



Association of African Universities

Press Release

11th May 2004

The Association of African Universities (AAU), in collaboration with UNESCO and the Council on Higher Education (CHE) (South Africa), organized a regional workshop on the theme: “**The Implications of WTO/GATS for Higher Education in Africa**”. The workshop, which was held from 27-29 April 2004 in Accra, Ghana, brought together education and trade ministers as well as other senior government representatives, Vice-Chancellors, Deputy Vice-Chancellors, Deans and other leaders of public and private universities, representatives of regional research and higher education organizations, representatives of national and regional regulatory agencies, sub-regional and international organizations, donors, advocacy networks, consultants, as well as journalists and other major stakeholders. Most of the 67 participants came from 16 African countries, and the rest from Europe, the Middle East, and Canada.

The World Trade Organization’s General Agreement on Trade in Services (WTO/GATS) came into effect with the first round of negotiations in 1995. The GATS covers 12 service sectors, but the inclusion of education and its implied treatment as a tradable commodity has raised serious concerns among stakeholders elsewhere about its implications for national sovereignty, the public mission of education, quality assurance, and other vital aspects of higher education in particular. However, this development has not received the critical discourse it deserves either in scholarly or other public forums in Africa. Not only is there a deficiency of public dialogue on the subject but there is also very little compiled and publicly accessible data on the status of GATS as well as the extent and impact of the internationalization of higher education in Africa. Therefore, AAU and its partners have organized the Accra workshop to fill this critical gap in public awareness of the issues of GATS and to facilitate proactive engagement as well as an informed and consensus-based policy-making process both at the national and regional levels. The workshop also aimed to identify strategies for follow-up action in the spheres of information dissemination, research, advocacy, and regional cooperation as well as the roles of major stakeholders in their realization.

The workshop was graced by a keynote address delivered by Ms. Elizabeth Ohene, Ghana’s Minister of State Responsible for Higher Education, and a closing address made by Mr. Allan Kyerematen, Ghana’s Minister of Trade, Industry, and President’s Special Initiatives.

During the three-day workshop, participants discussed presentations of scientific papers dealing with the opportunities and challenges emerging from GATS, regional cooperation under the Arusha Convention, country briefs on the state of higher education in African countries, and discussants’ comments on issues raised in the papers. Issues of quality assurance, research, advocacy and information dissemination were further deliberated on in breakout and plenary sessions and recommendations made on the way forward in each of these areas. Details of these deliberations and recommendations will soon be made available on the AAU website (<http://www.aau.org>), in the proceedings of the workshop, and through other channels.

Apart from recommendations on concrete follow-up actions, one major outcome of the workshop was the unanimous adoption of the “**Accra Declaration on GATS and the Internationalization of Higher Education in Africa**”. In their Declaration, participants recalled the right to, significance of and responsibilities for higher education as acknowledged in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948), the *World Declaration on Higher Education for the 21st Century* (1998), and the *AAU Declaration on the African University in the Third Millennium* (2001), and noted the negative impacts of Structural Adjustment Programs, limited level of development of higher education and its regulatory frameworks in Africa, the process of internationalization of education underway in Africa, and the full implications of GATS under such conditions. The participants

declared their commitment to the renewal of higher education and expressed their concern about the commodification of education under GATS. They also declared their firm commitment to the Arusha Convention and their support for an internationalization process that is mutually beneficial, and called on African governments to exercise caution on further GATS commitments in higher education until a more informed position is arrived at on how tradable transnational education can best serve national and regional development priorities.

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Participants' Evaluation of the Accra Workshop

As part of its impact assessment to determine workshop success and to identify aspects that need future improvement, the AAU prepared and distributed an evaluation form to be filled in anonymously by participants. Below is a sample of the responses received from most of the participants. These comments indicate that, on the whole, the participants were satisfied with the workshop in terms of both its organization and its outcome.

On the objective of raising awareness:

- *The workshop achieved its primary objective of sharing information and sensitizing stakeholders in higher education.*
- *Very good, well organized and relevant for higher education. Many universities were not aware of the GATS and they had relevant information on this agreement and also the awareness in terms of advantages and disadvantages. Well done!*
- *This is a very good and informative workshop on an issue that otherwise would have escaped our focus in spite of the rather deep consequences it will have on higher education in Africa.*
- *It was efficiently run and quite informative and useful to the participants who will share with others.*
- *Très utile. La compétence de certains participants a été essentielle pour la qualité de l'atelier*
- *It would have been beneficial to universities if there were representatives of the other services sections. Example: Health and particularly TRAD and relevant lawyers to elaborate legal elements of GATS*
- *Cross-boarder education monitors could have been given an opportunity to give their perspective.*

On the Declaration:

- *For the first time in higher education, we see an African joint position. This can be sent institutions which did not attend to make their observations / comments and if fit to support the declaration.*

On the organizational efficiency:

- *The workshop was very well organized and it achieved the goals.*
- *Excellently conceived and implemented.*
- *Excellent in terms of organization and outcomes.*

On the overall outcome of the workshop:

- *Well satisfied over the whole workshop. Congratulations to the organizers of this meeting, viz. AAU, CHE and UNESCO.*
- *Globalement satisfaisant au point de vue de sa conduite et des résultats.*
- *A very valuable and timely workshop.*
- *I deeply appreciate the opportunity of being part of this workshop. Generally, I am satisfied with the proceedings.*
- *Very good. My thanks to the AAU for an excellent workshop.*
- *Very good and useful initiative. My only criticism is that a wider array of perspectives, notably by the providers, but also by student organizations could have been useful.*
- *Excellent and thought-provoking.*