



EUROPE-AFRICA QUALITY CONNECT: BUILDING INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY THROUGH PARTNERSHIP

PROJECT RESULTS AND FUTURE PROSPECTS



With the support of the Erasmus Mundus programme of the European Commission



Copyright 2012 © by the European University Association

All rights reserved. This information may be freely used and copied for non-commercial purposes, provided that the source is acknowledged (©European University Association).

Additional copies of this publication are available for 10 Euro per copy.

European University Association asbl

Avenue de l'Yser 24

1040 Brussels, Belgium

Tel: +32-2 230 55 44

Fax: +32-2 230 57 51

A free electronic version of this report is available through www.eua.be

With the support of the Erasmus Mundus Programme of the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

With the support of IEP



ISBN: 9789078997344



EUROPE-AFRICA QUALITY CONNECT: BUILDING INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY THROUGH PARTNERSHIP

PROJECT RESULTS AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword and acknowledgements	6
Executive summary	7
I. Introduction	9
II. The project's policy background	11
III. The IEP approach and its adaptation to the different African contexts	16
IV. Institutional evaluations in Africa: practical and methodological challenges	19
V. The evaluation reports: main themes	24
VI. Concluding remarks and recommendations for future directions	30
VII. References	32
VIII. Annex: teams of experts	34

FOREWORD AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report analyses the results of QA Connect, a project co-funded by the Erasmus Mundus Programme and developed by a consortium that included the Association of African Universities (AAU), the European University Association (EUA), the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) and the University of Aveiro (UA), Portugal, in partnership with the African Chapter of the Erasmus Mundus Alumni Association.

Five African universities participated in pilot evaluations that were based on the methodology of EUA's Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP). The institutions were located in different regions of Africa and were sufficiently dissimilar to provide good testing ground for the IEP approach. The report analyses the adaptability of this evaluation methodology to the African contexts and the pertinence of the themes addressed in the evaluation reports.

It is clear that these pilot evaluations have been very successful. They were strongly endorsed by the universities that were evaluated as well as by their evaluation teams and were found to be useful to institutional development, particularly to their strategic capacity and the development of their internal quality processes.

Participants in this pilot project strongly advised that AAU takes responsibility for introducing a similar evaluation programme in Africa. The concluding chapter in this report examines how this can be done.

It is hoped that this report will contribute to designing future steps for the development of quality assurance in Africa and that it will be useful to the African universities, their associations, their national quality assurance agencies as well as their governments at national and African levels.

This project and the resulting report are further achievements of an ongoing and fruitful collaboration

between EUA and AAU and reinforce the important role that both associations have to play in fostering Europe-Africa university collaboration.

We are deeply grateful to the five universities that have agreed to participate in this pilot project. They demonstrated their commitment to quality and courage in undertaking a process that was new to them. They are: Ahmadu Bello University (Nigeria), Institute of Professional Studies (Ghana), Kenyatta University (Kenya), University of Namibia (Namibia) and Université Omar Bongo (Republic of Gabon).

Our heartfelt thanks also go to the 25 experts who took part in the evaluation teams and invested considerable time and effort in the exercise: studying the material provided by the universities; travelling, often long distances, in order to attend two workshops and visit the universities twice; and preparing the evaluation reports.

We particularly appreciated the responsiveness and thoughtfulness of the feedback provided by all project participants – universities, experts and Advisory Board members – on all aspects of these pilot evaluations. Without their contribution, this report could not have been as useful.

Finally, we wish to thank Andrée Sursock who was responsible for drafting this report, and a number of colleagues from the AAU and EUA Secretariat who provided important contributions and comments during the revision process. We are particularly thankful to Professor Goolam Mohamedbhai for having taken the time to comment on draft versions of the report. His discerning comments and questions contributed significantly to sharpening the argumentation and to the clarity of the presentation.



Lesley Wilson
EUA Secretary General



Olugbemiro Jegede
AAU Secretary General

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The report is the result of the project *Europe-Africa Quality Connect: Building Institutional Capacity through Partnership* (QA Connect) that took place between October 2010 and September 2012. The project was a joint undertaking by the Association of African Universities (AAU), the European University Association (EUA), the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) and the University of Aveiro (UA), Portugal, and co-funded by the Erasmus Mundus Programme of the European Commission. The African Chapter of the Erasmus Mundus Alumni Association was an associated partner.
2. Project partners agreed to use the methodology of EUA's Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) to test its suitability in different institutional and national contexts in Africa. The IEP's evaluation approach is conceived as a tool to support the strategic development of universities, within their institutional and national contexts. Thus, IEP does not evaluate on the basis of a uniform set of external criteria. Instead, it examines each institution on its own terms and seeks to provide recommendations in a supportive way.
3. The IEP methodology was discussed with both the project partners and the evaluation teams. It was found to be sufficiently open and flexible for use in a variety of African contexts. The main change introduced to the IEP approach was in the bi-regional composition of the evaluation teams, which included three African and two European members.
4. Following a call for participation, AAU selected five universities with a view to optimising geographic balance. These were: Ahmadu Bello University (Nigeria), Institute of Professional Studies (Ghana), Kenyatta University (Kenya), University of Namibia (Namibia) and Université Omar Bongo (Republic of Gabon).
5. The five institutions differed in aspects such as size and relationship to the State. Beyond these differences, all were relatively young and have had to respond to increased demand for higher education in a context of very limited public resources. The evaluation teams were aware of these constraints and provided the universities with a range of recommendations related to their core mission, governance, management and strategic capacity.
6. Feedback on the project was provided through two questionnaires and discussion during a post-evaluation seminar that gathered together representatives of the five institutions, the five evaluation teams, the project partners and the project Advisory Board. By and large, the IEP methodology was found to have worked very well.
7. The difficulties and obstacles encountered during the course of this project were not unusual or specific to the African contexts: IEP teams have faced them frequently, in Europe and elsewhere in the world, particularly in places where QA processes are new. In addition, most of these difficulties were apparent during the first visits and were addressed to ensure the usefulness of the second visits and the reliability of the evaluation reports.
8. The success factors that were identified were: the emphasis on the self-evaluation phase; the composition of the evaluation teams, which provided a range of backgrounds and experiences; the inclusion of mature and motivated students with international experience; strong support from the university leadership and a very good local liaison person; the two site visits and the inclusion of external stakeholders in the site visit meetings.
9. The universities were asked about the benefits that they have derived from the evaluations. Some of the recommendations, which they highlighted as being particularly useful, included suggestions for developing internal quality assurance processes and involving external stakeholders in evaluating the university. Some universities noted that the project raised important questions that will be discussed at national level with the authorities. In addition, because the evaluations engage with external stakeholders, they could have an impact on national QA processes and address gaps in national data collection (e.g. regarding the higher education system, employment, demography, etc.).

- 10.** Project participants recommended that a similar programme be established in Africa and agreed that AAU would be the natural organisation to take such an initiative forward and lead it. Because QA experience across the African continent differs, with some regions ahead of others, they recommended that AAU work with the regional bodies and the national QA agencies to promote the programme and to assist in alleviating the differences in QA across the continent. They noted that there is no conflict between the approach used by IEP and existing national and institutional QA processes and saw the IEP methodology as a complementary enhancement to other QA approaches.
- 11.** AAU gave its commitment to look for additional funding to lead and continue evaluations based on IEP methodology, promising that it would draw extensively from the experiences, lessons learnt, challenges, and recommendations of the pilot phase.

I. INTRODUCTION

The project *Europe-Africa Quality Connect: Building Institutional Capacity through Partnership* (QA Connect) was co-funded by the Erasmus Mundus Programme of the European Commission and took place over a two-year period, between October 2010 and September 2012.

It was a joint undertaking by the Association of African Universities (AAU), the European University Association (EUA), the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) and the University of Aveiro (UA), Portugal. The African Chapter of the Erasmus Mundus Alumni Association was an associated partner.

The project was developed in response to AAU's expressed interest further to support and promote quality assurance (QA) across its membership and to assess the feasibility of using EUA's Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) as a potential evaluation method. Given the growing interest in multi-lateral approaches to QA, the QA initiatives and networks taken at sub-regional and regional level in Africa, the project was considered a timely and complementary intervention to bolster AAU's support for institutional QA processes across a wide range of countries and, overall, institutional capacity for change. The project was also aimed at developing further the relationship of EUA and AAU, and at stimulating a dialogue on QA developments between different European and African stakeholders.

