

AFRICA CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE (ACE) PROJECT

MINUTES OF THE AFRICA CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE (ACE) ELEVENTH STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING

10 November, 2017
La Palm Royal Beach Hotel, Accra, Ghana

MEMBERS PRESENT

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

MEMBERS ABSENT

1. Dr. Emmanuel Barry (UEMOA)
2. Dr. Didier Acouetey (Private Sector)
3. Prof. Tewfik Nawar (Health)
4. Dr. Irene Annor-Frempong (Agric)

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. Dr. Adama Ouedraogo (World Bank, Burkina Faso)

7. Dr. Hyacinthe Gbaye (World Bank, Benin)
8. Dr. Michel Dr Marigny (World Bank, DC)
9. Ms M'Bahly Maud-Andree Kouadio IV (World Bank, Nigeria)
10. Mr. Graham Harrison (World Bank)
11. Prof. Koffi Mawunyo Agbenoto (Focal Point, Togo)
12. Mr. Edmund Aalangdong (Focal Point, Ghana)
13. Prof. Etienne Ehilé (Secretary General, AAU)
14. Prof. Jonathan Mba (Coordinator, ACE Project)
15. Mr. Maxwell Amo-Hoyte (Director of Finance, AAU)
16. Mrs. Adeline Addy (M&E Officer, AAU)
17. Mr. Awathey Tetteh (IT Officer, AAU)
18. Ms. Gabrielle Hansen (Assistant Project Officer, AAU)
19. Mrs. Bukola Olatunji, (Communications Officer, NUC)

Experts

1. Prof. Michelle Niescierenko (Health Expert)
2. Prof. Hadiza Galadanci (Health Expert)
3. Prof. Raphael Wahome (Agriculture Expert)
4. Dr. Carl Larsen (Agriculture Expert)
5. Gen. Xavier Michel (STEM Expert)
6. Prof. Mamadou Diallo (STEM Expert)
7. Prof. Godwin Ekhaguere (STEM Expert)
8. Prof. Abubakar Akpa (Agriculture Expert)

ACEs

1. Prof. Gordon Awandare (Centre Leader, WACCBIP, Ghana)

INTRODUCTION

1. The ACE Project Steering Committee held its eleventh meeting on November 10, 2017 at the La Palm Royal Beach Hotel in Accra, Ghana. Discussions at the meeting centred on project progress, RFU activities, Government support and communication and next steps. The meeting agenda as outlined in [Annex 1](#) was adopted with some modifications including provision for the review of the minutes of the previous physical and virtual meetings. Togo moved for adoption and was seconded by Cote d'Ivoire. The Committee was fully represented.

WELCOME REMARKS

2. Prof. Mohammed Salifu, PSC Member representing Ghana, chaired the meeting. In his brief remarks, he expressed the hope that members' participation in the workshop had provided adequate insight into the performance of the individual centres, and that this would inform in-depth discussions at the current meeting. Opening remarks by Prof. Etienne Ehilé noted the satisfactory progress of the project as a whole but expressed concern about the slow pace of a few centres. He expressed the hope that the meeting would discuss and take decisions regarding reallocation of funds where necessary, and wished all fruitful deliberations. Andreas Blom, the World Bank Team Task Leader (TTL) for the project thanked everyone for their time and effort, noting it was highly appreciated. He emphasised that the current meeting should focus on strategic issues including project progress, funds utilization, and the budget. In relation to the latter, he observed that for the coming year, the AAU will be in deficit and it would be needful to make tough decisions to cut down the budget. Mr. Blom noted that another issue for discussion would be dissemination of project information at ministerial level given concerns by ministers of the project countries that they are not fully-informed about the project. He observed that holding the PSC meeting after the ACE workshop was a trial and the project is open to having the PSC Meeting either prior or post the workshop depending on the PSC request.

