When President Donald Trump began his second term on January 20, he issued an executive orders that froze billions in U.S. foreign aid.

The freeze, which is set to last for 90 days, is meant to review funding priorities and align aid with the administration’s policies. However, this pause has raised concerns, especially about the impact on higher education in Africa.

U.S. foreign assistance has played a vital role in supporting African universities, particularly through the Higher Education Solutions Network (HESN), which is backed by USAID. HESN helps create partnerships between African and American universities, promoting research in areas like health, climate change, and agriculture. But now, these collaborations are at risk.

USAID, which has been the largest distributor of U.S. foreign aid, is going through a major restructuring. Many USAID employees are being placed on administrative leave, and the agency is being placed under the State Department’s control.

Some have criticized USAID, suggesting that it may be beyond repair, and even called for its shutdown.

Trump’s “America First” policy has made Africa a lower priority, and the aid freeze is threatening key areas of support for African universities. Institutional partnerships with U.S. universities are being disrupted, and many African universities rely on U.S. funding for research, especially in critical fields like public health, climate change, and agriculture.

Capacity-building programs that train African academics and improve university governance and research are also at risk.

Furthermore, scholarships and bursaries provided through U.S. aid have helped many African students access higher education. Now, these opportunities may be limited, making it harder for students to afford tuition at U.S. institutions.

Faculty exchanges, which allow African and U.S. professors to share knowledge, may also be reduced. African universities have become important players in solving public health issues like HIV/AIDS and malaria, as well as climate problems like droughts and desertification. Without funding, these vital research efforts may stall.

American support has also been key in agricultural research, helping African universities develop more resilient crops and sustainable farming practices. Now,

these programs face uncertainty.

Many African students have long looked to the U.S. for higher education. Thousands have benefited from scholarships and academic exchanges. But stricter visa policies are already making it harder for African students to study in the U.S., and the freeze will make things worse.

As opportunities in the U.S. decline, African students may increasingly look to other countries like the UK, Canada, or China for education.

If the freeze continues, the impact on African universities could be lasting. Many of the advances in education and research have relied on U.S. aid, so the loss of this support raises important questions about how African universities will continue to grow. African university leaders may need to advocate for policy change to ensure U.S. academic investment continues. They may also look to other countries and private organizations for funding or strengthen collaborations within Africa to become more self-reliant.

The freeze on U.S. foreign aid is a reminder of how political decisions in Washington can affect education across the globe. African universities, which have shown remarkable resilience, now face a major challenge.

Whether the U.S. restores funding or African institutions must adapt to new sources of support, the future of higher education in Africa may look very different in the years to come.