

Study Programme on Higher Education Management in Africa

The African Association of Universities (AAU)

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Sida Evaluation 99/28

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Sida Evaluation 99/28
Commissioned by Sida, Department for Research Cooperation, SAREC

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Registration No.: SAREC-1995-0696
Date of Final Report: April 1998
Printed in Stockholm, Sweden 1999
ISBN 91 586 7831 X
ISSN 1401-0402

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Executive summary

Brief description of the programme

The Study Programme was set up in 1993 in order to find solutions to the African higher education crisis of the late 1980s by developing local capacity for undertaking systematic research on issues of higher education policy and management, and increase the indigenous knowledge base of African higher education policy-making. Financial support was provided by the Government of the Netherlands and the Swedish Agency for Research with Developing Countries (SAREC) (now the Department for Research Cooperation within the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Sida). The financial contribution from Sida/SAREC over the period 1993–1997 amounted to SEK 3 million, the Netherlands contribution to NGl. 2 million. The indicative budget for the planned 4-year programme period was US \$ 1,978,300.

The main components of the study programme were 1) capacity building by providing grants to African researchers to undertake studies in higher education management, 2) production of papers and publication of research results, and 3) discussion of the results at seminars and conferences and promotion of their use in policy formulation and management practice.

The programme is meant to benefit higher education in the whole of Africa, however the direct beneficiaries of the programmes are the members of the AAU, the universities and the countries they represent.

Purpose and focus of the evaluation

The overall motive of the evaluation was to assess the activities and management of the Study Programme, the results obtained so far, and the prospects for the future. As far as possible, the evaluation should identify conditions of particular significance for programme success or failure. The evaluation was intended to:

- a) to make a general assessment of the Study Programme in Higher Education Management – its core activities, its strengths, weaknesses, its management and outcomes
- b) enable the AAU to further develop and improve the objectives, activities and management of the programme; to facilitate decisions by the donors on programme support.

Summary of findings

Despite poor communication infrastructure which is a feature of many African countries, the programme activities have largely been completed as planned. The timely submission of progress reports and financial statements to donors, minutes of meetings and the preparation of reports of workshops and seminars have been exemplary. The Co-ordinator of the Study Programme together with the AAU Secretariat regularly evaluates the procedures and processes involved from which reports are prepared for the AAU's Executive Board and the Scientific Committee of the Study Programme.

The Scientific Committee with members from both Africa and abroad was established to provide guidance, prioritise issues and ensure a high scientific quality of the research output. In addition, Resource Persons acted as mentors to the researchers, many of whom were undertaking research for the first time. Both these activities were invaluable in the development of the research programme.

The Study Programme began its activities by hosting a Conference on Higher Education Financing in Gaborone, Botswana, in December 1993. Financing of higher education was decided upon as one of the most pressing issues by the General Conference of the AAU in 1993. The purpose was to focus on a key area of higher education management in Africa, to assess the existing quality of research and to identify problem areas for researchers. Fifty nine participants were invited and 36 research papers were presented. In the concluding roundtable discussions, suggested themes for research which emerged were later modified and adopted by the Scientific Committee.

The response to submit proposals was very substantial. Following screening by the Scientific Committee, 15 projects were selected for funding. The projects comprised 28 researchers, of whom three were women. The average grant size was \$9,300. A second batch of grants was awarded in 1996 with 22 teams made up of 49 researchers, of whom 14 were women. The topics covered: institutional culture, decision making processes, financing models and higher education and work. Tracer studies involving a comparative study of graduate employment and work formed an important theme of this batch of research. Of the 15 grants awarded in 1994, 9 projects have been completed and reports submitted; of these three have been accepted for publication in the journal, *Higher Education*.

The first batch of research projects had a number of shortcomings such as inexperience of the researchers, too wide a focus, inability to access data etc. These were largely overcome with the second batch whose results look far more promising. The involvement of Resource Persons at the initial stages of the project also made a difference.

Dissemination of the results is an important objective of the Study Programme. This has been achieved in a number of ways: synthesised reports, publication of abstracts of conference papers and a limited number of papers published in peer reviewed journals. It is planned to bring out a collection of essays on the reports, publish a list of the titles of the research reports in the Newsletter of the AAU and on its web site on the Internet.

Training workshops and seminars were designed to improve the quality of the design and conduct of the projects, strengthen the research capacity of the teams and expose work in progress to critical review. The Methodology Workshop was intended to help clarify the research objectives, develop researchable topics and improve the formulation and methodology. Group work led to considerable interaction among the researchers during these workshops.

A workshop on data gathering and analysis was held in Mauritius in January, 1996. Critical comments made by university leaders, higher education policy makers and representatives of donors who attended this workshop were very helpful to the researchers.

A Management Development Workshop attended by Ministers of Education, Heads of National Education Commissions, Vice-Chancellors and other senior academics was held in Accra in March, 1997. Individual reports as well as a synthesised report of nine completed research reports were presented at the workshop. The roundtable involving the participants of the workshop highlighted a series of policy issues that required the attention of governments and universities in responding to the crisis of the African University.

Conclusions

- The Study Programme which has been well managed despite considerable difficulties has produced useful research findings and has the potential of high quality research in Phase II.
- The training workshops have been indispensable in the development of the researchers and in helping to identify research priorities.
- Strategic choices have to be made in moving from the developing of individual researchers to institutionalising research and establishing regional networks and linkages.
- In addition to financing and tracer studies as core themes, other topics critical to the development of African Universities such as enhancing quality, curriculum issues, postgraduate training and research, the relationship of further and higher education should be explored.
- A more concerted effort in disseminating the results of research and in particular of using the results of research to influence policy if not at least of informing policy should be a high priority.

Recommendations

- Concentrate efforts in a small number of centres to develop a critical mass of scientists rather than disperse resources too thinly.
- Continue support of promising and motivated researchers in addition to developing a new cadre of researchers.
- More interaction among researchers, with resource persons and spending periods in well established research centres.
- Increase participation from francophone and North African countries.
- Ensure participation from francophone countries in the Scientific Committee and as Resource Persons.
- Improve communication and widen publicity in order to reach a larger number of researchers; to this extent the identification of a senior administrator/academic as a contact person from each institution for the AAU would be helpful.
- Tracer studies of former grantees to ascertain whether they are on a research trajectory.
- Greater relevance and applicability of outcomes for policy purposes.
- Include faculty members, students and representatives of society in the determination of the research agenda.
- More support from institutions of researchers such as computers and other infrastructure.
- Widen topics for research – enhancing quality, curriculum, research and postgraduate study etc.
- Better dissemination of research results – press, policy briefings, think tanks etc.
- Emphasis on the publication of results in peer reviewed journals.
- Establish networks – institutional, local, regional and international..
- Consolidate knowledge data base of the AAU – printed material, web site on the Internet, publication of synthesised reports, the preparation of policy briefings etc.

Considering the plans for a Phase II

On the basis of the results obtained during Phase I, the evaluators are of the opinion that the Higher Education Study Programme is a very useful one that deserves and needs to be continued. The need for the programme is still relevant and urgent, the motivation among African researchers to participate in the programme great, and the ability of AAU to manage the programme reassuring. Furthermore, the problems of African universities especially of a financial and management nature are far from over.

The activities proposed for Phase II can be expected to increase and strengthen the research capacity, to make available the research outputs to interested parties, to initiate networking and to inform policy makers. However, the proposal does not address issues of institutionalisation and applicability of research results.

The proposal does not present a long term vision on the utilization and maintenance of the research capacity in the future, nor on the contributions which the research could have on policy development in Africa. It also does not contain a discussion on strategies which the programme wants to adopt to achieve its development and immediate objectives.

It is therefore recommended that AAU and the Scientific Committee prepare a strategic plan which would guide the Programme in achieving clearly defined short and medium term objectives. In doing so, the issues of 'institutionalisation', ownership, the relevancy and utilization of research should feature prominently on the agenda.

In preparing for Phase II of the programme, the evaluators recommend the following process:

1. AAU and the Scientific Committee to work on this strategic plan which should reveal a vision with regard to aims, outcomes and strategic choices based on solid arguments;
2. To draft a proposal for the second phase on the basis of this strategic plan;
3. AAU to discuss the proposal and strategic plan in a joint meeting with the donors;
4. AAU to finalise the proposal and to submit it to the donors.

