

**AFRICA HIGHER EDUCATION CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE FOR DEVELOPMENT
IMPACT**

MINUTES OF THE FIFTH PROJECT STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING

May 24th 2021

Virtual Meeting

MEMBERS PRESENT

1. Prof. Kouami Kokou (Togo), Chair
2. Prof. Aboubacar Marcos (Benin)
3. Prof. Ramané Kaboré (Burkina Faso)
4. Prof. Souleymane Konate (Côte d'Ivoire)
5. Dr. Fahmi Ahmed (Djibouti)
6. Mr. Modak Secka (The Gambia)
7. Prof. Mohammed Salifu (Ghana)
8. Prof. Mamadou Saliou Diallo (Guinea)
9. Prof. Moustapha Adamou (Niger)
10. Prof. Coumba Touré Kane (Senegal)
11. Prof. Kouami Kokou (Togo)
12. Dr. Emmanuel Barry (UEMOA)
13. Dr. Didier Acouetey (Private Sector)

MEMBERS ABSENT

With Apologies

14. Prof. Abubakar A. Rasheed (Nigeria)

FOCAL POINTS

1. Dr. Dègla Hyacinthe HESSOU (Benin)
2. Mr. Yusupha Touray (The Gambia)
3. Mr. Edmund Aalangdong (Ghana)
4. Pr. Dr. Joshua Atah (Nigeria)
5. Prof. Amadou Abdoul Sow (Senegal)
6. Prof. Koffi Agbenoto (Togo)

IN ATTENDANCE

World Bank, AFD, AAU & Others

1. Dr. Halil Dundar, Practice Manager, Education Global Practice, World Bank
2. Mrs. Himdat Bayusuf, 1st ACE Impact Task Team Leader and 2nd ACE Impact Co-Task Team Leader, Education Specialist, World Bank
3. Dr. Ekuia Bentil, 2nd ACE Impact Task Team Leader and 1st ACE Impact Co-Task Team Leader, World Bank

4. Ms Marion Aubourg, Deputy Director, Education Division, AFD
5. Dr. Quentin Delpech, Task Team Leader – Lead Expert Higher Education, AFD
6. Dr. Graham Harrison (Senior Science & Technology Specialist, World Bank)
7. Ms. Maud Kouadio IV (Consultant, World Bank, Washington)
8. Mr. Said Abdo (CoTTL, World Bank, Djibouti)
9. Mrs. Eunice Ackwerh (CoTTL, World Bank, Ghana)
10. Mr. Eliot Jolomi Dikoru (CoTTL, World Bank, Nigeria)
11. Ms Amani Osman (Consultant, World Bank, Kenya)
12. Mr. Harry Crimi (Consultant, World Bank, Washington)
13. Mr. Djibril Ndiaye (Consultant, World Bank, Senegal)
14. Prof. Etienne Ehilé (Secretary-General, AAU)
15. Dr. Sylvia Mkandawire (Program Manager, ACE Impact, AAU)
16. Ms. Nodumo Dhlamini (Director, ICT & Knowledge Management, AAU)
17. Mr. Maxwell Amo-Hoyte (Director of Finance, AAU)
18. Mrs. Adeline Addy (M&E Specialist, AAU)
19. Mr. Emmanuel Ansong (Procurement Specialist, AAU)
20. Mr. Scheneda Kwaku Ankomah (M&E Analyst, AAU)
21. Mr. Abednego Corletey (Procurement/ IT Specialist, AAU)
22. Mrs. Felicia Kuagbedzi (Communications Officer, AAU)
23. Mrs. Bunmi Odufala (Marketing & Development Officer, AU)
24. Mrs Yvette Quashie (Human Resource Officer, AAU)
25. Ms. Georgina Maison (Systems Developer, AAU)
26. Mrs. Gabrielle Hansen (Logistics Officer, AAU)
27. Mr. Frank Adjei – Senior (Accountant, AAU)

INTRODUCTION

Overview

1. The Fifth ACE Impact Project Steering Committee (PSC) meeting was virtually hosted on 24th May, 2021, ahead of the 5th ACE Impact Regional Workshop. The meeting objectives were to a) review the implementation status of the First and Second Africa Higher Education Centres of Excellence for Development Impact (ACE Impact) Projects; b) discuss the Monitoring and Evaluation Progress Results Update; c) review country status on Disbursement linked Indicators (DLI) and disbursements as well as AFD’s support to the regional activities d) review the RFU work plan and budget for the year 2021/2022; e) receive feedback and update on key actions undertaken by the 11 participating countries; f) present and discuss parameters and timeline for the upcoming projects mid-term review; and finally g) to discuss the next steps for both the First and second ACE Impact projects.
2. The meeting started at 10:15 GMT with the Chair, Prof. Kouami Kokou (PSC member for Togo) welcoming all members present and appreciating the AAU, World Bank and AFD teams

for nominating him to chair the session. He acknowledged all actors and stakeholders for their continuous support to the ACE Impact projects and for successfully hosting the country round tables in the week of May 17th, 2021, ahead of the 5th ACE Impact Regional Workshop.

