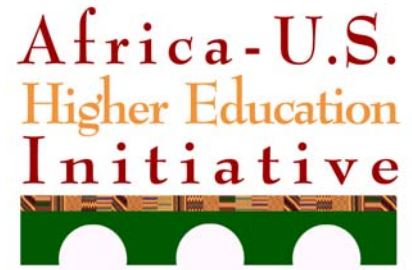


Speech given by Peter McPherson, President of the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) at the Africa-U.S. Higher Education Initiative Partners Conference¹



Accra, Ghana - August 27, 2009

Ladies and gentlemen, this is a large and important meeting. One of the tasks before us is to review the next critical steps for the Initiative. We now have 20 partnerships who have received planning grants and the grantees are all here to discuss progress they are making in developing strategic plans for future partnership activities. I am pleased to have the opportunity to share with you seven central points about the Initiative.

- 1) Let me start with our vision of having underway 30 to 40 partnerships between African and US institutions of higher education in the next five to seven years.
- 2) We expect that the partnerships will remain active for 10 years or more. This long term commitment is required because partnership goals and the work associated with them will require a sustained effort. Of course, long term partnerships can expect to receive continued support only if they make reasonable progress as they go forward.
- 3) Partnerships should be African driven. This is not just a diplomatic statement. Rather, considerable experience has shown that substantive and substantial change usually occurs only when the people and country impacted are in charge of defining goals and determining the efforts needed to achieve them. It has not been easy for donor countries or institutions to act in this manner because all caring people have views. When you have the money, it can be hard to listen and let others drive the process. Of course, U.S. partners should provide their views and assistance on what they believe will work and not work. Nevertheless, the partnerships must be African-driven to be successful. Note that the African institution and the governments of the country in which it is located are likely to be the key parties to an African-driven approach. It is clear that needs and circumstances vary widely and careful attention must be paid to those differences.
- 4) Partnership activities should be focused on building the capacity of African universities, colleges and polytechnics to better contribute to the important goals of their respective nations, be they in agriculture, elementary and secondary education, business, science and technology, health or other areas of development. Educating people is of course important for the people receiving the education. However, it would be a mistake to view higher education as separate from what goes on in other sectors. Rather we should view higher education and human resources as critical instruments to achieve important development objectives, be they in agriculture, health or other key sectors of society.
- 5) Partnerships should be committed to building African higher education institution capacity to:
 - a) Provide quality education to large numbers of students;
 - b) Build technical capacity to solve problems and, as part of solving problems, engage national and/or regional stakeholders in the process. Higher education institutions are unlikely to provide the full range of problem solving capacity required in a given nation. Nonetheless, their contributions should be substantive and they should demonstrate how such problem solving can be done; and
 - c) Build strong administrative and management capacity within African higher education institutions.

¹ APLU is a major US sponsor of the Initiative.

All these areas of work described here may not be undertaken from the very start of a partnership nor will every partnership place equal emphasis on all three. It is understood that some partnerships may involve African institutions that are focused more on teaching than research. For example, teachers colleges and polytechnics may not do substantial research. Partnership activities related to them might be more appropriately focused on helping to build capacity to engage, for example, primary and secondary education systems in nation and/or region. Further, they might also be focused on building administrative and policy capacity.

- 6) A great deal of thought has been given to how the partnership might be organized to do this work.

The U.S. side of the partnership should have the capacity to deal with the full range of issues that I mentioned above over the life of the partnership. This will often mean at least one of the U.S. institutions in the partnership relationship will have had substantial international experience and substantial depth and breadth of capacity. Partnerships will probably frequently have a combination of U.S. partners. They could, for example, include U.S. community colleges, U.S. historically black colleges or universities, or U.S. private colleges. There should not be too many U.S. institutions in a partnership because of the transaction costs associated with collaborating across large numbers of institutions. In any case, there must be a lead U.S. institution with the strength and capacity to provide effective leadership on the U.S. side. No judgment is made as to the type of U.S. institution that would be best suited to provide this leadership.

The African side of the partnership should be led by an institution that has the potential to impact an entire country or even a region by addressing the challenges described previously. Transaction costs should also be a major consideration in determining the number of African institutions in a partnership and how they relate to one another.

- 7) Funding will be required to operationalize a number of the strategic plans that are currently being developed as well as other potential partnership grants.

The FY10 U.S. Senate and House appropriation bills for USAID contain report language directing that some funds be used to support higher education in Africa, and specifically to support Africa-U.S. higher education partnerships. In addition, we realize that we must also seek support from other sources.

In this regard, we have been in contact with PEPFAR, the President's Emergency Plan for Aids Relief, a substantial commitment of U.S. funds to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis in Africa about support for partnerships in the health sector, especially in light of the PEPFAR authorization bill that directs funds be used to train over 140,000 health care workers worldwide. It will be important for individual health sector partnerships to follow up with PEPFAR, especially with PEPFAR missions in Africa.

We have also been in touch with potential multilateral bank funding sources from the beginning of the Initiative. The World Bank has recently increased its support to higher education in Africa. It will be important to ascertain how World Bank efforts can complement partnership activities over time. In addition, the African Development Bank is clearly an important investor in higher education on the continent and efforts to build upon their investments will also be critical.

All partnerships will need to seek support from private sector entities, foundations and other sources within and outside of the African nations in which they are working.

This is where we are at this time. All of you as well as those of us associated with the partnerships in Washington, D.C. continue to work hard and learn. We deeply appreciate all that you have put into these planning grants. I close by stating that I firmly believe that a decade from now we will look back and be proud of what we have done.

Thank you for your time and attention.