Programme context

The development context of the project

African universities have in the recent past experienced severe financial crises resulting in a decline in the quality of teaching and research, thereby reducing their effectiveness. There is therefore a critical need to review and adapt management as well as financial practices in order to make optimal use of limited resources which are not likely to increase in the short term. The AAU and the other African bodies have identified the minimal contribution of African researchers and institutions to studies of Higher Education Management and the limited contributions from perspectives reflecting African concerns and priorities. This makes it necessary for African academics and researchers to significantly increase their participation in and contribution to the debate on the major issues of Higher Education Management and the conditions for their resolution so that the perceptions of non-Africans may not unduly determine the definition of the problems and the agenda for change.

The project history

Until the early nineties, research on Higher Education Management was largely undertaken by the World Bank with little or no input by African researchers. The research undertaken by the latter was largely isolated endeavours with virtually no contact or exchange between researchers, and had only limited impact on higher education development in their countries or on international policy. As a response to this shortcoming, AAU initiated a major initiative towards a coordinated African contribution to the discussion of the issues in African higher education by setting up a study of the *Cost Effectiveness and Efficiency in African Universities* carried out by a study group. The study was made possible by support from the Government of the Netherlands and the World Bank. It provided considerable new information, presented new perspectives, and enhanced more than ever before awareness and understanding of the issues of cost effectiveness and efficiency in the universities involved in the study.

During discussions between the AAU and the donor community for the possibilities of funding another study, the idea of setting up a study programme rather than an individual study developed. The aim was to build a critical mass of professional policy analysis and developing management skills leading to full and active African participation in the design and implementation of development policies and programmes.

AAU formulated a first programme proposal to this effect in 1991 entitled *Programme of Regional Cooperation for the Improvement of Higher Education Management in Africa – Capacity Building in Research on Higher Education Management in African Universities*. This proposal was discussed during an AAU Experts Consultative Meeting held in Nairobi, Kenya, 7–8 February 1992. Nine experts, representing African Universities, IDRC, the World Bank, and IIEP/UNESCO participated.

The meeting in general agreed with the objectives and outline of the proposal but made a number of important recommendations regarding 1) the scope and focus of the programme, 2) organization and management of the programme, and 3) the utilization of the research results.

The meeting identified three critical areas for possible research activities:

- Governance and Leadership in Higher Education Management
- Financing of Higher Education Institutions
- Information System for the Universities

While these three areas were perceived to be critical, it was felt necessary to focus on one theme, in order to achieve impact and start the project at a manageable level. It was generally agreed to focus on the Financing Issues in African Education in the first phase of the project.

The meeting advised the setting up of a Scientific Advisory Committee and to appoint a co-ordinator for the programme. The Scientific Committee was to be responsible for reviewing research proposals and the development of the programmes, the co-ordinator for the day-to-day administration of the programme under the direct supervision of the AAU Secretary-General.

Effective utilization of the research results was seen by the meeting as a critical issue in the whole research efforts. Besides holding research seminars and management development workshops, consultancy opportunities should be canvassed to enable the researchers serve as consultants and to apply the research results in implementing reforms in higher education management.

Guided by these recommendations and suggestions, AAU redrafted the original proposal. This revised proposal, dating February 1992 was submitted to the two donor agencies that had shown an interest in funding the programme, i.e. the Netherlands Government and SAREC of Sweden. Another revision was necessary to bring the proposal in line with the specific requirements of and additional comments from the donor agencies. The final document dates from February 1993.

A first two-year agreement between SAREC and the AAU was signed in May 11, 1993. The agreement was extended for another two years in 1995. An agreement with the Netherlands Government was signed in April 1994 for a period of 5 years.

The Programme began in August 1993 and, after initial preparatory work, was formally inaugurated on December 7, 1993, by the Minister of Education of Botswana at the opening of the Regional Research Conference on Higher Education Management in Africa, held in Gaborone, Botswana.

The Goal-Hierarchy of the Programme

The overall aim of the Programme is to help develop local capacity for undertaking systematic research that enhances the understanding of issues in higher education management in Africa, as well as to produce useful new material and insights in relation to those issues. It is also hoped that this would widen the scope, and raise the level of the higher education policy debate, and contribute to the improvement of the quality of higher education policy and management in Africa.

In the Proposal, the development and immediate objectives of the Programme are formulated as follows:

The development objectives:

1. generate and promote policies for improved financing, management and governance of African Universities, and
2. contribute to the building of local capacity for systematic and continuous evaluation and input into higher education policy-making and administration.

The immediate objectives:

1. to disseminate the results of relevant recent research, especially the AAU study on cost-effectiveness and efficiency in African universities, and promote wider discussion of these issues in the African university community;
2. to identify and support a cadre of African researchers working on higher education issues;
3. to produce a set of papers on selected themes; and
4. to promote discussion of the results of commissioned studies, and their use in policy formulation and management practice.

Activities planned

The initial activities of the programme arranged in order of priority were listed as follows:

1. a regional conference on relevant recent research especially the AAU study of cost effectiveness and efficiency in African universities;
2. award of grants to researchers in African universities on a competitive basis to support studies on selected themes on higher education management;
3. establishment of linkages with higher education research programmes elsewhere;
4. information exchange between researchers in Africa and researchers elsewhere and between researchers, policy makers, planners, and senior university administrators;
5. organising seminars and workshops for researchers on higher education management in African universities and especially for beneficiaries of study grants from the programme;
6. organising a management development workshop for senior university administrators and higher education planners in Africa.
7. The Scientific Committee to prioritise, advice and develop appropriate projects for investigation.
8. Resource persons to act as mentors to research grant holders.

Expected outputs

The anticipated Programme outputs and expected impact were:

1. participation of 20 higher education policy makers, senior university administrators and researchers in a regional conference on relevant recent research, especially the AAU study of cost effectiveness and efficiency in African universities;
2. thorough discussion and proposal of priority study themes on higher education management in Africa produced from the regional conference for consideration of the Scientific Committee for the Programme;
3. participation of 20 researchers in a research seminar on formulation of study proposals and issues of methodology;
4. participation of 20 research grantees and potential grantees in a seminar on data analysis and presentation of results;
5. linkages established between researchers in African universities and researchers in at least 3 higher education research programmes and institutions outside the continent;

6. participation of 20 researchers (beneficiaries of research grants) and senior researchers from external partner institutions in a seminar to review research progress and the state-of-the-art in the field of higher education management and to establish contacts;
7. participation of 20 policy makers, planners, senior university administrators and researchers on higher education management in a management development workshop to disseminate research findings, exchange ideas and experiences and promote application of new ideas and methods or techniques for improvement of higher education management;
8. reports of proceedings of 1), 3), 4), 6) and 7);
9. published studies – at least 15 (occasional publications by AAU);
10. receipt of reports by AAU member universities, appropriate government organizations (ministries of education), participants of research seminars and management development workshops, link partner education and research institutions, donor organizations and other selected education and research institutions, and
11. a network of African researchers formed to provide continuity in research on higher education management in African universities.

As a result of these outputs, the Programme is expected to:

- a) significantly increase the number of researchers in Africa who are actively engaged in research on management issues in higher education, leading to a critical mass of expertise in the field in Africa, and a better understanding of the issues;
- b) enhance the quality of the research in the field in Africa;
- c) enhance awareness and understanding of management, governance and particularly financial issues among higher education planners and policy makers, and senior university administrators in Africa, consequently bringing about an improvement in the governance and management of African universities; and
- d) contribute African perspectives to the international discussion and understanding of higher education management issues.

The Evaluation Methodology

Reasons for the evaluation:

- to make a general assessment of the Study Programme in Higher Education Management – its core activities, its weaknesses, its strengths and outcomes
- to enable the AAU to develop and improve the objectives, activities and management of the programme
- to facilitate decisions by the donors on programme support

Scope and focus of the evaluation:

- (a) assess
 - (i) the Research Grants Scheme, workshops etc. in relation to:
 - the relevance of the topics studied
 - the coverage of the scheme (geographic, gender etc.)
 - the effectiveness of training (methods, participation, etc.)
 - the quality and usefulness of study reports, individually and as a whole
 - the contribution of the Scheme to AAU's knowledge base and
 - (ii) the overall management of the programme
- (b) assess and comment on the Proposals for Phase II of the Programme, advising particularly on improvements in the objectives and proposed activities; and
- (c) provide such other comment and suggestions as may be deemed appropriate

Approaches and methods used in conducting the evaluation:

These comprised interviews, examination of desk documents and files, study of research reports, discussion with representatives of the donor agencies, staff at AAU headquarters, discussion with members of the Scientific Committee, Resource Persons, Researchers, attending a meeting of the Scientific Committee and listening to presentation of research reports.

