

ACCESS TO SUCCESS: FOSTERING TRUST AND EXCHANGE BETWEEN EUROPE AND AFRICA

PROJECT COMPENDIUM



UNIVERSITETS- OG HØGSKOLERÅDET
The Norwegian Association of Higher Education Institutions



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European University Association asbl

Avenue de l'Yser 24
1040 Brussels, Belgium
Tel: +32-2 230 55 44
Fax: +32-2 230 57 51

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PART 1: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

The project

The Access to Success project (2008-2010), funded by the Erasmus Mundus programme of the European Union, aimed at raising awareness of access and retention issues in higher education in Africa and Europe, and at exploring how higher education institutions in both regions are coping with the changing demands of their specific socio-economic environments. By doing so, the project also intended to contribute to a wider discussion on effective inter-institutional cooperation between Europe and Africa, in particular with regards to student and staff mobility schemes, capacity building partnerships and government/donor support. The messages of the project have been captured in a final 'White Paper' that contains multi-actor recommendations for taking forward the Europe-Africa higher education cooperation agenda.

The project included:

- Parallel institutional surveys on access and retention in higher education conducted in 2009 across a sample of 16 African and 19 European countries. The surveys were supplemented with three student focus groups on the issue, one in Europe led by the European Students' Union and two in Africa led by the All-Africa Students' Union and the Erasmus Mundus Alumni Association.
- A first Europe-Africa rectors' dialogue in Addis Ababa, 17 November 2009 that examined issues of common interest amongst university leadership.
- Three dialogue intensive workshops involving university leadership and faculty, donors and government agencies, students and regional government bodies:
 - *Access and Retention: Comparing best practice between Europe and Africa*

(Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 18-20 November, 2009): Sharing university good practices in confronting problems of access and retention in both Africa and Europe, based on the project survey results.

- *Towards a coordinated vision of Europe-Africa Higher Education Partnerships: Supporting Institutional capacity building in Africa* (Oslo, Norway, 24-25 February 2010): this explored programmes that structure institutional cooperation and capacity building between Africa and Europe. The workshop also examined the theme of better donor coordination in research and higher education capacity building.
- *Inter and intra regional academic mobility in Europe and Africa* (Accra, Ghana, 3-4 May 2010): the workshop examined intra-regional mobility (within Europe and within Africa) as a potential avenue for higher education integration and inter-regional mobility (between Africa and Europe), the realities of brain drain and drive for increased brain circulation.
- *Final dissemination conference* (Brussels, Belgium, 28 September 2010) which presented the project outcomes in a White Paper to policy makers, cooperation agencies and the university community.

The project employed the following strategic and unique approach:

- It brought together policy makers, donor agencies and universities to address institutional development and to transcend the boundaries between research, education, development policies

and programmes. This provided a forum to discuss a wide range of existing initiatives in the field of African higher education and Africa-Europe higher education dialogue and cooperation.

- It focused on universities as actors in development cooperation, employing a holistic institutional perspective to the topics at hand. The project involved institutional leaders from both continents with overall responsibility for the development of their universities. This complements a commonly selected approach to development cooperation whereby collaboration and capacity building in certain fields, disciplines or sectors is targeted.
- The fact that the project was led by regional university associations (AAU and EUA) meant that it was able to take a broad “bi-regional institutional approach”, orienting discussions toward the wider framework of the Africa-EU Strategic Partnership and the role that the higher education communities of both regions should play. This allowed for a macro-level strategic analysis, which identified the need for better communication and information-sharing on ongoing bilateral initiatives in order to improve their impact.
- Finally, the project embedded the topics of cooperation and development within a wider discussion on higher education modernisation. The ongoing European experience in regional higher education harmonisation through the Bologna Process served as a basis for considering closer pan-African regional cooperation.

This publication: The project compendium

This compendium is intended to showcase the various outputs of the Access to Success project in an integrated manner. It is complementary to the White Paper publication and survey results. Given the rich content generated through the project, it provides the following:

- Analysis of the survey results on institutional challenges with access and retention (European and African)
- Outcomes of the student focus groups and student opinion pieces on access and retention
- Outcomes from the three project workshops and the Europe-Africa rectors’ dialogue
- Specific institutional case studies on selected themes
- Outcomes of the final policy conference and suggestions for taking the White Paper forward.

All content from this compendium can be downloaded on the Access to Success website: www.accesstosuccess-africa.eu.

Implementing partners:

The Access to Success project was implemented by a consortium consisting of:

- European University Association (EUA)
- Association of African Universities (AAU)
- Flemish Inter-University Council for Development Cooperation (VLIR-OUS)
- European Students’ Union (ESU)
- Association of Norwegian Higher Education Institutions (UHR)
- European Access Network (EAN)

Project website: www.accesstosuccess-africa.eu

PART 2: UNDERSTANDING CONTEXTS AND CHALLENGES IN WHICH EUROPEAN AND AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES ARE OPERATING: THE CASE OF ACCESS AND RETENTION OF STUDENTS AND STAFF

Introduction to Chapter

The following chapter examines two inter-linked issues that pose a myriad of challenges to higher education institutions in both the developed and developing world: access to higher education and retention of students and staff. These issues have underpinned the Access to Success project, and have, in many ways, served as a starting point for reflection. In particular, these issues have been selected for further study because they are both regionally and nationally specific, yet globally relevant. Though higher education participation rates in Europe may be on average eight times that of most African countries (though there is disparity), the profile of students attending higher education is not necessarily representative of the diverse profile of citizens. Europe has learned to some extent, and continues to realise, that open access to public higher education does not ensure equal opportunity and that completion and student 'success' matter far more than enrolment rates.

