

AFRICA CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE

PSC MEETING & ACE PROJECT WORKSHOP

May 16 – 19, 2016

Accra, Ghana

2016 ACE PROJECT UPDATE

Following the Seventh (7th) Project Steering Committee (PSC) and Fourth (4th) Workshop of the Africa Higher Education Centres of Excellence (ACE) held in Cotonou, Republic of Benin, on November 16 – 19, 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.

Results

Each ACE is moving forward on its implementation plan. We are aware that each ACE have carried out a number of activities to scaleup its student intake, improve quality of teaching, private sector partnerships, international collaboration, progress on national and international accreditation, research and internships. The information to be presented at the next regional workshop will give a comprehensive picture of the progress of each ACE and the aggregated project progress.

Disbursements and funds utilization

The ACEs in Ghana and Benin Republic have received disbursement advances. There have been progress on disbursing advances to Nigeria and Cote d'Ivoire. Specifically, for:

- Nigeria: the government mandated changes in financial management have caused substantial delays. There have been a lot of work to improve the situation and provide full access to project funding in Naira and dollars.
- Cote d'Ivoire: A meeting was held April 13 to advance the first disbursement. Accounts are to be opened and a number of other steps to be taken by ACEs, the government, and the WB.

The next large disbursement will follow the completion of the verification process of which a first round is expected by mid May and a second round mid June.

Funds utilization: The Bank team is currently compiling funds utilization information from the submitted Financial reports. Overall, more pore progress is needed.

Results Verification

Elsevier and Technopolis have been engaged as independent verifiers of results on research publications and other performance indicators respectively. To facilitate

verification of research publications, the ACEs were requested to submit details on researchers under their respective projects. Each centre was allowed a maximum of 40 researchers. The lists were submitted to Elsevier and draft reports on the performance of each centre have been submitted. Elsevier has been requested to provide additional details to help confirm certain aspects of their report. In addition, Elsevier would be presenting their draft report at Accra workshop.

For verification of other indicators, Technopolis was engaged through a transparent process for the assignment. Meetings were held between the AAU, the World Bank and Technopolis to agree on modalities and instruments for the verification exercise. Results were initially verified through online surveys. The pilot phase of the surveys targeted 5 ACEs namely, CEFOR, ACEGID, WACCI, PAMI and WACCBIP. These were selected based upon the need for additional funding and the completeness of the information submitted. The draft reports are being reviewed and the outcome would help determine if phone calls and physical visits to selected ACEs would be necessary.

Architects (one for Anglophone ACEs and another for Francophone ACEs) are being engaged to assist with verification of DLR 2.8 on construction.

Monitoring & Evaluation:

Review of M&E Reports: Following the ACE Cotonou Workshop in November 2015, some centres (11 out of 19) submitted revised reports. The aggregated RF was consequently modified to reflect the revisions. The Operational Manual (OM) was also revised following clarification on some indicator definitions. Follow up M&E sessions at an ACE Workshop organized by the NUC for the Nigerian ACEs in January 2016 addressed completion of the RF; calculation of cumulative results to match the cumulative targets; Verification of results (what to expect, how to prepare); Requirements for setting up institutional M&E Systems; Capacity Needs; and completing the list of researchers template. Issues were raised regarding definition of Faculty Internships and training, and the ACEs were requested to send to AAU lists of any relevant publication in their respective fields that do not feature in Elsevier's Scopus. It was agreed that AAU/WB would clarify issues around indicator definitions and share final decisions with all 22 ACEs.

In preparation for the upcoming ACE Project Steering Committee Meeting and Workshop in May 2016, ACEs were requested to submit reports for the period ending March 2016. Nineteen (19) out of the 22 ACEs submitted their reports. These have been reviewed and feedback shared with the centres. Additionally, standard graphs have been prepared for each centre to show performance on the DLIs and to allow for comparison among the centres. Issues arising from the analysis will be discussed with the centres during the M&E Sessions at the upcoming Accra workshop.

Capacity Building on Revenue Generation:

An international consultant, Xavier Michel undertook Revenue Generation training workshops for the ten (10) Nigerian ACEs in parts of Nigeria on 9 – 18 February 2016. This followed the successful holding of similar workshops for 9 other ACEs. Four workshops were held in Lagos, Port Harcourt, and Abuja.

