



**ASSOCIATION OF AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES
ASSOCIATION DES UNIVERSITES AFRICAINES**

اتحاد الجامعات الافريقيه

**Meeting on Regional
Harmonization of
Higher Education for Africa**

**24th – 26th February, 2009
Accra, Ghana**

MEETING REPORT

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1. *Brief Background*

In implementing the Plan of Action for the Second Decade of Education for Africa, the African Union Commission (AUC) has embarked on a process of promoting quality assurance and developing a framework for harmonization of higher education programmes in Africa, which has been endorsed by the Third Ordinary Session of the Conference of Ministers of Education in Africa (COMEDAF III). The Association of African Universities (AAU) is designated as the lead implementing agency for the AUC's higher education activities. Besides, Regional Economic Communities (RECs), relevant organizations at continental level, and regional associations of universities have been identified as key players for the implementation of the harmonization process.

A validation meeting was organized in March 2008 by the AAU, on behalf of and in collaboration with the AUC, to discuss and adopt an effective way towards implementing the African Union Harmonization Strategy; the Quality Rating Mechanism; and the revision of the Arusha Convention. It was pledged to sustain the implementation of the processes and embark on aligning organizational activities in support of regional harmonization. In the *Statement of Commitment of the Validation Meeting*, it was agreed to raise awareness about the harmonization strategies; to facilitate interactions with national governments (quality assurance agencies, accreditation bodies, Ministry of education, etc); and to share reports on progress made in the implementation of aligned activities. It was also committed to formalize relationships; and streamline existing initiatives at the continental, regional, national, and institutional levels.

As follow-up to the validation meeting and to sustain cooperation for advancing the higher education harmonization process, the Association of African Universities has organized a meeting on regional harmonization from 24th to 26th February 2009 in Accra, Ghana. *The Programme of the meeting is attached in Appendix I.*

1.2. *Objectives*

The main objectives of the regional harmonization meeting were:

- to **provide input for better conceptualisation** of the Africa Union harmonization strategy, quality rating mechanism, and the revision of Arusha convention;
- to **create a platform for dialogue and action** in promoting regional initiatives which are in line with a continental process of harmonization;
- to **streamline cooperation between regional organizations** to move the African higher education harmonization process forward;
- to **identify specific roles and responsibilities** of Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and Regional Associations of Universities; and
- to **draft a work plan** for harmonization activities for the year 2009.

1.3. Participants

The meeting on regional harmonization of higher education for Africa was attended by participants from the following organizations.

Organizations at Continental Level

- The African Union Commission (AUC)
- The Association of African Universities (AAU)
- The UNESCO Regional Office for Education in Africa (UNESCO/BREDA)
- The Association for the Development of Education in Africa – Working Group on Higher Education (ADEA-WGHE)
- The Pan-African Institute for Education Development / Institut Pan-Africain de l'Education pour le Développement (IPED)

Regional Economic Communities (RECs)

- The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)
- The Common Market for East and Southern Africa (COMESA)
- The Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD)

Regional Associations of Universities / Regional Council for Higher Education

- The Inter University Council of East Africa (IUCEA)
- The African and Malagasy Council for Higher Education / Conseil Africain et Malgache pour l'Enseignement Supérieur (CAMES)
- The Association of Arab Universities (AARU)

The list of participants is attached in Appendix II.

2.0. PRESENTATIONS

2.1. Opening Remarks

The meeting was opened by the Secretary General of the AAU, Prof. Goolam Mohamedbhai. The Secretary General warmly welcomed participants and reminded that the African Union has identified higher education as an area of focus in its Plan of Action for the Second Decade of Education for Africa; and regional harmonization of higher education features as one of the strategies in the Plan of Action. He noted that the implementation of the harmonization strategy needs establishing a well-defined process with clear objectives and targets.

Drawing some lessons from the Bologna process, Prof. Mohamedbhai identified three important things that need to be considered. First there needs to be not only a strong commitment but an equally active and continuous involvement of Ministers of Education in the harmonization process. Second the active participation of regional university associations, especially of the Association of African Universities, is crucial. And third, a clear road map with objectives and target dates must be established.

The Secretary General underlined that implementing harmonization process requires very high financial and human resources and thus it is very important to address the issue of resources. He noted that the lack of capacity at all levels in Africa is well known and can be a serious constraint, and this too needs to be taken into account. Finally, he reassured the commitment of the Association of African Universities to provide whatever support possible in ensuring a successful implementation of the African Union Strategy for Harmonization of Higher Education Programmes.

In her welcome remarks, Dr. Beatrice Njenga from the African Union Commission reminded that the AU harmonization strategy and the establishment of a quality rating mechanism have been endorsed by the Third Ordinary Session of the Conference of Ministers of Education (COMEDAF III) in August 2007. She underlined that there is a political backing from African leaders to the endeavors in promoting the quality of higher education as it is key to the development of the continent. She noted the usefulness of the rating mechanism to quality enhancement and highlighted the need for developing instruments to apply the mechanisms for self-evaluation in higher education institutions.

