



11-December, 2022 | Volume 1, Issue 1

A Daily Brief on the 18th RUFORUM AGM Week #RUFORUMAGM2022

Welcome to the 18th RUFORUM Annual General Meeting, 2022

I warmly welcome you to RUFORUM's 18th Annual General Meeting (AGM), which will be held from the 12th to the 16th of December in Harare, Zimbabwe.

The RUFORUM AGM brings together a collective of like-minded key players in the Agricultural and Education value chains who will play a pivotal role in forging sustainable solutions to eradicating poverty, hunger, and malnutrition in Africa as the world recovers from the two-year COVID-19 pandemic effects on global Agri-food systems. I believe that investing in agriculture and higher education provides us with this opportunity.

I recognize and appreciate African Governments and the global community's collective efforts to ensure that universities continue to play a critical role in the transformation of Agri-food systems in several developing countries. In particular, I thank the Government of Zimbabwe for hosting this meeting, which will enable the RUFORUM Network and other actors to deliberate on much-needed actions to better position Africa to respond to the future of its food systems based on equitable livelihoods, better nutrition, resilience in production, and market competitiveness.

The growing urban population is driving volatile growth in food demand, forcing us to convert forests and natural grasslands into farmland at high environmental cost, and increasing our reliance on food imports. Rapid globalization, particularly in the last four decades, has made African countries more vulnerable to regional and global shocks. And Climate Change has worsened livelihoods, increased poverty and weakened our economies.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the Ukrainian war have highlighted the risks associated with Africa's reliance on global supply chains for agricultural commodities such as wheat, maize, and cooking oil to meet the needs of its population. But



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Outgoing RUFORUM Executive Secretary

it also provided opportunity and drive for us exploit our resources and indeed feed the world.

According to the World Resources Center, approximately one-third of all food produced globally is lost or wasted, resulting in economic losses of an estimated \$1 trillion per year, resulting in lower economic returns for farmers. Increased conflicts, successive crop failures due to climate change and extreme weather events, and COVID-19-related econom-

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ic shocks and soaring food prices all contribute to increased food insecurity in Africa.

In addition to advocating for increased food production, we must find ways to reduce food waste from production to distribution and consumption. To ensure our success, we must first understand the obstacles along the agri-food system value chain. It is critical that we increase collaboration among key players in the agri-food ecosystem and create a platform for dialogue for learning and engaging with policy to transform agriculture and higher education.

This year's Annual General Meeting takes place at a critical juncture in the global debate on food systems. On 23 September 2021, the UN Secretary-General António Guterres convened the first-ever UN Food Systems Summit in New York, setting the stage for global food system transformation to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

I am pleased to note that the Network, in collaboration with the private sector, policymakers, and development partners, has made significant progress toward achieving the SDGs by accelerating innovation, reducing youth unemployment, and collaborating with communities to ensure research is relevant to the needs of smallholder farmers.

As we gather this week, we must find concrete solutions to our commitment to producing high-performing graduates and high-quality research that is responsive to the needs of Africa's farmers. Our solutions using Science, Technology, and Innovation should result in long-term livelihoods and national economic development. This commitment, I hope, will ensure that we achieve zero hunger on the continent by taking critical steps toward integrated food systems.

We have evolved as a Network in the past 18 years, remaining relevant to both continental and global demands affecting the agricultural and higher education sectors.

I am extremely proud of the RUFORUM Network, a group of African voices working tirelessly to advance the continent. I wish you great deliberations as we work to strengthen Africa's agri-food systems in the post-COVID-19.

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