



**22nd RUFORUM ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
CONCEPT NOTE
PRE-CONFERENCE LAUNCH**

**POSITIONING HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEMS TO CATALYSE AGRICULTURAL
TRANSFORMATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

Date: Thursday 14th May 2026

Time: 14.00-17:00 CAT (15:00-18:00 EAT or 12:00-15:00 GMT)

Venue: Blended (virtual and in-person) hosted by Copperbelt University

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BACKGROUND

Africa's economic growth continues on an upward trajectory, with the African Development Bank projecting real GDP growth of about 4.3% in 2026.¹ This growth is supported by improvements across key sectors. Agriculture is particularly vital for poverty reduction, given that it is more effective than other sectors of the economy to move masses out of poverty. Africa's extractive industry, a major driver of economic growth across the continent depends on the diversification of the economy, agriculture being key.² Africa is home to the world's youngest continent with 60% of its population under 25 years, and holds promise for the world's fastest growing workforce and largest demographic dividend.³ These development opportunities all hold true if the continent develops quality human capital for its 21st-century development vision. African universities, must therefore implement transformative education to deliver on the promise of vibrant and innovative human capital, science technology and innovations. Embracing 4th-generation university models that integrate research, innovation, teaching, entrepreneurship, and community impact and are underpinned by digital technologies and artificial intelligence is critical. The RUFORUM⁴ community aim to underpin these aspirations leveraging on the vast network's capacity and its partners.

The RUFORUM 2026 AGM, that will be held in Zambia, will speak to continental initiatives such as the African Union's Decade for Accelerated Action for the Transformation of Education and Skills in Africa (2025–2034) and the refreshed Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program (CAADP) Kampala Declaration (2026–2035). These frameworks emphasize resilient agri-food systems, robust institutions, enhanced scientific research output, and the translation of innovations into enterprises and jobs. The alignment with Agenda 2063 and its Second Ten-Year Implementation Plan (2024–2034), further prioritizes scalable investments in higher education for Africa's development.

¹ https://www.afdb.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/meo_2025_update_english_20nov.pdf

² <https://theconversation.com/africas-agribusiness-sector-should-drive-the-continent-economic-development-five-reasons-why-198796#:~:text=Africa's%20agriculture%20sector%20accounts%20for,Fund%20for%20Agricultural%20Development%20data.>

³ <https://www.uneca.org/stories/%28blog%29-as-africa%E2%80%99s-population-crosses-1.5-billion%2C-the-demographic-window-is-opening-getting>

⁴ www.ruforum.org



RUFORUM, now in its third decade, is strategically positioned to support the higher education sector's role in addressing Africa's development imperatives. The network's focus includes capacity building, fostering strategic partnerships, and leveraging science and innovation to drive sustainable economic transformation. The Pre-AGM event in Zambia thus offers an essential platform to galvanize stakeholders and prepare for the comprehensive discussions at the December 2026 AGM in Zambia. This year's pre-launch activities emphasize leveraging Africa's human capital to drive development processes, digital transitions, entrepreneurship, and collaborative research to accelerate higher agricultural education's impact on the continent and align with the overall conference theme **"Translating higher agriculture education innovation and research into actions for Africa's agriculture transformation and development."**

PRE-CONFERENCE AGM EVENTS

The AGM events annually start in May and this year, the pre-conference events will include webinars, as well as online and in person training sessions in; advanced data management and analytics in both biophysical and social-sciences; post graduate student supervision, young scientist mentoring sessions, proposal development, scientific writing and communication for impact; among others. Other pre-conference 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 i.e., centres of excellence, the Zambia higher education day (ZaHED) and technology hackathons. These will be formally launched during the Pre-Conference event.

OVERALL OBJECTIVE

To engage key RUFORUM stakeholders, Zambia government ministries, departments and agencies (MDA's), and Agriculture Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS) actors in a blended meeting to launch and coordinate pre-conference activities, build consensus on strategic priorities, and set the foundation for the 22nd RUFORUM AGM in Zambia.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. Assess critical success factors and challenges in positioning African universities and higher education to effectively influence agricultural transformation and development in Africa.
2. Explore mechanisms to deepen integration of African universities in policy formulation and development practice as generators of scientific evidence and solutions.
3. Formally launch key capacity-building initiatives, including training programs on advanced data analytics, digital innovations, research excellence, scientific communication, and entrepreneurship.

APPROACH

The session will be hosted by a consortium of RUFORUM member universities in Zambia in partnership with government institutions and delivered in a blended format featuring plenary presentations, interactive panels, and facilitated discussions moderated by experts in agricultural education and innovation. Physical attendance will take place at Copperbelt University, while the rest of the network and partners will join virtually. Official opening remarks will be delivered by the Honourable Minister of Higher Education, followed by presentations



from leading scholars, policymakers, sub-regional bodies and AKIS practitioners to provide an analytical backdrop, identify partnership opportunities, and encourage dynamic engagement to co-create pathways for strategic action and resource mobilization.

