

AFRICA CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE (ACE)

MINUTES OF THE AFRICA HIGHER EDUCATION CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE (ACE) VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE PROJECT STEERING COMMITTEE

31 August, 2017 @ 1.15pm

MEMBERS PRESENT

1. Prof. Mohammed Salifu (Chair, Ghana)
2. Prof. Salifou Ouiminga (Burkina Faso)
3. Dr. Joshua Atah (Nigeria)
4. Prof. Zasseli Biaka (Côte d'Ivoire)
5. Prof. Messanvi Gbeassor (Togo)
6. Dr. Irene Annor-Frempong (FARA - Agriculture)
7. Dr. Emmanuel Barry (UEMOA)
8. Dr. Didier Acouetey (Private Sector)
9. Prof. Tewfik Nawar (Health)

MEMBERS ABSENT

1. Prof. Abubakar Adamu Rasheed (NUC, Nigeria)
2. Prof. Jean-Claude Codjia (Benin)
3. Prof. Marcel Fouda (Cameroon)
4. Prof. Aminata Sall Diallo (Senegal)
5. Mr. Yaya Sireh Jallow (Gambia)

IN ATTENDANCE

World Bank & AAU

1. Mr. Andreas Blom (ACE Task Team Leader, Lead Economist, World Bank, DC)
2. Mrs. Himdat Bayusuf (ACE Co-TTL, Education Specialist, World Bank, DC)
3. Dr. Ekuia Benti (Education Specialist, World Bank, DC)
4. Graham Mark Harrison (World Bank, DC)
5. Dr. Moustapha Lo (Education Specialist, World Bank, Senegal)
6. Dr. Patrick Ramanantoanina (Education Specialist, World Bank, Cote d'Ivoire)
7. Prof. Etienne Ehilé (Secretary General, AAU)
8. Prof. Jonathan Mba (Coordinator, ACE Project)
9. Mr. Maxwell Amo-Hoyte (Director of Finance, AAU)
10. Mr. Abednego Corlety (Procurement /IT Officer, AAU)
11. Ms. Gabrielle Hansen (Assistant Project Officer, AAU)

WELCOME AND MATTERS ARISING FROM MAY PSC MEETING

1. The meeting was opened by Mr. Andreas Blom who handed over to the Chair of the meeting, Professor Mohammed Salifu, Executive Secretary of the National Council for Tertiary Education (NCTE), Ghana. Introduction of those connected was made. The proposed agenda was approved after all agreed to move the agenda item 5: (Brief update by each PSC member on National review meetings-prospective and supervision challenges) to a key item in the next PSC meeting due to the limited time available for the online discussion.
2. Review of the previous May 2017 PSC minutes. Member for Burkina Faso requested that the wording in the Lagos PSC minutes on the update from Burkina Faso be changed to read *“it would be helpful if the government followed the project more closely”* instead of the previous wording *“Very low involvement and interference from government”*. The chair, member for Ghana also noted that update from Ghana was missing from the minutes. The Lagos 2017 minutes will be updated to reflect the above comments and the members of Nigeria and Togo and Cote d’Ivoire approved pending the corrections are incorporated.

PROJECT PROGRESS

3. The following are a summary of the update of activities since the May workshop in Lagos:
 - DLR 2.5: the gap analysis and self-assessment of the 3 ACEs (PAMI, OAU and CEFOR) has been done and report submitted by the Consultant;
 - DLR 2.6: ACEs have revised their publication lists according to the new format and submitted to AAU. 17 ACEs have submitted more publications while 3 ACEs have submitted less. Letter for disbursement are being prepared for these ACEs;
 - DLR 2.7: 4 ACEs have been credited for the revenue generated. CEFOR and WACCBIP recently submitted achievement and verification is on-going;
 - DLI 2.8: Consultants were sent on mission to ACEs that reported achievement of milestones. Unfortunately, out of the 6 ACEs (CERSA; CEA-SMA; CEADSE; OAU-OAK; CEFOR and ACENTDFB), only CERSA has achieved milestone 1. The others were sent the reports of the verifiers to upgrade their achievement status within 2 weeks but only one has confirmed achieving the milestone.
4. ACEs have been requested to let AAU know if they have achieved any milestones so verification can be arranged. As at now, only RWESCK of KNUST has informed AAU of milestone achievement. If more achievements are received, verification will be done.
5. Cote d’Ivoire ACEs have submitted their M&E reports and these will be sent to Technopolis for verification.