Dr. Njenga pointed out that the development of a quality rating mechanism will help the African Union to identify 'leading African universities' that can participate in the Mwalimu Nyerere Scholarship Scheme. And she urged for urgent execution of quality rating so that it would be possible to report on some outcomes of the initiation to COMEDAF IV. She informed participants that a revised version of the Arusha Convention has been submitted recently to member states for their feedback and consultation. Finally, Dr. Njenga underlined the importance of meaningful and productive collaboration amongst all key players for successful implementation of the Harmonization Strategy.

2.2. Presentations from AAU Consultant

The following three topics were presented by Dr. Yohannes Woldetensae, AAU Consultant to the meeting and a Senior Expert in Higher Education Quality Assurance.

- The African Union Harmonization Strategy for HE: Major Focus Areas
- An African HE Quality Rating Mechanism: Purpose and Implications
- Revision and Expanded Ratification of the Arusha Convention

2.2.1. *The African Union Harmonization Strategy for HE: Major Focus Areas*

Dr. Woldetensae reminded that '*Harmonization*' refers to the synchronization and coordination of higher education provision in Africa; and that it is not synonymous with standardization or creating uniformity and identical HE systems. He noted that the main goals of harmonization are to bridge the gap between educational systems that exist as a result of colonial legacies; facilitate the mobility of students and academic staff across the continent; promote the development of effective quality assurance mechanisms; and to contribute to the vision of the African Union in building an integrated Africa.

The consultant elucidated the main concepts of the AU harmonization strategy by describing each of the five major focus areas.

- I. Establishment and Maintenance of Continental Political Commitment to the Process of Harmonization;
- II. Cooperation in Information Exchange;
- III. Development and Maintenance of a Continental Framework for Higher Education Qualifications;
- IV. Creation of Minimum Standards in Targeted Qualifications; and
- V. Establishment of Joint Curriculum Development and Student Mobility Schemes.

Dr. Woldetensae highlighted that the coordinate efforts of regional and continental organizations are decisive to execute the harmonization strategy; and it is necessary to clarify specific roles and formalize agreements between the key organizations. He underlined that financial and human resources are critical to move the harmonization process forward. In his concluding remarks, the consultant emphasized that it is useful to appoint full-time technical core staff in the Africa Union Commission; and assign coordinators in RECs and AAU for successful implementation.

2.2.2. An African HE Quality Rating Mechanism: Purpose and Implications

The consultant started by explaining the several purposes of quality rating mechanism. He mentioned that an African rating initiation would motivate HEIs and QA agencies towards the development of institutional cultures of quality and commitment to quality; foster comparability among academic qualifications; help to compare the performance of higher education institutions against a set of criteria; provide a means for determining leading universities for participation in the AU Scholarship Scheme; create basis to identifying centers of excellences across the continent; and consequently contributes to improve the status of African HEIs at a global level.

Dr. Woldetensae illustrated the similarity as well as the distinction between 'Ranking' and 'Rating'. He pointed out that rating involves identifying appropriate quality criteria and balancing between measurable and relevant indicators for making judgments. He indicated that rating is useful in promoting quality improvement; and as instrument for self evaluation. He further pointed out that, acknowledging diversity of contexts and considering international practices, it is essential to determine rating criteria of inputs, processes, and outcomes at institutional and program levels.

The consultant noted that, instead of three-point-scale: 'Unsatisfactory' 'Satisfactory' or 'Excellent', a five-point-scoring system is more appropriate to assign a value for each criterion as POOR, INADEQUATE, SATISFACTORY, GOOD, or EXCELLENT. He explained as rating is highly influenced by the weights given, it is useful to apply pragmatic Rating-Indicator-Weighting scheme. He finally suggested the need for enriching the African Union quality rating mechanism.

2.2.3. Revision and Expanded Ratification of the Arusha Convention

In his third presentation, Dr. Woldetensae reminded participants that the Arusha Convention was adopted in 1981 and twenty contracting states ratified the convention. He explained that major objective of the convention is to support the comparability of programmes and recognition of academic qualifications as well as to facilitating the movement of students and trained human power across the continent. He noted that the revision and expanded ratification of the Arusha Convention is necessary as legal mechanism to implement the AU Harmonization Strategy.

The consultant pointed out that the revised Convention will be more detailed and make much stronger commitments than are currently required. It will be accompanied by a series of Annexes, each of which will require separate ratification. And countries will be expected to develop timetables for action that indicate the dates by which they will achieve stipulated targets. He finally underlined that the expanded ratification requires greater advocacy; and guidelines on the implementation of the revised Arusha Convention are essential.

