

Emerging Regional Developments and Forecast for Quality in Higher Education in Africa

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Introduction

One of the major conclusions of the 2014 World Economic Forum held from January 22 to 25 in Davos, Switzerland is the need for leaders of the world to address inequities in the socio-economic configuration of national, regional and global communities especially through education and partnerships. As Guy Ryder, Director-General of the International Labour Organization noted at the Forum, "well-designed education and training systems are needed that respond to labour market needs, and equip a young workforce for the jobs of tomorrow." Within the inclusive growth sub-theme of the WEF, higher education is seen as a potent pathway for enriching human capital through knowledge development. The eight heads of African governments that were in Davos embraced a commitment to bolster higher education especially its quality dimension, a commitment which will echo at the Africa Economic Forum to be held in May 2014 in Abuja, Nigeria.

There is a refreshing attention being turned at the global and Africa regional level to the power of quality higher education at delivering on a promise of a more socio-economically equitable world. Within the context of this promise, the twin goals of this paper are to provide a brief narrative of recent developments in the establishment and enforcement of quality standards in higher education in Africa and to undertake a projection of trends for the next ten years. In the middle of the two focal areas, we shall pick out the major drivers or catalysts of quality standards, the key inhibitors of progress and the efforts deployed at the national and regional levels to bring down the barriers.

Perhaps of all regions in the world, Africa's higher education system would appear to be the most diverse. Diversity in race, gender, linguistic orientation, and other socio-economic and cultural attributes predominate. Differentiation in terms of school types that make up the higher education sub-sector is also vast. These characteristics present a context which makes Africa unique (AAU, 2007; Materu, 2007; Okebukola & Shabani, 2007), a uniqueness which comes with its own set of challenges.

In the first of three sections, as part of the narrative on recent developments, we present a situation analysis of the diversity. The second section examines current efforts at harmonisation and quality improvement. The third section directs attention at the challenges and efforts to address them. The future and sustainability of these efforts are the points of reflection in the concluding remarks.

Diversity of the African Higher Education System

The African higher education system is made up of over 2,450 post-secondary institutions (about 7% of the world's total). The diversity of these institutions is seen in varying institutional types, ownership, linguistic orientation, curriculum and student characteristics. The greatest proportion (over 65%) of institutions in the system is made up of universities (UIS, 2010). Non-university higher education institutions include polytechnics, colleges of education, as well as vocational and technical institutes. This institutional diversity comes with varying missions and mandates. While the universities generally have teaching and research thrusts, non-university institutions are more focussed on specific programmes leading to acquisition of skills e.g. for teaching (colleges of education) and for varying technological enterprises (polytechnics). These differing missions come with variability in staff qualifications and expectations for career advancement with implications for quality standards.

Within institutional diversity, universities lead the pack in the choice of secondary school products aspiring for higher education. This trend which in cases like Ghana, Ethiopia, Nigeria and South Africa leaves about 10 candidates struggling for one available university space. In 2007 at Osun State University, Nigeria, over 100,000 candidates applied for 500 available spaces! In 2011, a total of 99,195 candidates applied to the University of Lagos. Only about 9,000 could be offered admission. The preponderance of the bright and more intellectually able takes up such spaces. The non-university higher education institutions is where many of the others find repose, although a good number who are bright but would want vocational and technical career paths elect for these institutions as first choice. The preference for universities and the quest to increase high-level human resources have led many African countries to expand university spaces through converting technical institutions to universities as exemplified by South Africa and aspirational by Nigeria or to increase the number of universities under private ownership. Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Tanzania provide examples (Okebukola, 2011; 2012).

Diversity exists even within institutional categories. Specialised universities have continued to thrive in response to societal demand for specific skills. Of the 129 universities in Nigeria, ten are specialised universities of technology and five are universities of agriculture. Ghana has a specialised University of Development Studies and one which specialises in telecommunication. Both Nigeria and Ghana have specialised universities of education. Ivory Coast has a University of Science and Technology. In Kenya, there is the Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology. Namibia has a University of Management. Somalia has the Somaliland University of Technology.

