23 September 2019

The 15th ACE 1 Project Steering Committee Meeting and the 2nd ACE IMPACT Project Steering Committee Meeting were successfully held on the 23rd September 2019 at Radisson Blu Hotel in Dakar Senegal. **Professor Madame Coumba Toure Kane** successfully chaired both meetings. The meetings reviewed progress reports for both ACE 1 and ACE IMPACT Projects, reviewed the Regional Facilitating Unit (RFU) activities, discussed plans for the ACE IMPACT digitized reporting system, received updates from PSC members, deliberated on ACE 1 Project closing guidelines and reflected on sustaining the ACE 1 Project.

The key take-away messages from the ACE 1 PSC Meeting were:

- the importance of documentation and communication was a key lesson from ACE 1
- the PSC members must actively support their countries to accelerate implementation so that there are no unutilized project funds by March 2020

The key messages from the ACE IMPACT PSC Meeting were:

- the ACE IMPACT Project had been approved as a result of the good results that were achieved under ACE 1
- going forward we need to learn from ACE 1 and strengthen the communication system among and between all the project stakeholders

The PSC Meeting files will soon be shared on the ACE website: https://ace.aau.org/downloads/

24 September 2019

Representatives from over 56 African Centres of Excellence are converging in Dakar Senegal this week to review progress, learn from each other, build networks and forge partnerships to ensure the successful implementation and realization of the project's objectives. The opening ceremony for the 11th ACE 1 and 2nd ACE IMPACT workshops was graced by Dr Cheik Oumar Anne (Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, Senegal); Prof Etienne E. Ehile (AAU Secretary General); Veronique Sauvat (Head of the Education Division at the French Development Agency) and Madame Sophie Naudeau (representative of the Senegal World Bank Country Director). Dr Lamane Mbaye was the facilitator of the opening ceremony.

In his remarks **Prof Etienne E. Ehile** indicated the link between the African Union's Agenda 2063 strategy and the World Bank strategy for human capital development. He thanked His Excellency Mr. Maki Sall, President of the Republic of Senegal and the entire Government of Senegal, for their immense efforts of supporting higher education in Senegal and Africa as a whole.

Veronique Sauvat the Head of the Education Division at the French Development Agency (AFD) reiterated that the development of human capital in sub-Saharan Africa was very key. The AFD is keen to partner on the ACE Project because of the regional scope of the ACE Program, the relevant thematic areas covered by ACE and. The AFD does not want to scatter efforts – but prefers to join forces and create synergies with other development partners to improve African higher education institutions. The ACE Project fits the strategy of the AFD.

Madame Sophie Naudeau, the Head of the human development program at the World Bank represented the World Bank Country Director of Senegal. She reiterated that the World bank valued human capital development for meeting the needs of the job market. She said that there was a need to train more young people in innovative areas to provide tomorrow's solutions to new and future challenges. Since its creation ACE 1 has improved regional integration, supported dynamic institutions, achieving quality international standards, resource mobilization. The ACE 1 Project has kept its promise, promoted dynamism, innovation and progress for the continent in Higher Education

In his observations**, Dr Cheik Oumar Anne** (Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, Senegal) underscored the importance of high-quality university training in Africa. The continent of Africa needs more young researchers in the areas of STEM. He encouraged the universities to explore opportunities for collaboration with the private sector – saying it was only through deliberate efforts to prioritize synergies that this could be achieved. The Minister also recognized the excellent work that has been done by the two ACEs in Senegal - Centre d'Excellence Africain pour la Sante de la Mere et de l'Enfant (CEA-SAMEF) and Centre d'Excellence Africain en Mathimatiqués, Informatique et Technologies de l'Information et de la Communication (CEA MITIC). He congratulated the World Bank, AAU and the AFD for organizing the ongoing ACE workshops in Senegal and concluded by declaring the workshops officially opened.

ACE 1 Progress Report

Mrs Adeline Addy, the AAU MEL Officer provided an update of the impressive ACE 1 Project results to date:

1. There is a positive outlook on performance & disbursements as the ACE 1 project closure approaches
2. Extra rounds of Verification processes were fast-tracked to improve disbursement rates
3. Sixteen (16) ACEs have earned above 80% of their total grants
4. Four (4) out of five (5) Project Development Objectives & all intermediary results have been achieved!
5. Internships went up by over 20% and are now at 93%
6. There are 57 Internationally accredited programmes. All but 2 ACEs have achieved this. ENSEA & CEA-MEM to complete in Dec. 2019 & Jan. 2020
7. On average, about 25% of ACE publications are within the highest Cite Score percentile, indicating high quality of the publications
8. The ACE 1 Project has achieved the following cumulative results:
    a. 30,259 students trained
    b. 12,062 regional students
    c. 212 accredited programs
    d. 5,512 internships
    e. USD50,636,317 external revenue
    f. 3,583 faculty trained
    g. 231 revised curricula
    h. 2,593 research publications
    i. 447 new partnerships
    j. 490 project meetings