Welcome Remarks

3. **Prof Etienne Ehilé, Secretary-General, AAU** welcomed all the PSC members to the meeting, thanking them for their constant support and strategic leadership towards achievement of the overall project objectives. He noted the growth and notable achievements of the centres despite the limitations of the COVID-19 pandemic, and commended their innovativeness and contribution towards the fight against the virus in their respective countries. He reiterated the AAU's commitment as the Regional Facilitation Unit (RFU), to ensure that the objectives the Project are achieved with the support of the World Bank, AFD and other key stakeholders. Concluding, he encouraged partners to continue supporting all the centres as they strive to meet the project objectives and transform their institutions, and the continent as a whole.
4. **Dr. Marion Aubourg, Deputy Director, Education Division, AFD** welcomed and thanked all PSC members, project team members and stakeholders for their support and efforts towards the successes chalked by the project so far. She noted that the ACE Impact project is very important given that education is central to all of the AFD's interventions. She highlighted the project's contribution towards strengthening partnerships and creating fruitful collaborations at the international level, with specific mention of the Benin/Côte d'Ivoire collaboration. The AFD financial support towards the set up of four thematic networks and the remarkable progress made by the centers within one year particularly with regard to student enrolment, scientific publications, and the launch of training programmes were emphasised. Dr. Aubourg acknowledged the resilience shown by the centres amid the COVID-19 pandemic and reiterated the AFD's commitment to support the project.
5. **Mrs. Himdat Bayusuf and Dr. Ekua Bentil, ACE Impact TTLs, World Bank**, in their opening remarks, highlighted the important role played by the PSC in ensuring the alignment of the centers' activities to national and regional needs. They noted how the ownership and commitment of the PSC was fundamental to the success of the project, citing the example of the ACE I project. The proactiveness of the PSC in helping resolve challenges encountered through rallying their Ministries and all concerned stakeholders, was also acknowledged. With regard to the ACE Impact project, the team expressed the hope that the meeting would serve as a platform to discuss current challenges and recommend solutions to support progress as the project's mid-term approaches. Concluding their remarks, Mrs. Bayusuf and Dr. Bentil wished the Committee fruitful deliberations.

Adoption of Agenda

6. The Chair tabled the agenda for the fifth PSC Meeting and it was adopted without any amendment (See **Annex 1**).

Review and Adoption of Minutes of the Fourth PSC Meeting

7. The Chair indicated that the minutes for the 4th PSC meeting had already been shared by email with the PSC in March 2021 for their feedback. The document was however presented again for the Committee's final review. Subsequently, the minutes were adopted subject to the following amendment:

- Page 7, paragraph 18 (iii) - Replace the term '*Project Management Unit*' with '*Project Implementation Unit*' so that the sentence now reads, '*Updates to the project implementation arrangements have also been incorporated in the Manual, notably at Nigeria's level where a Project Implementation Unit has been set up*'.

Matters Arising from the 4th PSC Meeting Minutes & Key Actions Taken

8. The Project Manager, Dr. Sylvia Mkandawire reported that remarkable progress had been made over the past six (6) months to address the key issues arising from the Minutes of the 4th PSC meeting. The PSC congratulated the RFU for the commendable support provided the Centers and timely delivery of the project activities, including the verification ,M&E digital systems and technical support virtual meetings that have taken place.
9. **Adjustment and review of the Operations Manual in light of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on project implementation:** The necessary review was done and adjustments effected in the verification protocol. These included flexibility in the regionality, short course and other verification requirements. The adjustments were reviewed by the centres and the PSC before adoption and implementation. There were also updates to DLR 4.3, which relates to infrastructure and the teaching and learning environment. Centres submitted their DLR 4.3 milestone formulations and all of them were approved by the World Bank (with only four centers receiving conditional approval). Subsequently, these formulations were appended to the operations manual which is available on the project website.
10. **AFD Activities and Update Report:** The Project Manager reported that remarkable progress had been made following indication of the AFD's plans to undertake network bootcamps and physical visits to some of the network members. The visits were carried out and saw Coordinators from the Burkina Faso network visiting Ghana to discuss implementation details of the network's activities. There was also a joint AAU, IRD and Networks meeting to discuss the way forward and identify issues which needed strengthening.

11. **Update on RFU Activities, Workplan and Budget:** The RFU confirmed that the work plan and budget had been cleared by the WB following finalisation on the pending issues on staff RFU costs. Additionally, the Bank also gave a no objection on the budget for the previous year ending June 2021 which had earlier been shared with the PSC. The issue relating to the Project Accountant taking direct responsibility for the project's finances and reporting, had also been addressed. Subsequently, the Project Accountant has been working on all project financial reports and presented the project financial report to the PSC at the current meeting.
12. The PSC commended the RFU for sharing the documents well in time of the meeting. As directed by the PSC, the meeting documents were shared with the Committee at least five days before the meeting, on Monday May 17, 2021. A special reminder was sent out again on Friday May 21, 2021.

