



## Bible, Farming and RUFORUM: Promoting Integration of Farming and Theology in RUFORUM



### Preamble

*“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, He will make your paths straight” Proverbs 3:5-6*

Whatever we do on earth including farming, it is supposed to be done for the sake of God’s glory and for man’s pleasure and prosperity. God is pleased when he sees man doing things right with nobility. Not many people however, take farming as a biblical noble task and vocation. For a long time, many people have thought farming is to be done just as one of those things that a human being ought to do to find food and money to earn a living. Such being the case, they have often times not been theocentric. They have done farming irresponsibly by following their own decisions without seeking the face of God. They have done it without considering that harmful farming practices may affect the environment. But farming is more than just farming. Recently there has been a paradigm shift. There is an advocacy to turn away from such thoughts and practices. There is an embarkation on innovativeness to propagate proper modern methods of farming that are restorative, sustainable and more productive.



Dr. Timothy K. Nyasulu  
Vice Chancellor, University of  
Livingstonia, Malawi

This “Thought Piece” aims at appreciating RUFORUM’s initiative focusing on the incorporation of faith institutions like University of Livingstonia, which appreciate the integration of their operations with theology. The inclusion enriches RUFORUM agenda of promoting innovativeness in agriculture sector. This paper is a religious contribution to encourage members to appreciate that their contribution to RUFORUM agenda is godly. University of Livingstonia (UNILIA), a faith-based University under Synod of Livingstonia of Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) is excited to be part of RUFORUM. Its registration in RUFORUM fraternity in December 2021, at a Board Meeting during Annual Conference held in Cotonou in Benin is not taken for granted.



## Unilia's Vision, Mission Statement and its Potential to Collaborate with RUFORUM

University of Livingstonia was founded in 2003 to fulfill the dream conceived by a missionary Rev Dr Robert Laws in the late 1890s. It started with only one faculty; Faculty of Education with 35 students doing Bachelor of Education. Currently it has about 3,000 students drawn from across the country spread in three campuses Laws, Ekwendeni and Kaning'ina with a total of 8 faculties, with Faculty of Agriculture as the newest faculty.

To understand and appreciate UNULIA's unique academic contribution to the society and how it resonates well with RUFORUM's agenda one has to be familiar with its vision and mission statement. The University's vision is to be "a vibrant centre of academic excellence guided by Christian values and ethics". Its mission statement is "to inspire learners through relevant education, quality and innovative teaching, research and consultancy, and learning environment, the University of Livingstonia shall develop principled leaders who will transform society for the glory of God". The innovativeness is what RUFORUM is advocating and is well expressed in its mission statement "...to foster innovations responsive to demands of small holder farmers through the training of high-quality researchers...". RUFORUM envisions vibrant, transformative universities catalysing sustainable, inclusive agricultural development to feed and create jobs and good economy for African countries.

As a Christian institution UNILIA did not just embark on Agriculture programmes as one of the many programmes in the University. It wants to contribute to the welfare of the people of Malawi and the economy of the country. It is complementing to what other Universities like Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUNAR) are doing. UNILIA strongly believes in biblical farming; farming in God's way. The University is deliberately instilling in students' knowledge and skills the Christian values that are important in agriculture through its subjects, such as Christian Living courses, theology of ecology, which include conservation of natural resources that God provided for humanity's use. It is also interesting to note that many biblical metaphors including that of garden of Eden, point to this kind of farming where humanity is asked to take care of the land, which I believe is conservation agriculture. This calls for application of principles of agriculture which looks at values like health, ecology, fairness, and care of natural resources<sup>1</sup>. Researchers in universities are meant to address this. They are involved in research so that they feed governments and industries with their findings so that relevant methods of agriculture are applied.

UNILIA is pleased and appreciative to note that RUFORUM focuses its work on promoting agricultural enterprise and innovativeness in Africa so that at one point, among other things, Africa people will be self-sufficient in food production, food security and nutrition. This will in the end improve the economy of the continent. It will also transform the lives of people.

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<sup>1</sup> That that advocate for Farming God's way in countries like Holland will look at these values to be inclusive and holistic.



Healthy people are instrumental in the development of countries. UNILIA considers RUFORUM agenda to be an important initiative which universities and colleges in Africa have to appreciate, embrace and support by all means. UNILIA was motivated to join RUFORUM because of this profound cause, and it will be useful in encouraging RUFORUM institutions to integrate knowledge and faith in God who is the Master Farmer.

