



EAST AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY ASSURANCE NETWORK (EAQAN)

THE 13TH ANNUAL EAST AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY ASSURANCE FORUM

**THEME: Advancing Quality of Higher Education
through International Cooperation and
Networking, Harmonization and Integration**

**9th to 13th September 2024,
Safari Park Hotel, Nairobi, Kenya**



A. PREAMBLE

Quality assurance in higher education in Africa and globally has undergone significant transformations since 2010, influenced by various factors including technological advancements, globalization, increasing demand for tertiary education, and changing educational paradigms. One of the most prominent initiatives is the Post-2015 Education Agenda (2015), where UNESCO has emphasized that the main responsibility of higher education institutions is to teach the right things in the right ways in order to produce responsible citizenship. This can only be achieved or reached if Quality Assurance (QA) systems are in place and well managed. The emergence of regulatory agencies on Quality Assurance of Higher Education and the different quality assurance bodies is in response to ensure that the education providers conform to set standards and guidelines and is relevant to addressing contemporary needs.

Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA) is a strategic institution of the East African Community responsible for coordination of quality higher education. IUCEA established a network of Quality Assurance practitioners from universities, largely, and other Higher Education Institutions to champion and regularly deliberate on emerging trends in higher education and on matters geared towards promotion of quality higher education within the region. In this regard, the East African Higher Education Quality Assurance Network (EAQAN) was formally established as an Independent body in 2012 to provide a platform in which practitioners come together on an annual basis to share experiences on areas of common interest in ensuring and managing quality in the institutions.

Since then, EAQAN in partnership with IUCEA has hosted twelve (12) annual quality assurance fora in which keynote speakers are invited to discuss pertinent and contemporary matters and issues in higher education. The forum also provides opportunities for members to be trained on topical areas in higher education that are keenly selected to suit the theme of each forum. It also provides an opportunity for networking, sharing experiences through presentation of papers on key issues of quality assurance systems, practices, challenges and prospects in the East African Higher Education area. The culmination of the annual forum is a roundtable high level dialogue involving, high level policy makers from the Ministry in-charge of Education of the partner state hosting the forum, East African national regulatory agencies, member universities, key development partners and IUCEA Secretariat.

Higher education is at the forefront of a transformative journey in the ever-evolving landscape of education, where knowledge transcends borders and innovation knows no limits. It is with great anticipation and a shared sense of purpose that we introduce the concept note for the upcoming 13th Annual Forum of the East African Higher Education Quality Assurance Network, themed "**Advancing Quality of Higher Education through International Cooperation and Networking, Harmonization, and Integration.**" The 13th Annual Forum of the East African Higher Education Quality Assurance Network will be held from 9th to 13th September, 2024 in Nairobi, Kenya.

The AU Theme of the Year for 2024 was proposed to be Education under “Educate and Skill Africa for the 21st Century”. This signifies a concerted effort to prioritize and enhance quality and accessibility of all levels of education across the continent. African higher education stakeholders expect potential benefits from this initiative and this forum is expected to take advantage of this new development.

The forum will keenly deliberate on the policy dialogue and instruments that are key in the EU-Africa higher education cooperation, DAAD funding possibilities for bilateral cooperation between Germany and East Africa Partner States. Our collective mission is to explore, strategize, and implement measures that will foster greater collaboration among institutions, transcending traditional barriers for the greater good of global quality education.

Harmonization and integration of higher education emphasize the need for synergy among diverse educational systems. Various initiative on African Continental and East African Regional Integration Frameworks for Higher Education will be discussed in depth. By aligning internal and external quality assurance systems, the curricula, research agenda, and institutional policies, we seek to create a cohesive and harmonized East African, African and global educational ecosystem. This harmonious integration will not only facilitate the mobility of students and academics but will also enrich the fabric of higher education with diverse perspectives.

During the forum, quality assurance in higher education will be a focal point of our discussions. Through the exchange of best practices, innovative methodologies, and case studies, we aim to elevate the standards of education in East African.

Networking emerges as a potent tool in our pursuit of quality assurance in higher education and academic excellence. By fostering connections between institutions in EU and EAC, we aim to create a robust framework for sustained partnership and cooperation. Through these networks, we can leverage collective expertise, share resources, and navigate the complexities of the modern educational landscape more effectively.

Join us on this intellectual journey as we explore innovative strategies, share insights, and pave the way for a future where the quality of higher education is not just advanced but transcendent. Your participation and contributions will shape the narrative of a more connected, harmonized, and integrated global education community. Together, let us onboard in this journey towards Advancing Quality of Higher Education.

