



Northern and Anglophone Western Africa Regional Consultation on PAQAA

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1. Introduction and context

The Northern and Anglophone Western Africa regional consultation on the Pan African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency (PAQAA) took place on 4 November 2024 in Cairo, Egypt, within the context of the 7th International Conference of NAQAAE. Organized by HAQAA3, this consultation was part of a series of regional events conducted in 2024 to discuss the future governance, functional priorities, and implementation of PAQAA. It aimed to generate political and technical buy-in and to refine proposals based on regional perspectives.

The consultation was attended by more than 50 participants, including senior representatives from national quality assurance agencies, ministries of higher education, academic institutions, regional bodies, and strategic partners. Countries represented included Egypt, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia, The Gambia, Algeria, and Tunisia. Also in attendance were members of the PAQAA Interim Technical Unit, HAQAA3 implementing partners, and observers from the AAU, ENQA, and OBREAL. The session was facilitated by OBREAL and chaired by NAQAAE and the Association of African Universities (AAU).

2. Objectives of the consultation

The objectives of the consultation included:

- Reviewing the draft proposals for PAQAA's governance and structure.
- Gathering regional feedback on PAQAA's core functions and potential areas of concern.
- Discussing the alignment between national QA systems and the continental initiative.
- Strengthening stakeholder commitment and participation in the next stages of implementation.
- Encouraging consensus on political and operational issues ahead of a proposed interim governing phase.

3. Key discussions and outcomes

3.1 GOVERNANCE

A major focus was placed on PAQAA's governance structure. Participants emphasized the importance of full representation by all African countries in a General Assembly. It was recommended that member states with no existing QA agency be allowed to appoint representatives from their higher education authorities. Discussions also addressed voting rights, nomination procedures, and the balance between regional bodies and national agencies.

There was also a proposal to form an Advisory Board that would include representatives from regional and continental networks, providing guidance without voting power. Participants supported an Executive Board composed of 15 members elected from the General Assembly, ensuring balanced representation by region and requiring that elected members come from countries with independent QA agencies.

3.2 FUNCTIONS OF PAQAA

Consensus was reached around PAQAA's non-accrediting nature. Stakeholders advocated for functions focused on capacity building, peer review, compliance assessment, and a continental register of agencies. Accreditation of national institutions was deemed politically sensitive and should be avoided or delayed until legal and policy frameworks are in place.

There were discussions about renaming PAQAA to reflect its real purpose—some suggested 'Pan African Quality Assurance Regulatory' (PAQAR) to avoid misinterpretation. Participants reaffirmed that PAQAA's success will depend on trust, voluntary participation, and transparency in its operations.

3.3 FINANCING

The consultation emphasized the need for sustainable funding. Participants discussed multiple funding streams: host country contributions, donor partnerships, fees for services, and potentially membership subscriptions in the future. The importance of clear budget planning and the gradual transition from HAQAA3 support to autonomous functioning was noted.

3.4 ASG-QA AND COMMUNICATION

Raising awareness of the African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ASG-QA) was identified as a priority. Participants stressed the importance of training and advocacy for universities, QA bodies, and students. Communication efforts should focus on the added value of PAQAA and differentiate it from existing networks.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

Participants strongly endorsed the continuation of PAQAA's development, emphasizing inclusiveness, transparency, and political engagement. The region is committed to contributing constructively to the next stages, including interim governance formation and technical consolidation.

Key recommendations include:

- Maintain the vision and mission as defined in previous consultations, with clear language to avoid misinterpretation.
- Ensure that the governance model provides equitable representation, while safeguarding technical independence.
- Focus initial PAQAA activities on agency reviews, register development, and capacity building.
- Clarify the legal status and define a transitional governance model.
- Implement a comprehensive communication and advocacy strategy, particularly for ministries and national decision-makers.