


Africa Science News Service

Three African sciences, technology networks awarded US\$0.8m grant by US institutions 

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A new initiative to build scientific capacity in Africa has named its first three research and training networks following a competitive selection process.

The Regional Initiative in Science and Education, RISE Monday announced that grants each worth USD800, 000 over 2.5 years will be awarded to three research networks designed to strengthen science teaching in sub-Saharan African universities.

The three networks selected are the African Materials Science and Engineering Network (AMSEN), led by Lesley Cornish of the University of Witwatersrand in South Africa.

The network will focus on improving education in materials science to make fuller use of Africa's vast mineral deposits. It will be participated by universities from Kenya, Botswana, Namibia and Nigeria.

The second network selected was the Southern African Biochemistry and Informatics for Natural Products (SABINA) which aims to improve food security, public health and exports by taking advantage of Africa's natural biodiversity through advances in natural products science.

Based at the University of Malawi, the network will also include universities from South Africa, Namibia and Tanzania and is led by John Saka. The Western Indian Ocean Regional Initiative in Marine Science and Education (WIORISE), led by Alfonse Dubi, was the third network to have been selected.

It aims to use research and training to promote the sustainable development, utilization and protection of the coastal and marine environment. It will partner with universities in Mozambique and South Africa.



According to Dr Thomas Egwang (*see photo*), the executive director of the Nairobi-based African Academy of Sciences (AAS), “the RISE initiative is a welcome shot in the arm for science and technology training in African universities. The timing is really spot on at this time when the continent has to adapt to a dynamic and rapidly changing world. The best coping mechanism is well trained human capital”.

The competition was open to proposals in any area of basic or applied sciences and engineering with exception of agriculture and health sciences, which are already relatively

well funded through existing programmes.

The three awardees were selected from among 48 proposals involving 29 countries by a blue ribbon panel of international scientists. Proposals were evaluated based on scientific merit, training capacity, research activities, evidence of institutional support, added value of the network structure and potential for sustainability, including strategies for retaining faculty.

The establishment of regional scientific research centers is in direct response to demands within Africa for more and better university-based instructors”, said Vartan Gregorian, president of Carnegie Corporation. “It is these types of investments that will facilitate Africa’s accelerated development and greater and more meaningful participation in global knowledge flows”, he added.

On his part, Phillip Griffiths, President of Science Initiative Group, SIG, said the RiSE approach will help fortify and consolidate the community of researchers. He said by establishing knowledge networks in select fields of science, RISE will help combat the isolation that so often plagues researchers in Africa.

RISE which aims to strengthen higher education in the sciences and engineering by increasing the population of skilled PhD and MSc scientists and engineers teaching in Africa’s universities is supported by a total of USD3.3 million grant from Carnegie Corporation of New York to the Princeton, New Jersey-based Science Initiative Group (SIG) at the Institute for Advanced Study (IAS).