DATE AND VENUE

This pre-conference launch will take place virtually on Thursday 14th May 2026 from 14:00 – 17:00 CAT, Zambia Time (GMT+2). Register here (<https://bit.ly/4rRFaCS>) to participate virtually.

EXPECTED PARTICIPANTS

Participants will include Ministers and technical policymakers from Zambia, SADC, and across Africa; RUFORUM member universities and academic leaders; researchers, innovators, and postgraduate students; development partners and international organizations; private sector actors; farmer organizations and youth representatives; and regional actors such as COMESA, CCARDESA, SARUA and other Sub-Regional Agricultural Research Organizations (SROs). Over 300 participants are expected to attend both physically and virtually.

EXPECTED OUTPUTS

1. Key priority actions identified for leveraging African higher education institutions as agents of agricultural transformation and sustainable development.
2. Consensus on strategies and institutional arrangements for integrating universities into national and continental development planning and policy advisory processes.
3. Launch and endorsement of the 2026 AGM pre-conference training programs to build critical skills in research, innovation, and entrepreneurship among faculty and students.
4. Strengthened continental partnerships and collaboration mechanisms to advance the Network’s mission during the 2026 AGM cycle and beyond.

PROGRAMME May 14th, 2026 from 1400 hrs. – 1700 hrs, Zambia Time (GMT + 2)

Directors of Ceremony: Prof. Gillian Kabwe, School of Natural Resources, Copperbelt University; Prof Thompson Kalinda -Dean School of Agricultural Sciences, University of Zambia

Time (CAT)	Activity	Speaker / Responsible
12:30-13:20	Arrivals and settling-in	Prof. Bernard M. Hang’ombe DVC RI, Copperbelt University
13:30-14:00	Log-in and video of RUFORUM moving forward Video	Evaline Acan/David Amitu
14:00-14.05	National Anthem and prayer	Directors of Ceremony
14:05-14:10	Introductory statement - House-keeping issues and setting the scene	Professor Trywell Kalusopa Deputy Vice Chancellor - Research and Innovation, UNZA and LOC Convener
14:10-14:15	Opening remarks from RUFORUM Executive Secretary	Professor Patrick Okori, RUFORUM Executive Secretary



14:15-14:20	Remarks from the RUFORUM Board Chair	Professor Theresia Nkuo-Akenji, Vice Chancellor, University of Bamenda
14:20-14:25	Remarks by the Vice Chancellor, University of Zambia	Professor Mundia Muya, Vice Chancellor, UNZA
14:25-14:30	Remarks by the Secretary General, The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA)	Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe, Secretary General, COMESA
14:25-14:30	Introducing the Guest of Honor	Professor Imasiku Nyambe, Vice Chancellor, Copperbelt University
14:30-14:50	Official opening address: Harnessing African universities and the higher education sector to drive transformative change in Zambia's and the broader African continent's development trajectories	Honourable Mr. Douglas Munsaka Syakalima, Minister of Education, Zambia
14:50-15:45	<p>Moderated Panel Discussion</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Mulungushi University: Professor Royson M. Mukwena, Vice Chancellor Kapasa Makasa University: Professor Jacob Mwitwa, Vice Chancellor Zambia Agriculture Research Institute (ZARI): Dr. Ndashe Kapulu, Director The Southern African Regional Universities Association (SARUA): Professor Stephen Simukanga, Executive Director Youth Organisation: Ms. Sussana Phiri, Young Professionals for Agricultural Development (YPARD) Zambia 	<p>Moderator Dr. Benjamin Mubemba Dean, School of Natural Resources, Copperbelt University</p> <p>Rapporteur Dr. Chewe Nkonde: University of Zambia Dr. Chindi Kapembwa, Copperbelt University Dr. Donald Zulu, Copperbelt University</p>
15:45-16:00	Facilitated Open Dialogue	Moderator Dr. Benjamin Mubemba Dean, School of Natural Resources, Copperbelt University
16:00-16:05	Wrap up	Dr. Mick Mwala, LOC Operations Chairperson
16:05-16:15	Closing Remarks	Professor Trywell Kalusopa, Deputy Vice Chancellor for Research and Innovation, UNZA and LOC Convener
16:15 16:30	Tour of the Students' Scientific Exhibition and Universities' Stands	Dr. Benjamin Mubemba Dean, School of Natural Resources, Copperbelt University
16:30-17:00	Tree planting	LoC CBU team: Prof. Gillian Kabwe, Dr. Donald Zulu, Dr.



		Chindi Kapembwa and technicians
15th April 2026 08:30–12:00	Tour of Industry in Kitwe.	Dr. Benjamin Mubemba Dean, School of Natural Resources, Copperbelt University