



Call for Abstracts for the 22nd RUFORUM Annual General Meeting (AGM)

Introduction

Africa stands at a critical juncture, with unprecedented opportunities driven by its youthful population and the growing demand for sustainable agricultural transformation. The African Union's Decade for Accelerated Action for the Transformation of Education and Skills (2025-2034) and the CAADP Kampala Declaration (2026-2035) provide strategic frameworks to harness education, science, and innovation for inclusive development and the realization of Agenda 2063.

Building on commitments made during the 21st Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM), African universities have pledged to intensify efforts to transform higher education systems and enhance their contribution to development. This includes advancing transformative, digitally enabled education; transitioning toward 4th-generation universities that integrate teaching, research, innovation, and community engagement; leveraging emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and data science; and strengthening agriculture as a cornerstone for economic growth and resilience.

The 22nd RUFORUM AGM will serve as a strategic platform to assess progress, share innovations, and identify actionable pathways for translating research and educational advancements into tangible development outcomes across Africa. RUFORUM, in partnership with the Government of the Republic of Zambia and member universities, is pleased to announce the call for abstracts for the **22nd RUFORUM AGM**. This convening serves as a strategic platform for African universities to assess efforts to produce relevant human capital and science-based solutions to underpin the continent's development.

- **Dates:** 30th November - 4th December 2026.
- **Venue:** Livingstone, Zambia.
- **Host Institutions:** University of Zambia (UNZA), Copperbelt University (CBU), Mulungushi University (MU), and Kapasa Makasa University.

Thematic Areas for Submission

Abstracts are invited under the following sub-themes and critical topics:

Theme 1: Enhance Africa's Human capital to drive the continent's development.

Background

Africa's development trajectory is strongly tied to the quality, relevance, and adaptability of its human capital. With over 60% of the population under 25, the continent has a unique demographic advantage that can drive economic transformation if effectively harnessed through education and skills development. However, persistent gaps remain between higher education outputs and labour market demands, particularly in agriculture and related sectors

Co-organisers





(African Union, 2025). The Decade for Accelerated Action for the Transformation of Education and Skills in Africa (2025–2034) underscores the need for inclusive, digitally enabled education systems aligned with emerging global trends such as artificial intelligence, data science, and green economies.

Universities must therefore transition from traditional knowledge transmission models to more dynamic approaches that foster critical thinking, innovation, and entrepreneurship. Embedding experiential learning, interdisciplinary approaches, and digital competencies into curricula is essential for producing graduates capable of addressing complex development challenges. Strengthening human capital also requires promoting gender equity, youth inclusion, and lifelong learning systems that support continuous upskilling and reskilling (World Bank, 2023).

Sub-themes

- Employment and work transitions.
- Skilling for the world of work.
- Strengthening teaching and learning (learner-centered, problem-based, and competence-based learning).
- Innovations in curriculum review and industry-university apprenticeships.

Theme 2: Building a Resilient and Productive Economy

Background

Agriculture remains central to Africa’s economic transformation, contributing significantly to employment, food security, and livelihoods. However, the sector faces increasing challenges, including climate change, land degradation, low productivity, and limited value addition. The Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) Kampala Declaration (2026–2035) calls for a transition toward resilient, inclusive, and market-oriented agricultural systems capable of sustaining growth and withstanding environmental shocks (African Union, 2026).

Achieving this transformation requires strengthening agricultural value chains, promoting climate-smart agriculture, and improving access to markets, finance, and technology. Universities and research institutions play a critical role in generating innovations that enhance productivity, reduce post-harvest losses, and support sustainable resource management. Additionally, policy coherence and evidence-based decision-making are essential for creating enabling environments for agribusiness development and rural transformation (FAO, 2022).

Sub-themes

- Resilient agrifood systems and climate-smart solutions.
- Digital transitions, artificial intelligence, and robotics in agriculture.
- Policy information and evidence-based investments.
- Wealth creation for young women, men, and agrarian communities.





