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الرابطة لأجل تطوير التربية في إفريقيا

Association for the Development of Education in Africa

Association pour le développement de l'éducation en Afrique

Associação para o Desenvolvimento da Educação em África

Remote Education Benchmarking Toolkit

HIGHER EDUCATION

(DRAFT)

Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA)
in partnership with the National Quality Assurance Authority for Higher Education, Research and
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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought a historically unprecedented shock to education systems in Africa. Many higher education institutions were closed by governments in response to the pandemic. The lost learning time not only harms the current generation but could undo decades of progress.

At the same time, the crisis has stimulated innovation in the higher education sub-sector. Non-traditional and distance education options have been developed thanks to the rapid intervention of states and partners around the world committed to ensuring educational continuity.

However, not all African countries are at the same level of distance education development. In many countries, the development of effective distance education is still in its infancy.

Based on the above, ADEA proposes this toolkit to ministries in charge of higher education in African countries to help them better think, plan and implement, as well as ensure effective distance education.

Toolkit User Guide

The toolkit is designed to enable African governments to assess the level of development of distance education in their higher education systems in order to identify ways to improve their education and training practices. This assessment is a means of estimating how far we have come and how far we still have to go to achieve the expected performance in the development of effective distance learning.

The toolkit is organized into norms, standards, benchmarks, and standards implementation elements and actions.

Norms refer to a set of characteristics considered as criteria to be met in order to develop effective distance education. These are headings that structure the activities and tasks required to carry out distance learning.

Standards refer to levels of reference and best practices for the effective implementation of the activities and tasks of a norm in distance education development.

Benchmarks express what needs to be done to meet the standard set for effective distance education.

The **implementation** elements and actions allow for the implementation of benchmarks and the definition of target values as well as the identification of evidence of their achievement. It is a set of factual data and accomplishments that allow us to make judgments about the level of implementation of the benchmarks.

The toolkit includes eleven (11) norms covering standards with associated benchmarks and implementation elements and actions. The aim is for governments to assess all the standards in the toolkit, based on the benchmarks, and to gather all the information needed to improve their distance education practices by implementing effective actions.

At the end of the analysis of each norm, on the basis of its various standards, it is important to give a written general assessment, in order to give an overview of the level of achievement of the norm, and to make relevant recommendations for its achievement.

Norm 1: Strong, relevant and effective legal and policy framework

The government has a responsibility to put in place a strong, relevant and effective national policy and legal framework to support the development of distance higher education. This framework must be based on international policy options and good practices that promote distance learning. This is done through its development and management by a dedicated administrative and technical unit; legal texts; the provision of equitable and inclusive connectivity and through access to educational resources.

Standards	Benchmarks	Implementation elements/actions
Relevant and effective distance education policy, based on international best practices, the country context and the national strategic plan, is in place.	A policy determining the strategic objectives for distance education formulated in a strategic plan and taking into account international good practice and strategic options for the development of higher education is available and published.	Develop a national policy and strategic plan for the development of distance education with clear objectives and implementation plans.
Legal and regulatory framework available to support the development of distance education.	The national legal framework puts in-person and distance learning on an equal footing, facilitates telecommuting, protects personal data, and regulates the acquisition of ownership rights to courses and teaching materials.	Develop and promulgate legislation and regulations that put in-person and distance learning on an equal footing, facilitate telecommuting, protect personal data, and regulate the acquisition of ownership rights to courses and teaching materials.
Effective government support for equitable and inclusive access to the Internet and online educational resources.	The government is developing an equitable and inclusive policy of access to the Internet and educational resources to ensure connectivity on campuses; facilitate the acquisition of broadband and terminals (computers) for teachers, students, and other staff; and develop national databases and online information resources.	Implement a policy of equitable and inclusive access to the Internet, acquisition of computers, and databases in conjunction with telecommunications, Internet services, and online documentary resources operators.

<p>Unit for the administration, promotion and development of distance education established within the ministry in charge of higher education.</p>	<p>An administrative and technical unit in charge of the management, promotion and development of distance education with clear missions and a clear organizational chart, and with a sufficient number and quality of staff, exists within the ministry in charge of higher education.</p>	<p>Establish an administrative and technical unit in charge of the management, promotion and development of distance education with clear missions and organization chart and provided with quantity and quality of staff.</p>
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Overall assessment of the standard:

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Norm 2: Strategy, organization, operation and quality management of distance education in a relevant and effective way

For a harmonious development of distance education in higher education, it is necessary to review the strategies, organization, operation and quality management within the universities. This option requires the inclusion of distance education in the missions and strategic objectives; clarification of the processes of teacher involvement; provision of qualified staff and sufficient infrastructure; and the establishment of a functional quality assurance system.

