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AIHA Launches the First PEPFAR-supported Partnership to Strengthen Biomedical Engineering Training in Africa

US-Ethiopian partnership will build training capacity at Jimma University and Tegbar-Id Polytechnic College, Serve as a Model for Other African Nations

January 21, 2013 — The American International Health Alliance (AIHA) announced today the formation of a new twinning partnership designed to strengthen Ethiopia's training capacity in the field of biomedical engineering. This partnership is supported by the American people through the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Ethiopia. It is the first PEPFAR-supported partnership in Africa to focus on biomedical engineering and technology as an important component of health systems strengthening.

Ethiopia is currently facing a critical shortage of trained biomedical engineers and technicians capable of properly maintaining and repairing diagnostic and treatment equipment at healthcare facilities throughout the country. Jimma University's Institute of Technology established Ethiopia's first biomedical engineering degree program in 2008, while Tegbar-Id Polytechnic College has been home to one of the country's only diploma-level biomedical technician vocational training programs since 2006. The efforts of these institutions are greatly impeded by both a severe lack of qualified biomedical engineering instructors and a shortage of crucial training capacity, including well-equipped workshops; modern biomedical training equipment and teaching methodologies; and evidence-based international standards on biomedical equipment maintenance and support.

In response, AIHA — through its HIV/AIDS Twinning Center Program — has linked these two Ethiopian institutions with Rice University and Texas Children's Hospital in Houston, Texas. Rice is consistently ranked one of the best teaching and research universities in the United States with its undergraduate and graduate programs in bioengineering respectively ranked sixth and eighth in the nation by *US News & World Report*. Both US institutions are members of the Texas Medical Center, the largest medical complex in the world, and have a longstanding and successful history of collaboration around the design and deployment of global health technologies that improve HIV and neonatal care in Africa, including in Lesotho, Swaziland, Malawi, and Botswana.

Together, the partners will work to strengthen bioengineering capacity in Ethiopia, largely through curricula and faculty development and the improvement of practical training opportunities at both the pre-service and in-service levels. Education and training opportunities developed through the partnership will focus on giving students and technicians practical, hands-on experience and problem-solving skills, as well as on creating and maintaining robust technologies designed to deliver highly effective care in low-resource settings. Initially, partners will focus on HIV and neonatal care before later expanding to other priority clinical areas. Partners also plan to explore professional development opportunities for biomedical faculty, staff, and managers through ongoing training and mentoring.

An expert team from Rice University is in Ethiopia this week meeting with their counterparts at Jimma University and Tegbar-Id Polytechnic College. Together they will visit local hospitals, health centers, and biomedical equipment suppliers in both Addis Ababa and Jimma. They will also jointly develop a partnership work plan to outline their goals, objectives, and activities for the coming year.