



## Summary Report and Recommendations – July 2021

### 1. Introduction

The [HAQAA2 Initiative](#)<sup>1</sup> (Harmonisation, Quality Assurance and Accreditation in African Higher Education) has supported a series of online policy dialogue events entitled ‘CESA Higher Education (HE) in Focus’ between May and June 2021, with a common thread linked to data collection for policy making. The events are proposed as part of the Policy Component of HAQAA2, which provides support for the implementation of CESA (the Continental Education Strategy for Africa, of the African Union) and specifically for the CESA ‘Cluster’ of stakeholders responsible for higher education.

More precisely, this online event series is part of the groundwork for the development of a “Policy Data Unit” in Africa, which will drive a new approach and process for generating comparable higher education data across the continent, rooted closely in CESA and the different African Union structures which support it. ‘CESA HE in Focus’ examined different priority topics of the CESA Higher Education Cluster and generated recommendations for data and capacity building needs around these areas at the continental level. The conclusions are intended to pre-empt the work of a ‘PDU Development Team’, which, with the support of HAQAA2, will be designing a work plan for the PDU, contemplating its possible structure and modes of functioning, and generating buy-in over the course of 2022.

The events have been organised in close collaboration with the respective CESA Higher Education ‘Sub-Cluster’ coordinators, who oversee a range of topics, from curricula reform to quality assurance and leadership in higher education. Six online events have been organised as round table discussions, webinars and debates, open to all relevant higher education stakeholders in Africa, with interpretation provided in French, English and Portuguese, so as to facilitate the participation of different linguistic groups across the continent.

This process has been timed so as to lead to the AAU General Conference in July 2021, where a session is being dedicated to HAQAA2 CESA-related activities and the PDU concept will be presented to Vice-Chancellors in Africa.

### 2) Event Schedule

The schedule has been as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> HAQAA2 (2019-2022) is a Service Contract financed by the European Commission in support of the Africa-EU Strategic Partnership. It is implemented by a consortium consisting of OBREAL Global (lead), AAU, ENQA and DAAD.  
<https://haqaa2.obsglob.org/>

- **Event One:** 6 May, 2021 – *Towards the Development of a Continental Database for Effective Policy Formulation on CESA (HE) Initiatives*. CESA Sub-cluster on Harmonisation, Quality Assurance and Accreditation. Coordinator: Juma Shabani (with the support of Peter Okebukola)
- **Event Two:** 12 May, 2021 – *Preparing Higher Education Students for a Complex World: Exploring the Fluidity of Teaching, Learning and Curriculum Post-COVID*. CESA Sub-Cluster on Curriculum, Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. Coordinator: Charmaine Villet.
- **Event Three:** 20 May, 2021 – *Expert Consultative Roundtable on Transitioning from Distance Learning and E-learning in Higher Education in West Africa*. CESA Sub-Cluster on Open, Distance, Online Education and Flexible Learning. Coordinator: Goski Alabi.
- **Event Four:** 26 May, 2021 – *Strengthening personal, leadership development and work readiness of graduates in African Universities*. CESA Sub-Cluster on Student Affairs. Coordinator: Matete Madiba.
- **Event Five:** 10 June, 2021 – *Industry-Academia Collaboration and Technology Transfer in Africa*. CESA Sub-Cluster on Research and Graduate Studies. Coordinator: Olusola Oyewole.
- **Event Six:** 29 June, 2021 – *Leadership and Management*. CESA Sub-Cluster on Leadership and Management. Coordinator: Damtew Teferra.

The event agendas, bios of speakers and recordings can be found at <https://haqaa2.obsglob.org/cesa-in-focus/>.

This summary report highlights first the recommendations of CESA HE in Focus, as they pertain to a future Policy-Data Unit for Higher Education, and then provides a snapshot of events and the main discussion points.

