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Dear Dr. Alvis,

On behalf of the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS), I want to thank you for the opportunity to attend the discussion held on July 19th on the U.S. Government Basic Education Strategy and the impending USAID Education Policy. CGS appreciates the chance to provide additional feedback in response to the set of questions posed to the discussion attendees. Overall, we commend USAID for its work in advancing progress in communities abroad grappling to meet basic literacy needs in the absence of a high-quality teacher preparation infrastructure. We believe USAID and its partners will continue to make great strides by developing a systems approach that integrates primary, secondary, and higher education policy agendas.

CGS has a long history of collaboration with USAID, primarily through its partnership in the AFGRAD/ATLAS program. As the only national organization solely representing graduate education and research, CGS has a strong commitment to promoting the mission and values of the agency. Because pedagogy does not exist in a vacuum, we are sensitive to the economic, political, and humanitarian pressures that challenge efforts to improve educational systems in the communities that USAID serves. The expertise of CGS member institutions in educational research and teacher preparation is particularly critical for communities and individuals disrupted by war or other traumatic experiences. Several studies have shown that students of teachers with master's-level preparation in fields as diverse as special education, school psychology, adult literacy and numeracy, and secondary mathematics and science have better learning outcomes. Thus, whether nations or regions are at the early stages of ensuring access to basic education or are seeking to enhance the quality of their primary and secondary educational systems, collaboration across all sectors of the educational system will help to ensure a stronger future for all.

The perspectives below address how the higher education community, including graduate education, can answer the following inquiries:

How would a new USAID Education Policy be best focused to showcase both the role of HEIs in Basic Education systems and to develop Higher Education systems?

and

Please feel free to provide any additions questions, comments, or thoughts you have

regarding higher education and the USAID Education Policy.

Building the Academic Workforce

A fundamental component of any effort to improve basic and higher education systems should be strengthening the indigenous academic workforce. For education systems to truly thrive, it is critical that individuals native to their community are educated and trained to become the next generation of teachers, faculty, researchers, and academic leaders. The U.S. Government Strategy on International Basic Education draft for public comment notes that “by 2030, countries must recruit a total of 68.8 million teachers; 24.4 million primary school teachers and 44.4 million secondary school teachers.” Given these astonishing disparities at the early end of the educational spectrum, it is not difficult to assume that the demand for higher education faculty in some regions of the world is either equally daunting, or not yet able to be calculated because no higher education system yet exists.

As noted in the 2011-2017 USAID Education Strategy Progress Report, we commend USAID’s work in partnering with U.S. and local HEIs to build capacity through curriculum reform, faculty and administration training, research, and facility improvement. For example, the agency notes that it is supporting HEIs in Jamaica, Guatemala, and Honduras through professional development of faculty and staff as part of its overall plan to increase equitable access to higher education in these countries. We urge USAID to expand its collaboration with U.S. HEIs to create sustainable pathways that increase the number of faculty in local HEIs in both the short and long-term.

In the short-term, graduate students can help meet the demand for faculty in both basic and higher education systems. For example, placing graduate education students such as those pursuing a master’s in education would allow those students to staff up schools and institutions of higher education while contributing to their own training as educators. Further, since virtually all advanced U.S. education students and teaching assistants are required to develop multicultural proficiencies in the context of supervised teaching experiences, it is possible to imagine a program in which U.S. teacher education students and researchers serve abroad for a period of time, thus providing expertise and increased teacher preparation capacity at universities in other regions of the world. In sum, U.S. education graduate students and U.S. trained indigenous educators can help build the basic literacy teachers needed to advance regional development and respond to the needs of communities, especially those that have been geographically dislocated due to either natural or man-made disasters.

In the long-term, graduate students can help build capacity of a faculty pool comprised of educators within the community via a “train-the-trainer” approach on pedagogical skills. Increasing support for activities that expand faculty and teacher preparation, such as the Center for Teaching and Learning at the American University of Afghanistan, which provides pedagogical support for staff, is a necessary step.

Partnering with HEIs to Advance Research

The USAID’s Higher Education Solutions Network (HSEN) was a successful model that benefitted over 16.7 million people through advancements in innovation, data tools and development of data professionals, research, and policy. Notably, the majority of funding raised through its partnerships originated from universities. Though this five-year project has concluded, we urge USAID to consider how it can continue to forge strong partnerships

with HEIs to meet future goals. Graduate students conduct research in a wide variety of fields that concentrate on finding solutions for our global neighbors. Collaborating with HEIs to develop mutually identified areas of research will help improve basic infrastructure in public health, agricultural practices, energy use, and manufacturing—to name a few.

Improving Practices for Student Support Services

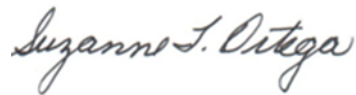
U.S. HEIs strive to provide support services that meet the unique needs of their student bodies. While communities abroad are faced with their own societal, economic, and political challenges, HEIs can offer expertise in the development of support systems for local students, such as campus mental/behavior and physical health services. HEIs can work with local HEIs to build out services that are culturally appropriate and will increase the holistic approach to delivering high-quality education.

Strengthening Ties with Employers and Industries

We are encouraged to see USAID make mention of its work in linking higher education to the private sector in the 2011-2017 USAID Education Strategy Progress Report and believe that this should continue to be prioritized in a USAID Education Policy document. Fostering collaboration between HEIs and local industries will help HEIs ensure that graduates are prepared to meet workforce demands.

Again, I look forward to continuing this important conversation on how higher education can inform USAID's in supporting basic and higher education across the globe. I hope you will consider CGS as a resource as the agency's work continues to unfold. Please do not hesitate to contact me or CGS's VP of Public Policy and Government Affairs, Lauren Inouye, at linouye@cgs.nche.edu.

Sincerely,



Suzanne T. Ortega
President