

Africa-U.S. Higher Education Initiative

Presentation for the RISE Inaugural Meeting

October 6-7 2008

Good afternoon everyone. We regret no one from our team is able to be with you at this inaugural meeting of the RISE networks. No doubt, we are missing some very interesting and informative discussions. We look forward to hearing about the outcomes of the meeting from Arlen and Lori when they return from Nairobi.

Congratulations to all of you for the remarkable and valuable programs of work you have received funding for. We wish you the best as you now begin to implement your plans.

Arlen asked for me to provide for your meeting a brief presentation on the Africa-U.S. Higher Education Initiative that has been developing for about one year now. Hopefully I (the author of this script) can convey at least some of the energy behind this project through this presentation...

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Before we get to the details of the project, I wanted to give you a quick overview of how it all began.

The Initiative originated from discussions between the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA), the Partnership to Cut Hunger and Poverty in Africa (a US-based organization) and the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges or NASULGC (also US-based) in December 2006.

The two US organizations were then invited to FARA's Annual General Assembly in June 2007 where they held a meeting with a number of African university leaders to discuss the needs and challenges of higher education in Africa and how U.S. and African institutions could work together to address some of the challenges. Shortly afterwards, a broader consultative meeting was held in Washington, D.C. between representatives of NASULGC, FARA, the Partnership, RUFORUM and several other US organizations. At this meeting the Initiative was launched under the leadership of NASULGC.

Over the past year – our first year – we have devoted considerable time and effort to consultations and research. The slide you are looking at provides an overview of the major research and consultative activities we have done to date.

- The formation of an advisory committee
- Consultations with a number of African ambassadors in Washington DC

- An extensive review of the literature on African higher education and capacity building partnerships.
- A number of phone interviews with African vice chancellors
- A consultative workshop with 40 African vice chancellors and about 35 US university leaders
- Peter McPherson, Julie Howard and Tag Demment, members of the team have also consulted with a number of people on various trips to Africa over the past year.

Our most broad-reaching consultation is going on right now though...

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From September 24 to October 29 we are conducting a 5-week electronic consultation. This is being moderated by Prof. Olusola Oyewole of the Association of African Universities and myself, Anne-Claire Hervy, and is taking place on the website you see noted on the slide. www.africa-initiative.org.

We encourage all of you to participate in this consultation if you have not already joined the discussion which began just a little over a week ago. I'll get back to this at the end of the presentation so that you first have more of the context to know what the consultation is about.

CLICK to bring additional text up.

We are also participating in USAID's Summit on Higher Education in Kigali, Rwanda from October 21-24, as USAID is one of our funders.

And finally, we had plans to hold a major consultation during the pre-conference sessions of the upcoming Ministerial Meeting on Higher Education being organized by COMESA and NEPAD but learned just a few weeks ago that the meeting is being postponed to February 2009. As a result, the e-consultation is taking on a much larger role.

Now -- what are all these consultations for?

Let me turn now to an overview of the Initiative's goals, objectives and program of work.

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The mission of the Initiative is to enhance and empower higher education institutions in Africa and the U.S. to contribute more effectively to African development and transformation.

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The Initiative is working to support the development of institutions of higher education in Africa that:

- Can better meet Africa's human resources needs

- Contribute to the development of relevant knowledge and technology
- Provide opportunities for historically disadvantaged populations – particularly women
- And become more fully engaged in Africa’s economic, social and political development.

On the US side, the Initiative envisions institutions that are more deeply engaged in and knowledgeable about Africa, with strong relationships, involving both students and faculty, with African institutions of higher education.

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In terms of a program of work, the Initiative has been working towards the development of a *long-term* well-funded competitive grants program that would provide resources for capacity building partnerships between US and African institutions.

In support of this grants program, the Initiative has also been developing plans for an interactive web portal that would allow institutions to share information and learn from each other’s capacity building experiences, collaborate on advocacy and lastly – provide a platform for the grant application process.

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Let me now go over some of the core principles that underpin this effort and that we will expect to see in partnership proposals.

The first is: Collaboration, shared ownership and partnership. What we mean here is that:

- First - All partners in the relationship need to be committed to learning and changing. We will be looking for proposals that demonstrate a commitment to the principle of partnership, not one-way technical assistance relationships.
- 2. Capacity building needs in Africa should be determined by African institutions – US partners can and should be involved in discussing needs and how they can best be met through collaboration, but ultimately it is the African institutions who will decide what capacities they want to develop at their institutions.
- 3. There needs to be a focus on collaboration and exchange between the institutions – not discrete projects at each partner institution.

