



# NEW PARTNERSHIPS FOR GROWTH RESEARCH IN AFRICA



## INITIATIVE SUMMARY

The Africa Growth Initiative at the Brookings Institution conducts high-quality policy research and analysis focused on attaining sustainable economic development and prosperity in Africa, while amplifying the voice of African researchers in policymaking and planning. By establishing long-term partnerships with leading policy institutions in Africa and throughout the world, the Africa Growth Initiative seeks to support and promote African solutions to address issues of growth and development on the continent.



### **BROOKINGS AFRICA GROWTH INITIATIVE TEAM**

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## FOREWORD



The Africa Growth Initiative (AGI) at the Brookings Institution began its work in September 2008 with a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The initiative is part of the Global Economy and Development program.

AGI has three main objectives. The first is to contribute to enhancing the quality of research done in the area of economic growth in Africa. The second is to help develop a more prominent voice for African researchers in international development debates and discussions by providing the means and opportunities for their work to be presented to a wider audience in donor countries. Finally, AGI seeks to support the influence of African researchers within their domestic policy settings through targeted communications strategies.

AGI is an African-led initiative working for an African cause, and supported by the platform of one of the most respected and trusted think tanks in the world. The Brookings Institution offers a significant opportunity for undertaking high-quality research and a rich experience in policy outreach and convening power. AGI benefits not only from the expertise of its top African scholars, but also draws on the larger Brookings network of experts, as well as a very valuable network of international development scholars to support the work of initiative.

Additionally, AGI is broadening its scope of work and impact through partnerships with respected and established research institutions and think tanks in Africa. Initial partnerships are being developed with the Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research (ISSER) at the University of Ghana; the Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research (NISER); the Centre for Social and Economic

Research (CRES) in Dakar, Senegal; the Economic Policy Research Centre (EPRC) in Kampala, Uganda; the Kenya Institute for Public Policy, Research and Analysis (KIPPRA); and the Development Policy Research Unit (DPRU) at the University of Cape Town, South Africa. Through these partnership arrangements, AGI will collaborate on research and outreach to better understand how economic growth in the African countries can be facilitated and how evidence based research may be used to support policymaking.

The partnerships with the African research institutions are based on cooperative action and shared values and resources. A major principle underlying this relationship is the need for regular consultation and agreement on areas of interest and joint activities. It was this principle that motivated the workshop that was held in Washington, D.C. on February 25-26, 2010. The workshop brought together not only the African research partners, but included a second tier of international development research institutions that share similar goals and ambitions. A number of development foundations also attended this workshop to support the process of building consensus on how best to organize the partnerships. These institutions represented have all demonstrated a keen interest in the work of AGI and in the development of policy research capacity in Africa.

The workshop was made possible through a grant to AGI from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and additional funders. AGI acknowledges this support with gratitude.

AGI would also like to thank all of the workshop participants who provided very valuable suggestions on how best to organize the partnerships, and offered considerable continuing support to AGI and its African partners. AGI looks forward to fruitful and mutually beneficial collaboration with all of its partners and supporters.

**Ernest Aryeetey**

Senior Fellow and Director

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LAUNCH WORKSHOP REPORT  
FEBRUARY 25-26, 2010

## INTRODUCTION

*“I want to be in a world where, when there’s an event in Washington and it’s about Africa, they don’t call me. They call an expert from Africa.”*

— John Page, Brookings

The state of economic growth in Africa is a source of constant debate and commentary. Catalysts, constraints, external shocks, internal drivers, sources of innovation, degrees of integration—all are scrutinized, documented and ultimately shaped by some of the world’s best minds. Yet the proliferation of studies and prescriptions—not to mention the abundance of print and airtime devoted to the subject—is as remarkable for the range of voices it excludes as for the volume of material it includes.

