

## ***African Regional Networks for Graduate Training and Research***

**November 3-5, 1998  
Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso**

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### ***Introduction***

The Working Group on Higher Education (WGHE), established under the Association for the Development of Education in Africa, held its twelfth meeting in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso on November 3-5, 1998. The meeting was planned and carried out as a joint activity with the Association of African Universities (AAU). The Université de Ouagadougou graciously hosted the event.

Some 43 persons attended the meeting (see Attachment 1), including representatives of 17 international development partners, 22 members of the African university community, 3 AAU staff, and 2 journalists.

The theme of the meeting was "African Regional Networks for Graduate Training and Research." It sought to identify lessons learned by development partners over some two decades of collaboration in building regional networks, and to apply these lessons in assessing seven new proposals for a regional network approach to graduate training and research. These proposals represented the WGHE's initial effort, in response to encouragement from the ADEA Steering Committee, to move beyond the analysis and discussion of higher education issues towards a few selective interventions of potential benefit. In addition, the meeting also provided opportunities to learn about the University of Ouagadougou's strategic development plan, to find out about the AAU's evolving activities, and to be informed

regarding several international initiatives in the field of higher education. The meeting agenda appears as Attachment 2.

### ***Context***

The meeting was officially opened by Mr. S. Sissoko, Secrétaire Général, Ministère des Enseignements Secondaire, Supérieurs et de la Recherche Scientifique of Burkina Faso who welcomed the participants. Referring to the recent World Conference on Higher Education, Mr. Sissoko highlighted the changes currently underway in global higher education. He emphasized the need for reforms which would allow higher education to provide greater support to national economic and social development. He asserted that the theme chosen for the Ouagadougou meeting was timely and appropriate in light of these reforms because regional and institutional collaboration constitute key elements of the solution to Africa's higher education crisis.

Dr. Narciso Matos, Secretary General of the AAU, also welcomed participants, and emphasized the growing need for partnerships in African higher education. He cited the AAU's and WGHE's collaborative efforts in preparing, organizing and holding the WGHE meeting as one example of a fruitful partnership.

The coordinator of the WGHE, Dr. William Saint, opened his remarks with an expression of appreciation to all those who had contributed to the organization of the meeting.

He extended a special thanks to the Université de Ouagadougou and its Rector, Prof. Michel Filiga Sawadogo, for the welcoming atmosphere and excellent preparations. In addition, he recognized Dr. Samba Ka of the African Capacity Building Foundation, Prof. Aimé Gogue and Prof. Aké N'gbo of PTCI, l'Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie (AUPELF-UREF), and the German donor agencies (GTZ and DAAD) for their intellectual and material contributions to the meeting.

Dr. Saint then reported the WGHE's main achievements over the past twelve months. These were the production, translation and dissemination of the report, *Tertiary Distance Learning in Sub-Saharan Africa*, and assistance in establishing the AAU's website.

Moving to the meeting's theme of "African Regional Networks for Graduate Training and Research," Dr. Saint expressed his belief that this is a long-standing aspiration whose time has come. It is, he explained, very much needed to address the twin challenges of effectively staffing the continent's expanding higher education systems, and of revitalizing university research activities. He noted that the networking initiatives reflect the rise of problem-oriented research in the global scientific community as well as recent advances in electronic communications technology. He cited various pioneering efforts that have set the stage for the increased use of regional networking, such as ANSTI, ARPPIS, AERC, SACCAR, and NAPRECA.

Dr. Saint then stated that motivation for regional cooperation is currently high for several reasons: (i) a declining ability, on the part of governments, to support higher education as enrollments continue to rise; (ii) decreases in foreign assistance at the institutional level which reflect a shift in the global geo-political balance as well as a

stronger donor focus on private sector involvement and basic education; and (iii) a major staffing crisis in African universities produced by two decades of persistent brain drain, the retirement of the post-independence professorial cohort, and the rising cost of overseas training.

### ***Université de Ouagadougou: Strategic Vision and Mission***

Prof. Sawadogo, Rector of the University of Ouagadougou, presented a three-part overview based on (i) the historical growth of the university and its current structure; (ii) an evaluation of its current strengths and weaknesses which highlighted the challenges ahead; and (iii) the strategic vision underlying a process of reform to address these challenges.

