

Policy Brief

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The Importance of National Forums in Agricultural Development in Africa



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RUFORUM POLICY BRIEF

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Executive Summary

National Forums will comprise an association of stakeholders in each RUFORUM member country who engage in graduate training and research. These Forums provide RUFORUM a complementary, decentralized approach to networking and collaboration, which will enable universities in African countries to liaise with a wider range of key stakeholders in agriculture and thus shape a common agenda to development in the sector.

To leverage them effectively, it will be important for governments and development partners to:

1. Provide political and financial support to National Forums;
2. Participate actively in National Forums;
3. Provide clear guidance to National Forums, to ensure that their activities are aligned with national policies and/or spending priorities.



What is a National Forum?

The Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) is a member-based organization owned by constituent universities in Eastern, Central, and Southern Africa. The mission of RUFORUM is, to foster innovativeness and adaptive capacity of universities engaged in agricultural and rural development to train high quality graduates and engage in impact-oriented research.

Despite the proven value of university networking at a regional level through vehicles like RUFORUM, its members have all agreed that it is equally important to foster a complementary, decentralized approach to networking and collaboration, which will enable universities in African countries to liaise with a wider range of key stakeholders in agriculture and thus shape a common agenda to development in the sector. Given this, RUFORUM is facilitating the establishment of National Forums by its members. These National Forums will comprise an association of stakeholders in each RUFORUM member country who engage in graduate training and research.

The functions of National Chapters will typically include:

- Formulating the national agricultural training needs and programmes in each country;
- Formulating and setting national agricultural research priorities for universities at a national level;
- Ensuring that financial and other resources are mobilized and effectively deployed for carrying out Association activities at a national level;
- Disseminating agricultural products produced by universities amongst key stakeholders, through conferences, field days, publications workshops, courses, and relevant appropriate media;
- Advocate, develop and lobby for close relationships with relevant local, regional and inter-national agricultural research centres, Universities and other training centres to foster greater understanding, collaboration and communication.

Why Establish National Forums?

National Forums provide an important opportunity to decentralize the role of RUFORUM to a national level, thus creating greater opportunities for accountability and relevance of the activities of associations at that level. This has several advantages:

It ensures that member universities have ongoing linkages to the communities that they serve;

It promotes improvement in services delivery and support through resource sharing among its members;

Members can work together at a national level to leverage and generate resources beyond the capacity of each individual organization;

It provides a national vehicle through which members with common interests can engage key stakeholders (such as government, agribusiness, NGOs, and farming communities) on an ongoing basis, both to share information and to lobby for important policy positions;

It is my fervent hope that the national chapter will provide an ideal focal point for merging the Ministry's objectives with the RUFORUM strategy for the region'. (Senator L. A. Tapela, Deputy Minister of Higher and Tertiary Education of Zimbabwe)

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It provides opportunities for members at a national level to reach agreement on key issues that they wish to table for discussion or adoption within RUFORUM, thus contributing to consensus-building;

National Forums can play an active role in ensuring that uniform operations and quality parameters are met across members as part of monitoring and evaluation and quality assurance processes, work with RUFORUM to develop mechanisms and criteria for monitoring and evaluating performance of agriculture related training, research and outreach.

Who should the members be?

To operate effectively, a National Forum requires representation from, at least:

- Universities within a country offering courses in agricultural training or providing agricultural research;
- The body responsible for higher education;
- The body responsible for agricultural extension services;
- The body responsible for national agricultural re-search;
- The relevant line ministry responsible for agricultural training and agricultural research;
- Coopted members from farmer's organizations, the private sector, and civil society representatives.

Ingredients for success

To be successful, National Chapters need to live up to high governance standards, which would incorporate registration as a formal organization (within the specific legal requirements of the country within which it is operating). This begins with determining the purposes of the Forum (within the overall framework of RUFORUM). In addition, a Chief Executive should be selected, who is held accountable for her or his actions by the members. From this platform, it is then essential to:

- Ensure Effective Organizational Planning;
- Secure Adequate Resources;
- Manage Resources Effectively;
- Determine, Monitor, and Strengthen the National Chapter's Programmes and Services;

- Ensure compliance with national laws;
- Ensure Legal and Ethical Integrity and Maintain Accountability.

Success in the operations of a National Forum will also depend on governments remaining interested in conforming to the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) and the roles of higher education in contributing to national economic development and will continue to provide and promote relevant policies for higher education and agricultural development. It is critical to ensure that governments send high-level representatives to participate in project meetings.

Finally, success of a National Forum depends on ensuring that universities integrate lessons from national platforms into their programmes sustainably. This requires willingness to change, including transformation from their traditional roles of research and advocacy.

Policy Recommendations

To leverage National Forums effectively, governments and development partners might wish to consider the following recommendations:

Provide political and, where possible, financial support to National Forums to enable them to discharge their core functions effectively;

Participate actively in National Forums, using them as a key mechanism to shape relationships between government and the university sector;

Provide clear guidance to National Forums, to ensure that their activities are aligned with national policies and/or spending priorities.



The Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) is a 19 year old net-work of 29 universities in 17 African Countries. RU-FORUM sees ICT effectively used and integrated into the operations of the member universities .

The Association of African Universities (AAU) is forum for consultation, exchange of information and cooperation among institutions of Higher Education in Africa

