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**UNESCO/OECD Guidelines on
“Quality Provision In Cross-Border Higher Education”
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**UNESCO’s Capacity Building Activities In Qualifications Recognition,
Quality Assurance And Accreditation:
Towards A Coherent Framework**

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Section for Reform, Innovation and Quality Assurance (RIQ)
http://www.unesco.org/education/higher_education/quality_innovation
http://www.unesco.org/education/higher_education/global_forum/second_meeting

INTRODUCTION: UNESCO'S FUNCTIONS

As a lead agency for education, science, culture and communication, UNESCO is servicing the international community and contributing to peace and human development by promoting international cooperation and providing advice and assistance to its Member States.

In education, UNESCO has set the following three strategic objectives for the medium-term 2002-2007:

- Promoting education as a fundamental right;
- Improving the quality of education;
- Promoting experimentation, innovation and the diffusion and sharing of information and best practices as well as policy dialogue in education.

In pursuing these objectives, UNESCO performs and assumes a range of functions and interventions in all countries and regions of the world. The five basic UNESCO functions are defined as follows:

- A laboratory of ideas
- A standard-setters (conventions, recommendations and other normative instruments)
- A clearing-house
- A capacity-builder in Member States
- A catalyst for international cooperation

While the other functions are quite explicit, the capacity-building function is performed and often interpreted in a variety of ways.

Depending on the context, capacity-building programmes are delivered through various mechanisms, which may include one or more of the following:

- Training (as well as training of trainers)/ internships,
- Building new and reinforcing existing networks
- Providing (technical) equipment,
- Forging partnerships,
- Fostering enabling environments and exchange of experiences through policy forums, experts' meetings
- Developing guidelines and/or normative texts,
- Advocacy through public campaigns;

UNESCO is in the process of evaluating its capacity-building activities and delivery mechanisms. Based on preliminary findings of an internal evaluation study, the following crucial elements have been identified that contribute to the success of capacity-building activities:

- Starting with a rigorous context / needs assessment (revisited if long-term process);
- Ownership of programme by stakeholders and involvement of important partners (particularly Member States);
- Building on existing capacities;
- Multi-level approach (individual, institutional, societal);
- Critical mass approach.

These elements served as a basis for the initiative to develop a strategic approach to build capacity for the recognition of qualifications, quality assurance and accreditation, within higher education reforms and national policy frameworks. The need for building such capacity at national level was expressed by a number of Member States as responding to an emerging policy concern to respond to challenges posed by higher education in a more globalized society.

THE FRAMEWORK

The Global Forum on International Quality Assurance, Accreditation and the Recognition of Qualifications was launched as part of UNESCO's mission to respond to the emerging ethical challenges and dilemmas as a result of globalization. This initiative was a reaction to growing demands by the international community that UNESCO takes a more proactive role related to the impact of globalization on higher education, in particular the emergence of cross-border higher education providers that do not fall under the purview of nation-states.

The First Global Forum (UNESCO, 17-18 October 2004) proposed an Action Plan for implementation by UNESCO in 2004 – 2005 focusing on the role of standard-setting, capacity building and clearinghouse functions of the Organization, putting forward UNESCO's regional conventions on the recognition of qualifications in higher education as educational agreements providing international standards in the context of the growing liberalization of trade in educational services¹.

The proposed Action Plan focuses on: updating the regional conventions so that they better respond to the new challenges of a changing higher education environment, capacity building for quality assurance at national and regional levels to ensure the sustainable development of higher education systems and developing information tools for students on quality provision of higher education to empower them for informed decision-making. In addition, the development of international guidelines and codes of good practice were proposed to support an international framework for national policy developments. The elaboration of the UNESCO/OECD guidelines on quality in cross-border higher education provision is a development of this process.

