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OF AGRICULTURE & NATURAL
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Newsletter

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Top News

LUANAR and NBS Bank Launch \$330,000 Spark Start-Up Fund for Agripreneurs

The Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR), in partnership with AGRA and NBS Bank Plc, has launched the Spark Start-Up Fund—a new loan facility designed to help graduates transform their research-based ideas into viable agribusiness ventures.

Unveiled Tuesday evening at the Bingu International Convention Centre in Lilongwe, the initiative is being rolled out under LUANAR's Africa Centre of Excellence in Transformative Agricultural Commercialisation and Entrepreneurship (TACE). The fund is part of a broader effort to tackle unemployment among Malawi's youth and women through innovation and enterprise.

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Editors Note

Welcome to the June 2025 edition of the LUANAR Newsletter.

This issue captures a dynamic season of growth, partnership, and purpose-driven innovation at LUANAR. From championing people-centred research at the 2025 Alliance for African Partnership (AAP) Consortium Meeting, to empowering smallholder farmers through sustainable agriculture initiatives, the stories in this edition reflect LUANAR's unwavering commitment to inclusive development and impact-oriented scholarship.

We spotlight how strategic collaborations with institutions such as Michigan State University, AGRA, NBS Bank, DSIK, and the Inter-University Council for East Africa are enabling our students, researchers, and entrepreneurs to thrive. These partnerships are not only bridging the gap between research and real-world challenges but also equipping youth and women with the tools to lead in agribusiness, finance, and environmental sustainability.

You will read about transformative programmes such as the Spark Start-Up Fund, LUANAR's leadership in tackling plastic pollution, capacity-building

efforts in science communication, and innovative support for fish farmers. We also celebrate the inspiring story of Mayi Jeremiah, a local farmer whose resilience and collaboration with LUANAR's Seed Systems Project are reviving indigenous crops and food heritage.

The activities shared in this issue are more than updates, they are affirmations of LUANAR's strategic direction to be a university that not only generates knowledge but also catalyzes solutions that matter.

We hope this edition informs, inspires, and reminds you of the power of academic institutions to drive change from the ground up.



Editorial Team

EDITOR:

Patricia Ngwale

LAYOUT & DESIGN

Precious Maunde

REPORTERS

- Kondwani Kapaula
- Isaac Songola
- Tawonga Msowoya
- Faith Ndunya
- Preston Mkupu
- Mark Malata
- Taim Jimmy
- Keneth Luciano

Universities Urged to Prioritise People-Centred Research

Written by Isaac Songola



LUANAR Vice Chancellor, Prof. Kaunda speaking at the event

Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR) Vice-Chancellor, Professor Emmanuel Kaunda, has called on universities in Africa to focus on research and innovation that directly addresses the needs of ordinary people. Professor Kaunda made the remarks on 9th June 2025 at Bunda Campus in Lilongwe during the official opening of the 2025 Alliance for African Partnership (AAP) Consortium Meeting,

jointly hosted by AAP, LUANAR and Michigan State University (MSU), USA.

The three-day meeting, which brought together academic leaders, researchers, and policymakers from across Africa and the United States, aimed to strengthen partnerships in research, education, and innovation.

"We must move beyond research that stays on

shelves or in laboratories," Professor Kaunda said. "If Malawi and Africa are to transform, our knowledge must be relevant and serve communities. Innovation must begin with the real challenges people face."

He further emphasised the importance of collaboration over competition, noting that

Africa's future depends on shared efforts to solve pressing development issues.

Michigan State University's Vice-Provost for International Studies and Programmes, Dr. Titus Awokuse, noted that AAP was established to build capacity in African universities but has since expanded to support research in areas such as food systems and farmer productivity.

Also speaking at the event, University of Botswana Vice-Chancellor, Professor David Norris, expressed concern that most research conducted on the continent does not reach end users. "Sixty per cent of research findings never reach farmers," he

said. "That's a serious loss of valuable knowledge and resources."

Principal Secretary in the Ministry of Higher Education, Dr Levis Eneya, described the meeting as a vital platform for aligning academic work with national and continental development goals. "Development without research is development without direction," he warned.

Running from 8th to 11th June 2025, the AAP Consortium Meeting was expected to set a renewed strategic direction for African-led research, with a focus on relevance, sustainability, and measurable impact.

"If Malawi and Africa are to transform, our knowledge must be relevant and serve communities. Innovation must begin with the real challenges people face."

