USAID Launches US$7.2M Health and Science Center at University of Liberia

The United States Agency for International Development has launched a seven million two hundred thousand dollars center for excellence in health and life sciences at the University of Liberia.

USAID Mission Director to Liberia Patricia Rader said the opening of the center is part of the US Government’s response to addressing problems in Liberia’s health sector.

Madam Rader noted the center is third that the USAID has opened in Liberia.

She named the first two as the Center of Excellence in Engineering also based at the University of Liberia and Center of Excellence in Agriculture located at Cuttington University in Suakoko, Bong County.

The USAID Mission Director said the three centers will contribute to addressing critical areas of priority in the country.

Madam Rader asserted that in 2008, the Liberian Government drafted the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) with the aim to expand access to basic health services.

She named some of the services as maternal and newborn care, child, adolescent health and communicable
The USAID head believes the center will develop new academic and research programs in bio-technology, public health, nursing, midwifery and enhance pre-clinical training in medicines and pharmacology.

UL President Emmet Dennis thanked USAID on behalf of the Government of Liberia for the opening of the center.

On October 31, 2011, the Indiana University announced that it was partnering with the University of Liberia and the University of Massachusetts Medical School to administer a transformative seven million two hundred thousand United States dollars project that will address the acute shortage of medical practitioners in Liberia.

USAID and Higher Education in Development are providing support to the center to increase the number of well trained health care life science workers to benefit the well-being of all Liberians.

Tully Cornick, Executive Director, Higher Education for Development said their involvement with Liberia goes back many years but noted that their engagement with the University of Liberia initially came through contacts in 2005-2006 between the Louis Arthur Grimes School of Law and the IU Maurer School of Law.

Mr. Cornick noted that those contacts in 2008 led to the award of an Honorary IU Doctorate to President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, pointing out that “conversations with both President Sirleaf and University of Liberia President Dr. Emmet Dennis lead to IU’s commitment to work with the UL health and life sciences programs”.

He stressed that the TJK Faulkner Science College at the University of Liberia lacks basic supplies, including teaching and learning resources, courses with an experiential component.

Mr. Cornick said, at present two USAID funded projects have begun to address the needs at the TJK Faulkner College, adding that “both institutions are providing substantial assistance to the UL College of Engineering”.

For his part, UL President Dr. Emmet Dennis said the major objective of the grant in the first two years is to assist in improving the quality of the pre-clinical curriculum at the University of Liberia Medical College and by providing instructional support for faculty in biochemistry, physiology, anatomy and pediatrics, adding that “all of these are being implemented”.

He said the second is to improve the quality of training for nurse through a mentoring leadership program and facilitate the establishment of a public articulated BSN, with emphasis on maternal and child care between the Tubman National Institute of Medical Arts (TNIMA), which only now offers a RN diploma and the University of Liberia.

Dr Dennis said already two faculties are trained at the Masters level at the Indiana University School of Nursing. “Seven thousand medical, nursing texts including references were shipped by the Sabre Foundation to the UL, TNIMA and also assistance were given in cataloging the material for use”.

The UL President also noted that the grant will increase the number and quality of public health workers, first by AA degree program in public health management at the UL, thus helping to relieve doctors of major administrative management of health centers and hospital so that they spend more time with patient care.

He said the grant will also help to transform the UL curricula in biology and chemistry and provide equipment and supplies that would improve the quality of instruction, pointing out that “two UL graduates have been identified and
are preparing to pursue masters programs in the region*.

Dr. Dennis thanked the UL donors and partners for working with them in the pursuit of excellence in human capital development.