Created in 1975, the university is relatively young. Following rapid growth, it was re-organized into five faculties in 1991 (sciences, economics & management, law & political science, medicine & pharmacy, technology & information science). Decentralization of the university was initiated in 1995, leading to the establishment of the Université Polytechnique de Bobo-Dioulasso (UPB) and to the creation of the Ecole Normale Supérieure de Koudougou (ENSK). Although other public and private post-baccalauréat teaching institutions exist, these three institutions provide most of the country's higher education. Enrollment at the university is 8,000 students.

The university follows several important practices which are unusual in Africa. First, it charges student fees of CFA 11,000 for full-time students and CFA 25,000 for part-time (employed) students. Second, student feeding has been privatized. Third, only one-third of its students receive government scholarships. Lastly, housing is provided to barely 10% of students, mainly women.

The strengths of the university are the political and social stability enjoyed by the country; a political will for reform at the highest decisionmaking level; a competent and dynamic staff; good supervision and management; a real interest in serving the local labor market; dynamic inter-university cooperation; and good laboratories. These

assets make the University of Ouagadougou a magnet for foreign students, who represent 10% of enrollment.

Despite these positives, weaknesses do exist. They include: the economic difficulties of the country which produce severe budget constraints; a shortage of training staff, especially in human and social sciences; curricula that are not adapted to the socio-cultural realities of the country and the economic needs and the labor market; low motivation of teachers (due to lack of incentives) and students (due to poor post-university employment prospects); inadequate teaching facilities; lack of a research budget; high levels of student failure during the first cycle; insufficient knowledge of donors and their funding procedures; and a weak capacity for project coordination.

In preparing its 1997-2006 strategic plan, the Université de Ouagadougou defined its goal as increasing its usefulness to its graduates and to society. Practically, this means a larger and more direct contribution to the development of Burkina Faso. This will be pursued through improved pass rates and reduced drop-outs, greater professionalization of the university curriculum, and a more active research program focused on the country's development priorities. The university will also expand its professional services, especially continuing education for the public and research support to the private sector.

To assist these efforts, the university is seeking to take advantage of recent technological advances. For example, it participates in both the World Bank supported African Virtual University and the AUPELF-UREF supported Université Francophone Virtuelle, as well as in various regional and European scientific networks.

Prof. Sawadogo concluded by stressing that while the role of universities is increasingly

challenged, it is important to retain the fundamental values of the academy while reforming its operations. One of the biggest challenges, in his opinion, is how to overcome strongly entrenched conservative tendencies which fiercely resist change.

### **Association of African Universities**

Prof. Matos focused his briefing on five main activities: the AAU website; the fifth SUMA workshop; the competitive program for regional cooperation proposals; the proposed *Database of African Theses and Dissertations*, and the COREVIP meeting. He first announced the launch of the AAU website ([www.aau.org](http://www.aau.org)) in April 1998. The site features the AAU newsletter, reference articles, major AAU projects, a directory of the AAU's 148 member universities (including hot links to those universities with e-mail capacities), and a conference schedule. The site operates in both English and French.

A second AAU activity was the Fifth Senior University Management Workshop (SUMA) in Cape Town, South Africa. Twenty participants (including seven female participants funded by the Ford Foundation) participated. The next such workshop will take place in Abuja, Nigeria. A francophone SUMA workshop is also planned.

A third activity has been to sponsor a competitive program of proposals for regional networks in graduate training and research, which was funded by the ADEA. A surprisingly strong response produced 41 different proposals involving 35 African countries. The AAU set up an international experts committee which developed selection criteria and evaluated the proposals. Seven proposals were chosen for presentation at this WGHE meeting. Prof. Matos expressed the wish that the next step would lead to implementation of the proposals and to greater regional capacity building as a result.

A fourth AAU activity is a feasibility study concerning the creation of a *Database of African Theses and Dissertations* (DATAD). This study is sponsored by the Project for Information Access and Connectivity (PIAC), an AAU undertaking supported by the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations. Its purpose is to ensure that research produced in Africa is not only preserved, but also made readily accessible both to African researchers and to the global scientific community.

Ms. Mary Materu-Behitsa, Reference Librarian at the University of Dar es Salaam, reported on the study's progress. The feasibility study covered 18 universities in Central, East, Southern and West Africa. It identified over 30,000 theses in these institutions and estimated that they produce 6,000 new theses every year. A survey of market demand among the world's libraries for a database of African theses and dissertations is now underway and will be concluded in January. It will inform a proposal to establish a capacity for identifying, collecting, and cataloguing African dissertations and theses, and making them available throughout the world on a demand basis. A CD-ROM database may be produced for reference use by libraries.