- 6 March: Boeren – interviews with Berit Olson, Tomas Kjellqvist, Mats Kihlberg of Sida/SAREC in Stockholm
- 10 – 14 March – Boeren & Reddy: visit to AAU headquarters in Accra
Discussions held with the following: Narcisso Matos, Secretary General, AAU; Aki Sawyerr, Head of Research, AAU and Co-ordinator of the Study Programme; J S Djangmah, grant recipient and Head of Institute of Economic Affairs; J K Amazu, pro-Vice Chancellor Elect, University of Ghana, Sefah-Dedah, Head of Department, Food and Nutrition, University of Ghana, D N Tarpeh, Head of Financial Administration, AAU, Accountant in charge of Study Programme finances.
A study and examination of relevant files and records.
- 15 March – Travel from Accra to Harare
- 16 March – Group Meetings with eight researchers from the study programme
Meeting with Kees van den Bosch, Regional Educational Specialist, Royal Netherlands Embassy, Harare
- 17 March – Meeting with three Resource Persons of the Study Programme

- 18 March – Attended the Seventh meeting of the Scientific Committee
- 19 March – Attended Symposium on Select Issues in Higher Education
Debriefing session with Narcisso Matos and Aki Sawyerr
Boeren and Reddy: discussion and review of meetings, files documents etc and planning of writing the report
- 20 March – Reddy departs for South Africa
- 21 March – Boeren departs for the Netherlands
- 30 March – Boeren has discussions with Wim Zoet and Lucien Wolfs, Education and Developing Countries Division (DCO/OO), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Netherlands
- 8 April – Reddy has discussions with Donald Ekong in Johannesburg, former AAU Secretary General who initiated the Higher Education Study Programme.

Limitations of the Study

The principal limitation of the study is that it was conducted in a relatively short space of time of less than two weeks in two sites viz., at the AAU headquarters in Accra and in Harare. Although all those involved in the management of the programme were interviewed and discussions held, few of the researchers with the exception of the eight in Harare were interviewed. We discovered that there were considerable problems of communication, lack of infrastructure, heavy teaching loads, poor salaries all of which impeded the progress of research. It would have been advantageous to have visited at least several institutions at which the research was conducted to learn at first hand of these problems.

Further, although there were a large number of research reports, again time did not permit us to evaluate these in any detail. It would have required a range of expertise to have evaluated these reports as to their scientific merit and their publishable potential.

Despite these shortcomings, we believe that the time period and the methodology employed were adequate for the purpose of the evaluation.

Findings

Management of the Programme

The Programme has been implemented according to the guidelines of the Proposal and has managed to undertake all its planned activities. The expected levels of achievement have not been reached in all of its activities. These levels of achievement will be discussed in detail below. The fact that the Programme has been able to conduct most activities according to schedule is remarkable considering the complexity of the activities from an organizational perspective combined with the poor communication infrastructure in most African countries. This is to the credit of the management of the Programme by the Co-ordinator, the Scientific Committee and the AAU. The reporting procedures for the management of the quality of the programme have been exemplary. Detailed progress reports and financial statements have been submitted timeously and as required to the donor agencies; detailed minutes of all committee meetings were prepared and comprehensive reports on workshops and seminars written.

The management and implementation of the Study Programme were based on the AAU's management and information system. All of AAU's programmes are internally evaluated every quarter. Progress on the programmes is discussed internally on the basis of the annual work plans that are made for each and every programme. Annual reports are submitted to AAU's Executive Board. The Co-ordinator of the Study Programme prepares bi-annual reports for the Scientific Committee and bi-annual reports accompanied by financial statements for the donors.

According to the Co-ordinator he spends 70–80% of his time on the Study Programme. The remainder of his time is spent with AAU as co-ordinator of the internal evaluation programme and co-ordinator of other AAU research activities. On the Study Programme he is aided by a full time Programme Assistant and incidental inputs from the finance and accounts section. The expenses for coordination and administration are covered by the budget lines of Co-ordinator and Technical Assistance and constitute approximately 18% of the total expenses. Support services from AAU amount to 12% of the total expenses.

To start off the Programme, a Scientific Committee was established to provide guidance and ensure the scientific quality of both the training and the research output of the Programme. Membership of the Committee was drawn from among established higher education researchers and social scientists within Africa and from outside. The Committee has been meeting twice a year and functioned well despite cases of absenteeism among its members. Over the years the composition of the Committee has changed, with an increasing input of the resource persons who were initially co-opted for advising the researchers in their research projects. This development implies that some committee members wear different 'hats' i.e. that of advisor in the selection of proposals, that of supervisor of researchers, and that of editor of academic journal(s). The Committee sees this as an advantage rather than a possible source of conflicting interests. This is remarkable considering that the Programme offers hardly any financial gains for the Committee Members.

There is agreement between the Co-Ordinator and the Secretary General about the general direction of the Study Programme. The former places more emphasis on capacity building whereas the latter on dissemination of results. We do not see any conflict in this but on the contrary feel that they complement each other. It should however be emphasised that both have placed more emphasis on the academic aspects of the Programme rather than on its potential for informing and influencing policy. Again this is understandable with respect to the first batch of research projects.

However we are of the view that an attempt should have been made with the second batch of projects to move in this direction and we point out elsewhere in the report some missed opportunities in this respect. Certainly a more concerted effort to be more proactive in this regard should be made with Phase II of the project.

Financial Management

The release of tranches of the grant was conditional upon the submission of progress reports by all research teams. As the majority of grant recipients were not specialists in higher education research, attendance at the training seminars and workshops was mandatory.

At the AAU offices in Accra, the financial management of the Study Programme was undertaken jointly by a finance officer and by the head of finance of the AAU. The Co-ordinator exercised close supervision over the activities and authorised all payments. It should be pointed out that while the finance officer spends 50% of his time on the study programme his salary is paid by the AAU out of other grants.

The policy of the AAU Board is to devote 15% of the budget on support services. Donors pay their grants directly into a savings account in dollars to Chase Manhattan Bank in New York. Current accounts from which payments are made are kept in the Chase Manhattan Bank in New York and Standard Bank in Accra. Recipients are paid in stages and the full amount is paid on receipt of all reports. About 95% of the grants for the period 1993-97 have been paid out. Accounts are audited annually and scrutinised by the AAU Board. Progress reports are provided annually to the donors.

Our assessment is that the financial systems are adequate and the programmes are competently managed from a financial point of view. Some recipients reported delays in payments and on the cumbersome procedures for payment but there was overall satisfaction. Some of these problems may arise because of poor communication technologies in a few countries.

Honoraria are not paid to researchers. The question arises because of the generally very poor salaries earned by most African academics; what incentives are there for undertaking research. We believe that a small % of the grant should be considered as an honorarium payment – of the order of 20%. This would have the potential of attracting a larger pool of and better quality of researchers.

Collaboration between donors and AAU

In talking to the representatives of both donor agencies and the Study Programme Co-ordinator, the evaluators observed a discrepancy in expectations with regard to the outcomes of the Programme between the donors.

The Dutch side primarily regarded and still regard the Study Programme as a capacity building programme with a long-term perspective. However, the Dutch side would like to see some form of networking develop among the researchers and also expects the Programme to strive for some form of cohesion in the research that is being undertaken.

SIDA hopes that the Programme will provide AAU with the necessary knowledge so that it can act as a well-informed body about higher education issues, to counterbalance the policy domination by the World Bank and other donors. Therefore, Sida looks at the Study Programme for the sort of results that will enable the AAU to play that role.

Interviews with the donors and AAU and consultation of the available documentation gave the evaluation mission the impression that on the Sida/SAREC side, the expectation regarding the outcome of the Study Programme has gradually shifted from a programme that is intended to build

research capacity to a programme that will generate knowledge that can be used to develop relevant policies or policy papers. The latter expectation is implied in the proposal for Phase I as a rather long term objective, but not explicitly stated. SAREC's assessment memorandum of 1993 also seems to suggest that capacity building was the first aim of the Programme by saying that 'the expectation is that such capacity building will develop at member universities and that AAU will later focus on compilation and dissemination of research'. This change in expectation may have caused, or coincided with, a feeling of slight disappointment which the evaluators sensed in talking to the SIDA representatives about the results of the Study Programme.

In the inception stages of the Study Programme, both donor agencies had frequent contacts about the Programme and the way it should be set up. Over the years these contacts have gradually vanished, basically due to personnel changes. Since the inception of the programme, the responsibility for the programme at both donor agencies has changed regularly. This has not only diminished inter-donor contacts about the Programme but also has had unfavourable consequences for the monitoring and implementation of the Programme.

Since AAU has to request for funds from the Netherlands Government every six months, the change of programme officers looking after the Study caused serious delays in the release of funds on several occasions. The Study Programme Co-ordinator also regrets that the donor agencies have not given feedback on the contents of the progress reports. It would have been helpful in guiding the Programme during its implementation.

