SECTION II

Institutional Frameworks for Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Africa

2

Quality Assurance in Africa's Higher Education

In establishing the colonial university colleges in Africa, steps were taken to institutionalise standards that could make these institutions comparable in quality to the metropolitan universities. The principal instrument for achieving this was through the placement of the African university colleges under the mentorship of metropolitan universities in the United Kingdom, France, and Portugal (Materu 2007; Lulat 2005). With these affiliations, the African higher education institutions inevitably became part of the British, French, Portuguese or the other systems for quality guarantees through their partner universities. The Cheikh Anta Diop University (formerly the University of Dakar) in Senegal was, for instance, regarded as an integral part of the French higher education system up to as late as the 1960s; much the same way as the University of Makerere, University of Ibadan and the University of Ghana were considered integral parts of the British higher education system (Materu 2007). The leadership of these university colleges was largely controlled by expatriate staffs who served as the conduits for transmitting the ethics required for quality assurance. And the ultimate authority for the delivery of quality in university education in those early days was vested in their faculty and the governing boards.

These institutions were subjected to the same kinds of traditional quality control mechanisms as were the British or other European universities, including assessment by external examiners and other aspects of quality control systems (Yankson 2013; Materu 2007; Manuh *et al.* 2007). Over time, some of the first generation institutions, such as the University of Cape Town, assumed the role of mentoring institutions for the younger ones in South Africa; and the University of Ghana in Accra became the parenting institution for the University College of Cape Coast. In all instances, the tradition remained that quality assurance was largely within the domain of faculty and the governance bodies of the universities. Even

as indigenisation processes were underway, they were not done at the expense of quality assurance. While the expatriate managers of the colonial higher education projects bequeathed to their African successors cultures that promoted academic freedom and the maintenance of standards, it became tedious for the African leadership to safeguard those tenets within the political environments that drifted away from liberal values to state regulation in the immediate post-independence period (Wolhuter 2013).

Political independence in Africa was interpreted by political office holders as being the time to assertively determine the agenda for university leadership (Mamdani 2008). Subsequently, state departments and ministries of education took great interest in university programmes and exerted massive control over their goal setting and in governance (Materu 2007; Agbodeka 1998). However, such interventions were not always done to guarantee standards that universities, world over strive to maintain (Mamdani 2008). Indeed, in many cases, the intervention of the state in the affairs of university education contributed to a decline in the quality of academic service (Materu 2007; Adesina 2006). Some of these interventions by governments were as indiscreet as the determination of faculty appointments, promotions and occupancy of management positions (Materu 2007; Agbodeka 1998). Circumstances of that sort tended to be detrimental to the promotion of intellectual enterprise (Collins 2013; Agbodeka 1998; Hagan 1994). As political manipulation from African governments became a commonplace in the immediate post-independence years, the tenacity of faculty to hold its own against governments in protecting the space for academic freedom and standards suffered setbacks (Hagan 1994).

The deteriorating circumstances in the African universities were aggravated further by the conjoined factors of economic malaise and bad governance, which soon became the definition of the African situation (Collins 2013; Adesina 2006). It was within such abysmal contexts, which persisted up to the mid-1980 that made the World Bank to audaciously make the unpleasant suggestion to Africa to farm out its higher education. To be true, this suggestion was to affirm the failure of African states and higher education leadership, the nadir that standards had sunk. What was to be done to elevate these universities out of their poor situations, in a sense, could be described as the beginnings of quality reassurance.

The liberalisation of the higher education space for the participation of private providers and the commercialisation of the public universities that were implemented in the 1990s were done to deal to with the mediocrity that had engulfed the sector. But the policy shift to managerialism has not passed without anxieties. These solutions have evoked new fears about whether quality could not fall even further

within the framework of market ethics (Adesina 2006). It is in this sense that we would appreciate the rejuvenation of the debate on quality and the apprehensions that have been raised about the nature of higher education and their governance in Africa since the 1990s (Materu 2007; World Bank 2002).