Beginning from the 1990s, the African higher education space opened to greater private participation. The diversity in public-private ownership has become a distinguishing feature of the system. In many countries, private higher education institutions range in proportion of total from 15% in Ghana and Ethiopia, through 20% in Kenya to 33% in Nigeria. While private higher education institutions have maintained high numbers, enrolment in these institutions is relatively low compared with public institutions.

Linguistic diversity given expression by language of instruction is another enduring characteristic of African higher education. In Anglophone countries (e.g. Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone), English is the medium of instruction while French is used in higher education institutions in francophone countries such as Cote d'Ivoire, Mali and Senegal. Lusophone countries - Angola, Mozambique and Cape Verde apply Portuguese in teaching and learning in higher education. This linguistic diversity comes with curriculum diversity fashioned along the lines of institutions in English, French and Portuguese higher education institutions. The originally-American course-unit system has been overlaid on the structure of academic programmes in most of the institutions. Within the last ten years, francophone countries have moved far in reaching consensus on the Licence-Master-Doctorate (LMD) reform which is aimed at streamlining programme offerings with anglophone models.

Diversity is also seen in racial composition of staff and students in African higher education. Nowhere is this more pronounced as South Africa where a mix of blacks, coloured, Indians and whites populate staff and student communities. There is also diversity with regard to gender and physical disabilities. The preponderance of males has been widely reported across Africa with females making up on the average about 32% of undergraduate enrolment. The percentage of students with physical disabilities is low (less than 1%); yet significant enough for attention to be paid to them.

On the March to Harmonisation with Quality

Diversity and differentiation are by themselves positive hallmarks of higher education institutions. Down through the ages, these institutions were noted for their uniqueness induced by institutional autonomy. Since such institutions could define their terms for teaching and research, they were able to metamorphose to achieve peculiarities in curriculum, orientation of research and governance. However, the forces of globalisation have steered some aspects of these age-old university traditions to cohere along congruent lines in institutions with similar missions. Harmonisation which does not mean uniformity, is fostering collaboration and partnerships among higher education institutions. Mobility of staff and students is encouraged. Research collaboration in the pursuit of solutions to global problems is fostered. The uniqueness of the core values of individual higher education institution is however not offset by the quest to harmonise.

There are at least eight major efforts at harmonising higher education in Africa with an eye on maintaining quality standards. These are (a) implementation of the Arusha Convention; (b) introduction of the African Credit Transfer System; (c) articulation of the African Quality Rating Mechanism; (d) Creating regional centres of excellence; (e) the establishment of the African Higher Education and Research Space (AHERS); (f) establishment of the Pan African University; (g) LMD reforms in francophone countries; (h) the establishment of the Africa Regional Qualification Framework. These efforts are propelled by two drivers: the need to promote qualitative higher education in Africa and to foster African unity.

Implementing the Arusha Convention: Meeting in Arusha on December 5, 1981, African countries signalled intention to foster harmony in the variegated higher education systems through mutual recognition of diplomas and certificates. The decision to enter into the accord came at a time when traffic of students and teachers to institutions in Asia, Europe

and North America was heightened and the pace of brain drain was quickening. Most graduates who were outbound for postgraduate studies cherished a higher degree in non-African countries. Even the transfer of undergraduate candidature from countries within and outside similar linguistic zones in Africa took long to process and finalise. A regime of freer intra-regional movement of students and staff was targeted with the initiative of the Arusha Convention.

