

**INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON  
ACCREDITATION, QUALITY ASSURANCE AND  
RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS IN HIGHER  
EDUCATION IN AFRICA**  
**Hilton Hotel, Nairobi, Kenya, 6-8 February 2006**

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*Communiqué*

## **Preamble**

Within the past quarter century, there is a rising tide of interest in leveraging Africa's development through education. While visibility continues to be given to basic education as espoused at the Dakar Forum of 2000 and the provisions of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), there is an upwelling of focus on higher education as a catalyst for high-level human resource development in the region. This focus is underlined in recent meetings of the African Union (AU) and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). The emergence of knowledge societies where higher education plays a pivotal role provides the stimulus for the new thrust. If anything, the demand in Africa for citizens educated within higher education systems will observe a steady rise in the coming years.

There are several key questions that now become clear when dealing with the challenges and opportunities presented through the heightened need for quality higher education in Africa. For instance, it is clear that globalisation is bringing about new forms of cross-border provision of higher education and the prospective liberalisation of trade in educational services. This calls for a revisit of existing mechanisms and the development of new initiatives likely to enhance quality provision of higher education at all levels by further strengthening quality assurance, accreditation and recognition of qualification schemes that already exist at national and regional levels. These initiatives should be seen as complementary to, but separate from the ongoing process of revision of the UNESCO regional conventions on recognition of qualifications.

Secondly, since the World Conference on Higher Education (WCHE) was held in 1998 in Paris, several initiatives have been undertaken in order to address the issue of accreditation, quality assurance and recognition of qualifications mainly for the purpose of widening access to quality higher education in the context of globalisation. These include capacity building initiatives through the establishment of the UNESCO Global Forum on International Quality Assurance, Accreditation and the Recognition of Qualifications, the development of UNESCO/OECD guidelines on "Quality provision in Cross-Border Higher Education" and the revision of the regional conventions on recognition of qualifications. Regarding access to quality higher education, it is now agreed that there is need to ensure enrolment rates of 40 to 50% of the relevant population group in order to enable a country to perform effectively in a competitive world. While several developed countries have already achieved this percentage, in most developing countries, in particular in sub-Saharan Africa the enrolment rates are lower than 5%. Therefore, the massive increase in the demand for higher education in Africa requires the existence of a more effective mechanism for accreditation, quality assurance and the recognition of qualification. It also requires the re-focusing of accreditation and quality assurance mechanisms to additionally address the innovative mode of open, distance and technology-mediated learning which has emerged in Africa and throughout the world.

Thirdly and closely tied with the first two issues are brain drain and brain gain and the use of the Diaspora in existing and emerging quality assurance mechanisms.

It is with the aim of providing solutions to these challenges and of setting in motion a process which will lead to sub-regional and regional cooperation and sharing national best practices that an international conference on “*Accreditation, Quality Assurance and Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education in Africa*” was convened.

The Conference which was held from 6-8 February 2006 at the Hilton Hotel, Nairobi, Kenya was jointly organised by UNESCO Harare Cluster Office, UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education in Africa (BREDA), UNESCO Regional Office for Science and Technology in Africa (ROSTA), Division of Higher education UNESCO Paris and the National Universities Commission (NUC) of Nigeria.

The objectives of the conference included the following: (a) to take stock of international, regional and national experiences in order to inform development of effective mechanisms for accreditation of institutions and programmes, quality assurance and recognition of higher education qualification in Africa; (b) to promote the use of the UNESCO/OECD guidelines in Africa; (c) to take stock of progress made in the process of revision of the regional conventions on recognition of qualifications; (d) to review existing global and regional initiatives for capacity building in quality assurance, including those offered through cross-border higher education; and (e) to map out the way forward regarding strengthening of mechanisms for accreditation, quality assurance and recognition of qualifications in Africa.

The conference was attended by 127 participants from 40 countries. Among the participants were representatives of Association of African Universities (AAU), Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU), Agence universitaire de la francophonie (AUF), African Virtual University (AVU), Conseil africain et malgache pour l’enseignement supérieur (CAMES), Commonwealth of Learning (COL), Hewlett Packard (HP), Southern African Development Community (SADC), UNESCO International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa (IICBA), The World Bank, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), European Foundation for Quality in E-learning, Global University Network for Innovation (GUNI), International Organization of Migrations (IOM), International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), Open University of Tanzania, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), World Federation of Medical Education (WFME), International Union of Architects and several representatives of Government Ministries and higher education institutions from Burundi, Botswana, Finland, Italy, Kenya, Macau, Nigeria, Norway, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America and Zimbabwe.