The matter that relates to the implications of the liberalisation of the higher education sector, and the associated concerns of massification, commercialisation, internationalisation and globalisation, is in fact different ways of querying whether intellectual standards are being sacrificed on the altar of marketisation. To be certain, the debate about whether or not higher education in the current circumstances can continue to be the standard bearer in knowledge production and transmission industry is a global one (ENQA 2005; Giertz 2000; Harvey 1999, Barnett 1992). The global response has been a trend towards the establishment of transnational, national and institution-specific bodies to superintend higher education for the maintenance of standards in the competitive global environment (Materu 2007; ENQA 2005). The imperative to embark on this path is a compelling one for Africa, if the continent would be abreast with the rest of the world in the knowledge driven comity of nations (Yankson 2013). The infiltration of higher education with NPM ethics, demands of academic service providers to take into consideration the concerns of stakeholders in defining and determining the parameters of quality service. This is the case because quality issues in higher education have become part of the accountability process to the stakeholders in these institutions. This thus removes the issues of quality determination from being an exclusive preserve of universities and their leadership. And in line with private-for-profit corporate dictum 'the consumer matters' in the determination of quality, even for public universities in the contemporary NPM environment.

Whereas, there has been much concern about quality assurance within higher education and even outside it, there appears to be no universal agreement in the literature, on what precisely constitutes *quality* (SAUVA 2002; Giertz 2000; Cameron & Whetten 1993). As a concept, 'quality' has been variously recognised to mean 'fitness for purpose' (Ball 1985); 'transformation from one state to another with value-added' (Harvey & Newton 2007; Harvey & Knight 1996); 'attainment of a flawless product' (Watty 2003) 'excellence' or the 'attainment of exceptionally high standards' (Harvey 1999) among others. The varying perceptions of what constitutes quality in higher education may in fact be a reflection of the diverse conceptions of the missions of higher education and how they are to be satisfied (Materu 2007; Harvey 1999; Barnett 1992).

In the contemporary situation where state controlled models of higher education are giving way to liberalised systems, the trend is for the emergence of

independent state and/or transnational superintending organisations to examine the outputs of higher education institutions (Vught 1989). The supervisory role of independent parastatal or transnational institutions is of much interest to all stakeholders, as a way of ensuring that some baseline criteria in calibrating quality within national setting or in a sub-region are put in place. This trend is in consonance with the emerging philosophy of institutional accountability; and the development of social metrics for an evaluative state (Materu 2007; Neave 1988). Because of the interest of all stakeholders in the quality of higher education, such matters have also become a political question (Brennan 1997; Barnett 1992; cf. Ball 1985). Quality matters in contemporary circumstances are neither the sole preserve of specific higher education institutions nor are they cases reducible to a binary deliberation between the state and the academic community.

Quality in higher education now goes beyond the preferences of the leadership of individual institutions and the choices of state managers. The compelling case of NPM demands that industry and students should become important stakeholders in the higher education quality assurance matrix (Materu 2007; Harvey 1999). It is in this regard that we would appreciate that the multivariate nature of the factors for defining quality must take into account the expectations of all the stakeholders. Invariably, the multiple interests from the stakeholders are but different conceptions of the mission of higher education. In the evolving situation, thus, quality assurance is to be arrived at through negotiation between the requirements of the major stakeholders (Vroeijentstijn 1999). Of course, it is important to recognise that universities have their specific mandates; the essence of which is encapsulated in the vision and mission statements of the institutions. The mandate and the vision of institutions essentially provide the ideological pathway within which universities operate and upon which quality issues can be addressed.