B. FORUM THEME

Advancing Quality of Higher Education through International Cooperation and Networking, Harmonization and Integration

Sub-Theme 1: Fostering Academic Excellence through Collaborative and Cooperative Networking between Universities and Industry, and between the EU and Africa.

The collaboration between the European Union (EU) and Africa in higher education signifies a visionary approach towards fostering academic excellence on both continents. This strategic partnership aims to create a robust framework for cooperation and networking, transcending geographical boundaries to harness the collective intellectual capital of diverse cultures. By facilitating the exchange of knowledge, resources, and expertise, this collaborative effort seeks to address common challenges and promote innovation in education. In particular the forum will be interested in project cooperation and partnership in grant proposal writing with a focus on the ERASMUS programme.

Collaboration and linkage between universities and industry in Africa is characterized by a diverse array of initiatives spanning various sectors. Universities have established formal partnerships with industry players, facilitating research collaborations, technology transfer, and knowledge exchange. However, such collaborations often remain fragmented and ad hoc, lacking sustained engagement and strategic alignment. Additionally, limited funding, inadequate infrastructure, and bureaucratic hurdles pose significant obstacles to effective collaborative and cooperative networking between universities and industry for sustainable development

Sub-Theme 2: Enhancing accessibility and inclusivity of Higher Education through Innovative Quality Assurance Practices

Innovative quality assurance practices are emerging as transformative tools in the realm of higher education, serving as catalysts for enhanced accessibility and inclusivity. Recognizing the imperative to adapt to diverse learning needs and ensure equitable opportunities, institutions are adopting pioneering strategies. From embracing technology-driven assessments to implementing flexible curriculum structures, these practices seek to accommodate varied learning styles and enable participation from a broad spectrum of individuals. Quality assurance frameworks are evolving to prioritize inclusivity, fostering environments where learners from diverse backgrounds, abilities, and experiences can thrive. Embracing virtual and blended learning, innovative assessment methods, personalized learning pathways, and proactive support mechanisms, higher education institutions are expected to invest in innovation in internal quality assurance for enhanced academic standards.

Sub-Theme 3: Harmonization and Integration of Higher Education through Credit Transfer System and mobility of staff and students in East Africa

The East African Community (EAC) Common Market protocol prompted the need to harmonize higher education systems in the Community, among other, to enable the operationalization of Article 11 of the Protocol which entails facilitation of easy mobility of learners and labour across EAC Partner State borders. The Treaty for the Establishment of EAC clearly stipulate the commitment of the Partner States to harmonize their education and training systems in order to provide for, among others, concerted efforts in the development of human resources, and mobility of people, labour, and services.

In EAC, harmonization of higher education mandate is clearly articulated in the IUCEA Protocol 2002 and the IUCEA Act 2009. Over time, IUCEA has championed harmonization and integration of higher education through staff and student mobility and development of benchmarks in various areas of specialization. This has presented a visionary leap towards a more interconnected and collaborative academic landscape. Creation of a seamless educational experience by facilitating the transfer of academic credits across institutions and borders, allowing students greater flexibility and opportunities for diverse learning experiences. Provision of a standardized credit system and encouraging academic mobility, this holistic approach to harmonization not only enhances the overall quality of higher education but also strengthens regional ties, laying the foundation for partnerships and a more united and cooperative academic community in Africa.

The nexus between national and regional accreditation systems/ agencies and qualifications frameworks play a pivotal role in harmonization and integration of higher education. The various national accreditation agencies in EAC have customized the benchmarks on various areas of specialization so as to address the Credit Accumulation and Transfer System within higher education institutions and to facilitate recognition of qualification anchored on the East African Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (EAQFHE).

Sub-Theme 4: Exploring the Transformative Role of Technology and Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education: Innovations, Challenges, and Opportunities

In the realm of higher education, the integration of technology and Artificial Intelligence (AI) brings forth a myriad of opportunities and ethical considerations that demand thoughtful examination. Issues of data management and protection, AI and big data cannot be wished away in teaching, learning and research. As universities embrace digital transformation and incorporate AI-driven tools into academic practices, concerns arise regarding issues such as privacy, data security, intellectual property and academic integrity. The collection and utilization of student data, algorithmic decision-making, and the potential for bias in AI systems all contribute to the intricate landscape of opportunities and ethical challenges. Striking a balance between leveraging technological advancements for educational enhancement and safeguarding individual

rights and ethical principles becomes paramount in navigating this evolving terrain. This exploration into the innovations, challenges, opportunities and ethical dimensions of technology and AI in higher education promises to shed light on the complex interplay between innovation and the need for responsible, equitable, and ethically sound practices in teaching, learning and research.