### 3. Recommendations related to African data collection and the CESA HE Cluster

CESA HE in Focus was designed to not only stimulate fruitful debate on the myriad topics which the CESA HE Cluster addresses, but to create a common line through these topics, related to data collection processes and needs at the African level. The coordinators of these events were asked to frame recommendations to this effect, which will be an important source of inspiration for the PDU Development Team going forward, under HAQAA2. Recommendations were made at various levels, including the institutional, national, regional and Pan-African levels, and how they interconnect.

The coordinators of event 1 - *Towards the Development of a Continental Database for Effective Policy Formulation on CESA (HE) Initiatives* - who are also the authors of a study and report which primed the event, have put forward a **10-point Agenda Towards the Setting up of a Policy Data Unit for CESA (HE)**. This agenda is an important input for the PDU Development Team in the coming year. Many of the points were echoed in subsequent events that were theme-specific.

The study authors have asserted the following steps are imperative in establishing a Policy Data Unit that is foundationally strong and sustainable in the face of economic and political shocks and social forces that may impede its work. They pertain to both structural and operational aspects of a PDU:

- 1) **Select national data collection units in every country in the region that can feed continental data:** This should be achieved through a survey of existing higher education institutions or agencies with a proven record of ability to collect and process verifiable data. The National Universities Commission (NUC) of Nigeria provides an example.

- 2) **Establish sub-regional coordinating node for national agencies/units:** This node will be a clearing house for data aggregated at the sub-regional level and processed for acceptability at the regional level.
- 3) **Establish a Policy Data Unit for CESA (HE) in a location that is determined through objective criteria and geopolitical considerations:** An existing regional agency with track record of performance in Educational Management Information Systems (EMIS) and policy development should be a strong candidate. Where such does not exist, a new PDU entity should be created in a location approved by the African Union that will blend policy development and EMIS.
- 4) **Institutional capacity building:** All entities involved in data collection, processing and policy making should have their capacities built/strengthened especially in the area of technical infrastructure for EMIS.
- 5) **Human capacity building:** All staff of institutions at the national, sub-regional and regional (PDU) levels should be trained to upgrade their knowledge and skills in EMIS and data-driven policy development. This training should be continuous.
- 6) **Establish regional standards for higher education indicators that form the core operations of the PDU:** While the higher education indicators should target broad data on access, quality, equity, funding, and efficiency, they should be focused specifically on contemporary global (e.g., SDGs) and regional (Agenda 2063) goals.
- 7) **Data verification, validation, and security at all levels:** A mechanism should be installed along the data collection and processing chain at the national, sub-regional and national levels for verification and validation. Data security should be given utmost attention.
- 8) **Partnerships:** Partnerships for data sharing, institutional and human capacity building should be established with the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, the World Bank, UNDP and agencies in Asia, Europe and North American that play similar roles as PDU in the areas of EMIS and policy formulation.
- 9) **Monitoring and evaluation:** The activities of PDU and its sub-regional members/units should periodically undergo external monitoring and evaluation.
- 10) **Incentivisation:** Incentivise all persons in the PDU chain from the national through the sub-regional EMIS and policy development agencies to ensure longevity on the job (low turnover rate) greater efficiency and commitment to duty.

Other specific inputs were provided from the subsequent CESA HE in Focus events, to enrich the above 10-point agenda:

*On curricula innovation*

It is not clear if there is systematic data collection happening on graduate competencies and attributes at all levels. Some universities may have this, but it is not clear how that data is collected. Some Departments conduct periodical surveys with their stakeholders, but universities do not necessarily have databases where this information is stored and made available for evidence-based HE curriculum development, teaching and learning. This was also not evident on country, regional or a continental level. There are certainly gaps in how data is collected, stored and accessed when it comes to HE curriculum decision making and policy development. The following was recommended:

1. Collecting data in a standardized and systematic way, on the **competencies and attributes of HE graduates across the continent**, in order to support policy decisions on the transformation of HE Curriculum, teaching and learning to meet the demands in an ever-changing complex world (Complex problem-solving capacities).
2. Collecting data on HEI that are effectively training their graduates to meet such demands and the sharing of effective information in this regard (including **graduate assessment** and student 'tracking' beyond graduation).
3. Collecting **data on the staff capacity building strategies and programmes** that are making impactful changes to teaching and learning that meets the demands of a complex world.
4. It should be noted that industry, alumni and community stakeholders are key agents in curriculum transformation and also in data collection about graduate attributes, monitoring of competencies and mentoring of students.

