

**MINUTES OF THE
AFRICA CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE (ACE)
EIGHTH STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING**

**16 May, 2016
La Palm Royal BeachHotel, Accra, Ghana**

MEMBERS PRESENT

1. Prof. Mohammed Salifu (Chair, Ghana)
2. Prof. Aminata Sall Diallo (Senegal)
3. Prof. Jean-Claude Codjia (Benin)
4. Dr. Joshua Atah (Nigeria)
5. Dr. Cherno Barry (Gambia)
6. Prof. Fulgence Nindjin (Cote d'Ivoire)
7. Prof. Zasseli Biaka (Cote d'Ivoire)
8. Prof. Marcel Fouda (Cameroon)
9. Dr. Irene Annor-Frempong (Agriculture)
10. Dr. Didier Acouetey (Private Sector)
11. Prof. Salifou Ouiminga (Burkina Faso)

MEMBERS ABSENT:

1. Dr. Emmanuel Barry (UEMOA)
2. Prof. Messanvi Gbeassor (Togo)
3. Prof. Tewfik Nawar (Health)

In attendance

1. Mr. Andreas Blom
2. Ms. Himdat Bayusuf
3. Mrs. Eunice Ackwerh
4. Prof. Etienne Ehile
5. Prof. Jonathan Mba
6. Mr. Maxwell Amo-Hoyte
7. Mrs. Adeline Addy
8. Mr. Abednego Corletey
9. Ms. Gabrielle Hansen
10. Prof. Mamadou Diallo (STEM Expert)
11. Prof. Idris Assani (STEM Expert)
12. Dr. Michelle Niescierenko (Health Expert)
13. Dr. Carl Larsen (Agriculture Expert)
14. Prof. Raphael Wahome (Agriculture Expert)

15. Mr. Xavier Michel (Revenue Generation Expert)
16. Mr. Moustapha Lo, World Bank, Senegal
17. Mrs Pamela Mulet, World Bank, Togo
18. Mr. Hermann Toualy, BCPE, Cote d'Ivoire
19. Mr. Shawn Powers, World Bank, DC
20. Dr. Tona Kokou (representing PSC member for Togo)
21. Mr. Evans Takyi Ankomah-Asare, Focal Point, Ghana
22. Dr. Logmo Mbelek, Focal Point, Cameroun
23. Mr. Philip Ayo (ACE II Representative from IUCEA)
24. Mr. Obi Ukwuagu, NUC, Nigeria

Introduction

1. The Eighth Steering Committee meeting of the Africa Centres of Excellence (ACE) Project was held at the La Palm Royale Hotel in Accra on May 16, 2016. The meeting was to follow up on the discussions and decisions of the previous meeting, review project progress and discuss the way forward especially as the project reaches mid-term. Agenda items included the following:
 - a. Project progress
 - b. Status of Activities of the Regional Facilitating Unit (RFU)
 - c. Status of National Review Activities
 - d. Next Steps of the project
2. Prof. Mohammed Salifu, Executive Secretary of the National Council for Tertiary Education, Ghana (NCTE) and Chair of the meeting welcomed members to Accra and led a review of the agenda and minutes of the previous PSC meeting held in Cotonou last year. The agenda ([Annex 1](#)) was adopted by consensus after rearrangement and merging of some items while the minutes were adopted subject to minor changes regarding the section on The Gambia.
3. There were welcome remarks from Prof. Etienne Ehilé Secretary General of the AAU and Mr. Andreas Blom, the World Bank Task Team Leader (TTL) for the ACE Project. The Local Organizing Committee (AAU and NCTE) was acknowledged for the excellent organization and the Government of Ghana for exhibiting ownership of the project. The critical role of the PSC and Focal Persons was also acknowledged and there were calls for critical objective discussion to provide direction for the project going forward.
4. **World Bank Update:** It was reported that a number of activities had been undertaken since Cotonou and progress is being made. It was hoped that feedback from the current meeting would provide pointers on areas needing attention. With regard to disbursement, the challenge in Nigeria in the face of new restrictive forex policies and implications for project implementation was raised. The World Bank is exploring possibilities of paying out dollars through the Nigerian Universities Commission (NUC). The NUC explained that under the new policy aimed at improving the exchange rate, all federal accounts were moved to the Central Bank. Challenges in the implementation of the new system subsequently led to the development of a thriving black market and unavailability of foreign exchange at the banks.
5. **Project Update:** The Regional Facilitating Unit (RFU) presented brief updates on activities carried out since the last meeting. Highlights included the DLI verification exercise which is ongoing; bibliometric services from Elsevier to validate results on research publications; training on revenue generation for ACEs in Nigeria and La Côte d'Ivoire and recruitment of a new ACE Project Officer. Additionally, results of the satisfaction survey undertaken at last year's event were shared. Generally, AAU and the World Bank were rated very high on 5-point scale. Details of the update are set out in

Annex 2. Discussions noted that the satisfaction survey should have items that are relevant to The Gambia given its peculiar position on the project as a buyer of services. It was also suggested to modify the title of the feedback presentation to better reflect the object of the evaluation which is the event and not the venue.