C. FORUM GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

The main *Goal* of the Forum is to provide a platform for capacity building of academician and quality assurance practitioners on pertinent quality assurance matters and to foster dialogue on quality of higher education through sharing of ideas on international cooperation, networking, harmonization and integration.

The main objectives of the forum are to offer academician and quality assurance practitioners the opportunity to:

- i. Foster academic excellence through collaborative and cooperative networking between universities and industry and between universities in the EU and Africa.
- ii. Enhance accessibility and inclusivity of Higher Education through Innovative Quality Assurance Practices.
- iii. Share experiences on harmonization and integration of higher education through credit transfer system and mobility of staff and students in Africa.
- iv. Explore the transformative role of technology and Artificial Intelligence (IA) in Higher Education.
- v. Share lessons learnt during the seventeen years of quality enhancement in higher education sector in East Africa.

D. FORUM ACTIVITIES

1. Keynote Addresses by Experts on various topical issues
Various keynote speakers will be at hand to train EAQAN members and quality assurance practitioners on pertinent topics on higher education quality assurance.
2. Conference - Paper Presentation on the various Sub-Themes
Members of EAQAN wishing to present papers on any of the sub-themes / topics identified below will be expected to submit their complete papers for evaluation. Papers chosen for presentation will be classified in appropriate paper sessions as defined by the Organizing Committee. Papers must be prepared according to the guidelines issued to authors. The sub-themes are:
 - i. Fostering academic excellence through collaborative and cooperative networking between universities and industry and between the EU and Africa;
 - ii. Enhancing accessibility and inclusivity of Higher Education through innovative quality assurance practices;

- iii. Harmonization and integration of Higher Education through credit transfer system and mobility of staff and students in East Africa; and
 - iv. Exploring the transformative role of technology and Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Higher Education: Innovations, Challenges, and Opportunities
3. Capacity building through training workshops
Training Workshops will be facilitated by the regional and international experts in the broad thematic areas shown below:
 - i. Opportunities for higher education cooperation and networking between EU and Africa, in particular the ERASMUS programme.
 - ii. Harmonization and integration in higher education in Africa
4. Annual General Meeting of EAQAN Members
EAQAN members will have their Annual General Meeting in which various reports will be presented and deliberated upon.
5. High Level Dialogue on pertinent issues on higher education in East Africa involving the Executive Secretary of IUCEA, the Executive Secretaries of the regulatory agencies within East Africa partner states, Vice Chancellors and Deputy Vice Chancellors from Universities within East Africa partner states, key partners, including the Regional Director, DAAD and the President OBREAL Global, & Coordinator of the HAQAA Initiative.
6. Networking Events
The Conference participants shall be treated to a variety of networking events including *cultural events* that will not only exhibit the rich diversity of the East African cultural heritages but will also provide opportunities for the participants to be entertained and to build partnerships for the enhancement of quality assurance in their respective institutions. In addition, attempts will be made for parallel site visits to learn from IQA initiatives in various universities settings around Nairobi.

E. CONFERENCE DATE AND VENUE

The 13th Annual Forum of the East African Higher Education Quality Assurance Network is scheduled to take place in Nairobi, Kenya from 9th to 13th September 2024. The proposed venue for the 13th Annual Forum will be Safari Park Hotel, Nairobi.

F. TARGET PARTICIPANTS

The target participants for this Forum are the Quality Assurance Coordinators/Directors/Officers from Universities; Academicians; University Researchers; University Administrators; Executives, Directors/Secretaries of National

Accreditations Agencies, Regional Higher Education Agencies and Experts, Policy makers, industry players, professional bodies, students and student unions and other higher education stakeholders.

G. CONCLUSION

This Concept Note is intended to invite you all to start preparations for the Forum by:

- i. Preparing conference papers or a poster on one of the Forum's sub-themes and submitting it on time (*see call for papers*);
- ii. Clearing your Institutional/individual EAQAN annual subscription fees;
- iii. Mobilizing resources since participation to the Forum is on the cost sharing arrangement; and
- iv. Setting aside time for the event.

H. COMMUNICATION

All communications should be directed to the EAQAN General Secretary, Dr. Amaal Kinene, Email: akinene2013@gmail.com, the EAQAN President, Prof. Paul Muoki Nzioki, Email: muokih@gmail.com. With a copy to the IUCEA Senior Quality Assurance and Standards Officer, Prof. Alexis Ndabarushimana email: andabarushimana@iucea.org Please visit EAQAN web page Website: www.eaqan.com for more information.