

AFRICA CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE (ACE) PROJECT

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

**1 November, 2018
AAU Secretariat, Accra, Ghana**

MEMBERS PRESENT

1. Prof. Mohammed Salifu (Chair, Ghana)
2. Prof. Ramané Kaboré (Burkina Faso)
3. Prof. Aboubakar Marcos (Benin)
4. Dr. Henry Nkoto (Cameroon)
5. Prof. N'goh Bakayoko (Côte d'Ivoire)
6. Mr. Yaya Sireh Jallow (Gambia)
7. Dr. Joshua Atah (Nigeria)
8. Prof. Aminata Sall Diallo (Senegal)
9. Dr. Emmanuel Barry (UEMOA)

MEMBERS ABSENT

1. Prof. Tewfik Nawar (Health Expert)
2. Prof. Jean-Claude Codjia (Benin)
3. Dr. Irene Annor-Frempong (Agric. Expert)
4. Prof. Messanvi Gbeassor (Togo)
5. Prof. Leopoldo Amado (ECOWAS)

IN ATTENDANCE

World Bank, AAU & Others

1. Mr. Andreas Blom (ACE Task Team Leader, Lead Economist, World Bank)
2. Ms. Himdat Bayusuf (ACE I Task Team Leader, Education Specialist, World Bank)
3. Dr. Graham Harrison (Senior Science and Technology Specialist, World Bank)
4. Dr. Ekuia Bentil (ACE Impact Co-Task Team Leader, Education Specialist, World Bank)

5. Mrs. Eunice Ackwerh (Education Specialist, World Bank, Country Co TTL, Ghana)
6. Ms. M’Bahly Maud-Andree Kouadio IV (Consultant, World Bank)
7. Dr. Valérie Tehio (Agence Française de Développement – AFD)
8. Mr. Quentin Delpech (Agence Française de Développement – AFD)
9. Prof. Etienne Ehilé (Secretary General, AAU)
10. Prof. Jonathan Mba (Coordinator, ACE Project, AAU)
11. Ms. Nodumo Dhlamini (Director, ICT & Knowledge Management, AAU)
12. Mr. Maxwell Amo-Hoyte (Director of Finance, AAU)
13. Mrs. Adeline Addy (M&E Specialist, AAU)
14. Mrs. Gabrielle Hansen (Assistant Project Officer, AAU)
15. Ms. Millicent Afriyie Kyei (Communications Assistant, AAU)

Focal Points

16. Mrs. Bénédicte Houetchenou (Benin)

ACE III

17. Dr. Ousman Mahamadou (Niger)

INTRODUCTION

1. The thirteenth sitting of the ACE Project Steering Committee was held on November 1, 2018 in Accra, Ghana at the Secretariat of the Association of African Universities ((AAU), the Regional Facilitation Unit (RFU) for the ACE Project. The meeting’s objective was to review project performance since the last meeting. Agenda items included: *Review of previous PSC minutes; Matters Arising from previous meeting, Key Decisions made by PSC and status of these decisions; Project Progress; RFU Activities; Disbursements and Fund Utilization, Country Updates; and the Next Steps.* The Committee was adequately represented.

OPENING

2. The meeting started off with opening remarks from the Chair, the AAU and the World Bank. The Chair, Professor Salifu Mohammed welcomed the PSC to the meeting and to Ghana, wishing all fruitful deliberations. The Secretary General of the AAU, Professor Etienne Ehilé was happy to host the PSC in the Association’s New Secretariat, constructed by the Government of Ghana within the framework of the Government of Ghana Hosting Agreement. He observed that a lot of work had been done following the last meeting in

Ouagadougou including preparations towards the launch of ACE Impact. Additionally, the ACEs had achieved significant results. He expressed the hope that centres that are yet to achieve set targets and use up funds would take advantage of the 15-month extension to March 2020. On his part, Dr. Halil Dundar (World Bank Practice Manager for West Africa) noted that there was a clear sense of ownership of the project in the region and among the governments of the participating countries. The ACE, he observed, is a flagship higher education project of the World Bank with significant collaboration and partnerships. He was thankful to the PSC for its strong leadership and support and called for continued guidance to ensure weaker centres complete their work successfully. Highlighting some project results notably increase in enrolments and international accreditations, Dr. Dundar confirmed that ACE II and ACE-Impact have benefitted from the lessons learned. He observed also that several partnerships/ projects have been launched over the last 3 years including the PASET and Japanese partnerships, and they are beginning to yield results. He noted that it was critical to build foundation competences hence the World Bank's focus on energy and related fields. He was confident the ACEs could contribute towards this effort.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

3. It was suggested to add on an item on the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) under "*Any Other Business*" The agenda was approved by consensus.