6. The Fourth Supervision Mission for 11 ACEs will be undertaken from 28th September to 31st October 2017. 11 ACEs are slated for the visit (CEADESE, Nigeria; CEA-SMA, Benin Republic; CETIC, Cameroon; CERHI, Nigeria; CEA-MITIC, Senegal; ACEPRD, Nigeria; OAU-OAK, Nigeria; WACCI, Ghana; CCBAD, Cote d'Ivoire; CEA-SAMEF, Senegal; and ACENTDFB, Nigeria). Logistical arrangements for their visas, tickets and hotels are underway. It was advised that Focal Points join in the supervision missions.
7. Preparations are on-going for ACE I and ACE II Joint Workshop in November. The local organising Committee made up of AAU and NCTE staff have held two meetings. The 1st skype meeting with IUCEA, the RFU of ACE II was held on 18th August 2017. The 2nd meeting will be held on 14th September, 2017. Arrangements for transport, entry visa, hotels and other logistical arrangements are underway.
8. Togo held its National Review Committee Meeting for CERSA on 22nd August 2017 in Lome. The AAU was represented at this meeting by the Secretary-General, Prof. Etienne Ehile. Senegal has planned to hold it's meeting in September 2017. Other countries held their meetings before the May 2017 Workshop.
9. The Regional Water and Environmental Sanitation Centre Kumasi (RWESCK) located at the Kwame University of Science and Technology (KNUST) held the first Regional Conference and School on Climate Change, Water and Environmental Sanitation for Early Career Scientists Working in Africa on 28 – 31 August 2017 at the Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences Auditorium, Accra, Ghana.
10. The next audio meeting with all the ACEs will be held in September, 2017.
11. Funds Utilization and disbursement: The World Bank reported that there has been a lot of progress made since May 2017. Overall project disbursement is at 40% with highest disbursement in Ghana at 60% and Nigeria at 50%. In terms of fund utilisation, the ACE average is 20% which is quite low given that the project is at two and half year of implementation. Some ACEs have received the funds but have achieved only 7% of funds utilization. ACEs like WACCBIP, RWESCK, 2iE, ACEGID etc have spent about 34% or more of the funds. Some ACEs in Nigeria, Cameroun and Senegal are not performing so well and with the project ending in 2018, even if they double their spending, they would not be able to spend all the funds. Reallocation of funds will be discussed with countries on case by case basis as it was noted that there has been some commitments for some of the projects but funds have not been paid out yet.
12. PSC members were assured that a careful discussion will go on at the country level before any re-allocation is done. .

13. A discussion on project extension from currently closing date of December 2018 for another 12-18 months was also discussed and agreed upon. Countries were requested to submit officially the request for project extension from December 2018 to June 2020 (an 18-month extension). It was recommended that this request from Ministry of Finance be coordinated with the request for participation in the new ACE III for West and Central Africa.
14. Performance Measurement: A summary of the performance of the project using the 7 workshops held was presented. There has been an increase in the performance rate of World Bank and AAU in areas like technical assistance and responsiveness. Some risks mentioned in earlier surveys have reduced.

Financial Report and 3-Year Budget

15. The highlights of the financial report was presented for information but as the report was not submitted before the meeting and could not be projected during the meeting, AAU was requested to send the report to all PSC members for review before comments are made. PSC members were worried about the funds available for the RFU looking at all the activities that need to be accomplished before the end of the project in December 2019.
16. The operations manual is being improved and updated with information on verification processes, M & E processes and verification payment. Translation of the document will be completed on time for the November 2017 workshop.

ACE Scale Up

17. Discussions with national governments have taken place regarding the ACE scale up. There is need to improve the project and work more with the national governments. It was noted that there was deficit in engineering, education and training of teachers, agriculture for development, science in economics, etc. Work will now be done more with industry including large companies, the society at large, training and research. These will be considered when selecting the centres. The aim is to use ACEs to strengthen capacity in health, industry and mining.
18. ECOWAS will be more involved in ACE III. Technical and financial sustainability will be key in ACE III. There will be more support for the universities, countries and national agencies. A lot of development partners like IDRC, Dangote and others have shown interest in the project. Meetings are therefore being planned with funding agencies in the USA, like the National Science Foundation so that their way of doing things will serve as a possible

model for Africa. ACEs that are working well will be maintained while counties like Djibouti, Guinea will be considered in ACE III. Some important meetings are also scheduled for Togo, Guinea and Djibouti in September 2017.

19. Though PSC members were concerned with the serious involvement of ECOWAS in ACE III due to their bureaucratic way of doing things and the fact that they may regress the project, World Bank assured them that ECOWAS will be useful politically to ensure success and ownership of the project in the region. Others were worried that if good performing ACEs are continually supported, it will be difficult for them to become independent.
20. Countries interested in ACE III are being requested to send an Expression of Interest (Eoi) from Ministry of Finance. The applications should also indicate if deadline extension of the project is required, either for a centre or for the country. Requests should also be sent on interest in PASET. Nigeria had already sent the letter of interest to the Ministry of Education for ACE III and PASET but will do another letter for the ACE I extension to December 2019. The application for Burkina Faso is ready and will soon be submitted.

Any Other Business

21. An update on the PASET China study exchange and tour was provided by the World Bank. Another trip to Korea is scheduled with 4 ACEs in early September 2017 to sign an agreement regarding PASET. The contributions of Kenya and Rwanda have been sent, and currently waiting for Ghana and Nigeria to send their contributions.

CONCLUSION

22. All the PSC members were very happy with the virtual meeting and how smooth it was for those who connected from the World Bank offices. More of such meetings would be held to help receive quick answers to urgent concerns. The World Bank assured members that when there are pressing issues, email can be used to address such issues.
23. The Chair was happy with proceedings and agreed that the meeting went well though there were a few hitches, especially with those calling-in on phone, but hopes that the process would be perfected so that only one physical PSC meeting could be held in the year.
24. The TTL of the project thanked all for their participation and was impressed with the turnout. He entreated members to talk to their ACEs regarding implementation, procurement improvement and other issues in order to speed up the project implementation.
25. The meeting ended at 4.40pm.

NEXT KEY STEPS

ACTIVITY	PERIOD
Supervision missions	28 th September to 19 th October 2017
Audio with all ACEs	September 2017
ACE CI Verification of DLI 2.1 - 2.4	September 2017
Discussions on ACE III	On-going
Submission of Expression of Interest by PSM members	On-going
Verification of DLI 2.6	On-going and draft results to be shared with all ACEs prior to November 2017 workshop
Verification of DLI 2.8	On-going
Preparation for Joint ACE I & ACE II Workshop	On-going