

MINUTES

Africa Centers of Excellence (ACE) Third Project Steering Committee Meeting

August 18, 2014

World Bank Office, Lome, Togo

PRESENT:

Prof. Messanvi Gbeassor, Chair/Directeur national de la recherche scientifique et technique, Togo
Prof. Jean Claude T. Codjia, Enseignant Chercheur à Université d'Agriculture de Kétou, Benin
Dr. Salifou Ouiminga, Directeur Recherche et Coopération Universitaire, Burkina Faso
Prof. Mahama Duwiejua, Executive Secretary National Council for Tertiary Education Ghana
Dr. Cherno Omar Barry, Permanent Secretary of Ministry of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology of the Gambia
Dr. Didier Acouetey, Executive President of AfricSearch, France
Dr. Joshua Attah, Director of the National Commission of Universities in Nigeria (Via Video Conference)-sitting in for Prof. Julius Okojie
NUC Team via Video Conference

ABSENT:

Prof. Julius Okojie, Executive Secretary of NUC of Nigeria
Prof. Aminata Sall Diallo, Conseiller Technique, Sénégal
Prof. Marcel Fouda, Immeuble Ministériel, Cameroun
Dr. Roland Kouakou, Principal Programme Officer in charge of Science and Technology, ECOWAS Commission Abuja, Nigeria
Dr. Irene Annor-Frempong, Director, Capacity Strengthening, FARA, Ghana
Dr. Tewfik Nawar, Professeur émérite, Faculté de Médecine, Université de Sherbrooke, Canada

OBSERVERS/FACILITATORS:

Dr. Kokou Tona, Associate Professor, CERSA, Université de Lomé, Togo
Dr. Koffi Hounkpe, Acting Country Manager, World Bank Office, Lomé, Togo
Mrs Pamela Mulet, Education Specialist, World Bank Office, Lomé, Togo
Mrs. Sylvie Nenonene, World Bank Office, Lomé, Togo
Ms Himdat Bayusuf, Education Specialist, World Bank Office, Washington
D.C, USA
Etienne E. Ehile, Secretary General, AAU, Accra, Ghana
Prof. Jonathan MBA, ACE Coordinator, AAU, Accra, Ghana
Mr. Maxwell Amo-Hoyte, Director of Finance, AAU, Accra, Ghana
Mrs. Brigitte Norgbey, ACE Project Officer, AAU, Accra, Ghana
Mrs. Gabrielle Hansen, Assistant Project Officer, AAU, Accra, Ghana

1. The Third Project Steering Committee (PSC) meeting for the Africa Centers of Excellence (ACE) project was held at the World Bank Office in Lome, Togo while the Nigeria team joined in via video conference from the National Universities Commission conference room. The main objective of the meeting was to review progress made on the ACE project following the Abuja PSC Meeting and to discuss the next steps. The specific objectives were to: (i) assess the project progress; (ii) discuss the declaration letter for regional specialization; (iii) provide update on key action items from last PSC meeting; (iv) provide an update on miscellaneous and other issues; and (v) discuss the priorities on next steps. The Agenda and list of attendees can be found in Annex 1.

2. After Opening Remarks by the PSC Chair and National Director of Scientific and Technical Research (University of Lome, Togo), the AAU Secretary General and the World Bank Acting Country Manager made short welcome addresses. The meeting participants then proceeded with self-introduction, followed by house-keeping announcements. Members went on and formally adopted the agenda of the third PSC meeting and the minutes of the last PSC Meeting.

