



INTER-UNIVERSITY COUNCIL FOR EAST AFRICA

HARMONIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN EAST AFRICA

**STATUS UPDATE
JULY 2015**



PREFACE

The Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA) is a strategic institution of the East African Community (EAC) responsible for coordinating the development of higher education and research in the region. After having been recognized as the surviving institution of the former EAC (1967 – 1977) responsible for coordinating the networking of university institutions in the region, since the re-establishment of EAC in 1999 IUCEA has assumed a broader role as a building block for the achievement of sustainable socio-economic development and regional integration of the EAC region. In that regard, the current mission of IUCEA focuses on the promotion of strategic and sustainable development of strong higher education systems and research for supporting East Africa's socio-economic development and regional integration. The goal of IUCEA is to be able to respond to the expectations of the EAC Partner States in terms of higher education institutions producing high-level human resources and research output that can promote and sustain socio-economic development and regional integration.

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. Furthermore, the harmonization of higher education mandate is clearly articulated in the IUCEA Protocol 2002 and the IUCEA Act 2009. These two are the legal instruments that mainstreamed IUCEA into the EAC Framework.

Harmonization of higher education in East Africa is anchored on two regimes: the regional quality assurance system and the regional qualifications framework. The development and implementation of a regional quality assurance system for East Africa that IUCEA coordinates is being undertaken through a consultative and participatory process by engaging various stakeholders to meet their various higher education expectations. The stakeholders include the governments of the EAC Partner States, commissions/councils for higher/university education, higher education institutions (both public and private), and the business community. The regional qualifications framework – the East African Qualifications Framework for Higher Education – has also been developed. The framework is intended to facilitate harmonization

of education and training systems and the qualifications attained by clearly indicating the programme learning outcomes, the different qualification levels, a regional credit system, and recognition of prior learning, among others. The regional framework is aimed at facilitating mutual recognition of qualifications across the EAC region, as envisioned in the EAC Common Market Protocol.

This document has been developed in order to provide an update on the status of harmonization of higher education in East Africa, and to further elaborate clear and common understanding of the concept of harmonization in the context of EAC as a common higher education area. On behalf of the IUCEA Secretariat, I wish to encourage all higher education stakeholders in the region to use this document as a guide in reading other policy documents that IUCEA has developed to guide harmonization of higher education in East Africa, which include (a) Principles and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education in East Africa; (b) East African Qualifications Framework for Higher Education; (c) Handbook for Quality Assurance in Higher Education – Roadmap to Quality; and (d) Benchmarks for Academic Programmes.



Prof. Mayunga H.H. Nkunya
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

Kampala, July 2015

1.0 Introduction

Higher education plays a unique and pivotal role in promoting East Africa's co-operation and regional integration. This dates back from the history of higher education in the three pioneer universities in the region, namely Makerere University in Uganda, University of Nairobi in Kenya, and University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, all of which were established in 1970 after the dissolution of the University of East Africa that had existed since 1963. The cooperation and networking of these universities that included exchange of students and staff, has seen many of those assuming leadership positions in the three countries to have interacted as students in one of the universities. This is one of the strong factors that have promoted continued cooperation among the East African countries.

Even after the collapse of the former East African Community (EAC) in 1977, the three universities continued to cooperate in a number of ways, initially under the umbrella of the Inter-University Committee, which in 1980 was transformed into the current Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA). Recognized as one of the surviving institutions of the former EAC (1967 – 1977), when the current EAC was established in 1999 IUCEA was given broader mandate of coordinating the development of higher education and research in EAC in order to promote sustainable socio-economic development and regional integration.

In addition to higher education institutions in Burundi and Rwanda that became eligible for admission to IUCEA membership after the two countries were admitted as members of EAC in 2007, many more higher education institutions in the initial EAC member countries of Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda have continued to be established. This has led IUCEA to register an upward trend in its membership to the current number of over 110, both public and private higher education institutions. The number is expected to increase significantly with the demand for access to higher education in the region continuing to increase, triggered by the corresponding expansion of basic education in all countries in East Africa.