2.3. Presentations from Regional Associations of Universities

Three presentations were offered by IUECA, AARU, and CAMES to provide an integrating platform for information exchange on current regional initiatives regarding harmonization of higher education.

2.3.1. Presentation from IUCEA

Prof. Moses Golola, Deputy Executive Secretary of the Inter University Council of East Africa (IUECA), began by introducing the vision and mission of IUECA as an inter-governmental organisation of five East African States (Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi). He explained that initiatives in regional harmonization are currently in progress to facilitate the comparability of study programmes and to promote the mobility of students and staff in the member states. These include:

- Students' Credit Accumulation and Transfer System
- Framework for describing and quantifying the content of study programmes
- Developing comparable admission requirements for the sub-region
- Common criteria and benchmarks for quality assurance in higher education
- Sharing information on mechanisms and status of QA and accreditation of institutions and programmes

Prof. Golola noted that while the process is in the advanced stage to bring in higher education councils of Rwanda and Burundi into the initiative, a joint project is initiated through a cooperation agreement between IUCEA and the Commission for Higher Education (CHE-Kenya), National Council for Higher Education (NCHE-Uganda), Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU-Tanzania). He indicated that in developing Students' Credit Accumulation and Transfer System, regional and national committees are working jointly towards its realization.

He explained that the East Africa regional initiative focuses on promoting both internal and external quality assurance at programme level; achieving training of critical mass of institutional QA coordinators; piloting internal evaluation of selected programmes; and training of peers for external evaluation. It was pointed out that an IUCEA Handbook called “Roadmap to Quality” has been developed as regional framework. He informed that IUCEA is undertaking collaborative research programmes and projects with various institutions of the region through harmonized research methodologies. Prof. Golola concluded by highlighting that the success and effectiveness of the harmonization process being introduced by the Inter University Council of East Africa (IUECA) depends on full support of the universities, the National Higher Education Regulatory Agencies and the respective East African countries.

2.3.2. Presentation from AARU

Prof. Faisal El-Hag, Assistant Secretary General of the Association of Arab Universities (AARU), gave a presentation about the role of AARU in the contest of regional quality assurance initiatives. As introductory remarks, he explained that AARU was founded in 1964 and currently it has 215 member institutions. The number of students enrolled is around 6 millions and the academic staff is about 250,000.

Prof. El-Hag pointed out that the AARU has formed the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Council for the member universities with the aim to build their capabilities in QA. The Council has organized a workshop attended by 140 staff of QA Units from different Universities; issued internal and external evaluation guide; and prepared Indicators and criteria for assessing institutions’ performance. He mentioned that the guides and performance indicators were piloted at 10 different universities to test their applications and to ensure effective implementation. Prof. El-Hag further indicated that the core quality standards are found to be in line with the International and regional practices as verified by the survey of AARU on 29 Countries. He finally remarked that none of the indicators used in the International Rating Systems (ranking of world universities) are applicable to Arab universities

2.3.3. Presentation from CAMES

Prof. Mamadou Sall, Secretary General of the Conseil Africain et Malgache pour l’Enseignement Supérieur (CAMES), gave presentation on Harmonization Efforts of CAMES and LMD Reform initiatives. He explained the main missions and objectives of CAMES that include promoting cooperation in scientific and cultural issues among its 17 member countries; facilitating the recognition and equivalence of diplomas and degrees; encouraging mobility of teachers and researchers; assisting member states in their implementation to align curriculum; and ensuring the collection and dissemination of scientific information. He noted that the Licence-Masters-Doctorate (LMD) reform contributes in harmonizing African higher education and facilitates the reconfiguration of academic programs in francophone universities. He informed that LMD cells are established at universities and activities are coordinated by networks of universities and conferences of rectors and presidents.

Prof. Sall pointed out that in addition to the three degree levels, the LMD reform will help establish a credit-transfer system. Different sub-regional organizations are integrated to advance the reform and a steering committee is harmonizing the different models of sub-regions towards a system of transferable credits to facilitate comparability of academic programmes and mutual recognition within CAMES countries and beyond. He also mentioned that CAMES and the Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF) work in collaboration to promote the development of quality assurance and monitoring system in the region.

2.4. Presentations of Regional Economic Communities

2.4.1. Presentation from ECOWAS

Mrs. Rachel Ogbe, Principal Programme Officer of Education in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), started her presentation by introducing that ECOWAS is founded in 1975 and consists of fifteen West African countries that account for over 40% of sub-Saharan Africa population. She noted that education is one of ECOWAS major focus areas. She indicated that there are initiatives to harmonizing educational and training systems in the member states through the signed protocol of cooperation and regional convention on recognition and equivalence of qualifications.