Review of previous PSC Minutes

3. The minutes of the 10th PSC Meeting held in Lagos (May 2017) was reviewed and minor corrections suggested. It was recommended to share hard copies of minutes with committee members a day before the meeting, in addition to sharing the electronic copy well in advance - at least 1 week before the meeting. Prof. Abubakar Rashid, Executive Secretary of the National Universities' Commission of Nigeria (NUC) moved for the adoption of the minutes and was seconded by Prof. Zasseli Biaka from Côte d'Ivoire.
4. Minutes of the virtual PSC meeting held on August 31, 2017 were amended to show Professors Abubakar Rashid and Aminata Sall Diallo as absent with apology. Dr. Joshua Atah moved for its adoption as a true record of the meeting's proceedings, and was seconded by Prof. Mohammed Salifu.

PROJECT PROGRESS

5. The performance report showed progress for most of the indicators since the last reporting period. In spite of the positive performance, internships, revenue generation, regional enrolment and accreditation continued to be far below both the annual and project-end targets.
6. With regard to results verification, the progress achieved on most indicators was reflected well for the DLR on research publications with almost 75% of the funding on this result achieved. DLRs on accreditation are also progressing with 38% of the funding received and

DLR on student enrolment at 28%. The ACEs still have significant DLR earnings to achieve in the revenue generation and infrastructure and equipment results. The project has made good progress on the financial management results with almost 50% of the financing achieved. The procurement results on audits are being achieved, however the project needs to review the second DLR on procurement that has so far not been achieved.

FUNDS DISBURSEMENT

7. The report on disbursement of funds noted high rates for the AAU, the NUC (Nigeria) and Ghana ACEs. It noted the need to investigate funds usage and procurement related challenges, observing that a reallocation would be necessary for those centres that are not making sufficient progress. The reallocation would be based on mid-term discussions, how much results have been achieved, and feedback from supervision missions.

PROJECT SATISFACTION SURVEY

8. Presentation on the project satisfaction survey highlighted attendance at previous workshops; feedback on satisfaction with various aspects of the organisation of meetings; and the technical support and facilitation of the World Bank, AAU, Governments, Sector Ministries and National Review Committees. Generally, feedback was positive on all aspects. However, there were some concerns about the level of involvement of national and state governments in the project's workshops and meetings. Comments and recommendations from respondents emphasised measures to ensure the sustainability of the project. Specifically, there were to task the centres to have clear milestones on industry partnerships, and for the World Bank to provide additional funding.

Discussion

9. Discussions noted challenges with critical objectives of the project including regionality, gender parity, accreditation and research, and emphasized the need to determine the issues and map the way forward. It was observed that though the project aims at entrenching research in the centres, the share of PhD students (the group that is engaged in research) is low. Questions were raised on what needed to be done so the centres grow more PhDs. The impact of research produced by the centres was also an issue of concern which the committee agreed should be addressed going forward. It was noted that a significant portion of project research output focuses on academic issues. It was argued that dissemination of research among the centres should be an indicator of its usefulness. The socio-economic impact of the research should also be considered. The verification of research output by experts was explained and it was noted that it involved an assessment of both relevance and ownership.