REVIEW OF MINUTES OF 12TH PSC MEETING

4. Having been already circulated for comment and input prior to the virtual PSC meeting held in September this year, there were no corrections or additions to be made to the minutes. The minutes were approved by consensus as a true record of the deliberations of the 12th PSC Meeting held in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.

MATTERS ARISING FROM 12TH PSC MEETING

5. Decisions and matters arising during the 12th PSC meeting related to *tabling of the agenda; targeting of low-performing centres in supervision missions; providing individual ACE performance reports and the profiles of high-performing and challenged centres; expediting results verification; sharing of the project audit report; revision and discussion of the RFU budget; and the suspension of AAU RFU expenditure after July 1, 2018 pending budget approval*. The meeting found all items to have been met satisfactorily. A suggestion to add on strengthening of national accreditation bodies as a matter arising was discussed and agreed that this would be handled in more detail through national projects. Additionally, it was recommend that national agencies should sign up on existing AAU and African Union Quality Assurance and Harmonisation programmes and initiatives.

PROJECT PROGRESS

RFU Activities

6. Over the reporting period, the RFU's activities centered around *supervision missions, performance reporting, results verification, financial management, digitization of the ACE reporting system, commissioning of new ACE buildings, project restructuring and reallocation and, funds disbursement*. Supervision missions were undertaken to three Health centres in Nigeria and two more missions are planned for November 2018. Other missions were postponed to January 2019 to accommodate the evaluation missions for the ACE Impact project. It was observed that the visits were very useful in helping the centres deliver on targets. There were also cases where good practices by centres have been adopted at the institutional level. The RFU explained that in Nigeria due to security concerns, one mission (to the University of Jos' ACEPRD) was held off-site in Abuja. Centre representatives were present, challenges were discussed and solutions offered. On how to undertake activities during the budget-neutral extension, the World Bank noted that essentially, centres would need to reprioritize key activities and, ensure effective and efficient funds utilisation. Additionally, many of the ACE I centres are expected to continue under the ACE Impact and the RFU has been allocated \$1.2 million under the project preparation advance for a total of approximately \$10 million under the new phase.

Project Status and Results

7. Performance briefs were prepared for each centre to facilitate their evaluation for renewal under the ACE-Impact. Project results were submitted by all centres for reporting to the PSC and various disbursement-linked results (DLRs) were verified and earnings communicated to the World Bank and the individual centres. DLRs 2.5 to 2.8 (accreditation, research, external revenue and, teaching and learning environment) were the top earners.
8. In discussion, the PSC noted that it is important to take into account the different focus and profiles of the centers when comparing them. It was argued that comparison of results and centre-level targets would be better analysis of performance. It was agreed that it is important to compare the centres but all the while bearing in mind their peculiar contexts. The Committee requested a listing of programmes with international or regional accreditation per centre at its next sitting in February 2019. It was also emphasized to go beyond quantitative analysis to provide additional qualitative information particularly in relation to sustainability. Details on specific strategies and plans to assure sustainability were also requested.

Disbursement and Fund Utilisation

9. The World Bank reported 67% of available funds had been disbursed to the ACEs and the RFU. For the ACEs, Benin, Cameroon and La Côte d'Ivoire were currently below the 60% mark. It is expected the situation would improve with payment of commitments as DLR 2.8 milestones are completed. Funds utilization data showed 9 ACEs performing above the

average 45% with KNUST reporting a significant 81%. For average proportion of results achieved, 12 out of the 22 centres performed above the 64% mean score.