Standards	Benchmarks	Implementation elements/actions
Distance learning introduced in the missions and strategic objectives of higher education institutions.	The missions and strategic goals of higher education institutions identify distance education as a major and strategic choice.	Taking into account distance education in the definition of the missions and strategic objectives of higher education institutions.
Teaching staff involved in decision making regarding distance education.	The levels of involvement of teaching staff in decision making regarding distance education are explicitly written and known.	Develop a formal document outlining the processes for involving teaching staff in decision-making regarding distance education.
Provide higher education institutions with qualified personnel and adequate infrastructure to achieve distance learning objectives.	The staffing of teaching, administrative and technical personnel, infrastructure and equipment is sufficient and adapted to the objectives of distance education.	Identify the human and infrastructural resource needs of higher education institutions to achieve distance learning objectives.
Established quality assurance system supporting distance learning.	Measures that support the quality assurance of distance education are taken.	List the quality assurance measures to be taken to ensure the quality of distance education.

Overall assessment of the norm:

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Norm 3: Appropriate technology governance

Technology governance is an important lever in the implementation of distance higher education. It addresses the key issues of technology policy to ensure the availability of the necessary resources, the proper use and accessibility of IT resources, infrastructure and equipment.

Standards	Benchmarks	Implementation elements/actions
Implementation of a technological development policy to ensure the availability of the necessary and appropriate means for the proper conduct of distance learning activities.	The technology development policy defines the strategy for optimizing the use of IT resources and their efficiency, identifying and controlling operational risks and measuring their performance.	Elaborate the technological development policy including the use of IT resources, risk management and efficiency measurement criteria.
Adequate infrastructure and equipment for the realization of the objectives of distance education and their accessibility to the various personnel.	The infrastructure and equipment necessary to achieve the objectives of distance education are available and accessible.	Provide higher education institutions with the necessary infrastructure and equipment to ensure quality distance learning.
Adequate Internet network and availability of terminals for distance learning.	Internet is widespread in higher education institutions and staff and students are equipped with terminals (computers, smartphones, IPAD, etc.)	Prepare a policy document on the acquisition/renewal of computers, licenses, servers, connectivity, other equipment and on incentives for actors to make personal acquisitions.
Infrastructure, equipment and terminals in line with sustainable development and environmental preservation.	Sustainable development and environmental preservation are considered in the choice and management of infrastructure, equipment and terminals.	Prepare a policy document on sustainable development and environmental preservation (electronic waste, energy efficiency, etc.)

Overall assessment of the norm:

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Norm 4: Mobilization of financial resources

The government is responsible for mobilizing sufficient financial resources for the development of distance higher education. Mobilizing these resources involves implementing the following strategies: (i) allocating an adequate budget for distance education development; and (ii) mobilizing financial resources from many sources for distance education development.

Standards	Benchmarks	Implementation elements/actions
National funding available to support the development and widespread introduction of distance learning at all levels of higher education.	The government supports the financing of connectivity, the acquisition of computer materials and equipment, databases and accompanies higher education institutions in the development and promotion of distance learning.	Set up a fund to finance the development of distance education.
Distance learning funding from many different sources.	Many sources from technical and financial partners fund the development of distance education.	Develop a long-term strategic roadmap for investment in distance education development and effective strategies for mobilizing technical and financial partners to fund this roadmap.

Overall assessment of the norm:

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Norm 5: Adapted, readable training programmes that guarantee effective and transparent conditions for evaluation and adequate monitoring of students.

In the context of distance learning, traditional training programmes undergo an adaptation based on a number of reference documents and principles while maintaining their legibility through the credit system and the possibilities of academic mobility. To strengthen credibility, the conditions for the evaluation of learning and achievement as well as the assessment of training programmes must be well regulated. In the same vein, it is important to organize the monitoring of the students' educational programme and the integration of the graduates.

