

New Foundation Will Help Africans Set Their Own Agenda for Long-Term Development

DAKAR, 6 June 2006 — Based on a deeply-held conviction that the search for solutions to Africa's development challenges must be led by Africans, the Ford Foundation today formally launched an independent philanthropic foundation for the continent, based here and managed by an experienced and diverse board of African leaders.

The new foundation, TrustAfrica, has just completed a five-year development phase within the Ford Foundation, using the time to explore its potential role, develop ideas, and make initial grants. With a growing track record behind it, and with new democratic governments and an increased focus on regional partnerships and development on the continent, both organizations believe the time is right for TrustAfrica to become a fully independent institution.

Launched with a \$30 million commitment from the Ford Foundation, TrustAfrica will convene innovative African leaders from varied disciplines to identify new approaches to the violence, discrimination and economic isolation that impact many African nations. Although most of the challenges facing Africa today transcend borders, most donors working on the continent channel their money through country-specific programs. TrustAfrica will break that mold by developing and funding regional initiatives that have relevance across the continent.

"Instead of relying on ready-made solutions from abroad, TrustAfrica offers a forum for developing collaborative, locally-grown solutions to the challenges before us," said Gerry Salole, Chair of the TrustAfrica board of trustees. "It also allows Africans to take their rightful seat at the table among donors and others who influence development."

Half of the \$30 million commitment made by Ford to TrustAfrica is earmarked for an endowment. TrustAfrica has already begun diversifying its resources with a \$1 million grant from the International Development Research Center. Additionally, 200 individual donors, many of them Africans living on the continent or among the African Diaspora, have made contributions, reflecting a genuine sense of ownership of an institution that is run by and for Africans. The all-African board brings broad experience in development and philanthropy and a firm commitment to good governance.

"Africans need and deserve to have a greater voice in the international donor community and in development efforts across their continent," said Susan Berresford, the president of the Ford Foundation. "We think creative new institutions such as TrustAfrica can help Africans take on a greater role in directing change, and help provide the resources to do so."

In some respects, TrustAfrica functions as a kind of African think tank. It brings together visionary figures – scholars, activists, entrepreneurs, artists, policy makers and other civic leaders – to set priorities, forge partnerships and mobilize resources. Then it makes grants to implement some of the recommendations made at these workshops. During its pilot phase, the trust funded the participation of women in peace talks in Liberia, convened an unprecedented meeting on citizenship and identity (the first to approach the issue from an Africa-wide perspective) and helped dozens of African organizations develop the institutional skills needed to do their work more effectively.

"We bring a new approach to philanthropy and development in Africa," said Akwasi Aidoo, Executive Director of TrustAfrica. "Instead of following the lead of external donors — or pushing an agenda of our own making — we help Africans work together to set their own priorities and chart their own course for a safe, free and prosperous future. We believe African leadership must set the agenda for development."

TrustAfrica also seeks to forge closer ties with the African Diaspora to strengthen global alliances for Africa. Accordingly, it is recognized in the United States as a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization and in Mauritius as a charitable corporation. It is committed to maintaining the highest standards of institutional performance, including sound management, accountable and transparent governance, effective communication, and sustainable results.

New Round of Workshops and Funding

Planning is under way at TrustAfrica for three upcoming workshops and a new round of funding. The first of these gatherings, in September, will look at ways to build sustainable peace. The second, near the end of the year, will explore issues of religious pluralism. The third, in January, will focus on opportunities to advance regional integration.

"These are not new challenges," Aidoo said. "But they require new solutions, for the old approaches have not worked. Fortunately, there are change-agents willing and able to step up to the plate. These are the kind of partners that TrustAfrica supports."

When it began in 2001 under the aegis of the Ford Foundation, TrustAfrica was first known as the Special Initiative for Africa. Its premise was that Africans need a greater voice in the international donor community as well as philanthropic resources that Africans control.

Last year, Ford committed \$100 million to 18 emerging and established foundations in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, the Americas, Eastern Europe and Russia. TrustAfrica is one of the newest of these foundations.

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