

**ACE Impact Projects
Response to covid-19
Funding options**

The Africa Higher Education Centers of Excellence projects

The Africa Higher Education Centers of Excellence (ACE) initiative is a flagship program of the World Bank that is investing, through three series of projects, over US\$580 million across more than 70 centers in 20 countries in Western, Central, Eastern and Southern Africa. The program is a series of regional higher education projects that aim to improve education, training and applied research at the post-graduate level in key priority fields, including health sciences, science, technology, engineering, mathematics (STEM), agriculture, industry and related fields. The First ACE for Development Impact (First ACE Impact) and Second ACE for Development Impact (Second ACE Impact) are part of the ACE Initiative and were both approved in March and November 2019 respectively, for \$294 million across 53 centers in eleven countries.

ACE in the covid-19 context

The relevance and the development impact of the ACEs are particularly tangible in the current covid-19 crisis. Across the eleven countries, ACEs are participating to the response on the covid-19 pandemic through research and innovation, knowledge-sharing, and production of key equipment. Centers are working on sequencing the genome of the virus; participating in national scientific observatories on covid-19; building mathematical models to map the spread of the virus and help predict its evolution; and producing hand sanitizers at a large scale for their communities and building face shields and breathing devices through 3D printing, to name but a few.

However, the Centers are also facing considerable challenges. The covid-19 crisis has taken an unprecedented scale and reached all countries across the world. To mitigate the contamination risks, most countries have closed schools and universities. ACEs, like all the education institutions, are having to rise to the challenge of distance learning and pedagogical continuity as students are out of school, all the while participating in the covid-19 response. There are risks of higher dropout rates and that the academic year will be wasted if virtual platforms for continued learning are not rapidly in place and students are able to use them. In many countries, connectivity comes with high costs outside the university and, sometimes, is altogether unavailable.

The below aspects are meant to provide information on the various financing options and timelines available to the ACE Impact centers. The key objective of this note is to provide further guidance on the existing financing windows, expenditures and activities that can be responded in response to covid and timelines on disbursement. A key priority for the World Bank and AAU is to accelerate the funds flow to you in the fastest way possible.

Financing centers to respond to the covid-19

Centers will need financing to (i) continue their operations to respond to the covid-19 in their respective communities and countries; (ii) build stronger connectivity for continued learning through virtual channels; and (iii) when applicable, finance the cost of connectivity for their students and teachers.

Three options are available for funding the covid-19 response through ACE Impact.

1. Existing ACE Impact funds

Some instruments are immediately available for financing towards the ACEs, such as:

- Funding windows within ACE Impact;
- Disbursement from the first Disbursement-Linked Indicator (DLI) 1 on institutional readiness, which is going to be reached by all the ACEs and associated to monetary gains for 35 out of the 53 centers¹. Across the First ACE Impact countries, over \$15 million are currently being processed for DLIs 1, 3 and 5 and \$10.3 million are expected to be disbursed by end of May 2020 for First and Second ACE Impact countries on DLI 1. The funding from DLIs can be used towards activities related to the covid-19 response. Details of disbursement currently under process may be found in Annex 1, and the breakdown of total results achieved per DLR per center may be found in Annexes 3 and 4.
- Funding earned on any other DLI may be used towards the covid-19 response. Examples include:
 - DLIs on teaching and learning environment (DLI 4.3), under which 18 ACEs have already formulated milestones dedicated to e-learning platforms, smart classroom and digital instruments (computers, software, video conferences);
 - similarly, under the DLI on institutional impact (DLI 7.5), centers have the flexibility to design their own milestones; and
 - Nigerian centers have a DLI on ICT services for innovation in teaching and research (DLI 7.6), which includes upgrading network infrastructure and internet bandwidth and enhanced participation in the National Research and Education Network.

Eligible activities of covid-19 responses include anything supporting virtual teaching learning, connectivity costs, activities supporting learning management platforms, activities supporting health responses to covid-19. All covid-19 related activities need to be added to the centers' Implementation Plans (IPs). This process of updating the IP to include the covid-19 response should take place simultaneously so as not to delay the implementation of the activity. Specific activities will be financed under each of the covid-19 response task force as followed:

i. Capacity task force:

- *Short-term*
 - Webinar for universities on capacity building focused on various in-depth topics including reopening of universities and online learning.

¹ 18 of the centers under ACE Impact were already part of ACE 1, under which they had money associated to a DLI on institutional readiness. Under ACE Impact, only renewal centers have money associated with DLI 1, i.e. 35 centers out of 53.

