

Workshop on the implications of WTO / GATS on higher education in Africa

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Quality assurance, accreditation and recognition of qualifications in Africa: Tanzania's experience and the Arusha Convention

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Introduction

Nations of the world are increasingly realizing the importance of close cooperation between them through the sharing of resources and technologies, addressing common problems and facilitating the free movement and law abiding desires of people. Cooperation through trade and services demands that education systems are adjusted such as to respond to the demands for trained people with recognized qualifications and able and ready to move and serve humanity in any part of the world. Already the nations of Europe have formed the European Union for this and related purposes and African States are developing frameworks to regulate their cooperation through their recently established African Union.

Further closer cooperation is needed through defined functions of nations. The East African Community, for example, recently signed an agreement for their customs union and the Inter University Council for East Africa has put in place a system of cooperation between university level institutions facilitating, for example students' and staff transfers between the institutions in the sub-region. Member states of the AU equally expect to build upon and strengthen their union through harmonized and comparable systems of education and training at national, sub-regional and continental levels. But the main facilitator of such plans to cooperate is the setting of and adherence to agreed criteria and standards of quality of all services.

The Arusha Convention, adopted in Arusha in 1981 and amended in Dakar, Senegal in June, 2003 in order to respond to current practices, challengea and other developments on the continent and beyond, is an expression of the desire, a resolve and agreement by African states, in exercising their solidarity and sovereignty, to jointly:

- ?? strengthen cooperation with each other through the African Union and membership to UNESCO;
- ?? safeguard national independence, and cultural identity of states and to promote historical links between the different parts of the continent;
- ?? develop education systems, sustainable improvement of curricula, rational choices of media of instruction and educational evaluation such as to promote the comparability of standards;

- ?? promote access to recognized programmes and courses of post secondary education, training and research in member states which have ratified the Convention;
- ?? encourage flexibility in admission requirements and the exchange and free movement of teachers, researchers and students and their credits from one state institution to another;
- ?? promote effective use of available resources for education, training and research on the continent through the free movement of expert human power and the establishment or recognition of centers of excellence;
- ?? enable Africa's educated and trained human power to practice their profession in any member state as long as they observe legal requirements and conditions of practice in force in the receiving state and to
- ?? institute and share criteria and procedures to facilitate the recognition of studies, certificates, diplomas, degrees and other qualifications of higher education such as to enable free mobility of students, academic and other experts human power within nations as well as beyond national and sub-regional boundaries and consequently beyond the African continent all in response to opportunities brought about by globalization, liberalization and privatization of trade activities and services.

The Arusha Convention is, therefore, the continent's strategy and framework for the recognition of qualifications obtained under each state's education systems. Such recognition of qualifications is possible through national quality assurance and accreditation systems in education as overseen and ensured by relevant legally established and internationally recognized accreditation organs mandated to set internal criteria and procedures for quality assurance and accreditation of institutions, validation and recognition of courses and qualifications.

Kenya and Uganda have accreditation bodies for higher education and already there is very close cooperation and sharing and exchange of ideas and experiences between these higher education accrediting bodies in East Africa. In addition, discussions are already underway for the establishment of common lines of action for the recognition of courses and qualifications within member states of the Southern Africa Development Community, SADC. It is the hope of Tanzania, the East African and indeed the SADC sub-regions that cross border recognition of each nation's qualifications, based on agreed criteria for quality assurance, will ultimately characterize all member states of the African Union and of course UNESCO.

The United Republic of Tanzania, in reaffirming the declaration of the 1998 World Conference in Higher Education, recognizes that it is necessary to ratify and implement regional and international normative instruments for the recognition of studies, certification of skills, competencies and capabilities of graduates and thereby making it easier for students to access and or change courses and move within and between national systems of education and labour. Based on this observation, Tanzania is a signatory of the Arusha Convention and is desirous and urges other states to ratify the convention for Africa's common good.

As a signatory of the Convention, and having accepted the identified current and ensuing advantages of cooperation under this and related conventions, Tanzania urges member

states of UNESCO and the African Union to ratify the convention if they have not yet done so. Chief Executives of universities or their representatives could develop, for their state leaderships justification for ratifying the Convention in the interest of individual states and the whole continent of Africa.

