

REGIONAL UNIVERSITIES FORUM FOR CAPACITY BUILDING IN AGRICULTURE  
(RUFORUM)

*Fostering innovativeness and adaptive capacity of universities to  
develop and sustain high quality in training, impact-oriented  
research and collaboration'*

## **Abridged version: RUFORUM Strategic Plan 2006-2010**

28 June 2005

RUFORUM SECRETARAIT, PLOT 151 GARDEN HILL MAKERERE UNIVERSITY, P.O. BOX 7062, KAMPALA, UGANDA  
(Website: [www.ruforum.org](http://www.ruforum.org))

## Background

Africa as a region is committed to exploiting opportunities by harnessing all available resources nationally and through regional partnerships to implement concrete actions and programmes to realize the hope for the continent (NEPAD, 2001). The same strategy is being used in the Millennium Development Goal (MDG)-centered Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) of the governments of the region. Strengthening agriculture productivity and the value addition chain through science led intervention is widely viewed as essential to stimulate economic growth in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Implementation of innovative, timely and client-responsive research for development (R4D) agenda, termed by some authors as the “doubly green revolution” in retrospect of old green intervention, is essential to bolster productivity and the entire value-chain (Conway, 2004). Accordingly, investing in capacity development through research and training is a critical success factor to ensure “SSA’s own innovation generation.” Indeed development of human capital is a central activity of MDG based development strategies (UNDP, 2003). Universities in SSA are cognizant of their role and the need to transform/ double efforts to produce quality human resources and other products to spur development in the continent. However, universities face a challenge of generating relevant, innovative and adaptive people and innovations to support development efforts of the region. To ensure relevance, effectiveness and efficiency, and to anchor universities better in SSA development paradigms, require change in the way universities conduct business, adaptiveness and innovativeness in research, training and outreach, which are the core functions of universities. It also requires dynamic institutional frameworks to promote partnerships, active engagement of university clientele and other development partners, quality enhancement mechanisms, and pooling of resources to enhance economies of scale, scope and impact. To achieve these outcomes requires that universities and their partners address a number of key challenges, which limit universities contribution to national development.

### Challenges faced by Universities in executing their roles in the development process

1. How to build a national and regional research for development (R4D) innovation system based on partnerships and dialogue between all actors, impact oriented and well coordinated, where universities are an integral part.
2. How to make research responsive to a stakeholder-driven research and training agenda. This challenge addresses two issues; supply (university responsiveness to specific demand issues) and demand side (end-users articulation of demand and utilization of products/outputs).
3. How to influence policy and development practices to generate higher impact and support research and training in universities. This challenge looks at the opportunities and related issues that universities need to harness to remain relevant in development endeavours.
4. How to build, sustain and strengthen capacity for integrated, inter-disciplinary and participatory research for impact. This challenge encompasses key issues that universities need to consider in their efforts to develop innovative mechanisms that promote joint-learning/ interaction with other stakeholders in the development arena to increase impact levels.
5. How to ensure quality of research and training in universities. This challenge addresses issues related to maintenance of quality, without losing relevance in service delivery by universities.
6. How to build graduates capacity so that they become reflective practitioners who can influence and make change. This challenge focuses on how universities can train reflective graduates with a good balance in practice and theory and new skills in a dynamic people oriented environment.



## **Core Values**

RUFORUM as a membership organisation has established strong values to guide its operations. All members and the Secretariat firmly commit themselves to these shared values.

- RUFORUM is committed to fostering innovation in universities and transformation of agricultural innovation systems in the member countries.
- RUFORUM builds most of its activities on collaboration and active partnerships within the organisation as well as with external stakeholders and development partners.
- The Secretariat and the universities are committed to the supremacy of performance over politics, seniority and hierarchy. It will operate in the least bureaucratic and hierarchic way possible to ensure efficient and effective accountable services.
- RUFORUM follows the principles of equity while maintaining quality performance and cost-effectiveness. Solidarity among members is a key value of RUFORUM in dealing with inequalities and crisis situations.
- RUFORUM is committed to strengthening the national university systems. The principle of subsidiarity, where everything is being handled at the lowest possible level, is a crucial value.
- RUFORUM believes in quality in all its actions. It will pursue quality in the way it designs its support interventions as well as in the quality of outputs and outcomes of the interventions in research, training and the services it provides to members and the partnerships it engages.

