

AFRICA CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE (ACE)

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

15 May, 2017

Intercontinental Hotel, Lagos, Nigeria

MEMBERS PRESENT

1. Prof. Abubakar Adamu Rasheed (Chair, NUC, Nigeria)
2. Prof. Salifou Ouiminga (Burkina Faso)
3. Prof. Jean-Claude Codjia (Benin)
4. Prof. Serge Nana Engo, representing Prof. Marcel Fouda (Cameroon)
5. Mr. Yaya Sireh Jallow (Gambia)
6. Prof. Mohammed Salifu (Ghana)
7. Dr. Joshua Atah (Nigeria)
8. Prof. Aminata Sall Diallo (Senegal)
9. Prof. Zasseli Biaka Côte d'Ivoire)
10. Prof. Messanvi Gbeassor (Togo)
11. Dr. Amos Gyau (from FARA - Agriculture)

MEMBERS ABSENT

1. Prof. Fulgence Nindjin (Cote d'Ivoire)
2. Dr. Emmanuel Barry (UEMOA)
3. Dr. Didier Acouetey (Private Sector)
4. Prof. Tewfik Nawar (Health)

IN ATTENDANCE

World Bank & AAU

1. Mr. Andreas Blom (ACE Task Team Leader, Lead Economist, World Bank)
2. Ms. Himdat Bayusuf (ACE Co-TTL, Education Specialist, World Bank)
3. Dr. Ekuia Bentil (Education Specialist, World Bank)
4. Dr. Moustapha Lo (Education Specialist, World Bank, Senegal)
5. Ms. Aisha Garba (Education Specialist, World Bank, Nigeria)
6. Mrs Olufunke Olufon (World Bank, Nigeria)

7. Prof. Etienne Ehil  (Secretary General, AAU)
8. Prof. Jonathan Mba (Coordinator, ACE Project)
9. Mr. Maxwell Amo-Hoyte (Director of Finance, AAU)
10. Ms. Nodumo Dhlamini (Director of ICT & Knowledge Management, AAU)
11. Mrs. Adeline Addy (M&E Officer, AAU)
12. Mr. Abednego Corletey (Procurement /IT Officer, AAU)
13. Ms. Gabrielle Hansen (Assistant Project Officer, AAU)

Experts

1. Prof. Michelle Niescierenko (Health Expert)
2. Prof. Hadiza Galadanci (Health Expert)
3. Prof. Raphael Wahome (Agriculture Expert)
4. Gen. Xavier Michel (STEM Expert)
5. Prof. Mamadou Diallo (STEM Expert)

ACEs

1. Prof. Ogbonna Joel, (Centre Leader, CEFOR, Nigeria)
2. Prof. S.S. Maimako, (Vice Chancellor, ACEPRD, Nigeria)

ACE II

Dr. Eugene Mutimura, (ACE II Coordinator, Uganda)

WELCOME REMARKS

1. The meeting was opened by Professor Abubakar A. Rasheed, the Executive Secretary of the National Universities Commission (NUC) of Nigeria and Chair of the meeting. In his welcome remarks, Professor Etienne Ehil , Secretary General of AAU noted some highlights of the project since the last meeting including redefinition of some Disbursement Linked Indicators (DLIs), and observed that generally, the centres had made good progress. There were however a few other centres that for various reasons including governance challenges, showed low performance. He wished all fruitful deliberations and hoped that decisions would be taken regarding low-performing ACEs.
2. Mr. Andreas Blom, the ACE Project Task Team Leader (TTL) applauded members for their consistent participation in meetings, noting that this was a clear sign of their commitment to the project and its objectives. The NUC and AAU were equally commended for their role in the smooth implementation of the project. Mr. Blom observed that in spite of challenges, there had also been progress in terms of student mobility, regionality, scale up of projects, revenue generation, and improvement of learning environment, among others. He mentioned governance issues, low uptake of project funds, and slow project implementation as some challenges the project is facing. Mr. Blom was hopeful that objective discussion would yield pointers for the way forward. He noted also that other agencies had expressed interest in supporting the ACE project.