The workshops went very well and were well attended. Overall, there is a strong correlation between good revenue generation and a strong ACE team. In other words, an ACE with efficient and dynamic leadership, coupled with strong and cohesive team work, will undoubtedly generate revenue for the centre. Nevertheless, most ACEs still have difficulties in transforming ideas and plans into reality, chiefly because they are not yet comfortable with revenue generation as this is a new approach for most ACE teams. A workshop for the 3 Ivorian ACEs was also held in Abidjan on 20-21 April 2016. The latest findings from the revenue generation workshops with the 22 ACEs in West and Central Africa will be presented for discussion at the Accra Workshop for the benefit of all the ACEs.

Accreditation

A brief project status on accreditation was circulated to all ACEs, attached.

An introductory meeting with HCERES, the French post-graduate evaluation and accreditation agency, was held on March 22 with participations of 4 ACEs. HCERES presented their accreditation objectives and methods. Subsequently, one ACE submitted a letter to HCERES expressing interest in engaging in an accreditation process.

A meeting is scheduled April 27 with ABET, an US-based accrediting agency for engineering and technology programs.

These activities seek to help ACEs advance towards national and international accreditation.

ACE Project Feedback:

Participants who attended the Seventh (7th) Project Steering Committee (PSC) and Fourth (4th) Workshop of the Africa Higher Education Centres of Excellence (ACE) held in Cotonu, Republic of Benin, on November 16 – 19, 2015, were asked to assess the World Bank, AAU, National Governments, as well as the relevance of the workshop sessions and the quality of logistical arrangements. The results are hereby attached.

Recruitment of the ACE Project Officer:

Following the advertisement placed on the AAU website and information that was disseminated via various media outlets, AAU received a total 25 applications for the post of ACE Project Officer. The applications were reviewed to ensure that applicants met the essential selection criteria of language proficiency in English and French, as well as a minimum of Masters degree in relevant disciplinary fields and project management experience. Accordingly, 11 applicants were shortlisted for interviews. The interviews were conducted at two levels – skype interviews; and face-to-face interviews by a panel composed of a seating vice chancellor and a representative of AAU Governing Board, ACE Project Steering Committee (PSC) Member, ACE Centre Leader, other professionals and AAU Senior Management. The skype interview led to the selection of four candidates for face-to-face interviews, which was held on Friday, 18 March 2016. The results of the interview have been shared with the World Bank. The recruitment process is expected to be completed soon.

Uniqueness of the 8th PSC Meeting and 5th ACE Project Workshop:

In the previous ACE events, the vice chancellors/rectors/presidents of the ACE institutions were not invited to participate in the proceedings. However, this time around, it is noteworthy that the vice chancellors and rectors have been invited in order to ensure ownership of the project and to elicit their maximum support and cooperation in project implementation. Two of these university leaders (one each from Francophone and Anglophone institutions) have been requested to participate in the PSC Meeting, while the rest of them will take part in Panel Discussions on topical issues relevant to the ACE Project during the workshop.

DLI 2.8 Improving learning infrastructure

Most ACEs have completed or are close to complete the formulation of the milestones for the DLI learning infrastructure; some still have to close. An overview table is attached. This is important to finalize by the workshop in May.

Before embarking on civil works, we strongly recommend that the ACEs review their social and environmental safeguard plan elaborated in the start of the project, and shares the civil works plans with simple pictures of the construction site with the Bank team. This seeks to avoid any violation of the Bank's social and environmental safeguards. So far no complications or remedying actions have been identified.

Financial Management

For all ACEs, the unaudited Interim Financial Reports are due semesterly each February 15 and August 15 until the end of the project. The Financial audit reports are due each June 30 until the end of the project. Meeting these deadline will result in an additional disbursement each year.

By now all ACEs should have hired their external auditor in order to meet the June 30, 2016 deadline. Kindly remember, for the ACEs who have not yet hired, make sure to get the Bank's no objection on ToRs prior to the hiring.

Procurement

The procurement audit report is due to be shared with the Bank by June 30, 2016. This is also a DLI worth up to 50,000 for each ACE per year. All the ACEs are expected to obtain a No Objection from the Bank prior to hiring a consultant firm.

Other Activities:

The Official Launch of the Regional Water and Environmental Sanitation Centre, Kumasi (RWESCK) was performed by the Vice Chancellor of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Prof. William Ellis, on Tuesday, 15th March 2016 at the Institute of Distance Learning (IDL) Conference Centre. This was followed by a Stakeholders Consultative Workshop, held on 16 – 17 March 2016.

The Senegal National Review Committee of the ACE Project held its meeting on 7th April 2016 at the TERROU-BI Hotel, Dakar, Senegal.