Agenda Item 1: Project Progress

3. Regarding the project progress, a brief update was given by AAU on the progress on the implementation plans reviews of the 3 scientific

disciplines (STEM, Health, and Agriculture) to date. In general, all ACEs had made considerable progress since last PSC meeting. However some are more advanced than others in revising their implementation plans (IPs) needed for obtaining approval and disbursement of funds. In fact, 5 of the ACEs are so advanced with their IPs that they are almost ready for approval. Therefore, these IPs are being shared with the other ACEs to encourage them to use them to improve their own IPs. Members requested that the Focal Points of the ACEs be involved in all communications related to the ACEs and also that specific invitation be sent to the Focal Points for face to face meetings or any field trip to the ACEs. A brief presentation was made on progress on the regional operations manual, the financial manual, and the procurement manual. It was reported that a second round of announcement was currently open for the recruitment of monitoring and evaluation consultancy firm to undertake monitoring and evaluation assignments throughout the life of the project.

4. Regarding the survey that was sent out after the previous PSC meeting in Abuja, AAU reported that only 18 responses were received out of the over 120 participants that took part in the ACE project launch. AAU believed that the number would not adequately represent the opinion of the participants. Therefore, gentle reminders were sent by AAU to participants to fill the survey form so that the result could be used to improve the project implementation.

5. Members suggested that the role and terms of the reference of the PSC be made clearer given the existence of national review committees. A reference was made to the Regional Operations Manual (OM) as a solution to the problem. Additionally given that some PSC members were also focal points and in other countries the persons were different, the terms of reference for the PSC and the National Review Committees were briefly discussed with an agreement that the roles as they currently are in the Regional OM need to be clearly defined. Finally with respect to project communication, it was agreed that AAU should continue to copy both focal points and PSC members in all communications and all activities related to the ACEs.

6. A brief presentation on the ACEs' level of effectiveness conditions revealed that Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Gambia, Senegal, Togo and AAU have signed the financial agreement while, Ghana and Nigeria are awaiting parliamentary approval.

7. As for the Performance Contract, members were encouraged to use the World Bank (WB) model that was shared with all members to draft one for their country. To date, only Burkina Faso was cleared by the WB and Nigeria developed a draft. The WB is still awaiting drafts from all the other countries.

8. The National Review Committees have been established by the Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria, and Togo. Benin and Cameroon are yet to establish their National Review Committees, however the PSC members of the remaining two countries agreed to follow up on this pertinent actions

9. There was a concern about Nigeria having the majority share of the ACEs still had a number of conditions remaining to be fulfilled. Following on the PSC meeting in Lome, a WB team visited Abuja to work with the NUC to develop an action plan on moving Nigerian national effectiveness conditions forward. There were debates on how WB/AAU could help support countries in moving forward and achieving the effectiveness conditions. The WB is open for questions and suggestions. Clarifications were also provided on what the Performance Contract entailed as members seemed to be confused about all the required documents for the disbursement of the first installment. It was also suggested that the Performance Contract of Burkina Faso be shared with the other members so that it could be adapted to specific countries' environment.

10. Questions were raised about who should coordinate the collection of documents to be sent to the National Review Committees. It was clarified that since all these were government related documents, the WB team in each country would work closely with the national review committees. The focal points would serve as secretaries to the national review committees and AAU would fund the meetings of the National Review Committees in all countries except The Gambia and Nigeria.

11. Related to the update on the remaining Regional Facilitation Unit (RFU) activities and financial report, AAU reported that a part-time procurement officer had been hired to work with the ACEs on issues related to procurement. It was further added that any country requiring assistance on procurement issues should contact AAU for assistance. AAU appealed to members to make suggestions on capacity building needs that could be addressed by AAU. Suggestions were made that AAU should send to all ACEs a list of 2 or 3 capacity building topics such as project management, project sustainability, partnerships, etc. in the first instance. AAU should then request the ACEs to suggest other capacity building needs they would need in order of priority. These needs would then be tallied by AAU to identify the most popular capacity building needs among the ACEs and subsequently mount a capacity building training workshop on the most popular capacity building need before the end of the year.

12. Members discussed ways of having the ministries work collaboratively with the ACEs and also with the private sectors. There was discussion on the creation of a platform for dialogue using entrepreneurs from the private sectors. It was confirmed that within each ACE, there was enough flexibility to allow for the creation of advisory panels, scientific advisory committees, etc.

