

**SPEECH DELIVERED BY MINISTER FOR EDUCATION,
HON. DR MATTHEW OPOKU PREMPEH (MP) AT JOINT WORLD BANK
SPONSORED AFRICA HIGHER EDUCATION CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE
ACE1 AND ACE2 PROJECT WORKSHOP AND STEERING COMMITTEE
MEETING
NOVEMBER 6-9, 2017, LA PALM BEACH HOTEL, ACCRA**

Mr. Chairman,

My Colleague Hon. Ministers of Finance, Agriculture and Health,

The World Bank Country Representatives for Ghana, Sierra Leone and
Liberia,

World Bank Task Team Leaders; Mr Andreas Blom and Dr Xiaoyon Liang
Secretary General of AAU

Executive Secretary of Inter-University Council of East Africa

ACE Project Steering Committee Members

ACEI AND ACEII Center Leaders

Media personnel present,

Distinguished Invited Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

It gives me great pleasure to be part of this historic 8th World Bank
Africa Higher Education Centers of Excellence (ACE) Project Workshop,
which I understand involves participants of both ACE1 (22 ACEs) from
West and Central Africa and ACE2 (24 ACEs) from East and Southern

Africa. Once again Ghana is taking the lead by being chosen as host for the first ever joint meeting and workshop for all participating Centers of Excellence (i.e. 46 ACEs from 15 countries) on the continent. Please let me put on record my personal appreciation and that of the Government of Ghana to the World Bank team and AAU for choosing Accra as venue for this special gathering.

I take this as a huge compliment and a vote of confidence in all that our country is doing right; especially in relation to what we see as its natural attractiveness as a preferred destination for Higher Education in the sub-region. But perhaps, more significantly, I believe this is recognition of the fact that all the three Centers of Excellence that Ghana is hosting currently, at least according to my briefing, are easily among the top performing Centers in terms of results achieved.

For our three Center Leaders and their hardworking teams, please be assured that the Government recognizes your efforts and stands ready to assist you to build a legacy that will endure long after the World Bank support has run its full length.

Mr. Chairman, as I understand it, the World Bank supported Africa Higher Education Centers of Excellence aim to promote regional

specialization among participating universities in areas that address specific common regional development challenges and to serve as an avenue for strengthening the capacities of these universities to deliver high quality training and applied research, among others.

Thus, the strategy is to use these Centers as models to drive changes that will entrench Higher Education Institutions as principal producers of knowledge that directly impact on socio-economic development. This after all is what the mission of Higher Education Institutions must be about.

The strategy is an extremely laudable one and has the full endorsement of the Government of Ghana. Indeed, the ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP) had elaborately captured in its Manifesto, plans to create Centers of Excellence to spur on national development. For example, under the broad heading of STIMULATING DEMAND FOR SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, the NPP Manifesto proposes to:

1. Establish a merit-based research system to encourage scientific research in priority sectors of the economy
2. Strengthen collaboration between industry, universities and research centers to promote commercialization of scientific research output

3. Expand research and development capabilities of the country through establishment of Regional Technology Parks; and
4. In collaboration with the private sector and international financing institutions (like the World Bank!), establish a flagship system of Ghana Centers of Excellence (GCE) across the country that networks all Higher Education Institutions (HEI), including research organizations like the institutes of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and the Cocoa Research Institute of Ghana (CRIG). The GCEs will cover areas such as:
 - a. Biomedical engineering
 - b. Pharmaceutical technology and bioequivalence research
 - c. Energy engineering
 - d. Food process engineering
 - e. Manufacturing engineering and
 - f. Electronics and software engineering, among others

I am happy to observe that on account of this broad strategy, there is clear convergence between our approach and that of the World Bank. Consequently, in addition to the three Centers we have in Ghana, namely, the West Africa Center for Crop Improvement (WACCI), the West Africa Center for Cell Biology of Infectious Pathogens (WCCBIP) and the Regional Water and Environmental Sanitation Center, Kumasi

(RWESCK), our goal is to collaborate with the World Bank to create many more Centers to work in other priority areas in the context of the network of Centers and Higher Education Institutions envisaged in the Government's programme.

Our commitment therefore is twofold. On one front, we are committed to supporting the existing Centers to consolidate the gains they have already made and to fully execute ongoing projects, particularly, the physical infrastructure projects. It is on this score that we have already given indication to the World Bank to consider granting a maximum of a one year no-cost time extension to the ACE1 projects and we are optimistic that this would receive appropriate attention.

On the second front, Mr. Chairman, I wish to serve notice of the keen interest of Ghana in taking full advantage of any future initiatives by the World Bank to scale-up the Centers of Excellence project. We intend to seize any such opportunity to establish the new Centers of Excellence envisaged in clearly defined priority areas. I therefore call on our Higher Education Institutions, both public and private, to start positioning themselves to develop competitive proposals that will earn them selection in the next round of call for establishment of centers of

excellence. We, as a Government, stand ready to provide the necessary facilitation or any other support that may be required.

I am also happy to announce that we are taking some concrete steps to enhance the entrenchment of the culture of high quality research in our Higher Education Institutions and Research Centers. In addition to payments of books and research allowance to academic staff of these institutions, government is in the process of setting up a National Research Fund. In fact, Cabinet has already given policy approval for the Fund and so the draft Bill will be going to Parliament shortly.

Mr. Chairman, on this proactive and positive note, I wish to take this opportunity to extend a warm welcome to all who are coming from outside Ghana. Our country is noted for its hospitality and I urge you to make time to enjoy the sights and sounds. Of course, naturally, while you do that, I expect that your primary focus and attention will be on actively participating in the peer learning and knowledge sharing platform that this meeting seeks to provide to enable your Centers perform better.

And now, finally, Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, I have the distinguished pleasure and privilege to declare this first ever

joint workshop of the World Bank Africa Higher Education Centers of Excellence, ACE1 and ACE2, formally open! I wish you successful deliberations and look forward to receiving a briefing on the outcome. Thank you.