



## CONCEPT NOTE

### 22<sup>nd</sup> RUFORUM ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING (AGM)

**Theme: Translating higher agriculture education innovation and research into actions for Africa's agriculture transformation and development**

**Host: Government of Zambia**

**Venue: under discussion**

**Dates: 30<sup>th</sup> November- 4<sup>th</sup> December 2026**

#### BACKGROUND

**The development opportunity.** In October 2025, the African Union launched the Decade for Accelerated Action for the Transformation of Education and Skills in Africa (2025-2034<sup>1</sup>). This strategic document along with the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program (CAADP-Kampala Declaration 2026-2035<sup>2</sup>) are essential for unlocking opportunity for Africa's young population, and its agriculture sector in the journey to achieving Agenda 2063, the Africa We Want. Among the outcomes of RUFORUM's 21<sup>st</sup> Annual General Meeting (AGM), African universities pledged to intensify their efforts to transform higher education, engage science, technology and innovation, leverage their capabilities (intellectual and physical infrastructure, as well as their social capital) to underpin production of graduates and science solutions for Africa's development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These ambitions must be strategically executed to underpin:

1. Transformative education whose content and delivery is contextual, relevant, digitally enabled, and aligned with labour market needs;
2. Reforms that accelerate the transition toward **4th-generation universities**<sup>3</sup>, which integrate teaching, research, innovation, entrepreneurship, and community impact;
3. Accelerate impact of artificial intelligence, robotics, and digital tools on the world of work and integrate digital literacy, data science, and emerging technologies into teaching and research; and,
4. Actions that support and growth and transformation of agriculture, Africa's most strategic sector to unlock widespread development opportunity for the continent.

During the upcoming 22<sup>nd</sup> RUFORUM Annual General Meeting (AGM) in December 2026, African universities will meet to assess and draw lessons from recent efforts that aim to produce relevant human capital and science solutions for the continent.

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<sup>1</sup><https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20251001/auc-launches-decade-education-and-six-strategic-frameworks-pacted-2025>

<sup>2</sup><https://au.int/en/newsevents/20250505/official-launch-kampala-caadp-strategy-and-action-plan-2026-2035>.

<sup>3</sup>4th generation universities are institutions that deeply integrate education, research, and innovation to actively co-create solutions for societal, environmental, and economic challenges. They function as anchor institutions in local innovation ecosystems, partnering with government, industry, and civil society to drive regional development and global impact.



**Zambia as cornerstone for Africa's growth and development.** Various reports indicate that Zambia's economy in 2025 experienced a rebound, with real GDP growth of roughly between 5.2% to 5.8%, driven by recovery in agriculture and strong mining sector performance. The World Bank projects economic growth to average 6.5% for the period 2026-2027, driven by sustained investment in mining and agriculture. Clearly therefore, economic growth of the nation is underpinned by strong natural resources sectoral performance. Both sectors are key for economic growth, being collectively the largest employer and creator of opportunity for masses and the economy. Moreover, a cross southern Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) in general, Zambia's economic outlook significantly outpaces economic growth at (approx. 4.0%–4.2%) for SSA and 2.2% Southern African Development Community. Such strong economic performance must invariably be underpinned by relevant human capital and science solutions.

RUFORUM's training programmes include both undergraduate and postgraduate education in agriculture and related disciplines, whilst research for development investments include basic, strategic and translational programmes. Institutional strengthening and policy actions target higher education sector as well as national to regional public agencies. The RUFORUM network implements these actions by co-creating and implementing them with partners

**The 2026 RUFORUM AGM.** The 2026 AGM is its 22<sup>nd</sup> edition, to be held in Zambia, hosted by the Government of Zambia and RUFORUM member universities in Zambia. This AGM edition offers Zambia, the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), the rest of Africa, and partners an opportunity to discuss current development opportunities and challenges, and to co-create roadmaps for delivering solutions. The strategic engagement of member universities across the continent; the African Union Commission; SADC and its agencies; United Nations agencies, Development partners; as well as academic and science networks from the global south and north, show the significance of the AGM.

### **AGM THEMES**

**Main theme:** Translating higher agriculture education innovation and research into actions for Africa's agriculture transformation and development.