The growth trend in higher education in East Africa was further facilitated by the liberalization of higher education delivery in the East African countries from the mid-1980 by allowing private providers to come in. This led to a continuous surge in the number of private higher education institutions being established. Therefore, in order to ensure that this trend in rapid expansion of higher education did not lead to compromising the quality of the education provided, efforts to harmonize quality assurance systems in higher education in the region became a paramount necessity. In that regard, the development of a regional quality assurance system for higher education was considered to be a timely response,

in view of the recognized importance of higher education in driving East Africa's socio-economic development on the one hand, and the need to promote student and graduate mobility as envisioned in the EAC Common Market Protocol, on the other. Thus, it is of great importance that the development of competent and adequate human resources required to drive socio-economic development of East Africa as a common market block is harmonized through, among others, establishment of a regionally recognized quality assurance system in higher education.

The above factors prompted IUCEA to embark on an initiative to develop a regional quality assurance system for higher education in East Africa. Therefore, in 2006 IUCEA, in collaboration with the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and the Germany Rectors' Conference (HRK) in the frame of their joint Higher Education Management Support Programme, referred to as "Dialogue on Innovative Higher Education Strategies (DIES)," started to develop the needed regional capacity for the quality assurance system. Initially, the initiative involved a consensus building process through engaging the key stakeholders in consultative dialogue.

Those participating in the dialogue included representatives of the national commissions and councils for higher/university education in the region, namely the then Commission for Higher Education (CHE) – now Commission for University Education (CUE), Kenya; Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU), Tanzania; and National Council for Higher Education (NCHE), Uganda, as well as some higher education institutions and key government officials from these countries. Similar bodies in Burundi and Rwanda, namely the National Commission for Higher Education (NCHE), Burundi, and Higher Education Council, Rwanda, and higher education institutions in the two countries got involved in this process after the countries had joined EAC.

To achieve the intended outcome of the dialogue process, a number of consultative national and regional meetings and workshops were held. Among the decisions made in this process was the need to develop a quality assurance handbook as a guiding tool in developing a common quality assurance system and culture in the national commissions/councils for higher/university education and higher education institutions in East Africa. Through this dialogue process, the assessment criteria and quality assurance benchmarks to be included in the handbook were also agreed upon. It was also agreed that the handbook would be developed through harmonization of the quality assurance systems existing in the individual countries in the region, and through drawing experiences from international practices.

The pilot phase of using the handbook has produced significant experiences for IUCEA, its member institutions, and the national commissions/councils for higher/university education on its usefulness and the inherent shortfalls. As a positive achievement, the initial phase of using the handbook has helped to entrench a culture of quality in higher education in the region. However, the experiences gained from using the handbook during the training of quality assurance officers and peer reviewers, and in the process of conducting self- and peer assessment of academic programmes in the region also identified a number of inherent shortfalls in the handbook. Therefore, this prompted the need to extensively revise the Handbook. This has resulted into the production of a revised edition of a new Volume I of the Handbook, which merges the previous Volumes I and 2.

The Handbook is one of the key instruments guiding harmonization of higher education in East Africa, whose ultimate goal is to transform East Africa into a common higher education area. Therefore, it is expected that the readers and users of the revised Handbook will find it a useful tool in promoting and inculcating a quality assurance culture and good quality enhancement practices in East Africa's higher education system.

2.0 Background

Being the strategic institution of the East African Community (EAC) responsible for coordinating the development of higher education and research, during the past 8 years IUCEA has been engaged in the development of systems for harmonization of higher education in EAC in order to transform the region into a common higher education area. The process started in 2006, initially focusing on the development of a regional quality assurance system for higher education in East Africa by harmonizing the national systems in a common regional framework.

However, when the Protocol for the Establishment of the East African Common Market came into force in 2010 the harmonization process was broadened, in order to establish systems that would facilitate mutual recognition of education and training systems, and qualifications attained/awarded among the EAC Partner States. In this process IUCEA has been working very closely with national commissions/councils for university/higher education in the EAC Partner States, as well as higher education institutions, ministries responsible for higher education, and other higher education stakeholders including the private sector through the East African Business Council, and professional and employers' associations in the EAC Partner States.

