

4th December 2025



Honorable Prince Maele, Minister of Higher
Education, Botswana



RUFORUM
Capacity Building in Agriculture
21st ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Theme: "Positioning Africa's Universities and the
Higher Education Sector to Effectively Impact
Development Processes on the Continent"

OVERVIEW

The 21st RUFORUM Annual General Meeting(AGM) convened in Gaborone, Botswana, provided a timely platform for reflection, strategic dialogue, and renewed commitment to repositioning Africa's universities as engines of transformation. Guided by the theme "Positioning Africa's Universities and Higher Education Sector to Effectively Impact Development Processes on the continent," the AGM brought together university leaders, policymakers, researchers, partners and industry actors to examine the role of higher education in shaping the continent's agri-food systems transformation to meet the aspirations of Agenda 2063 for an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa.

A total of 1,142 participants; from 50 countries; 37% of whom were women attended the AGM. This included 820 international delegates and 322 nationals from Botswana. Among the participants were Ministers responsible for Higher Education, Science, Technology and Innovation; over 87 Vice Chancellors and Deputy Vice Chancellors; 96 Principals and Deans; as well as development partners and other higher education stakeholders.

The AGM sought to:

1. Strengthen collaborations that enhance university capacity and maximize contributions to national, continental, and global development agendas.
2. Explore opportunities to build the science, technology, and innovation capabilities of RUFORUM member universities.
3. Identify pathways for achieving the Agenda 2063 Second Ten-Year Implementation Plan (STYIP) target of 100,000 PhDs.
4. Promote mechanisms for shared capacity in training the next generation of leaders in agri-food systems transformation.

The Pre-AGM plenary sessions predominantly focused on capacity within the SADC region and specifically Botswana in areas of scholarly writing, resource mobilization and data science and management. But most importantly a trail blazing hackathon and the RUFORUM Investor summit targeting youth entrepreneurs, who were exposed to business principles and the art of investment.

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Human capital is our most important asset and universities prepare them for the labour market and transformative education is required to prepare this important asset to address the continent's challenges by making them labour market ready as entrepreneurs/intrapreneurs, and be able to generate science solutions to address Africa's development challenges, further noting that partnership with ecosystem actors for education delivery should be deepened across the continent”. Higher Education Regulators.

The AGM reaffirmed the conviction that Africa's future depends on the strength, vision, and agility of its higher education institutions. Deliberations from more than 14 sessions of the AGM generated the conference “call to action” in the key areas below:

1. Adapting to the changing the Landscape of Transformative Education

Acknowledging that current training systems remain misaligned with labour market expectations, leaving many graduates underprepared and relatively unable to meet their own and employers need.

In order to unlock Africa's development potential, there is an urgent need to re-examine how universities in Africa are educating and preparing young people. There is need to adopt Transformative education— contextual, digitally enabled, and aligned to labour market needs.

With Africa poised to become the world's largest source of young people by 2030, universities on the continent must accelerate the transition towards 4th-generation universities, that integrate teaching, research, innovation, entrepreneurship, and social development impact. Our higher education systems must adapt and scale out development solutions.

With connectivity expected to reach over 1.1 billion Africans by 2029, universities must seize digital opportunities to position graduates for regional and global labour markets. They must urgently respond to the accelerating impact of artificial intelligence, robotics, and digital tools on the world of work. Universities must integrate digital literacy, data science, artificial intelligence, and emerging technologies into teaching and research to prepare graduates for global competitiveness.



2. Investment in Research, Development, and Innovation



Acknowledging that the level of investment in research and development (R&D) across the continent is low. Africa invests only 0.6% of GDP in R&D compared to the global average of 1.97%, which limits innovation, technology transfer, and competitiveness. Evidence has shown the high return on investment for PhD training and that investments in research is a key driver for economic growth and societal transformation.

Governments in Africa need to step up to the continental commitment to increase strategic investments in research, support to innovation hubs, strengthening intellectual property systems, and fostering industry-academia partnerships. Investments that drive us towards the 100000 PhDs STYIP target for science development.