Assessment of activities

An assessment of the results of Study Programme over the past 4 years can be summarised under the headings of the planned activities:

1) A regional Conference on relevant recent research.

The first activity of the Programme was a "Conference on Higher Education Financing", organised in Gaborone, Botswana, in December 1993. There was an enthusiastic response to the invitation to participate and present papers. Out of more than 100 researchers, senior administrators and higher education policy makers from all parts of Africa who applied to attend, 59 were invited, while 36 out of the 90 odd research papers offered could be accommodated. This positive response did not only reveal the level of interest throughout the region in the theme of higher education policy and management, it also helped to identify African scholars working on topics within the theme.

According to AAU, the Conference achieved its primary objectives, giving a measure of extent of interest and activity in higher education research in Africa, and indicating the quality of the work being done and those aspects that needed strengthening. An additional value of the Conference was that it brought together people with an interest in higher education research, previously unknown to each other. Some of those identified at the Gaborone Conference have continued with the Programme, joining the Research Grants Scheme.

Arrangements were made to have a selection of the conference papers published in a special issue of Higher Education policy. AAU prepared a mimeographed Book of Abstracts of the papers. No proceedings of the conference appear to have been published.

In a concluding roundtable on research priorities, participants examined current problems on African higher education policy and management and made suggestions as to the themes to be studied under the Programme. These were later modified and adopted by the Scientific Committee.

2) Award of grants to researchers in African universities.

Thirty-seven (37) teams consisting of 77 individuals researchers have been exposed to training in the methodology of research into higher education issues under the Research Grants Scheme.

On the basis of the deliberations of the leaders of African universities at the General Conference of the AAU in 1993, and elsewhere, it was decided that the first batch of research grants should concentrate on issues of financing of higher education in Africa, since it was at the time among the most pressing issues facing almost all African universities. Since there were hardly any specialist higher education researchers or institutions on the continent, the decision was taken to start the Programme by providing support for on-going work within the general theme, rather than assigning fresh topics for study or commissioning specific projects. The response to invitations to submit proposals was very substantial. The proposals were screened by the Scientific Committee, which selected 15 for funding on the basis of their quality and promise, due account being taken of the need to ensure proper gender, geographic and linguistic balance in the Programme. The Research Grants Scheme thus started with 15 teams consisting of 28 individual researchers, of whom three were women. The average grant was about \$9,300.

A second batch of grants was awarded in 1996. This time 22 research teams, made up of 49 individual researchers, of whom 14 were women, were selected. The selected projects fell under four sub-themes, namely,

- * Institutional Culture
- * Decision-making Processes
- * Financing Modes
- * Higher Education and Work.

Ten of the research teams were to work on a common theme of tracer studies and conduct a comparative study of graduate employment and unemployment, undertaken simultaneously in seven African countries. The Scientific Committee regards this study as a promising undertaking which could make a major contribution to an informed appreciation of the vexed question of graduate employment and unemployment in Africa.

Out of the 15 grants awarded in 1994, nine projects have been completed and reports submitted. The remaining projects are in various stages of completion. Of the nine completed projects 3 reports have been revised into publishable articles, and have been submitted and accepted for publication in *Higher Education*. The rest will be published as AAU occasional papers. The first Batch suffered from several constraints. At its commencement, most proposals lacked clear focus which had to be rectified. Some proposals were also over ambitious, beyond the financial and human resources available under the scheme while others were too optimistic, pre-occupied with generating instant solutions to major problems of Higher Education Management in the Continent. Delays in finalizing the research were caused by inability to access data, for a variety of reasons, including non existence of data, poor attitude of respondents and unwillingness to release existing data because of their perceived confidential and of sensitive nature.

The results so far obtained with the second Batch are much more promising than the first Batch projects. The reasons are threefold. Among the researchers of the first Batch there were many without a sufficient knowledge of research methodology and data processing. This meant that they needed levels of training and supervision that was not within the means of the Programme. Secondly, the resource persons were co-opted when the researchers were already conducting their research which made it very difficult to suggest any fundamental changes - even when that was

clearly needed. Thirdly, although the first Batch worked within the same theme, their research topics varied widely which made the results of the efforts hard to compare or to synthesize. The second Batch includes a comparative study on one specific theme which, as indicated above, might produce interesting results. The Scientific Committee is of the opinion that the following batches should also include comparative studies, if there are topics that lend themselves to such an approach.

An important improvement on the first Batch approach was made by engaging the resource persons at the initial stages of the research cycle so they could provide advice on the proposals in the first instance, and act as resource persons throughout, guiding the research process from inception to completion.

3) Establishment of linkages with higher education research programmes elsewhere

Links are beginning to be established among African researchers, and between them and researchers outside Africa in the course of this phase of the Study Programme. Links have begun to be developed among the researchers during the workshops and in follow-up contacts. In addition, the researchers have established relationships of varying effectiveness with the Resource Persons and their institutions. Apart from the direct links established in the advisory relationship between researchers and supervisors, several researchers have spent time with the Resource Persons at the latter's institutions. Again, some Resource Persons have visited researchers in the field.

These relationships which are of an individual rather than an institutional nature, are modest, but may form the beginning of future professional collaboration between individuals as well as institutions.

In a more formal sense, an attempt has been made to establish national networks of participants in the Study Programme. This has involved, in one instance, the choice of a researcher by his colleagues as the national focus person, to coordinate the activities of the network within his country. The networks are *in statu nascendi* and have not yet become operational.

4) Information exchange.

Dissemination of results of the work done under the Study Programme has taken place on a rather modest scale. The Scientific Committee did have modest expectations about the scientific quality and value of the results of the initial projects, given the background of the researchers. It was, nevertheless, considered necessary to ensure a minimum of dissemination of the work as it emerged. This took two main forms: distribution/publication of reports, and presentations at seminars and workshops.

Publication

- (i) Abstracts of the papers presented at the Gaberone Conference were bound and made available to member institutions of the AAU on request. Edited versions of a selection of the papers were later published as a special issue of *Higher Education Policy* (Vol.8: No.1, March 1995).
- (ii) With the completion of the majority of the projects under Phase I, and the winding up of the first part of the Research Grants Scheme, a programme of more formal publications has been initiated. Four of the researchers have been invited by the prestigious journal, *Higher Education*, to submit article-length papers based on their research results for consideration for publication, and three of these articles have been accepted.

- (iii) In addition, it is envisaged to bring out a collection of essays based on the reports of all the completed projects, and make this available to all member institutions of the AAU and to a wider readership. Moreover, a list of the titles of the research reports will be circulated in the Newsletter of the AAU and at its web site on the Internet, with an indication that the reports could be obtained on application to the AAU. There are plans to index the reports and include them in the AAU databases on higher education.

5) Organising seminars and workshops for researchers.

The third main activity of the Programme was a series of training workshops and seminars designed to improve the quality of the design and conduct of the projects, strengthen the research capacity of the teams and expose work-in-progress to critical peer review. At least one member of the Scientific Committee attended each training workshop. In addition to improving the research capacity of the researchers and the quality of the research, these workshops provided an opportunity for developing relationships among researchers, laying the basis for higher education research networking across the continent. The workshops were of two main types:

(a) Methodology Workshops

These were intended to:

- * help clarify the research objectives of each project;
- * isolate and develop researchable topics; and
- * improve the methodology and formulation of the projects.

The principal feature of these workshops has been the emphasis on group work. This ensures substantial peer contribution and self-correction, under the guidance of Resource Persons. Towards the end of each workshop, participants wrote a summary statement (1–2 pages) of their projects to reflect the impact of the workshop.

(b) Data Gathering and Analysis Workshops

After about six months of preparatory and initial field work, the researchers are brought together at a workshop on Data Gathering and Analysis. The objective at this stage is to advise on data collection and analysis, as well as report preparation. The approach adopted is broadly similar to the methodology workshops. However, owing to the differences in the subject-matter of the projects, and the different stages reached by the various projects, group work is heavily supplemented by individual work with Resource Persons.

Altogether, there have been three methodology, and two data gathering and analysis workshops for the two batches of Researchers.

A critical part of the entire process is the relationship established between a researcher or research team and the Resource Person designated as supervisor of a project. The closeness of the relationship has varied considerably, but overall, the researchers have derived great benefit from the contact with experienced higher education researchers. In a number of cases the communications between researchers and supervisors have been extremely difficult because of failing telephone and postal systems. In cases where researchers had access to e-mail facilities, communication has been frequent and efficient.

