

AFRICA CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE (ACE) PROJECT

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

8 May, 2018

2iE Campus, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso

MEMBERS PRESENT

1. Prof. Ramané Kaboré (Chair, Burkina Faso)
2. Mrs. Bénédicte Houetchenou (Benin)
3. Dr. Henry Nkoto (Cameroon)
4. Mr. Yaya Sireh Jallow (Gambia)
5. Dr. Joshua Atah (Nigeria)
6. Prof. Mohammed Salifu (Ghana)
7. Prof. Aminata Sall Diallo (Senegal)
8. Prof. Zasseli Biaka (Côte d'Ivoire)
9. Prof. Messanvi Gbeassor (Togo)
10. Dr. Emmanuel Barry (JEMOA)
11. Commissioner Leopoldo Amado (ECOWAS)
12. Dr. Didier Acouetey (Private Sector)

MEMBERS ABSENT

1. Prof. Tewfik Nawar (Health Expert)
2. Dr. Irene Annor-Frempong (Agric. Expert)

OBSERVERS IN ATTENDANCE

World Bank, AAU & Others

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. Dr. Adama Ouedraogo (Education Specialist, World Bank, Burkina Faso)
6. Dr. Vincent Perrot (Education Specialist, World Bank, Cameroon)
7. Dr. Hyacinth Gbaye (Education Specialist, World Bank, Benin)

8. Mrs. Eunice Ackwerh (Education Specialist, World Bank, Ghana)
9. Ms. Pamela Mulet (Education Specialist, World Bank, Togo)
10. Ms M'Bahly Maud-Andree Kouadio IV (World Bank, Nigeria)
11. Mr. Graham Harrison (World Bank)
12. Prof. Etienne Ehilé (Secretary General, AAU)
13. Prof. Jonathan Mba (Coordinator, ACE Project, AAU)
14. Ms. Nodumo Dhlamini (Director, ICT & Knowledge Management, AAU)
15. Mr. Maxwell Amo-Hoyte (Director of Finance, AAU)
16. Mrs. Adeline Addy (M&E Specialist, AAU)
17. Mr. Abednego Corletey (Procurement/ IT Specialist, AAU)
18. Ms. Gabrielle Hansen (Assistant Project Officer, AAU)

Experts

1. Prof. Michelle Niescierenko (Health Expert)
2. Prof. Raphael Wahome (Agriculture Expert)
3. Dr. Carl Larsen (Agriculture Expert)
4. Prof. Godwin Ekhaguere (STEM Expert)
5. Prof. Abubakar Akpa (Agriculture Expert)

ACE Impact (ACE III)

6. Dr. Ousman Mahamadou (Niger)
7. Dr. Valérie Tehio (Agence Française de Développement – AFD)

INTRODUCTION

1. The twelfth meeting of the ACE Project Steering Committee (PSC) was held on May 8, 2018 on the campus of the International Institute for Water and Environmental Engineering (2iE) in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. The 2iE hosts the Africa Centre of Excellence for Research and Training in Water Science and Technology, Energy and Environment in West and Central Africa. Agenda for the meeting included: *Review of previous PSC minutes; Project Progress; RFU Activities; Project Restructuring; Country Updates; and the Next Steps*. The Committee was fully represented.

OPENING

2. The meeting opened with welcome remarks from the Chair, the World Bank and the AAU. Prof. Ramané Kaboré, Chair of the meeting and PSC Member representing Burkina Faso, extended a warm welcome to all, noting it was an honour to host the 12th sitting of the ACE PSC meeting and 9th Workshop and wished all fruitful deliberations. On his part, Prof. Etienne Ehilé, Secretary General of the AAU, also welcomed all on behalf of the Regional Facilitation Unit (RFU). He observed that since the last meeting, the Project had achieved

several milestones and introduced some innovations, key among which was the maiden *Higher Education Fair*, held on May 7, 2018. He advised that, given that the Project was soon coming to a close, issues of sustainability should be emphasised. Prof. Ehilé was hopeful that discussions on the launching of ACE III (or ACE-Impact), which had commenced sometime earlier, would be finalised at the current sitting. Professor Léopoldo Amado, the ECOWAS new Commissioner for Education, Science and Culture, observed that this was his first time at the PSC, having assumed office recently. He expressed much interest in the Project and hoped that deliberations at the current meeting would help him understand the project better. On behalf of the World Bank, Mr. Andreas Blom, Task Team Leader for the ACE Project, expressed appreciation to 2iE for hosting the meeting and the upcoming workshop, noting this was the first time the annual events were being held in an ACE institution. He was hopeful that the outcomes of the first Higher Education Fair would be impactful and widely disseminated. Mr. Blom noted the major achievements of the Project, including the 1,600 PhD students enrolled.