## **RUFORUM's Niche**

RUFORUM is not the only organisation in capacity building in agriculture in the Eastern, Central and Southern African Region. An analysis of a range of institutions and projects with their mandates and foci lead to identification of RUFORUM's specific niche within the broader support to universities as:

1. Focus on capacity building for the agricultural sector through graduate training at Masters and PhD levels.
2. Focus on promoting innovation and integration within universities to support training and research that is aligned with the emergent rural development strategy of 'Integrated Agricultural Research for Development' (IAR4D).
3. Focus on adding value to regional agricultural training and research through building, rationalizing and sharing capacities and resources.

## **Strategic goals:**

RUFORUM's strategic goals embrace the central thrusts and performance areas which the organization will pursue to achieve its vision and mission. Five strategic goals were derived from the challenges universities face, the vision of the impact which RUFORUM would like to achieve and the functions at different levels, which were identified as necessary to produce the desired impact. They provide the strategic orientation and positioning of RUFORUM and demonstrate the organizational commitment to achieve impacts in the five areas through a range of strategies. These are described in detail below.



- Establishment of centres of specialisation among RUFORUM universities to support co-shared training and research in specific areas
- Development of joint/shared academic programmes among universities to permit efficient utilization of available infrastructure in the region
- Higher quality of research through specialisation and adequate facilities as well as higher quantities

***Main strategies to implement this strategic goal***

- Facilitation of a fact-based negotiation process among the involved partners to reach consensus on facilities and modalities for sharing.
- Establishing a database of technology developed, existing human resources, other information types for RUFORUM and region.
- Supporting development of centres of specialization to promote resource sharing and utilization.
- Establishing sharing policies and mechanisms for its implementation for academic programmes and infrastructure.

***Strategic Goal 3: Innovative training, research and outreach activities supported by adaptive management structures in universities contributing to policy and development practice***

Training and research are core functions of universities. This strategic goal addresses the issues related to how universities can more effectively and efficiently contribute to national development through research and training programmes that are relevant, responsive to market demands and with functional outreach schemes. The components of this strategic goal include:

- Efficiency and effectiveness in training of relevant and adaptive graduates to spearhead economic growth in dynamic environments
- Responsiveness, relevance and overall positioning of university research and outreach activities in national innovation system
- Management systems in universities that promote efficiency, innovation and self learning in training and research activities, including management and leadership development for present and future leaders
- Contribution to policy reform and implementation within the context of national development

***Outputs and impacts:***

- Improvement in training and research systems of universities to generate graduates who are adaptive, self reflective and innovative.
- Integration of end-users of university outputs (human resources and research products) in training and R4D through internships, review and reform processes to support innovation, relevance, efficiency and effectiveness.
- Performance based management systems and culture in universities (learning organisation) that supports innovation, adaptation of university research and training to challenges of rural development.

***Main strategies to implement this strategic goal***

- Conducting curriculum reform and review in a manner that permits involvement of all key actors with whom and for whom universities produce products

- Piloting and mainstreaming competence/performance enhancing courses and skills for academic staff, training programmes and university management systems.
- Promoting experiential learning by integrating internships and feedback processes in to training and research activities to improve quality adaptation skills and relevance
- Exploiting individual university comparative advantages in training, research and outreach for effective sharing of capacities and resources within the region
- Developing strong and articulate National Forums to advocate and lobby for universities roles in policy review, reform and implementation.

***Strategic Goal 4 Operational capacity and approaches for innovative, quality and impact oriented Agricultural Research for Development mainstreamed in Universities***

Research is one of the core functions of universities. The community expects universities to generate outputs that are innovative and relevant to their development needs and demands. This strategic goal seeks to support and promote action and relevance of Universities in national development areas. The components of this strategic goal include the following:

- Efficiency and effectiveness in conducting IAR4D with universities being active and integral actors in national agricultural innovation systems
- Integration of research approaches and disciplines to support R4D in cross-cutting rural development issues
- Linking university research activities (supply) to a functional demand side (end-users capable of articulating needs and demand)
- Institutional frameworks in universities that supports inter-and or multidisciplinary R4D activities in line with national development aspirations.