Tanzania's experience in institutional accreditation and recognition of qualifications

(a) Establishment and role of the Higher Education Accreditation Council

As part of the country's mechanism for internal quality assurance for higher education and, without interfering with the autonomy of institutions, Tanzania has established a Higher Education Accreditation Council inter alia to:

- ?? regulate the establishment and standardization of facilities, programmes, courses, services as well as other inputs, processes and products of institutions;
- ?? ensure the legality of every higher education institution through the validation and recognition of institutional constitutions which must at all times respond to the provisions of the country's constitution;
- ?? serve as a focal point for the standardization of nomenclature and setting minimum requirements for academic staff titles and promotion schemes in public and private higher education institutions;
- ?? regulate the adequacy and standards of academic and other programmes offered by institutions;
- ?? regulate admissions by monitoring adherence to minimum entry requirements for courses;
- ?? evaluate, validate and recognize qualifications obtained from institutions within and outside the country and to
- ?? provide reliable information to students, employers and the general public.

(b) Quality assurance and accreditation system

The HEAC of Tanzania has put in place regulations and guidelines to ensure:

- ✍️ appropriateness of institutional development plans, facilities for academic, administrative and technical support services including lecture theatres, seminar rooms, laboratories, workshops, special purpose rooms, libraries etc. The setting up an institution may involve the transformation of an existing one to university status. The founders of new institutions must also show proof that they have sustainable sources of funds for capital development as well as for recurrent expenditure.
- ✍️ appropriateness of the mission and objectives of the institution, the matching standard facilities and services and governance systems;
- ✍️ the relevance, adequacy and scope of courses for planned qualifications;
- ✍️ adequacy in the numbers, qualifications, competencies and experience of academic, administrative and technical support staff;

- ✍️ appropriateness and adequacy of teaching, research and learning resources;
- ✍️ arrangements for improved access, equity, without compromising quality by adhering to approved minimum requirements for admission into courses;
- ✍️ institutional quality assurance and periodic academic audit systems as pre-requisites for institutional and course re-accreditation after every four years (currently under consideration to change to five years)
- ✍️ Standard nomenclature for academic staff positions and minimum requirements for promotions from one academic position to the next.

Tanzania recognizes further that demands for places in higher education is on the increase and existing public and private institutions have not been able to meet that demand. As a result, would be students of higher education are now seeking new modes of domestic and international access and delivery as well as new types of qualifications of education through open, distance and ICT learning.

Any arrangements which can allow Tanzanians or indeed nationals of any African State to obtain education and recognizable qualifications through non-conventional means is, therefore, a welcome initiative to all the concerned. But parallel with this development is the need for a system of quality assurance and accreditation of students and their credit transfer system between institutions within and beyond national borders. Tanzanian experts are currently finalizing their proposals, to be considered by the HEAC, for quality assurance and accreditation system in respect of courses offered and qualifications obtained through non-traditional universities and delivery systems including open, distance and ICT learning.

(i) Accreditation of institutions

Before an institution is visited and inspected for purposes of quality control and accreditation, its management is informed and requested to receive and cooperate with the visitation team in the interest of both the institution and the higher education sector in general. The membership of institutional visitation teams will vary according to the mission and objectives of each institution. On arrival at an institution a briefing session is held between the evaluation team and the institution's management and staff. Here, the institution's management is requested to cooperate with the technical evaluation team on those issues which the committee will be interested to examine in accordance with the terms of reference issued by the HEAC.

After the visitation exercise a debriefing session is held where all the best practices and shortfalls are made clear to the institution's management. These de-briefing highlights will characterize the report of the visitation team to the HEAC. All shortfalls identified are discussed with the management of the concerned institution and later submitted to them, in writing, for corrective actions. Following satisfaction of set, requirements for the HEAC defined stages of accreditation, a relevant certificate is issued. All would be students are periodically informed through the press media and other HEAC publications about which institutions have been recognized to admit students and run approved courses.

(ii) Evaluation, validation and recognition of courses of study

According to Tanzania's guidelines for the recognition of courses, any higher education institution planning to initiate a new programme or course leading to any qualification to be conferred by the institution itself or by a foreign institution acting in collaboration with the local institution or if any institution revises existing syllabi for on-going courses shall submit the related proposals to the HEAC for evaluation, validation and approval prior to advertising it or inviting applications for enrolment into the referred courses.

Every such proposal shall indicate and justify the aims and objectives of the new courses, their relevance to national or indeed regional development as well as the targeted potential students.

Local institutions wishing to conduct courses on behalf of or in cooperation with external institutions are required to submit evidence of legal terms, contracts or Memoranda of Understanding drawn between concerned institutions mandating the local institution to facilitate and run courses on behalf of or in collaboration with the external institution. No institution of higher education may advertise its new or revised programmes or courses until the relevant curricula have been validated and approved by the HEAC.

Copies of the draft curricula and syllabi for the proposed new or revised courses are sent to experts in the relevant field of studies within or outside Tanzania requesting them to examine the adequacy of the course design and content for the planned awards in accordance with internationally accepted standards. Reference for comparison is normally made to members of such associations as the Association of African universities, or Association of Commonwealth Universities or indeed the International Association of Universities. In evaluating institutional programmes and courses the reviewers are guided by the vision, mission, and objectives of the concerned institution.