While declaring the conference open, the Honourable Minister of Education of Kenya, HE Professor George Saitoti observed that high quality human resource is critical to national development and the creation of global competitiveness. For this reason, quality education is not only necessary but critical to any nation's ability to compete in the world market. For us in Africa, there is an urgency to put in place mechanisms that will enable us minimise marginalisation and underdevelopment. He observed that Africa continues to show low rates of enrolments in higher education, currently standing between 5% and 7% in Sub-Saharan Africa Member States. Efforts to expand access face serious challenges, including those relating to, financing, equity, quality and relevance. Other challenges include: a mismatch between skills acquired by university graduates and those demanded by the industry, an imbalance between the number of students studying sciences and those in arts-based courses, rigid admission criteria, absence of modalities for credit transfers between universities and post-secondary institutions, as well as gender, and regional disparities, among others. He urged that we need to

pay special attention to issues relating to trans-national provision especially those that provide education and training through e-learning. Some of these providers are exploiting the current situation of limited access to higher education by providing sub-standard higher education. We need to create the necessary institutional framework and capacities to combat this challenge.

The conference was organised around three sub-themes. These were: (a) **Accreditation and Quality Assurance**; (b) **Recognition of academic and professional qualifications**; and (c) **Brain drain, brain gain and the use of the diaspora in quality assurance mechanisms**.

After plenary presentations and extensive discussions on the sub-themes, participants declared as follows:

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*We participants at the International Conference on “Accreditation, Quality Assurance and Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education in Africa” holding in Nairobi from February 6-8:*

**Recalling** the Declaration and Framework for Action of the 1998 UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education (WCHE) as well as the conclusions of the 2003 follow-up WCHE+5 on the issues of quality assurance, brain drain, recognition of degrees and cross-border higher education,

**Taking into account** the recommendations of the foregoing UNESCO global meetings that quality in higher education should be seen as a multidimensional concept, which should embrace all its functions, and activities: teaching and academic programmes, research and scholarship, staffing, students, buildings, facilities, equipment, services to the community and the academic environment. Internal self-evaluation and external review, conducted openly by independent specialists, if possible with international expertise, are vital for enhancing quality. Quality also requires that higher education should be characterised by its international dimension: exchange of knowledge, interactive networking, mobility of teachers and students, and international research projects, while taking into account the national cultural values and circumstances.

**Recognising** the role of universities in the teaching profession at the basic education level as a potent link between basic education and EFA ideals on one hand and the higher education delivery system on the other.

**Welcoming** the development that several African countries with less well-established quality assurance agencies are in the process of establishing such institutions and that existing ones such as those of Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania CAMES member countries and Nigeria are being strengthened. The proposed quality assurance framework for Uganda and quality assurance for open and distance learning by Tanzania were applauded.

**Noting** the efforts and **lessons learned** from country reports on the quality assurance practices of Kenya, Tanzania, Sudan, South Africa, and Nigerian which provide good practices for other countries in the region.

**Observing** that quality assurance agencies in Africa need to be concerned about and should take steps to address the problem of graduates from programmes they have accredited failing to find employment several years after graduation,

**Cognisant** of the fact it is through the use of open, distance and technology-mediated learning that the huge unmet demand for higher education can be addressed,

**Noting** that contemporary developments in the provision of quality higher education indicate that most African countries are embracing open, distance and technology-mediated learning as a cost effective and efficient means of democratising access to education,

**Further noting** that professional bodies at the international, regional and national levels play a crucial role in education and quality assurance. There is therefore the need to strengthen existing collaboration and encourage new partnerships between international organisations and professional bodies,

**Further welcoming** the initiative of the Association of African Universities to foster regional collaboration in higher education quality assurance through the establishment of a QA initiative which will lay a foundation for institutionalised quality assurance mechanisms within tertiary institutions, national quality assurance and accreditation agencies, and an eventual continental network for coordinating cross-border protocols and capacity building in QA in Africa

**Noting** the recommendation of the 2003 WCHE+5 that regional and international normative instruments for the recognition of studies should be ratified and implemented, including certification of the skills, competences and abilities of graduates, making it easier for students to change courses, in order to facilitate mobility within and between national systems.