1.1 Structure of this report

This report presents the project results:

Part I provides the contextual information of this project and Part II information about the project's objectives and activities. Part III describes the general IEP approach and how it was adapted for the purposes of this project.

Part IV analyses QA Connect in respect of the methodology and practical issues encountered during the evaluations whilst Part V examines the major thematic foci of the evaluation reports and their pertinence.

Part VI provides concluding recommendations for continuing and expanding institutional evaluations in

Africa as a complementary element of both national and regional QA frameworks, and in the context of international QA developments.

1.2 Higher education and quality assurance in Africa

National universities in Africa were created after independence in the 1960s. Rising demands for higher education led to rapid massification in the 1980s. However, following the World Bank's assessment that higher education yielded low returns for the economic advancement of developing countries, funding and "Donor interest shifted to primary education, and external funding declined from US\$103 million annually as late as 1994, dropping to an average of US\$30.8 million from 1995 to 1999" (Hayward 2012: 21).

Nevertheless, enrolment continued to soar in the 1990s and 2000s fuelled by increase in enrolment in primary and secondary education, which had been targeted by the Millennium Development Goals. The figures for sub-Saharan Africa are striking. Student numbers increased:

"... from 21,000 in 1960 to 473,000 in 1983. By 1991 enrollments reached 2.7 million, and by 2006 there were 9.3 million students ... Yet, only five percent of the college age population is in higher education in Africa, and demand will grow especially as the success of 'Education For All' at the primary level produces more secondary school graduates" (Hayward 2012: 21).

As in other parts of the world, the growth of the higher education system, including the creation of many new institutions, the penetration of private, for-profit providers and the emergence and relative spread of open learning, raised awareness for the need to develop formal QA processes.

QA agencies started to be established in the 1990s and QA cooperation at regional and sub-regional level has been developing for several years. Thus, in 2009, the Association of African Universities (AAU) established the first



Participants of the Final Dissemination Conference in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

© Dereje Wondimm - ECA

Pan-African network for QA, AfriQAN, which received support from UNESCO's Global Initiative for Quality Assurance Capacity (GIQAC) to strengthen QA in developing countries and countries in transition. AfriQAN is housed and managed by AAU, with support from various regional networks, and ultimately aims to create a harmonised QA higher education Area in Africa for comparability, transferability and effective competition in the global market.

AfriQAN membership comprises National Regulatory Agencies (NRAs), Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and relevant Government Ministries of Higher Education. The Network is developing its strategy in capacity building, creating a database and documenting QA practices in use in the various NRAs.

In implementing the AfriQAN agenda, attention has been focused on capacity building and QA advocacy campaigns. Working closely with the existing regional QA entities across the African continent such as the Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA), the Conseil Africain et Malgache pour l'Enseignement Supérieur (CAMES), and the Higher Education Quality Management Initiative for Southern

Africa (HEQMISA), AfriQAN has conducted an assessment of QA needs in the five sub-regions of Africa, including recommendations for policy and training development; AfriQAN has also organised training events on institutional self-assessment for 68 higher education institutions in different regions of Africa and held a series of workshops and events for QA actors in various regions. The Network has set up an operational network website and a database on Quality Assurance (cf. Chapter 7 for the website).

Such initiatives have been useful and important first steps, but, as Lenga emphasised, considerable work remains in order to raise institutional awareness and develop regional support instruments. Thus, Lenga (2011) notes that despite the increased cooperation in this area, these efforts have not yet resulted in a shared understanding and practice of QA across the continent. Quality assurance is still in a formative stage in most countries and QA agencies are still relatively scarce: only 19 African states (out of 55) have a national QA agency today (Lenga 2011: 30), even though, on the political level, the African Union identified QA cooperation as a key element in its "Harmonisation of African Higher Education Strategy"¹.

¹ Included in the Plan of Action for the Second Decade of Higher Education for Africa 2006-2015.

II. THE PROJECT'S POLICY BACKGROUND

From 2008 to 2010, AAU and EUA, in collaboration with other partners, conducted an Erasmus Mundus co-funded project entitled *Access to Success: Fostering Trust and Exchange between Europe and Africa*. This project examined the role of higher education partnership – at institutional, association, agency and government level – and identified a rich variety of practice on themes such as academic mobility, doctoral education and research partnerships, and donor collaboration. A series of bi-regional workshops resulted in a White Paper on *Africa-Europe Higher Education Cooperation for Development: Meeting Regional and Global Challenges*², which highlighted the important role of higher education in development cooperation.

In a subsequent policy declaration, AAU and EUA addressed the 2010 Africa-EU Heads of State Summit, regarding the “Joint Africa-EU Strategy”, a policy framework for dialogue and cooperation between Africa and Europe³. One of the recommendations invites governments of both regions to:

“Fund mutual learning projects on strategic higher education priorities for both continents. This could include themes like modernisation of higher education, a regional dimension to institutional quality assurance, development of doctoral education and internationalisation of research⁴”.

The two associations have declared their willingness to engage in further discussion with the African Union and the European Commission, as well as their wish to begin working with other partners, depending on their resources.

The current QA Connect Project follows up on the Access to Success Project and the ensuing White Paper and Joint Declaration, particularly regarding the urgent need for strategic capacity development of African universities⁵.

Drawing upon their respective experiences, AAU and EUA agreed that this should be carried out through joint institutional evaluations, supported by bi-regional teams of experts and supplemented with workshops on QA approaches in both regions. IUQB and the University of Aveiro were invited to join the project and to contribute

their respective experience with IEP and their commitment to sharing QA practices internationally.

2.1 The project's objectives

Europe-Africa Quality Connect: Building Institutional Capacity through Partnership was conceived as a pilot project, supported by a grant from the European Commission under the Erasmus Mundus Action 3. Beyond its general purpose to enhance cooperation and exchange between the institutions of both regions, and improve the operational contacts between AAU and EUA, the QA Connect Project identified several aims, including:

- To strengthen universities by enhancing their crucial role and responsibility in ensuring the achievement of their mission (i.e. providing quality teaching and learning, research and service to society), with clear benefits for their constituencies, notably students.
- To contribute towards internal QA development as a crucial element for advancing national and regional QA. This would be done through promoting the critical importance of institutional self-evaluation as a means to build the institutional capacity for change, through enhanced leadership.
- To promote international dialogue and cooperation on institutional development and QA as core elements for partnerships between universities in Europe and Africa, and to foster exchanges and networking between European and African QA peer experts through mutual training exercises.
- To contribute to exchange and collaboration within Africa by building institutional links among African universities, and strengthening their regional perspective on the topic of QA.
- To shape higher education QA policies in Africa and contribute to policy developments at national and regional level through lessons learnt and recommendations resulting from the project.

² http://www.eua.be/Libraries/Publications_homepage_list/Africa-Europe_Higher_Education_Cooperation_White_Paper_EN.sflb.ashx

³ <http://www.africa-eu-partnership.org/>

⁴ http://www.eua.be/Libraries/Publications_homepage_list/Joint_Statement_of_the_AAU_and_EUA.sflb.ashx

⁵ http://www.accesstosuccess-africa.eu/web/images/workshop1/outcomes_first_dialogue_meeting_african_european_rectors.pdf

As a basis for the project methodology and activities, EUA proposed to share the methodology of its Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP), an international peer-review programme that has been applied in Europe and many countries around the world for almost two decades (cf. Part III for further details on IEP).

Key questions to be addressed by the project were:

- Is the IEP approach – with certain adaptations – applicable to the various African contexts?
- Is it an effective and efficient means to contribute to the strategic institutional development of African universities?
- If that is the case, how could an evaluation programme be developed and sustained in order for African universities to benefit beyond the actual pilot project?

The report will return to these questions in Parts IV to VI.

2.2 Project activities and governance

The following sections present the project in more details.

2.2.1 Key activities

The key milestones of this project included the following activities:

- **Selection of five African pilot universities** from different regions.
- **Desk research** on QA developments and initiatives in Africa.
- **Preparatory workshop for the institutions to be evaluated** (18-19 April 2011, Accra, Ghana), focusing specifically on how to conduct an institutional self-evaluation process and prepare the institutional self-evaluation reports.
- **Identification of African and European experts** to conduct the evaluation visits.