3.0 Harmonization of Higher Education in East Africa

Harmonization of higher education in the EAC context refers to the establishment of a common frame of reference to facilitate comparability, compatibility and mutual recognition of higher education and training systems and the qualifications attained among the EAC Partner States, based on shared views on quality, criteria, standards and learning outcomes, for promoting student and labour mobility in EAC, and hence EAC operating as a common higher education area. Harmonization does not mean each university or country to operate a uniform system, as this would stifle competitiveness, uniqueness and innovativeness of universities and countries. Therefore, in harmonizing education system, the region is also promoting competitiveness, uniqueness and innovativeness among universities and countries, such that while universities benchmark their systems and programmes to the basic regional standards and guidelines, they also uphold uniqueness in terms of programme specializations, curriculum innovativeness and delivery approaches, etc.

Harmonization of higher education in East Africa has been prompted by, among others, the need to establish a framework to facilitate comparability of higher education quality standards in order to allow mobility of students and to promote regional and international competitiveness, comparability, and compatibility of the curriculum and qualifications attained for them to be mutually recognizable among the EAC Partner States and outside the EAC, and hence promote labour mobility.

4.0 Frame of Reference for Harmonization of Higher Education in East Africa

The frame of reference for harmonization of higher education in East Africa developed by IUCEA in collaboration with the national commissions/councils for university/higher education constitutes the following:

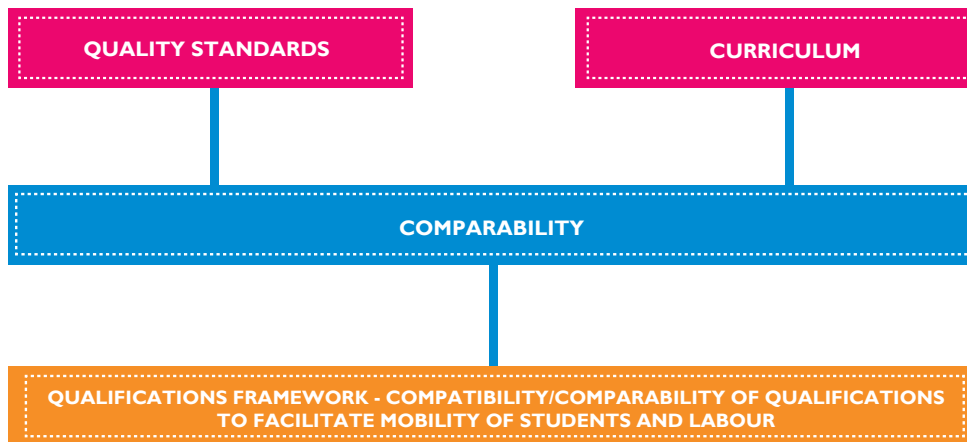
- (a) Regional Quality Assurance System, which is based on four operational tools:
 - (i) A policy framework, titled Principles and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education in East Africa;
 - (ii) Regional quality assurance instruments contained in the Handbook for

Quality Assurance in Higher Education: “Road Map to Quality”, published in four volumes covering internal quality assurance at programme level, external quality assurance at programme level, institutional quality assurance, and implementation of a quality assurance system;

- (iii) Benchmarks for academic programmes; and
- (iv) East African Higher Education Quality Assurance Network as the technical arm of IU CEA, which promotes the development of quality culture in East Africa; and

(b) East African Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (EAQFHE) as a human resources development instrument guiding the higher education and training systems, and as a reference tool in facilitating mutual recognition of qualifications attained in and outside the EAC Partner States.

The inter-relationship between the drivers of harmonization of higher education systems in East Africa can be depicted as shown in the diagram below:



4.1 Regional Quality Assurance System

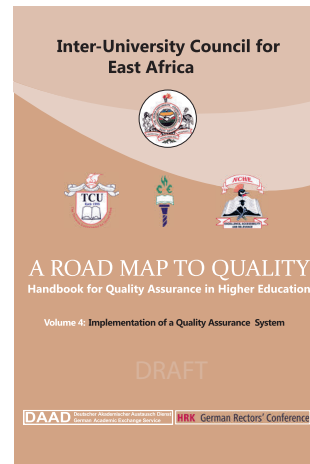
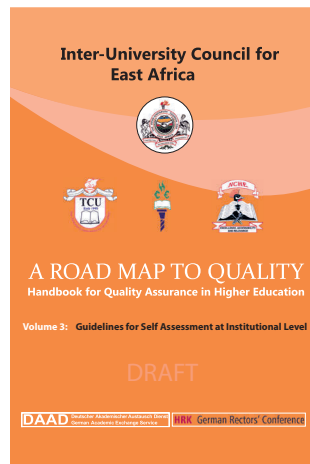
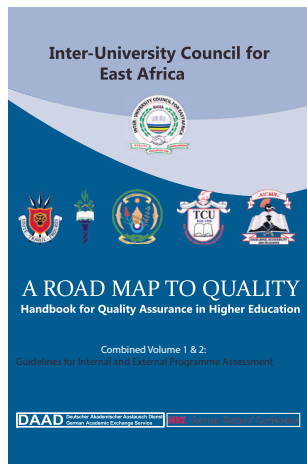
The Quality Assurance system that IUCEA has developed for East African higher education in collaboration with the commissions/councils for higher/university education in the EAC Partner States has been adopted and mainstreamed into the national systems through the commissions/councils for higher/university education in the EAC Partner States and into quality assurance systems of higher education institutions. The regional quality assurance policy framework – Principles and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education in East Africa, quality assurance tools that include the handbook for quality assurance and benchmarks for academic programmes, and quality culture that is evolving through training of quality assurance experts for higher education institutions, guide the implementation and sustainability of the regional quality assurance system.

(a) **The Principles and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education in East Africa** are meant to guide and harmonize quality assurance processes and practices in higher education in the national commissions/councils for higher/university education, and higher education institutions in the EAC Partner States. They provide a common frame of reference that assists and guides higher education institutions and national commissions/councils for higher/university education in developing and practicing a common quality assurance culture, in line with the regional aspirations for a harmonized higher education system, and international developments and practices in quality assurance.

(b) **The Handbook for Quality Assurance – Roadmap to Quality** was developed in order to provide a common understanding of the concept of quality and quality assurance as applied to higher education, and to use common quality assurance approaches by facilitating the region to “talk the same language” in quality and quality assurance in higher education. The Handbook that contains common guidelines, procedures, and assessment tools in quality assurance is currently used as a guide for the national commissions/councils for higher/university education and higher education institutions in the EAC Partner States to achieve, improve, ensure, and assure the quality of higher education in their respective domains.

The first edition of the Handbook, which was developed in 2007 and subsequently published in 2010, consists of 4 volumes:

- Volume 1 gives guidelines for self-assessment at the program level;
- Volume 2 covers guidelines for external evaluation;
- Volume 3 consists of guidelines for self-assessment at institutional level; and
- Volume 4 provides guidelines for the implementation of a total quality assurance system.



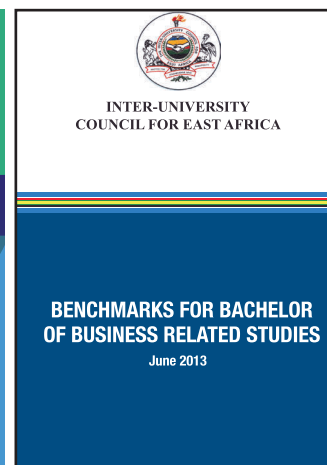
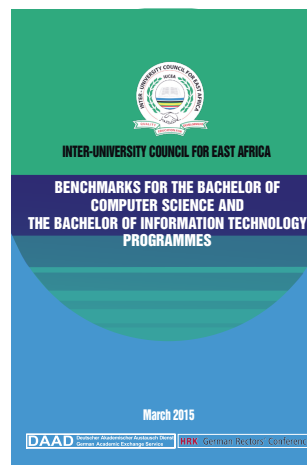
The Handbook has now been reviewed by taking into consideration experiences and lessons learnt during its piloting and subsequent use during the past 7 years, and to bring into it, new global dimensions in quality assurance.

(c) Benchmarks for Academic Programmes that constitute important building blocks of the East African Quality Assurance system, in that they provide a frame of reference for universities when developing and reviewing academic programmes and curricula in order to ensure that the programmes and curricula in the region are harmonized. The benchmarks are output based as guided by statements on learning outcomes, expected competencies and skills, and attitudes. Therefore, the benchmarks are also meant to inform the labour market and other stakeholders on what the graduates are able to do after completion of their studies.