10. Revenue generation was noted as a problematic issue and members emphasised the need for centres to build a culture of sustaining own programmes. Ghana was congratulated for its performance in this area and the meeting noted it was interested in learning from the two well-performing centres – WACCI and WACCBIP. The World Bank observed that most of the centres performing well on revenue are consciously going out to look for research grants. It was suggested that the centres should focus on sustainability and with sustainability plans.
11. International accreditation was another area of concern with critical issues being the availability of relevant agencies, the credibility of agencies engaged, the duration of the exercise, and unfamiliarity with the criteria. Some members expressed the fear that emphasis on achieving this result may push centres to work with any agency at all once it is tagged “international”. However, the AAU clarified that each center discusses with the AAU and World Bank prior to engaging with the proposed agency for verification and that there is a consistent effort to ensure that the agencies being used to assess the center programs status are indeed credible and bringing value to the centers.
12. Suggestions were made on having a common accrediting agency per subject area – STEM, Health and Agriculture. There were arguments that self-evaluation should not be recognised or paid for since it is only a step in the evaluation process. The World Bank explained that the emphasis on international accreditation was because of the importance of having the ability to benchmark global standards in Africa.
13. The AAU was encouraged to hold consultative meetings with the centres at national level because although the ACE is a regional project, it has very strong national roots. The AAU assured members that it will continue to keep the national project coordinating bodies informed on progress and would take on board their recommendations. On the term “regional students”, it was explained that the distinction between national and regional students is important to ensure that the centres reach out to students from without their countries.
14. The World Bank informed the meeting of the possibility of a budget-neutral 18-month extension of projects to allow centres complete scheduled activities. This would mean the project ending in June 2020. Centres interested in this provision would have to formally put in a request through their respective governments (specifically, the ministries of finance). The Chair (Prof. Salifu) noted that as evidenced by progress reports, a significant proportion of cumulative results was achieved during the review period so an extension was in order. He reported that for Ghana, a request for extension had already gone to the Ministry of Finance through the Ministry of Education, although in terms of performance the centres are not in dire need. It was noted that in Nigeria and Ghana, the project did not take off immediately – there was a lag of almost two years. This, coupled with late disbursements justify an extension. It was suggested to consider the extension in the presentation of performance so the situation does not look too dire. The World Bank agreed in principle to provide an 18-month extension to consolidate gains and make up on weak points. The legal process for the extension is to be taken up at individual country levels.

15. It was agreed to task the centres to draw up sustainability plans to cater both for students that will still be on project when the World Bank funding ends, and new intakes.
16. Issues were raised regarding the correct name of the project. It was clarified that the correct name is “Africa Centres of Excellence”, not “African Centres of Excellence”
17. Concerns were raised about the launch of ACE Impact for Development (ACE III) when ACE I was yet to be completed and evaluated. The World Bank however noted that there is general agreement from stakeholders to proceed with ACE III whilst ACE1 was still under implementation and that a number of ACE1 centers would be eligible under the new project.
18. On issues regarding introducing indicators to allow measurement of socio-economic impact, the World Bank noted it was too late but that it is being considered for ACE III. The Bank observed that measures would need to be taken to facilitate procurement without compromising standards.

PROJECT FINANCIAL REPORT & BUDGET

Financial Performance (2017)

19. Two reports on Financial Performance for 2017 and the Budget for 2017 – 2019 respectively, were presented. With regard to performance, total expenditure for 2017 came up to US\$ 776,189 against a budget of US\$ 818,700, leaving a positive balance of US\$ 42,511. The budget lines *Monitoring and Supervision Missions*, *DLI Verification/ Bibliometric Services*, *ACE Training Workshops* and *PSC Meetings*, represented 59% of total expenditure. Each of these budget lines also recorded negative variances. Details on the individual budget lines were also provided. The AAU was commended on the transparency of the reporting and the detailed information provided. It was recommended that the ACEs should emulate this on a half-yearly basis. The World Bank suggested to have *Financial and Procurement Transparency* as an item on the agenda for the next (12th) Project Steering Committee Meeting.
20. The AAU explained that the overspend on the *Monitoring and Supervision Mission* line was because of extra work recommended; and for *Verification/ Bibliometric Services*, it was explained that costs had been paid upfront per contract terms – subsequent payments would therefore be lower. In light of the foregoing, the AAU suggested an upward revision of the vote for *Monitoring and Supervision Missions*. The NUC also requested that provision be made for their national review meetings which hitherto had been sponsored from the Commission’s own budget. The AAU also explained that *Continued Capacity Building for ACEs* (Item 7) was to support capacity building for the centres, while *Capacity Building ACE/ AAU Teams* (Item 11) is to support M&E training for AAU staff.
21. On *Monitoring and Supervision Missions*, it was noted that the strong value of the visits to the centers in terms of supporting and guiding the centers in implementation as well as noting challenges that the centers are facing during implementation. Nonetheless, it was also raised that it is important that the experts have clear terms of reference and this should be communicated to the PSC. There were concerns about the low impact of the experts’ involvement in the case of