- **Training workshop for experts** (4-6 May 2011, Dublin, Ireland) to discuss the suitability of the IEP guidelines for this project.
- **Evaluation of the five institutions** (September 2011 to March 2012), including two site visits by the expert teams and a final evaluation report for each university, posted on the project website.
- **Post-evaluation workshop** (18-20 April 2012, Aveiro, Portugal) to assess and discuss the concrete experiences of both the evaluation teams and the universities.
- **Dissemination conference** (21-22 June 2012, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia), to discuss the outcome of the project and make recommendations for its wider application, and also to promote the results to donors and governments.

2.2.2 Participating universities and expert teams

An open call for participation in the pilot evaluations was disseminated among AAU members. Five universities were selected with a view to optimise geographic balance. Of the five institutions, one was located in a Francophone country and four in Anglophone countries, in different African regions. They were:

- Ahmadu Bello University, Nigeria
- Institute of Professional Studies, Ghana
- Kenyatta University, Kenya
- University of Namibia, Namibia
- Université Omar Bongo, Republic of Gabon

The project partners established five evaluation teams, each comprising five members, including a student representative. AAU identified the African experts and EUA the European experts (cf. Section 3.2 for details and the Annex for the list of team members). To ensure that the student representatives were in a position to contribute to the evaluations, it was deemed important to include students who had completed some part of their studies in Africa, had gained an international vision through studying in different systems, and were motivated to contribute to the development of African universities. Thus, the African Chapter of the Erasmus Mundus Alumni Association was asked to identify the five African students based on an open call to alumni and expression of interest.

Participating universities

Ahmadu Bello University, Nigeria

Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) evolved from the Samaru Agricultural Research Station, founded in 1924. It was established as a university in 1962. From a modest beginning, ABU has grown to be one of the largest universities in sub-Saharan Africa with current student enrolment at about 40,000, 12 faculties, 13 specialised centres and institutes, two teaching hospitals (one medical, one veterinary), two major campuses and about 7 000 hectares of land. There are presently 126 universities in Nigeria, whose ownership varies from public (Federal or State governments) to private. However, there are other higher education institutions, mainly polytechnics and colleges of education. Apart from its internal quality assurance mechanisms, the academic programmes are subjected to a mandatory accreditation exercise in five-yearly cycles. An overall institutional accreditation programme has also been introduced at the national level. Both exercises are undertaken by the National Universities Commission, NUC.

Institute of Professional Studies, Ghana

The Institute of Professional Studies (IPS) is a public academic-professional institution with a university status established in 1965 and located in Accra, the capital city of Ghana. The IPS has over 40 years of experience in the field of Business Professional education, with many of its graduates in responsible positions in Ghana and abroad. However, the Institute is relatively new in the academic discipline, established in 1999 by the Institute of the Studies Act, Act 566 of 1999 to award academic degrees. Subsequently, in 2005, the Institute gained accreditation and started its undergraduate programmes. The Institute currently offers both undergraduate and graduate programmes with about 8 000 students in 14 programmes located in three faculties and one school. The Institute has a Presidential Charter and undergoes programmes accreditation by the National Accreditation Board. The professional nature and market relevance of the IPS programmes is rapidly establishing the Institute as an institution of choice in Ghana and beyond. The IPS is poised to deepen its profile as an effective and unique institution that blends scholarship with professionalism.

Kenyatta University, Kenya

Kenyatta University is one of 34 universities in Kenya, which include seven public and 27 private universities. The university is located 23 kilometres from the city of Nairobi on the Nairobi-Thika Super highway on 1 100 acres of land. The plan to achieve university status started in 1965 when the British Government handed over the Templer Barracks to the Kenyan Government. These Barracks were converted into an institution of higher learning known as Kenyatta College. University status was

achieved on 23 August 1985. Currently, the university has one Constituent College, eight campuses and several regional centres. It has 15 Schools, 40,000 students, 889 full-time lecturers and 1 777 full-time non-teaching staff. The university has developed a Quality Assurance Policy that defines how quality is considered in the university and how and by whom the processes are carried out. In these processes the university undertakes different types of evaluation and surveys that include lecturer evaluations, customer satisfaction surveys, alumni surveys, and accreditation by professional bodies.

University of Namibia, Namibia

The University of Namibia (UNAM) is an autonomous public institution that was established by an Act of Parliament on 31 August 1992 (University of Namibia Act 18 of 1992). Apart from one private university and one public polytechnic, UNAM is the only state-owned national university in the country and has over 16,000 students. UNAM has 11 campuses and eight regional centres throughout the country. The latter are managed by the Centre for External Studies, the distance and lifelong education unit of the university. There are eight faculties that offer diverse academic programmes at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. UNAM's quality assurance activities are regulated by its own quality assurance policy as well as by the National Council for Higher Education's National Quality Assurance System for Higher Education. Its programmes are in line with the requirements of the Namibia Qualification Authority's National Qualifications Framework, which also plays a part in the maintenance of the university's quality through, among others, regular institutional audits and programme accreditation.

Université Omar Bongo, Republic of Gabon

The Université Omar Bongo (UOB) is the oldest and leading university in the Republic of Gabon. The university was established in July 1970 as the Université nationale du Gabon (UNG) to respond to the need for highly-skilled staff when Francophone African territories gained independence, and replaced the Fondation pour l'Enseignement Supérieure en Afrique Centrale (FESAC) that had been created in 1961 with French support. In 1978, the Université nationale du Gabon was renamed Université Omar Bongo, located in Libreville, the capital of the Gabonese Republic. There are two faculties at UOB, one for humanities and social sciences, and one for law and economics. In the academic year 2011-2012, 15,298 students were enrolled at the university. There are two other public universities and other higher education institutions in Gabon, and a number of private higher education institutions.

2.2.3 Project's governance

The project was carried out by a consortium of four partners with complementary capacities and experiences in higher education and in QA: two regional university associations, a national QA agency and a university. This enabled the project to consider the full range of views required for developing feasible and widely acceptable QA procedures. The partners met regularly to discuss the project implementation and outcomes.

The partners convened an **Advisory Board** to provide an external perspective on the project and to discuss and promote synergies with QA approaches in different regions of Africa and Europe. The Board involved representatives of regional organisations that have an interest in QA matters and met in April 2012 during the post-evaluation workshop in Aveiro. Members were selected to ensure geographic spread and a combination of expertise in, and relevance to, the QA discussion in Africa and internationally.

Project partners

European University Association, Belgium (Coordinator)

EUA's mission is to influence the outcomes of European-level policy debates on issues that will have an impact both at national level on the work of national university associations and for the association's individual member universities. Equally, EUA looks to support its members, through a variety of projects and activities, in understanding and responding to these developments in an ever-more complex and competitive global environment.

Association of African Universities, Ghana

The mission of the Association of African Universities (AAU) is to enhance the quality and relevance of higher education in Africa and strengthen its contribution to African development by supporting the core functions of higher education institutions (HEIs); facilitating and fostering collaboration of African HEIs; and providing a platform for discussion of emerging issues in African higher education.

Irish Universities Quality Board, Ireland

The mission of the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) is to support and promote a culture of quality in Irish universities and independently evaluate the effectiveness of quality processes. Since its inception, it has established itself as an important voice both nationally and internationally in the area of quality assurance. IUQB is funded by subscriptions from the seven Irish universities and an annual grant from the Higher Education Authority.

University of Aveiro, Portugal

The University of Aveiro (UA) was created in 1973 and quickly became one of the most dynamic and innovative universities in Portugal. Today it is a public foundation under private law attended by about 15,000 students on undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. One of the most dynamic and innovative universities in Portugal, UA has achieved a significant position amongst higher education institutions in Portugal, being one of the top universities regarding the quality of its infrastructures, the strength of its research and the excellence of its staff.

Alumni Association of Erasmus Mundus African Chapter

The mission of the Alumni Association of Erasmus Mundus (EMA) is to serve the interests of Erasmus Mundus Students and Alumni, notably by providing a forum for networking, communication and collaboration and by promoting Erasmus Mundus as a European programme of excellence in international education. EMA has regional Chapters that have contact points and conduct regionally relevant initiatives. The EMA Africa Chapter supported this project and advised on incorporating student representatives into the expert teams.

Erasmus Mundus Programme

Erasmus Mundus is a cooperation and mobility programme in the field of higher education that aims to enhance the quality of European higher education and to promote dialogue and understanding between people and cultures through cooperation with non-EU countries. In addition, it contributes to the development of human resources and the international cooperation capacity of higher education institutions in non-EU countries by increasing mobility between the European Union and these countries.