(c) Presentation Seminars

Mauritius, January 1996

A work-in-progress seminar was held in Mauritius in January 1996, on the occasion of the AAU ADEA/WGHE Consultation. It was attended by a large audience of university leaders, higher education policy-makers and representatives of donors to African higher education. The objective

was partly to expose a selection of the projects to critical comment, and partly to begin disseminating some of the initial findings and insights of the research. According to AAU, on both counts, the event can be adjudged a great success, in view of the comments of the participants during and since the seminar.

Harare, 15– 20 March 1998

The scientific session in which the recipients presented their research findings was held on Thursday, 19 March. The keynote address was given by the Minister of Education of Zimbabwe in which he welcomed guests, emphasised the importance of higher education for development of Africa and pledged his governments support for higher education. Five papers were presented at this session. It gave us an opportunity to hear the presentations, listen to and engage in the discussion. Our general impression was that the standard of the presentations varied from the outstanding to the average. Some of the researchers had gathered excellent data and had done good work but were not able to present their results convincingly. Clearly they require mentoring in this area which would translate into producing better papers for publication.

During the conference we had an opportunity to interview and interact with a number of the role players in the Study Programme. Among these were the researchers, the resource persons and members of the scientific committee. We were also invited to sit in at the Scientific Committee meeting which was quite informative.

We were also able to have a final debriefing interview with the Co-ordinator of the Research Programme and the Secretary General of the AAU.

It was also an opportunity to have a discussion with Kees van den Bosch who now works for the Netherlands Embassy in Harare and who was involved in the initial stages of the programme in the Netherlands. The insights he offered were helpful in gaining a better understanding of the origins and nature of the programme.

Finally the two evaluators were able to engage in extensive discussions, outlined their programme of work and were able to establish a framework for the written report. Thereafter we were able to complete and finalise the report via electronic communication.

6) Organising a management development workshop.

A different kind of presentation was made at a Management Development Workshop held in Accra in March 1997. This was the culmination of the first batch of grants under the Research Grants Scheme. As a background document for the workshop, a report summarizing the nine completed research reports was prepared. The workshop was attended by Ministers of Education, Heads of National Education Commissions, Vice-Chancellors and other senior academics from all parts of Africa. Donor representatives, members of the Scientific Committee and researchers were also in attendance.

The first segment of the workshop was taken up with presentations of individual reports by four of the researchers, preceded by an exhaustive discussion of the summary report of all the projects. The second segment was a round table, at which the Ministers, university policy-makers and administrators explored the themes that had emerged in the discussion, and highlighted a series of policy issues that required the attention of governments and universities in responding to the crisis of the African university.

Despite technical and other shortcomings, the general view was that the research findings were instructive and potentially useful for policy makers, university administrators and the AAU. The university was regarded as indispensable for social and economic development. The high demand

for university places has led to the growth of private universities. If African universities are to overcome their financial problems and offer quality programmes then cost sharing between students and government, the privatisation of certain operations and better management are essential. The preservation of institutional autonomy has to be balanced by public accountability. The Councils of universities must play a more proactive role and research programmes should be given more attention. The import of these conclusions is that it opens up new and key areas for research which should be incorporated in the Phase II proposal – privatisation of universities, the role of research and university councils, cost sharing strategies between students and the state.

Impact

1) Capacity-building

Coverage of the scheme

The first batch of researchers of 15 teams comprised 26 researchers of whom 3 were women from 10 different countries principally from the eastern and western parts of Africa. The second batch also of 15 teams were made up of 30 researchers of whom 8 were women. There was a slightly better spread of countries in that southern African countries were now included. In assessing the coverage of the study programme, efforts should be made to include more north African, franco-phone and women researchers in Phase II of the Study Programme. Improved publicity and communication from the AAU offices will be helpful in this regard. The General and Board meetings of the AAU can also be used for such publicity. Furthermore, a contact person for AAU communication should be identified at every campus through the Vice-Chancellor of each institution. The improvement from Batch I to Batch II in the number of women researchers should be carried into Phase II of the Programme.

Effectiveness of training

Thirty-seven teams, made up of over 70 researchers, have been provided with funding, training and technical supervision to conduct studies on aspects of higher education in Africa. The training workshops and close supervision by established researchers had many significant effects. Apart from the improvement of the final quality of the research projects, there was a marked sharpening of the focus of virtually all projects, and a strengthening of the capacity to define a researchable topic. There were observable improvements in the technical competence of virtually all the researchers, especially in dealing with the difficulties of data quality and accessibility under the specific conditions of their countries. In addition, several of the researchers have acquired some capacity to advise on aspects of higher education policy in their countries.

As a result, most of these researchers have acquired increased competence in the conduct of higher education research under African conditions, as well as greater capacity to contribute to policy-development and implementation in that area.

According to the Scientific Committee, one of the objectives of the future phases of the Programme should be to help sustain this interest, and help them continue and enhance the skills acquired under the Programme. To this end, the strengthening of community among past grantees through more effective networking should be one of the objectives of the next phase of the Programme.

The Scientific Committee also addressed in its Sixth Meeting the question of whether to move in the direction of a more coherent thematic focus for projects. It was agreed to leave the theme or themes of future projects open for determination as in the past. In the preliminary selection of

projects, the consideration should be whether a proposal posed a meaningful research question, and whether a topic was such as could be adequately supervised by the Resource Persons available to the Programme.

The Scientific Committee, in the same meeting, suggested that consideration be given to supporting two categories of research projects – one open, the other under a set theme, as with the Tracer Studies Project. Even within the open category projects with common elements could be encouraged to network more effectively – an opportunity missed in the case of the projects on financing in the First Batch (Minutes of the Sixth Meeting of the Scientific Committee, March 19, 1997)

Some Participants at the Research Seminar held in Mauritius, January 1996, including donor representatives, expressed the view that the Study Programme could usefully move towards the institutionalization of higher education research in Africa. This was in line with the general thinking of both the AAU and the Committee. The Committee affirmed the approach it had adopted at the Third Meeting in Kampala, namely, to proceed steadily through networking at this early stage. The AAU and members of the Committee were invited to put their thoughts on paper (Minutes of the Fourth Meeting of the Scientific Committee, January 12, Mauritius).

In Phase II the following issues should be given careful consideration:

- individual versus institutional capacity building – institutional capacity building may prove problematic because higher education institutions in Africa are generally weak
- how to move from individual to institutional capacity to regional networks?
- how to match individual interests with institutional aims?
- how to translate academic research into policy briefs for consideration by policy makers?

Performance of the Scientific Committee

A Scientific Committee was constituted to oversee the Study Programme, prioritise issues and ensure the quality of the research output. It comprised a Chair, the Co-Ordinator of the Study Programme, the Secretary General of the AAU and five other members. The members chosen from Africa and Europe were experienced researchers in the field of higher education. Our general impression is that the Scientific Committee has been very effective in undertaking its tasks. This was confirmed in our interviews with the researchers. Absenteeism of a few members has been a problem and should be ironed out in Phase II of the Programme. Further, one should ensure a reasonable gender balance, recruit more members from francophone countries as well as members from outside Europe.

Some members of the Scientific Committee also acted as Resource Persons involved in the mentoring and developing the potential of the researchers. Considering that many of the researchers were inexperienced the involvement of the Resource Persons has been invaluable in the development of the research projects. The researchers were highly appreciative of these efforts. An attempt should be made for researchers to spend periods in established research institutes abroad at which some of the Resource Persons and members of the Scientific Committee are attached.

The members of the Scientific Committee and Resource Person are not paid an honorarium. Consideration should be given for such payment especially to the Resource Persons in order to sustain their work over the longer term.

2) Research

Relevance of the topics studied

African Universities are beset in general with pervasive problems of a very serious nature which have undermined their capacity to retain the best academic staff, offer quality programmes and produce competent graduates for the socio-economic development of the continent. At the same time given the paucity of researchers in the higher education field in Africa and the limited resources, a start had to be made with a clear focus on the most serious of its problems. This is without question the financing of African universities. Funds are not only inadequate but its effective management is in serious question. Further through long established tradition, little income is generated from students resulting in an over dependency on governments. There is evidence that an undue proportion of available resources is spent on non-academic activities.

Therefore in our view a correct decision was made to focus first batch of studies on financing of universities. The second batch moved onto to concentrate on tracer studies. Here the thrust was to follow the students once they had graduated with respect to their employability. Their suitability for employment as well as the availability of employment opportunities had to be documented.

In Phase II of the project a wider range of pressing issues affecting African universities would have to be incorporated. Among these are questions of access of poor students, quality of programme offerings, better use of facilities, diversifying income generation, balancing autonomy with public accountability etc.

