FINAL REPORT- HAQAA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Harmonisation of African Higher Education Quality Assurance and Accreditation Initiative, hereafter referred to as the HAQAA Initiative, was contracted for three years (December 2015 – December 2018) to a consortium led by the University of Barcelona and consisting of the Association of African Universities (AAU), the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), the European University Association (EUA) and the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). The General Objectives of the contract, as outlined in the tender specifications, were to "contribute and support the harmonisation of higher education programmes and the creation of a revitalised, distinctive, attractive and globally competitive African higher education space, through enhanced intra-African collaboration". The Specific Objectives related to "Quality and Accreditation", and namely to "support the development of a harmonised quality assurance and accreditation system at institutional level, national, regional and Pan-African continental level."

The major outputs of the contract, which have supported the implementation of the Action Lines of the African Union's 'Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Framework (PAQAF)' – the overriding policy framework to which this contract catered - have been:

- The realization of a unique, **continental Training Course on 'A Common Language for Higher Education in Africa'.** This brought together nationally nominated representatives responsible for the national development of their QA systems and entailed both practice sharing from Europe and training on/providing sensitization to the PAQAF. The notion of "PAQAF ambassadors" arose from this dynamic group of individuals. In addition to three physical training events, participants also conducted Personal Action Plans aimed at improving specific elements of their own QA systems.
- The development of **the African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ASG-QA)**, a major guiding document that outlines common standards for institutional quality assurance as well as external quality assurance, as conducted by external QA bodies and accrediting agencies. The document is in four languages (French, Arabic, English and Portuguese) and has been extensively consulted across diverse stakeholder groups.
- The further promotion of one of the tools of the PAQAF - **the African Quality Rating Mechanism (AQRM)** - and support for institutional self-assessment, via **15 visits to universities in five African regions**, selected for their diversity. The evaluation visits were designed to validate the AQRM survey that the institutions completed and provided concrete advise for improvement.
- The development of **a methodology to assess, externally, QA agencies in Africa** in order to guarantee their transparency and ensure that they uphold common and internationally agreed principles and practices: The methodology utilizes Part C of the ASG-QA. It was tested on four established QA agencies in Africa (Senegal, Zimbabwe, Egypt and Mozambique) which agreed to under-go a self-assessment and receive an evaluation by an

international panel. Four additional countries which do not yet have agencies but are in the process of establishing them also received 'consultancy visits' by experts teams, inspired by the ASG-QA (Cameroon, Togo, Mali and Morocco).

- **General visibility for an awareness of the PAQAF and its components** has been generated through a HAQAA Initiative website, the creation of a QA database and the consistent follow-up with the Training Course participants, the Advisory Board, participation in international conference and events and the preparation of input for Africa-EU summits, the publication of a number of outputs (the ASG-QA, the outcome reports of the Training Course and the AQRM exercise), the organization of a consultation event in Addis Ababa for the ASG-QA and a final conference in Dakar Senegal and the general exploitation of the media channels and networks that the partners of the implementing consortium use.

The HAQAA Initiative has been a complex endeavor that has required working at various levels within the African context (institutional, national, regional and continental) and in conjunction with many diverse and important stakeholders active at these different levels. The consortium was carefully composed to guarantee a) outreach to these stakeholders (the AAU is the umbrella body for universities in Africa and is recognized as the implementing body for the higher education strategy of the African Union), b) expertise in the field and on higher education harmonisation and quality assurance (DAAD has a long track record of support quality assurance development in East Africa and now in West Africa and runs a professional training programmes to this effect; ENQA and EUA are both authors and drivers of the European Standards and Guidelines for QA in Europe in the context of the European Higher Education Area and represent quality agencies and universities respectively) and c) professional and efficient European contract management in an international context (provided by a dynamic international project team and project coordinators with long-standing experience in EU's external relation and higher education cooperation with Africa).

The complexity of the initiative also required a **dynamic and inclusive governance structure** in which major stakeholders were included in shaping all products and outcomes, so as to ensure their African ownership:

- An **Advisory Board** of major African regional higher education organisations from different linguistic groups was convened and met officially seven times throughout the three-year contract and was also invited to important events, to ensure their constant and constructive input;
- A **Technical Working Group** of seven African experts from different regions and linguistic groups was tasked with developing the African Standards and Guidelines for QA (ASG-QA) and the review methodology for assessing QA agencies, two major outputs of this contract and key contributions to realising the PAQAF of the African Union;
- The implementing consortium worked closely with both the EC and the African Union Commission to ensure that the initiative was consistent with and optimally contributing to African Union political objectives and particularly the PAQAF.

The consortium, though the various activities of the contract and through its contact with diverse stakeholders, can suggest a number of important considerations for investment in the future,

particularly when it comes to further promoting and implementing the PAQAF in the context of the Africa-EU Strategic Partnership:

- HAQAA has been successful in developing the ASG-QA in a consensual way that has been inclusive of diverse stakeholders. It is now important to 'domesticate it' e.g. to promote it nationally, institutionally and regionally in Africa. The pilot agency reviews and consultancy visits has been a fruitful way to do this and should be continued in future rounds of HAQAA.
- There is a large demand and interest in capacity building for QA agencies. Many countries are in the process of developing their QA systems and hence the time is right to introduced African continental tools, like the ASG-QA.
- A future phase of HAQAA should include a reflection on and improvement of the review methodology of QA agencies, given that it has now been piloted.
- The Training Course was a unique opportunity to sensitize key QA and regulatory actors about the PAQAF and its action lines. There should be coordinated promotion of the PAQAF in the future and a common message/means of describing it. Promoting the PAQAF is job for all stakeholders that have a stake in it and not just the African Union Commission.
- Future training activities should consider the continued support of 'HAQAA Ambassadors', highly motivated individuals representing national QA systems that can be key resource people.
- Future training activities should consider and build upon existing regional needs and strengths. They must be resourced to consider the difficulty of conducting continental training across four main language groups in Africa.
- The student voice is critical in implementing the ASG-QA in the future. Students should be more systematically involved in initiatives like HAQAA.
- It is important to seek synergies between HAQAA and other EU support initiatives in Africa, like Africa Connect, which supports connectivity in universities. Connectivity is a key feature of the quality agenda in Africa, yet the two audiences (QA/Academic and ICT) tend not to work together.