

## **ALABAMA COUNCIL FOR INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS - HOW IT ALL BEGAN**

### **B. Onuma Okezie, Ph.D.**

Stemming from a concern for lack of State support for International Education and Exchange Programs, Dr. B. Onuma Okezie, in 1983, organized and conducted a survey of Alabama four-year Colleges and Universities to determine whether any of them had any involvement, and to what extent, in international activities, either through teaching, research, outreach or exchange programs. The idea behind this was, if there were institutions that were already engaged in international activities, to try to bring them together as an organized stakeholders or group to serve as a voice or an advocate for, or to promote and bring awareness of the importance and role of international education, research and outreach to citizens of Alabama, particularly, the State legislators in order to generate their necessary support of the programs in a sustainable and effective way.

The result of the survey showed that 98% of the colleges and universities that responded to the survey were already engaged in one form of international activities or another, ranging from having had even one faculty member participation in Fulbright program overseas to elaborate involvements in various aspects. Those few who reported no involvements indicated that they would be interested in establishing such programs like international studies as part of their curriculum and faculty/student exchange programs with institutions in other countries.

It is to be mentioned that as a result of the Title XII legislation (Freedom from Hunger and Famine Prevention Act) passed by the U.S. Congress in 1975 by which U.S. Land-Grant Colleges and Universities were to be enabled to develop capacities to assist the U.S. government to render technical assistance to developing countries, and in an attempt to have an effective response to Title XII, thirty-two Land-Grant Colleges and Universities in the Southeast of the U.S. came together and formed the South East Consortium for International Development (SECID). Alabama A&M University, Auburn University and Tuskegee University were three Alabama Land-Grant Universities that were members of SECID. As Dr. Okezie began to share his concerns

about the limited or total lack of interest in International programs within the State with his colleagues, such as Dr. Don Richardson, the then Associate Dean of the Graduate School at Auburn and the Auburn's SECID Trustee and with the Executive Director of SECID, Dr. Ed Vickery, suggestions were made to find a way of getting more Alabama Universities to participate in the International Development programs in which the three Alabama members of SECID were already engaged. For Dr. Okezie, such increased number would mean increased strong voice and awareness of the importance of International involvement in the State. But because the SECID membership was limited to land-grant universities, it was not possible to invite more Alabama Universities to join the Consortium. Then Dr. Richardson, Dr. Vickery and Dr. Okezie decided to work out a way for SECID to partner with a group of selected Institutions in the State in International Activities or Programs of mutual benefits. This culminated in the formation in 1984 of the Alabama Council for International Development (ACID), which was made up of Alabama A&M University, Alabama State University, Auburn University, Tuskegee University, University of Alabama and University of Alabama, Birmingham. A Joint Memorandum of Understanding (JMOU) was entered into among the members of ACID and between it and SECID (which provided financial support for ACID's meetings) for the partnership or mutual cooperation and engagement in International Development Activities.

This appeared to be a step forward in increasing participation and awareness of the importance and need of such involvement in international programs by institutions in Alabama. However as time went on, Dr. Okezie thought that more still had to be done to enlarge the membership of ACID and broaden its scope to include other aspects of international dimension such as educational exchanges and study abroad than development assistance. Thus in 1987, he submitted a formal proposal to ACID for such enlargement of membership and a clearly defined set of objectives with suggested activities that could be carried out for accomplishing the objectives.

That proposal is reproduced below.

*WIDENING THE SCOPE AND PURPOSE OF THE ALABAMA COUNCIL FOR  
INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT*

*Dr. B. Onuma Okezie*

1. *A philosophy of the organization that should be seen as primarily responding to the individual and collective needs of the member institutions should be explored and defined. It should embrace long-term commitments in international dimensions in our various program foci including areas of research, service (or outreach) and classroom teaching.*
2. *The purpose of the organization could also be expanded to include:*
  - (a) *the fostering of development and growth of international education within the State of Alabama through cooperative and collaborative international programming and activities between the member institutions in particular and other state institutions in general.*
  - (b) *the fostering of better communication among member institutions and between their faculty and students in areas related to international activities.*
  - (c) *Fostering cooperation and collaboration in technical assistance projects abroad. This is our major objective at the present time and should be expanded to include cooperation in research and training.*
  - (d) *Support for and/or commitment to international education and development. It should include the promotion of public support for international education and development within the state and on the federal level.*
3. *Activities*

*We might think of expanding our activities that will correspond to the philosophy and purposes as indicated to include conferences and workshops*

*either regional or statewide; exchange of information on curriculum, on education exchange, on study abroad and the like; the suggested development of listing of faculty competencies, experience and interests in international area; an inventory of international related activities in Alabama institutions and the institutional contact persons. The brief survey that I conducted earlier, could be expanded to provide for the type of information envisioned above.*

- 4. If there are committees in the State Office of Education dealing with issues that would affect international education and development, we should seek representation.*

As might be seen, this proposal did not get very far. Members of ACID were not ready for such large steps. Later on in the same year (1987), Dr. Okezie received a communication in the form of a survey, from Dr. Jeral Williams, Vice-President for Academic Affairs, University of South Alabama, seeking information about institutional activities in International affairs or education. Dr. Okezie wrote to him informing him about a similar survey that he conducted in 1983 and sent him a copy of the instrument and the results. He and Dr. Okezie exchanged information and collaborated on the questions of how and what to do with the survey information. After a series of consultations with other stakeholders, Dr. Williams organized a series of meetings on International Education between 1987 and 1988. These meetings involved discussions on incorporating global education in A.C.H.E.'s list of educational priorities. At one of those meetings at Auburn Montgomery on December 2, 1988, a formal name for this International Education Meeting organization as Alabama Council for International Programs (ACIP) was agreed upon and thus ACIP was born. For all intents and purposes, ACID became subsumed under ACIP.

After ACIP was formed, Dr. Okezie advocated that the organization (ACIP) should take steps to assume leadership as knowledge based stakeholder spokes-organ and advocate for international education in the State of Alabama. He suggested ACIP goals/mission and specific objectives and activities for achieving the goals and which were similar to

the ones presented to ACID on which no action was taken. But again, and just like ACID, most members of ACIP were lukewarm or not ready for such level of responsibilities. It is clear that up till now not a great deal has been done as far as those proposed goal, objectives and activities are concerned.

ACIP has made some progress since its 14 year existence. Much of the achievements is attributable to the leadership provided by such persons as Dr. Robert Fornaro who has served as its Secretary/Treasurer since its establishment. The current leadership is making concerted efforts to reshape and strengthen the organization and to ensure that it plays its appropriate role of building, strengthening and promoting effective and sustainable international education, research and outreach in the State of Alabama.