***Outputs and impacts***

1. Functional operational modalities for IAR4D and inter-disciplinary research approaches in universities
2. Efficient R4D approaches in universities that are integrated with, and supports the end-users by supplying needs and demands at the same time facilitating their ability to articulate needs
3. Innovative approaches to conduct R4D in universities that supports self learning and adaptation of research systems/approaches to dynamic development challenges

***Main strategies to implement this strategic goal***

- Review and reform curricula and transform institutions to support cross-sectoral research undertakings.
- Strongly support multidisciplinary teams and research efforts in funding schemes
- Integration of other actors in national innovation systems in their research and training systems to provide suitable environments for them to self-learn and improve quality, while at the same time making impact on the ground.
- Development of mechanisms that support growth in capacity and competence of end-users of university training and research products to articulate demand.

- Innovation of efficient and effective outreach schemes where universities and end-users of products (graduates or technologies) freely inter-phase and cross fertilize the system for improvement in delivery.
- Action research on the 'HOW' questions at all levels to develop and improve the implementation process at all levels.

***Strategic Goal 5: A dynamic regional platform for policy advocacy, lobbying, coordination and resource mobilization for improved training, research and outreach by Universities***

Universities as institutions of higher learning are expected to play a crucial role in spearheading human resource development, knowledge generation and management and R4D. This strategic goal describes attempts by participating universities to proactively champion their role in national development. The key component of this strategic goal is to create an umbrella organization (RUFORUM). RUFORUM will be a voice and means to garner support for universities at all levels of development processes. RUFORUM will achieve this strategic goal by serving as a regional platform; for advocacy and lobbying, mobilizing resources and promoting innovation in universities.

***Outputs and impact***

- Economies of scope and scale through collaborative action and coherence to support research, outreach and training programmes of universities.
- More action by universities in national development arena through lobbying and advocacy to source funds and influence development policy reform and practice.
- An innovative support platform for universities in the region with regard to research, training, outreach and management.
- Strategic initiatives for services that aim at building regional capacities both infrastructural and human resource e.g. establishment of regional training and research laboratories and/or training programmes

***Main strategies to implement this strategic goal***

- Creating large constituency within faculties that engages actively in impact oriented training and R4D, thereby promoting visibility, awareness of universities in national development.
- Conducting joint planning and fair representation of member universities in the management processes of RUFORUM to ensure inclusiveness and cohesion
- Setting up and supporting inclusive National Forums (taking into account the interests of all agricultural universities and their partners) as the main pillars for RUFORUM.
- Developing a marketing profile and business plan for RUFORUM and market them nationally and internationally. This includes a variety of resource mobilization mechanisms.
- Developing alternative mechanisms for sharing of resources where the competitive grant scheme is one but also other mechanisms such as nurturing grants and grants for pooling expertise to address a national/regional issue or piloting an innovation.

## Resource mobilization strategy

The declining financial resource base and insufficient attention paid to graduate training and research invariability compromises sustainability and quality and hinders relevance of University programs to national and regional development needs. The challenge is how to plan for, demonstrate and market university relevance and products to attract support and how to rationalise and use existing resources more efficiently and effectively. RUFORUM proposes to mobilize resources to support research and training by employing the following strategies:

- Institutionalisation of a membership fee to promote institutional commitment, ownership and empowerment to demand for quality services.
- Demonstrating and marketing university relevance and outputs to diversify funding sources and attract more core funding and other resources from public sector, private sector and development partners.
- Exploiting individual university comparative advantage in training, research and outreach for effective sharing of capacities and resources within the region.
- Undertaking demand-driven strategic initiatives that add value and demonstrate impact.
- Creation of endowment and trust funds for sustainable funding of training, research and outreach.

## RUFORUM'S ROLE AND CORE FUNCTIONS

RUFORUM's mode of operation as a regional umbrella body which targets well-defined strategic goals determines that RUFORUM plays the following roles:

1. RUFORUM will be an **INNOVATOR** that catalyses change within universities in terms of training, research and related management aspects.
2. RUFORUM will be a **CATALYST** and **COORDINATOR** for partnerships and collaboration within the countries and across the region
3. RUFORUM will be an **INFORMATION & KNOWLEDGE BROKER**
4. RUFORUM will be a **REPRESENTOR** and **ADVOCATE** of universities and their stakeholders

All the four roles are based on the value-addition at regional level to on-going national universities' efforts. RUFORUM's core functions are at three levels:

1. Universities as own management entities
2. Universities with their stakeholders (National Forums) and
3. The Secretariat at regional level.

