

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

**14 November, 2016
Radisson Blu Hotel, Abidjan, La Cote d'Ivoire**

MEMBERS PRESENT

1. Prof. Fulgence Nindjin (Chair, Cote d'Ivoire)
2. Prof. Salifou Ouiminga (Burkina Faso)
3. Dr. Aaron Logmo, representing Prof. Marcel Fouda (Cameroon)
4. Dr. Sisawo Ebrima (Gambia)
5. Prof. Mohammed Salifu (Ghana)
6. Dr. Joshua Atah (Nigeria)
7. Prof. Aminata Sall Diallo (Senegal)
8. Prof. Messanvi Gbeassor (Togo)
9. Dr. Didier Acouetey (Private Sector)
10. Dr. Emmanuel Barry (UEMOA)

MEMBERS ABSENT

1. Prof. Jean-Claude Codjia (Benin)
2. Prof. Tewfik Nawar (Health Expert)
3. Dr. Irene Annor-Frempong (Agriculture)

IN ATTENDANCE

World Bank & AAU

1. Dr. Halil Dunder (Practice Manager, West Africa, World Bank)
2. Mr. Andreas Blom (Task Team Leader, World Bank)
3. Ms. Himdat Bayusuf (Education Specialist, World Bank)
4. Dr. Ekua Bentil (Education Specialist, World Bank)
5. Mrs. Eunice Ackwerh (Senior Education Specialist, World Bank)
6. Dr. Moustapha Lo (World Bank, Senegal)
7. Mrs. Pamela Mulet (World Bank, Togo)
8. Mr. Hermann Toualy (BCPE, Côte d'Ivoire)
9. Mr. Adama Ouedraogo (World Bank, Burkina Faso)
10. Prof. Etienne Ehilé (Secretary General, AAU)
11. Prof. Jonathan Mba (Coordinator, ACE Project)
12. Mr. Maxwell Amo-Hoyte (Director of Finance, AAU)

13. Ms. Nodumo Dhlamini (Director of ICT & Knowledge Management, AAU)
14. Mrs. Adeline Addy (M&E Officer, AAU)
15. Mr. Abednego Corletey (Procurement /IT Officer, AAU)
16. Ms. Gabrielle Hansen (Assistant Project Officer, AAU)

Experts

1. Prof. Idris Assani (STEM Expert)
2. Dr. Michelle Niescierenko (Health Expert)
3. Dr. Carl Larsen (Agriculture Expert, World Bank)
4. Prof. Raphael Wahome (Agriculture Expert)
5. Gen. Xavier Michel (STEM Expert)
6. Prof. Mamadou Diallo (STEM Expert)

INTRODUCTION

1. The ninth sitting of the ACE Project Steering Committee was held at the Radisson Blu Hotel in Abidjan on November 14, 2016. The objective of the meeting was to report on progress made in the implementation of the ACE Project since the previous meeting held in May 2016 in Accra; initiate preparations towards the mid-term review of the project; and to agree on the next critical steps for effective implementation of the project. The agenda (see Annex 1) for the meeting was unanimously adopted following minor modifications.

WELCOME REMARKS

2. The meeting was officially declared open by Professor Biaka, Focal Point for the ACEs in la Côte d'Ivoire (CDI). In his welcoming remarks, Prof. Biaka noted that development was key in the countries represented and major industrialisation is needed to achieve the goals set. Capacity building in higher education is therefore critical. He noted CDI is honoured to host the meeting for the ACE Project that seeks to address issues of relevance, quality and financing of higher education. On his part, Professor Etienne Ehilé, Secretary General of the AAU, welcomed members to the meeting and apologised for inconvenience of the change in venue. He observed that while some progress had been made since the last meeting, some centres were still facing challenges and hoped the current meeting would provide some resolutions. Prof. Ehilé also emphasised that the objectives and agenda of the current meeting should be seen within the context of the impending mid-term review of the project.
3. Dr Halil Dundar, Practice Manager for the World Bank, on his part, said he was happy to be part of the ninth meeting of the PSC. He was confident that the lessons learned under Phase 1 of the ACE Project, would contribute significantly to the success of ACE Phase 2 in East Africa, as well as the Partnership for Skills in Applied Science, Engineering and Technology (PASET) Initiative. Dr. Dundar applauded the contributions of the various stakeholders and called for closer collaboration between all three initiatives (ACE I; ACE II; and PASET) in order to maximize the benefits of the international

assistance. He observed that both primary and secondary education impact the quality of higher education and therefore the need to adopt a holistic approach in addressing education issues.