Discussions on Matters Arising

13. Responding to Prof. Salifu's request for an update on the recruitment of the Safeguards Specialist reported as pending at the last meeting, the Project Manager indicated this has been completed and the successful candidate participated in the 5th ACE Impact Regional Workshop. Already, the Specialist has started developing the project's grievance redress mechanism and reviewing safeguards documents, including Environment and Social Management Plans received from the centres.
14. On the incorporation of the DLR 4.3 milestone formulations in the Operations Manual, the Project Manager explained that the RFU took advantage of the review process to update the document in its entirety. The information integrated was not any different from that presented at the Dakar meeting. Through a series of clinics and thorough process, the centres were guided to formulate corresponding milestones to facilitate verification. The resulting milestone formulations were reviewed, approved, and the centres given a *no objection* to commence implementation of the related activities. Incorporating the approved milestone formulations in the Operations Manual was necessary as the manual serves as a guide for project implementation.

Update on First & Second ACE Impact Projects

15. **Component 1:** A number of activities were concluded under Components 1.1 and 1.2 of the project by the *Centres, Emerging Centres and the Colleges of Engineering*. The proportion of the total funds allocated per country that has been earned so far under the 1st ACE Impact showed Ghana in the lead at 43%, followed by Burkina Faso (34%), Senegal (33%), Djibouti (23%) and Guinea (22%). For the 2nd ACE Impact Countries, Benin, Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria recorded 31%, 27% and 21% respectively while the Gambia, Niger and Togo each logged 16%. It was clarified that the earnings were based on results submitted and verified and could

differ from amounts actually disbursed to the centres. In Nigeria, results have been achieved but funds are yet to be disbursed. There have been delays in the approval by the National Assembly of their national borrowing plan which has affected projects such as ACE Impact in Nigeria.

16. **Component 2.2 PASET Regional Scholarship and Innovation Fund (RSIF):** This component managed by ICIPE in close collaboration with the AAU, also recorded great progress. Five (5) ACE Impact participating countries are involved in this component – 3 1st ACE Impact Countries (Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Senegal) and 2 2nd ACE Impact Countries (Benin and Nigeria). Currently Ghana, Benin, Burkina Faso, and Senegal have finalized all required documentation and the first disbursements from their ACE Impact accounts have been received by ICIPE. Nigeria is still finalising the signing of the RSIF subsidiary agreement. This component in Nigeria is also being affected by the delays in the approval of Nigeria's borrowing plan. Overall, 71 (59%) of the expected 120 students have been recruited so far - Benin (10); Burkina Faso (8); Ghana (20); Nigeria (24) and Senegal (9).

17. **Component 3 (Facilitating Monitoring and Evaluation at the National Level):** The meeting was updated on the various initiatives undertaken by the four National Facilitating Units as follows: **a) The Nigeria Universities Commission (NUC)** focused on supporting the centres in the country to attain project effectiveness. Nigeria is now effective, and centres should soon be receiving their disbursements. Additionally, training sessions were organised, the Nigeria project website was restructured, and Annual Workplan review missions were undertaken. **b) The Project Coordinating Unit (PCU) in the Gambia** supported the transformation of the Gambia Technical Training Institute (GTTI) into the Gambia University of Applied Science, Engineering and Technology. The PCU also worked towards building partnerships with the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Ghana; overseeing progress on the DLRs, and supported Gambia's ACE Impact emerging center, STEE, to acquire land for construction. **c) The Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur, de la Recherche Scientifique et de l'Innovation (MESRI, Burkina Faso)** hosted national review meetings to check on project implementation progress; coordinated internal reviews of workplans and procurement plans; and conducted trainings in finance and procurement in line with capacity building needs of the ACEs. **d) The Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC, Ghana)** had its workplan approved and commenced its activities for the year. The Commission undertook site visits to all the nine (9) centres in Ghana and also conducted capacity building workshops for the centres on key thematic areas including financial management and procurement.

18. **Update on Inter-ACE Networking Initiatives:** The RFU supported the various ACE Impact networks to host a number of symposia which brought together students and faculty members

to share their research findings and discuss regional initiatives. Over the reporting period, six Networks e.g DSTN, TL-SCAN, WACEENET, ADEN, REMCHAN & WANIDA and FOOD4WA hosted symposia, while the remaining networks, mainly agriculture-focused ACEs, scheduled to hold their events in the month of June. The non-IRD sponsored networks also made some progress developing ten (10) innovative network proposals. Out of the ten (10), eight (8) proposals were adjudged fundable through the World Bank grant provided to the RFU.

19. Update on Verification of Selected DLRs:

- (i) ***DLI 2 (Development Impact):*** A Working Group was constituted to review verification of this indicator. Terms of Reference for evaluation of DLI 2 was also developed and widely disseminated to recruit an external evaluator who will oversee the verification process. So far, five applications have been received and the recruitment process is expected to be finalised by June 30, 2021.