The Convention makes provision for general guidelines to facilitate the implementation of regional co-operation in the area of recognition of studies and degrees through national, bilateral, sub-regional and regional mechanisms already in place or created for this purpose. Specifically, the Convention aims at:

- strengthening and promoting inter-regional and international co-operation in the field of recognition of studies, certificates, diplomas, degrees or other academic qualifications;
- defining and putting in place effective quality assurance and accreditation mechanisms at the national and regional level;
- encouraging and promoting the widest and most effective possible use of human resources available in Africa and of the diaspora in order to speed up the development of their respective countries and to limit African brain-drain;
- facilitating the exchange and greater mobility of students, teachers and researchers of the region and the diaspora, by the recognition of studies, diplomas, degrees or qualifications delivered by another Contracting State in order to follow or continue higher education studies;
- furthering the setting up of high level joint training and research programmes between higher education institutions and supporting the award of joint degrees;
- improving and reinforcing the collection and exchange of information for the purpose of implementing this Convention; and
- contributing to the harmonisation of diplomas, taking into account the current global trend aiming at generalising the Licence Master's Doctorate (LMD) system.

The mechanism for implementing the convention is at three levels- national level by national bodies; sub-regional level by sub-regional and bilateral organisations; and regional level by the regional committee in charge of the application of the convention. Any national of a contracting State having obtained, on the territory of a non-contracting State, certificates, diplomas, degrees or other qualifications similar with those defined above, can prevail herself/himself of these provisions, provided that her/his certificates, diplomas, degrees or other qualifications have been recognised in her/his country of origin and the country in which s/he wishes to continue her/his studies, without prejudice to the provisions of this Convention. The development of an online database for exchange of information on accreditation, quality assurance and recognition of studies and degrees is being planned to facilitate the implementation of the convention.

Currently, there are 21 contracting States and the Holy See. Kenya and South Africa which have not yet ratified the convention have established very effective systems of accreditation, quality assurance and recognition of certificates. At least 19 countries which have not ratified the convention are playing a major role in the implementation of the Arusha convention through sub-regional bodies in charge of recognition like the African and

Malagasy Council for Higher education (CAMES), the SADC (Southern Africa Development Community) Technical Committee on Accreditation and Certification and the Inter-University Council for East Africa.

Introduction of the African Credit Transfer System: One of the pillars of student mobility is the credit transfer system. The currency of exchange is the credit (units assigned to a course) which is aspired towards or earned from a particular institution. Binding the endeavours together is mutual recognition of courses by partnering institutions and standardisation of credits assigned to courses.

Credit transfer is at several levels. It can be from one department to another in the same institution or from one institution to another in the same country. Yet another level is from one institution in a country to an institution in a different country. The African experience so far shows a hindering of credit transfer within country and even across countries in the region. Beyond the bureaucracy installed by institutions on credit transfer, lack of harmony in what constitutes a credit and the additive mechanism has emerged another factor impeding progress. The importance of student mobility across departmental, institutional and national boundaries in search of knowledge and skills in a knowledge economy has spurred African countries to endorse the establishment of the African Credit Transfer System. Initial thoughts were given to the scheme at the 1997 Africa Regional Conference preparatory to the 1998 UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education with approval by several meetings of African Ministers of Education in Abuja (2001) and Dakar (2008).

Managers of African higher education systems especially Vice-Chancellors and Rectors are not in doubt about the practicability of the Africa Credit Transfer System. This confidence was expressed at the 2009 AAU Conference of Rectors, Vice-Chancellors and Principals (COREVIP) held in Abuja. If it works in Europe, there is no reason why it should not work in Africa is the typical perspective. At the sub-regional level, practical application is given to the system by University of Ilorin (Nigeria) and University of Cape Coast (Ghana). Since 2009, the two universities have had students take and transfer credits from one institution to another. Over 200 students have so far benefited from this cross-national credit transfer scheme.

LMD Reform in Francophone Countries: The LMD system was adopted by the UEMOA member countries in July 2007 through Decision No. 03/2007/CM/UEMOA. It was to achieve the following: (a) improve the efficiency and performance of institutions of higher education (b) promote a sub-regional system open to the world, able to develop joint mechanisms for promoting quality and (c) ensure international recognition of degrees issued by the institutions of higher education in the UEMOA member countries.