3. The Chair noted that while there had been good progress, there was the need for caution – issues of sustainability should be considered and consequently, there was need to revisit the idea of incentives. However, the latter should be implemented such that it is sustainable so that the projects do not wind down after the WB funding ends. He advised that the universities should own the projects and that it was critical to have the commitment of the vice chancellors (VCs). The Chair noted that partnerships among the project’s participant universities was on the low side and called for more collaboration to enhance student and faculty mobility. The Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) of Nigeria and l’Université Gaston Berger de Saint Louis (UGB) of Senegal were mentioned a good examples in this regard. He recognised the subject experts for their commitments in terms of time and expertise.
4. The Chair also called for higher involvement of government in the projects, noting that the strong involvement from the Bank and AAU in all aspects of the project in various countries. He was emphatic that centre leaders who move on to new positions, should be made to hand over completely, the leadership of the centres. Such former centre leaders may continue to play a role in their respective centres but not that of direct governance. He observed that the PSC should be very firm and clear on governance issues.

Adoption of Agenda

5. The Chair tabled the agenda for adoption and modifications. The agenda was amended to allow for reports from subject experts on progress of selected ACEs following supervision missions (See [Annex 1](#)).

EXPERTS’ REPORTS ON ACES

6. **Health ACEs:** The experts reported good progress over the six-month review period. Achievements included 19 new masters and 15 new PhD programmes; well-equipped laboratories; significant publications; research grants from major donors like DELTAS and the US Department of Defence; internationally accredited programmes at WACCBIP, while others are in line; enhanced approval processes; spill-over effect - host universities benefitting from internet connectivity and other project facilities; and ownership by host universities. However, there were challenges regarding linkages with industry. Industry relevant to the business of the ACEs is not well developed and resourced in the countries concerned. It was recommended to explore the possibility of strengthening national health systems through the ACE Project. Recruitment of regional students; visibility at national and regional levels; communication of results and experience; and student support (especially for regional students) were mentioned as areas needing extra attention.

7. **STEM ACEs:** The mission reported that significant progress had been achieved over the last six months. The centres have taken measures to address all issues raised during the last supervision mission and are poised for project implementation. Efforts have been made to engage with industry and real progress made in the recruitment of regional students. The experts noted that research capacity would be key in attracting regional participation in the project. There are however challenges with leadership turnover and the attendant loss of momentum with the coming on board of new leaders.
8. **AGRIC ACEs:** The experts reported that short courses are doing very well and feeding industry; excellent learning approaches are being adopted with measurable progress; national accreditation has been acquired for most programmes and international accreditation processes have been initiated; and, close learning and experience sharing has been encouraged between the Agricultural ACEs and two joint meetings held already. There are however challenges regarding the definition of some DLIs. There is also the need for to sell the ACE vision to the project team and partners; formalise the relationship with partner institutions; and address apparent signs of fatigue.
9. **General Comments:** On accreditation, the Chair noted that the relevance and not the number of programmes is what is key. It is also necessary to consider sustainability of the new programmes. He was happy that a total of 87 new programmes had been introduced in STEM, Agriculture and Medicine and concluded that if all the programmes grow and make a difference, then the project would have met the key objective of strengthening deeper research in our universities. On inter-ACE university collaboration, the Chair noted that it may be necessary to hold side meetings at the annual workshops to forge wider cooperation between the ACEs and ultimately lead to greater student and faculty mobility. NUC has now shared with WB/AAU record of all programmes submitted for accreditation, indicating which of them were eventually approved

DISBURSEMENT & FUNDS UTILISATION

10. Available data showed low absorption of funds for majority of the ACEs with percentages as low as 5%. A few centres including WACCBIP (Ghana) and 2iE (Burkina Faso) reported over 30%. It was noted however, that many centres have commitments and disbursements for some Disbursement Linked Results (DLRs) achieved were yet to be processed.
11. Discussions noted that disbursement challenges could largely be attributed to governance issues, communication problems between the WB and the ACEs; cash flow issues; bureaucracy as in the case of Cote d'Ivoire (CDI), delays in verification of results and delayed procurement processes.

