

# **OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT ON ESTABLISHMENT OF A CREDIT ACCUMULATION AND TRANSFER SYSTEM**

## **Background**

Before the break-up of the East African Community in 1977, the three East African Countries, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania used to have a common education system with one university (the University of East Africa). With the disintegration of the E.A. Community each country continued to consolidate its own system independent of its neighbours. The developments that occurred in late 1990s resulted into re-establishment of the Community with a view to eventual political federation.

In 1985, the Government of the Republic of Kenya established the Commission for Higher Education (CHE). Ten years later, the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania established the Higher Education Accreditation Council which was replaced by the Tanzania Commission for Universities with effect from July 2005. The Republic of Uganda established an equivalent body, the National Council for Higher Education along the same lines in 2001.

All three regulatory bodies are set up by Acts of Parliament and perform similar functions, namely,

- Approve the establishment of higher education institutions, register and accredit them through various graduated stages of licensing up to accreditation level;
- Validate and approve academic programmes;
- Set standards or benchmarks for admission of students, recruitment of staff and physical and human resource allocation;
- Set and monitors adherence to standards on infrastructure;
- Evaluates and equates academic and professional qualifications from local and international institutions.

The higher education sub-sector witnessed a re-vitalized Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA) supporting the three regulatory bodies in ensuring that they cooperate in key areas of common concern particularly in matters related to quality assurance.

In July 2006, the East African Regulatory Bodies, namely, the Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU), the Commission for Higher Education, Kenya (CHE) and the National Council for Higher Education, Uganda (NCHE), signed a Protocol for cooperation in areas of common concern. The pertinent elements in this cooperation include but are not limited to the following:

- (i) Working together in developing Students' Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) System at the East African Regional level.
- (ii) Developing a framework for describing and quantifying the content of study programmes in universities and diploma-awarding institutions in order to harmonise for benchmarking, equating and recognizing qualifications;
- (iii) Developing and overseeing the use, by institutions, of common, comparable or equivalent admission requirements across the sub-region for courses of study in higher education institutions and keeping the records of students from sister countries enrolled in universities in the host country.
- (iv) Working together to develop and use common criteria and benchmarks for quality assurance in higher education and ensuring that universities and other higher education institutions develop and apply internal quality assurance measures such as academic audits.
- (v) Sharing information on mechanisms and status of quality assurance, accreditation of institutions and programmes including informing each other about the issuance and revocation of relevant licenses, charters as well as approval or cancellation of programmes.
- (vi) Working together in understanding the principles and activities of WTO-GATS, UNESCO and other international protocols and agreements on higher education so as to effectively advise the East African governments.
- (vii) Developing mechanisms for inter-agency cooperation in ensuring that cross-border higher education coming from outside the sub-region is of acceptable quality.
- (viii) Undertaking to conduct joint research on issues of common concerns in higher education so as to ensure the relevance of study programmes to the needs and expectations of the East African sub-region.
- (ix) Developing mechanisms for handling complaints raised against individual institutions and against the agencies themselves; and
- (x) Recognizing the vital role of the Inter-University Council for East Africa in the promotion of good quality higher education for peace and prosperity of East Africa, work in harmony with it to reciprocally reinforce each other.

### **Justification to the project**

There are compelling reasons why the three higher education regulatory agencies should work together. Firstly, East Africa shares a common higher education history. Secondly, East Africa is not only a geographical unit enclosed by the Western Rift Valley to the West and the Indian Ocean to the East, it has developed a shared political history from the days of East African Common Services Organization and the East African

Community. The re-establishment of the East African Community is clear evidence of the resilience of the shared history and market.

Thirdly, regional and global forces require constant joint attention if East Africans are to benefit from higher education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These forces include the following:

- (a) Market forces that regard higher education as a commodity to be bought by students. For profit institutions are now emerging in East Africa. The World Trade Organization (WTO) through the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) is asking countries to open up their borders to cross-border providers of higher education.
- (b) The number of qualified students seeking admission into higher education institutions is growing year by year amidst declining funding by governments and other stakeholders. This constitutes a major challenge for the regulatory agencies. Inadequate provision and quality of funding translates into poor or inadequate academic facilities and other resources including ICT.
- (c) Online and cross-border provision and access to education is also growing.

While these developments are positive, they need to be appropriately managed and regulated as they pose serious challenges to the three quality assurance agencies in East Africa.