The UEMOA countries have made several commitments in order to facilitate the implementation of this reform. These include (a) the establishment of national mechanisms for assessing the quality of academic programmes; (b) establishment of a regional mechanism for monitoring, coordination and sharing of best practices on the LMD reform, and (c) promulgation before December 31, 2009 of the legislation required for the implementation of the UEMOA decision on the LMD reform. UEMOA Commission is committed to support the process of transition to the LMD system and the establishment of

quality assurance mechanism through the project on “Support to Higher Education” jointly funded through a grant provided by the African Development Fund and a financial contribution from UEMOA.

Implementation of the reform occurs at three levels: sub regional, national and institutional. The African and Malagasy Council of Higher Education (CAMES) is responsible for regional coordination of the LMD reform process and issues relating to accreditation and quality assurance. Two strategies were adopted to facilitate reform at sub-regional level (a) establishment of monitoring mechanisms and (b) organization of sensitisation workshops on the reform. In the UEMOA member countries, monitoring of the reform is carried out through the project on “Support to Higher Education”. The REESAO (Network for Excellence in Higher Education in West Africa) also participates in the implementation of the LMD reform, in particular through the organization of information workshops on various issues relating to the LMD reform.

At the national level, the reform mainly involves ministries responsible for higher education and their partners. Several countries have already enacted the necessary legal texts governing the reform and set up national commissions for steering and/ or monitoring of the reform. At the institutional level, some institutions have already adopted legal frameworks, established technical units responsible for monitoring the reform and organized awareness raising workshops. A forum on the current state of the LMD reform in the CAMES member countries held in Dakar in April 2009 was used to assess progress made in the implementation of the reform and to identify challenges that need to be taken up. Indeed the forum identified several challenges that can be grouped into four categories related to the quality of teaching and learning, the pedagogic capacity of teachers, the level of research development and management of the credit systems.

African Quality Rating Mechanism: Higher education has been identified as a major area of focus in the African Union (AU) Plan of Action for the Second Decade of Education for Africa (2006-2015). Within the framework of this Plan of Action, the African Quality Rating Mechanism (AQRM) was instituted to ensure that the performance of higher education institutions can be compared against a set of criteria that takes into account the unique context and challenges of higher education delivery on the continent (Oyewole, 2011). AQRM is also envisioned to facilitate improvement in quality of delivery of institutions across the continent, and allow for an objective measure of performance. A continental system will pave the way for African institutions to compete more effectively in similar systems in operation at a global level, while also creating a case for review of the basis on which those global systems operate. The purpose of the African Higher Education Quality Rating Mechanism is to present an alternative to the existing global ranking/rating systems that do not take into consideration African specificities. It specifically addresses the AU priorities (as outlined in the Plan of Action for the Second Decade of Education) regarding the improvement of quality in African higher education.

The existence of a quality rating mechanism, specifically relevant to the African higher education context, will support the AUC in its endeavours to identify centres of excellence across the continent. It will also provide a means for the AUC to make decisions regarding which institutions or programmes can participate in the Mwalimu Nyerere African Union

Scholarship Scheme. A pilot run of AQRM was implemented in 2010 on eleven clusters of standards.

Regional Quality Assurance Framework: Another strategy for fostering harmony within the diverse African higher education system is the establishment of a regional quality assurance framework. The assumption undergirding the award of degrees and diplomas is that the quality of certificate will not be too significantly different from one institution to the other. For example, knowledge and skills of the holder of a bachelor's degree in chemistry from University of Cape Town should not be different from that of a person holding an equivalent degree from University of Cocody in Cote d'Ivoire. There is another layer of assumption- the minimum standards for earning the degree are similar in the two institutions. In Africa, both assumptions are largely not met. Harmonisation of standards for the award of degrees has been work in progress. However, the establishment of a regional quality assurance framework for achieving this goal has received endorsement of African Ministers of Education at the November 2008 meeting in Dakar.