It was agreed that improvements in fund utilisation would be a key priority for the project. Additionally, it was noted that a lot of funds has been committed and are under procurement. It was agreed to review the August 2017 IFRs and review the fund utilisation issue at the next PSC meeting.

PROJECT RESULTS AND VERIFICATION

12. Summary results for the period under review showed positive progress towards achievement of the annual targets. Performance on enrolment, partnerships, regionality and research for the half-year period, far exceeded the annual targets. However, results for external revenue generation and internships were not encouraging. Under accreditation, considerable progress had been made with all the programmes in Nigerian ACEs receiving national accreditation; and, WACCBIP and CEA-MITIC accrediting two programs and CETIC receiving international accreditation for 6 programs.
13. Following r verification of results for 2014 – 2015, altogether, the ACEs earned SDR 23,899,700, approximately 27% of the total amount that could be earned. Earnings were low for external revenue, procurement, teaching and learning environment, accreditation and, enrollment and internships in that order. Improvements had been made in the verification process based on feedback from the first exercise.
14. In discussion, the PSC noted that the cost of PhD education could account for the low enrolments in that sector vis-à-vis enrolments for Masters and Short Courses. Availability of grants could be a solution. it was recommended that in the future, enrolment results should be disaggregated per the category of courses (PhD, Master and Short Courses) to make progress for each more evident.
15. It was observed that emphasis on revenue generation could be detrimental to the focus of the project. It was proposed to have a clear strategy on how the individual governments can assure sustainability of the projects.
16. On verification, there were suggestions to carry out verification at the national level since the current methodology seemed to be fraught with challenges.

Project Finance

17. The Financial Report was presented by the AAU Director of Finance. He highlighted the various monies disbursed in the previous six months including the last PSC Meeting in November 2016 in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire; supervision missions; verification exercise; staff salaries; and Partnership in skills for Applied Sciences, Engineering and Technology – Regional Scholarships and Innovation Fund (PASET-RSIF).

18. The PSC noted that the financial report showed the same trends as the report for the previous period – the vote for capacity building was not used and that for contingency was exceeded. There is also need for updated information on staff charges. The AAU explained that for capacity building, needs were to be discussed at the upcoming workshop with the ACEs. For contingency, it was noted that the 2017 vote is lower than that for 2016 and that a significant share of that allocation goes towards supporting PASET-RSIF.

19. The PSC noted the need for the regional facilitation unit budget to be managed conservatively in the remaining years of the project, given the high burn rate thus far. All project expenditures have been used towards important activities such as verification of results, technical assistance to support the implementation of the ACEs and aggregated M&E and communications. Additional support to the Partnership in Applied Science and Technology (PASET) is also a key new cost expenditure of the ACE project. PASET aims to establish sustainability of the project through a government supported scholarship fund for post-graduate education where students would be eligible to enroll in ACE centers. As such a clear line for PASET activities was recommended as opposed to have ad-hoc line items related to PASET. The PSC agreed to allocate USD150,000 of the ACE RFU funds to be put towards supporting PASET activities. The ACE project is supporting the initial project related costs of setting up this regional scholarship fund in anticipation of incoming government support to the PASET. In addition, the Bank team continues its due diligence on cost-effectiveness with respect to budget reporting

Action Point: AAU to provide details on staff costs (submit time sheets)