- *Cost: Speakers and participation cost for the universities*
- Online course on capacity building and training of the faculty
 - *Cost: Participation cost for the universities*
- *Long-term*
 - Acquisition of resources, material/equipment and qualified personnel for development of digital learning including digital learning studio.
 - *Cost:*
 - *Range: ~10-80k depending on countries and current facilities available at the university*
 - *Frequency: One-time cost for purchase of the equipment and recurring cost for qualified personnel and maintenance*

ii. Connectivity task force

- Provision of internet connectivity to faculty and students (at the discretion of the university)
 - *Cost of providing data bundle to faculty and students*

iii. Communication task force

- Preparation of communication materials on the centers' activities related to covid-19
 - *Cost of production of videos, factsheets and featuring articles in international website*

iv. Content task force

- Most contents currently proposed to the universities are free
- Negotiations with other online contents providers
 - *Cost to develop LMS and videoconference systems/rooms*
 - *Fees to enroll at the France Université Numérique*

2. Using unallocated funds

First and Second ACE Impact countries have unallocated funds towards the ACEs that could be used towards covid-19 response. Across both projects, there is a total of \$25,200,000 unallocated funds² that could be reallocated upon request from Government (national agency in charge of higher education and Ministry of Finance) to support COVID-19 related actions. Such a reallocation can be processed through a Contingency Emergency Response Component (CERC) that could be added to the project. If a CERC is triggered, a restructuring of the project will need to take place within three months. Another option is to undertake this reallocation during the mid-term review of the project to focus this unallocated funds towards financing gaps related to COVID-19 response. Further discussions with PSC and ACEs is required before this option is explored. Details on the unallocated funds may be found in Annex 2.

3. Financing of the covid-19 response activities through the Regional Facilitation Unit (RFU)

² \$7,500,000 are available under First ACE Impact, and \$17,700,000 are available under Second ACE Impact.

The RFU has a workplan in which the covid-19 response will be integrated directly, for example, financing on communication and capacity building will be geared towards covid-19 responses. Specifically, the RFU will provide the following types of support:

- Capacity building and technical assistance for maintaining the Learning Management Systems (LMS); instructional design training for developing quality content for teaching and training of campus network engineers to support ACE connectivity infrastructure
- Financing communication of the covid-19 response;
- Facilitating advocacy for the strengthening of NRENs and campus network infrastructure
- Funding the hosting of an e-learning platform, potentially procured on behalf of the ACEs as a regional platform (e.g. hosted by an NREN in Africa) (TBC); and
- Procuring additional content from providers such as Coursera, Edx and others.

The task force reviewed the RFU 2020 workplan and, based on the impact of the activities (lockdown, no travel), there are potential funds available worth \$300,000 that could be used towards new activities related to covid-19 response including communication, capacity building and virtual support.

4. Country-level options

All countries may leverage the options listed above, with option 2 having to be discussed with the Bank and option 3 having to be discussed with the AAU in order to better assess the capacity needs.

For instance, a Sustainable Procurement Environment and Social Standards Enhancement (SPESSE) project is currently in place in Nigeria. Just like the ACE project, SPESSE is supporting Nigerian Universities to build a skilled workforce, capacity building projects supporting Nigerian universities with national coordination and facilitation housed at the National Universities Commission (NUC). Under the SPESSE project, the NUC has made some arrangements for acquiring LMS, HPC and connectivity to the universities in the context of the covid-19. Cloud-based LMS could be used for teaching provided the NUC is able to (i) train the professors on conducting teaching and research online; and (ii) address connectivity issues for students irrespective of their current locations. The work of the task force feeds directly into these issues.

5. Key next steps

No	Key actions	Responsible	Timeline
1.	Accelerate verification and disbursement for results submitted by the centers to ensure funds are available to support any of the centers' covid-19 related activities	AAU/WB	Short-term
2.	Accelerate capacity building initiatives for the universities including webinars and communication activities	AAU/WB	Short-term
3.	Consider potential reallocation of the funds toward covid-19 related activities at mid-term review	WB	Mid-term
	Accelerate effectiveness in order for funds to be disbursed	ACE/WB/Govt	

Annex 1: Amounts currently under process	Country	Amount being processed (SDR)	Status
1st ACE Impact	Burkina Faso	3,072,398*	WA request being processed
	Djibouti	647,120	Accounts opening still in process
	Ghana	5,661,150	Disbursement process from Bank to NCTE finalized Disbursement in process from NCTE to ACEs
	Guinea	285,840	WA to be submitted
	Senegal	1,662,239**	DFIL being updated to reflect correct project accounts
	Total	11,328,747	

* based on exchange rate 1 EUR = 0.82 XDR based on the FA exchange rates (Burkina Faso has results in both euros and SDR)

** based on exchange rate 1 EUR = 0,795124 XDR on May 5th, 2020

In addition to the above funds that are in process, it is expected that the funds below will be processed for First ACE Impact in the next month. For Second ACE Impact, the Gambia and Togo are effective and it is expected that disbursements for these two countries will take place within the next month. In parallel, AAU is continuing to prepare the verification letters for all eleven countries under the ACE Impact project and the first round of verification for Second ACE Impact countries is expected to be issued by June 5th.

