

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

**09 March 2015**

**World Bank Office, Dakar, Senegal**

### **Members present:**

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

Prof. Marcel Fouda, Inspector General at the Ministry of Higher 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

Dr. Atta Joshua, Representative of the National Universities Commission, Nigeria

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

Dr. Irene Annor-Frempong, Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA), Accra, Ghana

Dr. Didier Acouetey, President of AfricSearch, France

### **Members Absent:**

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

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

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

**OBSERVER STATUS:**

Mr. Emmanuel Barry, Officer, Département du Développement Humain  
Union Economique et Monétaire Ouest Africaine (UEMOA), Ouagadougou,  
Burkina Faso

**IN ATTENDANCE:**

Dr. Claudia Costin, Senior Director, Global Practice, World Bank

Prof. Etienne Ehile, AAU Secretary-General

Dr. Peter Materu, Practice Manager, Education West and Central Africa, the World Bank

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

Miss Himdat Bayusuf, Education Specialist, the World Bank

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

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

Mrs. Gabrielle Hansen, Assistant Project Officer, AAU, Accra, Ghana

The fifth Steering Committee (SC) meeting for the Africa Centers of Excellence (ACE) project was held at the World Bank Office in Dakar, Senegal on March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2015. The main objective of the meeting was to oversee and guide the impact and progress of the project. The particular objectives are:

- (i) update on project progress;
- (ii) update on additional financing for Côte d'Ivoire;
- (iii) update on regional harmonization and integration of higher education support in the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA);
- (iv) discuss university/industry linkages;
- (v) discussion on next steps.

The agenda and the participants' list are attached.

1. The Chair and Technical Advisor to the Minister of Higher Education, Research and Technology for Government of Senegal, Prof. Aminata, Sall Diallo, welcomed members to Senegal and gave a short summary on issues related to higher education on the continent and proceeded by thanking the World Bank and other members for all the support and efforts provided for the success of the ACE project in Africa. Welcome addresses were provided by the AAU Secretary General Executive Secretary and Dr. Claudia Costin, Senior Director, Global Practice, World Bank.

### **Agenda Item 1: Project Progress**

#### ***Update on next steps following November 2014 Meeting***

2. AAU made a brief presentation on the progress since the November 2014 meeting including that 5 countries have now achieved project effectiveness (Burkina, Benin, Togo, Senegal and The Gambia). The first release of fund to an ACE has taken place (2iE in Burkina Faso). In addition, a number of activities have been ongoing including capacity building to ACEs on revenue generation, and update of the regional operations manual. Overall, good progress was made in all the ACEs. Besides the audio conferences facilitated by WB/AAU teams, and the preparations and sharing of general disbursement guidelines, members felt that more detailed information on disbursement, financial management, procurement, monitoring and evaluation procedures were required. Comments that followed focused on the need to complete these operational steps so as to allow the ACEs to focus on education results.

#### ***Update on project implementation including updated M&E aggregated table***

3. A brief presentation was made by the WB on project activities being implemented at sample institutions despite the delay in funds release. The results included enrollment of students including regional students, students in internships as well as publications. Feedback included the challenges and importance of ensuring enrolment of females. Feedback was also made on the need for a good baseline to identify the project's impact; current results reported are primarily a result of selection of well-functioning Centers, and may not yet show the impact of the project.

4. **ACTION:** members agreed to continue to monitor project progress in this aspect.

5. The Chair gave the floor to each Steering Committee member briefly comment on project progress in each country.

6. **Cameroon:** revealed that it had some internal challenges earlier that were resolved allowing the Centre to keep its autonomy while being part of the main institution. Members further added that the legal opinions were signed while the Performance Contract was prepared and was currently at the level of the Ministry of Planning and should be ready soon.

7. **Togo:** reported that the Centre's designated accounts were opened and signatories were already submitted. As for the Eligible Expenditure Program (EEP), the Center leader and members were looking forward to the first National Review Committee scheduled for the 20<sup>th</sup> of March to discuss issues related to the EEP. Togo made a request for capacity building in the use of procurement and financial management manuals. Hopefully, their next meeting with the WB country representatives would help build capacity in those areas. In response to the upcoming workshop, Togo reported that the team was ready and looking forward to the revenue generation workshop scheduled for April 2015.

8. **Burkina Faso:** reported that progress was being made in all areas of the project. The first disbursement of 10% was received; however, they were currently working on opening the account for the advance of 15% of the value of DLI 2. Burkina Faso further added that students were recruited and scholarships were awarded.

9. **The Gambia:** reported that it already reached effectiveness conditions and was ready to benefit from the services of the ACEs. Benefiting institutions have been selected and submission of the candidates' names was completed. A small committee was set up to evaluate and select the candidates who would be sent to the ACEs to receive training.