Africa remains in the global economic discourse a presence seen, but seldom heard. There is an abiding tendency to speak *to* or *of* the region, the speakers consisting primarily of a select handful of Western-based individuals and institutions. Largely absent from the conversation are the Africans themselves—researchers working in Africa, and African researchers based further afield. To overlook the contributions of those at the nerve center of African growth research is to forego the possibility of a richer, more nuanced understanding of the issues facing the continent today.

This was the impetus behind the launch workshop on **New Partnerships for Growth Research in Africa**, hosted by the Africa Growth Initiative (AGI) at Brookings on February 25 and 26, 2010 in Washington, DC. The workshop gathered some of the top African think tanks and research networks together with key foundations and multilateral institutions that support and benefit from their work. Though some had worked together before, the meeting marked the first time that all these institutions were assembled around a single table.

On that table, a core challenge: How to bring African scholarship into the center of discussions on growth research affecting Africa? How to broaden the reach, strengthen the voice and deepen the policy impact of African research institutions? How to strengthen collaboration among multilaterals, AGI and its partner networks and foundations? And how to make optimal use of finite resources?

Like all good research topics, these questions generated many ideas, and even further questions. But they also helped mark the contours for new dimensions and wider scales of partnership. This report is a first attempt to fill in those contours with what is already known, and to take steps forward in pursuit of the rest.

## THE RESEARCH AGENDA

*“Too many African-oriented initiatives are conceived with little input from African institutions, only to end up as examples of what can go wrong. We’re convinced that success would be more likely with greater African input.”*

— Ernest Aryeetey, Brookings Africa Growth Initiative

### Drivers of African Growth

Economic growth in Africa has often been driven by developments in world markets for renewable and non-renewable natural resources. As a result, growth has simply been a matter of how governments have managed rising or falling prices, and how this impacts production of the natural resource and other products. Economic performance has typically been strongest where export receipts have been well managed.

In the six years before the current financial crisis, however, many countries experienced much faster growth than had been usual in the region. Commodity prices shot up significantly in the wake of growing demand around the world, particularly from Asia and especially from China. The growing demand provided a needed stimulus for both agricultural exporters and mineral exporters. The only departure from the usual experiences of commodity booms was that many of the resource rich economies were observed to have managed the windfall gains better than in previous times.

But when export prices fell again during the crisis (even as the price of imported inputs increased), African economies once more felt the blow. This phenomenon of rising commodity prices improv-



ing performance for a time and a subsequent fall in world prices worsening performance has rekindled old debates about the need for African economies to diversify and to reduce dependence on commodities for more sustainable growth and development.

### Beyond Commodities

The post-independence history of Africa is replete with attempts to move beyond commodities. For example, in the early days after independence, a number of countries pursued import-substitution industrialization, but failed to achieve the expected industrial transformation. Others focused on large-scale commercial farming but never managed to find the most feasible formula. The role of the state in the process of transformation was never properly defined, leading to very different approaches from one country to another. Many countries neglected to consider how to generate the human capital required for pursuing their strategies. And some never really adopted a strategy for achieving long-term growth and development at all, choosing instead to plod along with short-term programs.

This dearth of good results after five decades of independence has widened the gap between Africa

and other developing regions and generated worldwide interest in what holds back African growth and development. Research into growth in developing countries contrasting Africa with Asia has become commonplace. In addition to cross-country regressions carried out in the 1990s to explain economic growth or the absence of it in Africa, a number of major country studies have recently been completed in the effort to find out how best to stimulate such growth.

Many analysts see limited **structural transformation**, a process whereby a predominantly agrarian economy is transformed into a diversified and productive economy dominated by manufacturing and services, as the heart of Africa's growth problem. Consulta-

tions with AGI's African partner institutions and others lead to the view that African countries have not been able to achieve sustained growth because they have not paid enough attention to the challenges of achieving structural transformation through carefully coordinated policy action. There has been considerable variation in performance and the nature of the links between policy reforms and outcomes across countries, and it is not clear what policies and under what conditions these have driven economic growth in African economies. It is also not clear how such growth may be sustained for a long period and lead to more diversified economies. Based on these, the focus of AGI and its partners is on structural transformation and growth in Africa.