First ACE Impact remaining results under DLI 1 to be achieved:

- 647,120 SDR for Djibouti
- 647,115 SDR for Guinea

2nd ACE Impact remaining results under DLI 1 to be processed:

- 1.1m EUR for Togo
- 880,000 SDR for Benin
- 1.35m SDR for Gambia
- 4.4m SDR for Nigeria for DLI 1.1

Annex 2: Unallocated funds under ACE Impact per country

	Country	Unallocated amount (\$)
1st ACE Impact	Burkina Faso	2,500,000
	Djibouti	2,000,000
	Ghana	2,000,000
	Guinea	1,000,000
	Senegal	0
	Total	7,500,000
2nd ACE Impact	Benin	1,200,000
	The Gambia	1,500,000
	Niger	1,000,000
	Nigeria	10,000,000
	Togo	4,000,000
	Total	17,700,000

Annex 3: DLR results tracking for First ACE Impact countries

ACE	1. Instit'al Readin ess	2.	3. Student s	4 Quality of educatio n and research	5. Relevanc e of educatio n and research	6.1 - 6.4 Fiduciary	7.1 - 7.5 Institution al Impact	Total
2iE			423,706	0	714			848,839
ACECOR	611,160		192,115	0	0			995,390
CEA- ITECH_ MTV	666,000		34,034	0	0			734,068
CEALT	323,560		0	0	0			323,560
CEA- PCMT			14,325	0	4,320			37,290
CEFORG RIS			0	0	0			0
CEMS	215,705		51,490	0	0			318,685
CFOREM	666,000		125,434	0	13,209			943,286
CoE_2iE			462,664	0	14,637			954,602
CoE_Djib outi	323,560		0	0	0			323,560
CoE_KEE P	607,160		368,630	0	0			1,344,420
KNUST RWESCK			301,835	0	39,240			682,150
RCEES	611,160		423,675	0	0			1,458,510
TRECK	611,160		187,085	0	0			985,330
WACCBI P			246,210	0	0			492,420
WACCI			153,075	0	25,200			356,550
WACWIS A	611,160		61,125	0	0			733,410
WAGMC	611,160		0	0	0			611,160
SAMEF			201,890	0	5,712			415,203
AGRISA N	487,490		113,329	0	0			714,148
AGIR	487,490		97,687	0	0			682,863
MITIC			286,679	0	33,915			892,065

Annex 4: DLI Assessment per ACE

ACE	1. Institutional Readiness	2.	3 Students	4. Quality of education and research	5. Relevance of education and research	6.1 - 6.4 Fiduciary	7.1 - 7.5 Institutional Impact
2iE	0%	0%	81%	0%	0%	0%	0%
ACECOR	100%	0%	27%	0%	0%	0%	0%
CEA- ITECH_MTV	100%	0%	4%	0%	0%	0%	0%
CEALT	50%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
CEA-PCMT	0%	0%	2%	0%	1%	0%	0%
CEFORGRIS	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
CEMS	50%	0%	8%	0%	0%	0%	0%
CFOREM	10%	0%	16%	0%	1%	0%	0%
CoE_2iE	0%	-	100%	0%	3%	0%	-
CoE_Djibouti	50%	-	0%	0%	0%	0%	-
CoE_KEEP	100%	-	50%	0%	0%	0%	-
KNUST RWESCK	-	0%	39%	0%	3%	0%	0%
RCEES	100%	0%	60%	0%	0%	0%	0%
TRECK	100%	0%	27%	0%	0%	0%	0%
WACCBIP	-	0%	32%	0%	0%	0%	0%
WACCI	-	0%	20%	0%	2%	0%	0%
WACWISA	100%	0%	9%	0%	0%	0%	0%
WAGMC	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
SAMEF	-	0%	70%	0%	2%	0%	0%
AGRISAN	100%	0%	24%	0%	0%	0%	0%
AGIR	100%	0%	20%	0%	0%	0%	0%
MITIC	-	0%	100%	0%	11%	0%	0%