Mrs. Ogbe pointed out that, in addition to obvious differences that exist between countries due to different political and colonial legacies, the highly limited personnel is a main challenge to execute harmonization initiatives. She noted that the effective implementation of Certificate Harmonization in the ECOWAS region requires synergy between diverse group of partners and an increased support to funding. Finally she concluded by remarking that political will in the region is very strong.

2.4.2. Presentation from COMESA

On her presentation, Dr. Drinah Nyirenda from the Common Market for East and Southern Africa (COMESA) explained that one of the priority areas of COMESA is policy harmonization for the deepening of regional integration and co-operation. She mentioned an initiative of the region in developing Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Programme with the creation of centres of excellence (universities) to catalyze research and promotion of best practices that leads to increased productivity. She noted that harmonized quality higher education is critical to ensure qualified human resources and technology development.

Dr. Nyirenda informed participants that COMESA, in partnership with NEPAD and other organizations, will organize from 7-11 September 2009 in Lusaka, Zambia a Ministerial Conference on Higher Education in Africa with the Theme: *Engaging African Universities in the Development Agenda*. The conference is expected to mobilize political commitment and facilitate networking at all levels to sustain high quality higher education in Africa. She finally remarked that COMESA values regional integration and harmonization of African higher education and gives its full support to the process.

2.4.3. Briefing from CEN-SAD

Dr. Abdulrrauf Abdulaal from the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD) noted that the importance of harmonizing higher education is recognized in the regional organization. He mentioned that CEN-SAD is just at initial stage of setting up an education office; and remarked that there is no much to brief on concrete initiatives of the Community of Sahel-Saharan States regarding higher education harmonization activities at this stage.

2.5. Presentations of Organizations at Continental Level

2.5.1. Presentation from IPED

Dr. Amadou Diop, Executive Secretary of the Pan-African Institute for Education Development (IPED), started his presentation by providing some historical background about the establishment of his organization being founded in July 2001. He pointed out the role of IPED as continental observatory for education in the implementation of the plan of the second decade of education in Africa that include assisting in the training of Education Management Information System (EMIS); developing and maintaining a database of indicators for African education; and publishing periodic reports on the state of education in Africa as well as monitoring and evaluation at the continental level.

Dr. Diop expressed the IPED wishes to strengthen its relations with the AAU in the provision and maintaining of data relating to higher education in Africa. He concluded by assuring his organizations' commitment to contribute to a better rationalization and synergy of efforts towards the success of the Second Decade of Education and the African Union harmonization strategy for higher education.

2.5.2. Presentation from AAU

Ms Adwoa Sey, QA project officer of the Association of African Universities (AAU), reminded that the AAU was founded with 37 institutions in 1967 and currently it has 212 members. She noted that AAU's activities are based on Core Programmes that are approved by its Board; although it has various initiatives with other organizations. She pointed out the AAU activities in promoting quality higher education that include inauguration of African QA network, learning events on institutional self assessment, liaison with other continental QA bodies, and executing '*Quality Assurance Support Programme for African Higher Education*'.

Ms Sey explained that the QA support programme intends to promote QA in HEIs and to support existing and emerging national quality assurance/accreditation agencies in developing strong external evaluation and monitoring systems. She informed that a capacity building workshop for African QA agencies will be organized by the AAU in April 2009. She also pointed out that AAU, in partnership with World Bank and UNESCO, is actively involved in a *Global Initiative for Quality Assurance Capacity* that is designed to support continental QA network through capacity building in HEIs and national QA bodies. Finally she underlined that funding is a major challenge for AAU and there is a need for more engagement to increase fund raising.

3. PLENARY DISCUSSIONS

The plenary discussions that followed the presentations highlighted a number of points. The issues that emerged from the discussions are summarized under various topical areas and presented as follows.

3.1. The African Union's strategy for harmonization

Participants underlined that the successful implementation of the AU harmonization strategy demands high financial resources and competent human capacity within the key organizations and thus it is crucial to addressing the issue of funding and resource mobilization. The active support of Ministers and sustained political commitments of governments are also considered to be essential to advance the process forward. It was pointed out that the harmonization strategy emanates from the plan of second decade of education in Africa and so harmonizing higher education is agenda of AU. It was also noted that COMEDAF is a strategic forum where harmonization issues can be championed on the continent. The need to secure political commitments both at national and regional levels was emphasized.

It was highlighted that the development of national quality assurance system is crucial for harmonizing higher education at regional and continental levels. However participants recognized that it can not be waited until it is established in each country; and the harmonization process has to start somehow but by focusing on capacity building at the same time. It was also pointed out that some RECs and individual countries are far advanced with their quality assurance mechanisms and so it is useful to disseminate best practices to other regions. It was further suggested that targeted study tours of country teams are helpful to learn from each other. The AAU initiatives in supporting existing and emerging national quality assurance/accreditation agencies was also noted to be useful and need to be encouraged.