Round table discussion at Evaluation Workshop in Aveiro, Portugal

©University of Aveiro

Members of the Advisory Board

- *Accreditation and Quality Assurance Commission for Higher Education, represented by Florence K. Lenga*
- *Conseil Africain et Malgache pour L'Enseignement Supérieur (CAMES), represented by Jean Koudou*
- *Higher Education Quality Assurance Initiative of Southern Africa (HEQMISA), represented by Timothy Ngwira*
- *Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA), represented by Mayunga Nkunya*
- *European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), represented by Fiona Crozier*

III. THE IEP APPROACH AND ITS ADAPTATION TO THE DIFFERENT AFRICAN CONTEXTS

As mentioned, the project partners agreed to use EUA's Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) as a basis for this project. AAU was interested in the emphasis put on the self-evaluation phase and the long and successful history of the programme.

The following sections describe the IEP and how it required minor adaptations for the QA Connect project. Before doing so, however, it is important to define key QA concepts⁶ that would help distinguish the IEP from other QA approaches:

- Accreditation: "Accreditation is the establishment of the status, legitimacy or appropriateness of an institution, programme or module of study. Accreditation decisions are usually limited to a fixed and stated period of time, after which the institution or programme is required to engage with a more or less rigorous re-accreditation process."
- Evaluation: "Evaluation (of quality or standards) is the process of examining and passing a judgment on the appropriateness or level of quality or standards."
- Institutional audits: "An external institutional audit is a process by which an external person or team check that

procedures are in place across an institution to assure quality, integrity or standards of provision and outcomes."

- Licensing: "Licensing is the formal granting of permission to (a) operate a new institution (b) a new programme of study (c) practice a profession."
- Quality assurance: "Assurance of quality in higher education is a process of establishing stakeholder confidence that provision (input, process and outcomes) fulfills expectations or measures up to threshold minimum requirements."

The IEP approach is a combination of an evaluation and an institutional audit in that it focuses on an analysis of decision-making processes and structures and provides an audit of internal QA processes.

As a formative QA programme, IEP is focused on improvement and is committed to contributing to each participating institution on its own terms. Therefore, IEP is not suited to evaluate illegitimate institutions that should be closed down. This is better left to licensing or accreditation processes.



Discussions at the Final Dissemination Conference

©Dereje Wondimm - ECA

⁶ The definitions come from the *Analytic Quality Glossary*, <http://www.qualityresearchinternational.com/glossary/apel.htm>

3.1 The IEP: scope and philosophy

The IEP is an independent membership service of EUA. It emphasises:

- The self-evaluation process and the institution's self-knowledge as the essential foundation for improved internal governance and management, as well as for external accountability purposes.
- Approaching each higher education institution in the context of its specific goals and objectives and actively supporting it in fulfilling its public mission by providing recommendations on the institutional structures, capacities, processes, policies and culture, in order to enable it to achieve its mission – in teaching and learning, research and service to society. It provides tailor-made recommendations about the governance of the institutions, their capacity to organise their activities to reach their strategic goals, to evaluate their activities and to manage change.

In the course of two decades, IEP has developed from a somewhat informal peer review into an independently governed evaluation programme, with well-developed structures and processes. Today, IEP is recognised as an external quality assurance provider in Europe. Following an external review, IEP has been accepted as a full member of ENQA (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education) and is listed in EQAR (European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education), a register of trustworthy QA agencies operating in Europe.

To the extent that IEP is mission-driven, it is a flexible tool that can be applied in different national and institutional contexts. Whilst a great variety of European universities have participated in IEP over the past 18 years, non-European institutions have also been attracted to its focus on stimulating a change process. Institutions from Japan, the Middle East, Latin America, and South Africa have participated in the programme, praising its flexibility and responsiveness to their specific challenges. It is for this reason that the project partners considered IEP as suitable for the variety of different universities in Africa.

3.2 The IEP methodology

The general IEP approach consists of the following practical steps:

- Five evaluators are selected from a stable pool of experts, three of whom are current or past rectors or vice-rectors⁷. The team chairs are selected after they have acquired significant IEP experience. The inclusion of rectors ensures a true peer-to-peer exchange with the leadership of the participating university. A student is also included in the team, as well as a senior higher education expert, acting as a team coordinator. None of the team members are from the country in which they conduct an evaluation. A yearly seminar, to which all experts are invited, is organised at the beginning of every evaluation round to induct new members, provide an update on recent developments in higher education, improve evaluation skills, etc.
- Based on the IEP guidelines, the participating university is asked to complete a self-evaluation and submit a self-evaluation report before the visits of the expert team take place. The self-evaluation is centred upon four key questions:
 - What is the institution trying to do?
 - How is the institution trying to do it?
 - How does the institution know it works?
 - How does the institution change in order to improve?

Because these questions are open-ended, they allow the institutions to focus on the issues that are of particular strategic importance to them, whether it is management, research and educational developments, internationalisation, contribution to the local community, etc.

- The evaluation team undertakes a first visit to become acquainted with the institution and requests additional information when necessary. Meetings are held with different institutional leaders, faculties, students, etc., as a means to understand the institution in its context.
- A second visit is conducted to deepen the team's knowledge of the institution and to formulate and confirm its findings. It ends with the presentation of an oral report that the evaluation team presents to the university

⁷ This report uses the term rector as a generic term for the top leadership position in an institution.



Participants at the Evaluation Workshop in Aveiro, Portugal

©University of Aveiro

leadership, the university community, and often also to a range of external stakeholders.

- The draft evaluation report is prepared by the coordinator, with contribution from all team members. It is sent to the institution for correction of factual errors. The final version is posted on the IEP website.

3.3 Adapting IEP to the pilot evaluations in Africa

When the IEP methodology was selected as the basis for the pilot evaluations in Africa it was agreed that due consideration would be given to the specific needs of African universities and to ensure a joint ownership of the process. Thus, the project partners discussed whether and how certain aspects of the IEP methodology should be adapted in order to ensure its suitability to the specific characteristics of the African higher education systems.

One key consideration was that the evaluations should entail a truly bi-regional dimension, by drawing upon African and European expertise. Thus, one major change was related to the composition of the expert teams. The regular IEP teams are generally composed solely of IEP pool members, but African experts were included in these pilot evaluations: two experts and one student in each team. One major difference with IEP practice is that some of the African experts were not rectors, former rectors or vice-rectors but were nevertheless selected for their commitment, relevance and depth of experience.

The IEP guidelines were discussed with the expert teams (Dublin training workshop). Given the IEP's stress on institutional autonomy, African experts noted that the national and legal context in some African countries may not permit such an emphasis, and drew attention to the political sensitivities of this issue in their region, and also to the different understandings of the term 'autonomy'. The teams took note of this.

Apart from this point, the guidelines were found to be sufficiently flexible and adaptable to the various African higher education contexts. They required no modification of the methodology.

IV. INSTITUTIONAL EVALUATIONS IN AFRICA: PRACTICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

How well was the IEP approach implemented? What were the practical and methodological challenges encountered? The following sections, based on feedback collected through two questionnaires – to the teams and the institutions⁸ – and the discussions in the post-evaluation workshop in Aveiro, provide answers to these questions.

4.1 Practical aspects

By and large, the practical organisation of the evaluations was relatively smooth. However, some issues did arise, which should be considered for the future organisation of such evaluations on the African continent.

Due to a variety of reasons, only one evaluation proceeded with the whole expert team intact for the two visits. All others lost one person for one or both visits, which is unusual for the IEP programme in Europe. After discussing this issue with the experts and universities, it was agreed that this may be due to the fact that the project expert pool included a high number of new members, as opposed to the long-standing IEP pool members, who are quite used to the evaluation workload. It also certainly has to do with the longer distances, and less frequent and flexible travel connections, in particular within Africa.

Whilst the project team – also on the European side – had experience in organising projects and events in Africa on a cross-continental level, some organisational issues proved to be far more complex than expected:

- The travel expenditure and time spent travelling were higher than usual due to the elevated travel costs between Europe and Africa and, especially within Africa, and the scarcity of airport hubs in Africa. Some travel arrangements were complicated and time-intensive.
- Vaccination and visa procedures not only added to the cost and organisational burden, but also required

more time for some team members who had to travel to neighbouring countries to obtain their visas. It also made it more difficult to replace a team member at short notice, which is usually feasible in IEP evaluations in Europe.

