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RUFORUM
Capacity Building in Agriculture



ZAMBIA'S SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE:
Nurture and mentorship of emerging scientists

CONCEPT NOTE

Webinar A Registration link: https://bit.ly/4kbc0yi
Webinar B Registration link: https://bit.ly/4BIMBbl
Webinar C Registration link: https://bit.ly/4BfSW8t
Date: Monday 16th – Tuesday 17th November 2026, 08:00–17:00 CAT | **Venue:** Virtual
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CONCEPT

BACKGROUND

Zambia has set an ambitious course for growth. The Grow Zambia Agenda, launched on 2 September 2026, aims to more than double the economy within five years through eight measurable targets for 2031, known as 10-10-5-3-3-1-1-1: 10 million tonnes of maize, 10,000 MW of electricity, 5 million tourists a year, 3 million tonnes each of copper and soya beans, 1 million tonnes each of wheat and sugar, and US$1 billion in beef export revenue [1]. Five of the eight targets are agricultural. The Agenda builds on Vision 2030 and the Eighth National Development Plan[2] and is aligned with Agenda 2063, the Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa (STISA 2034) and the Kampala CAADP Declaration (2026–2035).

The gap is one of productivity and skills rather than land. Maize yields average about 2.4 tonnes per hectare against a potential of more than 12; soya production must rise almost sevenfold and wheat twelvefold; formal beef exports have only just begun; and agricultural research spending, at about 0.5% of agricultural GDP, is half the African Union's 1% target. The 2024 drought, which sharply cut hydropower and left millions of people in food crisis, showed how closely agriculture, energy, climate and education are linked. Meeting the targets will depend on improved varieties and seed systems, irrigation, soil health, livestock disease control and clean energy, and on the scientists who generate and apply this knowledge.

Zambian universities and research institutes are the talent and technology engine of this agenda. Much of their new evidence on crops and soils, livestock and aquaculture, nutrition, climate risk, digital agriculture, clean energy, mining and environmental health comes from graduate students, early-career researchers and junior lecturers. Yet emerging scientists face persistent barriers: few experienced mentors, competitive funding that disadvantages newcomers, heavy teaching loads, limited support for scientific writing and little contact with policy and industry; only about 14% of Zambia's agricultural researchers hold a PhD. Structured mentorship is one of the most effective responses. It shapes early research careers, supports the move into research leadership and improves productivity, but most programmes in Africa remain externally driven, and locally led initiatives are needed[3].

PURPOSE

To connect junior and senior researchers across the RUFORUM network to exchange knowledge, pool expertise and resources, strengthen intergenerational partnerships, and translate research into innovation, policy and sustainable development impact.

MAIN OBJECTIVE

To build a connected, intergenerational research community across the RUFORUM network that leverages shared expertise, resources and partnerships to advance scientific excellence, strengthen Africa's human capital and accelerate research-driven development.

[1] Government of the Republic of Zambia (2026). Grow Zambia Agenda: 10-10-5-3-3-1-1-1. Presidential Inauguration Address, Lusaka, 2 September 2026.
[2] Republic of Zambia (2022). Eighth National Development Plan (8NDP) 2022–2026. Lusaka: Ministry of Finance and National Planning. https://www.zambiaembassy.org/sites/default/files/documents/8NDP_2022-2026.pdf
[3] Mtwisha, L., Jackson, J., Mitchel, A., de-Graft Aikins, A., Kebirungi, H., Outtara, K. and Viney, C. (2021). Early- and mid-career transitions to research leadership in Africa. Welcome Open Research, 6. https://doi.org/10.12688/wellcomeopenres.16540.2

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. Showcase research excellence and innovation by emerging Zambian scientists across the four AGM themes, providing structured feedback from senior researchers to strengthen research quality, publication readiness and relevance to national and continental priorities.
2. Strengthen intergenerational mentorship and research collaboration through mentor–mentee partnerships, co-supervision, joint research, and shared access to infrastructure, data and digital platforms.
3. Accelerate research uptake and development impact by connecting emerging scientists with government, industry, communities and development partners to establish practical pathways and follow-up commitments for translating research into policy, enterprise and community solutions.

CONVENERS

RUFORUM and the Zambian host universities through the AGM Scientific Committee, with relevant government, research, industry, community and development partners.

APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

The session will use an interactive, evidence-based and participatory approach, combining scientific presentations, selected papers and case studies, moderated panel discussions, intergenerational dialogue and facilitated synthesis. Contributions will be organised around the four thematic areas and their sub-themes. Rapporteurs will capture key evidence, innovations, gaps, partnership opportunities, recommendations and follow-up actions, with attention to inclusion, feasibility, resource requirements, scalability and sustainability. The session will conclude with a synthesis of priority actions and commitments for strengthening intergenerational research collaboration across the RUFORUM network.

OUTPUTS

1. Evidence for Resilient and Productive Economies: A synthesis of research evidence and innovations presented by emerging Zambian scientists across the four AGM themes, with mentor feedback on strengthening them for publication, policy and practice.
2. Mentorship and Capacity-Sharing Framework: Mentor–mentee pairs and follow-up plans, with practical mechanisms for co-supervision, joint research, mobility, and shared infrastructure, data and digital platforms.
3. Research-to-Impact Pathways: Outstanding presentations and promising research identified for publication and scaling, and opportunities for partnership with government, industry and development partners in Zambia and beyond.

IMPACTS

1. A more connected and impact-oriented research ecosystem in Zambia, in which the evidence and innovations of emerging scientists increasingly inform policy and practical solutions for resilient and productive economies.
2. Greater research confidence, visibility and leadership among emerging Zambian scientists through mentorship, joint research, co-publication and the sharing of expertise and resources.
3. Stronger partnerships between emerging scientists, Zambian and RUFORUM member universities and development actors, supporting Zambia's national development agenda and

inclusive, sustainable development across Africa.

PARTICIPANTS

Postgraduate students; early-career and established researchers; educators; university leaders; graduate schools; TVET institutions; employers; professional bodies; farmer organisations; policymakers; and development partners.