MINUTES OF THE 8TH PSC MEETING

4. The minutes of the 8th PSC meeting held in Accra were reviewed and accepted as a true record of the event. Prof. Salifu moved for its adoption subject to minor revisions, and was seconded by Prof. Gbeassor. See [Annex 2](#) for the recommended revisions.

Matters Arising

5. On capacity building needs and virtual training, Gen. Xavier Michel, the revenue generation and STEM expert noted that experience sharing was critical in moving forward. Three ACEs had documented their experiences in this regard and this had been shared with all the ACEs.
6. Draft ToRs for the proposed Scientific and Educational Committee to oversee the quality of implementation of the ACE Project was considered too broad in scope and unclear with respect to the tasks experts were expected to undertake. There were concerns that the tasks as outlined also conflict with existing supervisory arrangements. This was partially blamed on the quality of the English to French translation and it was recommended to ensure that the French version of documents always align with the original English versions. Prof. Mba, Coordinator of the Project, clarified that essentially the scientific committee was to play an advisory role by providing technical assistance to ensure relevance to local imperatives and agreed objectives of each ACE. The committee would therefore not be taking decisions. It was therefore recommended that the AAU and WB review the document in consultation with the PSC, to better reflect this position. There were concerns that it is not clear that the ACEs are being prepared to be independent. The PSC recommended that the ACEs should be supported in such a way that they can eventually be weaned off the experts and be independent.
7. It was noted some ACEs lack a business-oriented person on their project teams and this was adversely affecting recruitment, marketing and communication, among others. It was suggested that the experts, some of whom have this kind of experience, bring this up in their interactions with the ACEs.
8. On faculty motivation, it was noted this was still a thorny issue. The AAU noted that ACE staff take up additional responsibilities hence the need to be motivated. It was proposed that a review of the options for faculty motivation be discussed and presented to the committee at the next meeting.
9. Unverified results for the period ending September 2016 showed significant achievements since the last meeting held in May 2016. In brief, there were 4,774 students enrolled; 102 partnerships initiated; 1,013 internships undertaken; 535

research papers published; and US\$7.19 million external revenue raised. With respect to outreach, a total of 1,920 regional students were enrolled over the reporting period. Per the results, CEA-SMA and CEA-MITIC accounted for 48% of regional students enrolled. Short-term course students/ trainees made up a significant 70% of the total enrolment. This was cause for concern in view of the fact that the ACE Project is mainly to train doctorate and masters students. While the overall performance was encouraging, accreditation and revenue generation fell short of the annual targets.

10. It was observed that most ACEs concentrate on short-term programme enrolment because it brings in more revenue compared to PhD and Masters programmes which are relatively more finance intensive. There were concerns about classifying short-term programme participants as students. However, some experts explained that some short-term programmes are critical for the focus of the centre and are very high level courses targeting PhD and Masters Students. Specificity of each centre should therefore be considered in determining whether to call them students or trainees.
11. There were concerns about why performance for most indicators was well above the targets set. The impression was that targets may have been under-estimated. On the low female enrolment, the PSC Member representing Senegal, Prof. Aminata Diallo noted this was the result of a social challenge - normally for females, the reproductive age coincides with the post graduate training period. This may explain why fewer females enroll in post graduate programmes. It was also observed that the project reporting period does not coincide with academic years and this may explain the below target performance on some indicators. It is therefore not appropriate to compare the ACEs owing to the differences in admission periods.
12. On revenue generation which was below target, it was noted that in some of the universities there are restrictions on generating revenue and this should be considered in the interpretation of the results. The PSC cautioned that the performance on revenue has dire implications for both implementation and sustainability of the projects.
13. For accreditation, identification of a suitable accrediting agency was noted as a major challenge. The AAU and WB are assisting the ACEs in this respect.
14. Generally, the PSC noted there were significant differences between ACEs that had a foundation and those starting from scratch. Clearly the new entrants are taking longer to get the project moving. Subsequent performance reports should therefore differentiate between non-performers, new entrants with a potential to complete the project and the high flyers who were already established prior to the start of the ACE Project. In addition, performance reports should provide more explanations for the performance of individual ACEs. This would eventually be helpful in determining which individual projects to grant an extension.

