

Human and Institutional Capacity Development Through Higher Education Partnerships

Over the last several years, USAID has been expanding its engagement with U.S. higher education, particularly by harnessing the research capacities of U.S. universities to address global development problems. Examples of this include the new Global Development Lab, the new Feed the Future Innovation labs, and the Higher Education Solutions Network. APLU strongly supports USAID's renewed enthusiasm for utilizing scientific research to inform USAID investment decisions and improve outcomes in global food security, global health and other strategic priorities.

APLU also urges USAID to increase investment in building the strength of higher education institutions in developing countries to train a skilled workforce and enable countries to adopt, adapt and develop new innovations. While the United States has much to offer in terms of knowledge and innovations to help solve challenging development problems, without a local cadre of skilled individuals in developing countries to make use of knowledge and innovations, Western technology and knowledge will not have the development impact we might hope. It has been shown that it takes about the same development of economic and technical skills to become an efficient borrower of technology as it does to develop new technology.¹ Too often, donor-funded development projects are stymied because the local capacity to implement or sustain activities is inadequate. Investment in higher education in developing countries helps strengthen development efforts across all sectors – in infrastructure, public health, food security, etc.

Through partnerships between U.S. and developing nation higher education institutions, USAID programs should focus on improving the quality of teaching and curriculum, expanding access to higher education, and improving the research and public outreach capabilities of developing country universities. To achieve these goals, partnerships must address the challenges that developing country universities have in sustaining financing for their operations and managing their budgets effectively.

Examples of successful human and institutional capacity building partnerships:

- The partnership between the Ohio State University and Sokoine University of Agriculture in Tanzania is focused on strengthening the training and research capacities of Sokoine with the goal of improving food security and agricultural productivity in Tanzania. This five year project will result in a comprehensive performance improvement assessment of Sokoine and more than 130 individuals receiving masters, PhDs, and leadership training. These individuals will go on to careers in government, working on public policy, and in the university to train future generations of Tanzanians in a broad range of agricultural sciences.
- The partnership between the University of Connecticut and Addis Ababa University: In Ethiopia, the absence of expertise in water resource management traps the country in food insecurity, poor health conditions, low energy production, and recurrent droughts. The partnership has established an Institute of Water Resources at Addis Ababa University to coordinate education, research, and community service and strengthen connections to national and local policymakers. The Institute of Water Resources is developing water resource post-graduate programs that will train professionals and policymakers who will make a difference for generations.

These two partnerships are examples of how individual training investments are part of a strategy to strengthen vital higher education institutions in Ethiopia and Tanzania. Improving the quality of these institutions will have multiplier effects for generations. USAID should make similar investments throughout the developing world.

¹ Evenson, R.E. (1977). "Cycles in Research Productivity in Sugarcane, Wheat and Rice," cited in Eicher, C. K. (2009). Building African Scientific Capacity in Food and Agriculture. Review of Business and Economics. Vol LIV.3 July-September 2009: 238-257.