- The requirement to travel in economy class, as stipulated in the guidelines of the European Commission's Erasmus Mundus Programme, was generally contested, due to the length of travel and numerous connections. It meant that experts were tired upon arrival. The very short stay, especially during the first visit, aggravated the situation.

These issues would need careful consideration in any future activity.

4.2 Methodological aspects

By and large, the IEP methodology worked very well. The difficulties encountered were not unusual and often faced by IEP teams in Europe and elsewhere in the world, particularly in places where QA processes are new. In addition, most of these difficulties were apparent during the first visits and were addressed to ensure the usefulness of the second visits and the reliability of the evaluation reports. A review of each step of the evaluation process is presented below:

- The Accra preparatory workshop that introduced institutions to the QA Connect project and the Guidelines were praised. However, several institutions recommended that support could be improved during the self-evaluation phase by providing more detailed guidelines and more on-going support during the process. This type of comment reflects the difficulty that many universities have in producing a self-evaluation report that balances description and critical analysis, and encourages them to think about their institution strategically.

⁸ 14 out of 25 responses to the questionnaires to experts were received, the majority being from European experts. All five institutions responded to the university questionnaire.

- The quality of the training provided to the evaluation teams was praised as well:
 - The African team members felt that the Dublin training seminar for team members had been generally useful – although those with no prior evaluation experience noted that it is challenging to be fully prepared for an institutional evaluation in a seminar setting. They suggested that future training seminars could include additional modules for “newcomers” which would complement the modules that bring everyone together.
 - The European members – who are part of the IEP stable pool and as such well experienced in the IEP process – appreciated the opportunity to engage with their team members and to learn about different African contexts. In particular, discussions about certain sensitive issues, such as institutional autonomy in Africa, proved stimulating and challenged many of the Europeans’ assumptions and experiences.
 - The experts noted, however, that it would have been helpful to include more national background information during the training, particularly since the self-evaluation reports did not provide such information despite it being specified in the guidelines.
- The composition of the teams was deemed suitable. The combination of project partners from Europe and Africa brought a rich diversity of expertise and national and regional insights. However, isolated comments from African experts were received on:
 - Having only European experts serve as chairs or coordinators: this was discussed in the Aveiro post-evaluation workshop and agreement was reached that depth of experience rather than regional origin was the essential aspect in selecting chairs and coordinators. The chairs should always be experts with a longstanding experience in evaluations. Furthermore, it was stressed that the success of the evaluation depends on the active participation of every team member, and that the entire team should jointly agree on the contents of the report.
 - The suitability of including students in the teams, especially from an African cultural perspective: this was addressed in Aveiro and agreement was reached that the student selection method in the pilot project provided an exemplary model. All teams praised the quality of the student representatives and thought that they brought an added value. It should be noted here that when the inclusion of students into the IEP teams was introduced a few years ago, some of the pool members had expressed their concerns. Today, however, student participation is fully accepted as an enhancement of the methodology.
 - In addition, given that some experts were not able to attend one of the two visits, it would be important to select highly-motivated experts who are ready to commit the requisite time. In this respect, it was suggested that former rectors might be more available to participate actively in the programme than current ones. Creating a ‘community of experts’ was also stressed. This can only be developed over time and with regular opportunities for the experts to meet and be engaged in the programme. This has been the case with the IEP expert pool in Europe.
- As noted earlier, the self-evaluation process and the resulting report are very important to the success of the exercise. All universities followed the guidelines by setting up a self-evaluation committee, chaired by a member



University representatives share experiences

©Dereje Wondimm - ECA

other than the rector. Some conducted specific activities (such as focus groups, interviews and questionnaires) to gather data. The questionnaire to institutions asked them about the challenges met during the self-evaluation process. These challenges were also discussed during the post-evaluation seminar in Aveiro and included the following aspects, some of which can be taken up in the future:

- Careful identification and selection of members of the internal self-evaluation committee in order to ensure their presence at (most) meetings, in a context where work overload makes it difficult to devote time to the self-evaluation process.
- Some universities commented that there was an initial reticence or scepticism about the evaluation, which made it difficult to obtain quality input for the self-evaluation. This dissipated after the first visit, however, once colleagues understood the nature of the evaluation better.
- Mobilising stakeholders for participation. Thus, one institution commented that ‘external stakeholders’ (e.g. parents, local organisations, industry) found it strange to be invited to participate in a university evaluation, yet were highly appreciative of the experience after having been involved.
- Solicitation and generation of the data/information from the various units of the university and ensuring the currency of data. This was particularly difficult for universities with many campuses.
- In the absence of a single document on QA, collation of quality assessment practices.
- Defining the nature of the link between the institutional reality and its strategic plan.
- Contextualising the university’s strategic management and its capacity for change.

Given these challenges, all five institutions felt they needed more time to prepare the self-evaluation. In addition, they mentioned pre-programmed academic activities in the university calendar and holidays as other constraints. Nevertheless, the five self-evaluation reports were provided in time for the first visits, as was required.



EUA's Tia Loukkola with Dr Sifiso Nyathi from the University of Namibia

©Dereje Wondimm - ECA

Some self-evaluation reports were extremely thorough; others were commended by the evaluation teams for their honesty but lacked evidence-based argumentation, due to the scarcity of solid institutional data; still others did not identify key strategic priorities or were qualified as not being analytical. These weaknesses were clearly linked to the fact that the self-evaluation process was new to some universities and further support would have been useful. Most importantly, however, the lack of solid institutional data was identified as a major structural weakness, linked to the poor ICT infrastructure and lack of experience in internal QA processes.

During the post-evaluation workshop, it was noted that self-evaluations are generally a challenge for an institution, and that the self-evaluation process is as important as the report itself.

- Generally, the universities disseminated their self-evaluation report to all staff, students, and external stakeholders whom the evaluation team was to meet, as required in the guidelines.
- In general, the evaluation process is facilitated by the openness of the institutional leadership, which allows the evaluation team to identify quickly the main issues and priorities of the institution. Typically, this openness is more likely to be present when the university has had some prior evaluation experience with a similar formative philosophy as that of IEP. This being said, the rapport established during the first visit helps the second visit to

proceed smoothly and with more openness. This was the case for this project as well. Thus, one university noted:

“The evaluation team provided good explanation that made every participant at our institution understand the reason for the evaluation exercise. Before they arrived, some members of the university including senior management thought the exercise was meant to catch the university and expose it in terms of what we are not doing right. After the explanation by the evaluation team, all the members of the university understood that the purpose was to support the strategic change and improvement. Senior management realised that the exercise was meant for good intention and fully supported it and encouraged everybody to participate.”

- The schedule of the site visits included a range of meetings – some of which required the presence of a limited number of university staff. Although the QA Connect guidelines were very clear about the composition and size of each group for each meeting, in some cases, groups were larger than expected during the first visits, which made conversation difficult. This was notably the case when hierarchical levels were mixed, which meant that it was difficult to hear the voice of the more junior staff. This inclusive approach to meetings – again, not unusual in other parts of the world – was corrected for the second visits.
- Due to a strong culture of hospitality, some teams were accompanied at all times, particularly during the first visits, on occasions during times reserved for the team debriefing. Whilst the teams welcomed such friendliness and warmth, they did request time alone to debrief during the second visit as this is essential for the preparation of the oral report.
- Meetings with external stakeholders (such as local industry, local government, parents, police, local organisations, etc.) were deemed critical to the process and rather novel, despite that fact that some universities had difficulties identifying and securing appointments with them.
- The length of the site visits were deemed to be appropriate, except in the case of very big institutions with multiple campuses, which would have required slightly longer visits.
- The evaluation reports: following standard practice in external quality assurance exercises, universities received the draft report to correct factual errors. They were also encouraged to provide feedback on the findings and recommendations in the reports, which some of them did. The final evaluation reports have been posted on the project website (cf. Chapter 7).

4.3 Lessons learnt

As will be seen in Chapter 6, project participants endorsed the notion that this type of institutional evaluation should continue. Some practical aspects for a similar activity in the future were considered:

- Whilst the two site visits were certainly seen as useful by both the universities and the teams, the option of having a single visit of longer duration was discussed in the post-evaluation workshop. Most participants were sceptical about this idea and stressed that the two site visits are a critical success factor in the evaluations. However, given the complicated travel arrangements to some of the universities and the associated high travel costs, the question of containing costs was discussed. One approach would be to maintain the two visits but to include only two team members in the first one. This option would require selecting carefully two team members (for their depth of evaluation experience, status) in order to ensure credibility.
- Building up and preparing a larger pool of experts, and relying upon a professional administrative team that would develop the experience of coordinating evaluations in Africa would ensure quality. In addition, a stable and committed pool would minimise the number of last-minute cancellations and thus reduce costs.
- The combination of project partners from Europe and Africa brought a rich diversity of expertise and national and regional insights. This confirms the IEP experience: there is great value in having experts with diverse national backgrounds in teams although, in the future, these experts could all come from within Africa, with a combination of those coming from within the region in which the university is located, as this would save travel costs, and those from outside the region, to enable cross-fertilisation of experiences. The inclusion of mature and

motivated students with international experience was also deemed an asset.