- (ii) ***DLR 4.3 (Improved Teaching and Research Environment):*** All Fifty-three (53) centres prepared milestone formulations which were reviewed and approved by the World Bank, including four conditional approval for the two centers in Djibouti, the center in Th Gambia and 1 center in Togo (CERVIDA). The key next step is for the centres to implement the approved milestones.

- (iii) ***DLR 5.3 (Entrepreneurship and innovation) & DLR 7 (Institutional Impact):*** The verification methodology for this indicator has been agreed by the Project Team and the details and guidelines will be provided to the centers at special sessions to be held at the upcoming regional workshop.

20. Update on Capacity Building Webinars: The project hosted webinars to strengthen capacity in areas around the DLI structures such as program and institutional accreditation, and areas to support operations of ACEs e.g monitoring and evaluation and communications. Over the period, seven (7) webinars were held, with facilitators drawn from the AAU and the World Bank, and other international bodies including Elsevier, HCERES and the QAA-UK. The webinars targeted VCs, Centre Leaders and, M&E, Communications and Quality Assurance officers among others. Topics covered included *Monitoring & Evaluation, Institutional Accreditation, Communications, Publications and Scientific Communication*. An additional five (5) webinars are scheduled to hold in June and July 2021.

21. Implementation Support to ACEs and Emerging Issues: The project provided the platform for subject matter experts to interact with and support the ACEs in key areas. A total of 44 virtual meetings were hosted across all the project countries except Guinea, due to the unavailability of the experts at the scheduled time. The objective of these meetings was for

the experts to assist the centres accelerate completion and approval of annual workplans, and to provide other technical support. Fifty-three (53) Annual Workplans were cleared and approved over the period. Notably, the experts reported that COVID-19 had slowed down progress of the project in many aspects, affecting results earnings and fund utilisation of specific DLRs. Timely reporting of fiduciary results (DLR 6.1) for some countries, was also affected.

22. **Centres' COVID-19 Response:** Highlights of centres' contribution to the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic at national, regional and continent-wide levels, were shared. Broadly, the contributions focused on undertaking transformative research, technological innovations and production of sanitary materials and products.
23. **Development Impact Highlights (Awards, Honours and Collaborations):** Some centres received awards and initiated collaborations with other institutions within and outside the region. Other centres were given national level assignments or strengthened key areas at the regional level. Additionally, some Centre Leaders and Students received global recognition for their research and other works. For instance, Prof. Oguzie, Centre Leader for ACE-FUELS (Nigeria) was recently listed among the Top 2% of the World's Best Scientists in a database compiled by Stanford University (USA).
24. **Challenges faced within the Period:** The RFU reported that COVID-19 impacted the operations of the ACE host institutions and generally slowed down project implementation particularly with regards to student recruitment (especially regional students), internships and staff mobility. Procurement processes were also delayed, and Subject-Matter Experts were unable to undertake site visits because of COVID-19 travel and other restrictions.
25. **Partnerships:** Updates were provided on ongoing and potential partnerships within the ACE Impact Project including the multi-million-dollar AFD partnership implemented by the IRD to support networks in four thematic areas; the digital skills gap assessment to link students to job opportunities, and the research management collaboration with Elsevier. Progress on the IBM Partnership which provides internship opportunities at IBM's research laboratories in Kenya and South Africa, was also provided. Other partnerships were the Africa CDC partnership with the Health Centres and ongoing collaboration with the German Development Corporation (GIZ).

ACE Impact Communications

26. The period under review witnessed significant progress under communications. The RFU successfully hosted a virtual training for over sixty (60) ACE Impact Communications Officers and Website Management teams, and three (3) Newsletters were produced and disseminated among ACE Impact stakeholders. A *Communications Strategy* was developed to guide the creation of a robust identity, to promote visibility for the project and to help deliver on project

targets. In addition, the ACE Impact project website and social media pages were kept up to date and engaging with regular posts. Key analytics for the period May 2020 - April 2021 include the following: 519.5K Tweet Impressions; 600+ New Followers; 12K Website visits (increase of 1,588.8% over the performance of the previous 6-month period). The ACE Impact Communications Officers were engaged on a regular basis through information-sharing, capacity building and creation of content. An image bank with catchy and high-quality images was also set up. Despite progress, there were challenges relating to lack of or inadequate resources (including equipment) at the centre level to support the communications function; and, the limited skills of some staff and the resulting need for continuous training. Centre leadership was requested to help address these challenges to ensure more effective project communication.

ACE Impact M&E Progress Results Update (achieved by the Centers)

27. The Update focused on performance over the period January 2019 – November 2020 with specific emphasis on the project development objective results at the project, country and center levels; the status of results verification and earnings; and the next steps. Performance highlights included 10,817 students enrolled (2,828 PhD; 5,476 MSc & 3,773 Short Course students); 1,877 internships undertaken; 1,815 research publications produced; and approximately US\$30 million generated from external sources. Other results included 12 programme accreditations (2 International and 10 national) and 1 self-evaluation towards institutional accreditation. Under progress towards meeting the project targets, the top performing indicators were Research Publications (65%), PhD enrolments (55%); Masters enrolments (54%); and Revenue generated (45%). Professional Short Course enrolments, Programme Accreditation and Institutional Accreditation registered the lowest performance recording 20%, 17% and 14% respectively. Performance under the 1st and 2nd ACE Impact projects showed similar trends.

