

WEST AFRICA: 2-year project for reforming higher education quality

Wagdy Sawahel

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This will take place during the regional conference "leveraging on best practices to accelerate quality improvement in teaching, learning and research in higher education in Africa" [HYPERLINK "http://www.unesco-bamako.org/uemoa/home-english.htm"](http://www.unesco-bamako.org/uemoa/home-english.htm) \t "_blank" <http://www.unesco-bamako.org/uemoa/home-english.htm> " that will be held in Bamako, Mali in the period from 5-8 September.

Introduced into higher education system of UEMOA member countries in 2007, the implementation of the Licence-Master-Doctorate (LMD) system aims at improving the efficiency and performance of institutions of higher education, promoting a sub-regional system open to the world and able to develop joint mechanisms for promoting quality and ensuring international recognition of degrees issued by the institutions of higher education in the UEMOA member countries.

To achieve that, the UEMOA countries have made several commitments in order to facilitate the implementation of this reform including the establishment of national mechanisms for assessing the quality of academic programmes as well as the establishment of a regional mechanism for monitoring, coordination and sharing of best practices on the LMD reform.

However, LMD system is still facing major challenges which focus on the quality of teaching and learning, the teaching and research capacity of teachers, and management of the credit transfer system.

To facilitate effective implementation of LMD system, the project will focus on strengthening the capacity of higher education institutions and centres of excellence in UEMOA member countries.

The project includes four components, namely, capacity building on the use of information and communication technologies; effective teaching and learning in higher education; accreditation and quality assurance; and research.

The project will be implemented through the establishment of UEMOA Virtual Library Network, Virtual Institute for Higher Education in Africa (VIHEAF) for UEMOA Member States (French) and Development and Maintenance of Portals for Universities in UEMOA Member States.

UEMOA Virtual Library Network will focus on improving the quality of teaching and research in institutions of higher learning and Centres of Excellence in UEMOA Member States through the provision of current books, journals and other library resources. It will also enhance access of academic libraries serving the higher education community in UEMOA Member States to global library and information resources. In addition, it will enhance scholarship, research and lifelong learning through the establishment of permanent access to shared digital archival collections. Furthermore, it will provide guidance for academic libraries on applying appropriate

technologies used in the production of digital library resources as well as advancing the use and usability of globally distributed, networked information resources.

Virtual Institute for Higher Education in Africa (VIHEAF) for UEMOA Member States (French) will focus on building and strengthening the capacity of teachers, researchers and other personnel in higher educational institutions in UEMOA Member States in the use of ICTs through online training in line with the LMD reform. It will also enhance the knowledge and skills of staff in institutions of higher learning in UEMOA Member States on such issues relating to LMD reforms including teaching of large classes; effective utilisation of (meagre) resources; modern methods of assessment and evaluation of students' performance; basic guidance and counseling techniques; basic skills of curriculum development; techniques for writing grant winning proposals and transfer of credits. In addition, it will help in sharing experiences among staff in institutions of higher learning in UEMOA Member States on best practices in higher education teaching, learning and research.

The Development and Maintenance of Portals for Universities in UEMOA Member States will focus on developing a portal template for all universities in UEMOA member States that will facilitate credit transfer in line with the LMD reform. It will also provide a platform for managing teaching and learning as well as finances of the universities in UEMOA Member States. In addition, it will develop capacity of staff in universities in UEMOA Member States to maintain the university portals.

"This project will contribute to effective implementation of the most important reform of higher education in WAEMU member countries." Juma Shabani, director and representative of UNESCO Bamako cluster office, Mali, told *University World News*.

Shabani added that the project will build on lessons learnt from best practices developed in Africa and beyond. It will significantly strengthen the capacity of higher education, research and quality assurance institutions both in terms of human capacities and development of physical and virtual infrastructure of information and communication technologies that are necessary conditions to ensure the project sustainability.

Shabani pointed out that the implementation of the project will be coordinated by UNESCO Bamako Cluster Office and will involve several partners including WAEMU commission, higher education and research institutions in the WAEMU member countries, the African Malagacy council for higher education, UNESCO headquarters and several regional and international research and knowledge networks.

"It will make an important contribution towards the construction of the African higher education and research space. However, sustainability of this project could be compromised by political instability in member countries, inadequate financial resources allocated to higher education and student and staff strikes." Shabani concluded.

The conference will also focus on two initiatives that impact on the overarching goal of improving inclusiveness and quality of higher education in Africa. These include the UNESCO Global Initiative on Girls and Women's Empowerment which seeks to foster dynamic public and private partnerships, that stand to benefit marginalised girls and women in Africa. The other is the UNESCO initiative on Knowledge Societies with its slant on the use of ICT to foster quality education in a knowledge society.