REVIEW OF MINUTES OF 11TH PSC MEETING

3. In the review of minutes of the 11th PSC Meeting, held in Accra, Ghana (November 2017), there were complaints on the clarity of the French version. Members asked that future translations should be more thorough and a true reflection of the English copy. The RFU noted that new and better arrangements for translation had been put in place with the engagement of a translator from France and quality checks done by the Secretary General, himself a francophone. To complement this effort, the RFU requested members to suggest more competent translators, if possible, to ensure better quality translations. Francophone members, specifically Prof. Aminata Diallo and Prof. Zasseli Biaka, committed to review and edit the French versions of future translations. There was a suggestion to have the minutes in Portuguese also, but the RFU explained that the countries participating in the Project were either Anglophone or Francophone.
4. Under country reports, it was observed that there had been no mention of Cote d'Ivoire. However, Prof. Mohammed Salifu (Ghana) recalled that at the previous sitting, the Chair had asked for reports from countries with peculiar issues, which explained why not all countries were represented. Subject to a thorough revision of the French version, the minutes were adopted as a true record of the 11th PSC's deliberations. The motion was moved by the representative of Togo and seconded by his counterpart from Senegal.

Conduct of PSC Meetings

5. Professor Aminata Sall Diallo, representative of Senegal, raised concerns that the record of the previous meeting was narrative and lacked any analysis as well as a clear reference on decisions taken. She also raised the mandate of the PSC and conduct of the meeting, emphasising that the terms of reference for the PSC, as outlined in the *Project Operational Manual*, should be strictly adhered to, and the makeup of the Committee respected. Against this background, the role of participants at the meeting should be clarified, with pointers to who has a vote and who is an observer. On meeting procedures, Prof. Diallo noted that at each sitting, the agenda of the meeting

should be presented for endorsement before deliberations commence and should always include a review of matters arising from the previous meeting. In addition, decisions and resolutions should be clearly outlined in the minutes to facilitate follow up and review at subsequent meetings. She also observed that the current agenda was missing a section on ACE III, but it was explained that discussions on this would be tabled at a separate meeting. It was also emphasised that the PSC is the only decision-making body under the Project.

Decision:

- **PSC Meeting Agenda should be tabled for approval of the Committee, one week before deliberations**
- **PSC Meeting agenda should always feature “Matters Arising” from the previous meeting**
- **PSC Meeting minutes should outline decisions clearly**

PROJECT UPDATE

SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES

6. The Project update highlighted major activities, including approval of implementation and procurement plans; M&E/results verifications; supervision missions; National Review Committee meetings; and other activities by the World Bank and RFU. Site visits were undertaken to 10 Centres, while the mission to CEA-SAMEF (Senegal) was postponed because of unavailability of the subject matter expert. The AAU was also acknowledged for the introduction of a monthly Project Newsletter. The Bank apologised for the delay in approving some procurement plans and committed to hasten work on this, moving forward. Essentially, all project support activities were on schedule.
7. M&E and VERIFICATION OF RESULTS
8. Under M&E, following feedback from the Centres, a new methodology for verifying short course students, had been introduced and verification of students’ enrolment and internship results completed. Verification of research results was ongoing and that for teaching environment (DLR 2.8) was completed on time in January and April 2018. The verification of the student results (DLI 2.1-2.4) was also launched on time with draft results shared to the ACEs, prior to the ACE workshop as agreed.
9. In the discussions, questions were raised regarding delays in the issuance of verification letters and whether there was a specific cycle for the verification exercise. The RFU explained that there were different verification methods for different DLIs. However, consistent and successful efforts had been made to share, six months in advance, the verification actions for each DLI. This has resulted in verification letters issued and paid for. However, it was noted that efforts should be made to consistently improve the response rates on the “easy” DLIs. In terms of challenges, sometimes, failure to report results achieved is another challenge which delays disbursement. On discrepancies between results reported by the Centres and what was paid for, it was clarified that certain rules apply in the determination of disbursement amounts. The World Bank had however been very flexible in the application of the rules, especially in relation to eligible short course students where once 20% of students are verified, a Centre would be paid for all students reported – given that

other conditions are met¹. The Committee advised that processing of verifications should be fast tracked to avoid cash flow problems at the individual Centres.