The Second Global Forum (UNESCO, Paris 28-29 June 2004), as part of its mission to provide a platform for dialogue, aimed to set the basis for a strategy for capacity building and partnerships and to support the Action Plan objectives, while taking into account the increasing dimensions of access in the globalized higher education arena. It also looked at the differing regional developments in the revision of the recognition conventions, which provide a framework for capacity-building exercises, and noted the developments in the elaboration of the UNESCO/OECD guidelines on quality in cross-border provision of higher education. When finalized, these guidelines will constitute an internationally agreed upon, global framework for capacity building for quality assurance, supported by two major international organizations and complemented by an information tool to protect students.

A resolution, submitted by Norway at the 32nd General Conference at UNESCO further strengthened this agenda, linking quality in higher education to sustainable development and the objectives of Education for All (EFA).

The Second Global Forum provided a particular focus on capacity building through a needs assessment study on capacity building efforts in the regions and the discussions on the topic during the plenary and workshops. The needs assessment study started during the Second Global Forum was extended to cover all regions between June and December 2004. This study will serve as basis for developing a strategic approach to guide UNESCO's activities in capacity building in quality assurance and accreditation, as part of assisting the development of higher education policy frameworks.

The present paper reviews inputs from the regional papers² presented at the 2nd Global Forum, analyses the role the regional conventions can provide as mechanisms and motors for capacity-building in quality assurance and highlights suggestions for UNESCO action in capacity-building, including the capacity building elements of the UNESCO/OECD guidelines and accompanying information tool.

¹ UNESCO Medium Term Strategy, 2002-2007, paragraph 25, The initiative to establish a Global Forum sprang from an Experts' Meeting organized in Paris (10-11 September 2001)

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CAPACITY BUILDING IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC REGION

Context

The Asia and Pacific Region is a diverse and complex region with linguistic, political, economic and cultural differences. In most countries of the region, external quality assurance is of relatively recent origin. There are some 20 major national quality assurance efforts currently operating in 15 countries; two-thirds of these initiatives have been established in the last decade.

Based on national contexts and other considerations, quality assurance agencies of the region have varying policies in dealing with aspects such as the agency role in assessment, the nature of the assessment process, the focus of assessment and the linking of the assessment outcome to funding, the unit of assessment, the policy on disclosure of the assessment report, the assessment outcome and the period of validity.

While practices differ, there is agreement on the essentials. This scenario, marked with diversity in practice, as well as common core elements, has proven a fertile ground for experimentation in many issues of contention in quality assurance. Pooling the expertise developed in these systems, facilitating the sharing of the lessons learnt and addressing the emerging issues of concern collectively are the necessary steps to be promoted in the region through the different regional capacity building activities.

The variance in the developmental stage of the quality assurance mechanisms in the region also calls for attention to capacity building in many areas of quality assurance. While the fairly stabilized systems are in the process of redefining their roles and responsibilities, the emerging systems are analysing the practices of others to model their systems. Capacity building activities targeting these systems with the primary focus on the sharing of experiences and expertise have a major role in shaping the quality assurance scenario of the region.

The developments in transnational, cross-border education add to the need for capacity developing in the region. There is concern that the national quality assurance mechanisms that are oriented to the national context may not be able to deal with these issues effectively. A recent survey conducted by the Asia and Pacific Quality Network (APQN) concluded that the role of quality assurance agencies (QAA) in the national frameworks for quality assurance of cross-border higher education is not well developed.

Actors and activities

QAAs and bodies involved in the quality assurance initiatives of the region have been conducting various capacity building activities but in a rather uncoordinated way. The regional network efforts such as the Asia Pacific Quality Network (AQPN), the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the ASEAN University Network (AUN) and the inter-governmental bodies like UNESCO, OECD and the World Bank have the potential to bring-in more coordination and consistency in approach in these aspects.