MID-TERM REVIEW

20. The ACE midterm report findings were presented and it was noted that the progress is clear for strong and impactful centers and that they have continued their robust performance. This is partly due to their dynamic leadership and also the strong commitment from the university hosting the center. An important finding of the midterm review is that there continues to be a number of centers that have governance and implementation challenges. Each of these centers underwent a second round of individual supervision site visits in April/May 2017 prior to the workshop, where progress was assessed based on previous November 2017 meetings. Importantly the implementation support missions over the last 6 months have found that 4 Centers out of the concerning 6 Centers have showed considerable improvement with respect to governance and implementation. This includes Université de Yaoundé I, Cameroon; Université d'Abomey – Calavi, Benin; and Ahmadu Bello University, University of Jos in Nigeria. There continues to be concern at University of Abeokuta and University of Benin in Nigeria where these two centers continue to face considerable governance and project management challenges. Nonetheless, the shortcomings in these centers have been communicated and it has been agreed that there will be

time-bound action plans, close supervision by national government focal points and a review of performance in the coming 6 months. If there is no significant progress a reallocation from the lesser-performing centers to better performing ones will be made.

21. It was highlighted and agreed that any reallocation or reduction in funds would be led by the national review committee of the country in which the center is located. No reallocation is expected to take place across countries. It is expected that any fund reallocation or reduction would be based on the agreed performance-based contract that each center has signed with its respective government that allows for a funding reduction in the implementation gap deficit of the center. (Annex 3- Mid-term review note has further details on the reallocation approach that will be updated following fund utilisation and results information from the next quarter).
22. The decision on the need for this reallocation will be made after September 2017 following the submission of the January-June 2017 Interim Financial Reports (IFRs) together with the information on results achievements for the ACEs as well as supervision visits to the centers. The timeline for the proposed restructuring would be in coordination with the preparation of ACE 3 to ensure coordinated efforts on letters of requests from ministry of finance and related processing steps.
23. There was also an agreement to improve DLI definitions to provide more clarity and respond to some of the different needs of the centres. A revised operations manual with the revised DLI definitions is attached. Additionally feedback on the verification process was noted and improved and simplified approaches will be undertaken. .

ACE COUNTRY UPDATES

24. **Nigeria** shared a report on progress of its ten (10) ACEs. Student enrolments have seen some increase and progress has been made in the teaching and learning environment with the purchase of equipment and renovation of facilities. Collaboration between the centres has been very innovative and has helped to initiate a capacity building plan. There have however been some difficulties with procurement which have slowed down implementation. Again, there are issues with mobilisation of funds from the central bank and security issues and threats have negatively affected recruitment of regional students. An audit is planned to assess the action plan put in place last year and the timely intervention of the new Executive Secretary of NUC has helped resolve many difficulties.
25. **Cameroon** reported challenges with procurement processes noting that administrative barriers are significant. With the World Bank's intervention, governance issues have been resolved; International accreditation processes have been initiated; and an incubator to market skills for revenue generation has been introduced. Against this background, it is expected that there will be much improvement over the next six months and project's objectives will be attained.

26. **Benin** noted that good progress had been made over the period under review however there have been some challenges with governance of the project following the recent presidential and legislative elections in the country. The new government is yet to engage with the project, a tracking committee is not in place, and there have been changes in ACE leadership positions. Project implementation has slowed down as a result as some activities require the involvement of government structures. Efforts have been made to resolve these issues by engaging with the ministry of higher education and the World Bank was requested to intervene and explain the project to the ministry. The World Bank promised to discuss with the Co-TTL in Benin the strategies for resolving these issues.
27. **Togo** reported that performance was satisfactory but that there were issues with the procurement processes. The ACE had been visited by Dr. Makhtar DIOP, the World Bank's Vice President for Africa.
28. **Burkina Faso** reported satisfactory progress on implementation and disbursement of funds but noted that it would be helpful if the government followed the project more closely. On international accreditation, a credible agency has been contacted and processes initiated.
29. **Senegal** noted the great commitment on the part of the government – the Minister for Health is very dedicated to the centre. However, there are some communication challenges and issues regarding the motivation of faculty. The project was officially launched with the participation of all partners, giving good visibility to the project at the national level. The National Review Committee is working closely with the two centres in Senegal to resolve status and management related issues.
30. **Côte d'Ivoire** reported strong involvement of the ministry of education in the project and noted that issues with disbursement of funds are being sorted out. Bureaucratic bottlenecks at the Ministry of Finance are a challenge for smooth implementation of project activities. Given its peculiarities, the Climate Change project (CCBAD) may have difficulties in making significant progress on partnerships. Calls were made to consider strategies to ensure integration of ACE Project graduates into the work environment.
31. **Ghana** noted a continuous increase in project performance from the 3 ACEs with impressive strides being made in externally generated funds to support the project. Regional enrolment is improving and new partnerships have been developed while existing ones are being strengthened. Construction work at the Centres is progressing steadily. There are however challenges with industry partnership development and challenges associated with importing laboratory supplies and consumables for research.

