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DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

**Accreditation and Quality Assurance Workshop
on Establishment of a Continental Accreditation
Agency for Higher Education in Africa**

10 – 11 April 2013, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

CONCEPT NOTE

1. CONTEXT AND RATIONALE

Because different higher education systems in Africa are structured in different ways, it is imperative to integrate into a continental system of harmonization in order to ensure the recognition of qualifications across the continent. Harmonization with strong continental cooperation in quality assurance and accreditation is recognized to be instrumental in promoting internationalization of higher education and to facilitating student and staff mobility. The African Union Commission (AUC) has therefore embarked on a process of promoting quality assurance and developing a framework for harmonization of higher education programmes in Africa.

One of the ways for securing commitment to the AU harmonization strategy is through the ratification and implementation of the revised Arusha Convention which is a legal mechanism to facilitate the recognition of studies and degrees through national, regional and continental mechanisms. It is envisaged that the ratification of the revised Arusha Convention seeks requirements that individual countries will need to fulfill in setting up appropriate accreditation and quality assurance bodies that will be recognized by the African Union as legitimate members of the harmonization process. There is a strong need for effective networking of quality assurance and accreditation agencies to promote an equivalent way of assessing quality in higher education in Africa and to facilitate mutual recognition of academic qualifications.

Yet the African continent does not have any continental accreditation system of higher education, but several countries have their national accreditation system put in place. Efforts will need to be made to ascertain comparability and equivalencies across nations and regions in higher education quality monitoring, leading to an African-wide structure. There is an urgent need to exert coordinated efforts to put in place pan African quality assurance and accreditation frameworks. It is also imperative to reinforce cooperation between national regional quality assurance/accreditation bodies and promote the establishment of a Continental Accreditation Agency for higher education in Africa. The creation of continent-wide accreditation body will strengthen cooperation in quality monitoring; development of compatible methodologies; harmonization of procedures; mutual recognition of academic qualifications; and facilitates the mobility of students and academics across the continent.

The AU Strategy for harmonization of higher education programmes incorporates a strong focus on establishing effective accreditation and quality assurance mechanisms in order to enhance the global competitiveness of African universities. A partnership at national, regional and continental levels is indispensable to assure the quality of higher education systems and their compatibility in accreditation process. It is crucial to harmonize the standards and criteria so that all universities will be regulated according to comparable standards.

Moreover, the establishment of a Continental Accreditation Agency is vital to guarantee high quality of education provision in the Pan African University (PAU) and to ensure its international recognition. One major requirement for the PAU is ensuring excellence through internal quality assurance mechanisms and external accreditation. But institutions that form the PAU are located in several different countries. Currently, there is no continental mechanism for accreditation. The AU Executive Council decision EX.CL/Dec.676(XX) of January 2012 on the establishment of the Pan African University also requested the Commission to develop an African Accreditation Agency in collaboration with relevant stakeholders. As the PAU is a flagship project of the African Union Commission to revitalize higher education and research in Africa by nurturing quality and exemplifying excellence, the creation of such agency is paramount.

The Communiqué of the 5th International Conference on Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Africa also recommended that Key stakeholders including the African Union Commission, the Association of African Universities, the African Quality Assurance Network, and UNESCO should collaborate to establish a Continental Accreditation Agency for Africa and work out the possible operational modalities.

The intended African Accreditation Agency shall have the following objectives:

- i. To promote partnerships among quality assurance and accreditation bodies across the continent;
- ii. To assist the development of national QA/accreditation bodies in Africa;
- iii. To advance good accreditation practices and develop Pan-African quality assurance framework;
- iv. To foster development of compatible methodologies and harmonization of accreditation standards in Africa; and
- v. To supervise the quality of education provision in the Pan African University.

A first step towards the establishment of a Continental Accreditation Agency is to create a platform for key stakeholders to discuss on the process of establishing and possible modalities. Such consultative meeting is essential to identify areas of collaboration between quality assurance and accreditation agencies towards harmonization at regional and continental levels; and to create basis for promoting the establishment of a continental accreditation agency.

The Commission therefore wishes to organise a workshop bringing together experts and practitioners in higher education quality and accreditation, to brainstorming and critically examine the technical, financial, and administrative issues with regard to Establishment of a Continental Accreditation Agency.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE MEETING

The brainstorming meeting will have the following objectives:

- a. To exchange experiences and views among participants on quality assurance and accreditation mechanisms in Africa.
- b. To spot comparable practices that create basis for regional and continental harmonization in quality assurance practices.
- c. To identify areas of collaboration between quality assurance and accreditation agencies towards harmonization at regional and continental levels; and to create basis for establishing a Continental Accreditation Agency.
- d. To critically examine the technical, financial, and administrative issues with regard to Establishment of a Continental Accreditation Agency.
- e. To spell out the specific roles of African Quality Assurance Network (AfriQAN) in launching the Continental Accreditation Agency

3. EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The expected outcome of the meeting is to brainstorm and reach consensus on the process for establishing an African continental accreditation mechanism for higher education and work out the possible operational modalities for developing Pan-African quality assurance framework.

4. PARTICIPANTS

Participants of the workshop will comprise policy makers and practitioners of accreditation and quality assurance in higher education in Africa. The representatives of national quality assurance agencies, regional university associations, continental organizations, and UNESCO are expected to participate in the workshop.

About thirty participants will attend the meeting and 20 of them are to be sponsored by the Commission of the African Union.