- It was agreed at the beginning of this project that the final evaluation reports would be published. Participants in the post-evaluation workshop confirmed that this was important in order to disseminate the value of an institutional evaluation approach, identify shared challenges, demonstrate institutional accountability, and increase the Internet visibility of the evaluated institutions.

Success factors

Participants confirmed that the success factors of the project included the following:

- *The rich diversity of expertise and national and regional insights in every evaluation team and the active participation of each team member in the evaluation.*
- *Strong support from the university leadership and a very good local liaison person, engaged, committed and with enough influence to persuade colleagues to attend the meetings.*
- *The pre-evaluation and post-evaluation workshops to provide training as well as identify and discuss lessons learnt.*
- *Operational support for the self-evaluation phase and in the organisation of the two site visits.*

*
* * *

In conclusion, the IEP philosophy and general approach were understood and appreciated, although this took more time in some institutions than in others. As mentioned, all these issues had been faced by IEP elsewhere and the QA Connect teams and participating universities dealt well with the situation at hand.

V. THE EVALUATION REPORTS: MAIN THEMES

This chapter reviews briefly the main findings and recommendations found in the evaluation reports. Given the small number of institutions that were evaluated, the results of the evaluations cannot be seen as being representative of national systems or, more generally, of higher education in as vast and diverse a continent as Africa. Nevertheless, the evaluations identified some issues that are critical to all five institutions albeit to a different extent and in different ways.

The aim of this summary is to demonstrate the potential value of IEP to institutional and system development, beyond the five institutions that participated in this project. Before summarising these issues, however, it is useful to compare and contrast aspects that were different and those that were shared across the five institutions.

5.1 A contrasting set of institutions with some shared aspects

Following a call for participation, the project selected five dissimilar institutions in different countries and regions, based on their commitment to this pilot project, their diverse profiles and mission, and their prior QA experience. Institutional and regional diversity were considered to be important in testing the IEP approach and assessing if it could be used across the African continent. The five institutions differed in such aspects as size, relationship to the State, etc.:

- The smallest of the five universities enrolls about 7000 students, in three faculties located on a single campus. The largest enrolls 40,000 students and includes 12 faculties and 13 specialised institutes, distributed over two campuses. This university has also several branch campuses and extensions across the country.
- All five are public institutions but differences exist in their relationships with their national authorities and the accountability to which they must adhere.
- Four universities derived their funding mostly from public sources. The fifth is reported to have a fee-driven budget

(collected from students and other sources) and receives only 40% funding from the State.

- Three of the five are perceived as the leading institution in their region or country, which means that they have an even more important role to play in national or regional development.
- The campus environments differ: some enjoy well-maintained campuses and good infrastructure, whilst, at the other end of the spectrum, two suffer from inadequate infrastructures, power and water outages, and no building maintenance. Efforts are underway, however, to upgrade campuses in most cases.

Despite these differences, the five universities share common features. They are relatively young, having been established between 1962 and 1992, often as an offshoot of an existing tertiary institution.

Most importantly, these universities have been facing a set of similar challenges, which have affected their activities. They have had to respond to increased demand for higher education in a difficult context, characterised by limited public resources and labour markets that are not ready to receive their graduates. The consequences of fiscal austerity and massification include such aspects as: overcrowded classrooms, heavy teaching workloads, limited levels of research activities, generally weak IT infrastructures, poorly supplied libraries, brain drain and, in some cases, competition between universities when recruiting staff who have the requisite qualifications.

5.2 Four strategic questions

Naturally, the five evaluation reports addressed the four strategic questions that are at the core of the IEP methodology (cf. 3.2) and could be translated into the following four thematic questions:

- To what extent have the universities been able to achieve their three-fold mission – teaching and learning, research and service to society and their international aspirations?

- To what extent do their governance and organisational structures provide the support required to achieve set objectives?
- How far have internal quality assurance processes been developed?
- What is the institutional capacity for change?

Rather than presenting the full range of recommendations that emerged from the evaluation reports, the four sections below highlight the key aspects that have the greatest potential for strengthening institutional development in general in case of these pilot evaluations. Readers who are interested in the details can consult the five evaluation reports, which are available on the project website.

5.2.1 Achieving the mission: teaching and learning, research and service to society

The recommendations on teaching and learning focused upon the curricular portfolio, curriculum development, retention and graduation issues, and e-learning.

The evaluation reports recognised the efforts made to improve teaching and learning through several initiatives. Examples of good initiatives included: staff development schemes; the creation of pedagogical committees; the introduction of student-centred learning and more interactive teaching methods, including blended learning and integrating a research component in undergraduate education; more attention paid to providing graduates with employable and entrepreneurial skills; consulting employers in designing new study programmes and in the evaluation of the curricula; addressing retention and graduation rate through academic advising, opening learning support centres and improving assessment approaches and support to post-graduate students.

These efforts are all the more remarkable given the unfavourable student to staff ratio, the heavy teaching workloads, and the inadequate teaching facilities and libraries.

A sample of recommendations made to the five universities are:

- Ensure that all faculties and departments are aware and act upon targets set by the university to improve teaching and learning and avail themselves of existing resources such as centres for teaching and learning.
- Develop counselling, academic and career guidance services to students and ensure that all service units understand their support mission.
- Improve coherence of teaching and learning initiatives by bringing together the relevant service units under the leadership of one senior person.
- Develop the ICT infrastructure or strengthen its use in order to ensure access to library material and for e-learning and distance learning purposes.

The recommendations on research focused upon three main issues: doctoral education, the institutions' research activities and their strategic intentions.

The reports underlined several factors that severely constrain research activities: heavy teaching workloads, low research funding, inadequate laboratories, low percentage of staff with PhDs and, consequently, a heavy load for supervisors who sometimes have too many PhD candidates.



Erasmus Mundus Alumni representatives for QA Connect expert teams

©University of Aveiro

As mentioned, the universities in question are relatively young and research capacity takes time to develop. Nevertheless, good research is being carried out by very committed staff and there is clear intention to develop research activities further through such initiatives as: support for grant writing, the establishment of committees on ethics, PhD supervisors' training, incentives to increase the number of staff with PhDs (e.g. sabbaticals and fee-waivers); providing financial support for conference attendance and staff exchange.

The reports commended the universities for their commitment to research and recommended, in some cases, to:

- Develop clear research strategies with a limited number of priorities, based on existing strengths and financial considerations (i.e. costly research fields could be avoided and applied research further promoted); encourage research collaboration – within the university, nationally and internationally – as a means to reach a critical mass and foster interdisciplinary research groups.
- Set up a research office to establish a research policy framework, gather data on the institution's research activities, support collaborative research projects and promote funding opportunities for staff and students.
- Establish a selective admission process to the doctoral level and provide better support to facilitate PhD completion: e.g. regular compulsory meetings of PhD candidates to report on their work, regular reporting and feedback from their supervisor(s), disseminate information on potential scholarships, offer workshops and tutorials on paper writing, thesis writing and presentation skills.

The reports focused on the institutions' capacity to engage in their local and national communities.

Community engagement was perhaps the area of greatest divergence amongst the five universities. The spectrum of positioning included a university with no experience in community engagement to one with a relatively solid experience. This university has a unit responsible for consultancy activities and knowledge transfer and involves stakeholders in its faculty boards.

It is clear, however, that all five universities are interested in developing or strengthening further their links to

external stakeholders in order to support teaching and learning and research, and to contribute to local and national development. Thus, there seems to be room for more systematic engagement of the local community in the university and vice versa. Universities received recommendations on the benefits and pitfalls of stakeholder engagement and how to be effective in this area. These included recommendations such as:

- Develop a strategy that pinpoints the right partners, map stakeholders' needs and identify criteria to measure the success of partnerships. As part of the strategy, develop new administrative functions (such as marketing, legal office) and provide staff development to ensure effectiveness.
- Associate students and staff in the discussion of the strategy in order to ensure buy-in, and require external partners and individual academics to work with and through the university, which would serve to increase the visibility of the institution. In addition, ensuring that external funding flows through the university budget is accepted international practice.