### *On open and distance learning*

As a lead up to this CESA HE in Focus event, a survey was conducted to ascertain the *Preparedness and Challenges for the Adoption of Open and Distance Education in Africa: The Perspective of Students, Faculty and Administrators*. The purpose was to examine the experiences of these stakeholder groups with Open and Distance Education during the COVID-19 pandemic. While similar studies have been done on a smaller scale, and even at regional level, a study of this nature must be systematic and longitudinal for the African continent.

It is recommended that efforts are made to generate **an accurate database of the student population in the five African regions** based on which a representative sample size can be drawn for subsequent research.

Additionally, the Policy Data Unit should consider the decentralisation of data collection to country level to ensure an efficient data collection and management process.

### *On Students Affairs*

Data of student affairs should focus on multiple areas with multiple approaches. In first instance, the PDU could develop:

- A continental **Student Engagement Survey**, which could be administered locally
- A continental **Student Satisfaction Survey**, which could be adapted and administered locally
- Continental standards for the provision of student support services
- Continental **Professional Standards of student affairs practitioners**
- Continental student leadership development programme outcomes

### *On university-industry relations:*

Data approaches must be disaggregated, as data is needed both from universities and from industry in order to adequately assess policy objectives in this field. Institutionally, a more systematic data approach is needed for assessing:

- Needs of industry partners (skills and competencies)
- Student internships in different sectors and impact on employment
- Partnerships with academia for R&D strategic development projects
- Involvement of staff in industry associations

- Sponsoring of student projects (undergraduate and postgraduate) by industry

Additional data needs are primarily related to research capacity and infrastructure:

- Equipment available in universities
- How much would it require to upgrade the research facilities
- Types of research that universities have the capability to carry out and local/national relevance of research conducted with respect to development goals.
- Funds provided by government from R&I
- Internally allocated funds of universities that have been sourced within industry reserves
- Existence of research and development offices at universities that may be allowed to serve as university intellectual property offices

#### *On university leadership*

Data on university leadership could be channeled through an **African leadership institute**, which could also build capacity for leadership, adapted to specific African realities. This type of institute could scan leadership development needs, take stock of existing leadership development programmes on the continent, channels and exploit existing training resources and develop new ones.

## 2. Event summaries

### ***a) Event One: Towards the Development of a Continental Database for Effective Policy Formulation on CESA (HE) Initiatives: CESA HE Sub-Cluster on Harmonisation, Quality Assurance and Accreditation***

This launch event framed the problems, difficulties and trends related to data collection for higher education in Africa. It was preceded by a survey of stakeholders, conducted by the coordinators of the event, which gave a panorama of some of the challenges in certain African countries, and also highlighted some promising practices. The outcomes of this survey were discussed at this event<sup>2</sup>, as well as the concrete recommendations for the set-up of a PDU.

The dialogue was framed around the following questions:

1. What are country-specific challenges to the educational data gathering process and what sustainable solutions have been applied to address the challenges?
2. What lessons can be learned by the proposed PDU of CESA (HE) from your institution/country's experience in formulating data-driven policies?
3. What institutional and human capacity building/strengthening strategies can be applied to ensure that the PDU of CESA (HE) , when established, provides a model of an efficient and sustainable institution for data-driven policy making?

Key points from the survey that was conducted from the meeting were:

- Data inadequacy and reliability is one of the key blights to educational development in Africa. This phenomenon can explain, at least in part, the weak data-driven policy formulation process in many African countries.