UNESCO, in the process of the review of the UNESCO Conventions on the Recognition of Qualifications co-organized with the Chinese National Commission for UNESCO with input from the UNESCO Bangkok Office a 'Workshop for Exporters and Importers of Higher Education' in Beijing, China on 20-22 March 2004. The meeting brought together some 57 participants representing decision-makers from ministries and institutions of higher education in 18 countries in the Asia and the Pacific Region as well as a number of international experts in the area of quality assurance and recognition. Highlighted in the outcomes of this meeting was the important role that UNESCO had to play in quality assurance and recognition, as well as the need for an efficient mutual recognition framework, and a call for capacity building at the national, regional and international level to ensure robust national quality assurance frameworks to meet the challenges of globalization to higher education. The particular challenges of ensuring the quality and relevance of cross-border higher education provided through distance education was also stressed. The key role of ensuring that students are informed on quality issues was also highlighted.

The prospective UNESCO-OECD guidelines on quality in cross-border higher education and the accompanying information tool part of this project were considered as a useful starting point in building capacity in quality assurance criteria and procedures as they related to higher education provided transnationally in the Asia and Pacific region.

Other agencies, such as the World Bank, are developing regional and sub-regional strategies in this field in Asia and the Pacific. Pooling resources seem a logical step forward in the development of a strategy.

CAPACITY BUILDING IN THE ARAB STATES

Context

Although the Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees of Higher Education in the Arab States, adopted in 1978, stipulates in its article 2 that “the Contracting States solemnly declare their firm resolve to co-operate closely with a view to ...constantly improving higher education curricula through continuous evaluation as to take into account ... the recommendations made by the competent organs of UNESCO, ALECSO and the Association of Arab Universities concerning the continuous improvement of the quality of education...”, the concern with quality assurance was only dealt with seriously at the 7th meeting of the Regional Committee responsible for the application of the Convention (1995), when the Committee requested the Secretariat to develop a document on quality assurance to be presented at the next meeting of the Committee.

This was effectively done and the document³ was first presented by the Secretary of the Regional Committee at the “Scientific Conference” of the Association of Arab Universities held in Sanaa’ (Yemen) in March 1997 at the invitation of the Association. The document was consequently submitted to the 8th meeting of the Regional Committee held in Beirut (Lebanon), in June 1997, and the Committee recommended that it should be presented to the Arab Regional Conference on Higher Education to be held in Beirut in 1998 as one of the main working documents of the Conference. Thus, the document was discussed at the Conference which adopted a set of recommendations concerning quality assurance and quality enhancement.

Consequently, the Ministers responsible of Higher Education in the Arab States adopted in their regional conferences held between 2000 and 2003 a series of resolutions calling all Arab States to establish national agencies for quality assurance and all higher education institutions to establish institutional frameworks for quality assurance.

Actors and activities

Until now, the number of States and institutions that have responded to the call of the Ministerial conferences is quite low. The same apply to quality assurance initiatives and systematic quality enhancement frameworks and activities.

At the same time, following a resolution by the Conference of the Ministers responsible of higher education in the Arab States, an expert committee set up by the Association of Arab universities has developed guidelines for self-assessment and accreditation of higher education institutions that were distributed to all members of the Association.

Many of the ideas and projects concerning quality assurance in higher education in the Arab States have not come to realization because of the lack of qualified human resources to carry them out. In view of that, it is worth mentioning three recent initiatives that have been put in place to remedy the lack of highly qualified human resources.

The first initiative concerns the implementation by the UNDP Regional Bureau for the Arab States of an around two-million dollars project aimed, among other things, at the assessment of Computer Science and Business Administration programs and curricula in 30 universities of 14 Arab States. The

³ SALAME, Ramzi and AN-NHAR, Tayseer (1997). Quality Assurance in Higher Education. Beirut: UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education in the Arab States. In Arabic.

implementation of this project has encompassed the training of about 40 faculty members in the participating universities in (1) self-assessment of programs and curricula, (2) external assessment, and (3) testing of students' achievement according to pre-established standardized tests. This project has heavily relied on the expertise of the UK Quality Assurance Agency.

A second initiative concerns the implementation by a consortium of European and Arab universities of a project aimed at the assessment of faculties and schools of engineering in 14 universities of 7 Arab States, within the framework of a TEMPUS-MEDA Project, involving particularly French and German universities. The capacity-building relied particularly on the method of "learning by doing", involving the participation of the faculty members of the Arab universities in the development of the assessment guidelines and in the conduct of the self-assessment exercise.

