

What is missing in the United States' long-term plan to end dependence on foreign aid?

Substantial U.S. investment and engagement with higher education in developing countries

U.S. institutions of higher education have acted as engines of social mobility, innovation, and economic growth in the United States, building one of the world's most dynamic economies and a vibrant middle class. If partnered with developing-nation colleges and universities, together they can strengthen these institutions, while establishing critical diplomatic, economic, and political ties with the United States.

U.S. universities bring unparalleled resources of science, technology, thought leadership, and innovation to developing countries. With targeted investments, U.S. universities can help developing countries reduce poverty, alleviate hunger, grow economies and develop innovative solutions to the world's most challenging development problems. And they can do this by improving those countries' colleges and universities.

Why Invest in Higher Education for Development?

For decades the U.S. has invested significantly in basic and secondary education while mostly neglecting higher education. As a result, today most colleges and universities in developing nations lack the fundamental educational and research capacities to help these nations succeed on their own. If we want greater returns from our international development investments, the United States must prioritize investment in higher education.

- ***No country can grow without educated leaders, scientists, entrepreneurs, doctors, teachers, nurses, engineers, and other high-skilled drivers of economic growth.*** Countries without home-grown experts and leaders will forever be dependent on foreign aid. No country can develop these human resources without effective institutions of higher education.
- ***The returns from higher education are substantial.*** Contrary to prevailing thought, the poorer the region the greater the return on investment from higher education.¹ In fact, the poorest world region, Sub-Saharan Africa, shows the highest rates of return from investments in higher education at 21.9%. This rate of return is nearly double that for primary and secondary education in the region, and nearly double the return on higher education for high income economies at 11%. Additional studies show not only increased earnings by the individual as income, but improvement in health, greater education level attainment of children, stronger civic institutions, and democratic values.²

¹ Montenegro, C. E. & Patrinos, H.A. (2013). Returns to schooling around the world. Background paper for the World Development Report 2013.

² McMahon, W. (2009). The Private and Social Benefits of Higher Education: Higher Learning, Greater Good. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

- **Higher education is key to quality primary and secondary education.** Our investments in basic and secondary education have not led to anticipated learning outcomes. This is in large part because of the poor quality of the education and training of teachers. Higher education is critical to solving this challenge by creating well-qualified and professionally trained teachers for basic and secondary education.
- **Higher education leads to lower levels of conflict.** Higher education systems that are accessible and align with local labor market needs have a pacifying effect, often leading to democratization.³

What does the United States Gain from Investing in Higher Education Development?

- **Investments that build higher education capacity are critical to the effectiveness and sustainability of our development assistance.** One of the reasons development projects often don't succeed or aren't sustained after funding ends is that there aren't enough skilled and educated people in the host country to lead and manage them. U.S. development assistance will go further when we engage U.S. universities to strengthen higher education in developing countries. U.S. universities can help colleges and universities in developing nations produce the tens of thousands of educated people who can sustain and grow their economies. U.S. assistance to India in support of building their agricultural universities from 1949-1973⁴ in partnership with U.S. universities is an excellent example of the significant return to these kinds of investments given the remarkable advances in India's agricultural system that resulted.
- **It is in the political and economic interest of the U.S. to invest in higher education for developing countries.** Whether our investments bring scholars to universities in the United States or help U.S. universities reform and improve developing country institutions, the students and future leaders that emerge tend to appreciate similar values and be more knowledgeable about the United States. Hundreds of current world leaders were educated in the United States, including more than 1/3 of the Jordanian Cabinet.⁵ Those countries that invest in building ties now are fostering the economic and diplomatic connections that will be beneficial for generations to come. China is investing heavily in Africa (and in African higher education institutions⁶) for these very same reasons. Africa has the fastest-growing middle class in the world, with a total population expected to more than double by 2050, and Africa's biggest trading partner is not currently the United States, it is China.^{7,8}

³ Ostby, G. & Urdal, H. (2010). Education and Civil Conflict: A Review of the Quantitative, Empirical Literature. UNESCO.

⁴ Read, H. (1974). Partners with India: Building Agricultural Universities

⁵ [Foreign Students Yesterday, World Leaders Today.](#)

⁶ King, K. (2014). China's Higher Education Engagement with Africa: A different Partnership and Cooperation Model?" in *Education, Learning, Training: Critical Issues for Development*, International Development Policy, No.5, Geneva: Graduate Institute Publications, Boston: Brill-Nijhoff, pp. 151–173

⁷ UHY. [The world's fastest-growing middle class.](#)

⁸ Population Reference Bureau. (2014). [2014 World Population Data Sheet.](#)

What Have Higher Education Partnerships Shown They Can Do?

Below are three proven efforts to strengthen the human and institutional capacity of higher education in developing countries through partnering with U.S. universities. ***These successful higher education partnerships demonstrate that Congress should make appropriations for similar investments throughout the developing world.***

Partnering to strengthen training and research to increase food security in Tanzania

A partnership led by The Ohio State University (including Michigan State University, Virginia Tech, University of Florida, Tuskegee University and Iowa State University) and Sokoine University of Agriculture is strengthening the training and research capacities of Sokoine to improve food security and agricultural productivity in Tanzania. This six-year project will result in significantly improving the quality of education at Sokoine, deepening private sector engagement with the university, and improving university administrative operations. Most important, with improved and expanded educational opportunities, Sokoine will graduate more than 2000 well-educated Tanzanians each year for their agricultural sector and by the year 2020 the total alumni population of the university will be well over 30,000.

Partnering to build domestic capacity to train future leaders and entrepreneurs in Lebanon

The partnership between the State University of New York System (SUNY) and Al Kafaat University in Lebanon is working to improve educational curriculum, expand the numbers of students learning English, improve student services, and create a new program in small business development. The partnership developed a new English program which now serves 2,600 students each semester and established a Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) at AKU, which now serves 200 students on campus. The partnership is currently developing a curriculum for business administration.

Partnering to grow and build a major university in Ethiopia

A technical assistance grant to Oklahoma State University (OSU) in the 1950's to establish an agricultural college in Ethiopia grew to result in what is now Haramaya University, a comprehensive university with 12 colleges and over 25,000 students. Among graduates of the university is a World Food Prize winner, Gebisa Ejeta, now at Purdue University, who was recognized for profound contributions to combating global food and nutrition insecurity. The relationship between OSU and Ethiopian higher education institutions continues today.

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