**Observing** that the African normative instrument – the Arusha Convention is being revised to reflect current realities in the region although several African countries are yet to ratify the Convention,

**Aware** of the efforts and difficulties in the implementation of other similar regional conventions as reported to the conference by the chairpersons/representatives of these conventions,

**Further noting** the observation and recommendation of WCHE+5 that ‘brain drain’ has yet to be stemmed, since it continues to deprive developing countries of the high-level expertise necessary to accelerate their socio-economic progress.

**Recognising** that cross-border provision of higher education offers students/learners new opportunities such as increased access to higher education, improvement and innovations in higher education systems and the building of international co-operation, which are essential to academic knowledge as well as more generally, to national social and economic wealth;

**Aware** that cross-border provision of higher education has to be managed appropriately in order to limit low-quality provision and rogue providers, and that it is increasingly important for students/learners and relevant stakeholders to be better informed of the quality of higher education programmes;

**Recalling** that UNESCO and OECD have drawn up Guidelines for Cross-border provision of higher education.

**Referring** to the Resolution of the 2005/33rd session of the General Conference of UNESCO which led to the support for the UNESCO/OECD Guidelines on the Provision of Cross-Border Higher Education,

**Considering** that Africa is moving steadily towards regional integration in the pattern of the European Union through the instrumentation of the African Union,

**Aware** of the development in Europe of the Bologna process which seeks to harmonise the higher education space in the region thus bringing together such issues as quality assurance, student mobility, recognition of degrees, diplomas and certificates,

**Convinced** that higher education in Africa will benefit from the adoption of the model of the Bologna process especially in fostering regional collaboration in the three areas of focus of the conference, and

**Commending** the initiatives of UNESCO, UNDP, National Universities Commission (NUC) of Nigeria, OECD, Hewlett Packard, International Organization for Migrations (IOM), the IOM/Migration for Development in Africa (MIDA) project and others in combating brain drain in several African countries

Consequently, we do hereby agree on the following **Framework for Priority Action**

### **Accreditation and Quality Assurance**

- On the strength of the merit of the European example of the Bologna process in fostering regional collaboration in quality assurance, accreditation and recognition of qualifications, the model should be recommended for the Africa region. In achieving this goal, a taskforce should be set up with UNESCO and AAU as lead agencies to develop a strategic plan for the consideration of the Conference of African Ministers of Education and the African Union on how Africa can model the Bologna process. Other members of the taskforce should be drawn from southern Africa, central Africa, west Africa, east Africa and northern Africa. The taskforce should submit its interim report for discussion at a regional meeting on the subject to be convened by UNESCO during the fourth quarter of 2006.
- All national quality assurance agencies should document their good practices and share this resource with existing and potential quality assurance agencies in Africa and in other regions of the world. AAU and INQAAHE should be encouraged to facilitate this process.
- African governments should be encouraged to Establish National Commissions for Higher Education. At the present less than 10 exist throughout Africa. Communication on this recommendation should be extended to African Ministers of Education through the Conference of African Ministers of Education (COMEDAF) Secretariat.
- African governments should be encouraged to follow-up on the recommendations by MINEDAF VIII and establish accreditation and quality assurance agencies/cells for open, distance and technology-mediated learning.
- AAU should foster a scheme whereby national quality assurance agencies in Africa involve quality assurance agencies in other countries in Africa and

elsewhere in the world in their accreditation activities for the purpose of cross-fertilisation of ideas and towards internationalisation of quality assurance practices.