## A SEAT AT THE TABLE: NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND GLOBAL POLICY IMPACT

*“This is about Africa becoming part of the global discussion.”*

— Finn Tarp, UNU-WIDER

Today, with African countries increasingly setting up democratic institutions, the space is widening for discussion of development processes. The intellectual capacity behind policymaking has improved, and the analytical tools available to development researchers have increased along with the volume of data and other information about individual countries and the region as a whole. Several African research institutions are now conducting studies that could be useful in identifying opportunities for economic transformation. There are also many researchers in the United States and Europe doing very relevant research, but poor dissemination makes this work inaccessible to African policymakers. Most African researchers lack links to outside researchers, leading to duplication of efforts and inconsistency among policy messages.

These lapses in coordination have meant that the contributions and voices of African researchers are often left out of international development debates. AGI now seeks to remedy this by promoting and coordinating world-class research that can be used by African policy makers to transform African economies—and by the continent’s development partners to improve effectiveness.

### Overcoming Obstacles to Deliver Impact

One common impediment which hinders the influence of African institutional voices is money. Many



African research institutions are small outfits, leanly staffed and dependent on a combination of government allocations and private commissions for survival. That mix of public and private funding often obliges researchers to subjugate their own research agenda to the priorities of their clients, diverting focus, compromising independence, and stretching scarce resources. Such strictures also make it easier for star researchers to be lured away to more lucrative endeavors.

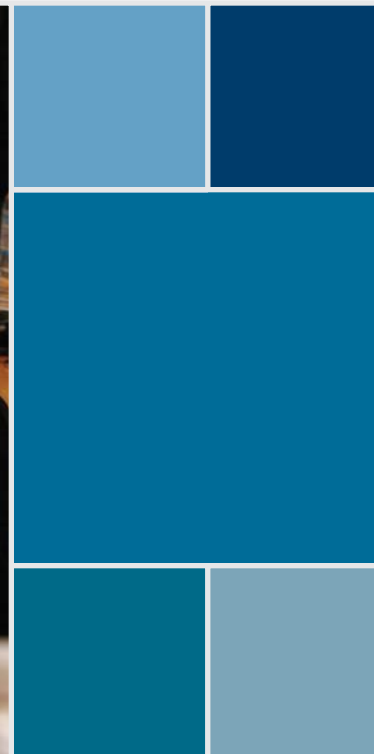
Another inhibitor is the isolating nature of the work itself. In some respects, the damaging linearity that has prevented so many of Africa’s failed growth strategies from bringing about structural transformation may be seen as a reflection of the very approach to the challenges they sought to remedy. Political economy research raises inherent tensions between breadth and depth, and many researchers favor the latter. Yet such laser-like focus can come at a price: many African research institutions admit to working in silos even within their own regions and countries, absorbed by their singular projects to the exclusion of all else. The result is a professional culture of insularity, a lack of dialogue among peers and, ultimately, some constraining of perspective and duplication of effort.



Furthermore, if Africa-focused researchers are barely talking to each other, slim are the odds of meaningful engagement with the wider stakeholder community. Despite the tremendous potential for transformative contributions to policy, many research institutions either neglect or are unable to disseminate and communicate their work to desired effect. The institutions and the research networks to which they belong often find themselves trapped in echo chambers, or else overlooked by counterparts in government and civil society who only dimly grasp the implications of the work for their own policy aims. Both patterns reflect a lapse in communication—an inability to recognize the value of translating research findings into digestible, accessible elements that can be put to use by a broad range of actors. This failure is a disservice not only to Africa’s development prospects, but also to the prominence and visibility of its research net-

works and institutions. The less effectively they communicate, the more invisible they become, and the weaker their influence on policymaking.