Professor Emmanuel Kaunda
LUANAR VICE CHANCELLOR

Malawi's ACEs Build Communication Capacity at Regional Workshop in Kenya

Written by Mark Malata

Staff members from three Malawi-based Africa Centres of Excellence attended a regional communication training workshop from 2nd to 6th June 2025 at the Sarova Stanley Hotel in Nairobi, Kenya. The workshop was organized by the Regional Facilitation Unit of the Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA) and brought together communications focal points from various World Bank-funded ACEs across Eastern and Southern Africa.

Participants from Malawi included Dr Frank Tchuwa, Mr Mark Malata, and Mr Daniso Mkweu from the Africa Centre of Excellence in Agricultural Policy Analysis (APA); Dr Grivin Chipula, Dr Felix Maulidi, and Mr Precious Maunde from the Africa Centre of Excellence in Transformative Agriculture Commercialisation (TACE); and Mr. Kondwani Kapaula from the Africa Centre of Excellence in Aquaculture and Fisheries Science (AquaFish).

The training focused on strengthening institutional communication strategies,

reviewing the progress of each centre's outreach efforts, and refining approaches to highlight national-level achievements during the final six months of the ACE Impact project. Participants also learnt how to create compelling, media-ready stories that reflect the impact of their research and innovation efforts.

"This workshop is timely and relevant as we prepare to showcase our results to both national stakeholders and international partners," said Dr. Grivin Chipula of TACE. "We're gaining new insights on how to position our

research work in a way that resonates beyond academia."

Dr. Frank Tchuwa of APA emphasized the importance of media engagement, saying, "Effective communication is no longer optional. Our ability to influence policy and development outcomes depends on how well we share our results with the public and decision-makers."

The ACEs hosted in Malawi APA, TACE, and AquaFish are all part of the World Bank-funded Africa Higher Education Centres of Excellence project, implemented through the Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR). Through initiatives like this workshop, the centres aim to improve visibility, impact, and partnerships across the region.



Participants of the communications training poses for a group photo in Nairobi, Kenya

LUANAR Proudly Participates in the Beyond Lending Product Development and Marketing Masterclass

As part of our ongoing partnership with the Malawi Microfinance Network (MAMN) and the German Sparkassenstiftung for International Cooperation (DSIK), the Department of Agribusiness Management (ABM) at LUANAR was honoured to take part in the Product Development and Marketing Masterclass held at Victoria Hotel in Blantyre.

Speaking during the opening of the two-day event, Dr. Felix Maulidi, Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Development Studies,

emphasized the importance of conducting ethnographic research within microfinance institutions (MFIs). He noted that by deeply understanding clients' lived realities, MFIs can design financial products that are not only relevant but also responsive to the real needs of their target communities.

This training highlights LUANAR's commitment to strengthening Malawi's microfinance sector through evidence-based, client-centred innovation.



Participants pose for a group photo during the event

LUANAR and NBS Bank Launch \$330,000 Spark Start-Up Fund for Agripreneurs

Written by Isaac Songola



LUANAR Vice Chancellor (L) Prof. Emmanuel Kaunda and Chief Executive Officer NICO Holdings Ltd Mr Vizenge Kumwenda (R) poses for a photo while holding the MoU.

The Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR), in partnership with AGRA and NBS Bank Plc, has launched the Spark Start-Up Fund a new loan facility designed to help graduates transform their research-based ideas into viable agribusiness ventures.

Unveiled on 10th June 2025 at the Bingu International Convention Centre in Lilongwe, the initiative is being rolled out under LUANAR's Africa Centre of Excellence in Transformative Agricultural Commercialisation and Entrepreneurship (TACE). The fund is part of a broader effort to tackle

unemployment among Malawi's youth and women through innovation and enterprise.

The Spark Start-Up Fund is being supported by AGRA through the Mastercard Foundation-funded Youth Entrepreneurs and Fisherfolk Empowerment for Food Security in Africa (YEFFA) program, which

has contributed 90 per cent of the funding, with the remaining 10 per cent coming from NBS Bank Plc.

Speaking during the launch, Dr Felix Maulidi, Monitoring and Evaluation Coordinator at TACE, said the initiative is meant to ensure that LUANAR graduates leave the university equipped to create their employment.

He explained that many young graduates struggle to access capital because financial institutions often view them as a high-risk group. "We want as many of our graduates as possible to start their businesses when they leave the university," he said. "This fund gives them that opportunity and support."