The Core functions of the Secretariat include;

- *Facilitate and organize platforms for regional PhD training and support Masters training*

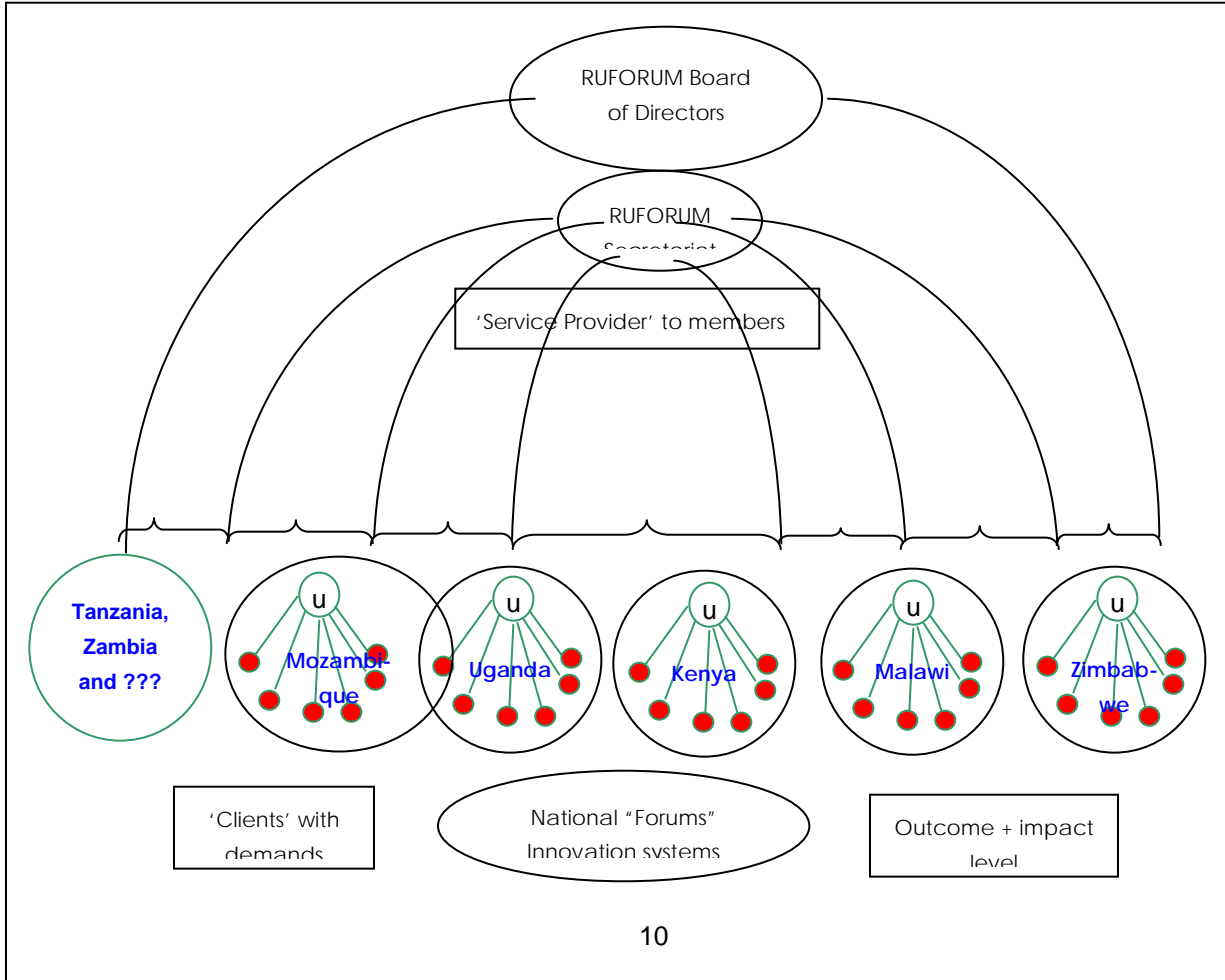
- Promoting regional partnerships and networks for research and training
- Support information access, exchange and availability
- Resource mobilization, lobbying and advocacy
- Support staff competence development and change efforts in specific areas
- Promotion/support curriculum review and reform in undergraduate and graduate training

The Secretariat will implement the above functions through a range of appropriate and innovative modalities like strategic initiatives, action research projects, task forces, and competitive grants and other grants mechanisms.