It was also recognized that the implementation of the LMD Reform in Francophone universities contributes to harmonization process in Africa. The identification of best practices in other regions (such as the experiences of the Association of Arab Universities) was also indicated so that lessons can be taken to inform the continental harmonization agenda. Participants pointed out that media involvement is essential for advocacy and there must be increasing visibility in the media in pushing the agenda of harmonization. It was noted that the effective implementation of the harmonization strategy requires both top-down and bottom-up approaches; and considering the cultural dimension is essential.

3.2 Quality Rating Mechanism

Important points were raised regarding the issues of quality rating mechanism. Participants underlined that the aim of African rating system need to be primarily at quality development so that HEIs employ it for self-evaluation and to measure their performances with regard to their missions and goals.

The fact that no university association rates its members was another issue that has been highlighted. It was underlined that the rating should be done by external independent assessors; and it would be fundamental error for the AAU to be responsible for rating its own members and this could have detrimental effects to the association itself. It was noted, as part of supporting institutions and promoting quality assurance, AAU may coordinate and follow up the process. It was also pointed out that AAU, partly by outsourcing as required, takes up the responsibility in the development of tools and enrichment of the rating mechanisms to initiate a piloting phase.

It was also noted that enriching the current Quality Rating Mechanism should not be a process by itself but need to go parallel with the piloting phase as complementary activity. A piloting phase may be undertaken in 5 countries, preferably, selected from each of the five economic regions/blocks covering the continent.

Participants agreed that an African rating system should not focus on ranking. It was underscored that global ranking is misused as unfair marketing tool to promote some universities than being relevant indicator of quality to measure the performance of institutions. Participants affirmed that academic ranking of world universities is not appropriate for Africa; and so it is useful to develop a continental framework of rating that aims primarily at quality improvement and considers both the African context and international good practices.

3.3. Arusha Convention

Participants highlighted the need for integrating regional (CAMES, ECOWAS) conventions on the recognition of certificates, with the Arusha Convention so that efforts at regional levels are aligned with each other and to the continental framework. It was noted that the different regional initiations involved in harmonization and equivalence of qualifications need to be streamlined.

Participants pointed out that the review process for the Arusha Convention has been slow and awareness of the Convention in individual countries is very limited. It was suggested to use advocacy forum involving Ministers (COMEDAF) as well as Chief Directors in Education Ministries (who are technical experts) in order to advance the review of the Arusha Convention and facilitate the expanded ratification. It was also pointed out the need for experts meeting to validate the revised Convention.

3.4. Promoting Continental Information System

Participants recognized the need for establishing reliable data base of higher education institutions and their programmes at national level to effectively develop a continental information tool. It was noted that AU observatory is in establishment phase and it needs time to set up a system for sharing information: Collection – Verification – Dissemination. It was highlighted the need to develop guidelines for data delivery; and strengthening education statistical units at the national levels for effective data collection and information generation.

It was suggested that the UNESCO Institute of Statistics data and global monitoring reports can be useful information sources in addition to IPED initiatives of establishing continental information tool (AU observatory). The issue of how to streamline IPED initiation in gathering information on African higher education with AAU has been raised. It was pointed out that AAU does not create a database, but provides a website link to its members.

3.5. Reinforcing Collaboration between AAU and AUC

It was noted that the Association of African Universities (AAU) needs resources, both financial and human, to undertake the huge tasks as lead implementing agency; and thus the support from African Union Commission (AAU) is essential. It was explained that AAU funding is mainly from membership fees of about 100 (in-good-standing) out of 212 registered members, for running the secretariat. Other funding that AAU receives is directed at its core programmes and specified activities.

The meeting recognized the capacity limitations of the AAU to single-handedly execute AUC's all higher education activities. The need for reinforcing collaboration between the AUC and the AAU was underlined. It was pointed out that AAU and AUC will work in partnership and in joint consultation to enhance fund raising. It was also reassured that the AAU is committed to providing all possible support to ensure the successful implementation of AUC's higher education activities.

4. GROUP SESSIONS

The presentations and plenary discussions were then followed by group sessions. The group discussions aimed at sharing information, define specific roles of regional and continental organizations, and propose working plan of activities to implementing the process of harmonizing higher education in Africa.

4.1. Themes and Discussion Points

The following four themes were presented for group discussions.

1. Proposals for effective networking and cooperation between regional organizations and national regulatory bodies of higher education (quality assurance and accreditation agencies, Ministry of education, etc).
2. Feasible approaches to streamlining harmonization activities between RECs and the corresponding Regional Associations of Universities.
3. Identifying specific roles of regional and continental organizations in implementing the African Union strategy for harmonizing higher education programmes, the quality rating mechanism, and the revision and ratification of the Arusha Convention.
4. Drafting a work plan for harmonization activities for the year 2009.

The following points were presented for discussion.