The African quality assurance framework is being designed to have three key elements (Okebukola & Shabani, 2011). These are the benchmark/minimum standards, regional accreditation mechanism and the strengthening of institutional quality assurance. The basis of measurement in the quality assurance process is the degree of deviation from a set of minimum standards. This, therefore implies that consensus should be reached on what the minimum standards should be for every academic programme and for the operations of the entire institution. Consensus is built by relevant professional bodies and experts in various disciplines. The resultant of this consensus is the regional minimum standards and benchmarks.

Most African countries have minimum standards for the higher education system below which a programme is not deemed eligible to graduate students. Sub-regional benchmarks have been set for francophone West African countries being supervised by the African and Malagasy Council of Higher Education (CAMES). It is also noteworthy that individual country efforts at setting minimum standards and benchmarks are strong in the region. Ghana, Nigeria and South Africa have well-acclaimed minimum academic standards for their higher education systems. Weaving together of the national and sub-regional efforts is the thrust of the establishment of the regional minimum standards. This activity is expected to be undertaken by relevant experts and professional bodies. The standards and benchmarks are to serve as minimum and will in no way constrain individual institutions from expanding the horizon of learning experiences they provide their students or the richness of activities in the institution. With the minimum standards in place, the stage is now set for implementing the regional quality assurance mechanism.

The regional quality assurance mechanism is the assessment of programmes and institutions against set standards and benchmarks by a regional body with a mandate to undertake such task. A network of national and sub-regional quality assurance agencies is being proposed as the foundation structure for this regional body. Already, AfriQAN has been put in place as precursor.

- All countries without national quality assurance mechanisms or agencies should put these in place without delay
- Strengthen institutional and human capacity for quality assurance at the national, sub-regional and regional levels.
- Strengthen the external examiner system and encourage regional and sub-regional peer reviews

Creating Regional Centres of Excellence: In view of the limited capacity in science and technology in individual African countries, a concrete way of collaboration among African states is through the creation of Regional Centres of Excellence. There already exist several such centres. The International Centre for Insect Physiology and Ecology (ICIPE) was set up in Kenya way back in 1970 and is now a world reference in its field of specialisation. More recently, the International Institute for Water and Environmental Engineering (2IE), which has strong links with industry, was created in 2005 in Burkina Faso to carry out advanced training and research in areas that are directly relevant to Africa. The African Institute for Mathematical Sciences (AIMS) was established in South Africa in 2003 as a partnership of six international universities (Cambridge, Cape Town, Oxford, Paris Sud XI, Stellenbosch and Western Cape) to promote excellence in mathematics and sciences in Africa. Through its Next Einstein Initiative (NEI), AIMS plans to create 15 AIMS Centres across Africa over the next decade.

A different concept in creating Regional Centres of Excellence is to network existing institutions. For example, the Carnegie Corporation of New York is promoting high quality graduate training in Africa through a programme known as the Regional Initiative for Science and Education (RISE), which was launched in 2007 and which makes use of African universities of proven excellence in specific disciplines as training nodes in a network.

The Pan African University: In the Plan of Action for the Second Decade of Education for Africa, African Ministers of Education reiterated the need to promote quality in African institutions of higher education and research and to strengthen intra-African collaboration and networking between African Higher Education institutions. One of the African Union Commission's (AUC) responses to this felt need has been to set up the Pan African University (PAU). PAU is designed to meet the need for African higher education through capitalising on the experience and intellectual resources of the best African universities and research centres and using them to create regional knowledge 'hubs'. The Pan African University aims to fulfil the following objectives:

1. Promote science and technology in Africa and strengthen quality in African institutions of higher education and research;
2. speed up the exchange of results and data through African and international networks, including linkages between African academia and industry;
3. increase systematic intra-African mobility of researchers and students;
4. provide exemplars for enhancing attractiveness and global competitiveness of African higher education space;
5. produce an adequate supply of highly qualified Africans able to innovate in order to address the challenges facing the development of the African continent; and
6. improve the retention of skilled African professional human resources.

