



ASSOCIATION OF AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES  
ASSOCIATION DES UNIVERSITÉS AFRICAINES

اتحاد الجامعات الإفريقيه

## AFRICA HIGHER EDUCATION CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE (ACE) PROJECT FOR THE REVITALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN AFRICA

### ACE PROJECT UPDATE

*Azalia Hotel, Cotonu, Benin, 16<sup>th</sup> November 2015*

#### Introduction

Sequel to the Sixth (6<sup>th</sup>) Project Steering Committee (PSC) and Third (3<sup>rd</sup>) Workshop of the Africa Higher Education Centres of Excellence (ACE) held in Banjul, Gambia, on May 11 – 14, 2015, the Association of African Universities (AAU) as the Regional Facilitation Unit (RFU) of the ACE Project, as well as World Bank and the ACEs themselves, has undertaken a number of activities.

The activities relate to securing additional financing to Cote d'Ivoire, completing effectiveness documentation for outstanding ACEs, revenue generation training sessions, and provision of bibliometric services consultancy and disbursement linked indicators (DLI) verification services.

Various audio and physical meetings transpired during the reporting period among relevant stakeholders in relation to the foregoing activities. It should be noted that all the 19 ACEs from the participating countries are now effective with disbursements on achievement of first DLI completed for all countries, except Cote d'Ivoire.

The ACEs have been implementing their project activities. For example, the West African Centre for Crop Improvement (WACCI) in Ghana organized a workshop for all Agricultural ACEs in Ghana in August 2015, while national review committee meetings have been held in Burkina Faso and Benin.

Other ACEs are preparing to hold similar events before the end of the year. For instance, the inaugural meeting of the International Advisory Board of the Centre of Excellence in Reproductive Health Innovation (CERHI) at the University of Benin, Nigeria beginning on Tuesday December 1, 2015.

#### Additional Financing for Cote d'Ivoire

As directed by the PSC, due process was followed to assess the proposals submitted by institutions from Cote d'Ivoire. The outcome of the call for proposal was that 7 proposals were submitted on 12 June 2015 by the Government of Cote d'Ivoire to the AAU. Applied Mathematics and ICT proposal was found ineligible due to a substantial overlap with already established ACEs. Subject matter experts were recruited from Africa and the diaspora to do online evaluation and desk evaluation simultaneously in Accra and their places of residence on 22 – 25th June 2015.

The recommendations of the experts resulted in five (5) proposals being shortlisted for further evaluation. Subject matter experts were once again contracted to undertake the site and leadership evaluation, as well as the procurement and fiduciary assessment on 6 – 10 July 2015. After compiling all the results of the whole evaluation process, the Climate Change proposal scored 72.6 points out of the maximum 100, and the Statistics proposal scored 65.2%. These proposals were therefore recommended for regional funding because they scored above the cut-off point of 62.6%, with a funding range to be determined through a careful review of their detailed implementation plans.

Two (2) proposals, one on E-learning for Geospatial Science and Technology, and the other on Skills for Mining and Construction scored slightly below the regional cut-off point of 62.6, and another proposal on Accounting scored below 50 points.

Given the critical importance of mining and construction, a request was made to the PSC to consider giving the mining and construction proposal a second opportunity to improve the proposal to the required level as this is a critical area for the development of the country and the sub-region. In addition, the World Bank team noted that skills for mining and construction have since the start of the project been a priority skill area due to the glaring skill shortages in these sectors and the economic importance of these sectors. The suggestion was not to lower the standard, but to give a second chance to the Government of Cote d'Ivoire to submit an improved proposal that would meet the regional high standard. The rationale for this second chance would be the availability of national IDA for Cote d'Ivoire to invest in regional higher education, which otherwise would be lost to the higher education sector, the development needs for a Center of Excellence within Mining and Construction, and the government's request.

The revised proposal on Mining and Construction was resubmitted to the independent evaluation committee for a final review. The evaluation was done by subject-matter experts who scored it higher than the 62.6% cut-off mark.