### Governance and Management

RUFORUM is an umbrella organisation of member universities and their partners/stakeholders at national level as members (Fig. 1). Membership is by subscription by individual universities and is intended to be encompassing of the east, central and southern Africa region but without spreading too thin.

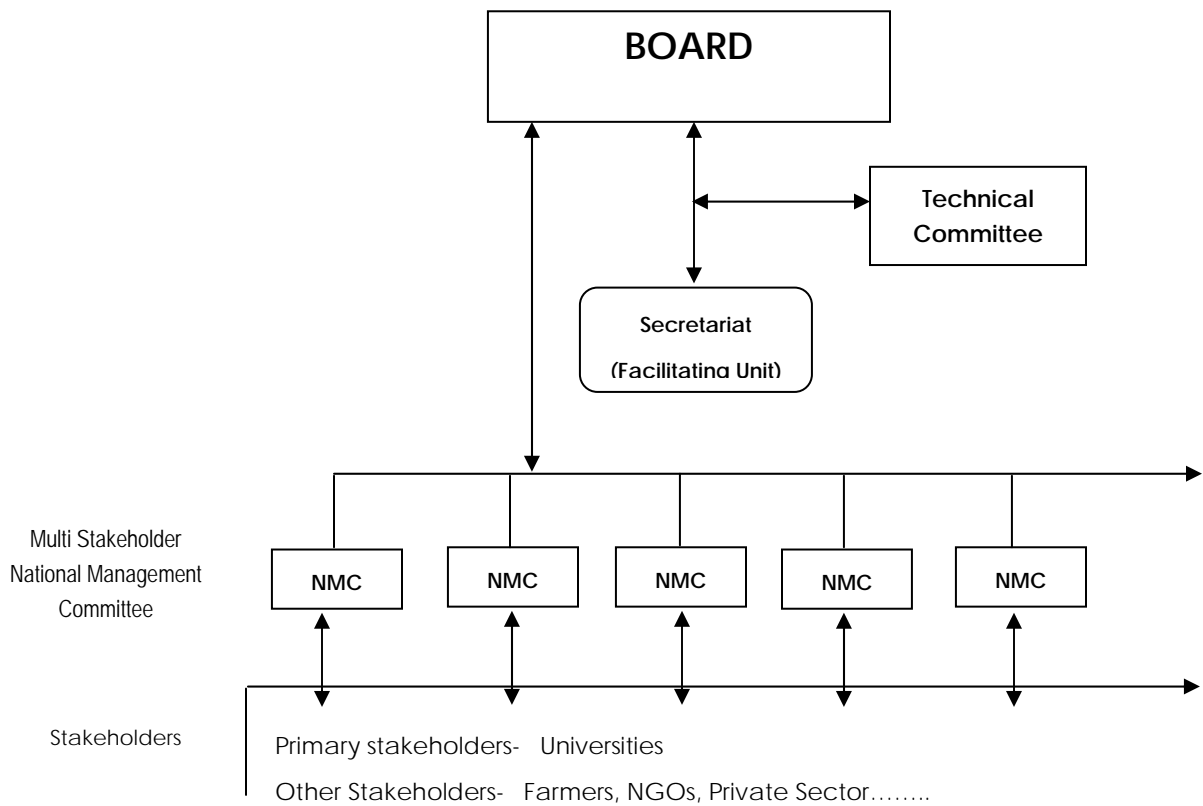
Figure 1: RUFORUM as a Member Organisation