Five key thematic areas corresponding to the pressing needs of Africa have been identified and these are: space sciences; water and energy including climate change; basic science, technology and innovation; earth and life sciences; and governance, humanities and social sciences.

Five hubs, one in each of the five African regions and each specialising in a different field, have been identified, and each hub will network with other institutions in its respective field, thus creating a network of networks. The hubs and fields already identified are Nigeria in earth and life sciences, Cameroon in social and human sciences and governance, and Kenya in basic sciences technology and innovation. The host for a hub in water and energy sciences in North Africa is Algeria while space sciences is based in South Africa. This is a bold and innovative approach and it would certainly help in reinforcing the teaching and research capacity of existing institutions in fields that are very pertinent to Africa's development (Mohamedbhai, 2012).

Forecast for the Next Ten Years

There are a number of programmes and projects, highlighted below, whose appearance is looming in the horizon and which when birthed, will be the key defining features of quality standards in higher education in Africa in the next ten years.

Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Framework

The outlook is strong that a regionwide quality assurance and accreditation framework will be in place before 2017. The harmonisation of higher education with strong continental cooperation in quality assurance and accreditation is an action point in the African Union Commission (AUC) strategic Plan of 2014-2017. Within the framework of the support mechanism for Joint Africa-EU Strategic (JAES), a project on "Implementing the African Quality Rating Mechanism (AQRM) for African Universities and development of a Continental Quality Assurance and Accreditation Framework" has been launched in collaboration with the AUC, the Association of African Universities (AAU), and the European Commission (EC). The development of a Pan-African QA and Accreditation Framework is considered necessary by the African Union, to reinforce a harmonised system in Africa. The framework shall be based on analysis of the quality assurance procedures and accreditation mechanisms of selected African countries representing different sub-regions and education systems to identify common standards and practices. The initial steps in the actualisation of this framework including baseline survey, have been triggered by the African Union Commission.

African Quality Rating Mechanism (AQRM) for African Universities

As stated earlier, the AUC spearheaded the development of the African Quality Rating Mechanism (AQRM) to establish an African system that will ensure the performance of higher education institutions can be measured against a set of agreed criteria, and to help the institutions carry out self-evaluation to support the development of institutional culture of quality. AQRM also provides a basis for promoting harmonisation of African higher

education and mutual recognition of degrees and qualifications in line with the vision of the African Union. Implementation of AQRM supports the work of national, regional and continental quality assurance bodies. It also supports African higher education institutions to take ownership of their quality assurance processes and use the quality rating mechanism as a means of continuous quality improvement.

After a successful pilot run of AQRM in 2007-2010, a consultative process is ongoing to ensure that in the next year or two, the mechanism would have been fine-tuned including on-site verification by external experts of the self-assessment carried out by institutional actors. This will lead to the establishment of a more credible rating mechanism with wide regional acceptability.

Virtual Institute for Improving Quality in Higher Education in Africa

During the first quarter of 2014, a virtual institute is expected to be established through a joint effort by UNESCO (as lead agency) and other partners, to foster improvement in quality standards in higher education in Africa with a focus on teacher development. Professor Juma Shabani, Chargé de mission for Higher Education in the Division of Teacher Development and Higher Education, UNESCO Paris, is leading this effort whose objectives are:

1. To build/strengthen the capacity of teachers and other personnel in higher educational institutions in Africa in critical areas of national and regional need with a view to improving quality;
2. to enhance the knowledge and skills of academic staff in institutions of higher learning in Africa on (a) teaching of large classes; (b) effective utilisation of (meagre) resources; (c) modern methods of assessment and evaluation of students' learning; (d) basic guidance and counselling techniques; (e) basic skills of curriculum development; (f) techniques for writing grant-winning proposals; (g) implementing LMD reforms; and (h) quality assurance in higher education; and
3. to share experiences among staff in institutions of higher learning in Africa on best practices in research and community service within the context of the Action Plan of the 2009 World Conference on Higher Education and the African Union Decade on Education.