3. Agri-food System Transformation

Acknowledging that agriculture remains Africa's most strategic sector, with the potential to become a trillion-dollar industry by 2030. Yet productivity is constrained by weak value addition, climate vulnerabilities, limited youth involvement, and underdeveloped innovation ecosystems. Africa's 65% share of the world's remaining arable land presents immense opportunities if leveraged through robust science, youth participation, and responsive educational models.

The AGM called for universities to leverage partnerships to play a more assertive role in driving agri-food system transformation by co-creating relevant technologies, strengthening value chains, promoting local processing, and building climate-resilient systems, that further target populations in conflict and post conflict areas.



4. Strategic Partnerships and Collective Action

GDev 2.0 PROGRAM



Acknowledging that RUFORUM is a growing network—currently spanning 175 universities in over 40 countries. It was recognized as a powerful platform for collaboration, capacity strengthening, and joint action. Agri-food systems transformation cannot occur in isolation. Partnerships among universities, governments, the private sector, development agencies, and international institutions are essential for scaling innovations, mobilizing resources, and delivering impactful solutions.

Drawing lessons from global partners in Europe, Asia and the USA, the AGM underscored how universities can leverage partnerships to strengthening incubation and innovation hubs; enabling public-private partnerships that support hands-on learning and commercialization; and the need to fully embedded TVETs within university systems. The need for stronger investment in technical and vocational training (TVET), digital skills development, and youth-focused innovation support cannot be emphasized.

5. Resource mobilization

Resource mobilization emerged as a significant institutional gap, with calls for universities to establish functional Grants Management Units and strengthen staff capacity to tap into the vast resource available. The Enterprise Business Development Strategy (EBDS) as a mechanism to transform universities into entrepreneurial institutions through incubation support, investment facilitation, and market linkage strengthening has great potential.



6. Equity, Inclusion, and Youth Empowerment



Delegates highlighted the need for inclusive, equitable, and accessible higher education systems. The Mastercard Foundation particularly emphasized the importance of enabling marginalized youth—women, rural students, refugees, and those excluded from labour markets to access dignified and fulfilling work. The 21st RUFORUM AGM emphasized integrating inclusion across curriculum design, innovation support, entrepreneurship programs, and skills development initiatives. Further endorsing the RUFORUM Gender Inclusion and Safeguards (GIS) Framework as a comprehensive policy tool for adoption across member universities.

7. Policy Alignment, and Partnerships

Government leaders, including representatives from the government of Botswana, government of Sudan, Uganda, Zambia, Malawi and DRC highlighted that in addition to national development prospects, universities should align with regional and continental priorities such as the Agenda 2063, and the 2025 CAADP Kampala Declaration.



Conclusion and Call to Action

The 21st RUFORUM AGM closed with a strong call for collective action. Universities should:

1. Accelerate the shift toward transformative and 4th-generation university models; with a need to implement proactive and innovative curricular reforms aligned with global academic trends and Africa's context specific development priorities.
2. Forge strategic alliances with private sector actors, industry entrepreneurs, civil society, and farmer organizations to enhance relevance and impact. these partnerships will improve research uptake, agribusiness ecosystems, and community livelihoods.
3. Strengthen institutional sustainability through improved governance, positioning universities as trusted partners in development.
4. Create inclusive safe spaces within institutions that will ensure that young people thrive and are able to realise their potential.
5. Embrace and adopt emerging technologies in higher education including responsible Artificial Intelligence and big data that will define the future of work for Africa's burgeoning young population.

The AGM recognized the urgent need to adopt an ecosystem approach, supported by effective multi-sectoral partnerships. The discussion during the AGM demonstrated the need for African governments to:

1. Increase investments in higher agricultural education, research, and innovation to drive development and support CAADP commitments.
 2. Mobilize additional financing through multilateral and international agencies, especially in agriculture, health, and STEM disciplines for education, research and development.
 3. Expand postgraduate training capacity, increasing enrollment from 9% to at least 20% by 2030.
 4. Ensure equitable access for refugees and displaced persons across gender and socio-economic groups.
 5. Strengthen digital transformation in higher education through AI, IoT, big data, and other emerging technologies.
 6. Improve governance, quality assurance, and community relevance of higher education institutions.
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Final Reflection