The programme benchmarks are also meant to enable the national commissions/councils for higher/university education in the EAC Partner States to assess the quality of the related academic programmes in the process of accreditation. They also enhance regionalization of the labor market, which is one of the goals of EAC as a common market block. In addition, the benchmarks are meant to guide the labour market in judging the quality of the graduates as they look for employment. Most importantly, the benchmarks are meant to promote harmonization of the specific academic programmes and curricula in the EAC Partner States.

The development of programme benchmarks is a continuous process that started in 2007 through a pilot process for benchmarks for Agriculture, Engineering, Human Medicine and Natural Science programmes. Some higher education institutions are already using the pilot benchmarks as IUCEA continues to develop fully-fledged ones. So far such benchmarks have been developed for undergraduate programmes in Business Studies, Computer Science, and Information Technology.

Development of benchmarks for Education programmes will be completed by December 2015. It should be noted that the process of developing benchmarks involves various stakeholders in higher education and related field of study, which include the national commissions and councils for higher/university education, higher education institutions, the private sector through the East African Business Council, and employers through the Employers' Associations in the EAC Partner States, and invited experts from outside the region in the related field of study in order to impart their expertise and experiences in the benchmarks.



(d) Institutionalization of Quality Culture: In recognition of the need to strengthen institutional capacity in quality assurance on total quality management, IUCEA in collaboration with external stakeholders in Europe developed a “Guide for the Promotion of Quality Culture in East African Universities” through the project titled **“AfriQ’Units – Sustainable Quality Culture and Capacity Building in Internal Quality Assurance in East African Universities”**. The aim of the project was to embed quality culture and continuous implementation of self-assessment mechanisms within higher education institutions in East Africa, in order to enhance increased efficiency of their planning, administration and management of quality assurance systems. The guidelines and principles that were developed under the project have been mainstreamed into the regional Quality Assurance system for East Africa that IUCEA has developed in collaboration with the national commissions and councils for higher/university education. The guidelines and principles have also been disseminated for use in all IUCEA member institutions and in the national commissions and councils for higher/university education.

(e) Capacity Building as a Strategy to Promote Quality Culture: In order to ensure that higher education institutions and the national commissions/councils for higher/university education have the capacity to undertake quality assurance functions in a sustainable manner based on the regional quality assurance system, since 2008 IUCEA in collaboration with the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and the German Rectors Conference (HRK) has been carrying out human resource capacity building through training of quality assurance coordinators in higher education institutions and the national commissions/councils for higher/university education. The training programmes are aimed at providing basic knowledge and hands-on skills to staff in higher education institutions and the national commissions/councils for higher/university education in the EAC Partner States, on the implementation of the regional quality assurance system. Furthermore, the training programmes are intended to enable the participants play a leading role in their respective institutions in developing strategic and action plans in quality assurance, including formulation of relevant quality assurance policies and conducting in-house training of staff on the quality assurance aspects as described in the IUCEA Quality Assurance Handbook.

So far, more than 70 quality assurance coordinators have been trained in three cohorts of 2007/2008, 2009/2010 and 2012/2013. The capacity building process also involved training of peer reviewers for external programme evaluation. In that regard, so far more than 80 peer review experts have been trained and have participated in the evaluation of more than 60 academic programmes in all the EAC Partner States.

In order to make the capacity building initiative structured and sustainable, IUCEA has developed training modules for that purpose that will be used by trainers and trainees in East Africa at regional and national levels, and in higher education institutions. The capacity building initiative has been embedded in the long-term plans of IUCEA strategies and activities. Furthermore, IUCEA has developed a regional pool of quality assurance experts from the previously trained staff from the national commissions/councils for higher/university education the in higher education institutions. These are now facilitating the quality assurance capacity building process for the region.