10. **Nigeria:** The signing of the Financing Agreement between Government of Nigeria and World Bank took place in February 2015. The remaining effectiveness condition of the Performance Contract is a critical next step that the NUC is intensively working on. In addition to the signing, the preparations to obtain the legal opinions of the signed documents were underway.

11. Nigeria then raised the issue about the project closing date given the delay that was encountered in project effectiveness. The World Bank noted that the project closing date is December 31, 2018, which leaves almost 4 years for project implementation. It was too early to request for project extension and that it was important to focus on implementation of the project. It would be appropriate to review the situation at the project's mid-term review, which would be scheduled jointly between the Steering Committee and the World Bank when substantial project progress had taken place.

12. **Benin:** made substantial progress. All the effectiveness conditions have been met. They were working on the half-year report. Capacity building in procurement, Financial Management and disbursements were equally requested.

13. **Ghana:** made very good progress until it was halted by the parliamentary approval issue. Member stated that a meeting was recently held with the Ministry of Finance and reportedly documents were ready to be presented to parliament for debate and approval. .

14. Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA) – representative of the agriculture education and research sector commended the project for its progress thus far. It was noted that the ACE project has potential for education reform in Africa. The regional dimension of the project was also encouraged. It was further added that the ACE project should be used as a lever and pilot for reforms and improvements of higher education in the region.

15. The Committee discussed the delay in project approval in Ghana and agreed that given the impressive quality of proposals from Ghana it should be made a priority to obtain the approval. NCTE of Ghana was encouraged to continue working with the government officials to get the issue resolved without any further delay.

16. All countries reported progress in various aspects of the project. However, besides the audio conferences and the development of generic disbursement guidelines, there is a need to customize this to each country. Since, each government has developed different disbursement arrangements to suit its specific institutional context. It was agreed that disbursement meetings would be organized for each country with relevant WB specialists. There was also a need for support within procurement and financial management procedures.

### ***Update on ACE Project Survey Results***

17. AAU briefly presented the Yaoundé Workshop Feedback survey results. According to the findings, 50% of the Workshop attendants responded to the questionnaire. Even though the response rate of this survey was slightly higher than the previous one, the results were generally as satisfactory as in the previous one. Members stressed the importance of the survey and that the AAU should continue to work on increasing the response rate. The results indicated a decline in satisfaction among ACEs in the implementation progress, which likely was due to the delay in project approval. The time dimension would be included in the presentation of the next survey. Members also expressed interest in including questions in the survey related to education aspects of the project; namely, teaching-learning; capacity building; industry collaboration; faculty time and barriers for research; generation of resources. It was agreed that more emphasis would be put on the education aspects of the project in future surveys.

### ***Update on remaining RFU Activities and Financial Report***

18. AAU made a short presentation of the financial report covering the period of July 2014 to February 2015 representing 44% of the budget. The report was subdivided into two parts representing the absolute value aggregated in three main columns (budget-Actual-Variance) .The financial reporting being an important piece of project management was appreciated by the SC and was followed by a few questions from members seeking clarifications of key line items. Suggestions were made on how to improve the financial statement in future report by:

- modifying a few of the categories to include the specific costs of each event: SC meeting; Workshop etc.

- Variance between actual and budget should be reduced
- showing time-duration i.e. reporting the latest period for more clarity on the expenses incurred during the reporting period.
- Overall the rate of expenditures should be reduced to ensure availability of funds towards the end of the project
- The Bank expressed interest in working more in detail with AAU to learn more about the details of a few line items related to expenditures.

## **Agenda Item 2: Update on Additional Financing for Côte d'Ivoire**

19. The WB made a brief presentation on the follow up to the agreements from the Fourth Steering Committee Meeting regarding the inclusion of Côte d'Ivoire into the project. The WB/AAU worked with the Government of Côte d'Ivoire taking into account 3 key indications regarding the unanimity of the SC on the legitimacy of the inclusion of Côte d'Ivoire, the assurance of transparency in the process and the relevance to concentrate on development challenges in the region. To that effect, the WB presented the revised proposal as developed between the government of Côte d'Ivoire and the World Bank on eligibility and selection process. The proposal was substantially modified following the guidance given during the last PSC, namely:

20. The timeframe of the call for proposal to be opened to all public institutions of higher education by March 30, 2015 with submission via the Ministry of Higher Education Institutions.

21. Proposal to be evaluated by an independent jury and experts using the same criteria that were used during the regional selection of the current 19 ACEs. The proposals to be selected by the regional SC according to the rules applied to the first selection by June 2015.

22. Members' reactions that followed proved that concerns remain about:

- (i) The lack of a true regional competition in the addition of new ACEs for single countries, and the risk of Côte d'Ivoire "buying" the brand of ACE without earning the brand through a regional competition; and

(ii) the capacity of Ivorian institutions in regional aspects in all STEM areas. However, there were strong reasons for the inclusion of Côte d'Ivoire – both in the country context as well as in terms of potential gains to the project.