13. Burkina Faso shared an example of the mechanism they put in place to allow the private sectors to work directly with the institutions to make sure that the training they were providing to students were responsive to their needs. Members were cautioned to be careful about the name given to the partnership so that there was no confusion about what they were trying to market.

14. A brief report on financial management was presented by AAU Finance Director. The first part detailed the expenses that took place during last fiscal year, from August 2013 to July 2014. It revealed that the project was moving as planned except some budget lines have been re-allocated leading to more expenses related to evaluation committee meeting and site visits for the implementation plan reviews. These resulted in a slight deficit in the summary of income and expenditure. Therefore, AAU has been pre-financing the various activities of the ACEs until the next installment is

received. The budget projection from July 1, 2014 to December 2015 was also presented to the PSC. Areas of technical assistance and knowledge sharing, partnership creation and meeting were the largest budget items. The WB agreed on the proposed budget as the expenditures in questions were for investments that would pay off in the long run.

15. Nigeria raised a question on financial issues related to the Abuja meeting that was answered by the AAU Finance Director. Nigeria further sought clarification on processes put in place to allow that the ACEs that were doing very well to begin receiving their funds. WB suggested to respond to that question during the visit planned to Abuja this month.

16. Members suggested the creation of round table discussions and forums to allow for more visibility and creation of partnerships, especially public/private partnerships. Suggestions were also made about the identification of targets industries and institutions. It was suggested that such forums would be possible during supervisions where a day or two could be set aside to allow members and private sector partners to brainstorm in order to bridge the gap between ACEs and private sectors. Benin gave an example of such a partnership taking place at the University of Abomey Calavi where first year students are sent directly to have internships in the private sectors. This gives them real life experience and also allows to bridge language gaps as some of the Anglophone students are being sent to work with Francophone employers.

17. The WB presented a brief summary of the key elements of the Regional Operations Manual (OM) including the purpose and the main sections. An emphasis has been put on the terms of references of all the different committees, the overall project financing, the performance funding contract. Clarifications were made about the activities supported by the project, especially activities that would help enhance the project implementation. It was pointed out that during the upcoming mid-term review, each ACE lagging behind in the implementation, would, unless special circumstances exist, have its grant reduced by 50 percent of the gap in implementation. The gap is the difference between half of the grant and the actual committed amount under the ACE. For countries with multiple ACEs, the freed-up funding could be allocated to other ACEs. For countries

with only 1 ACE, the government and the Bank would discuss other options. This seeks to avoid have large amounts of funding not being used.

18. The OM would be shared electronically to members for adoption

19. The purpose of the Regional Operations Manual was clarified and it was agreed that it was an important working document building upon the Project Appraisal Document.

Agenda Item 2: Update on key action items from last PSC meeting

20. Regarding the declaration of intent document, questions were raised on who would be responsible for signing the document. It was suggested that a line be added to include the private sector as well. However, the main debate was around either having the PSC members sign it on behalf of the country or have the sector minister represented in the ACEs sign it. A decision was made that an amendment be made to the document that should reflect the correct title of the persons to sign it. It was agreed that one of the members of the PSC would take on that task and the revised version is attached with the minutes for each country to review and agree upon by September 10th 2014.

Agenda Item 3: Further update on key action items from last PSC meeting

21. Regarding the discussion on how to support the national review committees, members sought clarifications on the statement in the manual about one meeting of the National Review Committee per year. The WB clarified that one was the minimum, so it was agreed that the OM would be amended to be consistent with what was in the PAD. There was also a discussion about the Mid-term review that should take place in Year 2 of the project. Questions were raised about how to determine when the Mid-term review was going to be made given the current status of the ACEs; all of them might not start the project at the same time. It was confirmed that given the four and half years of the project lifetime the mid-term review is scheduled for June 2016 (the mid point of the project) Members further

discussed the implementation procedure. It was agreed that each participating country would coordinate its own national review committees with AAU participating as an observer. However, AAU would pay for the costs of the meetings for all the countries except Nigeria and The Gambia. At least a two-week notice was required for each country to inform AAU of the meeting in order to prepare for the payment of the cost of the national review committee meeting. Members sought clarifications on the proposed \$50 per day, per meeting and per person. It was clarified that this cost was participation cost with respect to transport and other related costs to the participant. AAU would reimburse this cost based upon receipts. In addition, other costs like accommodation, logistics and food for the committee members coming from other parts of the country would be provided by AAU. This is further clarified in the Regional OM.