Dr Maulidi added that the pilot phase will support 50 graduates from LUANAR's incubation hub, with plans to reach up to 300 in future stages. He also emphasized the importance of collaboration between universities and the

private sector, saying LUANAR is working closely with industry to find practical solutions to real-world challenges, including youth unemployment.

Representing NBS Bank Plc, Chief Wholesale Banking Officer Alfred Nhlema described the launch as a landmark moment. He said the partnership emerged after eight months of discussions with LUANAR, AGRA, and the National Youth Council of Malawi, focused on supporting young people and women through job creation. "Many graduates leave college with innovative ideas but lack the financial support and training to turn those ideas into businesses," Nhlema said.

He explained that the Spark Start-Up Fund is

different from typical loan programs because it includes a strong incubation component. Beneficiaries will receive training in business management, credit handling, and enterprise development before receiving funds. "We are not just financing ideas, we are building future business leaders," he said.

The fund does not have a fixed loan limit. Instead, funding will be tailored to the needs and potential of each business idea. LUANAR is currently in the process of identifying the first cohort of graduates to benefit from the program.

"We want as many of our graduates as possible to start their businesses when they leave the university"

Dr. Felix Maulidi
M & E COORDINATOR

Military Students from Ghana National Defense College Visit LUANAR Bunda Campus for Insightful Study Tour

Written by Preston Mkupu

A delegation of military students from the Ghana National Defense College recently embarked on an educational visit to the Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR) Bunda Campus, marking a significant collaboration between the two

institutions and further strengthening Malawi-Ghana academic linkages.

Hosted by the Malawi Defense Force, one of LUANAR's longstanding partners, the visit took place on June 25, 2025, as part of a wider study tour focused on exploring

"Linkages Between SMART Governance and Sustainable Development in Malawi." The delegation's presence at LUANAR underscores the university's growing reputation as a hub for sustainable agriculture and natural resource management.

The student delegation, led by Air Commodore Odoi-Wellington (the equivalent of a Brigadier General), expressed keen interest in LUANAR's contributions to natural resource management and sustainable agricultural development. In an interview, Colonel



LUANAR senior officials commemorative photo with the visiting delegation

Chimbayo of the Malawi Defense Force, who accompanied the delegation highlighted that selecting LUANAR was intentional, due to its expertise in Natural resource Management and Sustainable Development aligned with the delegation's mission.

They further expressed enthusiasm about collaborations, emphasizing past successful staff exchanges and workshops with Ghanaian universities, and proposing potential partnerships with the Ghana National Defense College.

LUANAR's leadership represented by the University Registrar, Dr Phillip Kaonda welcomed the opportunity for enhanced cooperation, emphasizing the university's commitment to fostering international exchange, research, and

sustainable development initiatives across the region.

Apart from the meeting, the delegation toured LUANAR's key facilities, including Bunda Farm and Fish Farm, with detailed briefings on research and innovation efforts aimed at advancing sustainable development and contributing to smart governance initiatives.



LUANAR student explaining about fuel production from plastics to Hon. Chomanika

LUANAR Showcases Innovation in Combating Plastic Pollution

Written by Isaac Songola

The Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR) demonstrated its commitment to environmental sustainability during the commemoration of the International Day for Biodiversity and World Environment Day, held at Chingoli Primary School near Chia Lagoon in Nkhosha.

LUANAR participated through the Department of Environmental Sciences and Natural Resources at Bunda College. During the event, the university showcased its cutting-edge research and innovative solutions to tackle plastic pollution, among them, a project that converts plastic waste into fuel.

The university's display attracted significant attention, including from the Minister of Natural Resources and Climate Change, Hon. Dr Owen Chomanika MP, who was visibly impressed with LUANAR's contributions to environmental protection.

"I am truly impressed by what LUANAR is doing in turning plastic waste into fuel. This is the kind of homegrown innovation we need to support as the country," said Chomanika after visiting LUANAR's pavilion.

Dr Wilfred Kadewa, Director General of the Malawi Environment Protection Authority (MEPA), also praised LUANAR's efforts and pledged institutional support.

"These locally-developed innovations, like what LUANAR has showcased, have great potential to be scaled up and even reach international markets. MEPA is ready to support such projects," Kadewa said.

The event was held under the theme "Stop Plastic Pollution" and also spotlighted community-led conservation efforts, including a youth group involved in recycling plastic waste. The Chia Lagoon community was commended for its work in conserving bird species,

which has enhanced the area's ecological value and tourism potential.

"The conservation of such species is crucial," added Hon. Chomanika, referring to the efforts around Chia Lagoon. "It plays a vital role in preserving our national heritage and boosting tourism."

