

MINUTES

Africa Centers of Excellence (ACE) Steering Committee Meeting

May 19, 2014
Abuja, Nigeria

PRESENT:

Prof. Julius Okojie, Chair/Executive Secretary of NUC of Nigeria
Prof. Jean Claude T. Codjia, Enseignant Chercheur à l'université d'Abomey-Calavi, Benin
Dr. Salifou Ouiminga, Director Research and University Cooperation, Burkina Faso
Prof. Marcel Fouda, Ministerial Building, Cameroon
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
Prof. Messanvi Gbeassor, National Director of Scientific and technical Research, Togo
Dr. Didier Acouetey, Executive President of AfricSearch, France

ABSENT:

Prof. Aminata Sall Diallo, Conseiller Technique, Senegal
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, Professor Emeritus, Faculty of Medicine, University of Sherbrooke, Canada

IN ATTENDANCE:

Mr. Andreas Blom, Senior Education Economist/ACE Task Team Leader, Human Development, the World Bank, Washington DC.

Ms. Himdat Bayusuf, Education Specialist, the World Bank, Washington DC.

Mrs. Eunice Ackwerh, Senior Education Specialist, the World Bank, Ghana Office

Prof. Etienne Ehile, AAU Secretary-General

Prof. Jonathan Mba, AAU Director of Research and Academic Planning (DRAP)/ACE Coordinator

Mr. Maxwell Amo-Hoyte, AAU Director of Finance

Dr. Joshua Atah, NUC Director of ICT/National ACE Coordinator

1. The second Steering Committee (SC) meeting for the Africa Centers of Excellence project was held at the National Universities Commission (NUC) in Abuja, Nigeria. The main objectives of the meeting were to oversee and guide the impact and progress of the project. The particular objectives are: (i) confirm the Steering Committee members and composition; (ii) update on the Africa Centers of Excellence's (ACEs) progress and readiness for implementation; (iii) provide update on AAU project activities; (iv) update and comment on the World Bank project progress; and (v) discuss the priorities of launch workshop and the next steps. The Agenda and list of attendees can be found in Annex 1.

2. After the Opening remarks by the NUC Executive Secretary/SC Member, the AAU Secretary General and the World Bank, the NUC Executive Secretary briefed the members of the press and answered questions. Members of the press left the room. The meeting participants proceeded with self-introduction, followed by housekeeping announcements.

Agenda Item 1: Confirmation of SC members and composition

3. Regarding the selection of the chair, members agreed to have the hosting country act as chair and this should be done on a rotating manner. Therefore, the NUC Executive Secretary was nominated as the chairperson of the

meeting. It was further suggested that the next meeting be hosted by a French-speaking country.

4. A new Steering Committee member from the private sector was introduced, and presented briefly on how companies can provide critical guidance to the Steering Committee and the Africa Centers of Excellence.

5. The participants discussed the status of The Gambia in the Steering Committee given the fact that the country does not host an ACE. It was agreed that The Gambia is an equal partner in the project and a full member of the steering committee with access to the same support since the country will be purchasing educational services from the ACEs.

Agenda Item 2: Project Progress

6. AAU reported on the project selection procedures, the recent round of evaluations, and the recommendations of the experts with regards to the improvement of the ACE Implementation plans so that the implementation process could move quickly forward. The presentation and material prepared is in Annex 2, including all the evaluation reports of the International Evaluators.

7. One of the international experts on STEM reported on the main observations and recommendations for the review of the ACE implementation plans on the basis of the ACEs that he visited. Overall, the expert found the project team members to be dynamic, very dedicated, motivated and ready to tackle the work. However, the expert listed four challenges to be addressed:

- The aim of the ACE, and how to achieve that aim were not clear in several ACEs. There is a need to guide the ACEs to prepare more focused implementation plans.
- Gaps in the knowledge and guidance on the specific steps, on how the project will be implemented, including the transfer of funds and the results-based financing. Consequently, more guidance and specific information is needed for the ACEs to finalize the implementation plans.

- Issue with ACE leadership and support within the hosting university institutions and ACE leadership responsibilities vis-à-vis other institutional responsibilities.
- Difficulty in identifying how the ACE would be different from the existing institutions. Hence, a need to identify the desired changes in performance of the institutions, and an excessive focus on equipment.

In addition, the World Bank complemented the above points with a summary of observations from the reviews of the implementation plans, Annex 3.