Standards	Benchmarks	Implementation elements/actions
Adaptation of training programmes provided for distance education.	The development of online courses is based on scripting reference documents with quality requirements common to all training courses in compliance with the principles of reusability, accessibility and interoperability.	Prepare a document presenting the training offer taking into account distance learning.
	The training programmes offered correspond to international standards with an institutional approval system that takes into account distance learning.	Establish an approval process for distance education programmes.
Endowment of the training offer with a system of transferable and capitalizable credits favoring academic mobility.	Student performance is validated through a credit system.	Prepare a document describing the credit system.
Clear definition and respect of the conditions for the evaluation of learning and the awarding of academic degrees.	The conditions for evaluating learning and obtaining degrees in distance learning are defined, respected and guarantee their credibility and security.	Establish a system for evaluating learning and obtaining degrees that guarantees credibility, security, validity and reliability.
Organization of the monitoring of the students' educational programme and the professional integration of the graduates.	The online tracking system for the educational programme and professional integration is in place and functional.	Build a mechanism for educational tracking and online surveys of students and graduates.

Periodic evaluation of training programmes to ensure their quality.	All training programmes are periodically evaluated. Training programme evaluations are used and monitored to improve education and training provision.	Define the policy for the evaluation of training programmes and the use of the results.
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Overall assessment of the norm:

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Norm 6: Competent teaching staff and tutors

Distance learning involves teaching staff and tutors with specific skills, notably didactic, technical and techno-pedagogical. To acquire such skills, it is important to develop continuous training and development activities. It is also important to develop a sustainable succession policy that integrates pedagogical innovation and distance education.

Standards	Benchmarks	Implementation elements/actions
Didactic and pedagogical skills in distance education for teachers.	Didactic and technical skills in distance education are assessed during the recruitment of the teaching class.	Identify the didactic and technical skills according to the distance learning device deployed.
Tutors' technical and pedagogical skills.	Tutors' technical and pedagogical skills are assessed during their recruitment.	Identify the techno-pedagogical competencies according to the distance learning device deployed.
Regulation of continuing training and development in distance education for teachers and tutors.	There is a continuing training programme for teachers and tutors in distance education and educational technologies.	Implement a policy of continuous training for teachers and tutors.
Effectiveness of teachers' and tutors' work.	The lessons assigned to teachers and tutors are evaluated.	Establish a mechanism for evaluating the lessons learned and using the results.
Sustainable succession policy considering distance education.	Pedagogical innovation and distance education are integrated into the teacher succession policy.	Integrate distance education into teacher succession policy.

Overall assessment of the norm:

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Norm 7: Competent administrative, technical and service staff.

Administrative, technical and service staff support the delivery of distance education. In this regard, their recruitment, promotion and capacity building consider the adequacy between the profiles and the needs of the institution in terms of distance education and the skills in computer science and techno-pedagogy, in order to support online services.

Standards	Benchmarks	Implementation elements/actions
The regulation of recruitment and promotion procedures for administrative, technical and service staff ensures that the profiles match the needs of distance education.	A document governing the rules of recruitment exists and is applied. These rules ensure that profiles are matched to distance learning needs.	Establish recruitment procedures to ensure that profiles match distance education needs.
Availability of pedagogical technicians and computer scientists with the necessary skills to support online services, management, monitoring of digital usage and co-creation of learning content and pedagogical devices.	The techno-pedagogical and computer specialists are available, sufficient and have all the necessary profiles and skills for a good development of distance learning.	Prepare a directory of pedagogical technicians and computer scientists.
Continuous training and development of administrative, technical and service staff.	A continuous training system for administrative, technical and service staff in distance learning and information and communication technologies for education is available.	Establish a system for continuing and advanced training in distance education and information and communication technologies for education.

Overall assessment of the norm:

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Norm 8: Students who are well-informed, well-supported and active in academic life

For active learning and participation in the academic life of students, especially in the context of distance education, it is important to regulate and publicize the conditions for admission to distance education; promotion to a higher level; equal opportunity and equity; adequate supervision and access to counseling and support for success.

