in communication for impact; advanced data management and analytics training; Post graduate student supervision, young scientist mentoring sessions, proposal development and scientific writing among others. Other pre-AGM activities include development of new graduate, post-graduate and undergraduate curricula involving shared and non shared degrees; strategic partnerships between science-leaders within the Network ie., centers of excellence to enhance cots leverage as well as staff and

student mobility. Other pre-AGM events include the Botswana higher education day (BoHED) and student hackathons.

Main AGM events: such as scientific conference and side events, poster sessions and exhibitions, RUFORUM business meeting, high-level policy and strategic partnership meetings for co-creating initiatives and mobilizing partnerships for higher agricultural education and science.

The Business Meeting will include governance and management oversight convenings. During the scientific sessions, oral and poster presentations and facilitated discussions will be conducted in a blended manner. The AGM will be officially opened and closed by senior Government Leaders of Botswana. Guest speakers and leaders will engage with the AGM to discuss strategic issues affecting higher education and development in Africa. Additionally, field visits will be held to support learning, networking and education tourism. Recognition of outstanding achievers including young scientists, model farmers and young agripreneurs will be made.

Participants

The AGM event brings together academia and science leaders, policy makers (including ministers and technical experts), higher education leaders in Africa, development partners, private sector leaders, researchers, innovators, students, and farmer organizations, among others from Africa, the global south and global north. Approximately 600 participants are expected to attend the RUFORUM 21st AGM.

Expected outputs

- 1) Strategic partnerships to support African University missions involving north-south and south-south engagements co-created;
- 2) Universities discuss, co-create and leverage opportunities for new post graduate programmes in emergent areas of research and training for the continent;
- 3) University staff and post graduate students trained in key science gap areas to strengthen local capacity and quality science education;
- 4) The member universities and their partners present innovations and lessons learned in the application of science to activities that provide solutions for sustainable and profitable agri-food systems;
- 5) The achievements and key lessons learned by the RUFORUM Network for transforming higher and tertiary education in Africa are profiled to support reform and investments in best practices to solve common problems;
- 6) Clarity and convergence on investment opportunities within the network and with partners to strengthen higher education and catalyze African economic development processes;
- 7) Southern African development community member universities agree on key actions to be undertaken to support higher tertiary education transformation processes in order to equip universities with capacity to build the sub-region's human capital and generate development solutions;
- 8) The network and partners identify strategic areas and actions that ensure cost leverage and competitiveness in training, research, innovation and entrepreneurship activities;
- 9) Students and faculty at member universities are trained in critical science, management, and entrepreneurship skills in order to improve research, teaching, and learning, as well as development initiatives.
- 10) African talent and accomplishments are recognized and used to inspire others while also providing lessons for scaling up new ideas and innovations across the continent, and

- 11) The RUFORUM corporate financial statements and reports for 2024/2025, as well as the fiscal year work plans, budgets, and external auditor for 2024/2024, approved, and guidance provided to the Secretariat.

Dates and venue

The 2025 AGM will take place at the Gaborone International Conference Centre (GICC), in Gaborone, Botswana from 1st to 5th December 2025.

AGM Organizers and Contacts

The AGM will be organized by the Government of Botswana and RUFORUM member universities in the country ie. Botswana University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (BUAN); University of Botswana (UB), Botswana International University of Science and Technology (BIUST). The AGM planning coordination and management will be led by BUAN through the Vice Chancellor, BUAN (Professor Ketlhatlogile Mosepele, (kmosepele@buan.ac.bw) through a Local organising Committee (LoC). Co-leads of the LoC from UB and BIUST to work with the BUAN team led by the Acting Deputy Vice Chancellor, Academic Affairs and Research, Professor Samodimo Ngwako (sngwako@buan.ac.bw). The RUFORUM Secretariat AGM organisation is led by Professor Patrick Okori (p.okori@ruforum.org). Key contacts for the conference organising committee in Botswana are Professor Justine Hakamatsang Chepete, (jchepete@buan.ac.bw) and Professor Keba Hulela (khulela@buan.ac.bw). Whilst at RUFORUM Secretariat the contacts are s.dagnoko@ruforum.org and secretariat@ruforum.org with copy to agm@ruforum.org.

About the organizers

RUFORUM

The Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM), was established by ten vice chancellors in 2004 from 5 countries in East and Southern Africa. It currently has 175 member universities in 40 countries. In July 2014, RUFORUM signed a cooperation agreement with the African Union to support the implementation of (i) the African Union Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy (STISA 2024), and (ii) in July 2024 it renewed the MoU with The Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy and Sustainable Environment (ARBE) of AUC for the implementation of the Malabo Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP), respectively. For details please visit: <https://www.ruforum.org/>

Botswana University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (BUAN)

BUAN was transformed from the Botswana College of Agriculture of University of Botswana in 2016, creating the country's only agricultural university. The mandate of the University is to provide higher education and training in the field of agriculture, natural resources and such other allied and related subjects. The University aims to produce innovative graduates and technological solutions for sustainable development in agriculture and natural resources. The University has both under and post graduate programmes as well as professional and in service training. The University aims to develop and deliver science solutions that meet national, regional and continental needs for sustainable food production and environmental protection. BUANs' current Strategic plan is underpinned by a focus on the United Nations' Development Goals 1, 2 and 12. For details please visit: <https://buan.ac.bw/>.

University of Botswana (UB)

The University of Botswana is the oldest and largest public university in Botswana. Its mission

is to provide quality education, research, innovation and services for sustainable national development and global impact. The university implements a range of undergraduate, post graduate as well as continuing education programmes available for both local and international students. UB has well established learning, social, cultural and recreational opportunities that facilitate academic and personal growth. It has student-centred, intellectually stimulating and technologically advanced teaching, learning and research environment that will ensure positive academic and social experiences for students throughout their study. For details visit: <https://www.ub.bw/>.

Botswana International University of Science and technology (BIUST)

BIUST, was established in 2006, and was envisaged to be one of the key drivers in bringing about a fundamental transformation of Botswana as a catalyst for economic and social development. BIUST is Botswana's only international science, engineering and technology University. The universities mission is to drive cutting edge research and innovation in science, engineering and technology, propelling industry growth, development and advancement of a diversified knowledge-based economy and society. Given the pivotal role of science, technology and innovation in economic growth, BIUST offers the country and Africa opportunity to advance its economic growth underpinned by local solutions. For details visit: <https://www.biust.ac.bw/>.