# Report on Regional Consultation on HE Data Collection Capacity in West and Central Africa Francophone Region

## Organized by the HAQAA3 African Higher Education Data Team (AHEDT)

2024

Under the auspices of HAQAA3 Initiative Implementing Team (OBREAL Global, AAU, DAAD, and ENQA) with the support of strategic partners, CAMES and AUF

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# Executive Summary

On July 4, 2024, virtually, and in October 2024, in Senegal focus group discussion was convened under the HAQAA3 initiative. Participants representing national ministries, higher education institutions, quality assurance agencies, and regional bodies (e.g., CAMES and AUF) critically examined existing data collection practices, challenges, and capacity needs. The discussion identified persistent issues such as fragmented data systems, inadequate ICT infrastructure, and insufficient human capacity, while also highlighting opportunities for harmonization and regional coordination. This report synthesizes these findings, provides an in-depth analysis of the systemic challenges, and outlines recommendations to advance evidence-based policymaking in the region.

# 1. Introduction and Background

## CONTEXT AND RATIONALE

The Harmonisation, Quality Assurance, and Accreditation of African Higher Education (HAQAA) Initiative is one of the flagship initiatives of the Global Gateway package of the EU in partnership with the European Commission and the African Union Commission. The HAQAA3 Initiative is now in its third phase. HAQAA3 is a continuation and expansion of the work done under HAQAA1 (2015-18) and HAQAA2 (2019-2022) and is an ambitious response to African and international development objectives, framed within the context of the EU's growing investment in African partnership. The 'HAQAA3 Implementing Team', is comprised of OBREAL (lead), AAU, DAAD and ENQA, and is supported by 9 strategic partners, and key stakeholders who also form a Steering Committee and are integrated into the implementation structure.

The third phase of the HAQAA initiative was launched in July 2023. The work area on HE Data Capacity of the HAQAA3 initiative is designed to implement the Road Map developed under HAQAA2. HAQAA3 has set up an African Higher Education Data Team (AHEDT) which will lead the work area on data for policy analysis. The AHEDT is a regionally and linguistically representative operational team and is familiar with the PDU Development Team mapping

report and roadmap. The AHDET is constituted of representatives from regional and continental strategic partners, including AAU, IUCEA, SARUA, AUF, and CAMES and a representative from Northern Africa as well as representatives from relevant international and continental bodies like UNESCO/UIS, the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), the Ubuntunet Alliance for Education and Research, and IPED (AU's continental educational statistics repository and policy analysis).

Building on the foundational work of HAQAA2—which mapped existing HE data sources and identified capacity gaps—the focus group was organized to deepen regional understanding and catalyse a coordinated response to improve data collection and management systems.

## OBJECTIVES

The primary objectives of the focus group were to:

- **Assess the current state** of higher education data collection in Francophone Africa.
- **Identify systemic challenges** (e.g., fragmented mandates, manual data processes, and infrastructural deficits).
- **Explore capacity building and harmonization needs** at both national and institutional levels.
- **Formulate actionable recommendations** for establishing a robust, regionally integrated Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS).

# 2. Methodology

The focus group for the West and Central African region was organized in consultation with AUF and CAMES. Focus areas of the discussion and identification of participants were made in consultation and through the two strategic partners. The focus group comprised representatives from key stakeholder groups, including national ministries of higher education, HEIs, and regional bodies. Participants were selected based on their expertise and involvement in HE data collection and policymaking. Representatives from national higher education authorities were nominated by CAMES member states, through an official request for nominees sent by CAMES.

The online focus group was conducted via Zoom over a three-hour session while the physical meeting was held over one day in Senegal in October 20204. The discussions were structured into two distinct parts:

**Presentations and Context Setting**: Participants received briefings on HAQAA2's mapping study, the development roadmap for HE data collection, HE indicators developed by the AHEDT based on international practice but contextualized for Africa and a briefing on the strategic role of CAMES in harmonizing data practices.

**Interactive Discussion:** Delegates from national ministries and higher education institutions shared insights regarding their country-specific experiences, challenges in data collection (both manual and digital), and capacity gaps. Discussions then shifted to identifying common issues, best practices, and potential pilot projects to test harmonized data collection methods.