Standards	Benchmarks	Implementation elements/actions
Regulation, publication and compliance with the conditions and procedures for admission to training programmes, progression and transfer from one level to another.	The conditions and procedures for admission as well as the conditions for moving from one level to another are regulated, known and published. They comply with the legal and regulatory provisions. They support distance learning.	Prepare a document defining the conditions and procedures for access to distance learning and the conditions for moving from one level to another.
Equal opportunity and equity regardless of gender, geographic location or disability.	For each of the distance education programmes, statistics are available that allow us to observe the distribution of students by gender, geographical distribution and disability or special needs situations.	Establish standards of equal opportunity and fairness that are systematically addressed and take corrective action to achieve equal opportunity.
Effective supervision of distance students.	There are sufficient teachers and tutors to provide adequate supervision of students. Surveys on the quality of supervision are regularly conducted.	Prepare a document defining the appropriate thresholds and student-teacher ratio.
Participation of distance learning students in academic life and availability of guidance and support for success.	Distance learning students effectively participate in decision-making processes related to academic life.	Prepare a document defining the conditions for participation of distance students in decision-making processes related to academic life.
	Distance learning students have access to a structure for counseling, success support, and information about their studies and time management.	Create a structure for advising, informing, assisting and supporting the success of distance students with a list of services offered.
	Appropriate services allow distance learning students to access online courses and enhance their individual and group learning.	Implement an online access system that takes into account individual and group needs.

Appropriate special service in distance education for students with disabilities.	Adapted arrangements for distance learning for students with disabilities or special needs are in place.	Establish an adequate distance learning facility for students with disabilities and special needs.
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Overall assessment of the norm:

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Norm 9: Dynamic and mutually beneficial cooperation and partnerships with the socio-economic world

Mutual enrichment, sharing of experience and good practice, and support for the development of distance education can be facilitated through national, regional and international cooperation, partnership with the socio-economic world and collaboration with the social partners at national level.

Standards	Benchmarks	Implementation elements/actions
National, regional and international collaborations for distance education.	Cooperation agreements exist at the national, regional and international levels, between the government and higher education institutions in the context of distance education.	Sign cooperation agreements in the field of distance learning.
Effective partnerships with the private sector, the professional community of the Internet, computer science and information and communication technologies for education.	Effective relationships with the private, professional Internet, computer, and information and communication technology for education communities are maintained to support distance education.	Sign partnership agreements with private parties and with providers of Internet, computer and information and communication technology services for education.
Community Service.	Community service is taken into account in the distance education system.	Produce a document on strategies and activities related to community service such as the development of MOOCs.

Overall assessment of the norm:

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Norm 10: Relevant, objective, effective and transparent information and communication

For distance learning to be successful, it is important to have relevant and up-to-date quantitative and qualitative information for good decision-making and for an objective, effective and transparent internal and external communication policy.

Standards	Benchmarks	Implementation elements/actions
Relevant and timely quantitative and qualitative information for decision making and for internal and external communication about distance education.	The databases needed for distance education decision making are available.	Establish a structure dedicated to the management of the information and communication system integrating distance learning.
An objective, effective and transparent internal and external communication policy that includes distance learning.	Reliable and rigorous information, particularly concerning distance education, is available and made public.	Develop a communication plan with clearly identified actions for internal and external communication and a list of communication media.

Overall assessment of the norm:

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Norm 11: Consolidation and development prospects for distance education

In view of the accelerated development of distance learning and the educational transformations brought about by digital technology, the ministries and/or other structures in charge of higher education will review their strategies and initiate new projects in the short, medium and long term in order to consolidate and promote the emergence of innovative educational practices.

Standards	Benchmarks	Elements/actions to implement the norm
Medium- and long-term development projects with regard to the objectives of educational transformation integrating distance learning.	Investment projects for the development of distance learning and educational transformation are included in strategic partnerships.	Develop investment projects for the development of distance education taking into account technology assessment.
Strategy for achieving new goals in educational development and transformation.	New objectives for the development of distance education are set.	Develop a document outlining new goals for the development of distance education.

Overall assessment of the norm:

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Conclusion

The development of this toolkit for the implementation of distance education in higher education is based, among other things, on the need to help countries be better prepared to ensure continuity of teaching/learning faced with crises like the one involving COVID-19. The toolkit is also a tool to help initiate the pedagogical transformation that will henceforth characterize the education, training and higher education sector.

The toolkit has been designed with a synergistic approach, integrating both the shared obligations of higher education institutions and national governance bodies. It is designed as a self-assessment tool for ministries and/or other structures in charge of higher education wishing to provide a distance learning offer respecting a certain number of standards. Higher education, which will be able to cope with new and unusual situations, such as that of COVID-19, will have to integrate information and communication technologies (ICTs) and digitalization to the best of its ability in order to make it a current and future tool, integrating its policies and governance to meet the needs of Africa's socio-economic-demographic environment.

Therefore, it is necessary that the implementation of the toolkit integrates support processes for a better ownership by the various actors, in order to have a common understanding and culture. To this end, in the light of practical experience, it may be deemed appropriate to enrich the tool, in the future, for greater efficiency.