COUNTRY REVIEW MEETINGS

10. National Review Committee meetings were held in Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Nigeria. The World Bank commended countries that held *National Review Committee* meetings noting that the activity is very crucial for reviewing the performance of the Centres and much progress had usually been observed after these events.

11. Decisions

- **The Committee decided that one National review meeting should be held before November 2018**
- **It also recommended expedited action on the verification results for earnings achieved during the verification exercises of April and May, 2018.**

PROJECT PROGRESS (INCLUDING RESULTS)

12. Reports on project performance showed an upward trend on all disbursement-linked indicators with most exceeding the Project-end targets. With regard to the verification of disbursement-linked results, altogether, the Centres, in the aggregate, had earned 50% of the maximum SDR to be achieved. Areas of concern, where Centres have to put in more effort to increase earnings, included *internships; international accreditation; external revenue; fiduciary management; learning environment; and procurement.*

13. The Committee emphasised presenting disaggregated data to allow for more detailed analysis of the performance per Centre. On the generation of external revenue, it was noted that some centres could not generate funds and risk closing down after the World Bank funding ends in two years. This would inform remedial measures to be taken. The AAU observed that targets were set by the ACEs themselves; also, that some Centres were already well established before the ACE Project and therefore had experience in resource mobilisation.

PROGRESS ON DISBURSEMENT AND FUND UTILISATION

14. Overall project wide, disbursement was reported at 54% and expected to go up to 60% by June 30, 2018. For the fund utilisation of this disbursement, that is, the expenditure of the funds received, there is the need to accelerate expenditure at each Centre, if the Centres are to fully utilise the funds by project closing.

15. There were serious concerns about the performance of CEA-CETIC (Cameroon). The Centre had undergone leadership changes and it was one of the centres that would be receiving a fund reduction due to initial implementation delays. Given the recent change in leadership of the Centre

¹ However, the regionality rule would still be applied.

and plans to review management of the National Review Committee, a turnaround is expected. The RFU explained that challenges are usually addressed by subject matter experts during supervision missions. This particular Centre had been visited every six months for the last three years, with the last visits being a World Bank led supervision in January, 2018. As such, the April 2018 supervision missions that took place in 10 ACEs did not include a visit to CETIC because of the need for the Centre to focus on implementing the recommendations. The new project management arrangement was on the recommendation of these missions. Discussions had also been held at ministerial level to address the peculiar challenges of Cameroon ACE. In addition, a revised work plan had been approved and it is expected that the Centre would move forward on implementation.

16. On a general note, members also advised that poor performing Centres should be given particular attention by the World Bank and AAU to determine the specificities of their challenges and report back to the PSC. There was a suggestion that perhaps given the low performance, those centres that were not performing well should not be funded under ACE Impact (ACEIII). Against this background, the Committee raised concerns that a Centre's poor performance could discredit other Centres under the Project and would have implications for the credibility of the Project as a whole. Members proposed that under ACE III, institutions should not be labelled as "Centres of Excellence" (CoEs) until performance is proven over the first two years. A review of the Project Operational Manual was proposed to address sanctions and remedial measures for poor performing centres. A member proposed an adoption of the practice by UEMOA, where the Centre of Excellence label is removed if after the first two years, a Centre fails an external evaluation. Under this system, a Centre is either a Centre of excellence or an Upgraded institution. On the possibility of abrogating the contract with Cameroon, the World Bank cautioned that since the financing agreement was with the State and not the institution, the Committee may not exercise such powers. Reduction of CEA-CETIC's funds by US\$2.5m was already being undertaken because there were relevant provisions for this in the financial agreement. The agreement however has no provision for abrogation of contracts and even if it did, the future of the Centre's 300+ students would be at stake. It observed that Cameroon had not been participating in earlier Committee meetings but welcomed the representation in the May 2018 PSC meeting.
17. In his reaction, the Member representing Cameroon, Dr. Henry Nkoto, assured the meeting that measures had been taken at all levels to ensure that the Project works. The Committee agreed to his suggestion that concerns about their Project should be communicated to the government of Cameroon in writing. The World Bank was tasked to write the letter, on behalf of the Committee.