23. Finally, the AAU/WB team was given permission to proceed with the proposed selection process – keeping in mind that the best ACE proposal from Côte d'Ivoire will be selected, but any additional ACEs would have to be evaluated at the strict minimum criteria of 62.6 out of 100 (the minimum regional threshold of the last selected ACE of the first regional competition).

24. A recommendation was made to limit or even stop further additions of ACEs to the project to focus on the existing ACEs and to avoid the risk of decreasing the standards of the ACEs and undermining the value of the “ACE Label”. Thus it was agreed to stop new additions of countries into Component 1 of the project and if there is interest from Countries, component 2 of purchasing regional education services is still open.

### **Agenda Item 3: Regional Harmonization and Integration of Higher Education Support in UEMOA**

#### ***Regional Harmonization - West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA)***

25. UEMOA summarized its activities and possible collaboration with the ACEs. The presentation discussed the current UEMOA centers of excellence program and possible areas of linkages with the ACE project. There is also a possibility of ACE project support to regional harmonization. Members agreed to pursue further discussions on the issue and possibly include ECOWAS and make decisions on activities to be supported at a later PSC meeting.

### **Agenda Item 4: University-Industry Linkages:**

26. The Private Sector member made a presentation on how to link universities with industries. Emphasis was made on the following key issues:

- need for better understanding of what were the key ACE and project activities to

achieve stronger industry linkages (beyond the financial incentives embedded in the DLIs);

- build knowledge around the standard tools and approaches to university-industry linkages;
- consider better use of professional know-how either in existing industry-linkages units within the universities or use capacity/units financed by other projects;
- one option was to create an ACE platform with ACEs coming with a common approach to industry collaboration. A second recommendation was to start small, but move forward quickly;
- a focused forum with outreach to potential companies led by industry leaders to champion the project could be done virtually and with sector focus;
- the **next agreed action** was to plan a session at the next ACE workshop with focus on raising awareness on ways to increase industry-collaboration, exchange best practices among the ACEs, and plan an agenda within industry collaboration.

## **Item 5 of the Agenda: Next Steps and Closing of the Fifth Steering Committee Meeting**

### ***Preparations for next ACE Workshop and Steering Committee Meeting***

27. The Gambia informed on the activities undertaken towards the preparations of the next ACE workshop such as the venue selection for both the SC meeting and the Workshop; detailed information on accommodation and available flights from various parts of the region. The presenter added that the local organizing committee has already been put in place and ready to work with AAU in all aspects of the preparations.

### ***28. Key Next steps following the Fifth Steering Committee Meeting***

There were Presentation by WB and by the host government of the next ACE workshop, Government of the Gambia

- ❖ *Getting the project fully started in the ACEs*

- Achieve Project Effectiveness Conditions for Nigeria and Cameroon by March 30, 2015
- Disbursement of 1<sup>st</sup> instalment to the ACEs of Senegal, Togo, and Benin by March 30, 2015
- Finalization of the remaining 3 ACE Implementation Plans by April 10 by the concerned ACEs
- Disbursement to the 10 Nigerian ACEs by April 30, 2015
- Pushing for Ghana to obtain parliamentary approval

❖ *Education Related Support*

- Capacity Building on Revenue Generation March/April 2015
- University/Industry Collaboration support to ACEs in May 2015

❖ *Next PSC Meeting and ACE Workshop*

Agreement on focus on Banjul to include Capacity Building sessions for ACEs on FM, PM, Fiduciary DLIs and M&E, and a Session on University/Industry Linkages at May Workshop

❖ *Additional Financing for Côte d'Ivoire*

- Workshop on Proposal Development
- Call for proposal
- Evaluation and Selection of ACEs

❖ Sixth Steering Committee meeting **Monday May 11** followed by ACE workshop **May 12-14** in Banjul

❖ In connection with the planned Côte d'Ivoire selection, a SC meeting would be convened possibly via VC

❖ It was agreed that the subsequent ACE SC meetings with physical attendance would take place after 6 months linked to the subsequent ACE workshop in **November 2015**. This workshop would be hosted by **Benin**

29. The Chair extended his heartfelt gratitude to the AAU for organizing the PSC meeting and wished participants fruitful deliberations for Africa Higher Education Summit in Dakar from March 10-12, 2015.

**30. Annexes:**

1. Minutes of the 4th PSC meeting.
2. Update on ACEs.
3. Evaluation of Performance & Yaoundé Workshop.
4. Draft Call for Proposals for Côte d'Ivoire.
5. Memo for the Steering Committee- Additional Financing for Côte d'Ivoire.
6. Presentation on Update on UEMOA.
7. Presentation on University/Industry Linkages.
8. Update of the AAU ACE report –Financial statement for the period of July 2014 to February 2015.