



## About TrustAfrica

TrustAfrica is an independent foundation that strives to secure the conditions for democracy and equitable development throughout the continent.

Led by Africans, we convene dialogues, catalyze ideas, and provide grants and technical assistance to organizations working to advance these goals.

Our programs focus on:

- Democracy & Civil Society
- Equitable Development
- African Philanthropy

We also award competitive research grants through our:

- Investment Climate & Business Environment
- Research Fund

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## Stimulating Debate on Higher Education Reform

**TrustAfrica is cultivating rigorous analysis and inclusive dialogue about ways to revitalize higher education in Africa.**

With its white-washed walls and red tile roofs, the University of Ghana at Legon has long reigned as one of Africa's premier institutions of higher learning. Lately, though, its star has dimmed a bit. Classrooms and dormitories are notoriously overcrowded. The library is somewhat obsolete. Faculty are grossly underpaid. Recent graduates struggle in vain to find work. Unfortunately, Legon is not an isolated case. Similar conditions threaten universities throughout the continent.

Many of these problems date back to the 1980s, when budgets were slashed in accordance with structural adjustment programs designed by the World Bank. Higher education, once seen as a public good, became just another commodity fighting for a spot in the marketplace. As resources grew increasingly scarce, many of the best students and professors seized better opportunities overseas. Critics dubbed it "the lost decade," and higher education in Africa has never recovered. More recently, the emphasis on universal primary and secondary education has unwittingly come at the expense of universities.

No one is suggesting that it is possible, or even desirable, to simply turn back the clock. Indeed, the enduring challenges of access, quality and cost are now compounded by the rapid pace of globalization and the emergence of new information and communication technologies.

To help chart the way forward, TrustAfrica is mounting a three-year initiative to broaden the discourse about the role of higher education in Africa and identify the best ways to fulfill its potential. Initially, this work will focus on four countries: Ghana, Nigeria, Tanzania and Uganda. The initiative will look for ways to generate sustained dialogue, evidence-based policy proposals, innovative pilot projects, and concerted advocacy at the national and regional levels.

Higher education can surely play an important role in fueling economic development and building just societies. But as delegates concurred at the 2009 World Conference on Education, it is unlikely to succeed without comprehensive efforts to "enhance its relevance and responsiveness to the political, social and economic realities of African countries." ►



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## Strategies

In a fundamental sense, what is required to transform higher education in Africa is a broadly participatory process that actively involves all stakeholders and the public in a search for new solutions. These actors include universities, research institutions and policy makers as well as international organizations like the World Bank. But in addition to the established actors, new entrants like China, Brazil, India and Korea—which have pledged support for scholarships and partnerships—must also play a part.

TrustAfrica will use policy dialogues to bring these many constituencies together and capitalize on renewed interest in higher education and a mounting desire to reverse the errors of the past. In doing so, we seek to build an inclusive policy process that is premised on true and equal partnership. Our efforts center on three strategic imperatives:

- **Build an effective platform for engaging in the formulation and implementation of higher education policies in Africa.** Forums and networks that facilitate inclusive discussion and engagement are needed to generate workable solutions and inform government policies.
- **Initiate and sustain policy dialogues among key stakeholders in Africa.** Some of the many issues that merit discussion are governance, financing, collaboration, ethics and standards, research, planning, quality assurance and regulation, postgraduate training, and how higher education relates to economic development, information and communication technologies, and labor markets.
- **Leverage resources for higher education transformation in Africa.** Ultimately, institutions that work on higher education in Africa need to build a movement to sustain their efforts.

This initiative, with partial support from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, will focus initially on two countries in East Africa (Tanzania and Uganda) and two countries in West Africa (Ghana and Nigeria). It will also forge partnerships with pioneering institutions in Southern Africa—like the Centre for Higher Education Transformation and the Southern African Regional Universities Association—in order to build on their successes. Other key partners will include CODESRIA, the Association of African Universities, the International Network for Higher Education in Africa, and the Partnership for Higher Education.

## Activities

Over the next three years, TrustAfrica will undertake several activities designed to advance these goals:

- First, we will conduct a scoping study of organizations working on higher education reform in the focus countries to gain a clear picture of the issues, opportunities and activities already in place. The study will include a situational analysis of relevant policies and help to identify pertinent themes for the policy dialogue series, such as quality assurance mechanisms at the regional level, access to education, curriculum relevance, funding and governance.
- Next, we will commence a series of six policy dialogues: two in East Africa, two in West Africa, and two with a pan-African focus. Major universities will play a central role at each of these convenings, joined by relevant national, regional and international institutions. These conversations will be shared with a broader audience through policy briefs and webcasts.
- Thirdly, we will provide small grants to advocacy organizations working on higher education. These funds will be used to secure technical assistance with regard to governance, board development, policy analysis, strategy development, communications, and other key issues.

By taking these steps, we hope to stimulate productive debates on higher education in Africa and catalyze policies that better serve the African people. ■