**Sub-theme 1. Enhance Africa's Human capital to drive the continent's development.** This sub theme will cover the underlisted critical topics;

- a) Employment and work transitions
- b) Skilling for the world of work

**Sub-theme 2. Build a resilient and productive economy.** This sub theme will cover the underlisted critical topics;

- a) Resilient agrifood systems
- b) Digital transitions
- c) Policy information-evidence to support investments
- d) Creation of wealth among young women and men and agrarian communities

**Sub-theme 3. Harnessing African universities and partner opportunities for mission delivery.** This sub theme will cover the underlisted critical topics;

- a) Resourcing for mission delivery



- I. Centers of excellence and leadership-(Teaching, learning research and community development and strategic partnerships)-human resource, review and operational standards.
  - II. Strategic partnerships and bilateral engagements for resourcing for major infrastructure development
- b) Strengthening Zambia's higher education sector to underpin development imperatives
- c) Translating science into businesses and jobs. This topic aims to enhance translation of science into enterprise opportunity for Zambia and Africa. Specifically, the AGM will explore opportunity for enhancing science transitions into businesses by enhancing business incubation (ideation, product development; Business support services (venture capital, business registration, etc); University-industry partnership; Policy and institutional arrangement.
- d) Strengthening teaching and learning to produce graduates with 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. This sub theme will cover the underlisted critical topics:
1. Learner-centered teaching approaches;
    - o Problem-based learning,
    - o Competence-based learning,
    - o Industry-university based apprenticeship.
  2. Innovations in curriculum review and reform;
  3. Appropriate technology for teaching and learning;
  4. Postgraduate education.

#### **Sub-theme 4: Capacity sharing to train the next generation**

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.

#### **Sub-theme 5: RUFORUM AGM**

The AGM is the supreme decision-making organ of RUFORUM bringing together member universities, policy makers and partners to prioritize, seek guidance, share lessons and experiences on building Africa's human capital, science, technology and innovation, as well as relevant policy information to underpin the continents development. The AGM 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. During the AGM, key meetings such as the Vice Chancellors, Principals and Deans, bilateral and multilateral, and RUFORUM governance meetings are held. Financial accountability to the membership and partnerships is done.



### **APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY**

The AGM will involve different convenings such as: Pre-AGM events that will include training sessions in: advanced data management and analytics; Post graduate student supervision, young scientist mentoring sessions, proposal development and scientific writing as well as communication for impact among others. Other preconference and conference activities include development of new post-and undergraduate curricula involving shared and non-shared degrees; Strategic partnerships between science-leaders within the Network i.e., centres of excellence to enhance cost leverage as well as staff and student mobility. Other pre-conference events include the Zambia higher education day and student technology hackathons.

The AGM events will also include a themed science conference and side-events, poster sessions and exhibitions, RUFORUM business meeting and, high-level policy and strategic partnership meetings for co-creating initiatives for higher agricultural education and science. The Business Meeting will include governance and management oversight convening. 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 Zambia. Guest speakers and leaders will engage with delegates discussing strategic issues affecting Africa's higher education and development. Additionally, field visits will be held. Recognition of outstanding achievers including young scientists, model farmers and young agri-preneurs 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 1000 participants are expected to attend the 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) Students and faculty at member universities are trained in critical science, management, and entrepreneurship skills in order to improve research, teaching, and learning, and development initiatives.;
- 4) Member universities and their partners present innovations and lessons learned in the application of science to provide solutions for sustainable and profitable agri-food systems;
- 5) RUFORUM achievements and key lessons learnt in transforming higher and tertiary education in Africa are highlighted to facilitate reform and investment in best practices for addressing common challenges.;
- 6) Clarity and convergence on investment opportunities within the network and with partners to strengthen higher education and catalyse African economic development processes;
- 7) Member universities in the SADC agree on critical initiatives to reform higher tertiary education, equipping them with capacity to develop human capital and 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) 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
- 10) 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;

#### **AGM Organizers and Contacts**

The AGM is organized by the Government of Zambia and RUFORUM member universities in the country i.e., University of Zambia (UNZA); Copper Belt University (CBU); Mulungushi University (MU); and Kapasa Makasa University. While planning, coordination and management is anchored at UNZA, these operations co-managed by a Local Organising Committee (LoC) led by the Deputy Vice Chancellor, Research and Innovation, Professor Trywell Kalusopa ([dvc@unza.ac.zm](mailto:dvc@unza.ac.zm)). The Local Organizing Committee (LOC) is made up of university stakeholders in Zambia and the ministry of education. Other critical stakeholders will be brought on board in due course. AGM planning at the RUFORUM Secretariat is led by the RUFORUM Executive Secretary, Professor Patrick Okori ([p.okori@ruforum.org](mailto:p.okori@ruforum.org)). Key contacts for the conference organising committee in Zambia are Professor Mick Mwala, ([mmwala@unza.ac.zm](mailto:mmwala@unza.ac.zm)).