



RUFORUM 21ST ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2025

CONCEPT NOTE

**Women Leading Change: Inspiring and Mentoring
the Next Generation of Leaders in African Higher
Education**



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 led by Botswana University of
Agriculture and Natural Resources

Venue:

Botswana Craft

Date: 2nd December 2025

Time: 13:40-21:30 South African Time (SAT)

Contact: Anthony Egeru (a.egeru@ruforum.org)

Background

Women remain significantly underrepresented in senior leadership across African higher education, holding less than 15% of Vice Chancellor positions (AAU, 2022). Although gender mainstreaming has advanced, persistent structural, cultural, and institutional barriers continue to constrain women's progression into top academic leadership. Women Vice Chancellors have nonetheless demonstrated strong, transformative leadership, yet opportunities for collective reflection, collaboration, and mentorship remain limited.

Evidence from UNESCO (2021) and FAWE (2022) shows that structured mentorship, peer learning, and strong women's leadership networks are critical for accelerating gender equality in university governance. Without these systems, emerging women academics often lack role models, sponsorship, and clear pathways to leadership.

The Women Vice Chancellors' Leadership Dialogue is therefore designed as a strategic, high-level platform bringing together women Vice Chancellors, senior women leaders, and emerging academics to share experiences, build networks, and strengthen mentorship. The initiative aims to advance solidarity, visibility, and concrete commitments toward gender-responsive governance and leadership transformation in African universities.

This effort aligns directly with Agenda 2063, CESA 16–25, and RUFORUM's Gender and Youth Inclusion Framework, all of which emphasize inclusive leadership as essential for sustainable transformation in African higher education.

Objectives

The principal objective of the women vice chancellors' dialogue is to strengthen women's leadership in African higher education through strategic dialogue, and the establishment of a mentorship framework and digital platform that connects women Vice Chancellors with emerging leaders across the continent. Specifically, the dialogue seeks to;

1. Provide a high-level platform for women Vice Chancellors to share experiences, achievements, and lessons on transformative leadership.
2. To launch a structured Mentorship Framework and Digital Platform to connect senior women leaders with emerging academic women.
3. To strengthen inter-university collaboration and peer networks among women leaders in higher education.
4. To develop actionable commitments and frameworks that promote gender-responsive governance, mentorship, leadership development, and gender equity in African universities.

Approach

The Dialogue will feature a mix of high-level discussions, storytelling, mentorship, and collaborative planning using a participatory, intergenerational approach that engages both senior leaders and emerging women academics. Activities will include panel and fireside conversations on leadership journeys, institutional reform, and gender dynamics in university governance; interactive sessions pairing women Vice Chancellors with early-career academics and doctoral candidates; and the launch of a Women Leaders' Mentorship Framework to guide structured, ongoing capacity building across universities. Mentorship roundtables will create spaces for cross-institutional networking, collaboration, and joint advocacy. The Dialogue will also recognize exemplary women leaders advancing gender transformation, and it will produce a leadership

reflection brief capturing key stories, commitments, and best practices to inform future engagements.

Expected Outcome

By the end of this workshop, the women university leaders are expected to have a strengthened network of women Vice Chancellors committed to advancing gender-responsive leadership and establishing a sustainable mentorship framework to inspire and support young women leaders across African higher education institutions. Specifically, the workshop will result in;

1. Strengthened peer network and solidarity among women Vice Chancellors across African universities.
2. Established mentorship linkages and framework connecting senior women leaders to young women in academia.
3. Documented leadership insights and best practices for advancing gender-responsive governance.
4. Increased visibility of women's contributions and achievements in higher education leadership.

Participants

This workshop will be attended by Women Vice Chancellors, Female Deputy Vice Chancellors, Registrars, and Deans, emerging women leaders in academia (nominated from participating universities). Other participants will include development partners like Mastercard Foundation, AWARD and staff of RUFORUM and representatives from women's leadership networks.

Organizers

This event has been co-organized by RUFORUM, Mastercard Foundation, and TAGDev 2.0 gender, inclusion and safeguarding committee.

Day 1: Tuesday 2nd December, 2025 Afternoon

Venue: Botswana Craft
Session Chair: Dr. Otinga Abigael
Rapporteurs: Dr. Akite Irine

Day and Time	Agenda Activity	In-charge
13:40-14:00	Arrival & Registration	Dr. Abigael Otinga
14:00-14:10	Welcome remarks	Dr. Florence Nakayiwa, Deputy Executive Secretary, RUFORUM
14:10-14:30	Opening remarks: Overview of the purpose of the Leadership Dialogue and expected outcomes.	Prof. Mary Okwakol Lead, FAW VCs
14:30-15:00	Key note Address on “Women Leading Change: Navigating the Journey to the Top”	Esther Dassanou, Director, Gender, Mastercard Foundation
15:00-16:00	Interactive Panel Discussion: “Mentoring Future Leaders: Our Legacy in African Higher Education” Key themes: leadership challenges, institutional reform, creating enabling environments for upcoming women and Mentorship frameworks for young women.	AWARD, FAW VCs, Mastercard Foundation
16:00-16:20	Tea/Coffee/Health Break	Service Providers
16:20-16:50	Mentorship Conversations: Small group engagement between women Vice Chancellors and emerging women leaders.	All participants
16:50-17:00	Closing remarks	Prof. Anthony Egeru
Date: 2nd December 2025 Dinner Meeting		
19:00-19:15	Arrival and settling	Dr. Abigael Otinga
19:15-19:35	Welcome Remarks	Dr. Florence Nakayiwa, Deputy Executive Secretary, RUFORUM
19:35-19:55	Opening remarks on women leaders’ Mentorship	Ms. Pauline Gangla Head Higher Education, Mastercard Foundation
19:55-20:25	Launch of the Women Leaders’ Mentorship Framework Presentation of the framework and digital mentorship platform.	Joyce Muchena, Mastercard Foundation
20:25-20:45	Fireside Conversation: “Our Legacy: Mentoring the Next Generation of Women Leaders” Informal discussion among 3–4 Vice Chancellors sharing lessons and commitments.	Head FAW VCs

20:45-20:55	Recognition Segment: Presentation of Leadership and Mentorship Awards to outstanding women Vice Chancellors and mentors.	AWARD, FAW VCs, Mastercard Foundation, RUFORUM
20:55-21:10	Dinner Service Background music / cultural performance	Service Providers
21:10-21:25	Closing Remarks & Leadership Commitment Declaration of mentorship and collaboration pledges.	Prof. Anthony Egeru
21:25-21:30	Vote of Thanks and Networking Toast	Prof. Patrick Okori, Executive Secretary, RUFORUM