Claiming a seat at the policy debate table will require a definitive steering away from these practices—and toward the future. Many AGI partners acknowledge a tendency toward a “rear view” approach to growth diagnostics, more descriptive than prescriptive. African researchers can make themselves more integral to national, regional and global policymaking processes by strengthening their capacity to forecast trends, challenges and opportunities; to identify the dynamics at play among the various drivers of growth; and to venture bold, well-founded proposals to help guide future policy-setting.



## VOICES IN THE VANGUARD: AGI AND PARTNERS

*“We need to do a better job of leveraging the expertise that’s there. Most of us have little opportunity to share our front-line research.”*

— Samuel Oyetunji Akande, NISER

Partnerships can help bring African voices into the vanguard of growth and development discussions. AGI intends to create a platform for collaboration and exchange among African researchers and other international development researchers working on African growth and development. AGI is partnering with a select group of economic research institutions in Africa to collaborate on agreed research projects, the outcomes of which they will then bring to the attention of African policymakers and of US and international development audiences. Researchers will be encouraged to innovate and to seek practical solutions to development challenges while opening their work to international scrutiny. Research will focus on structural transformation through macroeconomic management; industrial policy; agricultural reform; natural resource management; and poverty and social protection.

Such an arrangement aligns well with the goals and challenges of the research institutions themselves as well as with those of the networks, foundations and multilateral organizations that support them.

For the think tanks, the research themes outlined above could amplify perspectives on familiar issues. Many are already absorbed by the mechanics of structural transformation, with questions of jobless growth and non-inclusive recovery taking on particu-

lar urgency in the light of the current global crisis. Research around climate change has also intensified in recent years, especially with respect to adaptation and mitigation strategies in the context of agricultural modernization and food security. And many institutions have begun to focus on the African place within an increasingly interlinked global economy, and on its engagement with emerging economies. These themes are rapidly reframing approaches to persistent development challenges facing the region: poverty and inequality; the empowerment of women and girls; governance and state fragility; capacity to deliver basic social services, including health and education; private sector development; natural resource management; and sustainable long-term growth.

The proposed AGI-supported platform offers opportunities to extend collaboration on these issues within Africa and beyond, and affords research institutions a greater degree of control and independence in pursuing research objectives. Some have expressed the view that an alliance with AGI could also serve to reinforce the validity of their research output, heightening credibility and visibility among governments and other stakeholders.

International research networks stand to benefit as well. Many have been using their limited resources to bridge communication gaps among Africa-based institutions exploring similar research areas, and to facilitate comparative research projects with think tanks in other regions. In addition to the overarching themes of growth, poverty, governance and inequality, some have coordinated regional studies on cross-cutting issues such as human capital development, disaster management and rapid response capacity.

While the networks by nature are built on successful partnerships, the AGI platform aims to expand their outreach capacity, draw global attention to the research they support at national and regional levels, and open up new possibilities for collaboration with foundations and multilateral organizations.

For the multilaterals concerned with large-scale diagnostics and support, the think tanks are an indispensable primary source of front-line data. Although multilateral interventions are often driven by crises or other exigencies, it is at the multilateral level that African growth research has the greatest latitude—academic, financial and geopolitical—to examine the complexities of development challenges over time. Examples of current focus areas include an analysis of the effect of labor market structures on competitiveness and integration; an attempt to chart returns on investment in education; a comprehensive study on remittances and migration in Africa; and identifying linkages in the “triple crisis” of aid effectiveness, food security and climate change.

African research groups have the potential but often lack the means to provide the data and analysis

needed to help multilateral and bilateral donors to design effective interventions. Partnerships like AGI can broker such relationships while also tapping the strongest performers at the country level for direct engagement with the global organizations.