Agenda Item 3: AAU Project Activities

8. AAU reported on project activities.

- Regarding the selection and hiring of consultants for M&E, AAU issued a call for proposals (consultancy) for the implementation and progress report. Three applications have been received; however, none of the applicants was bilingual. Therefore, the announcement would be readvertized internationally.
- The ACE Project operations manual is work in progress, which will be finalized shortly.
- Recruitment of the Project Officer has been completed and the Project Officer will assume duty on July 1, 2014.
- Plan to deliver training workshops for the ACEs to enhance their capacity.
- Support and monitor the ACEs, discuss challenges and share experiences.
- Recruitment of a Procurement Officer has been initiated and will be completed in the next couple of weeks to support the ACEs develop their procurement manual.

The full information is available in Annex 4.

9. Financial Report. The AAU Finance Director presented the financial statement of expenses and the proposed budget for the next six months of operation, Annex 5. Most items in the budget were accepted, but World Bank indicated the need for more consultation on the budget.

Agenda Item 4: World Bank Project Progress

10. The World Bank summarized the undertaken activities since the last Steering Committee meeting. These are summarized in Annex 6.

11. Steering committee members raised a potential problem that the costs and time involved with the ACE national review meetings are not currently covered by the project. Although the costs are relatively small, the national review committee and the work of the Focal Points are critical for the project's success. The World Bank explained that the transaction costs involved in fiduciary reporting exceed the gains from transferring funds to the focal points. It was agreed that all operational costs of the national committee meetings should be covered by AAU except in the case of Nigeria and The Gambia where the NUC, Nigeria, and the PCU in the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education are implementing bodies. In the case of NUC, Nigeria, the funding is from the national portion of the World Bank funding. After consultation with the fiduciary team members, the World Bank and the AAU will propose options for funding of the operational costs of the National Review Committee. However, such funding would not cover sitting allowances or any monetary reward for participation in the meetings. To cover such costs, it was suggested that government counterpart could be requested for the Focal Points.

Agenda Item 5: Discussion on next steps

12. The World Bank proposed next key steps, Annex 7. The discussion focused first on the required steps by the Centers, notably the improvement of the Implementation plans and the preparation of Fiduciary manuals. The proposed deadline of May 31 for submission of the revised Implementation Plan and Fiduciary Manuals was accepted. Second, the discussion focused on the following steps required by the government to achieve project effectiveness:

- a. Establishing the National Review Committee
- b. Endorsement of the Regional Operations Manual
- c. Review and adapt the draft Performance and funding agreement

d. Legal opinion on the Financing Agreement between the World Bank and the Ministry of Finance

These steps will be coordinated between each Focal point, World Bank country education specialist and the Ministry of Finance. Once the project is effective, the first transfer of funds can take place.

Third, a proposed schedule for implementation beyond project effectiveness was discussed.

The proposed next steps were endorsed by the Steering Committee subject to incorporation of feedback from the ACEs and subsequent feedback from the Steering Committee members and Focal points.

13. Next Steering Committee meeting. Members discussed the frequency of the meetings and agreed on holding three meetings this year because of the need for timely and frequent supervision and guidance of the ACE Project in its start-up phase. Therefore, the next two meetings have been scheduled for the months of August and November 2014.

14. There was a general understanding that the next ACE Steering Committee meeting should be hosted by a Francophone country. Given the efforts and visibility involved in hosting a meeting, Francophone country members agreed to consult their respective governments before confirming ability to host the next meeting. The Francophone country members would report back within two weeks on the possibility of hosting the next ACE meeting.

15. Members agreed to hold the 3rd and 4th ACE Steering Committee meetings in August and November 2014.

Closing Remarks

16. It was agreed that there should be more communication with Steering Committee on the ACEs and more advance notice on ACE events. The following agreements were reached:

- Timely sharing of information
- Inclusion of the ACEs in more communication

- Better planning of activities, setting of deadlines, and adherence to time lines
- Next meeting of the Steering Committee is slated for August 18, 2014.

17. The meeting was brought to a close by the Chair of the PSC at 6.00pm.

Annexes:

1. Agenda and List of attendees and regrets
2. Presentation and memo on Project progress
3. Summary of observations from the review of the Implementation Plans
4. AAU project activities
5. AAU financial report and proposed budget
6. Summary of World Bank activities from the last Steering Committee meeting
7. Proposed key next steps for the project