The third regional initiative concerns the Training Workshop called for by the Association of Arab Universities and that was scheduled in Amman (Jordan) early December 2004, concerning the application of the guidelines for self-assessment and accreditation developed by the Association.

It should be mentioned that other capacity-building exercises have been implemented in various institutions as preparation for the implementation of quality assurance mechanisms or as part of self-assessment or international accreditation exercises. However, it is quite clear that higher education systems and institutions in the Arab States still have to go a long way in terms of implementing institutional systems for quality assurance.

CAPACITY BUILDING IN THE AFRICA REGION

Context

During the last two decades, the development of higher education in Africa was characterized by a rapid increase in student enrolments and a major reduction in the public financial resources allocated to higher education teaching institutions. This situation led to a significant deterioration of academic infrastructures, laboratories, teaching/learning materials, and student supervision ratios and in the last analysis to a major decline in the quality of higher education.

At the beginning of the 1990s, all the major higher education stakeholders in Africa had agreed that there was need to revitalize higher education systems at least through three major strategies, namely development of new forms of higher education delivery, including private higher education institutions and open and distance learning, identification of new sources of funding and promotion of quality and equity.

Therefore, in addition to traditional higher education institutions, several new programmes and institutions were established including private higher education institutions, short courses leading to certificates, diploma courses and distance and virtual education programmes. Unfortunately, in several countries, these new initiatives did not fulfil minimal conditions required at national and/or sub-regional level for accreditation of higher education programmes and institutions and quality assurance.

Moreover, it is noted that the assignments entrusted to national and sub-regional bodies in charge of recognition of qualifications differ quite substantially according to linguistic zones. Indeed, in French speaking countries these assignments are limited to the recognition of studies and degrees, while in English speaking countries, they also encompass accreditation of programmes and institutions and quality assurance.

Therefore, the revitalization of higher education in Africa was raising major concerns regarding accreditation, quality assurance and recognition of qualifications. To respond adequately to these concerns, the African regional committee in charge of the implementation of the Arusha Convention decided at its 7th session held in 2001 in Dakar, Senegal to revise the Convention in order to take into consideration the new forms of higher education and to integrate issues of accreditation and quality assurance in the process of the recognition of qualifications.

Actors and activities

For this purpose, UNESCO and the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) jointly convened an experts' meeting in June 2002 in Cape Town, South Africa. The experts' made several recommendations on the following areas:

- Strengthening cooperation between the African regional committee and the national and sub-regional bodies in charge of quality assurance, accreditation and recognition of qualifications
- Improving exchange of information, case studies and good practices
- Capacity building in quality assurance, accreditation and recognition of qualifications at national, sub-regional and regional levels.

These recommendations were endorsed by several regional forums, including the 8th Conference of African Ministers of Education (MINEDAF VIII) held in December 2002 in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania.

There are several important initiatives in capacity building in quality assurance, accreditation and recognition of qualifications in Africa. There are a few well established national bodies for quality assurance (e.g. in South Africa and Kenya) and a number ongoing initiatives in establishing or strengthening national systems for accreditation, some with the assistance of UNESCO Office in Harare: e.g. Rwanda and Zimbabwe. Different forms of capacity development in quality assurance are underway in many countries e.g. the South African and Mozambican governments have bilateral agreements with other governments in the area of higher education.

However, many of these initiatives do not form part of a coherent regional framework. In addition, the Arusha Convention on the recognition of qualifications in Africa, although playing an important role and presently undergoing serious revisions, has to date been ratified only by 20 Member States. Furthermore, the sub-regional bodies in charge of recognition of qualifications differ in their approach according to linguistic zones.