Senegal, where both Anglophone and Francophone experts were supporting the center. However it was proposed moving forward that a full bilingual team supports the center. Senegal representative suggested recruiting an expert who can visit more frequently – every six months. In addition, the WB team and national focal points are given prior notice of upcoming missions; the centres confirm the value of their involvement; and the input of the subject matter experts has contributed immensely to the momentum of the project. On engaging experts specific to challenges, it was noted that a governance expert for example can only identify problem areas but cannot resolve them. The experts currently being used also identify governance issues which are then taken up by the national review committees. In addition, experts have been valuable in identifying student welfare issues and have a grip on technical/ scientific issues.

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23. Burkina Faso confirmed that missions usually end with meetings with the relevant ministry to brief the government on issues arising. Nigeria also confirmed the usefulness of experts' involvement but added that in their case, this is complemented by a national NUC-led supervision exercise involving three (3) locally recruited experts for *Health, STEM and Agriculture*. They suggested involving local experts also at the regional level. The AAU confirmed this was already the practice and currently, there are two such experts from Nigeria and Senegal on the team of DLI 2.8 milestone verification. The AAU clarified that supervision missions assess project implementation while verification visits assess the validity of the results reported.

Budget (2017 – 2019)

24. The forecast for 2017 – 2019 totalled US\$ 2,122,028 against available funds of US\$ 1,527,012, resulting in a deficit of US\$ 649,016. It was explained that the proposed no-cost extension had been considered, hence the duration of the budget. The AAU reported that the deficit would be covered either by raising extra funds or, downsizing the budget. Reduction of some budget lines has already been initiated.
25. The AAU was commended for the simple and straightforward presentation of the budget but was reminded to improve on the timeliness of submission of the report to the Committee – at least a week in advance of the meeting. The PSC recommended that in future ACE workshops, the ACEs themselves should also present a short budget note on their key expenditures for that period. This proposal is to encourage transparency on project funds. Follow-up discussions with the ACEs will take place to implement this recommendation.
26. On the budget deficit, the World Bank noted the AAU should consider scaling down costs for specific budget items such as staff time for a more efficient charging towards the project. The Bank also recommended cutting down the cost of PSC meetings by being more cautious in the choice of venues - use more affordable venues like reasonably priced hotels and campus facilities.
27. The AAU explained that the deficit was arising from a twelve-month no-cost extension – the budget would therefore need to be revised to cover the full eighteen months of the proposed extension. The World Bank noted the extension will not cover AAU costs and called on the Association to be more specific on how it intends to reduce staff cost. The Bank suggested that savings could also be

made on regional workshops and requested the AAU to submit a revised budget within four weeks. The revised budget should assume no extra funds would be provided by the World Bank given the no-cost project extension.

28. Queries were raised regarding the continued support for *PASET* (Item 14) given the project now has its own funds. It was clarified that the earlier financial support was considered a loan that would be reimbursed. *PASET* has refunded US\$ 33,000 leaving an outstanding amount of US\$ 120,000. The World Bank agreed that the support should be stopped. The support had been necessary at project inception when there were no funds from the governments. The Committee recommended that the balance be documented as a start-up grant and written off since *PASET* is not in a position to pay back. This would be in order given that *PASET* deliverables will feed into the ACE Project.

TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR NATIONAL FOCAL POINTS AND ACE STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

29. In light of recent lack of information from ministers of higher education regarding the ACE project progress in their respective countries, National Focal Points/ PSC Members were reminded of their terms of engagement. Essentially, it was noted they are expected to support centres on national performance reviews, presentation of results, and project implementation; communicate the outcomes of regional steering committee meetings to the Ministry and Minister; ensure alignment of project with national strategies; and be the liaison between the project and the ministries of higher education, and finance to encourage their buy-in.