10. ACE Restructuring

11. The project has undergone a restructuring that included an extension of the project closing date until March 2020 from December 2019. Additionally, in Nigeria and Senegal there has been a reallocation of funds and in Cameroon a partial cancellation. All of the legal notifications have been issued by the World Bank on the extension with counter signatures obtained from Senegal. The last step is to obtain countersignature on the amendment from the Federal Ministry of Finance in Nigeria.

Decisions: Agenda Item 1

- **The PSC should strongly recommend that National Accreditation Agencies subscribe to AU and AAU Quality Assurance and Harmonisation Programmes and Initiatives.**
- **Under the ACE Impact Project, employability should be measured.**
- **The World Bank should facilitate interaction between the ACE Project and other employment/ entrepreneurship focused projects funded by the bank.**
- **The World Bank should advise and inform centres on what happens to funds earned but are unspent at the end of the project.**
- **Each participating country should hold at least one National Review Committee Meeting before end of the year 2018.**

Performance of National Governments, the RFU and World Bank

12. Generally, results of the survey were satisfactory. The *Risk of Project Implementation* was high but decreasing compared to the previous year's results. Details on why some participants considered interaction with national agencies as low and cumbersome were not available. It was explained this was probably in relation to cash flow especially where funds are disbursed to the ACEs through agencies. The World Bank was charged to fast track approval processes; country Co-Task Team Leaders to issue no-objections on time; and governments to facilitate national processes for timely release of funds. The report highlighted the low survey response rate, which was due largely to poor internet access in Ouagadougou. It was suggested that the RFU should develop a strategy to improve the situation including doing both online and manual survey, as well as designating a set time for all participants to fill the online forms before the end of the workshop. In addition, Centre Leaders could be tasked to ensure their team members complete and submit the survey.

Monitoring & Evaluation and Verification

13. The RFU reported work on a digital M&E system to facilitate reporting, data management and results verification. Existing data has been uploaded and tests would be done with selected ACEs in December 2018. Results achieved in 2017 were verified and letters on earnings were dispatched. The next verification exercise would be undertaken between January and March 2019, and on demand depending on the category of results.
14. The World Bank noted physical verification is very crucial and applauded the RFU's initiative to digitize.

RFU Financial Report and Budget

15. The Financial Performance Report showed a July to October expenditure of US\$39,216.03 against available cash of US\$ 276,834.01, leaving a balance of US\$237,617.97. Additional ACE-Impact and RFU furnishing related expenses further reduced the balance to US\$11,860.47. Staff related costs were yet to be deducted.
16. The RFU explained that expenses on ACE-Impact activities would be reimbursed and the excesses under ACE I would be absorbed by the ACE-Impact budget. Further explanations noted that some zero expenditure cases implied funds were committed or expenses were yet to be recouped from the ACE-Impact budget. It was also noted that the bulk of total expenditure related to ACE-Impact expenses. The World Bank was happy expenses had been reduced by the RFU. The latter assured the PSC the 2017/2018 audit was underway and the final report would be shared with the Committee. The PSC was assured that the report titles would be reviewed to reflect it as a trimestral budget. It was suggested to do quarterly reports next time and to report percentages for individual lines for better comparison between previous and current expenditure. Explanations were requested regarding verification consultancy fees as they represent 25% of the total expenditure. The World Bank noted the value of the contract was based on the scope, timeliness, responsiveness and importance of the work. It maintained it was good value for money and reasonable given ACE II is paying 3 times more for similar service. Verification by Elsevier would however be reviewed to ensure additional service is provided including an impact assessment of publications for inclusion in the end of project report. The Committee noted the need to evaluate the impact of supervision missions. Concerns were raised by the Representative for Senegal regarding the value of earlier consultancy on resource generation. In her view, centres that succeeded in raising funds already had experience and competence.

