Eastern Africa Regional Consultation on PAQAA

19 July 2024, Juba, South Sudan

Organized in the framework of the IUCEA Annual Conference

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1. Introduction and context

The Eastern Africa regional consultation on the Pan African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency (PAQAA), held on 19 July 2024 in Juba, South Sudan, was convened as part of the IUCEA Annual Conference. The consultation was organized within the framework of HAQAA3 and aimed to generate regional input on the governance structure, functional priorities, and implementation roadmap of PAQAA, building on the technical foundations developed under HAQAA2.

The meeting brought together over 30 participants, including representatives from ministries, national quality assurance agencies, higher education institutions, and strategic partners. Countries represented included: South Sudan, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Egypt. Also in attendance were members of the PAQAA Interim Technical Unit, HAQAA3 implementing partners, and observers from the AAU, and OBREAL. The consultation was chaired jointly by the Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA), the Association of African Universities (AAU), and OBREAL.

2. Objectives of the consultation

The main objectives of the consultation were to:

- Revisit and reflect on the recommendations made under HAQAA2 for the establishment of PAQAA.
- Present and discuss the proposed work plan under HAQAA3, including the role of the Technical Unit and activities such as agency reviews.
- Gather feedback on the proposed governance structure of PAQAA and regional perspectives on representation and membership.
- Clarify the legal and operational aspects of PAQAA and its relation to national QA systems.

- Foster buy-in from regional actors and establish channels for ongoing engagement and ownership.

3. Key discussions and outcomes

3.1 FUNCTIONS OF PAQAA

Participants broadly endorsed PAQAA's role in enhancing the quality of higher education in Africa through supportive, non-intrusive functions. There was strong consensus on prioritizing capacity building, peer reviews of QA agencies, and the development of a continental register of compliant agencies. However, several participants expressed concern about the inclusion of 'accreditation' in the agency's name, as it may imply interference with national mandates. The discussion clarified that PAQAA will not accredit institutions or agencies but will support mutual recognition and trust-building.

Examples were drawn from the European model, including ENQA and EQAR, emphasizing that the success of such a body depends on trust, collaboration, and a shared understanding of quality assurance principles. The phased implementation approach was seen as a strength, allowing PAQAA to evolve based on need and capacity.

3.2 GOVERNANCE

There was strong support for an inclusive and pragmatic governance structure. Most participants favored the creation of a General Assembly with representation from all AU member states, through their national QA bodies or designated authorities. Suggestions included allowing countries without established QA agencies to nominate representatives from ministries of higher education. A flexible and transparent nomination and membership process was recommended, with clear criteria.

The proposal for an interim governance mechanism, including an Interim General Assembly and Technical Unit hosted by AAU, was endorsed. Participants appreciated that this approach balances urgency with realism and allows for gradual institution building.

3.3 FINANCING

Financial sustainability was discussed extensively. It was agreed that initial funding would be provided under HAQAA3, but that long-term sustainability would require a diversified funding strategy. Ideas included cost-recovery for services such as agency reviews, training, and consultancy, as well as contributions from host institutions and regional bodies. Membership fees were not recommended at this stage.

3.4 COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Participants emphasized the need for clearer communication on PAQAA's objectives, status, and progress. Targeted outreach to ministries, QA bodies, universities, and student associations was recommended. The PAQAA website and multilingual dissemination of materials were considered essential for building trust and visibility.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

The Eastern Africa consultation concluded with broad consensus on the relevance and value of PAQAA. The region supports a gradual, stakeholder-driven process towards full operationalization, starting with practical, non-political functions. Participants expressed readiness to engage in the interim governance structure and contribute to shaping PAQAA's evolution.

Key recommendations include:

- Clarify PAQAA's legal status and its relation to the AUC.
- Emphasize early functions that provide value without duplicating national mandates.
- Establish an inclusive governance model with flexible participation criteria.
- Develop a diversified and realistic financing model.
- Strengthen communications through regional platforms and strategic engagement with ministries.
- Continue to prioritize agency reviews and ASG-QA dissemination through the PAQAA Technical Unit.