Prof Michelle Niescierenko, a health expert supporting the health ACEs made observations from the ACE 1 supervision missions. She said that the ACE Project has required change from the beginning – new ways of doing research, teaching, managing and leading. She encouraged the ACEs to keep the pace and contribute to their sustainable future. It was important that the ACEs thought beyond the ACE Project. She concluded by reiterating that she and all the thematic experts were excited to see the ACE journey maturing to completion, with most of the ACEs being renewed to be part of ACE IMPACT.

Prof Jonathan Mba the ACE 1 Coordinator presented the outcomes **from the Djibouti Workshop Evaluation.** The survey had attracted a low response rate – however the project implementation risk was the lowest since 2014. The slow and cumbersome approval process was still a risk

On **Disbursements and Funds utilization Mrs Himdat Bayusuf** reported that the disbursements by country were going up. The overall disbursement stood at 83% - showing a 10% increase since Djibouti meeting. With 6 months remaining before the closure of ACE 1 - disbursement is the number one priority for the Bank. Emphasis for ACE 1 institutions must be on accelerated implementation in order to utilize the outstanding project funds.

Dr. Sylvia Mkandawire, the Program Manager for the ACE Impact presented the status of 1st & 2nd ACE Impact Effectiveness, Implementation Readiness & Support. Good progress has been made by all the countries to facilitate their effectiveness. In order to be effective countries involved in ACE IMPACT submit Financial Agreements, Performance Agreements, Endorsement of Regional

Operations Manual, Legal Opinion and Parliamentary ratification.

Dr Ekua Bentil made some remarks concerning the roles of World Bank staff supporting ACE Impact 1 and 2 – i.e. Mrs Himdat Bayusuf is the TTL for ACE Impact 1 and Dr Bentil is that TTL for ACE Impact 2. However, they work very closely together – e.g. Himdat is the co-TTL of ACE Impact 2 and Dr Bentil is the co-TTL of ACE Impact 1. The ACEs were asked to follow consistent communication protocols – e.g. copy Dr Sylvia Mkandawire in communications concerning ACE Impact.

Veronique Sauvat the Head of the Education Division at the French Development Agency (AFD) spoke about the support to the ACE Impact Project. AFD is co-funding of ACE Impact Centres – 4 Cote d'Ivoire ACEs, selected Nigerian ACEs and one ACE in Benin.

Q&A Session

QN: What are the deadlines for effectiveness?

ANS: The World Bank Governing Board must approve the country effectiveness. All countries have 90 days to be effective. We will do our best – hope you and your governments will also do your best

Comment: Submitting documents via email is a problem – I strongly suggest that documents must be uploaded via a portal

QN: Where can we go for approved Project Management Training?

Dr Ekua Bentil introduced the proposed Africa Digital Skills and Training (ADSAT) program to be funded by the World Bank to an approximate tune of USD 600 million. Digital skills are key for the digital economy and the ADSAT program aims to facilitate more students choosing STEM careers. Relevant training for advanced digital skills would be prioritized. Undergraduate programs would be supported, investments in laboratories and possible support for National Research and Education Networks (NRENs). NRENs are key for the improvement of national internet infrastructure for education. There would be a competitive selection of countries to participate in the ADSAT program.

Digital Development in Higher Education

Samia Melhem the Digital Development Policy Specialist at the World Bank spoke passionately about **'**Effective Digital Development in Higher Education' and that this requires a systematic approach to accelerate digital skills strengthening. Digital skills, Digital Infrastructure, Digital Platforms and Digital Entrepreneurs are key pillars for digital development. She also described a digital skills framework to quicken digital skills strengthening. She concluded by sharing survey results on the digital skills status in African countries – a great deal needs to be done, especially in the area of connectivity.

Mohamed Benhouman from IBM highlighted the need to prepare students for the digital world from primary school. The role of universities would then be to prepare the students for the unknown. Technology is moving very fast - by 2022 90% of the jobs will be using technology

Kursat Gunenc from Microsoft described the 4th Industrial Revolution and the digital age. He said that the future looked very different for our students who must learn how to learn - and learn how to unlearn. He explained PHIGITAL – i.e. the recently invented name for the upcoming generation of

students who don't draw a distinction between the physical and digital worlds and are comfortable in both.