Participants also took a boat tour of the nearby Luwi Sanctuary, where they observed the recovery of bird species that had previously been in decline due to environmental degradation.

This year, Malawi

combined World Environment Day and the International Day for Biodiversity to raise awareness of plastic pollution and biodiversity loss, bringing together government, academia, and communities for collective action.

LUANAR Partners with LIBIC to Empower Farmers on Cost-Effective Chicken Feed Production

Written by Taim Jimmy & Keneth Luciano

About 30 livestock farmers from Nkwinda EPA in T/A Chiseka in Lilongwe district will no longer worry about expensive chicken feed following an initiative from Livestock Innovations and Business Innovation Centre – LIBIC in conjunction with the Lilongwe University Natural Resources LUANAR which aims to train broilers farmers in chicken feed production.

Chief Executive Officer for LIBIC Alfred Gadama said the project seeks to solve some of the main challenges that livestock farmers are facing including high costs of broiler feed and lack of high-value markets which have driven many farmers out of business.

Speaking during one of the trainings at LUANAR campus, Gadama said targeted farmers will also gain knowledge in modern chicken rearing, chicken feed production and livestock management. "For the next 6 months, we will be working with chicken broiler farmers

from around Bunda area on how they can make their chicken feed. We will share the formulas and ensure that they master the processes so that they reduce costs when it comes to accessing chicken feed," said Gadama.

Edwin Action, one of the farmers from Thiwi village, says he can not wait to master the trade of making chicken feed considering the current market prices which

are too high for chicken farmers from rural areas. "I am excited to be part of this training. As farmers, we struggle to raise resources for chicken feed but in the near future I am assured that I will be processing healthy feed from my backyard," he explained.

LIBIC was started in 2020, founded by a team of animal science graduates from LUANAR.



Some participants at the training session

Bunda Campus Steps Up Environmental Stewardship on Plastic Pollution

Written by Taonga Msowoya

In a bold move to combat environmental pollution, the Department of Environment and Natural Resource Management (ENRM) at LUANAR on 14th June 2025 organized a campus-wide plastic clearing day, reaffirming its commitment to sustainability and environmental stewardship. The event drew participation from both staff and students who worked together to collect plastic waste, scrap metals, and other pollutants scattered across Bunda Campus.

Speaking during the official opening of the event, the Head of the ENRM Department, Mr Chrispin Kambani-Banda, commended the Government of Malawi for taking a strong stance against plastic pollution through the ban on thin plastics. He further called on manufacturers to halt the production of such plastics and instead invest in sustainable alternatives that are less harmful to the environment.

"Each one of us has a role to play," he said. "From institutional policies

to individual choices, we must all rise to the challenge of creating a sustainable environment."

In a landmark announcement, the department declared it had ceased the use of plastic-bottled water in all its official activities, adopting more eco-friendly alternatives as part of efforts to reduce its plastic footprint. The Head of Department also urged the University management to emulate this example by implementing concrete interventions to address plastic pollution on campus.

The cleaning exercise was led by Dr. Josephine Zimba Chirwa, a lecturer in the ENRM Department, renowned for her passionate advocacy for sustainable environmental practices. In her closing remarks, Dr. Chirwa applauded the students for their active participation and encouraged them to be ambassadors of the 'No Plastic Use' campaign at LUANAR.

Let's all join hands and make LUANAR a plastic-free zone



The head of the Department, Dr. Chrispine Kambani-Banda speaking during the opening of the exercise

Sustainable Fingerling Breeding Project Supports Fish Farmers in Kasungu and Mchinji

Written by Kondwani Kapaula



A fish farmer from Lisasadzi EPA receiving fish feed

The Sustainable Fingerling Breeding Model for Smallholder Fish Farmers Project, under the Sustainable Food Systems in Malawi initiative, conducted a field visit from 23 to 26 June 2025 in Kasungu and Mchinji to distribute feed and monitor the progress of the project's implementation.

During the visit, the project team delivered

grower feed to selected smallholder fish breeders to support the growth and development of broodstock and fingerlings. The team also held follow-up meetings with the farmers to assess the status of breeding ponds, fingerling production, and the overall management of hatchery systems.

The project aims to increase the availability

of quality fingerlings among rural farmers by developing a sustainable all-male fingerling production model. This model is expected to improve productivity and income for smallholder farmers by ensuring access to fast-growing and uniform fingerlings.