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<sup>2</sup> The report can be found on the CESA HE in Focus Website

- In the field of education, credible and up-to-date data are particularly important for the harmonisation, quality assurance and accreditation of higher education given the need to promote the recognition of qualifications and academic and professional mobility. A Policy-Data Unit (PDU) could support the collection of data and the production of policy reports on African Higher Education and contribute to an effective coordination of the CESA HE Cluster.
- A PDU should provide reliable and up-to-date inputs on higher education in Africa, making them easily accessible, as well as aligning them to the assessment of the objectives of the CESA HE Cluster in particular, and the CESA objectives in general.

The discussions demonstrated four clusters of reasons offered by the experts for data inadequacies, which are affecting meaningful policy formulation and implementation. These are:

- ✓ inadequate funding for research and data collection;
- ✓ inadequacy of well-trained personnel for data collection and analysis;
- ✓ weak political will to make data available which gives room for corruption;
- ✓ inadequate technology and facilities for data storage and retrieval.

Solutions included 1) targeted funding of research and data collection; 2) training and building capacity for data collection and analysis at institutional and national level; and 3) provision of facilities for data storage and retrieval.

Some exemplary practices of Education Management Information Systems (EMIS) were provided, from which a PDU can draw lessons. This included strategies employed by the NUC (Nigeria) on annual data collection and publications, the Higher Education Research and Advocacy for Africa (HERANA) project (South Africa), the Education Sub-Saharan Africa (ESSA) strategy (Ghana) and the National institute for statistics in Cameroon goes about data collection.

***b) Event Two: Preparing Higher Education Students for a Complex World: Exploring the Fluidity of Teaching, Learning and Curriculum Post-COVID: CESA HE Sub-Cluster on Curricula Development***

This event revolved around a provocative presentation by Professor Paul Hanstedt, which focused on preparing higher education graduates for the complex world of work. The context outlined is highly relevant to African higher education:

- a. Dynamics in the world are constantly changing and previous solutions may not work. There is often resistance to new solutions and the data on the solutions are often incomplete or contradictory. This is a ‘wicked’ problem which must be solved.
- b. Solutions are often drawn from multiple fields of knowledge. It hence requires “wicked” students who are open to new challenges, who are deliberate and thoughtful, who are able to combine courage with humility, who are able to draw from multiple areas and adapt ideas to new concepts, not afraid to fail and able to try again.
- c. Too often higher education institutions teach students that parameters are static. Memorisation is not enough to succeed.
- d. Creating graduates who are able to address these challenges successfully requires designing of HE structures, curricula, and courses fit for a complex world.

The questions, explored in small breakout sessions, were on the following topics:

- a. How can we break the boundaries between static university learning and the complex fluidity of the global world?
- b. How do we rethink our curricula in light of the sorts of problems students will be asked to solve, the skills and thinking they need to address (complex) problems in a constructive, ethical and equitable way? What needs to change at the curricular level?
- c. How can we help our students to better understand and prepare for the complexity of the world beyond the walls of the academy?
- d. What are the questions we as academics need to ask about teaching and learning in Higher Education to make the mindset change, focus from subject content to directed self-learning?
- e. What data/information is needed in Africa to support policy decisions related to this issue? How can we ensure such data is comparable across Africa? Is there any evidence of Universities in Africa that engage in practices that promote this way of thinking and learning?

Participants offered a number of reflections:

- Covid 19 has been a springboard for change and HEI and professors must embrace this, despite the challenges.
- Community and industry engagement has become essential: Internships and problem-based courses are needed to generate collaboration, critical thinking and flexible learning
- Community outreach must be integrated into the educational approach: Models for student involvement in social change should be collected and disseminated.
- Quality assurance institutions and processes need to become more flexible to allow for and incentivise innovative teaching and learning.
- Blended learning approaches and practical work experience are the way forward: Programmes should be restructured to break boundaries between disciplines and outside partners.
- Surveys for alumni, employers, relevant stakeholders about graduate competencies must be integrated into institutional data practices.
- Staff training and development to bring about impactful learning must be a point of investment. Examples from the Carnegie collaboration in Ghana, African Centres of Excellence, Kenyan Universities, and University of Namibia were provided.
- Building networks to support regional integration when it comes to teaching innovation are key; They can also support curricula development, share modules and embrace practical learning activities across universities and industries regionally.