Theme 3: Harnessing African universities and partner opportunities for mission delivery

Background

Universities are increasingly recognized as key actors within innovation ecosystems, contributing not only through teaching and research but also through partnerships that drive societal impact. The concept of 4th-generation universities emphasizes the integration of education, research, innovation, and community engagement, alongside strong collaboration with government, industry, and civil society (Etzkowitz & Zhou, 2018). In Africa, such partnerships are essential for overcoming resource constraints and scaling impactful solutions. Strategic collaborations enhance knowledge exchange, facilitate technology transfer, and mobilize resources for research and innovation. Engagement with the private sector supports the commercialization of research outputs, while collaboration with policymakers ensures that scientific evidence informs development strategies. Furthermore, South–South and global partnerships offer valuable opportunities for shared learning and capacity strengthening (OECD, 2021).

Sub-themes

- Translating science into businesses and jobs (business incubation and venture capital).
- Centers of excellence, leadership, and operational standards.
- Strategic partnerships for infrastructure development.
- Resourcing for mission delivery.

Theme 4: Capacity Sharing to Train the Next Generation

Background

The sustainability of Africa’s development depends on its capacity to train and retain a new generation of scientists, innovators, and leaders. Capacity development must extend beyond individual training to include institutional strengthening, regional collaboration, and knowledge-sharing networks. Platforms such as RUFORUM have demonstrated the effectiveness of collaborative training models, including joint degree programmes, staff exchanges, and regional research networks, in building critical mass and enhancing quality (RUFORUM, 2023).

Mentorship, mobility programmes, and inclusive training approaches are essential for nurturing talent and fostering innovation among young researchers. Addressing gender disparities and promoting equitable access to opportunities for women and marginalized groups remain critical priorities. At the same time, digital technologies offer new opportunities to scale capacity development through open learning platforms and virtual collaboration (UNESCO, 2024).

Sub-themes

- Digital networks and open science platforms.
- Joint research and academic mobility programmes.
- Thematic consortia and regional centers of excellence.





Submission Guidelines

- ❖ **Format:** The scientific sessions will be conducted in a **blended manner** (face to face and online), and will include both oral and poster presentations.
- ❖ **Target audience:** Researchers, innovators, students, academia, and private sector leaders.
- ❖ **Recognition:** Outstanding achievers, including young scientists and agripreneurs, will be recognized during the event.

- ❖ **Abstract Format:** The abstract format should be submitted as a Word document. Scientific sessions will be conducted in a blended manner (face-to-face and online) and will include both oral and poster presentations.
- ❖ **Abstract text:** The abstract should have a maximum of 300 words (excluding title, author names, and affiliations) and should include key issues: with objectives, methods, results, and implications of findings.
- ❖ Do not include tables and graphs, and bullet points in the abstract.
- ❖ **Target Audience:** Researchers, innovators, students, academia, and private sector leaders.
- ❖ **Submission Link:** Abstracts must be strictly submitted via this link: [2026 Abstracts submission](#)
- ❖ **Submission deadline:** Please submit your abstract no later than **15th July 2026**. (Submissions sent via email will not be accepted.)
- ❖ Provide a clear and concise abstract of no more than 300 words (including spaces), excluding the title, authors' details, and keywords. Please do not include figures or tables.
- ❖ Authors of accepted abstracts will be invited to submit a full paper. Once accepted for the conference, these will be published in either the RUFORUM Working Document Series (<https://repository.ruforum.org/>), the African Journal of Rural Development (<https://afjrdev.org/index.php/jos>), or other peer-reviewed journals. All papers will be subjected to peer review and plagiarism checks before publication.
- ❖ You may submit more than one abstract. However, individuals selected for oral presentations will be permitted to give only one. Any additional accepted abstracts from the same presenter will be allocated as posters.
- ❖ Posters must be printed in A0 paper size (Height: 118.9 cm and Width: 84.1 cm). Only vertically oriented (portrait) posters will be accepted.

Important Dates:

- ❖ Abstract Submission Deadline: 15th July 2026.
- ❖ Notification of Acceptance: 15th August 2026.
- ❖ Full Paper Deadline for accepted abstracts: 15th September 2026.

Enquiries should be submitted to ruforumpapers@ruforum.org with a copy to b.yamungu@ruforum.org; m.majaliwa@ruforum.org and