The following capacity building initiatives will be undertaken shortly by UNESCO in connection with commitments recently made by new African fora to facilitate ratification of the Arusha Convention by Member States:

- Cooperation arrangement established between UNESCO and African Member States through the Forum of African Parliamentarians for Education (FAPED) launched in December 2002 in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania, and
- The Forum of Regional and Sub-regional African Organizations in support of cooperation between UNESCO and NEPAD (New partnership for the African development). At the first meeting of the Forum held on 10-13 September 2004 in Paris, the African regional economic communities committed themselves to *"support UNESCO to facilitate member states' ratifications and implementation of all the conventions adopted by the organization"*, including the Arusha Convention.
- *Establishment of the Southern African Framework for Qualifications (SAFQ)*: In collaboration with UNESCO Harare Office, the SADC technical committee has recently initiated the process of establishment of a sub-regional qualifications framework known as *"the Southern African Framework for Qualifications (SAFQ)"*

QUALITY ASSURANCE, ACCREDITATION AND RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Context

The paper presented at the 2nd Global Forum gave an overview and analysis of major quality assurance institutions and mechanisms in Latin America, with a focus on quality assurance and accreditation systems in three countries: Costa Rica, Mexico and Venezuela.

An additional paper was commissioned to cover similar issues in English-speaking Caribbean countries and Suriname.

The following conclusions could be drawn from the review for Latin American countries:

- Quality assurance and accreditation systems have developed rapidly and became current practice in the Latin American region as a response to rising trends towards economic integration and increasing mobility of highly skilled labour during the 90's.
- Among the most advanced and highly performing quality assurance models in the region is the Mexican quality assurance multi-level national system.
- In Costa Rica, public authorities have chosen accreditation systems rather than recognition systems, and promoted regional mechanisms of quality assurance through the *High Council of Universities in Central America (CSUCA)*.
- In Venezuela as well as in other Latin American countries, accreditation mechanisms are still in the experimentation phase.

Comparative analysis of the different existing and experimental quality assurance and accreditation systems in Latin America shows that in spite of the great achievements of the past decade, there remain common problems and areas that need to be addressed and tackled through concerted efforts at national, regional and global levels. Among these issues, the most urgent are:

- The development of quality assurance policies did not always take place as an integral part of national HED reforms processes.
- In many countries, quality assurance policies were originally initiated and designed by government authorities. They remain services provided exclusively by the government in countries like Argentina, Bolivia and Brazil. Whereas in countries like Mexico, more and more partners from the civil society and the private sector are participating actively in the movement whether through funding or implementation/provision of services.
- National regulatory mechanisms put in place, whether public or private, have rarely managed to cover all educational programmes publicly and privately provided, and focus more on evaluation and accreditation of programmes and less on evaluation of institutions.
- Coverage is also limited to traditional forms of educational provision. The emergence of new forms of HED trans-national programmes' provision, whether virtually or through joint degrees' systems is not yet covered by the existing national regulatory QA and accreditation systems. This is an area where a lot of work is needed and specialized expertise should be sought.
- Finally, the multiplicity of specialized quality assurance systems and agencies have created the pressure for regulating the provision of quality assurance and accreditation services through, for instance, a system of mutual recognition among quality assurance agencies.

In the Caribbean, establishing higher education standards in programme quality and accreditation of post secondary, tertiary and higher education programmes have gained increasing importance over the past decade, but have come to particular prominence over the past four years. The successful establishment of the National Vocational Qualifications for Jamaica (NVQ-Js) in technical/vocational education through the National Council of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (NCTVET) has prompted steps towards creating a Caribbean qualifications framework and the award of Caribbean qualifications (CVQs) and led to the establishment of a regional network of national training agencies that recognise shared competencies and means of measuring them. Both of these initiatives have stimulated a variety of capacity-building activities in the region.

Jamaica has the most fully developed accreditation system in the English-speaking Caribbean. Besides Jamaica, the two other countries that are advancing toward national accreditation agencies are Barbados and Trinidad. Both have recently passed legislation addressing the registration and accreditation of tertiary institutions, which establishes the platform on which a national accrediting body can be situated.