SUPERVISION MISSIONS TO SELECTED ACES

15. Supervision missions were undertaken to seven selected ACES to assess the progress of implementation and provide necessary technical support. The missions revealed challenges to do with governance, disbursements and verification of project results, student welfare, staff motivation and linkages with industry.
16. **Governance:** On governance, it was noted that much effort is needed to promote cooperation and ownership and there is also the need to clarify who is in charge of the centres and what the related responsibilities are.
17. **Industry Linkages:** It was observed that clearer definition of “industry” within the context of each ACE would help the centres perform better in this regard. It was suggested to use more appropriate terminologies like *Small and Medium Scale Enterprises* (SMEs). Industry could also support the uptake of research results in the community.
18. **Accreditation:** Performance on accreditation has been well below expectation. There are however some ongoing negotiations with HCERES, the Royal College of Canada and ABET. Three (3) ACES are in consultation with ABET and will be undertaking self-evaluations and gap assessments between January and March 2017.
19. **Funds Disbursement:** Both the rate of disbursements and that of fund utilization were reported as low. Some countries had peculiar challenges in this respect. For Nigeria, some significant progress had been made with respect to disbursements after initial foreign currency restrictions with the introduction of new monetary policies by the Nigerian Government. For CDI, while disbursement was made since July 2016, the 3 ACES are yet to receive their allocations due to bureaucratic bottlenecks. The funds are presently with WASCAL and would be distributed to the ACES concerned. The PSC recommended more effort on the part of the various governments and commitment of key university players to ensure timely execution of project activities.
20. The World Bank noted a one-year extension of the project is possible. A review on the low-performing centers is being made with consultations and meetings between those centers and national agencies taking place before any decision for reallocation of funds from weak performing centers to strong performing centers.
21. **Satisfaction Survey:** Although there has been some increase in response rates (190 in November 2016), the level of satisfaction has either remained static or in some cases, reduced. On the average, the performance of both the WB and AAU has been satisfactory but there is room for improvement. With regard to the satisfaction of participants, performance has been quite encouraging. Concerns were raised regarding the appropriateness of the survey items for measuring the performance of AAU. Although it was explained that the survey instrument had items on other issues aside

logistics pertaining to the functions of the key partners (World Bank; AAU; national governments) as stated in the Project Appraisal Document (PAD), the PSC tasked the AAU to come up with a list of SMART performance indicators for the Committee's approval.

VERIFICATION OF 2014 – 2015 RESULTS

22. Results for 2014 – 2015 were verified by an independent third party. The exercise took longer than expected because of delays in finding a suitable consultant and time spent in filling gaps in performance reports. Verification of DLRs 2.1 – 2.5 was undertaken by Technopolis while that for DLR 2.6 (*research publication*) was done by Elsevier. Unreliable internet access and incorrect contact details meant that a significant number of students could not be reached during this round of verification. Given that all PhD and Masters' students have to be verified, it is planned to include this group in the next round of the exercise in 2017. The individual ACEs would therefore be provided with an updated list of students who could not be reached even after the deadline for the exercise was extended. For DLRs 2.1 – 2.5 the following rules were applied:
- 100% of PhDs and Masters' students needed to be verified to attract payment. The centres earned payment only for students that were verified.
 - 30% of short-term students verified attracted payment for 75% of total number reported.
23. For verification of research publications, Elsevier extracted all publications produced by researchers over the period 2014 – 2015, based on the lists of researchers provided by each ACE. The results for each ACE were then reviewed by subject matter experts to determine their relevance to the particular centre's objectives or focus. Given challenges with this methodology including the omission of some key publications, it is planned to review the methodology and have Elsevier verify lists of publications provided by the centres themselves.
24. The PSC recommended that the next exercise should take no longer than three months. The next exercise was subsequently fixed for March 2017. The results should therefore be ready for discussion at the next PSC meeting in May 2017. Meanwhile, the results of the just-ended exercise would be shared with the ACEs concerned so they can claim payments accruing to them.

PROJECT FINANCE

25. Total funds available for the reporting period totaled UD\$2,558,356 while total expenditure for January 1, 2016 – October 31, 2016, came up US\$482,198 leaving the balance of funds as at October 31, 2016, at US\$2,076,158. While the analysis showed under expenditure, it was noted that there are many commitments especially relating to the organization of the November 2016 PSC Meeting and Project Workshop. Based on the 2016 experience, the budget for 2017 had been prudently fixed at US\$725,865.

26. The WB was happy with the unqualified audit report and the prudent reductions in both the 2016 and 2017 budgets but noted the latter was a bit off target if it should remain sustainable. The WB also requested additional details on the RFU's overheads and usage of US\$200,000 staff time allocation, and submission of outstanding staff time sheets. Explaining the expenditure on PASET, the WB noted this was essentially an advance to the PASET Initiative to cover its staff costs until government funds are ready. The PASET Initiative is a regional scholarship fund being managed by the AAU for a group of interested African governments.

