



New Science, Engineering Networks to Boost Research, Collaboration in Effort to Strengthen Africa's University-based Instruction

New York NY, Princeton NJ, and Nairobi, Kenya, July 28, 2008—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) today announced that grants, each worth US\$800,000 over 2.5 years, will be awarded to three networks of sub-Saharan universities.

RISE, which aims to strengthen higher education in the sciences and engineering by increasing the population of skilled Ph.D. and M.Sc. scientists and engineers teaching in Africa's universities, is supported by a \$3.3 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). SIG is leading the RISE initiative in consultation with African partners including the Nairobi, Kenya-based African Academy of Sciences (AAS), the initiative's co-administrator.

The competition was open to proposals in any area of basic or applied sciences and engineering, with the exception of agriculture and health sciences, which are already relatively well funded through existing programs.

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, will focus on improving education in materials science to make fuller use of Africa's vast mineral deposits. Other participating universities will be located in Botswana, Kenya, Namibia and Nigeria.
- **Southern African Biochemistry and Informatics for Natural Products (SABINA)** 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 under the direction of John Saka, the network will also include universities in Namibia, South Africa and Tanzania.
- The **Western Indian Ocean Regional Initiative in Marine Science and Education (WIO-RISE)** will use research and training to promote the sustainable development, utilization and protection of the coastal and marine environment. Led by Alfonse Dubi of the University of Dar es Salaam's Institute of Marine Sciences in Zanzibar, Tanzania, WIO-RISE will have partner universities in Mozambique and South Africa.

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.”

The network structure is meant to facilitate the sharing of resources and scholarship.

“The RISE approach will help fortify and consolidate the community of researchers,” said SIG chair Phillip Griffiths. “By establishing knowledge networks in select fields of science, RISE will help combat the isolation that so often plagues researchers in Africa. With increased contact and cooperation, both instructors and students will profit immensely.”

According to AAS executive director Thomas Egwang, “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 Institute for Advanced Study has for a decade provided the administrative home for SIG, an international team of scientific leaders dedicated to fostering science in developing countries. SIG’s mission is to strengthen science and its uses in the developing world. It has helped create research and training programs in Chile, Brazil, Mexico and Uganda, financed by The World Bank and governments. The Institute is a private, independent academic institution, and is one of the world’s leading centers for scholarly and theoretical research and intellectual inquiry in the sciences and humanities. The Institute supports a permanent faculty of 27 eminent scholars and each year awards fellowships to some 190 visiting Members from research institutions throughout the world.

The Carnegie Corporation of New York was created by Andrew Carnegie in 1911 to promote “the advancement and diffusion of knowledge and understanding.” For more than 95 years, the Corporation has carried out Carnegie’s vision of philanthropy by building on his two major concerns: international peace and advancing education and knowledge.

The mission of the African Academy of Sciences is to provide leadership in science and technology (S&T) innovations in Africa and to bring S&T solutions to bear on the socioeconomic challenges that Africa is currently facing. During the next decade AAS plans to undertake visionary and innovative initiatives in renewable energy, climate change, food security, microbial diversity, health, and socio-anthropology, as well as establish a think tank to influence policy directions in these areas.

More information about SIG, RISE and the competition is available at www.ias.edu/sig.

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