28. Over the period, results verification focused on Enrolments, Programme Accreditation, Revenue, Internships, Fiduciary Management, Competitive and Open Selection of University leaders, and Institutional Accreditation. The exercise was marked by high quality data, and high response and verification rates (91% and 82% respectively), an indication that centres are now more competent in tracking, reporting and online submitting of results. For the 1st ACE Impact project, earnings so far represent 36% of the total grants allocated. Performance at country level was varied with a high of 43% (Ghana) and a low of 22% (Guinea). Under the 2nd ACE Impact, overall performance was lower at 21% given the project was declared effective later in the countries concerned. Benin recorded 31% while Niger, the Gambia and Togo each logged 16%.

29. Key next steps included (i) Report submissions and verifications to start in June 2021; (ii) The submissions and verification of fiduciary management results between July 15 2021 and September 30, 2021; (iii) The submissions and verifications of data on students, publications and internships scheduled for December 1 2021 – January 4 2022; and (iv) On-demand verification of other results every quarter.

Country Status on disbursements and Processes

30. Details on disbursement and funds utilization rates showed that for the 1st ACE Impact Centres, disbursement was at 26% and expected to go up to 33% by the end of May 2021. Country-wise, rates ranged between 31% (Ghana) and 12% (Djibouti). The 2nd ACE Impact recorded 5% disbursement rate expected to go up to 23% by the end of May 2021. At country level, maximum disbursement was at 22% (Benin) and the lowest at 10% (Togo). Notably, some centres have already earned the maximum of funds allocated to selected disbursement-linked results (DLRs) including Student Enrolments, Programme Accreditation, Research Publications and Revenue Generated. On funds utilisation, performance was varied ranging between 0% and 32%. Next steps included verification of additional results; External Evaluator recruitment for DLI 2; Experts site-visits; Graduate Tracer Study; Project Mid-term Review; National Review Meetings; and the 6th Regional Workshop, all to be implemented between June and November 2021.

AFD Support to Regional Activities

31. The French Development Agency (AFD) supports the project in Benin, Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria. The AFD is also funding the ACE Partner Project implemented by IRD in collaboration with the RFU. Significant progress has been made under this initiative including the launch of calls for internships for Masters and PhD students under mining, water, climate change, digital science and COVID-19 programmes. Four thematic networks were launched, online bootcamps held and massively open online courses (MOOCs) are being developed to train the centers.

Discussions

32. Responding to concerns on the apparent lower performance of the 2nd ACE Impact, the Project Manager explained that the latter was launched later and most countries achieved effectiveness a year after the 1st ACE Impact countries. In addition the seventeen (17) Nigeria centres are yet to receive any disbursements as approval of Nigeria's national borrowing plan has been delayed at the country level. Given Nigeria accounts for more than half of the 2nd ACE Impact centres (17 out of 31), this has affected the overall performance. The outstanding issues are being resolved and Nigeria centers should soon be receiving their disbursements.
33. With regard to international programme or institutional accreditation, it was clarified that this takes about eighteen (18) months to complete so centres should do well to start the process

early. Prof. Salifu (PSC Member, Ghana) cautioned that most national accreditation agencies have international agencies they recognise so centres should do well to discuss with their respective national agencies before engaging any agency to undertake programme or institutional accreditation.

34. There was a request to consider accepting research publications indexed in databases other than Scopus as the current requirement limits publications from specialized areas such as mathematics. The issue had come up during the country roundtables prior to the PSC meeting and centres were tasked to propose other research databases and journals per thematic area for consideration by the RFU and World Bank. The RFU will collect and share the necessary information with the World Bank.
35. The Project Manager explained that while Guinea missed out on the initial round of implementation support meetings because of non-availability of the Expert, the latter has scheduled meetings over the month of June to provide technical assistance to the centres.
36. Speaking to whether the impact of COVID-19 on project implementation had been assessed, the RFU confirmed that an online survey was administered and the results informed the verification requirement adjustments in the Operations Manual. The assessment is an ongoing exercise, and the upcoming project midterm review will be another opportunity to review the COVID-19 impact. The RFU assured the PSC of its commitment to providing solutions and supporting the centres based on findings.
37. With regards to participation in the PASET initiative, Benin indicated it had already signed the necessary agreements and requested that the RFU report be revised accordingly. The meeting was informed that, *icipe*, facilitation unit of the initiative, will be providing comprehensive information at the upcoming 5th ACE Impact Regional Workshop.
38. On steps taken to strengthen communications at the centres, and the benefits of the RFU's initiatives and efforts, it was clarified that the AAU and WB communications team has been working closely with the Communication Officers in the centres to generate content. Capacity building sessions had also been organized and more tailor-made training events have been scheduled. In addition, the team has been available to review communications products generated by the centres. A major request from the communications officers was for centres to allocate specific funds to support communications activities.
39. The RFU clarified that partnership initiatives were either specific, targeting particular thematic areas or general issues, in which case all centers were involved. Only Health Centres have been invited to participate in the CDC on May 30th meeting, as it is specific to this category of ACEs.