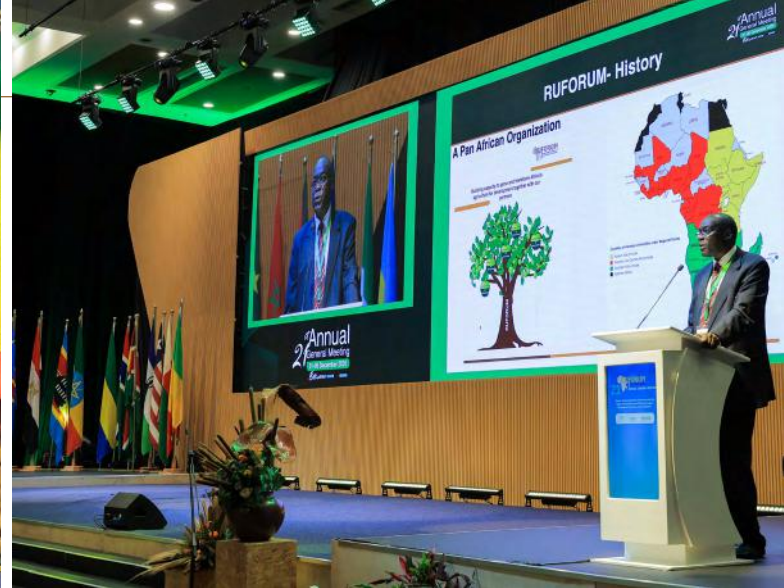
The 21st RUFORUM AGM reaffirmed the collective commitment of African universities, governments, partners, and development actors to advancing a resilient, innovative, and inclusive higher education sector capable of generating context-specific scientific and technological solutions for Africa's food and nutrition security, economic growth, and sustainable development. Through strategic intent, collaboration, commitment, and innovation, universities can drive the continent's progress and contribute significantly to a more resilient, prosperous, and food-secure Africa.

Renewed Commitment to RUFORUM's Continental Mandate

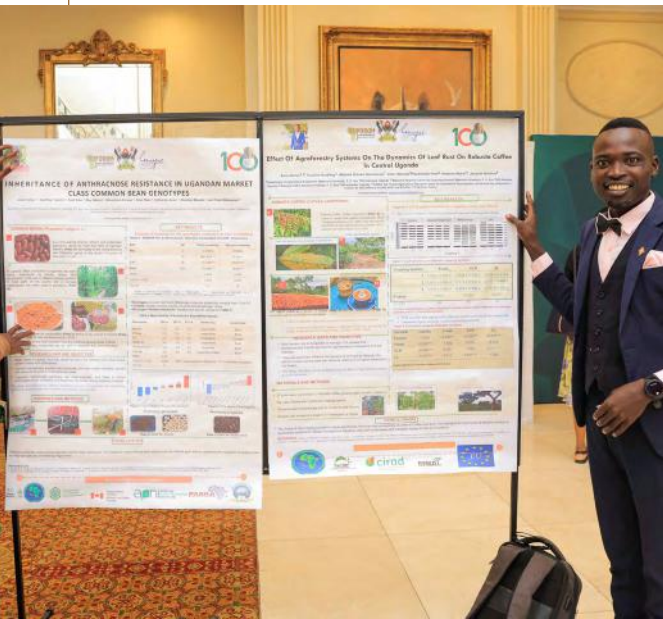
Universities across the network, academic, and industry leaders reaffirmed RUFORUM's unique role in strengthening higher education capacity, supporting research, building networks, and anchoring continental policy dialogues. They affirmed the need for deeper engagement, more strategic partnerships, and continued advocacy for investment in science, technology, and innovation. With rising climate challenges, emerging technologies, economic pressures, and demographic shifts, RUFORUM's mandate remains more relevant than ever.

AGM IN BRIEF





Official Conference Gala Dinner and Book Launch Ceremony





THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION
IN THE RUFORUM 21ST AGM