***c) Event Three: Expert Consultative Roundtable on Transitioning From Traditional Distance Learning To E-learning In Higher Education In West Africa: CESA HE Sub-Cluster on Open and Distance Learning***

This Expert Consultative Round table brought together stakeholders in Higher Education in West Africa to discuss strategies for transitioning from the current distance learning practices to eLearning and blended learning modes post-COVID. The expert panel discussed the findings and recommendations of a survey on the preparedness of students, faculty and administrators of higher education institutions and the potential challenges to the adoption of e-learning approaches post-COVID 19.

The areas highlighted in the presentations and discussions were:

- Faculty support for the migration to e-learning in HEIs: Insights on the advantages and challenges of teaching online as well as recommendations to address the identified challenges.
- Strategies for transitioning to e-learning and the ACDE Quality Assurance Toolkit<sup>3</sup>.
- The university management perspective, with a focus on the best practices from the University of Ghana, to inform the policy direction at the continental level.
- The student perspective/ experiences of students who have been experimenting with e-learning, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic/lessons to be learnt in implementing ODeL in African HEIs.
- Infrastructure readiness for e-learning in Africa and the importance of investing in infrastructure to complement traditional learning modes

Some take-aways from the discussion included:

1. There is an urgent need for African governments to reinforce the research and techno-pedagogical capacity of higher education institutions on the continent to be more resilient to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. E-learning is now an integral part of education and will continue to play a major role in the achievement of SDG 4 as well as transnational education.
3. Measures must be taken by the relevant institutions (AAU, AU-CESA) to mitigate the challenges faced by lecturers and students with regards to using online platforms for teaching and learning.
4. The ACDE Quality Assurance toolkit must be shared with all higher education institutions in Africa.
5. The development or sharing of e-library resources must be explored to reduce costs. The experiences of Laweh Open University and the University of Alexandria, who have successfully developed an online library of over 30,000 e-books, could be considered as models that could be replicated across the continent.

#### **d) Event Four: Strengthening personal, leadership development and work readiness of graduates in African Universities. *CESA HE Sub-Cluster on Student Affairs***

This meeting aimed to contribute towards the strengthening of student affairs practices and its offerings in higher education, in order to enhance student success, critical civic engagement and personal and leadership development of African graduates.

Key questions explored were:

1. How far are Student affairs practitioners in African universities using other sites of learning (besides the formal classroom) to develop African graduates and to prepare them for critical and engaged citizenship?
2. How to take advantage of the latest technological advances to design, implement and recognise learning and development outside the formal classroom?
3. Exploring selected case studies, how do student affairs practitioners infuse the Sustainable Development Goals (SGDs) and Agenda 2063 in their (co-)curriculum design and delivery to prepare graduates who will contribute to sustainable development in Africa?

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<sup>3</sup><https://acde-afri.org/qa/>



4. What data needs to be collected for a better understanding of the state of leadership and personal development of students in African Universities?
5. What are policy implications?

In terms of the way forward, the discussions highlighted the following:

- The need for community service to be part of graduation requirements
- Volunteerism should be promoted in curricula design and in the university student service office
- Leadership development and mentorship is essential at the level of HEI, professors and leaders of student organisations and associations. It must promote common values and models for civic engagement as well as for tackling the SDGs through professional and personal life.
- The subsequent need to restructure Student Affairs management and offices in HEIs in Africa.

**e) Event Five: Industry-Academia Collaboration and Technology Transfer in Africa: CESA HE Sub-Cluster on University-Industry Cooperation**

This event was held as a round-table discussion involving representatives of industry and higher education institutions from South Africa and Nigeria. It looked at needs, availability and sources of data required to support policy decisions on university-industry collaboration in Africa.