The "Study Programme"

Quality and usefulness of study reports

Of the fifteen grants made in the first batch, nine projects were completed on time, one appears to have foundered, and the rest are at various stages of completion.

In several instances, the reports have produced new material or cast new light on old material. These include the very instructive examination of the social background of university students (Mayanja), and the role that improved data storage and retrieval could play in strengthening management capacity, thereby saving costs at universities (Ssewanyana). Also of very great interest and practical value to universities all over Africa is the presentation on how universities could get at the untapped resources potentially available in the budgets of government departments. (Djangmah *et al.*). Finally, mention has already been made of the innovative proposal of a global funding model for budget preparation and fund allocation (Liverpool, *et al.*).

The quality of the reports varies, but the nine reports so far completed make a useful contribution to our knowledge and understanding of the conditions, problems and approaches to the resolution of some of the key issues in higher education in Africa. These include the question of underutilisation of resources in public universities and the need for greater cost-consciousness; the insignificance of tuition fee income in university finances and the case for a measure of cost-sharing; the over-subsidisation of municipal services, at the expense of direct academic inputs.

Many of the researchers occupy key positions in their institutions and countries and it is hoped that their increasing insights and capacities will feed directly into higher education policy-making and administration. Additionally, their work may have other less direct effects – through the dissemination of their findings and their participation in national and international policy debates. In one case, it is reported that the researchers and the model outlined in their project report are already involved in the work of their National University Commission, the body responsible for coordination and fund allocation to universities.

As already mentioned in an earlier paragraph, are seven of the projects in Batch Two which are grouped under the sub-theme, “Higher Education and Work”. These, together with three others set up under another AAU programme, involve graduate and employer surveys in seven countries – Benin, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Tanzania and Uganda. The groups use a common core questionnaire and rigorous survey and analytical techniques. These projects are expected to yield valuable data on the basis of which a major comparative analysis of the graduate employment situation in Africa will be undertaken.

Issues that have to be assessed especially with respect to Phase II of the project:

- communication between AAU, the researchers and the Resource Persons need improvement by improved infrastructure at the institutions such as e-mail, the identification of a contact person at the institutions etc.
- the need to balance academic quality versus applicability of outcomes of the research findings for policy purposes should be carefully assessed in view of the continuing pressing problems of African universities
- a wider basis of consultation should be utilised in the determination of the research priorities involving Vice-chancellors, education researchers, faculty members, students and carefully chosen members of the wider society eg., from the corporate sector, the professional bodies, labour unions, non-governmental organisations.
- The composition of the Scientific Committee should be reviewed in order to minimise absenteeism, include more members from the francophone countries, more women and researchers from a wider selection of countries outside Africa.
- AAU should make it a condition of the grant that institutions should at least provide a minimum level of support to the researchers – time for research, e-mail, copying and faxing facilities
- A careful balance will have to be arrived at in support of established competent researchers with developing a new cadre of young researchers
- access to literature is a key variable in undertaking quality research in a knowledge explosive world; the internet and the world wide web provide a relatively inexpensive means of acquiring this access to updated literature
- the interests of researchers and resource persons must be well matched in the light of the needs and priorities of African universities

3) Dissemination

The publication of a selection of the Gaberone Conference papers in *Higher Education Policy*, and three of the research teams in the first batch publishing article-length versions of their reports in *Higher Education*, a leading international journal on higher education research, constitute a significant comment of the technical quality of some of the products of the Programme. They also introduce such material and the Study Programme into the international higher education dialogue.

Both the Mauritius seminar and the Management Development Workshop held in Accra, served as a significant means for bringing the findings and suggestions of the research to the attention of university leaders and the academic community generally, Ministers and senior officials involved with higher education, and representatives of donor agencies that support African higher education. They also helped to promote the Programme.

- Missed opportunity 1: Proceedings of Gaberone Conference
- Missed opportunity 2: placing the Study Programme on the agenda of the General Assembly in Lusaka, and using the results from the studies in order to influence policy makers and practitioners – government officials, university administrators etc.
- Missed opportunity 3: the Co-ordinator preparing synthesis reports and discussion papers on the basis of the research being undertaken.

Issues:

- academic versus non-academic channels for dissemination of research results (e.g. press, policy briefings, debates, etc.) will have to be discussed at the level of the Scientific Committee
- the various AAU meetings provide an excellent opportunity for advocacy of higher education research and the Study Programme; governments and donor agencies should also be the targets of such advocacy
- our observation in Harare though limited indicates a need for improvement in presentation and quality of the final reports; mentoring from Resource Persons would seem to be essential in this regard

4) Linkages and networks

There are beginnings of networking of African higher education researchers as a result of activities under the Programme. AAU hopes that this will develop, in the course of the next phase of the project, into a real community of African higher education scholars in collaborative relationships with established researchers and institutions in Africa and abroad. AAU also intends to make the results of the research available to African universities and the wider readership through the electronic and other distribution networks of the AAU.

The Scientific Committee, in its Third Meeting (June 1995), discussed the idea of networking at length. There was general acceptance of the idea as an appropriate step in the evolution of relations within the Study Programme. Its membership, objectives, mode of financing and operationalisation were discussed at length. It was agreed that the network should aim at building up a minimum of research capacity and long-term commitment to higher education research in its members. The resource persons and the best of the researchers under the Grants Scheme (and their institutions) could increase their interaction and start collaborating on agreed projects. (Minutes of the Third Meeting of the Scientific Committee, June 16, 1995)

It is the case that even in developed countries only a few centres specialise in the area of higher education research. AAU would have to make some critical decisions of balancing the need to develop a wide network of researchers with establishing a few centres of excellence in higher education research. An option is to adopt the networking and linkages strategy. This could be based on regions, on language groupings and/or on particular themes.

Possibilities of linkages with established higher education centres outside Africa should also be considered. This has the advantage of mobilising resources from the particular countries especially for young researchers to spend periods in such centres under the mentorship of experienced researchers.

5) Contribution of the Scheme to AAU's knowledge base

The establishment and implementation of the Study Programme has over the period of four years served to raise the profile of higher education research in Africa, and lay the foundation for a higher education research community, able to contribute significantly to the on-going policy dia-

logue on the crisis of African higher education. The results so far obtained have begun to make a modest contribution to the body of knowledge generated by African scholars and available to policy-makers locally and internationally. Reflecting on the situation in the early 1990s, represents the sort of progress that the AAU had hoped to achieve in establishing the Study Programme.

With this encouraging beginning the challenge is how to institutionalise the developing knowledge base at the level of the AAU headquarters, within the culture of the organisation and in the system wide institutional level.

Comments on the Proposal for Phase II of the Programme

The aim and scope of Phase II of the Study Programme is concisely laid out in the introductory paragraph of the Proposal:

“...while the capacity-building aspect [of the Programme] will be continued, greater emphasis will be placed on dissemination, not only of the results of work done under the Programme but also of more general insights and information on higher education development in Africa and beyond. In addition, there will be an increase in the identification of policy-relevant outcomes of the research through the encouragement of more frequent interaction between researchers, policy makers and university leadership. It is proposed to maintain the Research Grants Scheme and the Training Workshops and Seminars, with a view to widening the pool of higher education research competence in Africa, as well as moving the promising researchers to higher levels of work. (.....) A strong feature of Phase II will be the emphasis on dissemination of the results of the research conducted both under the Study Programme and generally within the AAU. This would be done through the publication of articles in refereed journals and as occasional papers, especially for distribution to AAU member institutions; the regular reporting on higher education developments in the AAU Newsletter; and the introduction of higher education research material both from the Study Programme and elsewhere into AAU databases”.

The immediate development objectives of Phase I and Phase II are fairly similar with more emphasis in those of Phase II on international contacts between researchers and the facilitation of networking. International contacts will be stimulated through the organization of 2 international conferences, and the networking among African researchers by ‘the promotion of at least 3 national/regional networks of higher education researchers’ (programme activity *Information exchanges and networking*).

New features in the programme activities of Phase II are the institution of ‘on-campus seminars’, the listing of AAU higher education research results on Internet, and the fore-mentioned international conferences. The on-campus seminars are meant to strengthen AAU’s outreach programme and will encourage AAU member institutions to conduct workshops and seminars on research results and ideas developed under the Study Programme as well as other AAU work. A host university will organize the seminar and finance its local costs, while the AAU makes available facilitators from its network of researchers and resource persons, including researchers trained under the Programme.