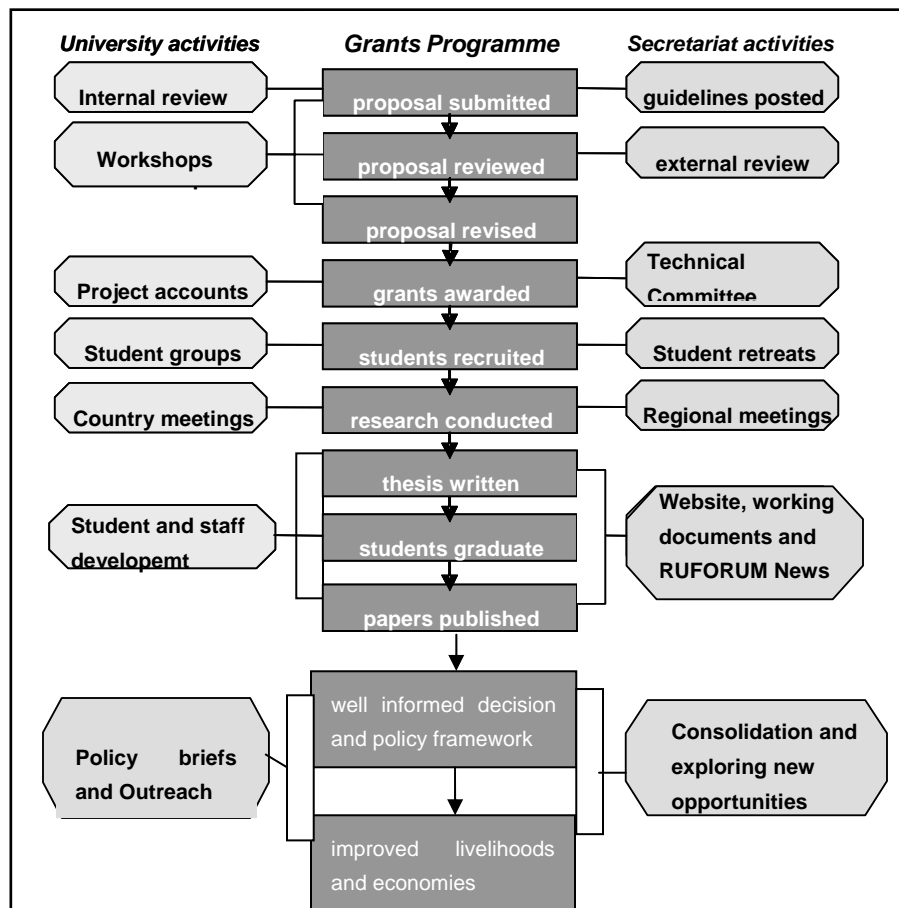
Thus, the organisation intends to expand within the participating countries and the region in a phased manner to allow for lesson learning and incorporation of experiences. The pillars of the organisation are the National Forums who take responsibility for their own set objectives and priorities and the desired impact has to show at this level.

- RUFORUM is governed by a BOARD (Fig. 2) consisting of 8 members, 5 Vice-Chancellors, and representatives of private/ civil societies, development partners, and NARS.
- Strategic activities and other initiatives are implemented through a competitive grant system and other grant awards (Fig. 3) overseen by a 10 member Technical Committee (5 males, 5 females); of whom 5 represent universities and the other 5 diverse sectors outside the university systems.
- Demands are generated by National Forums consisting of participating universities and other stakeholders.
- Regional services are provided through a lean Secretariat (Fig. 4) which provides regional coordination, finance and management and programme support. The Secretariat has three sections, Regional Coordination (headed by the Chief Executive-Regional Coordinator), Program Coordination and Finance & Administration.