One of the Incubates pitching her business

TACE Incubates Pitch for Investment as LUANAR, DSIK Strengthen Strategic Collaboration

Written by Kondwani Kapaula

The Centre of Excellence in Transformative Agriculture Commercialisation (TACE), in partnership with the German Sparkassenstiftung for International Cooperation (DSIK) Southern Africa, hosted a pitching event at the Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR) on 24 June 2024.

Held at LUANAR's Bunda Campus, the event brought together students, government

officials, financial sector stakeholders, and development experts to witness innovations from TACE incubates. Speaking at the event, Dr Grivin Chipula, Deputy Director of TACE, described DSIK as a strategic partner whose support has enabled the centre to deliver tailored training, mentorship, coaching, and financial literacy programmes targeting youth and women in agribusiness.

"Our partnership with DSIK is already having a significant impact. Through business games, financial training, and other capacity-building initiatives, we are equipping a new generation of entrepreneurs with the tools they need to thrive," said Dr Chipula. TACE, which positions itself as a leading entrepreneurship and commercialisation hub in Malawi, has been

instrumental in providing practical skills and real-world business exposure to students and startups, especially in agriculture-based ventures. Representing DSIK, Managing Director Mr Niclaus Bergmann reflected on the organisation's longstanding collaboration with LUANAR, which began in 2019.

"Academic institutions like LUANAR play a crucial role in shaping the future of a country's economic and financial systems. Our cooperation with LUANAR in financial education, entrepreneurship, and innovation directly supports Malawi's broader goal of building an inclusive, sustainable economy," said Mr Bergmann.

He emphasised that a strong financial sector

requires more than just policies and regulations. It hinges on high-quality human capital.

"The real capital of any financial institution is not just money, but the quality of its staff. That's why we focus so much on capacity development."

Mr Bergmann also applauded LUANAR's role in fostering an environment where students gain both academic knowledge and practical financial skills.

"We aim to bridge the gap between innovation and investment readiness through incubator programmes like TACE, ensuring that youth and women-led enterprises are well-positioned to access finance and grow."

Also in attendance were officials from the Reserve Bank of Malawi, the Malawi Microfinance

Network, and the German Embassy. Alongside business pitches, the programme featured a Stock Exchange Simulation and a presentation by the Reserve Bank of Malawi on the Malawi Stock Market, aimed at strengthening financial literacy and investment readiness among young entrepreneurs.

Feature

Preserving Heritage, Embracing Innovation: The Story of Mayi Jeremiah and the Revival of Bambara Nut and Finger Millet in Kampanje 2

Feature by Faith Ndunya

In the quiet village of Kampanje 2 in Ntcheu District, under the Kandeu EPA, lives Mayi Jeremiah, a seasoned farmer born in 1950, with three children and four grandchildren. Her journey in farming dates back to 1971, when she began cultivating

finger millet and Bambara nut, crops that have since become part of her family legacy.

Mayi Jeremiah's love for farming was inherited from her parents, particularly her mother, who passed

the soil. Post-harvest, she would dry the crop under the sun and store the best seeds in clay pots, a method that preserved them from pests like mice and diseases.

The remaining harvest was kept in sacks for consumption or sale. "For seed selection, I always chose the biggest and healthiest nuts to store in the clay pot," she explains.

Despite her dedication, farming Bambara nut came with many challenges. She recalls battling crop diseases like Leaf bright (Getsi as is known in the vernacular), which they managed using ash, a natural traditional remedy. Yet, perhaps more daunting were the cultural misconceptions surrounding the crop.

Some believed Bambara nut was only for traditional healers, while others claimed it was harmful to children or cursed for mothers who hadn't lost a child. "These beliefs caused many to abandon the crop altogether," Mayi Jeremiah says. "But I held on because I learned its value from my parents and never stopped farming it."



Mayi Jeremiah shares her journey of preserving and reviving neglected and underutilized crops at her home in Kampanje 2.

down the Bambara nut seed, a neglected and underutilized crop known for its resilience and nutritional value.

She remembers how she was taught to farm the Bambara nut using traditional methods: tilling the land without ridges and planting directly into

Everything began to change with the arrival of the Seed Systems Project. The initiative introduced modern farming techniques such as ridge-making, proper crop spacing, and access to agricultural medicine. It also provided education to dispel harmful myths about Bambara nut and finger millet, helping the community understand their nutritional and economic value.

"Now, we understand the truth," says Mayi Jeremiah.

"We know these crops are not only for consumption but can also generate income. People are beginning to respect them again."