Decisions: Agenda Item 2

- **The RFU to collect details on challenges and suggest solutions.**
- **The RFU to also suggest strategies to improve survey response rates.**
- **The RFU to present quarterly financial performance reports.**

- **The RFU to indicate percentage of total expenditure for each budget line in subsequent reports.**

PSC Roundtable

17. **Burkina Faso:** The National Review Committee has been formally set up but is yet to hold meetings. It appears there was an earlier Committee in place but the Ministry was not involved in its activities. The situation is expected to improve with the set up of a formal Committee.
18. **Gambia:** The project has been successful so far. Eighty-nine (89) students out of 133 in training have graduated. There has been a challenge getting transcripts from CERHI (Nigeria), CEA-MITIC (Senegal) and CEFTER (Nigeria) and this is affecting progress and promotion of the students involved. Efforts to resolve this have so far been unsuccessful. The PSC found this unacceptable and agreed that letters be written to the Vice Chancellors of the centres' institutions concerned with copies to the RFU, the World Bank and Country Task Team Leaders. In addition, the PSC Representatives of the countries hosting the Centres concerned should intervene and expedite release of the documents.
19. **Cameroon:** The National Review Committee meets twice annually with informal meetings in between when required. The Centre Leader for CEA-CETIC has been replaced and the incumbent is in contact with the World Bank. A Strategic Plan has been developed and a workplan with detailed budgets have helped to resolve the challenge of active supervision by the Ministry. The Government is working to offset the performance deficit. The Chair noted the World Bank and RFU would be in touch to ensure the turnaround is maintained. A supervision mission is also planned for November 2018.
20. **Benin:** The National Review Committee met in September and another session is planned for November. Representatives from the relevant Ministries are invited to discuss issues and challenges of the project. Partnerships have been developed with external and local bodies and recommendations made are being implemented. It was confirmed that the initial leadership challenges at the centre have been resolved. A Committee has been set up by ministerial order to oversee the centre. The World Bank confirmed the turnaround and applauded Government for it. They requested that Benin shares the minutes of the Committee meetings to facilitate follow up by the Bank. It was suggested other centres could learn from the Benin experience.
21. **Côte d'Ivoire:** Strategies have been put in place to increase performance. Institutional changes in July have impacted positively on project operations and time has been spent orienting the new leadership. Assistance has been sought from the RFU and the World Bank has undertaken country level supervisions. . It is planned to restructure the National Review Committee and to hold one meeting before the close of the year.

22. **Nigeria:** Nigeria has a very strong National Review Committee which meets two times annually and mostly before the project PSC meetings to take stock. Meeting venues have been rotated among the ACEs to facilitate peer review. The next meeting would be in Zaria (ACENTDFB). Three local experts have been engaged to accompany official teams on supervision missions. They provide national context and hence promote better understanding of issues. A documentary has been produced and shared with the ACEs on the achievements of the Nigerian centres; a total of US\$ 43 million has been generated; a significant portion of the advance funds have been repaid; 83 PhD, 809 masters and 1,023 Short-term students have completed their training; over 1,400 research publications have been produced; and centres have been tasked to develop sustainability plans. These together give a positive outlook on sustainability. However, international accreditation and regional enrollment (in conflict prone areas) are still a challenge, and cash flow is hampered by the Government requirement that public institutions should do business exclusively with the Central Bank.
23. **Senegal:** National Review Committee meetings are held and there is strong leadership. However, for continuity, there is the need to change leadership going forward. Much of the Committee's work since the last meeting was on helping the centres prepare towards the ACE-Impact.
24. **Ghana:** The National Review Committee is vibrant. A meeting scheduled for October was postponed due to preparations towards the ACE-Impact. The centres are doing well as evidenced in the progress report by the RFU.
25. In discussions, Dr. Halil Dunder (World Bank Practice Manager, West Africa) observed that some centres would need to put in more effort if they are to meet targets within the remaining 15 months. He encouraged the Centres to complete outstanding activities and use up all available funds. Dr. Dunder advised that centres should be seen within the regional context and planning for sustainability is critical. He emphasized the need for an enabling environment both at institutional and national levels.

Next Steps

26. Key steps for the next 4 months would evolve around PSC Meetings, Verification and Disbursements, Financial and Procurement Reporting, Implementation Support and Supervision, Country/Regional level Milestones and ACE Extension and Reallocation. Specific items under these headings are set out in the table below.