Hence to validate the different conceptions of quality in higher education, there is the need to appreciate the ideological context within which the concept is formulated (Elliot 1993). It is worth noting that in higher education governance, quality assurance is achieved through planned and systematic review of the processes of institutions and their programmes to determine that acceptable standards of education, scholarship, teaching, administration and infrastructure are being maintained and/or enhanced (Giertz 2001). But as has been pointed out by Lee Harvey (1999) the bottom line of quality assurance of such endeavours in higher education rests with the element of employability of their products; and their ability to perform in industry. Whereas universities continue to pride themselves as the industries for intellectualism, the new global reality is embedded in the

question regarding the quintessence of the knowledge to its bearers in terms of livelihood. Certainly, higher education institutions transform students to enhance their knowledge, skills, attitudes and abilities while simultaneously empowering them to become lifelong critical effective learners. However, given the stakes in NPM, it is becoming increasingly difficult to sell this idea to African students that the essence of their training is to transform them into critical thinkers. The reality of the elements of fee paying for programmes, limited space for public sector employment, and the uncomfortable prospects of joining the ranks of the unemployed have evoked the rational question about the livelihood prospects of programmes students pursue in the university.

The concerns of industry about the employability of graduates and their level of preparedness for jobs are also variables that emanate from stakeholders in determining quality service delivery in the universities. The importance of these benchmarks in quality determination, deals with the critical issues of the relevance and the fitness of knowledge acquired in universities for development in Africa. The responses to these concerns have been shown in the numerous efforts to revitalise higher education in Africa through the institutionalisation of the mechanisms for quality assurance (Yankson 2013; Shabani 2013; Materu 2007; AAU 2000).

To be able to understand the discussions on institutional efforts for quality assurance in higher education, we need a structure that defines the variables that are acceptable to all the stakeholders. In Africa, we find a number of institutional arrangements that are designed for ensuring that higher education institutions provide quality services. Three main institutional designs are found on the continent to provide services related to quality assurance. These are: (a) transnational bodies; (b) statutory national bodies and (c) higher education specific institutions. In this section of the book, we would limit our discussion of the institutional framework of quality assurance to transnational efforts.

Francophone Africa provides us with a good example of transnational body for quality assurance. The African and Malagasy Council for Higher Education (CAMES)[11] was established in 1968 to, among other things, harmonise recognition and equivalence of awards among member countries.[12] Today, the CAMES is also responsible for accrediting private universities and some select professional programmes in the member countries (Shabani 2013; Materu 2007).

The Association of African Universities (AAU), a pan-African body for higher education was founded in November 1967 in Rabat, Morocco. It is headquartered in Accra, Ghana, and has, since its beginning, served as the apex organisation

and a forum for consultation, exchange of information and cooperation among Africa's institutions of higher education (AAU 2014). The AAU has used its unique position to create the stage for ensuring that higher education on the continent remains competitive in terms of quality service delivery. Consequently, the AAU has since the year 2000 developed the Quality Assurance Programme (QAP) meant to arrest the fall in quality delivery in African universities (Collins 2013; Shabani 2013). The objective of the project is to lay a foundation for institutionalised quality assurance mechanisms within higher education institutions, national quality assurance and accreditation agencies, and an eventual regional network for coordination of cross-border protocols and specialised capacity building in quality assurance. The programmes provide support to:

1. member universities of the AAU which are establishing or evaluating internal quality assurance systems;
2. national assurance/accreditation agencies in developing professional capacities for external evaluation and monitoring systems; and
3. AAU to update and negotiate with partners, a regional framework on the recognition of studies, certificates, degrees and other academic qualifications in higher education.

The main components of the QAP, as outlined by the AAU (2014) are as follows: strengthening member institutions' internal quality assurance systems through training, seminars and learning events; supporting established and emerging quality assurance/accreditation agencies in developing strong external evaluation and monitoring systems within national higher education systems in Africa. The AAU also commits itself to the development of a quality assurance database that would facilitate knowledge sharing; and the updating and renegotiation, with partners. Finally the platform provided by the AAU is to be used for the establishment of a Regional Framework on the recognition of studies, certificates, diplomas, degrees and other academic qualifications in higher education in Africa, based on the Arusha Convention (AAU 2014).