6. Training in revenue generation was acknowledged as very critical and there were proposals that instead of providing a one-off training session, a training of trainers event would be more appropriate in producing a critical mass of resource persons. The consultant on revenue generation agreed to the proposal but noted that the quality of training and the specificity of individual centres would have to be considered. He was tasked to propose a longer-term capacity building approach and to define the target audiences. To reduce cost, it was also recommended to do some training via video conference. With regard to accreditation, it was clarified that the project recognizes accreditation of programmes and not accreditation of institutions.
7. **Monitoring and Evaluation Report:** A summary monitoring and evaluation report for the period ending March 2016, showed progress since 2013. Generally, performance on achievement of the DLIs was average. However, performance on accreditation and internships was not encouraging. Other highlights included high student enrollments by CEA-SAMEF (UCAD) and CEA-CETIC (UYI); considerable progress towards regionality; and very high research output compared to the 2016 targets.
8. The PSC recommended that for presentation of results in subsequent meetings, the percentage of achievement for each DLI should be provided; raw instead of aggregate results should be used to allow for comparison between the various periods; results should be shared with the PSC before the meeting for better feedback; the ratio of men to women in the region must be considered in the interpretation of gender participation in the projects; and the concept of faculty internships should be clarified so the ACEs know what is eligible.
9. The World Bank clarified that faculty internships are outreach periods that allow faculty some interaction with industry and not another academic institution or department within the same university. For faculty in medicine however, outreach periods in their university's own hospital would be eligible as internships.
10. The PSC noted the need for further investigation to ensure that the research publications reported by Elsevier are produced by the ACEs and relevant in relation to the focus of the individual ACEs.
11. Concerns were raised regarding the relevance of the Elsevier rating of ACE research output vis-a-vis its impact on development in the respective countries and throughout the region. The Committee agreed that impact and citations are necessary but observed

they do not necessarily reflect the extent to which research output contributes to development. It was recommended to find an appropriate indicator for measuring the extent to which the research influences development at national and regional levels. Another suggestion was for the AAU to procure the Elsevier programme, customize it and manage verification of ACE research output directly. There were concerns that the use of the Elsevier rating system is forcing ACEs to work for foreign journals. It was generally agreed that for centres of excellence, the use of international benchmarks is relevant. However, the ACEs should also be locally relevant. PSC members noted that the ACEs are developing in different aspects and this should be considered when the relevance and impact of their research output is being assessed.

12. The PSC recommended that research should not be delinked from course work to ensure that students' research address local issues. The Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta (FUNAAB, Nigeria) example was cited. FUNAAB students undertake internships with industry and the relevance of their research proposals are determined by stakeholders including academia and industry representatives. Multidisciplinary research was encouraged as a means for promoting collaboration.
13. Subject matter experts proposed the setup of a scientific committee to assure the scientific quality and relevance of the project's research output. The PSC emphasised the need for specific terms of reference for the proposed committee and noted the evaluation should not only assess academic quality but also social relevance. Experts observed that such a committee would lend credibility to the project's research. The proposal was accepted in principle subject to the following: that modalities for selecting members would be clearly determined; membership should be diverse and should include representatives from academia, industry and other publics; and the evaluation process should be clearly spelt out.
14. The experts were tasked to provide a draft concept note outlining the terms of reference, objectives, composition, etc. within two weeks. The concept note would be circulated for feedback and later discussed via video conferencing. Once a firm decision is taken, the AAU as the RFU would coordinate the implementation.
15. There was some dissatisfaction with the pace of the verification exercise especially given the urgent need for funds by some centres. Members were assured that the main verification exercise would be launched very soon.
16. Staff motivation was identified as a bone of contention within ACEs and between some centres and their partner institutions. It was proposed to motivate faculty of ACEs with self-generated revenue and provide professional development opportunities as incentives, not monetary incentives from project funds. The RFU proposed using its Staff Exchange Programme as incentive for ACE faculty. There were different views as to the possibility of provision of monetary incentives for good implementation. The need to apply existing

national and institutional policies or statutory provisions in any potential motivation scheme was raised several times. Further, an ACE incentive could create tension and alienation of non-project staff through the introduction of new procedures. But, on the other hand, the effectiveness of the existing motivation schemes for good performance vs. nominal extra time spent was also mentioned. There were also concerns that an incentive scheme could reduce team work and team-cohesion by creating tension. It was agreed to collect views on this during the 5th ACE Project Workshop and task a committee to discuss modalities.