In terms of the reasons for promoting industry-academic and technology transfer, the following arguments were listed:

- Knowledge transfer and exchange between university and industry is critical for relevant skills development
- Enhancement of collaborative research and commercialization of research outputs.
- Generating funding for university research and new product development by industry.
- Researchers will also gain from technology transfer and commercialization. This can stimulate research and development investment and help both parties to exploit synergies and complementarities of scientific and technological advancements.
- Innovative solutions to national developmental socio-economic problems/challenges will be fostered.

However, the challenges remain multiple:

- Institutional rigidity, fragmented organisation and lack of trust between firms and universities are some of the major barriers affecting cooperation.
- The curricula across most universities does not encourage industry relevant research. Industries do not look to universities for solutions for challenges faced by them because they are ill equipped in terms of equipment and human resources.
- Lack of Industrial mentors that will work with faculties /students to enhance students' skills
- Academia is not generating innovation that can be commercialized.
- Lack of efficient coordination and synergy between universities and industries.
- Trust issues between industry and the university
- Lack of appropriate public policy for sustainable university-industry linkages.

Policy-makers across the continent are the main facilitators in promoting university-industry cooperation. Reviewing the funding models for universities, especially towards research and

development, and providing incentives to industries to fund research projects are ways that governments could drive cooperation between industries and universities. However, universities and their industry partners can also take specific actions. For example:

- Creation of mobility scheme/programme that will mobilize university faculty members and industry personnel to work in each other's environments.
- Sponsorship of professorial chairs by the industry.
- Creation of innovation which can encourage businesses to collaborate with universities to utilize the academic expertise.
- Strengthen university Research and Development Centres.
- Effective communication channels between universities and industry and publications of "bankable" research findings.
- University bureaucracy should be streamlined to ensure that research/projects are being realized at the speed demanded by the industry.
- Involvement of staff industry associations (eg.SAAFoST and SAAFI), who are supported through sponsorship of conferences, student R&D days and employee volunteership.
- Offering R&D mentorship to undergraduate students who are completing their final year R&D projects.

**f) Event Six: University Leadership and Management in the Era of Covid: CESA HE Sub-Cluster Higher Education Leadership and Management**

The final CESA HE in Focus event offered an opportunity for executive and senior institutional leaders and managers to share their experiences and sound practices in managing their institutions in the aftermath of Covid-19. It also attempted to identify leadership and management opportunities in Africa and explores their profile and implications.

The event was predicated on the following assumptions:

- The HE sector in Africa is anticipated to expand and the need for a skilled and competent leadership and management—commensurate with the increasingly complex higher education sector of the 21st Century— has become imperative.
- Managing a plethora of stakeholders—students, parents, academics, staff, management, unions, institutions, ministries, businesses, and industry—with as many interests, albeit sometimes competing, makes the task of leadership considerably demanding and arduous. Managing institutions—where resources are chronically short, enrollments are ballooning, infrastructure and facilities are dilapidated, staff are financially distressed and discontent—is a tremendous burden.
- Data collection ambitions in Africa cannot be reached if leadership in higher education is not committed to it and equipped with the tools and capacities to accommodate it.

A prestigious panel of university leaders, policy makers and head of regional associations from across the continent and beyond weighed in on the topic and provided illustrative cases of how they shaped leadership in response to the Covid 19 crisis. Some of the needs cited were:

- Sustained and long-term planning for training university leadership, among others in risk management;

- A concerted, African discussion on how to prioritise university activities in the crisis and how to target actions, taking into account limited resources;
- Supporting leadership to tackle the increasing inequities and access issues associated with the pandemic;
- Ensuring leadership that is digitally minded and understands the training needs required for staff and students in order to be able to fully exploit digital possibilities; and
- Adopting 'blended' models in all forms international cooperation, among others conferences and conventions.