Decisions/Resolutions

- **RFU to compile and share with the WB, proposals on non-Scopus research databases/ journals to be considered as eligible under the project**

AAU Workplan and Budget

40. The Budget and Annual Work Plan for the period June 2021 to July 2022 with a total cost of US\$4,247,604, including US\$150,000 administrative costs and US\$60,000 contingency costs was presented to the PSC for approval. The Work Plan covers 6 key areas:
- (i) Coordination and organization of the PSC meeting and Regional workshops;
 - (ii) Monitoring and Evaluation of the project and individual centre levels;
 - (iii) Communication, Publicity and Information Dissemination;
 - (iv) Capacity Building for the centres;
 - (v) Networking and Partnerships among the centres; and
 - (vi) Project Management and Implementation Support.

RFU Financial Report and Budget

41. The RFU *Financial Report and Budget* for the period July 2020 - April 2021 with details on project funding and financial progress for the entire project as well as for the 1st and 2nd ACE Impact projects. Project funds at the RFU level total US\$15 million and financed by the World Bank under two funding agreements - 1st ACE Impact and 2nd ACE Impact. Expenditure for the current year 2020/2021 totaled US\$1,292,161. Based on projections for subsequent years, it is clear that there are sufficient funds to fully implement the entire project.
42. **1st ACE Impact Financial Performance:** Funds available at the start of the period totaled US\$165,199. An additional US\$1,041,842 was received making a total of US\$1,207,041. Total expenditure for the period was US\$636,629, leaving a balance of US\$570,412 as at April 30 2021.
43. **2nd ACE Impact Financial Performance:** Cash inflows over the period totaled US\$350,000 while total expenditure was US\$126,598. The balance as at April 30 2021 was US\$223,402.

Discussions

44. On budget savings made because physical activities could not be held due to COVID-19 restrictions, the RFU explained that this has been re-distributed across the remaining years of the project. A suggestion was made to explore the possibility of allocating the savings to centres to support COVID-19 communication and sensitisation activities. The RFU clarified that the capacity building budget is used for training (through webinars) and also for facilitating linkages between the centres and the private sector. Specifically, the digital network project is

being funded from this allocation. The project aims to establish a blue print for the deployment of digital education across the ACEs by building competence in digital education. Starting June 2021, the École polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL), Switzerland will support this initiative to train ACE faculty in online education design and the production of digital content.

45. On funding for student activities, the RFU explained that this is provided at the center level.

Update on M&E Digitised System

46. The Construction of the system which commenced in 2018 and aimed at simplifying data collection and, facilitating and advancing data analysis, is at an advanced stage. The system is being developed jointly with an ICT Consultant Firm, Bewsys Ghana. The key stakeholders of the digital system are the RFU, the World Bank and Technopolis. Over the reporting period, several meetings were held with the stakeholders. Notable achievements include:

- Successful reporting by centres for 3 reporting periods (Jan 2019 – Nov 2019; Dec 2019 – Nov 2020 and Dec 2020 – April 2021)
- Submission of 2021 Workplans by the ACEs via the system
- Completion of verification process for DLRs 3.1,3.2&3.4 (Students), 4.2 (Publications) and 5.2 (outreach).

47. Key timelines for testing and training activities to be completed before the next regional workshop were highlighted as follows:

- July, 2021 (Testing of Report Generation by all key stakeholders);
- June, 2021 (Testing of World Bank Access);
- July 19 – 20, 2021 (Training session for centres on report generation); and
- July 30, 2021 (Payment Processes and generation of verification letters).

Country Roundtable Discussions

48. **Benin:** The representative for Benin reported that in spite of some delays in the signing of the subsidiary agreement for the PASET-RSIF component, the initiative is now on course. At the national level, oversight is being assured by the national monitoring committee with the main objective of facilitating achievement of the project goals. Work on infrastructure is on course and there have been meetings at ministry level to provide progress updates and to address challenges. On institutional impact, an officer from the University of Abomey Calavi has been nominated to lead the process.

49. **Burkina Faso:** The national coordinating body held a number of meetings with the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research to keep track of project status and progress, and discuss challenges and recommendations for the way forward. Additionally, the national coordination organized capacity building sessions for all the centres. Key project achievements

were highlighted including 43 PhDs, 1,300 Masters students, 187 internships and 108 scientific articles. Financial management documents have been duly submitted to the RFU and World Bank, and the country has achieved significant funds disbursement (25% as at 11th May 2021). Challenges faced relate to international and regional accreditation, developing and sustaining partnerships with the private sector, and ensuring publications are indexed in Scopus. Next steps will focus on completing the procurement of the TomPro Accounting Software for use by all the centres, finalizing recruitment of external auditors and moving on with arrangements for international and regional institutional accreditation.