- What are effective mechanisms to facilitate formal cooperation and effective networking between regional associations of universities and national accreditation/QA bodies; as well as between RECs and national Ministries of Education and QA agencies?
- How can the issue of countries belonging to more than one REC (i.e. Countries' multiple membership in RECs) be effectively addressed?
- What should be done to establish strong education desks in the Secretariats of RECs?
- To what extent is the AU Harmonization Strategy recognized as one integral activity and working agenda in the regional organizations?
- How can regional associations of universities and RECs streamline existing initiatives for effective implementation of the AU Harmonization Strategy?
- What mechanisms should be established to publicize and create awareness on harmonization initiatives of RECs and monitor progress reports on harmonization processes?
- What roles should each organization play in taking the harmonization process forward?
- Identify the specific roles of regional and continental organizations to promote and advance the AU Harmonization Strategy, quality rating mechanism, and to ensure expanded ratification and implementation of the Arusha Convention?
- What additional financial and human resources are required within the RECs and other key organizations in order to implement the harmonization process? Identify mechanisms to ensure adequate provision of funding.
- Identify a limited but focused number of harmonization activities to draft your organizations' work plan for the year 2009.
- What are effective strategies and monitoring mechanisms to facilitate the implementation of the identified activities?
- What are the ***immediate next steps*** in implementing the AU Harmonization Strategy, the quality rating mechanism, and the revision and ratification of the Arusha Convention?

4.2. Issues Raised in the Group Discussions

The group session discussions are summarized as follows.

Cooperation and networking

Participants underlined the importance of cooperation and networking to establish strong links between regional organizations and national regulatory bodies for promoting initiatives in higher education harmonization activities. It was highlighted that efforts at regional levels should be aligned with each other to form continental framework so that collaborative linkages are established between all key organizations. It is necessary to create synergy at all levels.

Multiple membership in RECs

It was noted that overlapping of countries is not necessarily a problem for RECs if properly networked to communicate with their member states. In RECs with many countries, smaller sub-regional networks may be useful for implementing harmonization activities effectively. It was indicated that the African Union is working to rationalize multiple membership. It was also pointed out that the general strategy of AU is to use existing structures and avoid setting up new institutions that create duplication.

Strong education desks in RECs

It was observed that RECs have many other responsibilities and major issues to handle beside education; and harmonization of higher education is not their only concern. RECs are aware of their inadequate capacity and the need for strong education desk to effectively network with their member states. It was noted that too much should not be expected with respect to education sectors of RECs unless they are well developed.

Identifying champions for outsourcing

A suggestion was made to identify a strong regional or national universities association which can play the lead role in championing and lobbying on harmonization and higher education quality assurance issues at the national and regional levels. The selection of such a strategic implementing agency must take into account its proximity, technical capacity, resource availability, etc. Outsourcing complemented by capacity building was identified as useful strategy for RECs.

Streamlining interaction between RECs and regional university associations

It was pointed out that there is need to streamline the interaction between RECs and corresponding regional university associations. In their role as HE advocates, the Regional University Associations need to work with the RECs in regional education agenda as lobbyists for harmonization and by providing support to their member institutions and encourage them to participate in quality rating programmes. It was noted that regional association of universities could be important implementing agency for HE activities of RECs.

Documentation, information dissemination and awareness creation

It was highlighted that proper documentation, information dissemination, awareness creation, advocacy, and timely reporting is very necessary and has to be taken seriously. Participants underlined that there must be a systematic way for sharing what is being done by key organizations at the continental, regional and national levels. RECs need to document what they have done and submit a report soon considering this as an important activity. It was noted that the regional bodies need to play a key role in raising awareness through communication with national regulatory bodies.

Mobilizing resources

It was observed that the current resource commitments are inadequate with respect to the resource demands that are needed to implementing the harmonization strategy and quality rating. The participants underlined the need for mobilizing both human and financial resources.

Visible HE structure in AUC

The issue of creating visible higher education structure in AU Commission, that reflects the huge recognition given by leaders, was highlighted.

Review progress after Validation Meeting

It was pointed out to monitoring and assessing progress made on decisions taken at the March 2008 Validation Meeting. It was noted such an assessment will assist in identifying to what extent progress was made with tasks assigned to various organizations and to learn from the shortcomings and difficulties encountered. Unaccomplished tasks can possibly be integrated into new plans of action with new strategies for implementation.

Pragmatic actions plans

The issue of pragmatism (practicality and strategic) has been given strong emphasis in the discussions. Participants underlined that specific actions plans and realistic time frames need to be set in order to initiate successful implementation of the AU Harmonization Strategy in a pragmatic manner. It was highlighted to be pragmatic in drafting work plan considering the existing capacity and resources of continental and regional organizations.

It was consequently agreed to draft a six-month plan of action focusing on three main result areas that will create basis for embarking on implementing the harmonization process. Participants underscored the need for regular follow-up mechanisms and formal reporting to review progress in the implementation; and to plan concrete activities for the next phases.