The reports also offered recommendations for the development and implementation of an internationalisation strategy.

All five universities had some regional and international activities, and generally defined internationalisation as capacity building and a means to promote intra-African mobility. They differed, however, in the emphasis on teaching and learning or research in their approach to internationalisation. In addition, the evaluation reports noted gaps in the internationalisation strategies and provided recommendations such as:

- Elaborate an internationalisation strategy – with specific objectives, action plans, including responsibilities and resources – and ensure staff buy-in by specifying the rationales and benefits for wanting an increased level of internationalisation.
- Create or strengthen the international office, which would coordinate policy and delivery in the key areas.
- Improve internet visibility by extending the university web site; developing personal web pages for academics; possibly using social networks; establishing a common university email address (as opposed to personal accounts) etc.



University representatives and project experts

©University of Aveiro

Naturally, in order to support the mission of the institutions at hand, recommendations addressed staffing issues.

All reports noted the poor staff to student ratio. In addition, given the small pool of available PhDs in some countries, recruitment is often endogamous. Furthermore, the civil service status of academic staff limits the university's capacity to effectively manage them.

The reports also commended the universities for their staff policies: promotion, with strict criteria and transparent processes; orientation sessions for new staff; staff handbooks; staff development or mentoring; efforts to correct the gender imbalance; changing promotion criteria to include all three university missions.

They received recommendations in line with their policies and initiatives such as:

- Reconsider promotion criteria and, particularly, introduce more flexibility in assessing staff by distinguishing between those focused primarily on research from those focused primarily on teaching.
- Redefine the notion of student contact hours, in order to accommodate the shift to student-centred learning (e.g. tutorial guidance, mentoring, materials development) within the existing legislative framework.

- Support staff development with training opportunities, including in e-learning technology, research methodologies, etc.

5.2.2 Governance, organisational structures and financial planning

The recommendations addressed the effectiveness of the organisational structures, the balance between centralisation/ decentralisation, communication issues, and the question of organisational cohesion.

Any generalisation about governance and organisational structures is hazardous given the institutional diversity. Shared issues, however, included:

- The balance between centralisation and decentralisation, not only between the faculties and the central administration but also in respect of the service units which needed to be consolidated in central services rather than spread over the faculties.
- The need to streamline the structures: simplification seems to be the key word that arises in the recommendations in order to address the existence of too many committees and their overlapping responsibilities.

- The need to consult staff and students and to make decision-making processes more transparent.
- The necessity to develop the IT infrastructure as a matter of urgency in order to address the need for an integrated management information system, improve registration and collation of examination marks, enhance capacity for internal and external communication, etc.

During the post-evaluation workshop, participants indicated that issues such as institutional leadership capacity, academic freedom, devolving powers within the university, external and internal accountability mechanisms and the capacity of the institution to diversify its funding sources would depend on the autonomy of the institution. Thus, autonomy was clearly identified as an important condition to enable good governance. The point was made that the state of university autonomy varies considerably across the African continent, generally with more autonomy granted to universities in the British tradition. Apart from the issue of academic freedom, these aspects were broached in the evaluation reports.

The recommendations focused upon strategic planning, financial planning and the extent and implications of financial and resourcing constraints.

One common set of issues related to financial planning is linked to underfunding. Some universities are attempting to improve their financial position by developing alternative sources of funding (e.g. developing alumni relations, consultancy services, research support centres to assist with grant writing, etc.). Other universities have been encouraged to do so in the recommendations received. A common recommendation is:

- To ensure that contract research income does not go directly to individual staff or faculty but flows through the university budget (with an overhead going to the university). This issue was particularly stressed when quasi-autonomous research institutes existed on campus.

5.2.3 Internal quality assurance

The recommendations focused upon quality assurance and quality management systems and arrangements and use made of students' feedback through questionnaires.

The scope of internal QA processes varied significantly across the five institutions, from one that was ISO-certified to one with no QA procedure. Others had developed a few procedures, such as student evaluations, curriculum committees, a QA central committee, quality officers in faculties, etc. In general, however, the approach to internal QA was not systematic and feedback loops were not closed or the use of evaluation results was not readily transparent.

All reports urged the universities to pay great attention to internal quality processes and internal quality cultures. They received recommendations in line with their state of development in this area, such as:

- Consolidate all quality assurance operations, including the office responsible for collecting institutional data with the QA unit, and base QA on international good practice together with a set of principles (e.g. improvement oriented, non-bureaucratic QA).
- Develop a quality culture by offering seminars to staff and students, and leadership training to student representatives, in order to discuss their respective roles in the QA processes.
- Ensure the transparent use of evaluation results in order to maintain commitment to quality maintenance and enhancement.

5.2.4 What are the institutional capacities to define and implement strategic orientations?

The recommendations focused upon the institution's capacity to manage change including the structures and processes necessary to reinforce change and to ensure organisational coherence.

The universities were generally praised for their strong leadership and their dynamism. Similarly to universities elsewhere in the world, the environment of the five institutions is in great flux, requiring them to make internal changes. Reforms are being discussed or are underway in the five institutions, with consequences for several of the following aspects: internal structures, funding levels, academic staff careers, external quality assurance, links to stakeholders, etc. To address these issues, several institutions developed documents outlining their strategic intentions.

The evaluation teams welcomed this development and offered a range of recommendations to improve the proposed strategies in order to avoid the common pitfall of trying to undertake too much and setting the change agenda too broadly.

For example, the reports recommended:

- To set realistic goals, i.e. aligned with available resources and current research and educational capacities and strengths; define priorities, timelines, resources, and activities to reach goals; clarify the division of labour and responsibilities; identify performance indicators; undertake an annual review of progress and review the strategic document regularly.

- To involve the university community and external stakeholders in the development of the strategic orientations and their implementation in order to ensure internal buy-in and external support.

*
* *

The participants in the Aveiro post-evaluation workshop confirmed that these findings reflected their experience, thus demonstrating the relevance of the IEP approach to the diversity of African contexts.

In the concluding chapter, this report offers a general assessment of the project and identifies possible next steps.



*James Nyomakwa-Obimpeh,
Marie Curie PhD Researcher,
with EUA President Professor
Maria Helena Nazaré*

©University of Aveiro

VI. CONCLUDING REMARKS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The results of the project clearly confirm the need to conduct institutional evaluations in Africa.

Quality assurance is developing quickly in Africa: national QA agencies are being established, and institutions are developing internal QA approaches, in a context characterised by the expansion of higher education institutions and systems due to the growing number of student enrolments.

In such a context, developing a programme similar to IEP and managed by AAU, a continent-wide body that represents the voice of African higher education could be useful in preparing universities for their national evaluation exercises and would further strengthen the institutions' role in managing quality, thus raising quality levels. These evaluations would have the potential for developing evaluation expertise across regional African associations and enhancing quality levels across the continent:

- They would complement existing national QA processes, particularly where these are focused mainly on accountability rather than supporting institutional development.
- The approach could be an important complement to activities that are already being carried out at sub-regional level and could enhance regional integration in higher education across Africa.
- An Africa-wide pool of experts would collectively gather and share a comprehensive knowledge on

QA and governance of African universities, and thus develop expertise in institutional development in priority areas such as teaching and learning, research, internationalisation, and links with external stakeholders.

- In turn, the expertise gained would contribute to developing in-depth and topical understanding of higher education by university associations because the evaluations help to identify current and crosscutting issues.
- Thus, it would support AAU's prime mandate of promoting quality and enhancing universities' strategic capacity.

Such an initiative would also promote dialogue on quality assurance and exchange of practices between Africa and Europe and also with other parts of the world, and enhance common understanding – which were particularly valuable aspects for both the African and European partners involved in this pilot project.

It should be recalled that the project aimed to answer three key questions (cf. 2.1). The responses after the pilot evaluations are as follows.

Is IEP applicable to the different African higher education contexts?

Based on the experiences in the context of this project, the answer is clearly affirmative. The formative philosophy was understood and accepted and the methodology was embraced as shown by the detailed analysis in Chapter 4.

Is the IEP methodology an effective and efficient means to contribute to the strategic institutional development of African universities?