50. **Djibouti:** The Country Representative expressed appreciation to the RFU and World Bank for the continuous support to assure the progress of the centres in Djibouti. A lot of progress has been achieved since the last regional workshop. The Annual Workplan and budget have been approved, the project staffing has been beefed up and recruitments are 50% completed. For infrastructure, all plans have been approved and work would soon commence. Good progress has been made on internships and the centres are looking to the Scientific Committee to help reach out to the industry and private sector for internship opportunities. For revenue generated, performance suffered because of delays in the recruitment of the external auditor. A *No Objection* from the World Bank is pending. There are plans to register patents and it is expected this will improve performance on DLR 5.1 – revenue generated. There are however challenges relating to the recruitment of regional students from neighboring countries (Ethiopia and Somalia).
51. **Gambia:** The Ministry of Education has a transformation plan for education which informed the transformation of the Gambia Technical Training Institute (GTTI) into a university. Gambia reported a significant proportion of their funds are for infrastructure. Land has been acquired and the environmental impact assessment completed. Additionally project readiness requirements have been satisfied; and milestone formulations have been partially approved pending minor reviews. There have been delays and challenges owing to the COVID pandemic and other reasons. Contractual agreements have been signed with the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST, Ghana) and another pending with the De Montfort University (UK). Discussions have been concluded with the latter and documents have been shared with the World bank for no objection.
52. **Ghana:** Much progress has been made at country level with a significant 43% of funds disbursed with varied performance at centre-level, the highest being at 65% for CoE-KEEP. The National Facilitating Unit (NFU) conducted missions to all nine centres and provided direct support through a workshop on financial management and procurement for all the centres. Significant progress has been made but there are also challenges including managing regional students. It appears regional students have expectations beyond what the centres are able to provide , giving rise to credibility issues. A comprehensive report on the missions

undertaken is being finalized and will be shared with the RFU and World Bank. The country representative observed that the reliance on scholarships to attract regional students is not sustainable in the long term and alternative strategies should be explored.

53. **Guinea:** The country is at 20% disbursement which is unsatisfactory although this is an improvement from the earlier performance. Fiduciary and administrative teams, as well as regulatory arrangements are now in place. Two training sessions have been held, and academic programme documents have been submitted to the national accreditation agency for validation. Performance under research publications and regional students is encouraging. On the procurement side, the national procurement code has been renewed and now requires centralized processes resulting in delays. The national oversight body is operational and AAU's response to proposals on its leadership is awaited.
54. **Nigeria:** Nigeria reported it was yet to get approvals for disbursement at the national level but that the matter was being resolved and they hoped to receive funds for the results achieved so far. In spite of this challenge, the centres have been working hard and have made significant progress as reflected in the RFU reports. The Representative observed the situation has brought to the fore the need to assure sustainability right from the start of the project. As the Project Implementation Unit, the Nigerian Universities Commission (NUC) has been providing support to the centres. The country should have more to report at the next regional workshop.
55. **Senegal:** The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research provides oversight and support to the centres in Senegal working closely with the Ministry of Finance . A committee has been set up to interact directly with the centres. Over the reporting period, Senegal participated in RFU organized roundtable discussions. While the country level disbursement rate stands at 33%, the second highest under 1st ACE Impact, the Ministry noted the centres need to work harder to improve their individual performance on all fronts. Enrolment of regional students is currently a challenge given the reliance on scholarships and more effort is needed on interactions with industry and other sector players. On a positive note, the national accreditation agency has accredited some programmes at the CEA-MITIC and there are many more for the centres in the pipeline.
56. **Côte d'Ivoire:** Three meetings were held to set up the National Project Steering Committee which is chaired by the Minister of Higher Education himself. Recommendations have been made to improve the performance of the centres including one on harmonising accounting procedures for all four centres. Another meeting was organized by the network on mines, energy and environment. Performance-wise, the country is at 27% of disbursement, with the lowest and highest performance being 11% (CEA MEM) and 34% (ENSEA) respectively. In view of the varying performance between the centres, collaboration and experience sharing

among the centres is being encouraged. The country would appreciate further clarification on the development impact indicators.

Key Next Steps for the 1st and 2nd ACE Impact Projects:

57. Next steps for both the 1st and 2nd ACE Impact were presented and largely covered:

- Issuance of verification letters; Verification of results;
- Recruitment of an External Evaluator for DLI 2;
- Completion of the MEL Platform;
- Organisation of Expert site visits;
- Implementation of Digital Education Networks project;
- Organisation of capacity building events for ACEs;
- Oversight of the Graduate Tracer Study;
- Support for thematic networks and partnerships;
- Preparation for the Mid-Term Project Review;
- Organisation and participation in the national steering committee meetings; and
- Organisation of the 6th PSC and Regional workshop, to be implemented between June and November 2021.