The consultations were complimented by an online survey distributed as a follow-up to the focus group discussions. In total 26 representatives from HEIs, Ministries in charge of HE and QAs in 15 countries in the region responded to the survey. This has enabled an interactive dialogue where qualitative inputs were later analysed thematically to identify recurring challenges and opportunities across the region.

# 3. Key Findings and Analysis

## 3.1 CURRENT DATA COLLECTION PRACTICES AND NATIONAL MANDATES:

Most countries in the region have established mandates for HE data collection. However, these mandates are often implemented through disparate and fragmented systems. Many participants noted that existing systems are not sufficiently digitized, and there is a shortage of skilled personnel trained in modern data collection and analysis methods. For example, while countries like Senegal and Cameroon have instituted centralized digital platforms, others such as Madagascar continue to rely on paper-based processes, resulting in significant delays and data inconsistencies. Despite these differences, majority of respondents indicated that HE data is collected annually in their respective countries.

**Is the data collected and updated annually?**
26 responses



- Oui
- Non

96.2%
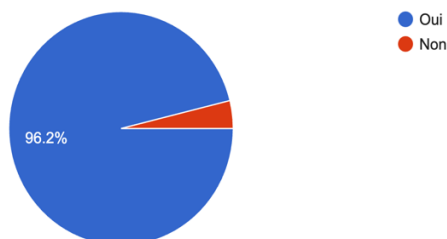
Lack of Harmonization and Standardization is also highlighted as a challenge for collecting a regionally comparable HE data. Participants stressed that variations in data indicators and collection methodologies impede comparability across institutions and countries, hindering effective policy formulation. A notable divergence exists between public and private institutions. Public universities typically adhere to more structured reporting mechanisms, whereas private institutions often exhibit flexibility but with lower levels of standardization. This variability undermines data comparability at the regional level.

## 3.2 TECHNOLOGICAL AND PROCESS CHALLENGES

**ICT Infrastructure:** A critical recurring theme is the lack of robust ICT infrastructure. Many participants underscored that outdated or non-integrated digital systems hinder timely data aggregation and analysis. The absence of a unified digital platform compromises the ability to produce real-time, high-quality data for policymaking.

**Is the data available in an electronic system at the national level?**
26 responses



- Oui
- Non
- Je ne sais pas

26.9%

11.5%

61.5%
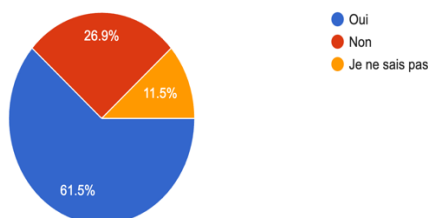
**Manual vs. Digital Systems:** Despite some progress toward electronic systems, many institutions still depend on manual, paper-based surveys. This duality in data collection methods leads to inefficiencies and inconsistencies in reported figures, affecting the reliability of national statistical yearbooks and performance reports.

Is data collected and submitted using paper surveys?
26 responses

● Oui
● Non

53.8%

46.2%
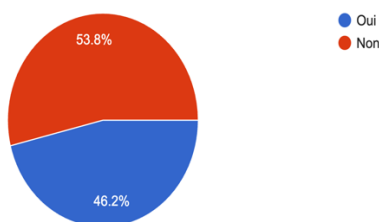
## 3.3 HARMONIZATION AND STANDARDIZATION OF INDICATORS:

**Indicator Discrepancies:** One of the major challenges identified is the lack of harmonized definitions and protocols for key indicators. While all stakeholders agree on the importance of core metrics—such as enrolment, graduation rates, staff profiles, and graduate employability—the methods used to collect and report these indicators vary widely. This heterogeneity limits cross-country comparisons and the development of a cohesive regional database.

In terms of priorities for the region, majority of participants identified indicators pertaining to, disaggregated data on student enrolment, dropout, and graduation rate (85% participants), disaggregated data on academic and administrative staff (73% participants), fields of study/discipline and classifications (80% participants), budget and finance (73% participants), graduate employability (85% participants), data on quality assurance (88% Participants) and institutional data (53% participants).

