

Towards Operationalizing the RUFORUM Regional Hubs: First Regional Meeting of RUFORUM Member Universities in Eastern and Central Africa

Date and Time: Wednesday, July 30, 2025 @ 14:00 – 16:00 EAT (13:00 – 15:00 CAT)

Registration Link: <https://bit.ly/46EPM0U>

Concept Note

Contact: Dr Sokona Dagnoko, RUFORUM (s.dagnoko@ruforum.org)

Background

The Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) is a continental network that supports higher education institutions in mission delivery to strengthen their contributions to agricultural development and innovation in Africa. The network grew from its base in East and Southern Africa to cover three other regions of the continent i.e., Central Africa, Northern Africa and Western Africa. This growth encompasses all major working languages of the African Union (Arabic, English, French, Portuguese, Spanish, and Kiswahili). Currently, RUFORUM uses four of the African Union Commission (AUC) working languages i.e., Arabic, English, French, Portuguese that are also used as languages of Instruction across its members in 40 countries. Currently, 20 universities in Central Africa, 65 in Eastern Africa, 6 in Northern Africa, 53 in Southern Africa, and 31 in Western Africa are members of the RUFORUM Network. The higher education systems across the RUFORUM network are also different and there is need to gain deeper clarity on their structure, missions and operations in order to provide contextualized support by the Secretariat. This is the basis of the proposed meeting. It also underpins creation of Regional Operation Hubs. By engaging different education systems under its membership, underpinned by main languages of instruction, differences will be leveraged to enhance convergence and cross learning.

Accordingly, the RUFORUM Board approved in 2021 in Cotonou, the establishment of a Regional Hub in Malawi and Benin; to support coordination of Network activities in Southern Africa and Western Africa, respectively. While West Africa node caters for member universities having in common the French language and English speaking West Africa, the Secretariat shall continue to support coordination of RUFORUM activities across Eastern and Central Africa. In November 2022 and May 2024, RUFORUM signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Government of the Republic of Malawi and Benin, respectively to support establishment of the RUFORUM Regional Hubs. Using the regional hubs, RUFORUM will increase its footprint across Africa, its member universities, countries and regions of the network and enhance coordination and synergy in agricultural higher education across the continent.

Rationale

Member universities in Africa and in the targeted countries of the Eastern and central Africa in particular are confronted with numerous challenges, including:

- **Financing:** Limited funding for research and innovation.
- **Infrastructure:** Including students' accommodation
- **Staff recruitment and retention:** Recruiting and retaining quality teachers to maintain quality education is challenging especially in certain disciplines
- **Outdated curricula:** not adapted for producing graduates with 21st century skills and knowledge
- **High unemployment rates among graduates:** It is estimated that more than half of the young people in East Africa aged 15-35 are unemployed with even higher rates amongst young women in rural areas (up to 66%)¹. Equally worrisome is level of unemployment and the quality jobs available for young people, the majority of such jobs being “insecure jobs.”
- **Relevance of Curricula and Research:** Weak alignment between research outputs and community needs often triggered by weak university – community linkage, and weak technology transfer capacities of universities.
- **Outreach:** Insufficient partnerships with public and private actors.
- **Business Skills:** Gaps in entrepreneurship training and opportunities.
- **Business creation:** Inadequacy in the number and quality of agribusiness incubation hubs.

The creation of the RUFORUM Hubs is a call to action for strengthened regional collaboration among universities and coordination of RUFORUM operations across regions. It presents a timely opportunity for member Universities to dive deep into the above challenges to identify specificities and priority issues in the countries covered by the hub, and design tailored solutions, under the coordination of the RUFORUM Secretariat. Furthermore, it is an opportunity for university stakeholders to take ownership of RUFORUM's mission locally, deepen their engagement in the network and shape a collaborative response to these challenges. Whereas the government supports to create regional hubs have been given, there is need for creating convergence on operational themes, engagement with stakeholders in the wider higher agricultural education and research for development ecosystems. This meeting aims to start discussions and develop a roadmap towards the formal launch of the regional nodes. Similar workshops are also organized for all the other sub regions of Africa where RUFORUM member universities are based.

Purpose

The purpose of this event is to engage member university leaders from Eastern and Central Africa sub region in discussions around operationalization modalities of the RUFORUM Regional Hubs in view to better serve the membership.

¹ <https://rippleeffect.org/blog/africa-youth-unemployment/>

Main Objective

The main objective of this virtual event is to initiate a strategic dialogue among the targeted RUFORUM member universities around the key challenges of agricultural higher education institutions in the targeted sub region and operationalization modalities of the newly established RUFORUM regional hubs.