Decisions:

- **The World Bank to write to the Government of Cameroon on concerns about the performance of CEA-CETIC and report back to the PSC within two months**
- **The next supervision site visits will target low performing ACEs to ensure that adequate support is provided to these ACEs**

18. PSC COMMENTS ON THE PROJECT PROGRESS AND UPDATE PRESENTATIONS

19. Stronger analysis by Centre. The RFU clarified that while the progress report covered the period January – December 2017, information on funds earned had also taken into consideration achievements for January – March 2018. With regard to poor performing Centres, it was proposed that the World Bank and AAU should do a paper on disaggregated results per centre, noting problem areas, while the *National Review Committees* make proposals to the PSC on remedial action.
20. Improving partnerships. It was suggested that Centres could consider engaging consultants to lead and maximise returns on partnerships (development of programmes and organisation of internships with industry).
21. Research publications. While the performance on research publications was deemed commendable, members emphasised the need to assess the value and impact of the outputs and assess how these might have influenced policy. This should be beyond the current practice of determining their relevance to individual project objectives.
22. Implementation of ACE plans. The Committee tasked Centres to provide realistic projections on what they can implement within the last eighteen months of the project. Members cautioned on being too prescriptive in this regard and noted that the responsibility should be on the Centres to ensure that they meet the targets set. Where this would not be possible, the Centres concerned could request for specific assistance.
23. Doctoral supervision. Questions were raised regarding the supervision of doctoral students and whether there were any attempts by the Project to ensure quality of the graduates. The RFU explained that the Centres are within universities that have structures in place to ensure that they meet minimum standards. The project requirement for international and other types of accreditation also assure quality. Members noted, with concern, that the peculiarities of Africa were not considered in the development of the project indicators. With respect to industry linkages, it was observed that, in the area of health, the absence of multinationals undertaking research locally, posed a huge challenge. There is the need to contextualise and customise ACE deliverables based on the actual environment and members hoped this would be done under the ACE-Impact.
24. International accreditation. For international accreditation, there were concerns about the cost involved and the reluctance of some accreditation agencies to visit Centres in certain parts of Nigeria for security reasons. Members argued that national accreditation agencies could be strengthened so that they can accredit the Centres. The RFU and the World Bank however underscored the need for international accreditation so that the Centres could be at par with their foreign counterparts with regard to the quality of programmes. It was argued that in developed countries, accreditation is mandatory and standards are general and basic while in Africa, few institutions have methods to assess competency of teaching and other criteria for excellence. In spite of the high cost, international accreditation is still worth it and had encouraged Centres to introduce improvements. The Committee agreed that accreditation should continue but that national accreditation agencies should be strengthened.

25.

Decisions:

- The AAU, working together with the World Bank, should provide an analysis of the performance of each Centre, including external revenue generation.
- The Committee advised that subsequent progress reports should provide additional information on the characteristics of high performing Centres and the peculiar challenges of poor performing Centres
- The National Review Committees of each country should assess the performance of their respective ACEs and note specific support needed for the development of revenue generation strategies.

RESTRUCTURING (INCLUDING REALLOCATION OF FUNDS/REFINANCING) AND PROJECT EXTENSION

26. The World Bank reported that refinancing arrangements had been discussed and concluded for Cameroon (CEA-CETIC), Nigeria (CERHI and CEADSE) and Senegal (CEA-SAMEF). The processing and approval of these reallocation was in progress and expected to be completed in coordination with the Project extension by June 30, 2018
27. On restructuring, the World Bank reported it had received all requirements from the Centres concerned and reallocations had been finalised in Cameroon, Nigeria and Senegal. Legal processing work is expected to be completed soon.

REPORT OF SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS

28. The experts noted that, generally, there were specific reasons that accounted for the performance of individual centres. Questions were raised on discrepancies between reported results and corresponding payments and it was observed that while there had been improvements on the verification process and schedules, there was still the need to address some of the student verification outcomes. It was emphasised that in assessing performance, there should be a distinction between existing Centres and those that started from scratch. On revenue generation, the observation was that majority of the Centres were far behind. The better performing Centres included those that were already established before the start of the Project. The experts noted that it was important to define sustainability and proposed that emphasis should be on the Centre's ability to maintain the programmes initiated under the Project, carry out relevant research and sustain strong outreach. It was also noted that although the supervision missions were helpful, sometimes challenges are not easy to identify or resolve by experts. Often, government and or WB actions are necessary to address the issues arising. The experts observed that over time, the agitation for staff motivation, had toned down. However, in recent times, *Partner Institutions* have raised issues on their visibility on the Project.
29. The experts observed that it took the centres some time to understand the concept of results-based financing and they would also need time to work out what it would take to run the Centres on their own without the current support from the World Bank, the AAU, PSC and experts. They emphasised the need for staff to commit a minimum of time towards management of the projects. Additionally, they noted that commitment of national stakeholders is crucial for good performance of the Centres. The Committee suggested a review of the selection criteria for Centre Leaders and

observed that choosing a leader from outside the team that developed the Project Proposal could be detrimental to the progress of the Project.