5. PROPOSED PLAN OF ACTION AND COMMUNIQUÉ

5.1. Proposed Plan of Action

The meeting developed a framework of action plan by identifying three key result areas that are of essence in moving the AU Harmonization Strategy, the quality rating mechanism, and the revision and ratification of the Arusha Convention forward.

Framework of Action Plan for Harmonization

Result Area – 1			
IMPROVING VISIBILITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION / HARMONIZATION			
Activities	Indicators	Time Frame	Implementer
1. Develop communication and publicity strategy	Communication strategy document	3 – 6 months	AAU & ADEA-WGHE (Focal)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website link for harmonization • Publishing in e-newsletters • Involving public media 	Created website links		AUC
2. Advocacy and awareness creation at every appropriate forum	Increased visibility on media		RECs Associations of Universities
Result Area – 2			
PILOTING THE QUALITY RATING MECHANISM			
1. Enrich rating criteria and develop tools to guide HEIs on data requirement	Report on piloting exercise	6 months	AAU (Focal)
2. Pilot the QRM in 5 countries (preferably from each of the regions)			HEIs QA Agencies
Result Area – 2			
REVIEW AND EXPANDED RATIFICATION OF THE ARUSHA CONVENTION			
1. Finalize the revision of the Arusha Convention	Finalized version of Arusha Convention	6 months	UNESCO (Focal)
2. Advocate for ratification			AUC

5.2 Communiqué

Emerging from the presentations, plenary sessions, and group discussions, a statement of commitment was developed and adopted by the meeting.

COMMUNIQUÉ

Meeting on Regional Harmonization of Higher Education for Africa 24th – 26th February Accra, Ghana

We the participants of the Meeting

RECOGNIZING THAT

- Networks are vital for effective progress on harmonization of HE in Africa;
- It is critical to set up systems which transcend individual efforts in order to ensure sustained progress;
- There is the need to streamline the processes of interaction between Regional Economic Communities, national accreditation boards, and regional university associations;
- The need for increased visibility of the Harmonization process; and
- The need to document and report on regional initiatives and achievements.

AGREE TO

- Set up mechanisms for regular communication on harmonization efforts and monitor the progress of agreed framework activities;
- Raise awareness on higher education harmonization initiatives in our interactions with national governments, HEIs, and national accreditation and QA agencies;
- Commit resources (financial, technical and political) to quality assurance and harmonization of higher education in Africa; and
- Encourage the AU and UNESCO to work on the revision of the Arusha Convention and at lobbying for ratification.

APPENDIX I**Programme of the Meeting**

Day One: February 24th		
Time	Activity	Presenter
8:30 – 9:30	Arrival and Registration	
FIRST - SESSION		
9:30 – 9:40	Welcome Remarks	Dr. Beatrice Njenga
9:40 – 9:50		Prof. Goolam Mohamedbhai
9:50 – 10:00	Opening and Introduction of Participants	
10:00 – 10:30	<u>Presentation:</u> The African Union Harmonization Strategy for Higher Education: Major Focus Areas	Dr. Yohannes Woldetensae (AAU Consultant)
<i>The presentation aims to provide input for better conceptualisation of the Harmonization Strategy by describing the major focus areas and the integrated strategies for implementing the processes of harmonizing higher education systems across Africa.</i>		
10:30 – 11:00	Coffee Break	
11:00 – 11:30	<u>Presentation:</u> An African Higher Education Quality Rating Mechanism: Purpose and Implications	Dr. Yohannes Woldetensae (AAU Consultant)
<i>The presentation aims to increase awareness on Quality Rating Mechanism and its implications to improving the quality of African higher education; and to elucidate associated practical issues.</i>		
11:30 – 12:30	Reflections on Presentations and Plenary Discussion	Dr. Beatrice Njenga
12:30 – 2:00	Lunch Break	
SECOND - SESSION		
2:00 – 2:20	<u>Presentations:</u> Harmonization of Higher Education in Africa: Highlights from East African Initiatives	Prof. Moses Luutu Golola
2:00 – 2:40	<u>Presentations:</u> The role of AARU in the Contest of Regional Quality Assurance Initiatives	Prof. Faisal Abdalla El-Hag
<i>The purpose of the briefings is to provide an integrating platform for information exchange on current initiatives, with updates from Regional Associations of Universities, in advocating harmonization process and promoting quality assurance in higher education institutions.</i>		
2:40 – 3:30	Discussion	
3:30 – 4:00	Coffee Break	
4:00 – 4:30	<u>Presentation:</u> Harmonization Efforts of CAMES and LMD Reform Initiatives	Prof. Mamadou M. Sall
<i>The purpose of the presentation is to promote awareness on LMD reform initiatives as input for facilitating the recognition of academic qualifications in Francophone African countries; and the implications to regional and continental harmonization of higher education.</i>		
4:30 – 5:20	Plenary Discussion	Prof. Goolam Mohamedbhai
5:20 – 5:30	Day-One Closing Remarks	Ms Adwoa Sey

