

# MINUTES OF THE

## **Africa Centres of Excellence (ACE) Fourth Steering Committee Meeting**

**18th November 2014**

**Yaoundé, Cameroun**

### **Members present:**

Prof. Marcel Fouda, Advisor to the Minister of Education (Yaoundé, Cameroun)

Prof. Jean Claude T. Codjia, Rector of the Agricultural University of Kétou, Benin

Dr. Salifou Ouiminga, Director of University Research and Cooperation, Burkina Faso

Dr. Cherno Omar Barry, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology, Gambia

Prof. Messanvi Gbeassor, President of the University of Lomé, Togo

Prof. Aminata Sall Diallo, Technical Advisor on Higher Education, Government of Senegal, Senegal

Mr. Obi Ukwuagu, Representative of the National Universities Commission, Nigeria

Mr. Evans Kwabena Takyi Ankomah, Assistant Secretary/Coordinator Universities and Polytechnics, National Council for Tertiary Education, Ghana

Dr. Tewfik Nawar, Professor Emeritus, Faculty of Medicine, University of Sherbrooke, Canada

Mr. Nelson Ojijo, Programme Officer, Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA), Accra, Ghana

### **Members Absent:**

Prof. Julius Okojie, Executive Secretary of the National Universities Commission (NUC), Nigeria

Dr. Roland Kouakou, Senior Programme Officer responsible for Science and Technology, ECOWAS Commission, Abuja

Dr. Irene Annor-Frempong, Director, Capacity Building, FARA

Prof. Mahama Duwiejua, Executive Secretary, National Council for Tertiary Education, Ghana

Dr. Didier Acouetey, President of AfricSearch, France

### **IN ATTENDANCE:**

Mr. Andreas Blom, ACE Project Task Team Leader, the World Bank

Mrs. Pamela Mulet, Education Specialist, the World Bank, Togo

Miss Himdat Bayusuf, Education Specialist, the World Bank

Dr. Olatunde Adekola, Senior Education Specialist, the World Bank, Nigeria

Mr. Adama Ouedraogo, Senior Education Specialist, the World Bank, Burkina Faso

Mr. Atou Seck, Senior Education Specialist, the World Bank, Cameroun

Dr. Omar Sock, Director, Higher Education, Senegal

Prof. Jonathan MBA, Coordinator-ACE, AAU, Accra, Ghana

Mr. Maxwell Amo-Hoyte, Finance Director, AAU, Accra, Ghana

Mrs. Brigitte Norgbey, Project Officer-ACE, AAU, Accra, Ghana

Prof. Idris Assani, University of North Carolina, STEM Expert, AAU/World Bank

Prof. Raphael Wahome, University of Nairobi, Agricultural Expert, AAU/World Bank

### **Item 1 of the Agenda: Report on the main points discussed during the previous meeting of Project Steering Committee (PSC)**

1. The fourth meeting of the Project Steering Committee (PSC) of the African Centres of Excellence (ACE) took place on the 18<sup>th</sup> of November 2014 at the Hilton Hotel, Yaoundé, Cameroun. The main objective of the meeting was to assess the

progress made with the ACE project after the August 18<sup>th</sup> Lomé meeting and to initiate discussions on the next steps to take. The agenda items include:

- (i) presentation of a report on the main points discussed during the previous PSC meeting;
- (ii) presentation on progress towards achieving effectiveness at the national level
- (iii) presentation of progress towards achieving effectiveness at the institutional level;
- (iv) discussion on priorities with regard to the next steps; and
- (v) any other matters.

The agenda and the participants' list are attached.

2. In order to facilitate participation of members whose flights were cancelled and therefore could not arrive on the meeting date of the 17<sup>th</sup> of November 2014, the meeting was postponed to the 18<sup>th</sup> of November at 2pm. Given that the opening addresses had already been presented by the Chairman of the Steering Committee, the advisor to the Ministry of Education (Yaoundé, Cameroun) and the AAU Secretary-General during the morning session of the Second ACE Workshop, this part of the agenda was not repeated.

3. A brief opening address was delivered by the new PSC Chairman, Prof. Marcel Fouda, followed by the introduction of the meeting participants and concluded with some housekeeping and administrative announcements. The chairman presented the details on the items for discussion on the agenda. The first two presentations on the progress made with regard to the project (annexes 1 and 2) had already been done during the plenary session in the morning. Members continued with the adoption of the agenda. Concerning the survey questionnaire sent to participants after the Abuja workshop, AAU made a brief presentation on results of this survey. According to the findings, only 36% of participants answered the questions, that is, 38 Anglophones and 9 Francophones. Though the survey results were generally very positive, considering the fact that less than 40% of the participants at the Abuja workshop responded to the

questionnaire, the results might not necessarily reflect the opinion of members. For this reason, new approaches would be adopted in future evaluations.