FINANCIAL REPORT

30. The Financial Report featured performance reports for the periods January – December 2017 and January – April 2018, and forecast for 2018-2019. Funds available for 2018 totalled US\$842,150 and comprised funds for the year and undisbursed funds from the previous year. Expenditure for January – April 2018 came up to US\$234,000 leaving funds for the rest of the year at US\$608,314. The performance report for January to December 2017 showed expenditure of US\$1,016,246 against a budget of US\$816,890. The over expenditure of close to US\$200,000 was attributable to AAU overheads, supervision missions, capacity building for ACEs, verification and PSC meetings. Projections for 2018/2019 against available funds showed a deficit of US\$194,378.
31. There were concerns over the significant over expenditure for 2017. It was explained that this resulted from the need to scale up some activities and also opting for more expensive meeting venues for security reasons. The overruns were with the knowledge and approval of the World Bank. The World Bank called for cost-cutting measures but noted that verification was crucial so other budget lines should be targeted. Staff time was identified as the budget line with the largest overrun and the AAU was asked to provide more detail on this and other over expenditure.
32. The Committee emphasised that expenditure for the previous year should be certified before presentation of the budget for 2018. The normal practice would be to review the project account to ascertain if the approved budget had been followed. Accounts presented would also need to have been audited to assure its sincerity. The AAU confirmed that indeed audited reports had been presented at previous meetings. The current account (2017) had been audited by Ernst and Young, but the report was yet to be signed.
33. On the forecast for 2018/2019, the AAU was asked to revise the budget to cover the second half of 2018. Provision should be made for supervision missions, verification by Technopolis and the next workshop. On the deficit, the World Bank mentioned exploring the possibility of financing some aspects of regional facilitation from the ACE III budget. It was agreed that going forward, approval for any overruns beyond agreed thresholds, should be sought from the Committee; the audit report for 2017 once ready should be shared with the PSC and the local World Bank Office; and the budget should be submitted on an annual basis. In the absence of an audited report, the Committee noted it could not certify the accounts presented.

Decisions/Resolution:

- **The meeting directed AAU to share the project audit report upon approval, expected by July 1 2018**
- **The AAU should also submit a revised budget for discussion with the PSC and the World Bank**
- **The Committee resolved that no expenditures should be undertaken after July 1, 2018 without an approval of the budget.**

NEXT STEPS

34. It was agreed that the November Project meeting and workshop be postponed to February 2019. The next workshop would be held in Djibouti and would involve discussions on ACE Impact.
35. Country level supervisions would be undertaken in coordination with the AAU site supervisions. It is expected that these actions would take place between October-December 2018

Action	Date	Responsible
Timely and appropriate project steering and supervision support		
ACE project wide Webex	July 10, 2018 and September 20, 2018	AAU/WB
PSC Meeting in coordination with ACE Impact Project	November, 2018	AAU/WB/PSC Members
Planned supervision missions to selected 9 ACEs	October and November, 2018	AAU/WB/Country focal points
At least one National Review Committee meeting for each country	October 2018	Country focal points
M&E and results Verification		
Verification of completion of DLR 2.8 milestones	May 30, 2018	AAU/WB
Letters of verification of results for student results (DLI 2.1-DLI 2.4), revenue generation (DLI 2.7), Infrastructure and Equipment (DLI 2.8) no-objection to submission of disbursement to all Centres	June 5, 2018	AAU/WB
ACE submission deadlines		
FM and procurement audits and evidence of institutional oversight (for disbursements)	June 30, 2018	ACEs
Unaudited Interim Financial Report for 2nd semester 2017	August 15, 2018.	ACEs
End of equipment procurement	April 30, 2019	ACEs
Finalisation of Project Extension and Reallocation		
Submission of extension requests from Benin, Ghana and Cameroon Ministries of Finance	May 30, 2018	Country focal points
World Bank approval and processing of Project extension	June 30, 2018	WB
Joint 11 th ACE workshop and ACE Impact Launch Workshop and project Steering Committee meeting February 18-22, 2018 in Djibouti	February 18-22, 2019	AAU/WB