An activity which featured in Phase I, i.e. ‘the establishment of linkages with higher education research programmes elsewhere’ is not included in Phase II. It is not clear whether the same applies to the activity ‘management development workshop’ which brought senior university administrators and university planners together to learn from and discuss the outcomes of the research carried out under the Programme. Costs for Policy development seminars are included in the indicative budget, but the activity does not appear in the paragraph on Programme Activities. It is also not made clear whether the new items, i.e. ‘on-campus seminars’, international conferences and networking, are intended to replace or to provide follow-up to these two activities.

The overall indicative budget of Phase II is of the same magnitude as that of Phase I. The costs for the Co-ordinator have increased considerably, apparently due to the fact that these costs now include retirement benefits.

The technical quality of the document could be improved, especially with regard to the operationalisation of overall aims into immediate aims and activities. The implicit 'logical framework' of the proposal lacks consistency and completeness. This explains why an immediate objectives is mistaken for a development objective; in certain instances activities do not logically follow objectives, and the budget lines not quite overlap with the proposed activities.

On the basis of the results obtained during Phase I, the evaluators are of the opinion that the Programme is a very useful one that deserves and needs to be continued. The need for the programme is still relevant and urgent, the motivation among African researchers to participate in the programme high, and the ability of AAU to manage the programme reassuring. Furthermore the problems of African universities especially of a financial and management nature are far from over.

Capacity building is a long-term endeavour especially when the aim is to build up a viable and sustainable local expertise and knowledge base. Effective channels for the exchange of information, guaranteed opportunities for conducting research and dissemination of results and access to professional networks, all contribute in building and maintaining the required expertise.

In order to sustain the efforts it is essential to 'institutionalize' the capacity in the AAU, the member universities, databases and networks, to conduct research that can be translated into relevant inputs for policy development and to create dialogues between researchers, policy makers, administrators and stakeholders.

The activities proposed for Phase II can be expected to increase and strengthen the research capacity, to make available the research outputs to interested parties, to initiate networking and to inform policy makers. However, the proposal does not address issues of institutionalisation and applicability of research results. The programme has a strong academic bias emphasizing the need for attaining academic standards in research and publications and striving for publication of research results in international refereed articles. This approach is necessary to groom credible research capacity but must be balanced with the need for the application of the research results for policy purposes.

The proposal does not present a long term vision on the utilization and maintenance of the research capacity in the future, nor on the contributions which the research could have on policy development in Africa. It also does not contain a discussion on strategies which the programme wants to adopt to achieve its development and immediate objectives.

The proposal would be much stronger if it were to be based on a clear vision on what the Programme wants to achieve at the medium and long term, complemented with strategic plans on how best to achieve these objectives taking into consideration the limitations of the African situation. The AAU, the Research Co-ordinator and the Scientific Committee are capable of designing such a 'master plan' and of making strategic choices with regard to the Programme's direction, scope and approaches based on valid arguments and insights. In doing so, the issues of 'institutionalisation', ownership, the relevancy and utilization of research should feature prominently on the agenda.

This strategic planning exercise could well reveal that additional types of activities need to be undertaken to complement or amplify the activities presently proposed in order to arrive at the planned outcomes of the Programme. This might require the formulation of complementary projects and the broadening of the donor base, eg. funds could be solicited for computers and other information technology support.

Summary of findings

1. The Programme has undertaken all activities as planned although not in all activities the expected levels of achievement have been reached.
2. The Programme has been well managed.
3. Emphasis of this phase has been on capacity building through training.
4. There has been improvements on first Batch of research in terms of selection, input by resource persons and confining the range of topics under study.
5. The workshops on methodology and data analysis as well as supervision by the resource persons has been very effective and is very much appreciated by the researchers.
6. Achievements have been made in publishing research outcomes in refereed international journals.
7. Modest results have been achieved with regard to synthesizing research results and preparing discussion papers on the basis of research conducted.
8. Opportunities have been missed to put the Study Programme and its research on the agenda of important meetings, e.g. the AAU General Assembly Meeting of 1997 in Lusaka.
9. The influence on policy making at governmental and institutional level is yet modest and at this stage not the prime concern of the AAU and the Scientific Committee.
10. In its capacity building and dissemination components, the Programme has given priority to academic goals and academic quality standards rather than relevancy of the research.
11. Among the researchers there is eagerness to have their research results exposed to policy makers and administrators so that they may be utilized.
12. The proposal for the Second Phase of the Programme puts the emphasis on more training and more dissemination of results mainly through academic publications.
13. The proposal for Phase II lacks a sound logical framework of objectives, activities and expected outputs. It also fails to present a clear vision on expected outcomes of the Programme at short, middle and long term range and argument based strategies to arrive at those destinations.

Conclusions

1. The Study Programme has the potential of making an important contribution to the body of higher education literature.
2. It is well managed and very much appreciated by the researchers.
3. It has arrived at a point where strategic choices have to be made with regard to ‘institutionalization’, focusing on research themes and building linkages and networks.
4. These strategic choices will have implications for the activities of the Programme, its operations and financial requirements.
5. The Programme also has reached a stage at which capacity building should be matched with efforts to influence and guide policies which means giving due attention to matters of applicability and utilization of research for policy development.

Recommendations

On capacity building:

- concentrating efforts in a small number of centres rather than spreading the resources thinly.
- continued support to promising and motivated researchers, and using them to build a centre of excellence.
- more and longer working sessions with groups of researchers, possibly at research centres abroad
- increase participation from francophone and North African countries (increasing publicity to reach more candidates for research grants).
- increasing publicity to reach more candidates for research grants.
- tracer studies of former grantees to find out whether they are firmly on a research trajectory.
- incorporating the increasing number of private universities that are emerging in Africa into the study programme.

On research:

- improve communications where possible.
- greater emphasis on relevance and applicability of outcomes for policy purposes.
- expand the group of stakeholders to set the research agenda, to include faculty members, students and society.
- expand Scientific Committee with resource persons from Africa, and with persons who can advise researchers on qualitative research methods, keeping in mind the necessity to include persons from the francophone countries and to maintain gender balance.
- researchers to get more supervisory support from their own university and access to computer facilities and other information technology support.
- demand elaborated research proposals especially with regard to methodology at the selection stage.
- set up research cooperation projects between researchers in Africa and researchers abroad (mutual interests).
- mixed approach for selecting topics: ongoing concerns together with new topics and interesting individual proposals eg., curriculum and quality issues.
- a small % of the grant should be considered as an honorarium payment to the researchers – of the order of 20%; this would have the potential of attracting a larger pool of and better quality of researchers.

On dissemination:

- use more non-academic channels for dissemination of research results (e.g. press, policy briefings, debates, etc.).
- recognise the importance of publishing their research findings in peer reviewed journals.
- organise workshops for researchers on.
 - a) preparing policy briefs of their research reports

- b) advocacy of higher education research at their campus
- c) ways of sharing what they learned with interested colleagues
- d) linking up with think-tanks in their country
- e) organising platforms for debates on higher education management

On linkages and networks:

- study the options for establishing viable and effective linkages and networks.
- organise workshops for researchers on
 - a) setting up with fellow researchers linkages for information exchange and consultation
 - b) maintenance of linkages and networks

Contribution of the Scheme to AAU's knowledge base

- invite comments on research reports from local education commissions.
- use local researchers to advocate higher education research among university staff and administrators.
- increase commitment and support from universities where researchers come from (advocacy)
- build local databases on higher education.
- AAU to write synthesis reports and discussion papers on important research issues.
- AAU to act as a data base and reference point for policy related HE research in Africa.

On the Co-ordinator:

- a more proactive approach by synthesising various reports for the type of conference held in Lusaka in 1997.
- encouraging and facilitating links between researchers and establishing regional networks.
- diversifying funding for support of specific areas such as computers and information technology.

On preparing for Phase II:

- for AAU and the Scientific Committee to prepare a strategic plan which would guide the Programme in achieving clearly defined short and medium term objectives. In this respect it would be important to adopt the following process:
 1. AAU and the Scientific Committee to work on this strategic plan which should reveal a vision with regard to aims and outcomes and strategic choices based on solid arguments;
 2. To draft a proposal for the second phase on the basis of this strategic plan;
 3. AAU to discuss the proposal and strategic plan in a joint meeting with the donors;
 4. AAU to finalise the proposal and to submit it to the donors.

On relations between donors and AAU and the Study Programme:

- it is important that the donor agencies and AAU share a common understanding about the aims and expected outputs of the Study Programme and that the aims and expected outcomes are clearly stated in the project proposal;

- it is recommended that AAU and the donors meet at regular intervals to discuss the progress of the programme and exchange views on matters of strategic importance to the Programme;
- it is recommended that the donors guarantee continuity in the monitoring of the programme.