17. **Project Finance:** The financial statement for 2015 and the budget for the current year (2016) and until the expected end of the project, foreseen a potential one-year extension of implementation. The budgets were highly appreciated as it provides the possibility for good budget planning. Further, the budgets were clear and yet provided sufficient details in the notes to each proposed expenditure. The World Bank clarified that the facilitation grant is not expected to be increased and the budget and expenditure must ensure available funding for project facilitation till the end of the project. Therefore, the sustainable level of spending is USD650,000 per year. The following requests for revision were made:
- a. Provide an estimate for the staff time for each staff, including updating the salary for the project officer.
 - b. Update costs based upon last year's charges with potential foreseen changes, such as for the national review committee charges,
 - c. Update costs based upon contracted amounts for the Elsevier and Technopolis contracts, incorporating some for contingency)
 - d. Provide specific activities for the ACE capacity activities and AAU staff capacity training, seminars and CONFAB, publicity and communication costs,
 - e. Justify the overhead charge for utilities (15% of 200,000). In particular, kindly justify that utilities and other overheads make up 200,000
 - f. Review need for additional furniture and equipment for the project officer and coordinator office taken into account previous spending.
 - g. Review the charge pf 10,000 for the annual audit. It was suggested to charge the project for the audit in relation to the share of the project in AAU's turnover.
 - h. There may be additional costs for a vehicle and for extra consultancy for regional advisory services (harmonization of higher education within ECOWAS for example).

Further, prioritization of expenditures is expected. The World Bank proposed the following four top priorities: Project Steering Committee, regional workshops, monitoring and evaluation, and supervision through the academic experts. Other activities such as capacity building, communication, and regional studies are highly desirable, but only once the other priorities have been funded. Also, there were recommendation to cut down on travel; holding workshops and PSC meeting every eight months instead of semi-annually. However, the value of the regularity of the 6 monthly workshop was important. AAU would revise the budgets and share as early as possible.

18. **ACE Country Updates: Ghana** reported good progress generally with WACCI and WACCBIP attracting external revenue and increasing enrolments. However, KNUST has been a bit sluggish as a result of management challenges. The National Council for Tertiary Education (NCTE) is in contact with the university's management to resolve the issue.
19. **Togo** reported that the project had begun in earnest with training in procurement and other areas, and a formal launch of the initiative. Challenges include improving female enrolment and vigorous marketing of the project has been initiated to address this. Short courses have been introduced to address capacity needs within the poultry sector. Minimum entry requirement is a brevet or Baccalauréat. Concerns were raised regarding the relevance of the short courses vis-a-vis the focus of a Centre of Excellence (CoE) but it was argued that the ACEs should provide support for lower cadre of professionals.
20. **Cameroon:** CEA-CETIC started off with challenges which partly reflected in low enrolment of regional students. Enrolment of female students has also not been encouraging but this reflects the general low show of females in science-related subjects. There are challenges with generating revenue externally given restrictive national policies, and accreditation of programmes is a fairly new concept in Cameroon Higher Education. There are however some efforts to raise funds externally through consultancies.
21. **La Côte d'Ivoire (CDI):** CDI reported that it had met all conditions for project effectiveness but the initial disbursements are yet to hit project accounts. The projects are ready to start work once the funds are received. The World Bank noted it was ready to disburse but needs to be clear on which accounts to use and confirmed that the principal had been signed.

Next Steps for the Project

22. **Hosting of next PSC:** PSC Members decided that even though it was costly, holding the PSC Meeting and ACE Project Workshop every six months was better than the proposed eight months and that it should be institutionalized so that the stakeholders would know that the next events would come in the next six months and hence plan for it. Based on preliminary discussion held, it was agreed that Burkina Faso should host the next PSC meeting that would be held back-to-back with the ACE workshop. Tentative dates of 14 November 2016 for 9th PSC Meeting and 15 – 17 November 2016 for the 6th ACE Project Workshop were agreed and it was noted that the RFU should coordinate to ensure the experts are on board.

Closing

23. The Chair thanked the members for their active participation in the proceedings.

24. The meeting ended at 6.30pm.

LIST OF ANNEXES:

1. ACE PSC Agenda
2. ACE Workshop Agenda
3. ACE Project Update
4. ACE Loan Overview
5. ACE DLI 2.8 Approval
6. ACE Performance Report (Jan-April 2016)
7. ACE Performance Report (July-Dec 2015)
8. ACE Project Budget (2-16-2019)
9. Graphical Presentation of ACE Performance
10. Brief on 10 Nigerian ACEs – December 2015