There has been a diversity of initiatives undertaken in the fields of quality assurance, accreditation and recognition of qualifications in the English-speaking Caribbean. Many of the initiatives have been

scattered and isolated in single consultancies, which have concentrated on one area among a plethora of needs, which demand an integrated approach for success in the longer term.

Examples of promising integrating initiatives at the sub-regional level include:

- The Caribbean Community Secretariat's (CARICOM) plans to create a regional accreditation framework/ accreditation agency
- The establishment of common framework for regional standards and recognition of qualifications in technical and vocational training by The Association of National Training Agencies (CANTA)
- The establishment of a Caribbean Area Network for Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education (CANQATE) (Inaugural Conference in November 2004)

CAPACITY BUILDING IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

Context

The Mediterranean Recognition Convention is unique in its kind as it is the only UNESCO Convention on the recognition of qualifications to promote inter-regional co-operation between the Arab and European States bordering on the Mediterranean.

To support cooperation with countries outside the European Union, the European Commission has put into place the Tempus Programme, which since 2002 covers the Mediterranean partners of the European Union ('MEDA countries').

In the Tempus-MEDA framework two projects have been established for capacity building in quality assurance:

- EvQualif-Rec aims to establish or reinforce the national systems and/or regional systems of quality assurance by establishing a pilot phase concentrating on quality assurance of engineering education; and
- RecQualif aims to foster the establishment of information centres which address the recognition of qualifications and quality assurance.

Actors and activities

EvQualif is operational from September 2003 to September 2005. RecQualif is operational from April 2004 to April 2005.

Both projects involve partners from the Northern and Southern banks of the Mediterranean. The Target of the EvQualif consists of higher education institutions in Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and Syria). The Target Audience of RecQualif consists mainly of representatives of ministries of education responsible for higher education in Algeria, Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia.

The partners in Evqualif from the Northern Mediterranean includes: France and Germany. Partners for RevQualif are : France, Italy, the Netherlands and Slovenia.

The 'Centre international d'études pédagogiques' (CIEP) is involved as the Contractor with the European Commission for both projects. UNESCO is Co-Coordinator of RevQualif with CIEP, while CIEP is the sole Coordinator for EvQualif. The two projects are being developed in synergy.

Both projects consist of activities aimed at the analysis of national frameworks (higher education systems, quality assurance systems, political contexts, and decision-making structures) in order to determine the status and responsibilities of information centres which are relevant to the respective national contexts; and the exchange of best practices between project partners through study visits and seminars between establishments and partner countries.

CAPACITY BUILDING IN SOUTH-EAST EUROPE

Context

A project developing a "Regional University Network on Governance and Management of Higher Education in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia and Montenegro" was implemented during 2002-2004

The objective of the programme was to promote effective higher education authorities and institutions in the region that operate in line with European standards and common regional needs by (1) integrating universities and higher education authorities in South-East Europe into existing European networks; (2) developing higher education policies that are based on European standards and international good practices in the areas of strategic management, financial management, relations with civil society and quality assurance; (3) developing national and institutional capacities and skills in higher education strategic management and policy making; and (4) stimulating the establishment and/or consolidation of new structures and mechanisms of financial management, based on the principles of university autonomy and accountability, while encouraging the establishment of links with civil society and local economy.

Actors and activities

The programme, implemented by the UNESCO European Centre for Higher Education in 2001-2004 with funding from the European Commission, EuropeAid Office and UNESCO-CEPES, focused on Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Serbia and Montenegro. The programme target audience were university managers and administrators, officials in ministries of education, higher education associations, parliamentarians, policy agencies and student organizations.

During its inception phase (January-March 2001), a thorough study was undertaken in order to outline the current state of affairs and to identify the basic needs of the higher education systems and institutions. Documentation materials were elaborated for use as training resources throughout the duration of the programme. These resources cover three areas of reference: (1) policy making and institutional strategic management; (2) funding of higher education and institutional financial management; and (3) quality assurance and credit transfer systems.