During the ensuing discussion, Dr. Mve-Ondo of AUPELF-UREF communicated efforts at the Conseil Africain et Malgache de l'Enseignement Supérieur (CAMES) in Burkina Faso to digitalize doctoral dissertations submitted by academic staff from francophone West Africa as part of their applications for academic promotion.

The fifth activity report provided details on the AAU's upcoming meeting of the Conference of Rectors, Vice-Chancellors and Presidents (COREVIP). The meeting will be held in Arusha, Tanzania on February 1-4, 1999. Its theme will be *Revitalizing*

*Universities in Africa: A Strategy for the 21st Century*. Sessions will be organized around related sub-themes: (a) Regional cooperation in graduate training and research;

(b) Communication and information technology; and (c) Access, quality and resource management. Additional conference information is available on the AAU website.

### **UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education**

Dr. Saint offered a brief overview of the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education, which attracted 4,000 participants to Paris in October 1998. He indicated that the Conference was an effort to take stock of the global state of higher education, to set a benchmark as to its current state of development, and to distill consensus regarding future strategies. As such, it provided a synthesis of worldwide thinking on higher education, informed by regional and national reports on the sector.

Conference discussions emphasized several strong trends in higher education. First, access to higher education around the world is moving away from its traditional selective elitism towards massification. Second, higher education is increasingly viewed as a lifelong learning process that leads students to have continuous relationships with teaching institutions. Third, historical university characteristics of extreme autonomy and distance from the daily life of society are now being tempered by the growing frequency of partnerships between universities and public institutions, business, non-governmental organizations, and professional associations. Fourth, universities are increasingly viewed as accountable to society and required to be relevant to social development at national and international levels. Finally, higher education financing was much discussed. Although there is a consensus that the main source of support for higher education remains the responsibility of government, it was also recognized that the shift from elite to mass higher education will only be possible through

much greater diversification of funding sources.

### **Task Force on Higher Education and Society**

Prof. Matos provided a progress report on the Independent Task Force on Higher Education and Society, jointly convened by UNESCO and the World Bank, of which he is a member. The Task Force is charged with undertaking an independent assessment of higher education in developing countries and recommending strategies for improvement. Its members are 15 internationally recognized experts in higher education from the major regions of the world.

The Task Force plans to complete its report in April 1999. The report will address six topics: the public interest in higher education; differentiation of higher education systems; governance; liberal education; science and technology; and major trends that will affect the future of higher education.

### **Report on The Partnership for Capacity Building in Africa**

Next, Dr. Saint provided an update on the status of the Partnership for Capacity Building in Africa. This Partnership was initiated in October 1996 at the Annual Meetings of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, when the African Ministers of Finance requested the President of the Bank to join hands with them in efforts to strengthen African institutional and human resource capacities in key areas. They targeted the renewal of African universities as one of these areas. In response, the Bank established with the ministers a Partnership for Capacity Building in Africa as mechanism for marshaling government and donor energies around these tasks. One of the first outcomes of this effort was the report titled *Revitalizing*

*Universities in Africa: Strategy and Guidelines*, prepared by the AAU and the World Bank in consultation with a number of national and regional higher education institutions.

Although the Partnership's momentum slowed somewhat during 1998 as Bank

leadership focused on financial problems in Asia, the issue was revived at the recent Annual Meetings last October. During those meetings, the idea of a multi-donor Trust Fund to support capacity building in Africa was vetted. The Bank's president, Mr. James Wolfensohn, is expected to make an announcement on this matter in early 1999.

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## REGIONAL NETWORKS FOR GRADUATE TRAINING AND RESEARCH

The main theme of the meeting was introduced by Dr. Saint. He underscored the high demand for regional networking, as reflected in the 41 proposals submitted to the AAU. He noted important common characteristics of the seven proposals selected for discussion. They all focus on critical African problems, such as energy, accounting, and environment, among others. They all strive for capacity building in graduate training and research. They are all based on prior experience and lessons learned in institutional networking. Additionally, all

of the proposals are flexibly constructed, thereby allowing an expansion or contraction of activities in accordance with resources available.