Update on Mid Term Review

58. The structure, details and timeline of the mid-term review were discussed during the country round table meetings and the PSC meeting. Essentially, the mid-term review will focus on DLI performance, disbursement and fund utilisation rates, among others. The review will also entail qualitative assessments where expert technical implementation support missions will be undertaken jointly with the WB and RFU. Findings from these missions will inform the distribution of unallocated funds to most performing centers and the potential decision to reduce funds of the least performing centers. A key focus will be to ensure that by the closure of the project, each country's funds have been fully disbursed and adequately utilised.

59. The mid-term review will also assess the continued appropriateness of the disbursement linked indicators, the need for amendments and reallocation of funds within DLIs, among others. The RFU and World Bank will prepare and share a mid-term review paper for the consideration of the PSC and to facilitate discussions at country level.

Closing

60. The meeting ended at 16:45 GMT with appreciation from the Chair for the active participation and significant contributions of the Committee. The RFU and World Bank teams were also recognised for the successful coordination of the project and for the support to the centres.

Annex 1: Agenda for 5th ACE Impact Project Steering Committee

Fifth ACE Impact Project Steering Committee Meeting Virtual Platform 24th May 2021 (10:00 – 15:30 GMT)

PROGRAMME

10:00-10:15		OPENING
Welcome Address		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prof. Kouami Kokou (PSC Member for Togo & Chair)• Prof. Etienne Ehile (Secretary General) AAU• Dr. Marion Aubourg, Deputy Director, Education Division, AFD• Dr. Halil Dundar, WB Practice Manager, Education GP
10:15-11:45		OVERALL ACE IMPACT UPDATES
Review and Confirmation of Minutes of the Last Meeting /Discussion on Key Action Points		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prof. Kouami Kokou (PSC Member for Togo & Chair)
Status of First & Second ACE Impact Implementation		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dr Sylvia Mkandawire, ACE Impact Project Manager• Dr. Graham Harisson, ACE Impact Core Team Member, WB• Mrs. Felicia Kuagbedzi, Communications Officer, AAU• Ms. Amani Osman, Communications Consultant, WB
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Project Implementation Progress (summary of progress and implementation support)▪ Project Verification Update▪ Status update on RSIF Component▪ Status on Project Component 3▪ Development Impact highlights of centres▪ Networking activities▪ Partnerships▪ Communication Activities		
ACE M&E progress results update		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mrs. Adeline Addy, ACE Impact M&E Officer• Ms. Maud Kouadio IV, ACE Impact Core Team Member, WB
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ PDO and Results Achieved▪ Status of Disbursements▪ Operational and POM updates▪ DLI/DLR verification schedule and timeline		
11:45-12:00		AFD SUPPORT
Country Status on disbursements and processes AFD support for regional activities		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dr Quentin Delpesch – Task Team Leader – Lead Expert, Higher Education
12:00-13:00		BREAK
13:00-13:30		UPDATE ON RFU ACTIVITIES
AAU Workplan		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dr Sylvia Mkandawire, ACE Impact Project Manager• Mr. Frank Adjei, ACE Impact Accountant, AAU
AAU Financial Report and Budget		
13:30-14:00		UPDATES ON M&E DIGITIZED SYSTEM

Progress, lessons, next steps on the development and use of the MEL platforms

- Ms. Nodumo Dhlamini, Director of ICT, Comms&KM, AAU
- Ms. Georgina Maison, Systems Developer, AAU

14:00-15:00

TOUR DE LA TABLE

Roundtable on Key Country Feedback and Actions

- PSC Members

15:00-15:30

CLOSING

Key next steps, First ACE Impact and Second ACE Impact

Closing Remarks

- Mrs Himdat Bayusuf, ACE Impact TTL WB
- Dr. Ekua Bentil, ACE Impact TTL, WB
- Prof. Kouami Kokou (PSC Member for Togo & Chair)

Annex 2: Key Next Steps for 1st and 2nd ACE IMPACT

No	Activity	Timeline	Responsible
1	Issue disbursement letter for Nigeria	ASAP	AAU/WB/ Centres
2	Ongoing/regular verification activities across the DLIs of the project for ACE Impact Countries	June – November 2021	AAU/WB/Centres
3	Finalise procurement of External Evaluator for DLI 2	June 2021	AAU
4	Finalise MEL platform development	June 2021	AAU
5	Timely planning and organisation of expert site visits and virtual support to the centres	July 2021	AAU/WB
6	Implementation of Digital Education Networks	June – November 2021	AAU/ WB
7	Capacity Building Activities for Centres, eg- via webinars, coaching	June – November 2021	AAU/ WB/Centres
8	Oversee the Graduate Tracer Study Implementation	June – November 2021	AAU/ WB/Centres
9	Support the implementation of ACE Impact thematic Networks and Partnerships	June – November 2021	AAU/Centres
10	Project Mid-term review - First ACE Impact - Second ACE Impact	- Oct – Nov. 2021 - Feb 2022	WB
11	National Steering Committee Meetings	Prior to 6 th Workshop	Gov'ts/Centres
12	6 th Regional Workshop	TBC	AAU/WB