Here is a summary in table form of the higher education data indicators that are of the highest priority for each country identified by focus group participants.

| Country | High Priority Data Indicators |
|---|---|
| Burkina Faso | Data disaggregated on enrolment, dropout, and graduation rates, Data disaggregated on academic and administrative staff, Fields of study/disciplines and classifications, Budget and financial aid, Data on international enrolment, Data on quality assurance and governance, Data on graduate employability, Institutional profile data, Budget and financial aid, Fields of study/disciplines and classifications. |

![HAQAA3 - Harmonisation, Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Africa]
![Global Gateway - Co-funded by the European Union]
![African Union]

| | |
|---|---|
| *Cabo Verde* | Fields of study/disciplines and classifications, Budget and financial aid, Data on international enrolment, Data on quality assurance and governance, Data on graduate employability, Data disaggregated on enrolment, dropout, and graduation rates, Data disaggregated on academic and administrative staff. |
| *Cameroon* | Data disaggregated on enrolment, dropout, and graduation rates, Data disaggregated on academic and administrative staff, Fields of study/disciplines and classifications, Budget and financial aid, Data on international enrolment, Data on quality assurance and governance, Data on graduate employability, Institutional profile data. |
| *Congo* | Institutional profile data, Data disaggregated on enrolment, dropout, and graduation rates, Data disaggregated on academic and administrative staff, Fields of study/disciplines and classifications, Budget and financial aid, Data on international enrolment, Data on quality assurance and governance, Data on graduate employability. |
| *Côte d'Ivoire* | Institutional profile data, Data disaggregated on enrolment, dropout, and graduation rates, Data disaggregated on academic and administrative staff, Fields of study/disciplines and classifications, Budget and financial aid, Data on international enrollment, Data on quality assurance and governance, Data on graduate employability. |
| *Gambia* | Data on quality assurance and governance, Data on graduate employability. |
| *Guinea* | Institutional profile data, Data disaggregated on enrollment, dropout, and graduation rates, Data disaggregated on academic and administrative staff, Fields of study/disciplines and classifications, Budget and financial aid, Data on international enrollment, Data on quality assurance and governance, Data on graduate employability. |
| *Madagascar* | Institutional profile data, Data disaggregated on enrollment, dropout, and graduation rates, Data disaggregated on academic and administrative staff, Fields of study/disciplines and classifications, |

| | |
|---|---|
| | Budget and financial aid, Data on international enrollment, Data on quality assurance and governance, Data on graduate employability. |
| Mali | Institutional profile data, Data disaggregated on enrollment, dropout, and graduation rates, Data disaggregated on academic and administrative staff, Fields of study/disciplines and classifications, Budget and financial aid, Data on international enrollment, Data on quality assurance and governance, Data on graduate employability. |
| Niger | Institutional profile data, Data disaggregated on enrollment, dropout, and graduation rates, Data disaggregated on academic and administrative staff, Fields of study/disciplines and classifications, Budget and financial aid, Data on international enrollment, Data on quality assurance and governance, Data on graduate employability. |
| Senegal | Data disaggregated on enrolment, dropout, and graduation rates, Data disaggregated on academic and administrative staff, Fields of study/disciplines and classifications, Budget and financial aid, Data on international enrolment, Data on quality assurance and governance, Data on graduate employability, Institutional profile data. |
| Tchad | Data disaggregated on enrolment, dropout, and graduation rates, Data disaggregated on academic and administrative staff, Fields of study/disciplines and classifications, Budget and financial aid, Data on international enrolment, Data on quality assurance and governance, Data on graduate employability. |

It's worth noting that many countries selected a similar range of indicators, with **data disaggregated on enrolment, dropout, and graduation rates**, and **data disaggregated on academic and administrative staff** frequently marked as high priorities. Other common priorities included fields of study/disciplines, budget/financial aid, international enrolment, quality assurance/governance, and graduate employability.

**Regional Standards:** There is a broad consensus on the need for regional guidelines to establish common norms. CAMES, given its established role in the region, is frequently mentioned as the

potential lead for harmonizing data collection practices. Harmonization is seen as a prerequisite for developing a regional HEMIS that can support evidence-based policymaking.

