

Higher Education Africa Centers of Excellence meet to plan innovative ways to deliver quality post graduate education

Addis Ababa (April 27, 2017) - The Eastern and Southern Africa Higher Education Centers of Excellence Project (ACE II) has held its biannual Technical and Advisory Meeting in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The meeting brought together leaders of the 24 Africa Centers of Excellence (ACEs) from the eight countries hosting the project to network, seek solutions to emerging challenges and plan innovative strategies to achieve project objectives. The overall objective of the project is to strengthen selected Eastern and Southern African higher education institutions to deliver quality post-graduate education and build collaborative research capacity in the regional priority areas, which include industry, agriculture, health, education and applied statistics.

Dr. Zerihun Kebede, who represented the Minister of State for Education, Republic of Ethiopia, Dr. Samuel Kifle Kidane, stressed the need for a more practical teaching and learning approach. “University-industry cooperation is one of the most important mechanisms for practical application of science and technology as well as the development of industry,” said Dr. Kebede. “Theory dominated teaching, learning traditional approach cannot bring the substantial socio-economic change,” he said, adding, “Science and Engineering education should be supported with practical activity to produce knowledgeable, well skilled and resourceful as well as self-reliant graduates so that they contribute in the national growth and development endeavor.”

Despite the high demand for graduates in emerging sectors with high growth potential such as oil and gas, energy, extractives, and railways industries across Eastern and Southern Africa, the region faces a shortage of skilled professionals with specialized knowledge such as engineers, geoscientists and mechanical technicians.

ACE II is helping to address this deficiency through the creation of Centers of Excellence that address critical human resource gaps and innovations in priority sectors and each center will have the potential to become the regionally leading scientific and academic institution in its particular field, serving the region collectively to tackle the development challenges.

“As centers of excellence for the region, the 24 ACEs are going to provide exemplary models to promote best training practices in the industry, strengthen national quality standards, serve as knowledge centers and be hubs that link diverse stakeholders with productive sectors,” said Mr. Abebaw Alemayehu, Acting Director of World Bank for Ethiopia, Sudan and South Sudan, who represented Carolyn Turk, the Country Director. “We look forward to innovations and research coming out of these centers to strengthen the region’s expertise in health, agriculture, material sciences, extractives, data sciences, railways, renewable energy and environment management, food security, education and ICT applications,” he said.



In total, ACE II has 24 competitively selected centers to deliver quality, market-relevant post-graduate education, and build collaborative research capacity in five regional priority areas: industry, agriculture, health, education and applied statistics.

In the area of industry, there are nine selected ACEs in the areas of energy, extractives, ICT, manufacturing, railways, and water, based in Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia.

The center in energy will try to alleviate constraints which have resulted from low energy access and adoption of technologies in rural areas and poor inter-state energy trading in the region. The centers in mining and oil and gas will take the lead on sustainable development of the extractive industry. The center in ICT will educate Africans who will develop and deploy innovative ICT services. The two centers in the water sector will address water and sanitation challenges in the region to ensure safe water and sanitation requirements for water provision, apply technology to use ground water for agricultural applications, and improve municipal and industrial water management. The center in railways will produce trained graduates who can fill the manpower needs of the burgeoning railway sector. The centers in manufacturing will utilize nanotechnology to fill the gap in promoting value addition of primary produce.

“Each of these is so important and will help young people gain the knowledge and skills to take advantage of economic opportunities instead of being left out or left behind,” said Mr. Alemayehu.

The Executive Secretary of Inter University Council for East Africa (IUCEA), Prof. Alexandre Lyambabaje, reiterated the conditions to achieve excellence and stressed the need for sustainability of the Centers beyond the life of the project through “income generation, strong long-term partnerships and pooling of financial and human resources at the regional level while avoiding duplication.” He also called on the need to simplify visa procedures “to facilitate movement of staff and students from the participating countries.”

The five year project is financed by the World Bank to a tune of \$140m in form of a loan to eight countries: Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia. Burundi will access services offered by ACEs in those countries. IUCEA, an institution of the East African Community, is the Regional Facilitation Unit for the project and will receive a grant totaling \$8m over five years to facilitate and coordinate the project.

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