All staff of educational institutions in sub-Saharan Africa are eligible to participate in the training programmes. Registration is expected to be free.

Establishment of an ECOWAS Regional University

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has initiated steps towards the possible establishment of a regional university. A preliminary meeting of experts was held in September 2013 with a view to following up with a feasibility study.

During the first conference of ECOWAS Ministers of Education held in 2002, higher education was adopted as one of the regional priority programmes. The Ministers adopted the Protocol on Education and Training, and the Convention on the establishment of

Equivalence of Certificates in the region as the two major framework documents. The Education sector of ECOWAS was established 2003 to improve access of ECOWAS citizens to education of good quality at all levels; to facilitate free movement of students, lecturers and skilled labour; and to ultimately attain harmonisation of education systems of Member States. Although appreciable progress has been made over the years to improve education delivery at the basic and to some extent the secondary levels, access to tertiary education and universities in particular and its attendant quality have been abysmally low in most of the countries of the region. It is the view of ECOWAS as summarised in the concept note for the proposed establishment of the sub-regional university that higher education and research in the ECOWAS region need to be repositioned to contribute meaningfully to prosperity, peace and integration, anchored on the collective vision of the ECOWAS, including the Plan of Action for the Second Decade of Education for Africa. It should be tailored towards producing African-centred knowledge with global appeal that will form the basis of education at all levels and in all fields. Higher education should be challenged to produce graduates of highest level and quality that are skilled and knowledgeable, not just in technical and scientific know-how, but also in appropriate attitudes that compel them to contribute to the region's human resource base rather than join Africa's brain drain. It should be challenged further to derive new definitions for and by the citizenry of the sub-region, and for global concepts in the spheres of education and knowledge production, industrialisation, environmental management, politics, and economic development.

The regional university project is expected to enhance greater collaboration and mobility of scientists, students, staff and by so doing put the ECOWAS Community on the path of feasible integration of the education systems in line with Articles 6 and 7 of the ECOWAS Protocol on Education and Training; and the ECOWAS Convention on Equivalence of Certificates in the region. According to the concept note, the justification for the project includes:

- The ECOWAS Revised Treaty Chapter XIV, Article relating to Cooperation in the areas of human resources, social and cultural Affairs
- Decision A/DEC.3/01/03 Protocol on Education and Training
- Decision A/DEC.4/01/03 relating to the General Convention on Equivalence of Certificates
- Recommendations of statutory and technical meetings;
- AU plan of Action for the Second Decade of Education and Training (2006-2015)
- ECOWAS Strategic Priority on sustenance of Development and Cooperation

In particular, Articles 7 and 8 of the Protocol on Education and Training, Member States acknowledged that the cost of sustained, specialised graduate, post-graduate and research programmes in specialised centres are too heavy for individual countries to bear. As a result, Member States undertook to pool the resources of the region with a view to formulating high quality study programmes at less cost. To this end, the protocol has definite articles designated for harmonisation of admission, administration, examination, certification, research and development, staff and student transfers, academic programmes as well as teaching and training materials. In particular, Article 7(E) of the Protocol regarding cooperation in higher education and training states that "Member States undertake to

create specialised departments where necessary within existing institutions in order to up-grade and up-date them”.

Challenges and Recommendations

On the march to improving quality standards, there are a number of obstacles that need to be scaled. We will draw inspiration from the listing of these obstacles from a recent regional survey undertaken by Shabani in 2013 and reported in 2014 (about two three weeks ago).

