Association of African Universities

Minutes
Meeting of AfriQAN Interim Committee Members
Dakar, Senegal
29-30 June 2009

Present

Professor M. Nkunya, Tanzanian Commission of Universities, Chairman

M. A.L. Cisse, Member, Ministre de l'Enseignement Superieure, Senegal

Mrs F. Asemadahun, Member, National Universities Commission, Nigeria

Professor Faisal Elhag, Association of Arab Universities (AArU)

Dr Mariama Sarr-Ceesay, UNESCO BREDA, Senegal

Prof. Papa GUEYE, Ministère Enseignement Supérieur, Senegal

Miss Adwoa Sey, AAU, Secretary

Mrs Gabrielle Hansen, AAU

Absent
Mr Theo Bhengu, with apologies

Mr Thembo Ramatsui, with apologies

Mr Idriss Ehfaza (it was proposed at the first meeting of the AfriQAN interim Committee that a representative from North Africa should be on the Committee. Mr Ehfaza, of the Libyan Quality Assurance Agency, was approached. He indicated interest but it was not possible to reach him before the meeting to request that he attend.)

Discussion
It was decided that minutes of the meeting should be sent to absent members for feedback, before distribution to a wider audience.
Meeting participants were given copies of proposed activities GIQAC will fund under AfriQAN during 2009/2010.
Participants indicated that it would be best for the AfriQAN secretariat to be hosted at the AAU for the foreseeable future. It would be best for the Committee to move as fast as possible with

activities, to take advantage of the current enthusiasm noticed, and to ensure that the revamped/renewed network gains ground before the workshop participants lose interest.

Experiences of ANQAAHE
Professor El-Hag made a presentation on the establishment and the work of ANQAAHE (Arab Network for Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education). He outlined the different forms of Quality Assurance currently operating in the Arab world. These include the network for institutional Quality Assurance in HEIs. There is also a council made up of representation from Higher education institutions, and there are agencies in different countries. There are nine agencies, of which four are in Africa – Tunisia, Libya, Morocco and Egypt.

Professor El-Hag noted that certain activities were considered very crucial in the setting up of a network. A workplan of activities should be seen to involve, or represent the needs of all countries in the network. It was also important to include all language groups, and to help set up QA agencies where they did not exist, and have training events for core standards and the evaluation of HEIs. He also said that it was important to ensure a way of evaluating EQAAs themselves. This is because most of them were linked to Ministries of Education and were therefore sometimes 'complacent'. He also explained that some QA agencies did not understand their role very well, and that there were cases of the merging of licensing and evaluation functions of EQAs. He also considered it important to develop guides for internal quality assurance, a guide for EQAs, and a guide for indicators.

Professor El-Hag, on asked on how long he thought it would take to get AfriQAN operational, said that ANQAAHE was actually established the previous year, with a conference. Activities regarding QA actually started in 1999, however due to some issues these were postponed until two years ago. Funding was received from the World Bank and UNESCO.

Professor El-Hag was asked about challenges in the implementation of activities in the network. In his opinion, one major problem was the unsustainability of funding. Another challenge was non-reaction of governments when applied to. It was for this reason that the advisory council had been formed with universities, to get things started. It had also been observed that there were some problems with some countries in the region refusing to recognize the certificates of other countries. This was however considered to be a teething problem. He also noted that in the cases of the network, activities for Gulf member states were not funded by the network donors.

ANQAAHE is a member of INQAAHE. Professor El-Hag advised that AfriQAN register formally with INQAAHE, as it was a good way to have contact with other networks.

AfriQAN documentation
Meeting participants then discussed the draft Constitution, which was prepared in 2007. Participants went through the draft constitution of AfriQAN and made changes. It was proposed that the reviewed document is presented at the General Assembly and Conference to be held in November 2009.A number of changes were made, and Adwoa was tasked with completing the changes and sending the document back to participants at the meeting before the end of July, preferably earlier. Professor Nkunya invited the committee members to hold the event in

Tanzania. The other members not present at the meeting are to be informed of this. Participants were asked to check their diaries and to indicate suitable dates.

Participants indicated that even though there was already a proposed budget and related activities which GIQAC would support, it was important to discuss what members of the Committee thought important, and come up with a short term strategy (three years), with related activities which would reflect the needs of QA agencies in different subregions of Africa, and a budget. Participants discussed activities to be kept in mind which could be included in the GIQAC 2009/2010 budget, or implemented if there were other sources of funds. The draft strategy is an annex to the minutes. Dr Sarr-Ceesay remarked that it would be also be useful to prepare a workplan for financing of these activities.

Cooperation between different language groups

The comment was made that there was sometimes a difficulty within different language groups in higher education, to perceive the usefulness of a network related to Quality Assurance, as members had different HE systems, which were already developed. A discussion involving all members ensued. Professor Nkunya remarked that it was important during these times to be very open-minded on what was possible, that language should not be a barrier to discussions, and that harmonization did not mean standardization. It was important to view cooperation on harmonization as a way of exchanging information on standards and benchmarks in different regions, and also as a way of facilitating academic mobility. AfriQAN should also make an effort to have all documents in English, French and Arabic.

*Financing*It was noted that at the present time, full financing of the network was not sustainable. It was not considered likely that fees would be sufficient for activities. It was therefore very important to maintain links with other networks in different parts of the world, for economies of scale in organizing events.

Activities

The meeting discussed the issue of core standards. It was proposed that one activity should be related to definitions of standards, and comparison of these with standards used in a number of agencies around the world.

In many countries n Africa, QA agencies are linked to the Ministry of Education. In cases where there is no national agency and no strong regional QA agency, AfriQAN should consider ways on improving the situation.

There are however limitations in being able to help countries in which there are no legal frameworks encompassing accreditation of HEIs. In these cases, support could be limited to sensitisation of governments and politicians.

It is therefore important to make sure links are established with regional agencies and different national agencies within certain regions, in order to ensure cooperation with local actors. AfriQAN should therefore also, as part of its activities organize meetings with agencies and national representatives in different sub-regions.

Membership fees

It was considered important to charge members of QA agencies, for events if not for membership of the network. It is also important to inform UNESCO that a level of cost sharing is taking place.

Funds from charging membership fees could be used for activities. Low or no fixed costs due to the location of the Secretariat at the AAU is an advantage.

Participants proposed increased cooperation with ANQAAHE.

There was a general discussion on sub regional bodies concerned with QA, and there was general agreement that though there was none for Anglophone West African countries, it was not necessary to impose a structure. Meeting participants were informed that RESAEAU had a great deal of information on the LMD reform.

Way Forward

It was agreed that:

- The reviewed draft constitution would be sent to members for comments
- A meeting would be called for a General Assembly, to be held in November 2009 where a Board will be elected to to ratify the constitution.
- Changes would be made to the website to reflect discussions at the meeting, eg. putting photographs of participants at meetings on the home page
- The re-phrased Mission of AfriQAN should be sent to meeting participants by Friday 3rd July 2009. The reviewed draft constitution should be sent to participants of the Capacity-building workshop held in April, as well as other members already admitted to AfriQAN by the AAU;
- Members should be asked to send addresses and relevant information on their EQAs to the AfriQAN Interim Committee Secretary.