Unlike in Europe, there is a blatant urgency in addressing this issue in Africa: classrooms are literally overflowing, and the percentage of teaching staff with doctoral degrees is minimal. While the problems of access and retention may seem more drastic, it has become clear that there is enormous creative potential in addressing such issues. With the exception of

Francophone Africa, system structures often permit institutions to select students, and thus have a proactive role in composing their entering classes. While many African universities are scrambling for infrastructure and teaching staff to meet the rising enrolment demand, the debate around alternative delivery methods, ICT infrastructure, public private partnerships to ensure facilities such as dormitories, etc. has been taken up in a more dramatic and perhaps innovative way than in Europe.

Thus, in studying current institutional approaches to access and retention in both Africa and Europe, the Access to Success project assumes that mutual learning is of critical importance. It not only draws attention to some of the environmental constraints which face African universities, but it shows that European countries do not always have the answers, and that they too must examine if higher education is responding to society's present needs.

Most importantly, the topics of access and retention were a point of departure for examining the wider principle of partnership, and how universities in Africa and Europe can cooperate more efficiently and effectively. African universities need partnerships that are sensitive to their own needs, whether it be in ensuring gender balance, retaining researchers and teaching staff, or building institutional

capacity. European universities need partnerships that are sensitive to their own needs as well, which include incentivised researchers, diverse opportunities for student and staff mobility, and a more strategic internationalisation of teaching and learning.

This chapter presents the results of the first half of the Access to Success project, which essentially examined access and retention in Europe and Africa from various angles: through two regional surveys of higher education institutions on current pressures and strategies regarding access and retention, student focus groups in both regions probing the issue, and a first bi-regional workshop of university leaders on the topic.

Part A of the chapter examines ‘European trends, disparities and challenges of access and retention in higher education’. This is further divided into:

- The analysis of the European survey, undertaken by the Access to Success project in 2009, on the state of play of access and retention policies in European universities. Though it only represents a limited sample size, common trends and challenges are identified as well as specific country cases examined.
- A literature review on ensuring retention in higher education: this is written from the perspective of a UK institution and provides insight into both theory and practice in student success. It touches on a range of issues from student services to student-centred learning, all of which can be considered as playing a role in institutional strategy in this regard. It reflects the current policy frameworks

and vocabulary that has evolved in the UK around this topic, which is strikingly different from the discourse (or lack of discourse) in other European countries.

- Several case studies provided from European institutions. These range from an analysis of the institutions’ approaches and strategies, to specific programmes designed to improve access and retention. The articles vary in nature and, clearly, different countries and institutions interpret the issues differently. The sample is not representative (UK and Nordic institutions dominate), however, more cases were presented and discussed in the workshop that took place in November 2009 (Part C).
- A contribution from the European Students’ Union, discussing the student perspective on access and retention, on which they have been outspoken in the context of the Bologna Process and other policy circles.

Part B of the chapter examines the African dimension to access and retention. It includes

- The analysis of the parallel African institutional survey on access and retention trends and challenges. This survey, which was designed to be almost identical to the European survey, often elicited quite different responses.
- A contribution of the All-Africa Students Union, discussing common concerns in access and retention in Africa.
- A case study of Makerere University, Uganda, which has proved to be one of the most progressive universities in

Africa in terms of enabling access to and retention of women in higher education.

The range of institutional approaches in Africa in meeting the demands of rising enrolment could not be fully captured, however the survey results paint an overall picture of the identified problems and constraints. Though primary concern is clearly with *increasing participation*, the case of Makerere University demonstrates a particular institutional initiative to widen participation, and pro-actively recruit woman.

Of note in the contribution of the student organisations is the strong emphasis put on fees and the cost of higher education; the European students see the introduction of tuition fees in many traditionally public financed systems as a threat. The rise of the private university sector in Africa has been dramatic, and the African students also note with concern the introduction of higher fees at public institutions. The question

of access and retention is undeniably linked to financial resources and the sensitivity of the students regarding this issue was a topic of debate between institutional leaders at the first workshop of the Access to Success project.

The third part of this chapter presents the outcome report of 'Workshop 1 - Access and retention: comparing best practice between Europe and Africa', 17-20 November 2009, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

This first workshop of the Access to Success project was designed both to draw from and upon the fact-finding phase of the project, in which surveys and focus groups were conducted. It summarises many of the issues raised in the surveys and presents the dialogue that ensued between European and African universities and the students that attended.