**Figure 2: RUFORUM Governance Structure**



**Figure 3: RUFORUM grant award process**



### **Operationalising the Strategic Plan**

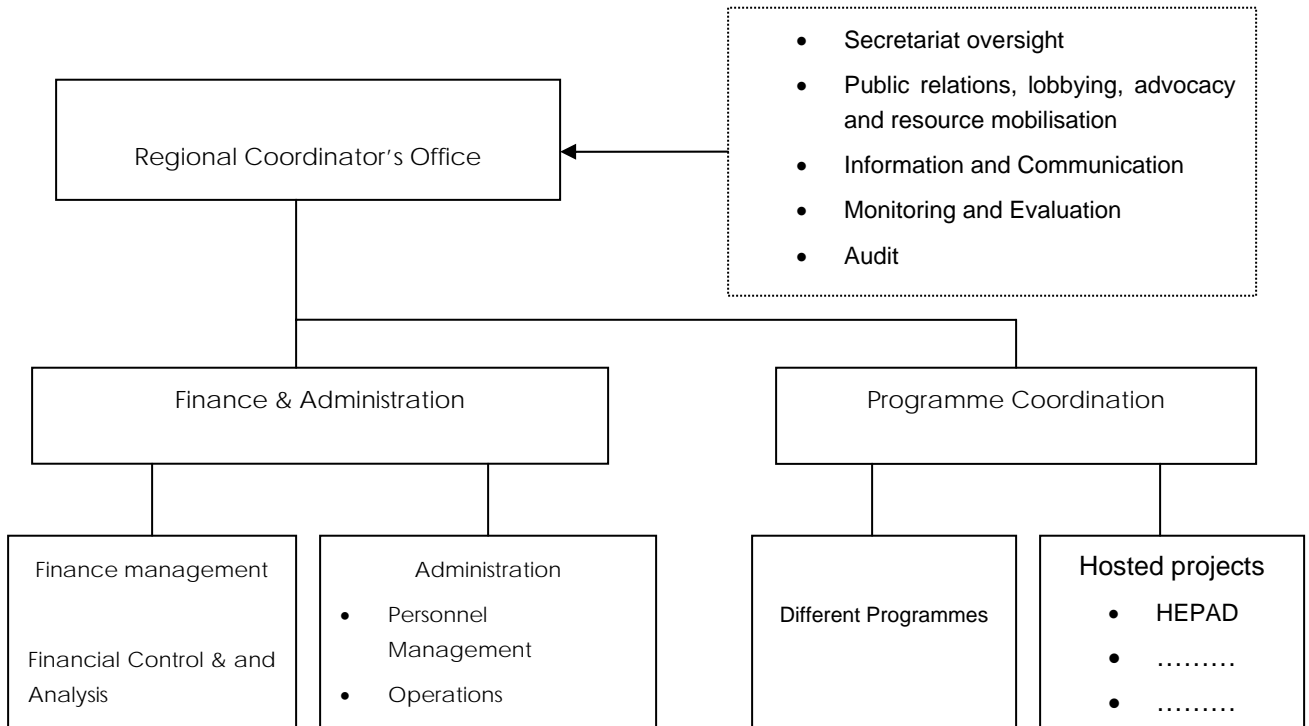
This is the first strategic plan of RUFORUM as an organization. RUFORUM's planning system comprises three major levels:

1. The overall strategic plan as an orientating and guiding framework in a 10 years time perspective, on the basis of which this Medium -Term (Five years) Plan is built. Based on experiences and new issues emerging, it might be revised in a shorter timeframe.
2. The operational plan or business plan with a Five year time horizon will provide a break down of the strategic goals and their strategies into well-defined actions with clear outputs and indicators and overall budget lines.
3. The operational plan will be specific to the National Forums and their identified priorities. There will be one part for the countries and another part for the Secretariat. In other words, RUFORUM will not do the same activities in all the countries at the same time.

4. The annual work plans will define the detailed activities

There will be an annual self-evaluation and review in view of the strategic goals and the desired achievements and based on this strategic monitoring, strategies and activities will be adapted.

**Figure 4: RUFORUM Secretariat Organogram (Function)**



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Conway, 2004. Re-imagining philanthropy: Partnership and Poverty in the global age. Rockefeller Foundation, New York: Remarks by Gordon Conway at the Global Philanthropy Forum, Stanford University, USA, 4<sup>th</sup>.March.2004

NEPAD, 2001

RUFORUM, 2005a. Master Document: RUFORUM Ten-Year Strategic Plan. RUFORUM Secretariat, Kampala Uganda. ISSN.....

RUFORUM, 2005b. Master Document: RUFORUM Five-Year Business Plan. RUFORUM Secretariat, Kampala Uganda. ISSN.....

United Nations Development Program (UNDP), 2003. UNDP, Annual Report 2003. United Nations, New York, USA.

For further information please contact;

The RUFORUM Secretariat,

Plot 151 Garden Hill, Makerere University Main Campus, P.O. Box 7062, Kampala, Uganda

Fax: 256-41-535153; Tel: 256-41-535939; E-mail: [secretariat@ruforum.org](mailto:secretariat@ruforum.org) ; website:

[www.ruforum.org](http://www.ruforum.org)