Agenda Item 4: Miscellaneous and other updates

22. The WB reported that the ACE project was getting a lot of goodwill outside Africa and a lot of publicity as well. This of course would bring about a lot of pressure. Consequently other African countries are interested in joining, namely Cote d'Ivoire and Mali. The WB is having discussions with governments and trying to come up with the best mechanism taking in consideration lessons learned from the current project.

23. Regarding updates on Phase II of the project, the WB confirmed that there was good news as some funds have already been allocated. However, the Ministry of Finance for each country has to support the project for it to move forward. All countries in Southern and Eastern Africa could potentially participate in the project. The World Bank has had initial discussions with Kenya, Ethiopia, Mauritius, Mozambique, Malawi, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda, and will reach out to further countries as part of a consultative and open preparation process. More concentration on the countries with more specifics on the disciplines such as extractive industry, infrastructure, and statistics are being explored keeping in mind the lessons learned from Phase I.

Agenda Item 5: Discussion on next steps

24. There were discussions on the overall project next steps which were:

- Declaration of Intent – Sharing with PSC members from August 22 to September 1 for comments
- All National Review Committees to be established latest by October 2014
- 4th PSC Meeting and ACE Supervision and Capacity Building Workshop slated for 17 – 20 November 2014 as discussed in Abuja
- One Capacity building workshop before the end of the year – areas to be determined following prioritizations between project management and education issues
- As agreed at this meeting, center leaders would be contacted and capacity building workshops would be suggested by AAU
- Request of additional capacity building topics and prioritization
- Review progress made at the next meeting where all the 19 ACEs would be present

25. Key steps for National Focal Points and PSC Meeting
Follow up on:

- Performance contract
- Financing agreement
- Endorsement of the Operations Manual
- Legal opinion

AAU/WB

- Completion of the ACE survey
- Implementation plan reviews for all 19 ACEs completed and approved
- Fiduciary manuals for all 19 ACEs approved

Agenda Item 6: Further Discussion on next steps (Any Other Business)

26. AOB - Share information of what has been going on in specific countries. The Gambia informed members that it was organizing a

sustainability retreat and all other ACEs would be invited so that they could get information on what the needs of the Gambia were in order to respond to their needs. Other members from outside the ACEs would also be invited to attend. Clarifications were sought by other members to understand the purpose of the Gambia's proposition. It was clarified that the approach that the Gambia was planning to adopt was a unique one as the Gambia was not a University, but a participating country under Component 2, requesting for service. They were planning to share their needs with the service providers so that they could come up with solution to their specific needs.

Closing Remarks

27. The Chair expressed regret that all the PSC members were not at the Third PSC meeting, but promised to share the minutes with all of them. The following were agreed on:

- Timely sharing of information
- Inclusion of the Focal Points and the PSC members in all communication
- Next meeting of the Steering Committee is slated for November 17, 2014.

28. The meeting was brought to a close by the Chair of the PSC at 5:45 pm. An informal dinner was hosted by AAU at the restaurant "Côté Jardin in Lome".

Annexes:

1. Agenda and List of attendees and regrets
2. Minutes of the 2nd PSC meeting
3. Update on ACE Project – 12 August 2014
4. Update on the ACEs Report from AAU
5. List of PSC members 2013-2017
6. Letter of Endorsement
7. Proposed mechanism to support ACE National Review Committees
8. Financial statement for the period of august 2013 to July 2014

9. Proposed budget for the period of July 1, 2014 to December 31, 2015