### **Institutions under RUFORUM are Doing GOD's Mission**

If not all, Faith-based institutions conceive agriculture enterprise as biblical. Man's involvement in agricultural work starts appearing in the first chapters of the Holy Bible (Genesis 2:5-4:16). When God called Adam and Eve, he gave them responsibility to take care of the creation and all that was in it. It is part of stewardship. This task included the keeping of animals (livestock), birds (poultry), fishes (aquaculture), even plants (agronomy). What is significant is that agriculture originates from God and it starts with God who planted the garden of Eden. God is the Master Farmer<sup>2</sup>. But he calls man to be involved in this farming. In other words, man's involvement in agriculture is noble. It is actually God's calling. It is part of God's mission (Missio Dei). To contextualize with RUFORUM, RUFORUM is performing an agricultural stewardship. This is an important acknowledgement that all the creation and all that is in it belongs to God. The academia in RUFORUM is in cognizance that applying proper agriculture methods is a God given responsibility over the creation (Psalm 24).

It is pleasing that God himself works with his humanity to do good agriculture by giving people all that they need such as wisdom, energy, skills, and innovativeness. Undermining the presence of God in farming will make farming ineffective. Poor harvest is a result of the failure of man to follow God's command to take care of the natural resources. As an organization with interest in good agricultural methods, RUFORUM will make itself effective by being conscious of God's presence in its endeavour. This was even evident from the commitment I saw during one week I first attended RUFORUM conference in Cotonou, Benin in December 2021. Members from different institutions demonstrated their passion in their presentations and contributions during deliberations. For things to work well like that, it was nothing else but the presence and intervention of God. Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labour is in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain. In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat..." (Psalm 127:1-2). RUFORUM will be successful in its endeavour by God's presence and grace.

### **Conclusion: Theological and Hands-On Mandate of RUFORUM in Agriculture Programmes in Universities**

RUFORUM has been commended for having embarked on a good initiative. The paper appeals for continued support from institutions. The calling of universities in Africa to work

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<sup>2</sup> Farming God's Way lessons by Mr Bo Teerling to farmers in Africa, 2013 at Chitunda in Malawi, indicated that the first farm, Eden owned by God himself.

together to promote innovativeness can be likened to the calling of disciples by Jesus to go and make disciples of all nations in Africa. The acceptance by universities to work together under one umbrella is like accepting to put all the required forces especially the human capital together. No university will work in isolation to achieve the agenda put by RUFORUM. Individual universities need to empty themselves. They are called to abandon the self-centeredness that might have existed before. They have become one family. As a parent organization, RUFORUM through its Secretariat has a task not only of gathering all universities together annually, but it is also passionately endeavouring to empowering them with scholarships, expertise and other required resources to support research activities. Very soon if we walk the talk Africa will be transformed into a self-reliant and self-sufficient continent.

Readers within RUFORUM and beyond are invited to think about what I call “agricultural missiology”, i.e., taking agriculture as the mission of God. We need to accept that it is a noble task. It is meant to glorify God. In whatever form, institutions, faculties and entrepreneurial are engaged to improve and enhance agricultural activities. God should not be left out, but invited to take lead.

University of Livingstonia which introduced its agriculture programmes not long ago is likely to be one of the potential beneficiaries of RUFORUM'S agenda and improve its operations and services in research expertise and its engagement with Malawian communities.

### **About the Author**

*The Very Rev Assoc. Prof. Timothy Kabulunga Nyasulu is the Vice Chancellor of the University of Livingstonia in Malawi. He is the Chairman of Board of Trustees of Theological Society of Malawi. Previously, he has served as the Moderator of the CCAP General Assembly (Livingstonia, Blantyre, Nkhoma, Harare and Zambia Synods) for seven years. He has served in both rural and urban congregations within the CCAP Synod of Livingstonia, and he understands the effects of poverty due to poor methods of agriculture. He has headed synod departments as the Executive Director including the Lay Training Centre and Education Departments. He was the first Regional Coordinator of Theological Education by Extension in Malawi (North). He had taught for many years and held positions in institutions of higher learning. He has served in many governments and non-governments boards of directors.*

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