Lessons learned

The chances of success of the research projects are increased by selecting candidates on the basis of well designed proposals especially with regard to the methodology section.

Try to avoid the selection of candidates without research experience.

Involve the resource person from the start of the research cycle, i.e. the screening of the initial research proposals.

Ensure commitment from the institutions in the form of access to data, communication and computing facilities, as well as supervisory support.

Research conditions are not favourable in most African countries which can easily lead to delays in the completion of research projects and demands considerable levels of motivation and endurance on the part of the researchers.

Communications are an essential ingredient of the Programme, and determine to a large extent the efficiency of the programme and the quality of the outputs.

Appendices

1. Terms of Reference for the Evaluation

I INTRODUCTION

Despite improvements in the past few years, a striking feature of attempts to deal with the crisis of higher education in Africa remains the limited contribution of African scholarly research to national and international higher education policy making and development. To address this problem, the AAU established the “*Study Programme on Higher Education Management in Africa*”. Financial support came from the Government of the Netherlands and the Swedish Agency for Research Cooperation with Developing Countries (SAREC) (now the Department for Research Cooperation within the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, SIDA), (hereafter “the Donors”). The broad objective of the programme was to develop local capacity to undertake systematic research that enhances the understanding of issues of higher education management in Africa. The programme should widen the scope and raise the level of debate on higher education policy. Further, it should contribute to the improvement of the quality of higher education policy and management in Africa. Particularly, it was hoped that the AAU should be equipped with systematic knowledge to guide the organisation in the higher education policy debate.

As Phase I of the programme moves towards a conclusion, it is proposed that an evaluation of the programme be initiated. The terms of reference have been elaborated by the research director of the Study Programme at the AAU, commented on by the donors and modified by SIDA.

II OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE OF THE EVALUATION

The overall motive of the evaluation is to acquire a detailed description and assessment of the activities and management of the Study Programme, the results obtained so far, and the prospects for the future. As far as possible, the evaluation should identify conditions of particular significance for programme success or failure.

The evaluation is intended:

- (a) to enable the AAU to develop and improve the objectives, activities and management of the programme;
- (b) to facilitate decisions by the donors on programme support.

III CONSULTANT

Two evaluators should be assigned for the mission, one of them as Team Leader. The evaluators should be persons with extensive international experience of higher education research, the organisation of research in Africa and conditions of university education in Africa.

IV TASKS

The evaluation shall:

- (a) assess
 - i the Research Grants Scheme, workshops etc., in relation to:
 - the relevance of the topics studied
 - the coverage of the scheme (geographic, gender etc.)
 - the quality and usefulness of study reports, individually and as a whole
 - the contribution of the scheme to AAUs knowledge base and
 - ii the overall management of the programme

- (b) assess and comment on the Proposals for Phase II of the Programme, advising particularly on improvements in the objectives and proposed activities and
- (c) provide such other comment and suggestions as may be deemed appropriate.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluation shall present main findings and assessments on the matters set out at IV and above and on the basis of such findings and assessments, draw conclusions and make recommendations for the attainment of the objectives set out at II above.

VI. APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

The evaluation shall consist in:

- (a) desk studies of documents, including research reports and the Proposals for Phase II of the Programme
- (b) examination of the programme files and other material, and discussion with staff at AAU headquarters, Accra
- (c) consultations (by correspondence or otherwise) with selected
 - i research grant recipients
 - ii members of the Scientific Committee and Resource Persons to the Programme and
 - iii representatives of the Donors

VII. TIMING

The evaluation shall be conducted between the 1 March and 30 April 1998. It shall include necessary field or other visits for a maximum of ten (10) days and a visit to the AAU headquarters for a maximum of three (3) more days, for a total of not more than (13) working days.

In addition to necessary travel time a further period of seven (7) working days is allowed for preparation, report writing etc.

VIII. REPORTING

The evaluation report shall be written in English and should not exceed 30 pages, excluding annexes. Format and outline of the report shall follow the guidelines in *Sida Evaluation Report – a Standardized Format* (see Annex 1). Five (5) copies of the draft report shall be submitted to Sida no later than 10 April, 1998. Within two weeks after receiving comments on the draft, a final version in 5 copies and on diskette shall be submitted to Sida. Subject to decision by Sida, the report shall be published and distributed as a publication within the Sida evaluation series. The evaluation report shall be written in Word 6.0 for windows (or in a compatible format) and shall be presented in a way that enables publication without further editing.

The evaluation assignment includes the production of a Newsletter summary following guidelines in *Sida Evaluations Newsletter – Guidelines for Evaluation Managers and Consultants* (annex 2) and also the completion of *Sida Evaluations Data Work sheet* (Annex 3).

2. List of persons interviewed

- 6 March Mr.Boeren visits SIDA/SAREC in Stockholm, meetings with:
Dr.Berit Olsson, Head of the Research Division
Mr.Tomas Kjellqvist, SIDA/SAREC Programme Officer for the AAU Study Programme
Dr.Mats Kihlberg, former Officer in Charge of AAU Study Programme.
- 10 March Evaluation team of Dr Reddy and Mr Boeren arrive in Accra
- 11 March Meetings at AAU:
Prof.Narcisso Matos, Secretary –General, AAU – courtesy call
Prof.Aki Sawyerr, Head of Research, AAU; Co-ordinator of Study Programme
Introduction to AAU Staff
- 12 March Prof.Narcisso Matos, Secretary General AAU
Prof.J.S.Djangmah, Resident scholar, The Institute of Economic Affairs
Prof.J.K.Amuzu, Dean, Faculty of Science and Pro-Vice-Chancellor elect, university of Ghana
Prof.Sefah-Dedeh, Head, Department of Food and Nutrition, University of Ghana
- 13 March Prof.Aki Sawyerr, Research Co-ordinator
Dr.D.N.Tarpeh, Head Financial Administration
Accountant in charge of Study Programme
- 15 March Travel from Accra to Harare, Zimbabwe
- 16 March Group Meeting with researchers from the Study Programme:
Dr.(Mrs.) C.N.Omoifo, University of Benin, Nigeria
Mrs.G.E.Ugwuonah, University of Nigeria, Enugu
Dr.Elizabeth U.Anyakoha, University of Nigeria, Nsukka
Prof.N.L.Gayibor, Université du Bénin, Togo
Mr.Babacar Thiaw, Université Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar, Senegal
Dr.Erasmus S.Kayage, University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania
Mr.Muhammad Mayanja, Makerere University, Uganda
Mr.L.S.O.Liverpool, University of Jos, Nigeria
Meeting at the Royal Netherlands Embassy:
Mr.Kees van den Bosch, Regional Education Sector Specialist, Netherlands
- 17 March Resource Persons:
Em.Prof.Jean-Claude Eicher, Institut de Recherche sur l'Economie de l'Education, Université de Bourgogne, France.
Dr.Per Olaf Aamodt, Institute for Studies in Research and Higher Education, Norway
Mr. Harald Schomburg, Centre for Research on higher Education and Work, University of Kassel, Germany.
- 18 March Attending the Seventh Meeting of the Scientific Committee. Present:
Members: Prof. Jean-Claude Eicher
Prof. Mala Singh
Prof. Narciso Matos
Prof. Akilagpa Sawyerr
In attendance: Dr. Per Olaf Aamodt (Resource Person)
Mr. Harald Schomburg (Resource Person)

- 19 March Attending the Symposium on *Select Issues in Higher Education*
Debriefing session with:
Prof. Narciso Matos, Secretary-General, AAU
Prof. Akilagpa Sawyerr, Director of Research, AAU; Co-ordinator of Study
Programme)
- 20 March Dr Reddy departs from Harare
- 21 March Mr.Boeren departs from Harare
- 30 March Mr.Boeren meets with:
Mr.Wim Zoet and Mr.Lucien Wolfs (Head), Education and Developing Countries
Division, Cultural Cooperation, Education and Research Department (DCO/OO),,
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Netherlands
- 8 April Dr Reddy meets with Prof Donald Ekong, former Secretary-General AAU

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July 1993 – August 1994
July 1994 – June 1995
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Book of Abstracts. Gaberone, Botswana, December 7–10, 1993.
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- 1996 Core Programme of Activities: 1997–2000.
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- n.d. Study Programme on Higher Education Management in Africa. Research on Policy and Management Issues and Outcomes. An Association of African Universities (AAU) Special project.
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- n.d. Association of African Universities. AAU Services to Member Universities.
- n.d. Core Programme 1997 – 2000. Proposals for the Continuation and Expansion of SIDA/SAREC Support.
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