Consequently, the Additional Financing for Cote d'Ivoire has been completed with three institutions from Cote d'Ivoire namely, (i) Université Félix Houphouët Boigny (UFHB) on Climate Change; (ii) Ecole Nationale Supérieure de Statistique et D'économie Appliquée (ENSEA) on statistics; and (iii) Institut National Polytechnique Félix Houphouët-Boigny (INP-HB) on mining have been competitively selected. This brings the total number of ACEs in West and Central Africa to 22.

## **Capacity Building on Revenue Generation**

Following successful holding of capacity building workshops on Revenue Generation by Mr. Xavier Michel for four ACEs (Dakar workshops took place from March 30th 2015 to April 3rd 2015 for Université Cheikh Anta Diop (UCAD) and Université Gaston Berger (UGB), while the workshops for Cameroon (Université de Yaoundé I) and Benin (Université d'Abomey Calavi) took place on 21-24 April 2015 and on 27-28 April 2015 respectively), the consultant undertook a similar training for the three ACEs in Ghana (on 9-10 November 2015) and the one in Togo (CERSA) at the Université de Lomé, Togo (on 12-13 November 2015). It is hoped that other ACEs will soon benefit from such training sessions. His findings from interaction with the ACEs will be presented for discussion at the Cotonu Workshop for the benefit of all the ACEs.

## Monitoring and Evaluation

With regards to Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E), the recruitment of consultancy firms that will respectively provide Bibliometric Services and DLI Verification has reached an advanced stage. Regarding the Bibliometric Services, the ELSEVIER Consultancy firm has been competitively selected to undertake the assignment. Negotiation on how to carry out the assignment has been completed with the firm, and the draft Contract Agreement has been sent to the firm for review and signature.

In accordance with the procurement guidelines of World Bank, only one firm was qualified for assessment for the DLI Verification consultancy. Unfortunately, that firm could not score up to the recruitment minimum threshold, and hence was disqualified from undertaking the assignment. A re-advertisement of the Expression of Interest has been done and seven firms (Berenchot International; Price Waterhouse and Coopers: Serge Coussement; Technopolis; Universalia; Innovos Group SA; Ernst & Young; and University of Dar es Salaam Business School.) have so far submitted their letters of Expression of Interest for the assignment as per the deadline of close of business on 10<sup>th</sup> November 2015. Six of these firms have been shortlisted after internal reviews of their Expressions of Interest. The Request for Proposals has subsequently been sent to each of these six firms. Due process will be followed to recruit a firm for the assignment soon.

As at the time of writing this update, AAU has received Results Framework (RF) report from 12 of the first 19 ACEs. The remaining 7 Centres are yet to submit their annual M&E Reports or revised versions of the same.

The actual results recorded over the period ending October 2015 are compared to agreed targets for 11 performance indicators measuring:

- Regionality
- Quality of Training,
- Quality and Quantity of Research
- Quality of Governance/ Administration

Details of the M&E reports from the ACEs will be presented by the AAU M&E Specialist.

## Financial Performance and Budget

The AAU Director of Finance, Mr. Maxwell Amo-Hyote, will present the financial report and budget for the next phase of project implementation.

## Key Next Steps

In line with its mandate as the RFU, the AAU will continue to support the ACEs in the implementation of their respective project activities with a view to achieving their objectives. To this end, AAU will:

- Support and enhance the M&E structures of the ACEs in order to facilitate regular and timely progress reporting;
- Organize and support workshops and trainings for the ACEs' relevant staff on revenue generation;
- Support regional policy making through working with relevant regional bodies and building capacity for regional policy making within higher education, including training of staff;
- Organize regular supervision missions for the first 19 ACEs and implementation plan reviews for the three ACEs in Cote d'Ivoire;

- Organize at least one PSC meeting (in Ghana), and support the national review committees, including activities related to project management;
- Facilitate third party evaluation (Bibliometric services using SCOPUS to verify publications outputs from the ACEs) and technical evaluations for the disbursement linked indicators (DLIs) and results reporting;
- Support other relevant activities that have a bearing on the ACE Project.