Shabani surveyed the higher education community in Africa on the challenges to higher education in the region. Participants in the survey were asked to rank the challenges and propose remedial action. Respondents from 12 countries spread over all the sub-regions and one from the Council of Europe shared their views on the subject. The top ten challenges that were revealed in the results are listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Top Ten Challenges to Quality in Higher Education in Africa

Rank	Challenges
1	Depreciating quality of higher education teachers
2	Research capacity deficit
3	Infrastructural/facilities inadequacies
4	Lack of a regional quality assurance framework and accreditation system
5	Slow adoption of ICT for delivering quality higher education including distance education
6	Capacity deficit of quality assurance agencies
7	Weak internationalisation of higher education
8	Management inefficiencies
9	Slow adoption of LMD reforms
10	Poor quality of entrants into higher education from the secondary level

Source: Shabani (2014)

The top three challenges are depreciating quality of teachers, research capacity deficit and inadequacies in facilities for teaching, learning and research. A number of recommendations were made by participants in the study, one of which is the stimulus for the establishment of the Virtual Institute for Improving Quality of Higher Education in Africa. Table 2 provides a summary of other recommendations.

Table 2: Recommendations for Overcoming the Challenges to Quality Higher Education in Africa

Challenge	Suggested UNESCO HQ's intervention with partners in 2014-2015
Depreciating quality of higher education teachers	Establish the Virtual Institute for Improving Quality of Higher Education in Africa (VIIQAF) using the new Guide for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education
Research capacity deficit	Work with ROCARE to run sub-regional workshops on improving research capacity.

	Run module on Modern Methods of Conducting and Reporting Research in VIIQAF
Infrastructural/facilities inadequacies	Advocacy with National Governments
Lack of a regional quality assurance framework and accreditation system	Facilitate setting up of AHERS and African Higher Education Accreditation System.
Slow adoption of ICT for delivering quality higher education including distance education	Run modules on Use of ICT and application of ODL in VIIQAF
Capacity deficit of quality assurance agencies	Run modules on Quality Assurance in VIIQAF

Source: Shabani (2014)

Concluding Remarks

In this paper, we provided snapshots of efforts at improving quality standards in higher education in Africa. We noted that there are at least eight major efforts at harmonising higher education in the region. These are (a) implementation of the Arusha Convention; (b) introduction of the African Credit Transfer System; (c) articulation of the African Quality Rating Mechanism; (d) Creating regional centres of excellence; (e) the establishment of the African Higher Education and Research Space (AHERS); (f) establishment of the Pan African University; (g) LMD reforms in francophone countries; (h) the establishment of the Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Framework. The proposed ECOWAS University was also mentioned. These efforts are propelled by two drivers: the need to promote qualitative higher education in Africa and to foster African unity.

There is a heightened willingness in Africa to take full advantage of quality higher education. This is to complement the progress made in improvement in quantity. Many more countries are witnessing expansion in enrolment into higher education with a concomitant need to keep an eye on quality (Okebukola, 2013). It would appear that improvement in the quality front is yet to keep pace with the rapid gains in quantity. It is to this gap that attention should turn in the coming years. The on-going efforts at bolstering quality at the national and regional levels some of which are reported in this paper should not wane. Funding is a major handicap to the success of these efforts hence African governments need to pay more funding attention to the higher education delivery system.

Apart from the broad issue of funding, the teacher factor is worth addressing with vigour. The teacher is a key player in the delivery of quality higher education. If quality standards are set that are comparable with global best practices and the teachers have capacity deficit to deliver on such standards, the quality of graduates and research will be compromised. The report and action plan of the of the 2009 World Conference on Higher Education gave visibility to the deficiencies of many teachers in the higher education system in Africa especially in pedagogic and research skills. The 2013 survey by Shabani provided recent supportive empirical data. These justify the call for strengthening the capacity of teachers in African universities through various capacity-building regimes including the promised virtual institute and specialised on-site training in centres of excellence in higher education in the key areas of pedagogy and research.

The outlook for Africa in ensuring quality higher education is bright. It needs to be stressed that it is not enough to keep quality check on higher education while the lower levels of education are weak in quality. Since the chain is as strong as its weakest link, any attempt to assure quality in higher education should not leave unattended, the need to strengthen quality at the basic education level. The need for political will to keep quality atop the agenda of education at all levels and implement such agenda with a high degree of fidelity should be underlined and given priority in the years ahead.

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