Dr. Saint re-stated the goals of the AAU and the WGHE in supporting the development of these proposals: (i) to support a process whereby cross-country partnerships and institutional collaboration become the norm rather than the exception among African universities; (ii) to build capacities for initiating and managing partnerships as this becomes the dominant global practice for research and training; and (iii) to produce the increased numbers of academic staff that will be required by African universities in the 21st century. He shared his view that the proposals were well-conceived and potentially

fundable, with occasional shortcomings that should be reasonably simple to address.

Dr. Hassan Mekouar, a member of the AAU International Experts Committee that selected the proposals, summarized their approach to the proposal evaluation process. Dr. Mekouar explained that the Committee sought to address the fundamental question of how these pilot projects could be used to foster innovation and change. It felt that success of the activity should not be determined solely in terms of whether the individual projects achieve their own stated objectives. Much more important, from the Committee's perspective, is whether these projects will trigger and subsequently accelerate a process whereby regional networking becomes the method of choice for graduate training and research within Africa.

To this end, the Panel adopted a set of selection criteria: academic and scientific excellence; leadership; autonomy of decisionmaking process within institutions and among proposed network members; demonstrated institutional support for the proposal; adequate operational arrangements; cost-effectiveness and the potential for longer term financial sustainability. Employing these criteria, the Committee recommended seven proposals to the AAU as deserving of support.

### ***The Seven Proposals***

Seven proposals for regional networks were presented and discussed in the course of the meeting. The proposed networks are:

<i>Coordinating Center</i>	<i>Name of Network*</i>
University of Cape Town, South Africa	University Science, Humanities and Engineering Partnerships in Africa (USHEPiA) Programme
University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana	Masters Programme in Renewable Energy Systems
Centre d'étude régional pour l'amélioration de l'adaptation à la sécheresse, Dakar, Sénégal	Research on Semi-Arid Agriculture
University of Namibia	Masters Programme and Research in Distance Education
Center for Human Rights, University of Pretoria, South Africa	Master's Programme on Human Rights Law in Africa
Centre de recherche en sciences biologiques, Université de Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso	Network for Environmental Bio-technology
Department of Applied Accountancy, University of South Africa	Quality Assurance Network for Accountancy Programmes in Southern Africa

\*A descriptive overview of each proposal is contained in Annex 1.

### **Lessons Learned**

To put these proposals in context, four networking experiences were analyzed for lessons learned. They were: Programme de Troisième Cycle Inter-universitaire en Économie (PTCI), l'Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie (AUPELF-UREF), Regional Postgraduate Program in Water Resources Engineering, and the German Working Group on Higher Education Cooperation with Developing Countries.

The PTCI is the francophone equivalent of the African Economic Research Consortium (AERC). It provides a collaborative MA program in economics and also supports economic policy research. Prof. Aimé

Gogue, former director of the PTCI, highlighted five good practices based on PTCI experience. First, a common needs assessment involving all partners enables a shared definition of problems and a joint understanding of the proposed solutions. Second, program services and products must respond to demonstrated demand, or the market for them will be weak. Third, adequate management capacity is necessary for success. Fourth, frequent communication and transparency in decisionmaking build trust and support among partners. Lastly, the above practices produce the institutional ownership necessary to sustain the program.

The Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF) is a worldwide network of French-

speaking universities funded at \$50 million annually by France and seven other francophone countries. It seeks to build human resource capacities through staff exchanges and linked training programs. It also fosters research capacity-building in selected thematic areas through a competitive research fund, access to scientific bibliography, and electronically linked research teams. A major initiative in institutional cooperation is the Francophone Virtual University.

Lessons learned from these AUF experiences include: (1) the value of building upon consensus among the participating universities; (2) the need to combine solidarity with a commitment to excellence, because excellence without solidarity will lead to exclusion, and solidarity without excellence will lead nowhere; (3) the advantages of adopting an integrated strategic program approach; (4) the utility of generating political and financial support through public education activities and lobbying with regard to program accomplishments; (5) the benefits of genuine multilateralism of structures, activities, and financing (herein lies a weakness of the AUF since it is too heavily dependant on a single government for its funding); (6) the benefits of designing new programs in the context of local socio-economic realities, particularly job markets; and (7) the importance of maximizing use of new information and communication technologies as a means of reducing intellectual dependency among universities in developing countries.