Specific Objectives

1. Discuss how to improve collaboration amongst member universities within the targeted sub region around teaching, learning, research and outreach.
2. Discuss expectations of universities and other stakeholders from the Regional Hubs.
3. Discuss on the kind of support expected from RUFORUM Secretariat and how to implement them at sub regional levels and across the region (Continent).
4. Start discussions and develop a roadmap towards the operationalization of the hub.
5. Engage actors in a participatory dialogue on the official launching of the Regional Hub's in Gaborone at the 21st RUFORUM AGM scheduled to take place in the first week of December in Botswana.

Workshop Approach and methodology

This meeting will be held as a facilitated virtual event. There will be four sessions as follows:

- **Session 1:** Opening ceremony: This workshop will gather representatives of member universities from Central (with particular focus on Anglophone universities) and Eastern Africa. During session 1, opportunity will be given to one representative of each of the two sub regions and one representative from Makerere University (RUFORUM Host University) to address the audience with their welcome remarks.
- **Session 2:** Scene setting and plenary discussions.
- **Session 3:** Moderated Panel discussions

During session 3, the floor will be given to one representative of each of the two sub regions and one representative from Makerere University (RUFORUM Host University) to share their perspectives, imperatives, challenges, best practices, opportunities and future prospects on the issues raised under specific objectives.

There will be opportunity for open-discussions as well.

The aim is to engage stakeholders in debates, to capture the contributions, ideas and perspectives of the participants on the above issues in the framework of the operationalization of the regional hub. During the debates, elements for designing a roadmap would be identified, taking into account the peculiarities of each language zones.

Session 4: The closing ceremony

Expected Outcomes

1. Strategies to improve collaboration amongst member universities within the targeted sub regions around teaching, learning, research and out-reach developed.
2. Expectations of Universities' leadership from the regional hubs clarified.
3. Support expected from RUFORUM secretariat and how to implement them at sub regional levels and across the region (Continent) clarified.
4. Draft roadmap for operationalizing the Node developed.
5. Shared vision and direction for the official launching of the Regional Hub's in Gaborone at the 21st RUFORUM AGM.

Participants:

Principals and Deans and other representatives of member universities will participate in this event. They include (i) all RUFORUM member universities in Eastern Africa and in Central Africa (irrespective of the language, with particular focus on Anglophone universities). Representatives of the RUFORUM Secretariat, Resource persons, and government officials, will also participate in the meeting.

Date and Venue: This event will be held Online on:

- Wednesday, July 30, 2025 @ 14:00 – 16:00 EAT (13:00 – 15:00 CAT)

Tentative Programme of the Workshop

Moderator: Dr Sokona Dagnoko, RUFORUM

Rapporteurs: David Ekepu and Evaline Acan

Agenda Item	Timing	Person Responsible
SESSION 1: OPENING CEREMONY (30 minutes)		
Session Introduction, objectives, and format	6 mins	Moderator
Remarks from RUFORUM Executive Secretary	8 mins	Prof Patrick Okori
Remarks from the Representative of Eastern Africa Member Universities	2 mins	Dr. Salah Khatir Jubarah, Dean, School of Natural Resources and Environmental Studies, University of Juba
Remarks from the Representative of Central Africa Member Universities	2 mins	Professor Mathias Fru FONTEH, University of Dschang, Cameroon
Remarks from the Representative of Makerere University	2 mins	Professor Gorettie Nsubuga Nabanoga, Principal, College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, Makerere University
Official Opening Remarks	10 mins	Professor. Thomas Kimeli Cheruiyot, Vice Chancellor, University of Eldoret, Kenya
SESSION 2: SCENE SETTING (30)		
Keynote Address: Positioning African Universities to contribute to the Continent's Economic Development through strengthened regional collaboration	15 mins	Dr Sokona Dagnoko, Head of Strategic Partnerships, RUFORUM
Facilitated Plenary Discussions:	15 mins	Moderator
SESSION 3: PANEL DISCUSSIONS (40 minutes)		
Moderated Panel discussions: Strengthening collaboration amongst Agricultural Higher Education Institutions in Eastern and Central Africa for training the requisite Human Capital capable for the 21 st Century job market: Status, Imperatives, Challenges, best practices, and opportunities in the framework of the RUFORUM Regional Hubs	35mins	Moderator: Dr Sokona Dagnoko, RUFORUM Panelists: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Panelist 1: Professor Yazidhi Bamutaze, Deputy Principal, College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences, Makerere University Panelist 2: Dr. Guillaume Nyagatare Principal, College of Agricultural Sciences & Veterinary Medicine, University of Rwanda Panelist 3: Dr. Ibrahim Kedir Jemal, Dean, College of Agriculture and Environmental Science, Haramaya University
Open Floor	5 mins	Moderator
SESSION 4: CLOSING CEREMONY (10 MINUTES)		
Workshop Summary	5 mins	Moderator
Closing remarks by the Executive Secretary, RUFORUM	5 mins	Prof. Patrick Okori
Total time for session	120 mins	