SUBJECT-MATTER UPDATES

30. **Agriculture ACEs:** The experts reported a general increase in progress but admitted a few centres are still lagging behind. They noted there were some discrepancies between DLR earnings and results achieved and requested reports so they could verify. The experts recommended exchange of staff and students between the centres and, fee waivers to encourage regional female enrolment and increase DLR earnings/expenditure. It was noted that there was a high potential for inter ACE linkages but this is not being tapped – this would be a subject for discussion at a proposed agriculture ACEs meeting to be held in Ghana. Other observations noted more support for accreditation; the need to address issues of relevance in spite of the increasing research output; and the need for centre leaders to delegate some management activities and focus on the long-term sustainability of the project. There were also concerns that some centres are being managed as projects (with definite end points) instead of as regular programme of the host university.
31. **STEM ACEs:** Experts reported that some centres had governance issues. Centres with good governance systems had made better progress especially with procurement. On accreditation, it was observed that there are differences between Francophone and Anglophone agencies – HCERES appears to have a faster process while ABET is slower. Generally, the centres with student affairs committees in place have performed better on student wellbeing and satisfaction with faculty; revenue generation needs more attention in most of the centres; and the experts will be supporting centre leadership to develop their vision for the future.

32. **Health ACEs:** Experts reported the centres are linking up with each other and colleagues under ACE II and partners have been identified. However, the Anglophone centres are struggling with regional recruitment. The experts noted the need to leverage existing revenue to attract more regional students. On sustainability/ business plans, the experts suggested the World Bank and AAU could help get the necessary expertise. They cautioned that the projects may be run differently in the future especially as they are integrated into the general university systems. It is therefore necessary to be cautious and realistic in planning ahead. The centres would need to envisage a scenario where World Bank funds are no longer available.
33. It was generally agreed that all centres should be charged to develop and submit sustainability plans that address their unique circumstances. This task should be time-bound and projects should be regarded as a continuum of regular university business. Where centres lack the skill for the assignment, it was recommended that they seek assistance from relevant departments in their institutions, and the subject-matter experts.
34. Discussions following the experts' presentations noted that there is a critical link between partnership with industry and revenue generation. Therefore, the centres should be encouraged towards industry partnerships. With regard to sustainability, it was emphasised that excellence would also need to be maintained after the World Bank pulls out. There were concerns about financing of research especially in the Francophone centres, given that their economies do not generally finance research. It was also emphasised that the centres would need the help of the experts as the majority do not have a culture of revenue generation.

SUSTAINABILITY

35. Still on issues of sustainability, it was emphasised that first of all, the regional bodies (ECOWAS and UEMOA) would need to be involved in the centres and encouraged to own them after the World Bank funding ends. In the case of The Gambia, it was noted that the project is located within the sector Ministry which is represented on the Project Steering Committee. Industry collaboration and competitive grants were mentioned as other sources of securing additional funding.
36. It was observed that centres that do well on regional students have international recruitment units;

COUNTRY REPORTS

37. Country reports focused on strategic issues and specific challenges given that the performance of the individual centres had been discussed during the workshop.
38. **Ghana:** The biggest challenge is low industry partnerships because of the dearth of relevant industries in the country. Efforts to engage have been unsuccessful given that most industries just do packaging and selling, and almost no research. They therefore need only marketing experts. This has serious implications for the employability of the centres' graduates. The majority are restricted to academics. The need for the government to incentivise industries and require that they establish research units, was emphasised. Discussions along this line has already been initiated with the relevant ministry.