32. **Gambia** reported that recent political upheavals impacted significantly and negatively on the implementation of the ACE project. However, the new government has put in place a new team that is very committed and working towards moving the project forward. There are internet connectivity issues as well as challenges with the working and living conditions of Gambian students in some of the host countries. The Gambia is working closely with other ACE partners to pursue project objectives.

33. In discussion, the PSC noted that motivation is important but also a very sensitive issue and cautioned against the creation of new frameworks that can jeopardise the functioning of universities and may not be sustainable after the World Bank funding ends.

KEY NEXT STEPS

34. Key next steps presented by the World Bank, related to financial, procurement, verification and disbursements, and general project implementation activities as outlined in the table below:

ITEM	PROPOSED ACTIVITIES	DATES	RESPONSIBILITY
Financial & Procurement Reporting	Submission of 2016 Financial Audit	June 30, 2017	ACEs
	Procurement Audit	June 30, 2017	ACEs
	Interim Reporting	August 15, 2017	ACEs
	End of Civil Works procurement	September 30, 2017	ACEs
	Submission of Annual Work plans and Procurement Plans	October 30, 2017	ACEs
	Clearance of Annual Work plans and Procurement Plans	November 2017 (at November 2017 Workshop)	WB/ AAU
Verification & Disbursements	Centre feedback on draft verification reports	May 26, 2017	ACEs
	Submission of DLI 2.7 national accreditation certificates	May 26, 2017	ACEs
	Communication of Verification letters (i) DLI 2.1-2.4 (second round results verification) (ii) DLI 2.5 national accreditation and (iii) DLI 2.7 revenue generation (iv) DLI 2.8 verification exercise	June 30, 2017	AAU
	WB disbursement clearance letters to each country	July 30, 2017	WB

ITEM	PROPOSED ACTIVITIES	DATES	RESPONSIBILITY
	Submission of withdrawal applications	August 15, 2017	ACEs
	Verification of DLI 2.6 research publications	July 2017	AAU/WB
	Verification of CDI ACEs –submission of results	September 2017	CDI ACEs
	Verification of CDI ACEs project results	October 2017	AAU/WB
General Implementation Support & Supervision	WebEx with selected ACEs as needed	To be scheduled	AAU/WB
	National review meetings-1 per country	May – November 2017	National Review Committees
	Supervision missions to CDI ACEs	July 2017	AAU/WB/National Focal Point
	ACE Audio	July 6, 2017 September 13, 2017	AAU/WB/ACEs
	Country level WB/Centers procurement meeting/workshops	August 2017	WB
	Virtual regional steering committee meeting	August 2017	Steering Committee
	Supervision missions to selected ACEs	September/October 2017	AAU/WB/National Focal Points
	11 th PSC Meeting	6 November 2017	AAU/WB
	Joint ACE 1 and ACE 2 workshop	7-9 November 2017	AAU/IUCEA/WB

35. . Specifically

Annex 1

- The Agenda for the meeting is attached as **Annex 1**
- **ACE Aide Memoire-Annex 2**
- MTR Note-Annex 3