MID-TERM PROJECT REVIEW

27. The mid-term review was launched at the ACE Abidjan workshop. The mid-term review offers an opportunity to the Governments, AAU, and centers to jointly revisit efficacy and effectiveness of project design and implementation approach, resolve problems, and possible reallocation of funds depending upon the performance of the centers. Good planning and quality preparation are therefore essential for a successful MTR. The Abidjan workshop laid out the main areas of review at mid-term and lessons learned in the first two years of project implementation. Further discussions on project performance and areas of improvement will be discussed by each country at the national level over the next 3 months, led by each country national review committees. A final MTR report will be prepared jointly by AAU/WB with the findings and recommendations from each country included.

COUNTRY REPORTS ON THE ACES

28. **Ghana:** The 3 ACEs in Ghana are making good progress. However, regional enrollment is low and could be blamed on the lack of scholarships. A strategy for attracting regional students is therefore crucial. There were debates on the need for harmonizing tuition fees across the ACEs. It was reported that such a policy exists in the UEMOA countries but is not enforced.
29. **Nigeria:** Funds have been transferred at the level of the Central Bank and new member has been nominated to represent Nigeria on the PSC in the person of the new Executive Secretary of the Nigerian Universities' Commission (NUC), Prof. Abubakar Rasheed.
30. **Senegal:** The report noted low disbursement of funds to CEA-SAMEF and recommended that the WB notify the authorities concerned that they risk losing the funds altogether if implementation does not improve. A formal launch of the ACEs in Senegal is fixed for 22 December 2016 to give visibility to the centres and build ownership among the key stakeholders.
31. **Togo:** Togo noted the extra responsibilities of the Centre Leader and its negative impact on implementation of project activities; release of faculty to the Centre has been problematic given that the legal status of the ACE is yet to be determined; negotiation are ongoing with HCERES regarding programme accreditation; and the lack of ownership by the Togolese government presents a major challenge.

32. **Burkina Faso:** Burkina Faso reported that external audits and major procurements have been undertaken and reports are available online, and equipment have been purchased including laptops for students. Concerns were expressed regarding the delays in the verification process which ultimately will affect the implementation of future project activities.
33. **Cameroon:** Ownership by University leadership was reported as the major challenge for CEA-CETIC especially at the start of the project. Currently, however, there is more involvement on the part of major stakeholders.
34. **Côte d’Ivoire:** CDI observed that all conditions for project effectiveness had been met and the first disbursement was released in June 2016. Unfortunately, the funds were held at the Central Bank for five months. Currently, the funds are in the WASCAL account and would be redistributed to the 3 CDI ACEs. The Focal Point for CDI noted also the challenges of navigating the internal procedures for this type of WB funding.

PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES BETWEEN PASET AND THE ACE PROJECT

35. Dr. Ekuia Benti presented on the Partnership for Skills in Applied Science, Engineering and Technology (PASET), noting the progress made so far. The PASET Initiative is to strengthen capacities, propose a regional scholarship programme and launch a call for PhD students. It is important that synergies between the PASET and ACE are identified and promoted to enhance internationalization of the ACEs. Already, there are opportunities for partnership and networking with Indian as well as Chinese institutions. Other organisations and countries have expressed interest in collaborating with the ACE Project. The presentation also mentioned the proposed set up of a Research and Finance Council to help strengthen scientific research and the financing of the project.

KEY NEXT STEPS

36. The WB presented key next steps relating to *Financial Reporting, M&E and Results Verification, General Implementation Support and Supervision, Mid-term Reviews, DLI and Partnership Milestones and PSC and Project Workshop*. See table below for proposed timelines. It was agreed that Nigeria would host the 10th PSC and 7th ACE Project Workshop to be held on 15 May 2017 and 16-18 May 2017 respectively.

ITEM	PROPOSED ACTIVITIES	DATES
Financial Reporting	Interim Reporting	February 15, 2017
	Submission of 2016 Financial Audit	June 30, 2017
	Submission of Annual Work plans	November 30, 2017
Monitoring, Evaluation & Verification	Submission of M&E Results for verification	February 15, 2017

ITEM	PROPOSED ACTIVITIES	DATES
	Verification of 2016 results	March 1 for delivery of reports by May, 2017
General Implementation Support & Supervision	ACE Project Team Audio	Jan 25, 2017
	M&E Audio	February 1, 2017
Mid-term Project Review	Country-level MTR	March 2017
	AAU/WB Regional MTR	March 2017
	MTR/ Supervision Missions (Nigeria)	January
	MTR/ Supervision Missions (Others)	TBC
Partnership/DLI Milestones	ACE India Workshop	December 12, 2016
	Procurement Audit	June 30, 2017
	End of Civil Works Procurement	June 30, 2017
PSC Meeting & ACE Workshop	10 th PSC Meeting	May 15, 2017
	7 th ACE Workshop	May 16 – 18, 2017

CLOSING

37. In the absence of further comment and contributions from members, the meeting was brought to a close at 5.50pm.