39. **Nigeria:** For Nigeria, the government is looking to producing relevant expertise to fill gaps in academia and retain existing faculty. The centres also expect to train university staff within the region, at the other centres. Generally, the centres in Nigeria are happy with the support provided by the AAU and the World Bank.
40. **Burkina Faso:** Burkina noted issues and challenges had been addressed during the recent supervision mission and the centre is on course with regard to performance.
41. **Cameroon:** The just-ended supervision mission had helped the sector minister understand the project better and also provided an opportunity to lobby for the project. Issues on ownership of the project were addressed. There is however, need for very clear terms of reference for the supervision missions, and also a need to clarify the role of the subject-matter experts. The support of the AAU and World Bank was commended.
42. **Benin:** The Focal Point was happy with the recent supervision mission and noted it helped resolve issues of governance. He observed that there had been a change in government after the start of project and the new government had insisted on restarting the whole process. There are still some challenges to address. About 31 per cent of the budget has been spent and so the eighteen-month extension would be very necessary to complete outstanding activities.
43. **Togo:** No particular challenges were reported. Much progress had been achieved in accreditation.

NEXT STEPS

44. Major next steps for the next six months were outlined and included: Financial and Procurement reporting; Verification and Disbursements; General Implementation Support and Supervision; Regional/ Country level Milestones; and ACE Extension and Reallocation. Details on this are set out in [Annex 1](#).
45. May 7 – 9, 2018 were tentatively agreed as the dates for the next ACE Workshop. The AAU in consultation with the World Bank would discuss and finalise. A decision will also be taken on whether to hold both the PSC and workshop or, just the workshop. In case of the latter, the PSC meeting would be held virtually. The event would be hosted by Burkina Faso and held at the 2IE campus. Security arrangements would be made. The PSC will participate in an ACE III Regional Workshop to be organised in March 2018. In attendance will be Ministers of Education as well as Focal Points, and may approve the launch of the call for proposals for ACE III.
46. The meeting was brought to a close at 14:30.

Annex 1

TASKS	RESPONSIBILITY	DEADLINE
Financial and Procurement Reporting		
Clearance of Procurement Plans and Annual Work Plans	WB/AAU	January 15, 2018
Submission of Annual Works plans and Procurement Plans	ACEs	November 30, 2017
Interim financial reporting	ACEs	February 15, 2018
FM DLIs-financial audit for 2017	ACEs	June 30, 2018
Procurement Audit (<i>ACEs responsible</i>)	ACEs	June 30, 2018
End of civil works procurement	ACEs	June 30, 2018
Verification and Disbursements		
Center feedback on draft verification letters @ACE workshop	ACEs	November 10, 2017
WB disbursement clearance letters to each country	WB	December 10, 2017
Submission of withdrawal applications	ACEs	December 15, 2017
2018 Verification	AAU/ WB/ ACEs	January – March 2018
DLR 2.1 – 2.4		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Submission of all results ▪ Data quality check ▪ Survey and telephone calls ▪ Draft results 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ACEs ▪ Technopolis ▪ Technopolis ▪ Technopolis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ January 2018 ▪ February 2018 ▪ March 2018 ▪ April 2018
DLR 2.8		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Submission of milestones ready for verification ▪ Technical missions to selected ACEs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ACEs ▪ Experts ▪ AAU 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ January 2018 ▪ March-April 2018
General Implementation Support & Supervision		
ACE Project Audio Meeting	ACEs/ WB/ AAU	January – March 2018
Supervision Missions to selected ACEs	ACEs/ Nat. Focal Points/ WB/ AAU	February – April 2018
ACE I Workshop	AAU/ WB	May 2018
Milestones & Reallocation		
National Review Committee Meetings	Nat. Review Committee	January – May 2018
Virtual Regional Steering Committee Meeting	WB/ AAU/ PSC	May 2018
Submission of Extension Requests from ministries of finance	Nat. Focal Point/ MoE	December 15, 2017
WB Approval and Processing of Project extension	WB	February 2018
Restructuring to include fund reallocation in Nigeria and Senegal	WB	February 2018