4. Taking into account the main points discussed during the previous PSC meeting as well as the presentation of the evaluation results of the last ACE workshop (annex 3), the Chairman gave the floor to members to make their observations. The following were the points raised on the progress made in the area of project activities:

- i. The PSC committee commended the AAU for the good preparation and asked that moving forward if possible it would be beneficial to members to have the documents at least a week ahead of the meeting in order for members to have enough time to read and be adequately prepared before the day of the meeting.
- ii. Considering all the necessary logistics required for the smooth hosting of participants during meetings, the PSC committee commended the host government in its organization and thanked the organizing committee for their support.
- iii. Since the last meeting, communication improved considerably among organizations that are part of the project implementation. However, for some countries, information flow to ACE members at the national and focal point levels could be more fluid. Members agreed on the importance to continue to improve the channel of communication and collaboration among the various members of the ACE project.

5. The issue of **financing logistical costs for the national review committee meetings** was raised and it was clarified that the Regional Facilitation Unit (Association of African Universities) would provide some funds to cover operational costs of national review committees in all countries in the project except for Nigeria and The Gambia as both of these countries have existing mechanisms under the project to support their national committees. Members also made reference to the decisions taken at the previous meeting which directed members to the ACE Regional Operational Manual for clarifications on the issue. Finally, the World Bank made the observation that countries

have various practices as far as counterpart funding is concerned in financing national meetings and that the rules for the project should be flexible in order to accommodate such practices.

**Item 2 of the Agenda: report on the main points discussed during the previous PSC meeting**

6. The majority of these points were discussed during the morning session, including:

7. The report on **national implementation conditions**. In this regard, the World Bank reported that there was considerable progress in all areas related to the conditions. Funding agreements have been signed by all countries except Ghana and Nigeria that are awaiting parliamentary approval; all the countries have set up national review committees; legal opinion of on performance contracts have been provided by Burkina Faso and Senegal with Benin, Cameroun, and Togo remaining. It has been suggested that the World Bank and the Ministries of Education of Ghana and Nigeria work in concert with their respective governments to accelerate the approval process.

8. As agreed according to the AAU proposals during the previous PSC meeting, AAU requested and received quite a number of suggested themes related to the capacity building of ACEs. Thus, a brief presentation was made on the **capacity building programme of ACEs**. According to the suggestions made by the ACEs, it was agreed that the organization of a workshop on “**Effective Project Management**” was necessary.

**Item 3 of the Agenda: account on progress at the institutional level**

9. With regard to progress made within the framework of the project, a short update was provided by AAU on **the status of the review of the implemented plans** of the three scientific disciplines (STEM, Health and Agriculture). On the whole, considerable

progress has been made by all the ACEs since the previous meeting of the Steering Committee. However, some ACEs are ahead of others in the review of the implementation plans of ACEs. Nevertheless, the ACEs whose implementation plans are still being reviewed are all in the final review and approval phase.

10. All ACEs have finalized the drafting of the financial and procurement manuals with the exception of the University Gaston Berger of Senegal (UGB), the University of Abomey Calavi and the University of Lomé. The University de Lomé had only the procurement manual to prepare. In fact, all ACEs are in the final phase of drafting the manuals thanks to the assistance provided by financial management and procurement consultants.

**11. The Regional Facilitation Unit financial report (RFU)**

AAU did a short presentation on the budget especially on the expenditure incurred between the months of July and October 2014 including the expenses made during the third PSC meeting.

12. Discussions were held on the request for the purchase of a vehicle by the AAU to help better manage the transport-related expenditure of the RUF team and various members who could use it during their field visits. The Steering Committee members were of the view that if it was more cost-effective to procure a vehicle for ACE-related activities, that option should be pursued.

**Item 4 of the Agenda: Any other matters and updates**

**Additional Financing on Cote D'Ivoire**

13. The Additional Financing project for Cote d'Ivoire was submitted for validation to the Steering Committee. On request from the President of Cote d'Ivoire, financing has been requested for African Centers of Excellence in Cote d'Ivoire. Three elements were submitted for approval or advice to the Steering Committee:

- (i) The legitimacy of integrating Cote d'Ivoire to the Centers of Excellence. It was reminded that the country was not able to take part in the competition during phase 1 as it was just coming out of a recent political crisis. However, the country has long been a leader in training in several fields with renowned institutions at the regional and even international level. The Steering Committee was unanimous about integrating Cote d'Ivoire, reasserting the great potential for excellence of some of the institutions.
  