Mamadou Drame is the co-founder of Digital School Technologies. Digital School Technologies is a company specialized in ICT applied to education. They aim to become catalysts who help schools, universities and governments in their policies of introducing ICTs (information and communication technologies) to education. They run training digital skills training programs within campuses and off- campus training

Q&A

QN: What skills are important for the future?

ANS: Growing need for data and data science proficiency, Coding skills for kids, Business analysis and Cloud infrastructure management.

Technology in Education Parallel Session – by Dr Dimitrios Noukakis (EPFL Switzerland) and Dr Abdourahmane Mbengue (Universite Virtuelle du Senegal)

In this session key questions were discussed concerning digital education and the road to excellency.

1. What does it take to provide educational programs that are of excellent quality and local relevance? [*planning, creativity, commitment, multi-stakeholder engagements, learning from others and adapting to the local contexts*]
2. Is accreditation enough to help Higher education Institutions achieve quality? [*No we need commitment, consistency and clear outcomes*]
3. Which type of benchmarking is appropriate? [*peer benchmarking and aspirational benchmarking*]
4. What type of excellence must we focus on? [*assessment integrity, conducive teaching and learning environments, students' evaluation, external peer reviews and feedback from the industry and communities*]
5. Can African Universities offer excellent education programs without going digital? [*need to take advantage of digital technologies - a hybrid approach is recommended*]
6. What are the alternatives to leapfrogging?
7. What can digital technologies bring to excellence? [efficiency, standardization of teaching resources, easy peer reviews, co-teaching, lifelong learning]

The experiences from the **Universite Virtuelle du Senegal - Dr Abdourahmane Mbengue**

Universite Virtuelle du Senegal (UVS) conducted research over 3 years to study the factors contributing to the development of 21st century skills among staff and students. Some of the findings were:

1. The more teachers collaborate the more creative they become
2. Learners are able to use ICT for learning when they are clearly guided
3. The use of ICT was largely in the areas of information search – and not the creative use of ICT

UVS initiated a training program called New Pedagogy for Deep Learning (NPDL) to address the capacity issues and promote deep learning among teachers and students.

UVS collaborated with EPFL and 2 other academic institutions in Senegal to strengthen technical capacities and improve pedagogy and learning methods in higher education – through a common program to support African teachers in pedagogical engineering.

Takeaways from the digital infrastructure parallel session

1. **Presentation from KORETEX (**https://www.kortext.com/)
    1. Have digitised several resources (textbooks, journals, manuals, technical reports from publishers like Wiley, Taylor and Francis and are making them available to institutions vial apps
    2. The Kortex resources are accessible on mobile phones, tablets and laptops
2. **Microsoft** spoke about the cloud infrastructure service available through Azure (a cognitive service
    1. Educational institutions that can prove they are educational through their url (e.g. shows www….edu.) get free access and usage for certain Azure services
3. **IBM is also offering cloud services for educational institutions.**
    1. https://developer.ibm.com/digitalnation/africa/innovator/a cloud-based learning and innovation platform, providing digital competency and nurturing innovation. Institutions can register to work with IBM to run the courses and help improve them.
4. **Orange (Sonatel Grp)** They are offering digital school programs aimed at delivering free educational content in digital format. They are working with AVU and are also working in Senegal, Mali, Niger and Cote d'Ivoire.

Takeaways from the 'digital skills for students' parallel session

This session had the following speakers: Saleh Iliyasu Maitala (IBM), Habib Kammoin (IEEE) and Tarik Hilali (Microsoft)

1. Saleh mentioned that they have a platform available to assist people to learn IT courses like Block Chain and Artificial Intelligence (AI). This platform also allows the user/student to earn badges based on their progress in studying. A learning profile of the student is also kept, to allow the student to share their profile with prospective employers. The platform may be accessed on www.digitalnationafrica.com. This platform is free to use for Africa. IBM will work with African Universities by organising a 5-day boot camp to train university faculty members on emerging technologies. The platform also provides the user to learn basic soft skills that are need in basic life like designing presentations.
2. Habib spoke about digital schools. He said that digital skills are necessary for improving youth employment. He also stated that the current digital trends are Big Data, AI, Cloud and Augmented Reality / Virtual Reality. When thinking about digital skills we should not only focus on its use as in the Technology industry. Digital Skills cut across every sector of life. AI could be used in medicine, farming, and other areas. He also stated that before an institution sets out to develop a curriculum, the local needs must be assessed first. We should not follow the trends without verifying the needs of the community. Training should also be adapted for everyone's needs.