Meanwhile, for the partnering foundations, the emphasis is on results—of implementation, execution, monitoring and evaluation. Public policy proposals are being more closely scrutinized for solid grounding in empirical research and data. There is growing recognition that this grounding is most achievable when local researchers, their fingers on the pulse of their countries’ policy needs, can enjoy the freedom to set their own research priorities as a function of demand. Many foundations, for their part, acknowledge a need to better support the communication of results to funders as well as to policymakers. Many donors also recognize that greater transparency is needed in terms of decisions regarding which African research organizations to fund. More visible ranking guidelines could promote a healthy competitiveness amongst other think tanks to streamline their research practices and improve their standing to be eligible for funding.

## **PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS**

### **Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research (ISSER) at the University of Ghana**

ISSER is a semi-autonomous research institute at the University of Ghana. Its main areas of research include macroeconomic policy, household economics, institutional economics, rural institutions, population, health, environment, gender, technology, and spatial development. ISSER is considered to be one of the top think tanks in Africa. Research undertaken by ISSER is usually in response to the direct demands of government and other stakeholders for information and strategies for improving the well-being of people. At the same time, research by ISSER seeks to maintain a focus on the academic purpose of the Institute by adding to existing knowledge about society and development.

### **Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research (NISER)**

NISER is a research and consultancy parastatal of the Federal Government of Nigeria whose mission is to provide consultancy services to the Federal and State governments, and their agencies and organizations, in the field of economic and social development. NISER cooperates with Nigerian universities, research institutes and other institutions in the mobilization of the country's research potentials for the task of national development and dissemination of research findings for the use of policymakers at all levels.

### **Centre for Social and Economic Research (CRES) in Dakar, Senegal**

The Consortium pour la recherche économique et sociale (CRES) is a research institution created in 2004 at the Université Cheikh Anta Diop by a multidisciplinary group of researcher-teachers. Its mission includes building research and analysis capacity in economics and the social sciences, as well as informing decision-making on social and economic questions. CRES' research priorities include the analysis of poverty, growth, and equality issues, local development, regional integration and globalization issues, economy of information (information and communication technologies) and economy of human resources (education, health and population).

### **Economic Policy Research Centre (EPRC) in Kampala, Uganda**

The EPRC was established in 1993 in Kampala, Uganda. It was designed to fill fundamental voids in economics research, policy analysis, and capacity building for effective in-country contributions to Uganda's policy processes. In this context, the EPRC was created to provide analytical backstopping for policy dialogue, formulation, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. The EPRC aims to foster sustainable growth and development of the Ugandan economy through the advancement of research-based knowledge and applied policy analysis.

**Kenya Institute for Public Policy, Research and Analysis (KIPPRA)**

Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA) is an autonomous public institute whose primary mission is to provide quality public policy advice to the government of Kenya and to the private sector in order to contribute to achievement of national development goals.

**Development Policy Research Unit (DPRU) at the University of Cape Town, South Africa**

The Development Policy Research Unit (DPRU) is part of the School of Economics at the University of Cape Town. The DPRU specialises in socio-economic research with a focus on labour markets, poverty and inequality. The objectives of DPRU are to foster high quality, policy relevant research, train a new generation of research economists, and disseminate knowledge to decision makers in government, the private sector and civil society.

**United Nations University – World Institute for Development Economics Research**

World Institute for Development Economics Research of the United Nations University (UNU-WIDER) is the first research and training centre of the United Nations University (UNU), established in Helsinki, Finland in 1984. UNU-WIDER undertakes applied research and policy analysis on global development and poverty issues.

**African Development Bank**

The African Development Bank (AfDB) Group's mission is to help reduce poverty, improve living conditions for Africans and mobilize resources for the continent's economic and social development. With this objective in mind, the institution aims at assisting African countries – individually and collectively – in their efforts to achieve sustainable economic development and social progress. Combating poverty is at the heart of the continent's efforts to attain sustainable economic growth. To this end, the Bank seeks to stimulate and mobilize internal and external resources to promote investments as well as provide its regional member countries with technical and financial assistance.