In pursuance of this goal, the AAU has through the QAP been supporting in the establishment of institutional, national and sub-regional quality assurance systems. This effort has been followed by a series of workshops across the continent, such as Morocco (2003), Nigeria (2007) and Ghana (2009). The AAU, in 2009, subsequently launched the African Quality Assurance Network (AfriQAN), a network of Quality Assurance practitioners in African Higher Education to carry forward the tasks of assuring quality in Africa's higher education institutions. The task ahead of the AAU, nonetheless, remains enormous. The higher education

landscape of the continent is a reflection of a number of factors that have to do with Africa's colonial history, postcolonial socioeconomic stresses, and the global liberalised trends that have simplified cross-border academic service delivery. The effect is an interesting medley of higher education systems divided along language lines (Anglophone, Francophone, Lusophone, and Arabophone); each of these with its own structure and a diverse array of study programmes, qualifications and awards (Materu 2007). These differences needed harmonisation if progress was to be made in forging unity in the region through enhancement of access to higher education and ensuring that there are common denominators for quality determination. This would then create the basis for the mutual recognition of qualifications and the creation of a common framework for credit transfers across national boundaries. The AAU has undertaken to accomplish this task to serve as a path to promoting mobility across higher education systems within Africa.

The African Union (AU) Commission has also adopted three initiatives in addressing quality assurance issues in higher education on the continent. The first initiative of the African Union is the African Higher Education Harmonisation Strategy. This was adopted in 2007 to ensure comparability of qualifications; so as to facilitate the implementation of the 'revised Arusha' Convention. The original convention was the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in African states, was adopted in 1981 in Arusha, Tanzania. A conference of African Ministers of Education was held in March 2014 that adopted the revised Arusha Convention. The recognition of the exigency to expedite actions on quality assurance within the African higher education system has engendered collaboration between UNESCO, the African Union Commission and the Association for the Development in Education Africa (ADEA) to implement initiatives. Subsequently, the number of national quality assurance agencies on the continent rose from 6 in 2004 to 23 in 2014 (Materu 2007).

UNESCO has been an important player in quality assurance issues in Africa. This was first done through its Harare Cluster Office in 2006 and Bamako Cluster Office in 2009. They have been working closely with a number of organisations such as the Association of African Universities (AAU), the African Union Commission (AUC), the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), the Global University Network for Innovation (GUNi)-Africa to initiate the International Conference and Workshop series on Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Africa (ICQAHEA). This has served as a platform for building the capacities of over 2,000 higher education professionals, researchers and

experts in Africa to address capacity deficits in higher education quality assurance (Materu 2007). Thirdly, the African Quality Assurance Network (AfriQAN) was inaugurated in 2007 to pursue its mandate of "assurance and enhancement of the quality of higher education in Africa through strengthening the work of quality assurance agencies and other associated organisations with similar objectives." Fourthly, the Association of African Universities (AAU) through a wide array of programmes and projects including the Quality Assurance Support Programme for Higher Education in Africa and the African Higher Education Excellence Award made significant additions to the pile of efforts at ensuring that the quality of higher education in the continent does not regress. Fifthly, the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) through its Working Group on Higher Education (WGHE) was at the vanguard of efforts that are envisaged to lead to strengthening the African Higher Education and Research Space (AHERS). The sixth evidence of positive development is led by the African Union Commission which has vigorously pursued several initiatives towards the harmonisation of higher education in Africa with a foundational strand on quality.

In the changed circumstances, the challenges that face leadership in higher education in Africa today is how to respond to the dynamics of stakeholder participation, at both national and international levels, in determining quality that meets intrinsic and extrinsic values of universities, industry needs, community needs, knowledge and skill needs for students. For leadership, meeting these quality needs and expectations for all stakeholders that may not always be in agreement about the programmes that the institutions roll out requires thinking outside the box.