- (ii) The selection process of the Centers of Excellence given that there will not be a regional competition. It was suggested by the World Bank not to resort to a competition as the institutional capacity assessment seemed to identify only two institutions with the potential to be candidates, each in different sectors. However, the necessity to ensure transparency of the selection process and quality of the projects through a call for proposals which should be open to all public institutions was clearly underscored. The Steering Committee also highlighted the added benefit of the call for proposals to build a mindset within the applicant teams which, according to the Steering Committee, fosters the development of excellence, innovative training as well as collaboration and facilitates project implementation when the project is selected. Last, the process which leads to the selection of the proposals was considered crucial to ensure the highest regional level of the ACEs and thus to strengthen the "African Centers of Excellence" label.
  
- (iii) The relevance of the pre-identified sectors of possible ACEs. Finally, the World Bank asked the Steering Committee if they thought it was relevant to focus the call for proposals on the sectors of mining, power and statistics, as well as potentially construction. The World Bank indeed regrets that those sectors, which are key to the economic development of the region, have not had an ACE in phase 1. The Steering Committee underlined, in the choice of sectors, the importance of the potential for excellence of the institutions possibly competing

for selection, as well as the importance of taking into account the economic structure of the country. It was thus noted that the potential in mining and power was limited, all the more since Cote d'Ivoire is not a big mining country, while the country's institutions have strengths in civil engineering and statistics. From a general point of view, the discussion led to an agreement on the relevance of funding an ACE in engineering.

It was agreed that the World Bank will work with the government to further the introduction of Cote d'Ivoire in the project, taking into account the directions given, and will inform the Steering Committee of the progress.

14. **Report on the second phase of the Africa Centres of Excellence project for Eastern and Southern Africa.** The World Bank mentioned that the second phase would follow the same procedure as the Phase 1 making use of the lessons learnt from the first phase. For this second phase, an independent steering committee would be formed. Countries participating in the projects would share experiences and collaborate with the World Bank during the implementation of the project.

15. The subject-matter experts who assisted the ACEs to revise and improve upon their implementation plans were invited to present their observations on the progress and status of the project.

- (i) The consultant for the STEM ACEs made a presentation on the importance of the ACE project for Africa and how the success of the project would demonstrate that applied research on pressing regional development challenges and high quality post graduate training can be done within African universities. He used the opportunity to show gratitude to the Governments of the participating countries, the Association of African Universities and the World Bank for drawing up such an innovative and pioneering project for Africa. He finally mentioned the considerable progress made since the

inception of the project and how the ACEs, especially the Francophone ones, have made progress during the various phases of the project. He particularly mentioned the University Gaston Berger (UGB) of Senegal as a special example for having succeeded in providing answers to the numerous questions on the implementation plan.

- (ii) The Consultant for Agriculture ACEs also congratulated the Governments of the participating countries, AAU and the World Bank for the conception of such a high-scale project that could only go to improve the quality of African universities and push them to a higher scale on global rankings. This would help the Africa Centres of Excellence attract students from the whole world.

The Chairman finally thanked the two experts for their contribution to the project and invited them to continue their work in the same direction.

16. The representative from Senegal raised an issue on the distribution of funds among their partners. The discussions that followed were not conclusive due to the absence of some relevant information. Members agreed to revisit the issue with the help of experts in order to find a satisfactory solution to it.

#### **Item 5 of the Agenda: Next steps and closing of the Fourth Steering Committee Meeting**

17. In view of the African Higher Education Summit organized by which will take place on 10-12 March 2015 at the King Fahad Palace Hotel, in Dakar, Senegal, it was proposed to host the next Steering Committee meeting in Dakar to coincide with the above-mentioned conference. Members agreed with the proposal to hold the fifth Steering Committee meeting on ACEs in Dakar on 9<sup>th</sup> March 2015.

18. In the same vein, the Gambian representative proposed to host the sixth Steering Committee meeting and the Third Workshop on ACEs in Banjul in May 2015. Members agreed with this proposal.

19. The Chairman thanked all participants who contributed to the success of the meeting. The meeting was closed by the Steering Committee Chairman at 18h30.

**Annexes:**

1. Minutes of the 3<sup>rd</sup> PSC meeting
2. Presentation of the progress on achieving national project effectiveness conditions
3. Presentation on the progress on achieving institutional effectiveness
4. Presentation of the results of the evaluation of the previous ACE Workshop
5. Assessment of the ACE Project – October 2014
6. Update of the AAU ACE report –Financial statement for the period of August 2014 to October 2014