Since the programme was meant to contribute to capacity-building in the areas of higher education governance and management, emphasis was put on (a) the development of a new institutional basis in terms of legal and normative provisions and organizational structures; (b) the training of human resources; (c) the elaboration and application of new national policies and institutional strategic plans; and (d) the introduction of those new codes and practices that would contribute to the development of a new academic ethos and culture. These objectives of capacity-building were taken as reference during the implementation phase of the programme.

Activities undertaken during the implementation phase (April 2001 – September 2003) involved both policy makers from ministries responsible for higher education and university managers, academics and students. Ten pilot higher education institutions were selected from the target countries, each delegating representatives for the three areas of interest i.e. strategic management, financial management, and quality assurance. Activities included training seminars, study visits, and the elaboration of national policy papers and institutional plans of action for each area of concern, together with corresponding calendars of implementation.

The programme also included an evaluation phase (October 2003-December 2003). Specific evaluation criteria and procedures were applied for each activity and for the programme as a whole. An evaluation report on the outcomes of the programme was elaborated and analysed by the beneficiaries and by representatives of various European organizations.

Finally, during the additional phase (January-April 2004), the need for speeding up the process of developing a new institutional culture in relation with the changing governance and managerial models was addressed.

COMMON ELEMENTS AND CONCLUSIONS FOR UNESCO ACTION

Common elements for capacity building needs

Although the regional reviews presented above demonstrate a high level of diversity, some common elements can be derived. On a more general level, there is clearly a new emerging concern for quality assurance, explicit in all the regions, accompanied by a lack of human, institutional and financial resources to respond to these concerns and often, a confusion of terms: what is quality assurance, accreditation, registration, licensure, qualifications recognition? These terms are sometimes interpreted differently and there are even discrepancies in their meanings in the Anglo-Saxon spoken community.

At the same time, there is a sense of urgency to move forward and to respond to the various needs, from a common understanding of the terms, to a better insight of different models, criteria and procedures for these processes, to the policy level and their adequate inclusion in national reforms and legislation.

Furthermore, the following more specific preconditions for building capacity in quality assurance efficiently were identified:

- to have support from the government
- to involve other relevant stakeholders at national level in addition to the government, in particular higher education institutions, academic staff and students
- to address issues related to new providers of higher education, in particular private institutions, distance education delivery and cross-border higher education
- to be part of long-term processes and assure sustainability
- to have adequate funding to assure impact
- to facilitate mutual recognition arrangements between QAAs

Some more regional specificity reflect the following needs/suggestions:

- to have a regional forum to act as clearinghouse for information, a nodal point for research and development, and a registry for regional expertise (Asia and the Pacific);
- to develop a regional capacity building strategy for the continent but also to use South-South co-operation and more advanced systems to train less advanced neighbouring countries (Africa);
- to create national and regional databases on certificates and diplomas and institutions that offer them (Africa);
- extend coverage of regulatory mechanisms to evaluation of institutions and not be limited to evaluation and accreditation of programmes (Latin America);
- establish regional accreditation agency and pass to the regional level of accreditation (CARICOM) and support to linkages with Spanish, French and Dutch-speaking countries to enhance regional character (Caribbean);
- the short time frame of projects in the Mediterranean region funded through the EU and the importance of extra-budgetary funds for motivating the further development of activities further enhance the need for strong political backing and ownership at national level (the Mediterranean)
- if appropriate incentives for action are to succeed, they should be associated with new institutions as this would engage a larger number of academics to undertake innovative action and suppress those that are no longer appropriate (South-East Europe).

An important prerequisite, however, is a change in mentalities by promoting a “quality culture”, overcoming the traditional resistance to change from the academic community and ensuring the continuity of personnel involvement and government support.

