



THE AFRICA-EU PARTNERSHIP
LE PARTENARIAT AFRIQUE-UE



Foreword

by

Mike Kuria

Acting Executive Secretary

Inter-University Council for East Africa

This initiative is implemented on behalf of the European and African Union Commissions by:



Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst
German Academic Exchange Service



This training material is provided



FH MÜNSTER
University of Applied Sciences

These modules are designed to initiate a herculean task. I have no doubt about that in my mind. The phrase “Harmonization of African Higher Education Quality Assurance and Accreditation” contains at least three controversial terms. The first is harmonization. How do you harmonize an education system informed by diverse colonial footprints? The British, French, German, Portuguese, and the Arabs all left their mark in Africa’s education systems. The systems left behind and still operational in Africa are not always cooperative but are sometimes competing discourses reflected in the number of years required for a certain certification, teaching methods, assessment methods, credit accumulation and duration to achieve them amongst others. Even in their mother continents, these systems are not harmonized. I must add, however, that the concept of harmonization is sometimes misconstrued to mean everyone doing the same thing in the same way or standardizing the way of doing things. I rather like to think about the term harmonization in the context of music. Some sing base, alto, or tenor. If you harmonize all of them, you get beautiful music. And this might be found in different genres of music such as jazz, gospels, acapella or even rock. The challenge in higher education for me is to do different things but in a way that is in harmony with other systems of education at similar levels.

The second controversial term is quality assurance. Scholars and practitioners cannot agree on a single definition of quality let alone quality assurance. What is quality? Who defines quality? How do you assess and assure quality? To who? What parameters? With multiple stakeholders, sometimes with diametrically opposed requirements, how does a higher education institution provide and assure quality for all of them. When you put these dynamics in the context of an entire continent with about 54 countries, different education systems, languages and cultures, their complexity is even more intensified.

The third term is accreditation. Not all African countries have accrediting agencies and most of them are fairly recently institutionalized. The systems and structures for accreditation have hardly been sufficiently operational. This means that in some instances, there is really nothing to harmonize in the context of accreditation. Add to these the different legal regimes for each of those countries with some having provisions that are not acceptable in other countries. Harmonizing accreditation in such circumstances will surely not be a walk in the park, because many of the countries have no experience to offer in the harmonization process.

The above tasks are also to be read in the context of interests of regional economic blocks such as the East African Community (EAC), Economic Community of West African States

(ECOWAS), South African Development Community (SADC), Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and others. So far, the EAC is said to be most integrated region. Its integration is premised on four pillars: Common market protocol, customs union, monetary union, and political federation. Although education impacts all the pillars, it's in the common market protocol that it is mostly felt with regard to human resource development and labour mobility in particular. The EAC has the Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA) as the legal entity responsible for coordinating higher education in the region. It was only in May 2017 that it managed to have the EAC declared a Common Higher Education Area by the Summit of Heads of State of the EAC Partner States. Although the region has developed and is implementing a regional quality assurance system and qualifications framework, it is yet to achieve a harmonized regional accreditation system. This is in spite of the fact that IUCEA has been in existence since 1970 and survived the collapse of the first phase of the EAC Community in 1977.

In spite of the above challenges, however, Africa has vision 2063 and regional blocks also have their visions such as the EAC community's Vision 2050. The EAC Vision 2050 makes specific reference to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and in the context of higher education, SDG 4. This goal emphasizes quality education accessible for all. This is a big vision. In spite of the significant huddles ahead, we should not stop to dream. If there is political will, and I use this term to mean supportive leadership, I believe that these modules represent a significant step towards realizing a harmonized quality assurance and accreditation system for Africa and even if this is not realized in our life time and or for the entire continent, participating universities and accrediting agencies will have their own internal education systems transformed for the better. I therefore take this opportunity to congratulate the authors of the modules for a job well done and wish the project success.

Finally, I would like to encourage all participants to actively engage in this training course and share your experience with other participants and colleagues. Even though the above mentioned is contested and may seem like a mountain too high to climb, it should not keep us all from making the first step. Like Nelson Mandela said, "*It always seems impossible until it's done*".