The experts will also be expected to make recommendations relating to minimum requirements for admission into the course and about needed resources and befitting delivery systems. They will examine the curriculum vitae of academic staff lined up to teach the new course and will make recommendations that will ensure the adequacy of academic staff qualifications, competencies and experiences. In the effort to ensure continuity of courses and the quality of delivery, the HEAC has developed guidelines to regulate the recruitment and deployment of agreed ratios of permanent and part-time staff.

The expert evaluators of courses will further assess and recommend improvements needed in the institution's general teaching and learning environment, examinations regulations, students' performance assessment system and conditions for course completion and graduation including the design of the terminal awards. The HEAC has also put in place guidelines for students selection, admission and allocation to institutions as well as for their transfer between programmes, intra-country institutions or between local and external institutions.

The evaluators of institutional programmes and courses will submit their reports for consideration by the Council Accreditation Committee. The observations and

recommendations of this Committee are forwarded to the full Council for further consideration and possible approval.

The concerned institutions are consequently informed about the Council decision in respect of their proposed new or revised courses. The HEAC, in their effort to ensure comparability of standards for courses, has issued guidelines to regulate the design and management of courses. They include minimum requirements for semesterization of the delivery system which now characterizes programmes in higher education nationwide. This arrangement facilitates students and staff mobility across courses and institutions.

(iii) Framework for the recognition of qualifications

In order to ensure comparability of education qualifications conferred by higher education institutions inside and outside Tanzania, the Higher Education Accreditation Council has instituted guidelines to regulate the evaluation, equating and consequent recognition of the qualifications against Tanzanian standards. The factors considered include:

- ?? the accreditation status of the institution conferring the award;
- ?? adequacy of entry requirements demanded for the concerned course or programme;
- ?? the scope, appropriateness and relevance of curricula followed;
- ?? course duration;
- ?? qualifications and experience of academic staff involved;
- ?? mode of delivery of the course;
- ?? examinations and performance assessment system used, and
- ?? conditions for course completion and graduation.

Applications for evaluation and equating of academic awards may be submitted to the Council by individuals or employers who desire to authenticate the qualifications of their employees for purposes of job placement and promotions.

The holder of the certificate will be expected to fill a HEAC form to provide specified details about the institution attended, course pursued and qualification given. In addition, the HEAC will need the following documents to support the award evaluation and recognition exercise:

- ?? Copy of the Certificate of Ordinary Level Secondary Education or its equivalent;
- ?? Copy of the Advanced Certificate of Secondary Education (A – Level) or equivalent;
- ?? Supporting documents for any preparatory course followed prior to the start of the substantive course e.g language course;
- ?? Copy of the curriculum/syllabus or course content followed;

- ?? Certified true copy of the certificate to be evaluated, equated or recognized; (this should be in the relevant foreign language with a certified translation into English preferably from the Embassy, in Tanzania, of the concerned country);
- ?? Copy of the relevant academic transcripts certified by a relevant authority;
- ?? Other supporting awards as detailed in the form provided;
- ?? Copy of the dissertation/thesis (for Masters and Ph.D holders). Where the thesis or dissertation is in a foreign language an authentic English translation should be arranged by the award holder and submitted in full or as a synopsis of the research undertaken;

All the above documentation will be sent to an appropriate expert in the field of study to evaluate the award and advise the HEAC whether or not the qualification is equivalent to the same category of qualifications by Tanzanian standards. The expert evaluator, guided by a list of HEAC criteria, will be expected to submit a narrative report of how he or she arrived at the conclusion and recommendation made to the Council regarding the appropriate or comparable equivalence of the award.

The HEAC Accreditation Committee will consider the evaluation report for each individual award and make their recommendations to the Council for further consideration and decision. The applicant who submitted the request for the award evaluation will consequently be informed about the equivalence and status of recognition of the certificate submitted to the Council.

Conclusion

African member states need to cooperate more closely in the field of education through the sharing and exchange of experiences in the design, development, duration and mode of delivery of courses, students' minimum entry requirements, academic staff qualifications, conditions for course completion and therefore recognition of qualifications.

In order to expedite the achievement of this noble objective of the African Union and UNESCO member states the need is now stronger than ever before for closer cooperation between African states in the education sector. Member states are therefore urged to establish a database of critical information, accessible by every state's accreditation body on the status of recognition of their institutions and courses.

This information will help and facilitate the review, evaluation and consequent recognition of qualifications from different parts of the continent; the facilitation of movement of students and trained human power across states and even between Africa and other continents and altogether mutual benefits by all UNESCO member states of the current globalization of trade and services.