<i>Item</i>	<i>Activity</i>	<i>Dates</i>	<i>Responsibility</i>
	National Review Committee Meetings	By December 2018	National Agencies

<i>Project Steering Committee</i>	Signing of ACE I Restructuring Agreements for Nigeria	November 2018	Federal Ministry of Finance of Nigeria
	Review of Annual Workplans, Post-procurement Audit Reports and IFRs	December 2018	World Bank and ACEs
<i>Verification & Disbursements</i>	Verification of Student Enrolment and Internship results (DLR 2.1 – 2.4)	January – March 2019	ACEs, RFU, Technopolis & WB
	Verification of Accreditation results (DLR 2.5)	Continuous	ACEs, RFU & WB
	Verification of Learning Environment results (DLR 2.8)	December 2018 March 2019	ACEs, RFU, Consultants & WB
<i>Financial & Procurement Reporting</i>	Dispatch of Disbursement Clearance Letters to all countries	January 2019 March 2019	WB (TTL & Co-TTLs)
	Submission of Withdrawal Applications	January 2019 March 2019	ACEs/ National Agencies
	Submission of Interim Financial Reports (IFRs)	August 15, 2019	ACEs
	Submission of Financial DLRs and Audit	June 30, 2019	ACEs
	Submission of Procurement Audit Report	June 30, 2019	ACEs
	Procurement for civil works	NO MORE – LAST DEADLINE WAS APRIL 2018	ACEs
	Execution of Equipment Contracts of not more than US\$50,000	April 30, 2019	ACEs
<i>Implementation Support & Supervision</i>	ACE Audio meeting	December 5, 2018	ACEs, RFU & WB
	WebEx meetings with selected ACEs	As required	ACEs, RFU & WB
	Supervision Missions to selected ACEs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ CEADSE & CEFTER (Nigeria) ▪ CEA-MEM, CCBAD & ENSEA (CDI) ▪ CEA-CETIC (Cameroon) ▪ CEA-SAMEF (Senegal) ▪ OAU & PAMI (Nigeria) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Nov. 5 – 9, 2018 ▪ Nov. 12 – 16, 2018 ▪ Nov. 20 – 21, 2018 ▪ Nov. 2018 ▪ Jan. 2019 	ACEs, RFU & Experts
<i>Milestones & Restructuring</i>	National Review Meetings	By December 2018	National Agencies
	10 th ACE I & 1 st ACEE-Impact Joint Workshop	February 18 – 27, 2019	ACEs, RFU, WB et al.
	ACE Project Restructuring	COMPLETED	

ACE I and ACE-Impact PSC and Workshop

27. The Committee asked that travel arrangements for the next PSC and Project Workshop in Djibouti should start early to avoid challenges. Specifically, arrangements should be made for visas on arrival and where necessary, invitation letters should be provided well ahead of time. The Djibouti Representative assured the Committee, his President’s strong commitment towards the project would guarantee smooth operations.

A.O.B

West Africa Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU)

28. The Representative for the West African Economic and monetary Union (WAEMU) spoke briefly on the Union’s World Bank funded Project on *Affordable Housing*. Dr. Barry noted a component of the Project is to support a Centre of Excellence for research on housing and urban planning in the WAEMU region. Given the component’s similarity to the ACE Project,

the AAU would be providing technical support towards its implementation. He requested the contacts of members to allow sharing of the details with the PSC.

AAU Television and Staff/ Student Mobility

29. The AAU Secretary General informed the meeting about the AAU Television ([AAUTv](#)) Initiative which is intended to promote information sharing and better understanding of higher education issues Africa including the African Union’s Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA). The AAU is the Coordinator for the CESA Higher Education Cluster. The AAUTv is diffused via YouTube and Facebook but would go satellite in the next 6 months and would cover Africa and Southern Europe. Professor Ehilé called on members to contribute input for programmes under the initiative. Details of requirements would be shared with PSC members via email. The *AAU Conference of Vice Chancellors, Rectors and Presidents of African Universities (COREVIP)* to be held July 8 – 11 2019 in Cairo (Egypt) on the *Role of Universities in the Implementation of the AU’s Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA)* was also announced. Additional information was shared on the enormous staff and student exchange opportunities in Northern Africa, and the AAU’s role as the liaison between universities in the region and sub-Saharan Africa.

Closing

30. The meeting was brought to a close at 1.45pm.

Attachment

- ACE Project Update
- ACE Communications Update