The Regional Postgraduate Program in Water Resources Engineering has functioned since 1982 at the University of Dar es Salaam with financial support from the governments of Germany and Ireland. In order to be cost-effective, it must serve a regional pool of students as Tanzania alone does not have a demand large enough to sustain this specialized course on a national basis. The financial break-even point is 12 students a year; the program currently enrolls 20

students. Lessons learned are five. First, competent local academic staff are a necessary foundation for such a program. Second, efforts should be made to establish the true configuration of demand for such a course, and then to design the course in close consultation with the expected employers. Third, active marketing of the program should be given explicit attention. Fourth, subject-related institutional partnerships can play a valuable mentoring role during the initial phase of the program. Lastly, planning for the adequate provision of student scholarships should be an integrated part of the program consultation and design process.

The German aid agencies (GTZ, DAAD and DSE) assessed their collective experience with regional networks during the past two decades. Well-known examples of these networks are ANSTI, ESAURP, ERNESA, and NAPRECA. A number of valuable lessons are drawn from these experiences:

- When compared with the alternatives of providing the full range of post-graduate training programs in each country or sponsoring post-graduate training abroad, a collaborative regional program is generally superior in terms of both economic and social benefits.
- A sound assessment of strengths and weaknesses at the different project sites and an analysis of their comparative advantages is the main starting point.
- Coordination of supply and demand for regional post-graduate courses in close cooperation with target groups is an important planning step.
- Regional collaboration programs are effective, but are cost-sensitive to macro-economic and social contexts.
- Regional collaboration programs are also highly sensitive to donor interests.
- Building local program ownership, particularly by addressing tendencies to under-value own capacities for post-

graduate training and to over-rate overseas programs, is a requirement for success.

- Tendencies to rely exclusively on donor funding for scholarships and other costs limits program sustainability; funding diversification should therefore be part of the initial program design.
- Good marketing of the regional post-graduate program is a necessary element of success.
- Qualified academic staff are also necessary to ensure the credibility of the collaborative program.
- Subject-related institutional partnerships can be valuable during the initial developmental phases of collaborative post-graduate programs.
- Competitive conditions of service for guest lectureships are necessary to facilitate regional academic exchanges.
- Regional networking requires an occasional subordination of national interests to the common interests; conscious attention to trust-building and transparency in both decisionmaking and the allocation of benefits is an important means to this end.
- The right balance between central coordination and decentralized program management is difficult to maintain and requires constant attention.

Francophonie intervened. They were very appreciative of the creativity and work reflected in each proposal. They also lauded the excellent coordinating role played by the AAU. Importantly, they strongly endorsed the need for demand-driven regional graduate networks in Africa.

Most donor representatives concluded, however, that further evaluation and internal discussion will be required separately for each proposal presented. A frequently

### ***Next Steps***

Following the presentation and discussion of the seven proposals, donor representatives were invited to share their views on the process as well as the substance of the proposals. Representatives from the Government of the Netherlands, GTZ, USAID, Carnegie Corporation, the British Council, Ford Foundation, the African Capacity Building Foundation, the International Institute for Educational Planning, and the Agence Universitaire de la

expressed concern was that a particular agency's strategic priorities, targeted countries, and defined way of operating only permitted piecemeal consideration of the proposals. However, the donor representatives promised to indicate their possible interest to the coordinators of the proposals, and also to the Secretary General of the AAU, by Christmas 1998. In the case of favorable response, they will also communicate their preferences as to how they wish to proceed, i.e., direct bilateral discussions of individual proposals, or a regional program coordinated by the AAU. Furthermore, participants agreed that the Secretary General of the AAU and the WGHE Coordinator will issue a joint letter of endorsement for each of the seven proposals.

#### ***Next Meeting***

The meeting closed by selecting a new theme for the coming two years: ***New Technologies***

***to Strengthen University Teaching and Learning Processes***. This will include virtual universities, on-line libraries, use of multi-media, the relevance of new technologies to learning in large-size classes, thematic networks and knowledge management, and distance learning. The WGHE Coordinator will propose a 1999-2000 work program to the ADEA Steering Committee based on this theme.

Accepting a gracious invitation from the National Universities Commission of Nigeria, participants decided that the next WGHE meeting will be held in Abuja, Nigeria during the last quarter of 1999. The exact dates will be set once the dates of the ADEA Biennial Conference in South Africa are known. WGHE members will be surveyed as to their preference for combining the WGHE meeting with travel to the ADEA conference in South Africa, or for holding the meeting at an earlier date.