**International Growth Centre, London, UK**

The IGC promotes sustainable growth in developing countries by providing demand-led policy advice based on frontier research. The IGC is directed and organised from hubs at the LSE and Oxford and comprises country offices across the developing world. The IGC was initiated by and is funded by UKaid from DFID. The IGC's research programme hopes to generate innovative ideas for economic growth in the world's poorest countries.

## CONFIGURING COLLABORATION: IDEAS TO MAXIMIZE IMPACT

*“Expenditure in research and development in Africa is less than one percent of world share; patents developed in Africa account for 0.1 percent of world share. Compare that with 23 percent of world share in patents from the United States alone. Similarly, African scientific publications account for less than one percent of world share, compared with 30% from North America. There is no substitute for long-term investment to develop African research capacity.”*

— Marie-Claude Martin, IDRC

The question of why African expertise tends to be sidelined in discussions on Africa is undoubtedly more complex than may thus far have been implied. Some of the more nebulous, less quantifiable contributing factors—inherited geopolitical dynamics, vestiges of colonialism, perception lag—may lie beyond the purview of traditional economic research.

Nonetheless, enough is known of the ingredients for success to make a strong case for the partnering strategies proposed by this initiative.

### Predictable Funding

Most of the world’s research funds tend to circulate within the confines of the West. Of the \$1 billion spent annually on research worldwide, only about six percent goes to policy research in developing countries. Yet experience shows that above all, it is long-term core support that allows research institutions to allocate the resources at their disposal according to the priorities that they themselves establish, and to pursue those priorities to a degree capable of producing impact and effecting change. Partnering with other institutions to raise funds can help improve resource predictability and sustainability, while also pooling research capacities, maximizing efficiency and expanding learning opportunities among researchers domestically as well as internationally.

### THE THINK TANK INITIATIVE: INCUBATING EXCELLENCE

Providing stable, long-term support is the objective of the Think Tank Initiative, a new model of partnership implemented by IDRC with funding from the Hewlett Foundation and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Launched in 2008, the initiative aims to strengthen local research institutions over at least 10 years. The think tanks have been selected via a rigorous yearlong process, and funding is renewed only upon satisfactory evaluation of program management and results, including the policy relevance of the research output.

The Think Tank Initiative is appealing for several reasons. It focuses specifically on institutions in poor and lower- to middle-income countries, whose funding options may be especially thin on the ground. Its long-term vision is to support 50 to 60 institutions around the developing world to go beyond conducting policy-relevant research to becoming active participants in policy debates locally, regionally and globally. And with five of the six AGI partner institutions as beneficiaries of the initiative, the model hopes to serve as an example to funders as well as to the wider research community for promoting excellence and engagement among African researchers.

### **Early, Sustained Engagement with Beneficiaries**

Many research groups seek to ensure the relevance of their work by cultivating strong working relationships with stakeholders early in the process. Some conduct annual client surveys to gauge priorities. Others, in addition to taking assignments on commission, host conferences and conduct training sessions on economic policy issues for parliamentarians, civil servants, academics, and others. Early positioning on the radars of proponents of the research helps expand client and resource bases and gain audience with policymakers.

### **Long-Term Relationships**

An extended commitment is as pivotal to the research itself as to research partners. Having the time and space to thoroughly explore a topic enriches results, builds credibility and makes for more meaningful and enduring impact. For many organizations, foundations in particular, that optimal time horizon can run up against pressure to demonstrate results on an annual basis. Some alleviate this pressure by spreading funding over several years—the Think Tank Initiative model—but must balance investment in a few institutions against the desire to enhance capacities across a wider pool. For the research institutions, a common strategy has been to manage stakeholder expectations from year to year, emphasizing the value of a long-term perspective in grasping and diagnosing macroeconomic issues.