The participants were asked: "Do you think this process was beneficial to your institution? Please identify any results or outcomes that you can use for the future". The responses received mentioned the following:

- "It stimulated most of the minds and became a reference point for discussions in meetings. It has contributed



QA Connect experts, Professor Goolam Mohamedbhai (left) with Professor Babatunde Ipaye and one representative from Kenyatta University, Professor John Ndiritu

©University of Aveiro

to the development of the quality culture within the university. All the recommendations are very useful and the university is going to implement them.”

- One university mentioned that the report raised important questions that will be discussed at national level with the authorities. Another noted that because IEP engages with external stakeholders, the evaluation could have an impact on national QA processes and address gaps in national data collection (e.g. about the higher education system, employment, demography, etc.).
- The evaluations were also seen as an opportunity for the top leadership team “to have an external international perspective on, and perhaps some endorsement of, the direction of travel of the university in the areas that IEP considers.”

Given this feedback, is the IEP approach to institutional evaluation an effective and efficient means to contribute to the strategic institutional development of African universities? The experience of the project and the individual evaluations seem to indicate that this is so.

Ultimately, the impact of any type of evaluation depends on a combination of two factors: the pertinence of the recommendations and, most importantly, whether the institutions have the requisite capacity to implement them. This includes such considerations as: the quality of leadership, a reasonable degree of institutional autonomy, costs and available resources, IT infrastructures and the capacity to collect institutional data. Some of these aspects are within the control of institutions; others are within the control of the State or dependent on the general context. Therefore, it is essential to sensitise the institutional leadership across the continent as well as the relevant ministries so as to ensure the establishment of appropriate framework conditions that would enable universities to implement the recommendations.

Should this project be taken forward and, if so, how?

There was a strong agreement among project partners and participants that it would be useful to continue this kind of evaluation. It was noted that there is no conflict between IEP and existing national and institutional QA processes and that institutional evaluations could be seen as a complementary enhancement to other QA approaches.

It was further agreed that AAU would be the natural organisation to take such a programme forward and lead it.

AAU, however, should work with the regional bodies and the national QA agencies to support the promotion and adoption of the programme. Because the QA experience is uneven across Africa, having an Africa-wide evaluation instrument, in coordination with regional bodies, would serve to even out the QA experience across the continent.

Thus, as an outcome of the QA Connect, **AAU has decided to continue the activity beyond the project with the intention of establishing its own programme for institutional evaluations.** To this end, it will develop an implementation plan for the next phase, which will be built on the lessons learnt from the successful pilot evaluations. This plan will consider the following aspects, which were considered vital during the project discussions:

- a) Management and supervision:** Ensuring the professional management and administration of the programme and its supervision through a steering committee that would include university leaders.
- b) A stable and committed expert pool:** Developing and training a committed expert pool. This is key to the quality of the evaluations and, therefore, to the sustainability of the programme.
- c) Communication plan:** A communication plan that includes specific ways to promote the supportive and enhancement-led evaluation approach.
- d) Business plan:** A business plan based on a principle of co-financing by universities and governmental and non-governmental donors so as to ensure broad ownership. The business plan should include a long-term perspective that would ensure the financial sustainability of the programme.

Thus, as a first step, AAU will seek seed funding from donor organisations. For its part, EUA offered principally to continue sharing its experience with AAU and – where required and feasible – to contribute actively in various ways to this activity in the future, such as participating in the training of the future pool of African experts and inviting European team members to join their African colleagues.

It is hoped that the outcomes of this project will contribute to the further development of quality assurance in Africa.

VII. REFERENCES

Publications

EUA (2010) *Africa-Europe Higher Education Cooperation for Development: Meeting Regional and Global Challenges. White Paper. Outcomes and Recommendations of the Project "Access to Success: Fostering Trust and Exchange between Europe and Africa"* (2008-210), European University Association, http://www.eua.be/Libraries/Publications_homepage_list/Africa-Europe_Higher_Education_Cooperation_White_Paper_EN_FR.sflb.ashx

Hayward, F.M. (2012) Graduate Education in Sub-Saharan Africa: Prospects and Challenges, *International Higher Education*, N°66, Winter 2012, pp. 21-22, <http://www.bc.edu/content/bc/research/cihe/ihe/issues/2012.html>

Lenga, F.K. (2011) Regional approaches to quality assurance – the Africa perspective, *Quality Assurance International Conference*, Brussels, 14-15 December 2011, <http://www.qaconnect-africa.eu/en/qa-in-africa>

Acronyms and websites

AAU: Association of African Universities
<http://www.aau.org/>

Alumni Association of Erasmus Mundus, African Chapter:
<http://www.em-a.eu/en/ema/our-regional-chapters/african-chapter.html>

AfriQAN: African Quality Assurance Network
<http://afriqan.aau.org/>

CAMES: Conseil africain et malgache pour l'enseignement supérieur
<http://www.lecames.org>

ENQA: European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
<http://www.enqa.eu/>

EQAR: European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education
<http://www.eqar.eu>

EU-Africa Partnership:
www.africa-eu-partnership.org

EUA: European University Association
www.eua.be

HEQMISA: Higher Education Quality Management Initiative for Southern Africa
<http://www.gtz.de/de/dokumente/en-qualitaetsmanagement-heqmisa-2005.pdf>

IEP: EUA's Institutional Evaluation Programme
www.eua.be/iep

IUCEA: Inter-University Council for East Africa
www.iucea.org

IUQB: Irish Universities Quality Board
www.iuqb.ie

Joint Africa-EU Strategy (2007):
http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/er/97496.pdf

QA Connect: Europe-Africa Quality Connect
<http://www.qaconnect-africa.eu/index.php>

UA: University of Aveiro
<http://www.ua.pt/>

VIII. ANNEX: TEAMS OF EXPERTS

Ahmadu Bello University, Nigeria

Winfried Müller (chair), former Rector,
University of Klagenfurt, Austria

Teresa Lee (coordinator), Quality Enhancement Manager,
Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB), Ireland

James Nyomakwa-Obimpeh, Board of Erasmus Mundus
Alumni Association, Ghana

Baanda Ayub Salim, Quality Assurance and Promotion
Bureau, Sokoine University of Agriculture, Tanzania

Andrew Ssemwanga, former acting Vice-Chancellor and
Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Cavendish University, Uganda

Institute of Professional Studies, Ghana

Maria Helena Nazaré (chair), former Rector,
University of Aveiro, Portugal

Howard Davies (coordinator), Senior Adviser,
European University Association (EUA), Belgium

Simeon Chituru Achinewhu, former Vice-Chancellor,
Rivers State University of Science and Technology,
Port Harcourt, Nigeria

Essete A. Bekele, Erasmus Mundus Alumni Association

Ddembe W. Williams, Associate Dean,
Faculty of Computer Science and Informatics,
KCA University, Nairobi, Kenya

Kenyatta University, Kenya

Jacques Lanarès (chair), Vice-Rector,
Université de Lausanne, Switzerland

Tia Loukkola (coordinator), Head of Unit,
European University Association (EUA), Belgium

Louise Martha Bezuidenhout, Erasmus Mundus
Alumni Association, PhD candidate in Sociology,
University of Exeter, United Kingdom

Babatunde Ipaye, Director, Learner Support Services,
National Open University of Nigeria, Nigeria

Gilbert Midende, Executive Secretary, Réseau
interuniversitaire des Grands Lacs (RIGL), Burundi

University of Namibia, Namibia

Tove Bull (chair), former Rector,
University of Tromsø, Norway

Jethro Newton (coordinator), Dean of Academic
Quality and Enhancement,
University of Chester, United Kingdom

Yasser Mohamed El-Wazir, Chairman,
Department of Physiology, Suez Canal University, Egypt

Olugbemiro Jegede, Secretary General,
Association of African Universities (AAU), Ghana

Apiyo R. Okwiri, Erasmus Mundus Alumna, Kenya

Université Omar Bongo, Republic of Gabon

Jean-Louis Vanherweghem (chair),
former Rector and former President,
Université libre de Bruxelles, Belgium

Andrée Sursock (coordinator), Senior Adviser,
European University Association (EUA), Belgium

Gaston Hakiza, Rector, University of Burundi, Burundi

Goolam Mohamedbhai, former Vice-Chancellor,
University of Mauritius and former President of the
Association of African Universities (AAU), Mauritius

Rosine Tchatchoua, Erasmus Mundus Alumna, Assistant,
Université de Dschang, Cameroun