### **Project Objectives**

The overall objective of this project is the development of a CAT system with benefits as follows:

- To obtain detailed descriptions of academic courses of study and reach an agreement on the course contents at the East African level. This is expected to introduce transparency in the course of study.
- To promote the mobility of students amongst institutions and programmes within the East African region through the use of one credit system representing defined load of work-based on credit hours.
- Guarantee value for money in the East African higher education sector when the minimum standards and benchmarks for courses of study have been determined and agreed on by the three regulatory bodies and institutions in the region.
- Provide a model of attributing credits that will link diploma awarding (tertiary) institutions with universities in East Africa.
- To enable consideration and recognition of work previously done that will promote higher education system. This will reduce inefficiencies in the system.
- To facilitate the integration and harmonization of higher education in East Africa.
- To link East African higher education with global education systems.

### **Why a joint CATS project?**

It is imperative therefore that the three agencies should jointly develop common strategies to enhance the quality of higher education, to regulate the mobility of students

amongst institutions and programmes and to integrate (and harmonise) the higher education landscape in the region.

## **The approach**

Experts in each field were required to study what is being taught in our different universities and decide on and describe the minimum requirements of courses of study in terms of core and elective courses.

In this process, features of the different programmes were to include:

- Course Title/Name
- Course level (Year of study and Semester of study)
- Details of course content in terms of course units and time it takes to teach each unit and suggested credits to be attached
- Course objectives/outcomes
- Modes of delivery/teaching the course paying special attention to practical work/internship
- Modes of student assessment (Distribution of marks)
- Suggested study materials (Flexibility is accepted)

Each country is expected to study the report of the programme specialists and agree on minimum requirements for courses of study and credits to be assigned to various courses of study. A national workshop is the forum for this stage of developing the credits, the objective being to bring together the findings and come up in each country with agreed upon documents.

## **Regional level activities**

A regional workshop will be organized where countries will exchange notes. The three countries will meet to agree on credits for courses of study from each country and a mechanism for accumulation and transfer of credits.

The agreed upon CAT will be published and disseminated and later the project will be piloted for six months.

## **Steps of implementation at the regional level**

- (a) The first stage will involve **selecting a few programmes** as a start. The following four are proposed.
  - i. Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery
  - ii. Bachelor of Engineering/ Bachelor of Science (Engineering)
  - iii. Bachelor of Science /Basic Sciences
  - iv. Bachelor of Science/ Agriculture

- (b) The second stage will involve the three agencies **selecting four programme experts for each country** to do the drafting of working documents comprising of minimum course contents within each country.
- (c) The third stage will *involve the development of minimum course requirements* by selected programme experts as delivered (and agreed upon) in each country. These course contents will include the hours needed to cover their delivery and suggested credits.
- (d) The fourth stage will involve the **submission of draft reports** to the respective Councils/ Commissions of each country. In turn, the Commissions/Councils will discuss these reports at a country level and agree on them.
- (e) The fifth stage will involve the Councils/Commissions discussing and harmonizing the draft reports by organizing a **residential workshop of experts** to merge the country specific draft reports into a single draft programme report for each of the four disciplines. The product of this meeting will be reports of the programmes and credit hours that are acceptable to all the three East African commissions. Eight experts from all over East Africa, two for each programme, will be involved. These experts will both check on course contents and attach credits. The experts who drafted the initial drafts will not be legible to participate in this exercise at this stage.
- (f) The Councils/Commissions will cause the **meeting of vice chancellors**, subject experts and professional councils to discuss and make any necessary changes at country levels.
- (g) The **three regulatory agencies will meet** to discuss inputs from each of their countries. The meeting will produce a final report with an approved credit system for the four programmes for the East African region. The three regulatory agencies will meet to discuss inputs from each of their countries. The meeting will produce a final report with an approved credit system for the four programmes for the East African region.
- (h) Finally each Council/Commission will organize a **dissemination workshop** to publicize the regional CAT framework for the four programmes.

## **Conclusion**

The tasks before the three regulatory agencies in East Africa are many and crucial to higher education in the region. The most urgent ones are the development of quality assurance frameworks and a credit accumulation and transfer system as a major component of a quality assurance framework. That is why *CATS* is the first component to be addressed by the three regulatory agencies.