### **Incentivizing Individuals, Not Just Institutions**

Attrition is a widely cited challenge. The best researchers remain subject to poaching by competitors offering better working conditions, financial or

otherwise. For think tanks of limited means, it is important to create incentive packages that do not rely solely on remuneration. Many researchers point to qualitative factors such as the degree of autonomy in setting an agenda, a stimulating work environment, personal attachment to a research topic, and the psychic rewards of building a reputation in a given niche. Moreover, when researchers do move on, the transitions often inure to the good of their former institutions, to the extent that they expand the alumni network into positions of authority or influence that can allow greater access for impact

Developing ties with individual researchers as well as with institutions is essential for research networks. Frequently the success or failure of a coordinated project will hinge on the individuals involved—regardless of the merits of the institutions they represent. Networks must therefore be mindful that their experience of each institution is as personal as it is organizational, and that their relationship with each researcher may outlast the context in which it was initially forged. At the same time, institutions should remain cognizant of the risks of linking their institutional prospects to a “cult of personality” around an individual researcher, which may collapse should that individual move on.

### **Joint Dissemination and Outreach**

Generally speaking, the research community continues to recognize the true value of outreach strategies largely in retrospect. But for the wider world, including the places where policy is made, it is outreach—disseminating and communicating research findings—that determines impact.

Institutions that take outreach seriously begin by developing good media contacts. Solid relationships with local, regional and international media outlets can maximize visibility and burnish an institution's authority on policy issues. Partnering with regional institutions to pool media databases widens access, which streamlines communication and coherence, and helps reduce overlap and attrition.

The vehicles of dissemination are as important as the channels. Many research organizations produce themed annual reports, some deliberately adopting controversial or provocative positions to attract attention. In addition to the obvious publicity dividends of such a strategy, generating debate makes for a richer marketplace of ideas locally and regionally. However, it is critical that researchers move beyond debating each other to engaging the various audiences for their work. Core messages need to be distilled and delivered to policymakers, academics, civil society, and funders in ways that resonate effectively with each group.

Research institutions can also derive multiple benefits from the dissemination tools at their immediate disposal, particularly with respect to outreach on joint research projects. Joining forces to promote and publish joint research serves as a quality control system, as collaboration tends to invite more rigorous peer scrutiny and review and hence to drive up the standards of scholarship.

One persistent challenge of partner institutions is the struggle to gain the attention of international audiences (U.S. policymakers, G20 governments and parliaments and international development orga-

nizations), and to achieve impact within their own governments. It is critical that institutions recognize their audiences and brand their communications appropriately. In addition to policymakers, civil society representatives and potential investors should not be ignored. Broadening networks through partnerships also allow for greater access and impact among international audiences.

### **Monitoring Impact**

As noted earlier, the impact of research outcomes has become a key barometer of credibility among think tanks. Research institutions face the twin pressures of persuading policymakers of the relevance of their work while also demonstrating impact to their funders. Many take advantage of online tools to track hits to web pages, using visitor data to tailor communication strategies to various audiences. But gauging impact is a more elusive task than simply monitoring reader interest. It may be helpful to begin by trying to establish the current level of impact of partner institutions on policy yardsticks most applicable to Africa—the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act, the Millennium Development Goals and the Doha Development Agenda, for instance—and to set a goal for increasing impact over the next two years.

### **Nurturing Capacity**

Strengthening research capacity across the region is a key objective of the partnership arrangements under consideration, and participating institutions can contribute to this effort in several ways. Each partner could elect to mentor an institution within its country or region, drawing on its own reputation as well as on its association with Brookings to motivate emerging research talent. This could be done either in the



context of collaborating on a research project, or in a traditional training arrangement. The gradual, long-term nature of such an approach would encompass many of the recommendations cited in this report, and would offer the possibility of widening the partnership network at a steady yet manageable pace. Other options include formal scholar exchange programs that can expose institutions and researchers to a wider range of expertise while strengthening and expanding networks.