Day Two: February 25th		
Time	Activity	Presenter
THIRD - SESSION		
9:00 – 9:20	Review and Highlighting Day-one Major Issues	Dr. Yohannes Woldetensae
9:20 – 9:40	<u>Presentations:</u> Regional Harmonization Initiatives on Higher Education: ECOWAS Briefing	Mrs. Rachel Jummai Ogbe
9:40 – 10:00	<u>Presentations:</u> COMESA Engagement in Higher Education	Dr. Drinah Banda Nyirenda
10:00 – 10:10	Briefings from CEN-SAD on Initiatives towards Regional Harmonization	Dr. Abdulraouf Abdulaal
10:10 – 10:30	Discussion	
<i>The purpose of the briefings is to share information on activities and initiatives of RECs; and to create basis for dialogue among key organizations towards regional harmonization.</i>		
10:30 – 11:00	Coffee Break	
11:00 – 11:20	<u>Presentations:</u> The role of IPED as Continental Observatory for Education in the Implementation of the Second Decade of Education in Africa	Dr. Amadou Hamady Diop
11:20 – 11:40	<u>Presentations:</u> Overview on Current QA Initiatives and Activities of AAU	Ms Adwoa Sey
<i>The purpose of the briefings is to update information on efforts of organizations at continental level regarding harmonization activities and advocacy initiatives.</i>		
11:40 – 12:30	Plenary Discussion	Prof. Moses Luutu Golola
12:30 – 2:00	Lunch Break	
FOURTH - SESSION		
2:00 – 3:30	<u>Group Discussion and Feed-back:</u> Proposals for effective networking and cooperation between regional organizations and national regulatory bodies (quality assurance and accreditation agencies, Ministries of education, etc.)	Group Chair /Secretary
<i>The discussion aims to identify pragmatic ways towards establishing strong links for effective coordination of structures and networks between regional and national levels that create basis for maintaining political commitment to the process and implementation of the Africa Union harmonization strategy.</i>		
3:30 – 4:00	Coffee Break	
4:00 – 5:20	<u>Group Discussion and Feed-back:</u> Feasible approaches to streamlining harmonization activities between RECs and Regional Associations of Universities	Group Chair/Secretary
<i>The discussion aims to recommend effective mechanisms for facilitating the coordination of integrated activities between RECs and Regional Associations of Universities towards regional harmonization.</i>		
5:20 – 5:30	Day-Two Closing Remarks	Ms Adwoa Sey

Day Three: February 26th		
Time	Activity	Presenter
FIFTH - SESSION		
9:00 – 9:15	Review and Highlighting Day-two Major Issues	Ms Adwoa Sey
9:15 – 9.45	<u>Presentation:</u> Revision and Expanded Ratification of the Arusha Convention	Dr. Yohannes Woldetensae (AAU Consultant)
<i>The presentation aims to increase awareness on the Arusha Convention and its implications as legal mechanism for implementing the African Union Harmonization Strategy; and emphasize some practical issues involving the Convention revision and expanded ratification.</i>		
9:45 – 10:30	Reflections on Presentation and Plenary Discussion	Dr. Mariama Ceesay
10:30 – 11:00	Coffee Break	
11:00 – 12:30	<u>Group Discussion and Feed-back:</u> Identifying specific roles of regional and continental organizations in implementing the Africa Union strategy for harmonizing higher education programmes	Group Chair/Secretary
<i>The discussion aims to identify the specific roles that regional and continental organizations should play in taking the harmonization process forward.</i>		
12:30 – 2:00	Lunch Break	
SIXTH - SESSION		
2:00 – 3:00	<u>Group Discussion and Feed-back:</u> Drafting a work plan for harmonization activities for the year 2009	Group Chair/Secretary
<i>The purpose of the discussion is to draft annual plans of action as input for implementing the Harmonization Strategy; to sustain the commitments of regional and continental organizations; and to create basis for monitoring and follow-up.</i>		
3:30 – 4:00	Coffee Break	
4:00 – 5:00	Drafting and Presentation of Meeting Communiqué	Ms Adwoa Sey
5:00 – 5:20	Remarks by Participants	
5:20 – 5:30	Closing Remarks	Prof. Goolam Mohamedbhai

APPENDIX II

Regional Harmonization workshop - List of Participants

No.	Participant	Organization
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6	Dr. Drinah Banda NYIRENDA Chief SPR Officer E-mail: comesa@comesa.int Tel. +260 1 229 725 Lusaka, ZAMBIA	The Common Market for East and Southern Africa (COMESA)
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