### **Cross-Border Higher Education (CBHE)**

- National quality assurance agencies and Ministries of Education should give greater intra-national publicity to the UNESCO/OECD Guidelines so that the target group of users are made aware of the existence of the guidelines which should be customised for local use. The Division of Higher Education of UNESCO and OECD should take steps towards enhanced international publicity of the Guidelines.
- Ministries of education should be encouraged to translate the Guidelines into local languages for the purpose of better understanding of its provisions.
- UNESCO and OECD should facilitate training programmes for personnel of quality assurance agencies and ministries of education who are/will be involved in the use of the Guidelines.
- UNESCO should facilitate the setting up of a regional database of recognised higher education institutions in Africa to enhance the assessment of the legitimacy of cross-border providers. This database should be developed from national databases by accredited State authorities.
- Approval should be received from the local quality assurance agency before a foreign provider is permitted to operate in a receiving country.
- Confirmation should be received from the quality assurance agency in the exporting country that certificates issued by the exporting institution in the receiving country will be acceptable for employment purposes in the country of export.
- National quality assurance agencies should provide information to parents and potential students seeking such information on the nature and quality of offshore degrees. The setting up of a desk in the agency or Ministry of Education to offer such guidance and information is advised.
- A network should be established among quality assurance agencies to filter out rogue providers. The AAU network is proposed as a mechanism for achieving this.
- UNESCO and OECD should consider updating the guidelines with prescription for employers since this is absent in the present version of the document.
- Invite the G8 and other partners to support UNESCO in these initiatives,

### **Brain Drain and Brain Gain**

- Resources for addressing brain drain should be focussed on areas considered to be priority for regional development of Africa. These areas were identified as: biotechnology, energy, health sciences, ICT, basic sciences, environment, agriculture, social sciences and governance.
- In selecting countries for intervention at the regional level, criteria that should be applied are proposed as: existence of centres of excellence in the focal area; equitable geographical and linguistic spread; and data available from active UN agencies on the subject of brain drain and brain gain in Africa.

- UNESCO should approach the following organisations, among others to provide resources for implementing projects on brain gain in Africa: HP; JICA; international financial institutions; Partnership for Higher Education in Africa (Carnegie, MacArthur, Rockefeller, Ford, Hewlett and Mellon); ADEA Working Group on Higher Education, and the organised private sector.
- All current initiatives such as NEADS of NUC, TOKTEN of UNESCO/UNDP should be continued and strengthened in order to derive maximum benefit from the efforts to bring expatriate resources from the diaspora for short-term contributions.
- An African Fund for Academic Mobility should be established under the aegis of the AU.
- African experts in the diaspora should be invited to national and regional conferences in order to derive first hand experience from them on their needs and to secure valuable input into interventions to which they are targets.
- UNESCO should partner actively with AU on the implementation of the diaspora project.
- UNESCO should document and popularise good practices in reversing brain drain..
- An African master database of the human resources in the diaspora should be developed under the auspices of UNESCO which will be frequently updated. Such a database should be derived from national databases.
- African governments should strive to increasingly enhance the environment conducive to attracting and retaining skilled human capital, either through national policies or international arrangements to facilitate the return - permanent or temporary - of highly trained scholars and researchers to their countries of origin. At the same time, efforts must be directed towards a process of 'brain gain' through collaboration programmes that, by virtue of their international dimension, enhance the building and strengthening of institutions and facilitate full use of endogenous capacities
- UNESCO should establish a Working Group on Brain Drain and Brain Gain in Africa to develop project proposals on these recommendations and to implement the foregoing conclusions.

### **Student mobility, Recognition of Degrees, Diplomas and Certificates**

- Need to continue the revision of Arusha convention in the light of suggestions on the inclusion of life-long learning, ICT, GATS and other emerging issues. In undertaking the revision, input should be received from Member States after which the Convention Committee can meet to reflect the new changes.
- Promote an African higher education space as an overarching framework for the above developments.

### **General**

- The Action Plan will be implemented with partners supporting developments in higher education in Africa, in particular UNESCO, COL, ACU and AUF.
- The Association of African Universities should be urged to seek support of the African Union, NEPAD and development partners to intensify awareness and ratification of the five UNESCO Conventions particularly the Arusha Convention and

the UNESCO-OECD Guidelines on the provision of cross-border higher education to support capacity building and accelerate the establishment of the African Network for Quality Assurance institutions and agencies.

- The Africa Regional Committee on the Follow-up to the World Conference under the leadership of Professor Lamine Ndiaye should work closely with UNESCO Harare Cluster Office for the implementation of the conclusions of this conference.

## **Appreciation**

Participants are grateful to all the sponsors of the conference and wish to commend especially, Professor Juma Shabani, Director, UNESCO Harare Cluster Office for initiating the conference.

For and on behalf of all participants

**Professor Peter Okebukola**

*Rapporteur -General*