Before the project, she only knew one variety of Bambara nuts. Today, thanks to the support from the Seed Systems Project, her community has access to multiple improved Bambara nut varieties and the knowledge to identify which ones thrive best in their local environment.

Mayi Jeremiah's story is one of resilience, tradition, and transformation. Through her enduring commitment and the support of research and extension systems like LUANAR's Seed Systems Project which is funded by the McKnight Foundation, a once-endangered crop is finding its place again in the fields and hearts of farmers in Ntcheu.



Her thriving Bambara nut field



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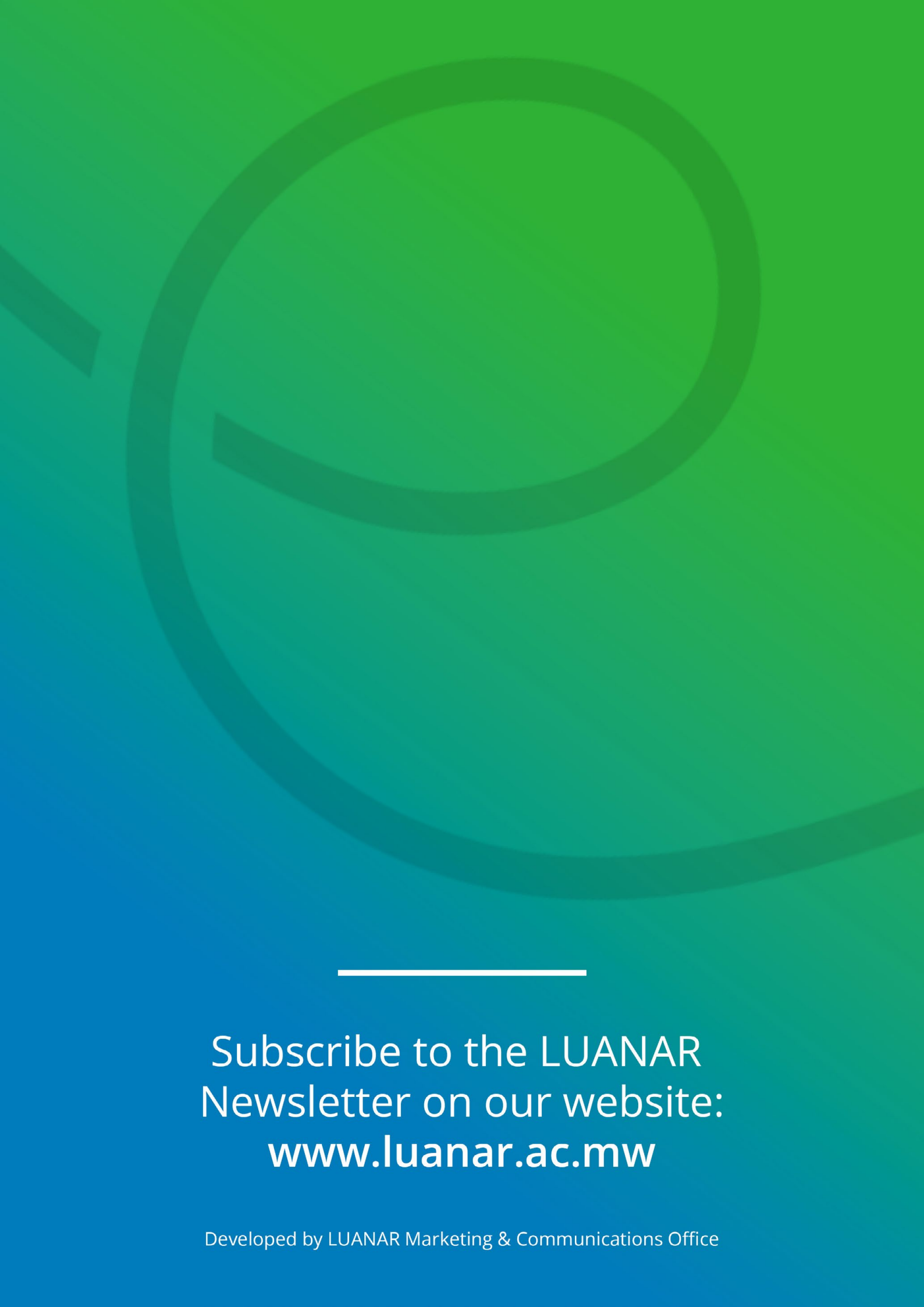


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