UNESCO action

As for UNESCO's further action, four main functions should be coordinated into an appropriate framework so that they are mutually supportive along the following lines:

1. Standard setting:

- The implementation of regional conventions strengthened and reviewed provide the regional legal framework for national action;
- The UNESCO/OECD guidelines on quality in cross-border higher education provision provide an internationally agreed code of good practice that can guide action at national level. Although not legally binding, it does have moral value as it sets basic principles to be respected, both by the receivers and the providers of such education.
- The regional committees in charge of the application of the conventions may choose to add the UNESCO/OECD guidelines as a subsidiary text to their respective conventions which would further promote their implementation

2. Laboratory of ideas

- Link research and policy issues related to the educational response to WTO-GATS issues, of which quality assurance and qualifications recognition as part of larger policy frameworks are essential developmental issues;
- Further co-operation between the Global Forum on quality assurance, accreditation and the recognition of qualifications, as a platform for policy debate, and the UNESCO Forum on Higher Education, Research and Knowledge, as a platform for research and knowledge production, at global, inter-regional level;
- Further promote regional activities to link policy and research. This has successfully been initiated for the Africa region at the Accra, Ghana Conference in April 2004. It will be followed by a similar event for Asia and the Pacific in Seoul, Korea in April 2005 and in Mexico in June 2005 for Latin America and the Caribbean. These meetings will propose action plans for more sustainable regional strategies.

3. Capacity-building mechanisms, tools and activities:

Cooperation with stakeholders and coordinating and strengthening of ongoing initiatives will be vital for the UNESCO activity in capacity building.

Mechanisms and tools:

- The regional committees in charge of the implementation of the conventions can be the main vehicles for workshops, seminars and training exercises as well as for regional networking with higher education associations and other key-players.
- The UNESCO/OECD guidelines can provide a useful starting point for capacity building.
- The UNESCO field offices, institute and centre in Bangkok, Beirut, Bucharest, Caracas, Dakar, Harare, and the Higher Education Division in UNESCO HQs, that provide Secretariats to the regional committees in charge of the application of the conventions can use this instrument and adapt it to the specificities of their region to promote capacity-building exercises, both at regional and national level.
- Promote the development and supply of training programmes and workshops for quality assurance personnel at regional level. UNESCO will work closely with its International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) and INQAAHE to develop training modules.

Priority activities at regional level:

- Support the creation of a regional network of quality assurance agencies in Africa; in cooperation with regional partners like AAU and regional UNESCO offices (Dakar and Harare), national quality assurance agencies and Ministries and international partners like INQAAHE. The further aim is that the network will serve as a foundation for extensive capacity building activities at regional, national and institutional level. The AAU conference in Cape Town in February 2005 and the next Regional Committee in 2005 could be good starting points for these initiatives.⁴

⁴ The 11th General Conference of the Association of African Universities (AAU) 21-25 February 2005. The main theme of the Conference is Cross-Border Provision and the Future of Higher Education in Africa

- In the context of Africa, link QA and QR capacity-building activities to evaluation of teacher-training activities, curricula and qualifications, in the framework of the UNESCO Teacher Education initiative for Sub-Saharan Africa.
- In Asia and the Pacific promote capacity-building strategies at the forthcoming meeting of the Regional Committee for the Convention on the recognition of qualifications in Asia and the Pacific in Kunming, China on 24-25 May 2005.

4. Clearinghouse:

Collecting, disseminating and sharing information and making it accessible to a wide range of stakeholders constitutes an important part not only of the implementation of standard setting instruments but also of capacity-building exercises and sharing of research findings.

The following seems appropriate for the four processes to be mutually supportive and effective:

- Strengthening national information centres and linking them into networks, as an obligation stipulated by the conventions with the final objective of establishing an international operational network;
- Data-bases and information tools for students, employers and parents as a form of 'quality' literacy and empowerment of learners, part of the longer term activities of the UNESCO-OECD guidelines on quality in cross-border higher education;
- Publications and electronic research forums;
- Knowledge Bases for decision-makers on policy issues in higher education;
- Electronic forums for promoting communities of interest in QA and QR and generating policy debate.

Finally, for all four elements described above, partnerships and coordination remain crucial, both in terms of content, as well as related to fund-raising from multilateral and bilateral donors.