An oft-cited capacity deficit among African partners is the ability to make the most of communication technology. In addition to the outreach and dissemination challenges described earlier, there is a tendency among institutions to regard their own online databases as clearinghouses or repositories of

data, rather than as dynamic forums for interaction with research partners, the global policy community and civil society. Recognizing a significant missed opportunity, institutions are starting to prioritize media training, supported by foundations and research networks. Having acknowledged the value of proactive engagement with the public on issues impacting policy, many have come to realize that such engagement begins with maximizing in-house communication resources.

### **Expanding Scope**

The partnerships contemplated here aim to amplify collaboration, research excellence and impact throughout the region and beyond. Each partnership proposal should include a growth component to capitalize on momentum. A logical strategy would be to

### **AFRICAN ECONOMIC RESEARCH CONSORTIUM: CREATING CAPACITY FOR IMPACT**

The African Economic Research Consortium (AERC) was created in 1988 to build the capacity of African economic researchers to provide alternative research material to policymakers. By far the most successful capacity-building initiative in the region to date, the AERC has succeeded in increasing significantly the number of researchers and volume of studies being conducted in individual countries. It has also enhanced the profile of its network members, with several researchers going on to assume major policymaking positions.

The AERC study “Understanding Growth in Africa” brought together a number of international and African researchers to analyze comprehensively the experiences of individual countries and to synthesize the different lessons and experiences for general application. The study provided good explanations of how the growth experiences of individual African countries came about, with a strong focus on policies, institutions and political economy context.

AERC has recently initiated a new collaborative research project to understand the growth-poverty nexus. It seeks to study in more detail the channels through which current growth may impact the livelihoods of poor individuals and households, and how the extent of poverty in African countries affects growth processes.

undertake regional and comparative studies that can not only increase research visibility and relevance, but also generate further research at country and international levels. The research networks are strong proponents of this approach, as are multilaterals and foundations that can help in forging connections and providing funding support.

It will be important for AGI to eventually expand its partnerships to additional institutions in other African countries. The next section sets forth an initial blueprint for AGI engagement with its current partners, which can form the basis for expansion going forward.



## NEXT STEPS

*“Starting an institution can be messy. But we can see the pieces coming together.”*

— Ernest Aryeetey, AGI

### Partnerships with Brookings

AGI will sign a Memorandum of Understanding with each partner institution, setting forth the terms of engagement, research focus, output expectations and financial commitment of each party. In addition to the partnership arrangements set forth in the memoranda, there will be the possibility of informal *ad hoc* partnerships with international organizations and multilaterals.

AGI researchers will partner with researchers in Africa to undertake research assignments and write policy papers. The partners will jointly agree on a mixture of high-quality regional and country-specific studies. Depending on the interests and capabilities of partner institutions, AGI will facilitate work on at least two themes per year with institutions that have

a track record of good research in those areas. Considering the limited number of researchers available at AGI, AGI will create the opportunity for other US-based scholars and researchers, including researchers at Brookings, to partner with African researchers to undertake particular studies.

AGI will also work with participating research networks and multilateral institutions to conduct research and to organize international conferences and other advocacy and dissemination activities, and will support policy outreach strategies by the partners at the national level. Partners will also share responsibility for raising funds for future joint projects.

### Partnerships within Africa

Where possible, the six African partners will work not only with AGI but also with each other on joint comparative research and regional studies. Partners are encouraged to make their own links with international partners, even if separate from their relationship with AGI.

## CONCLUSION

The current global crisis has widened the sphere of engagement for research economists in policymaking. As Africa continues to bear the sometimes inordinate repercussions of externally derived market forces, this wider engagement must extend to African researchers based in the region and elsewhere: African expertise must take its place as a credible and indispensable partner in the design of global policy solutions. The heightened urgency for stable growth strategies calls for “all hands on deck”—a marshalling of the full spectrum of intellectual resources available to the continent, and an overall strengthening of the African voice in the development discourse. Guided by these principles, AGI stands ready to partner with the African research community to bridge the gap between research outcome and impact.



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