Many respondents emphasized the necessity of regional guidelines and standards to enhance higher education data collection. In Côte d'Ivoire, a respondent suggested that putting in place a data collection and analysis policy would address the lack of harmonization. From Cabo Verde, it was suggested that the state/government should have a protocol with dimensions, indicators, and a defined schedule for this purpose. In the Gambia, it was believed that regional guidelines and standards are important so that information is readily available for purposes of comparison and effective planning and could also facilitate a seamless transfer of credits and harmonization of curricula. Overall, the development of regional guidelines and standards for higher education data collection is seen as a crucial step toward improving data quality, comparability, and the use of data for effective planning and policymaking in the region

## 3.4 CAPACITY BUILDING NEEDS

**Human Resources and Training:** A significant gap exists in the capacity of personnel involved in data collection, analysis, and management. Respondents emphasized the need for comprehensive training programs on digital tools, data governance, and advanced analytical techniques. Particularly at the HEIs level, participants emphasised the need for capacity building trainings on HEMIS (conceptualization and implementation), on data governance and security and the use of data for policy making.

What should be the objective of capacity building training to improve higher education data collection at higher education institution level? (you can select multiple options)
26 responses
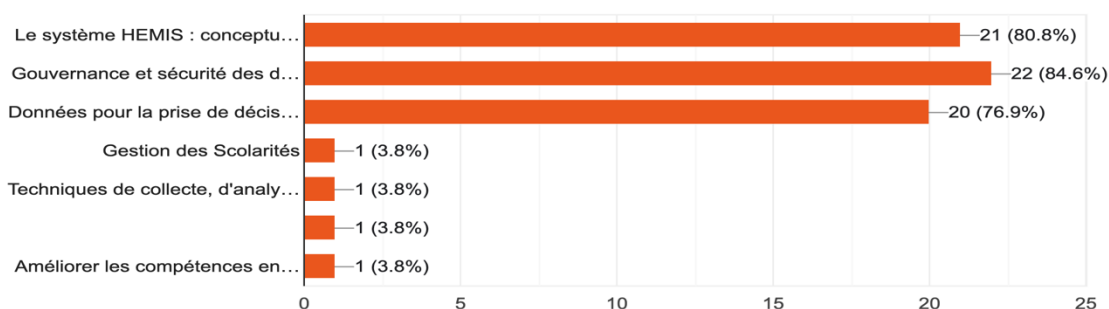


**Technical and Managerial Skills:** The capacity building strategies proposed include specialized workshops on HEMIS system (conceptualization, implementation), Comparative national data systems, use of modern statistical software, and training in data validation methods.

Particularly at the national authorities' level, it was highlighted that training on national and regional comparative data systems and approaches would contribute significantly to address the challenges. These initiatives are critical for both institutional staff and national agencies to ensure the accuracy and reliability of HE data.

What should be the objective of capacity building training to improve higher education data collection at higher education institution level? (you can select multiple options)
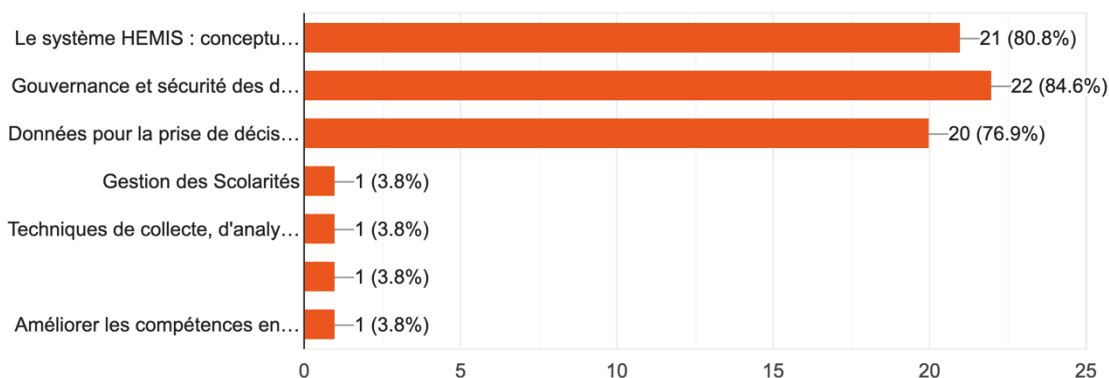26 responses

| Option | Count (%) |
|---|---|
| Le système HEMIS : conceptu… | 21 (80.8%) |
| Gouvernance et sécurité des d… | 22 (84.6%) |
| Données pour la prise de décis… | 20 (76.9%) |
| Gestion des Scolarités | 1 (3.8%) |
| Techniques de collecte, d'analy… | 1 (3.8%) |
| | 1 (3.8%) |
| Améliorer les compétences en… | 1 (3.8%) |