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The second core principle is a focus on people and organizational structures. The issue here is NOT that we don’t recognize that infrastructure investments are needed – we know there is a great need to expand and maintain the physical capacity of Africa’s institutions of higher education. But in this initiative, the focus is primarily on developing human and organizational capacity.

The initiative WILL allow funds to be used for the purchase of equipment, the development of libraries, etc. because we know you cannot develop human capacity without basic resources, but the Initiative hopes that its funding for human capacity development might leverage investments from other donors and national governments in physical infrastructure.

The Initiative also recognized the importance of information and communications technology for capacity development and has been looking for ways to build on infrastructure investments already being made in ICT.

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A third core principle is a focus on development and problem solving. At all times, we must ask ourselves, capacity building *for what*? In this regard, the Initiative is looking to facilitate the transformation of institutions in Africa so that they are **problem** and **community-oriented**, connected to their societies and capable of meeting their societies' human resource, knowledge and technology needs.

The Initiative plans to do this by asking applicants to frame their proposals around a specific societal problem. The Initiative does not plan to identify a set of priority problems – we will leave that to the institutions to decide.

Please note that a problem-orientation does not need to imply a focus on research – the problem can be, for example, a lack of high quality basic and secondary education teachers, or the need to train more students in watershed management – and therefore a need for more well-trained faculty. These are just examples, of course.

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The fourth core principle is institutional transformation and sustainability.

The Initiative is not just trying to strengthen institutions as they are in Africa, but transform the role they play in their countries and regions.

Institutions will be strongly encouraged to increase their connectedness to public, private and civil society sectors to ensure greater relevance of the institution's teaching and research.

The Initiative believes that the long-term sustainability of its investments will depend on success of this transformation – so that the value of higher education institutions will be recognized and rewarded in the long-term by private and public stakeholders and so that institutions can attract and retain strong faculty into the future.

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The last principle is the need for a *long-term* time frame.

It takes time to develop programs collaboratively. If you want genuine partnership, you need to build in the time for building relationships, developing trust, consulting, planning, communicating ideas, etc.

A long-term *commitment* of funding is key to institutional and human capacity building so that partners are able to plan with a degree of certainty about future funding. At the same time – continued funding must be contingent on performance and the achievement of benchmarks by all partners.

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In close consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, the Initiative has identified six priority fields of focus for the Initiative, listed here. We fully expect that a number of proposals will be interdisciplinary and cross-cutting.

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The Initiative has also identified seven capacity building priorities that it aims to support through the grants program. Again, these have been determined in consultation with stakeholders.

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Finally, on to the more concrete details of how the grants program is envisioned to work.

It will be a two-stage program with consultative planning grants in the first phase. These will be small, short-term grants that will allow partners to assess one another's needs, determine a long-term program of collaborative work, and build the relationships and management structures necessary to carry out the long-term program. We see this first phase as very important to the success of the long-term effort.

In the second phase, we envision substantial funding for a period of 10-15 years to carry out the program of work determined during the planning phase.

In terms of eligibility, partnership proposals must include an accredited higher education institution and an accredited *or* recognized African higher education institution. Additional partners can include university networks or consortia, research institutions, NGOs, regional organizations, international, national and local government bodies, private sector firms, etc.

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In terms of funding, the Initiative has received a small grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to develop the grant making framework and has also received \$1 million from USAID for the first twenty planning grants of the Initiative. The RFA for these planning grants is due to be released mid November.

As of yet, the Initiative has not obtained any long-term funding for the program but is working diligently to do so through advocacy efforts in Congress, with foundations, multilateral donors like the World Bank and the private sector.

Just a few months ago, the Initiative played a key role in amending the recent PEPFAR legislation which calls for 140,000 new healthcare workers to be trained. The amendment calls specifically for African higher education institutions to play a role in meeting this need. <<IF NEEDED: PEPFAR IS THE PRESIDENT’S INITIATIVE TO COMBAT HIV/AIDS, TUBERCULOSIS, AND MALARIA.>>

There are also other promising pieces of legislation that could lead to significant investments in higher education in Africa. We believe that after years of neglect of higher education, the pendulum is now finally beginning to swing in the other direction.

And foundations, too, are showing greater interest in long-term investments in human and institutional capacity.

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To conclude, I return now to the e-consultation I mentioned earlier. I strongly encourage anyone interested to sign in to the discussion forum and participate. We will be putting out aspects of the RFA framework for comment over the next several weeks, so it is a very good opportunity to influence the upcoming RFA that will be released next month.

I hope you found this presentation helpful. I imagine there might be many questions though so I have included my contact details here – please do not hesitate to contact me.

Also, if you are interested in receiving occasional updates about the Initiative, please send an email to info@africa-initiative.org to have your name added to our email list.

Thank you and again congratulations to you all.