## 3.5 UTILIZATION OF DATA FOR POLICY MAKING

**Evidence-Based Policy Gaps:** While data are collected, there remains a disconnect between data availability and their integration into policy decisions. Respondents indicated that the lack of analytical capacity and clear protocols for data use limits the effectiveness of evidence-based decision-making. Improving this linkage is crucial for aligning HE data collection with broader policy objectives, including those articulated in the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

# 4. Discussion and Interpretation

The focus group discussions reveal that while the region has made strides in establishing HE data collection systems, significant challenges persist. The reliance on manual data collection methods and the absence of harmonized indicators impedes the development of a unified data ecosystem. Furthermore, the insufficient ICT infrastructure and human resource constraints exacerbate these challenges, ultimately affecting the quality and timeliness of data used for policy development.

OBREAL

ASSOCIATION OF AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES
ASSOCIATION DES UNIVERSITES AFRICAINES
اتحاد الجامعات الأفريقية

DAAD Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst
German Academic Exchange Service

enqa.
European Association for
Quality Assurance in Higher Education

The role of regional bodies such as CAMES and AUF is pivotal in bridging these gaps. By fostering regional standards and facilitating capacity building, these organizations can help transform fragmented practices into a cohesive, efficient system. The establishment of a regional HEMIS is seen not merely as a technological upgrade but as a fundamental step toward enabling data-driven policy reforms.

# 5. Recommendations

Based on the analysis, the following recommendations are proposed:

## 5.1 ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN A REGIONAL HEMIS

- **Centralized Data Unit:** Host the regional data unit within an established organization like CAMES to ensure uniformity and sustainability. This unit should act as a central repository for HE data across Francophone Africa.
- **Interoperable Digital Platforms:** Invest in the development of interoperable digital systems that facilitate real-time data sharing and analysis across national boundaries.

## 5.2 HARMONIZE DATA COLLECTION PROTOCOLS AND INDICATORS

- **Standardized Indicators:** Develop and implement a regionally accepted set of indicators with clear definitions. This would enable cross-country comparisons and support regional benchmarking.
- **Guidelines and Best Practices:** Publish comprehensive guidelines and conduct regular workshops to ensure that both public and private institutions adhere to common data collection and reporting standards.

## 5.3 ENHANCE CAPACITY BUILDING INITIATIVES

- **Training Programs:** Launch targeted training initiatives focusing on digital literacy, data analysis, and the use of modern statistical software. Training should be tailored to the needs of both national agencies and HE institutions.
- **Institutional Support:** Allocate dedicated resources for capacity building and technical assistance, ensuring that all stakeholders have the necessary skills and tools to contribute effectively to the data ecosystem.

## 5.4 IMPROVE DATA UTILIZATION FOR POLICY MAKING

- **Analytical Tools and Protocols:** Develop protocols that guide the integration of HE data into policy development processes. This includes investing in analytical tools that can translate raw data into actionable insights.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Establish regular forums for dialogue between data collectors, analysts, and policymakers to ensure that data are used effectively to inform decision-making processes.

# 6. Conclusion

The focus group discussion under the HAQAA3 initiative has provided critical insights into the challenges and opportunities in HE data collection across Francophone Africa. Although the region has made progress in establishing national mandates and data collection systems, significant issues remain—particularly regarding harmonization, technological infrastructure, and human capacity. Addressing these challenges through the establishment of a centralized regional HEMIS, standardized data protocols, and robust capacity building programs is essential for advancing evidence-based policymaking. By aligning these efforts with international standards and regional goals, stakeholders can significantly enhance the quality and utility of HE data, ultimately contributing to the development of a more integrated and responsive higher education system.