(f) East African Higher Education Quality Assurance Network: One of the sustainability strategies of the regional quality assurance system in East Africa was the establishment of an East African Higher Education Quality Assurance Network, which was formed in 2011. The aim of the Network is to provide an avenue for continuous sharing of experiences and networking among quality assurance practitioners in East Africa, and as a platform for lifelong learning through capacity building on current global trend in quality assurance and higher education management systems in general, including new trends in curriculum development. Another objective of the network is to strengthen collaboration and networking among stakeholders involved in quality assurance in East Africa, and to discuss policy issues concerning quality assurance in the East African Higher Education systems and their impact on the practice of quality assurance, and to learn from best practices within and outside East Africa. Currently, the Network has more than 150 members from all the EAC Partner States, who meet annually in a forum where they share experiences in quality assurance practices in their institutions, and undergo training on topical subjects as stated above.

4.2 East African Qualifications Framework for Higher Education

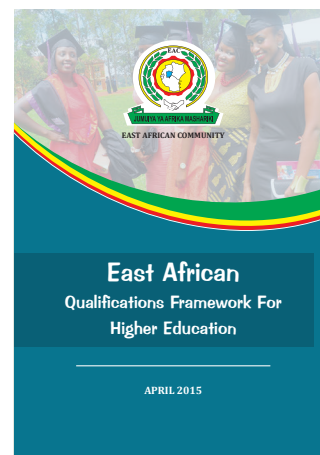
The coming into force of the EAC Common Market Protocol in July 2010 prompted the urgent need to develop tools and systems for the operationalization of Article 11 of the Protocol in order to facilitate easy mobility of learners and labour. This, among others, required the establishment of a framework to enable mutual recognition of academic and professional qualifications across the region. Thus, in 2013 and 2014 IUCEA guided a regional consultative and participatory process that led to the development of the East African Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (EAQFHE), which was approved by the EAC Council of Ministers on 30th April 2015.

Qualifications frameworks are globally regarded as all encompassing tools for guiding systematic approaches to human resources development. As such, they are designed to serve as useful instruments

for guiding higher education institutions in curriculum development, delivery, assessment and certification, in line with the needs of the labour market. Hence, EAQFHE was developed both as a higher education supportive tool and as an instrument for guiding structured human resources development in the EAC region, focusing on skills and competences development, and the relevance of such skills and competences to the region's human resources needs.

EAQFHE is a generic instrument for the region, onto which the Partner States' national qualifications frameworks will be aligned for the purpose of harmonization and synchronization of education and training systems, and the qualifications attained in the EAC Partner States. The major building blocks of the EAQFHE in harmonization of higher education systems include a Credit Accumulation and Transfer System, Qualifications Levels, Levels Descriptors, Articulation and Exit Pathways, and Recognition of Prior Learning.

The Levels Descriptors provide details on the competences and expected learning outcomes to be achieved by a learner at each particular learning level. EAQFHE is divided into 8 Qualifications Levels, of which Levels 5 – 8 constitute higher education (Bachelors, Masters and Doctoral) qualifications. IUCEA is now in the process of developing strategies for operationalization of the EAQFHE, including establishment of the policy frameworks spelt out in the EAQFHE document, and undertaking sensitization and capacity building of the potential users of the framework.



5.0 Conclusion

The process of harmonization of higher education in East Africa constitutes establishment of a harmonized regional quality assurance system that provides appropriate quality assurance guidelines, quality assessment tools, procedures and standards, and benchmarks for academic programmes. The system is linked to the East African Qualifications Framework for Higher Education that articulates harmonization of education and training systems and the qualifications attained by clearly defining the programme learning outcomes appropriate for each level of learning, and the different qualifications levels, a credit system, articulation and exit pathways, and recognition of prior learning, among others. Hence, the qualifications framework is a useful instrument for facilitating mutual recognition of qualifications among the EAC Partner States.

All these interventions are aimed at transforming East Africa into a common higher education area as the ultimate goal of EAC.

So far development of instruments for operationalization of the regional quality assurance system and qualifications framework has made sufficient strides. However, this process has been limited to systems for undergraduate studies. Therefore, for instituting holistic interventions, IUCEA would have also to focus on the development of quality assurance and harmonization frameworks for postgraduate training and distance education, and quality assurance systems for research.

Operational factors that support harmonization of higher education in East Africa include:

- (a)** National and institutional systems as the building blocks;
- (b)** Common conceptual understanding of the harmonization tools and goals;
- (c)** System acceptability and ownership at the higher education institutional level, national levels through commissions/councils for higher/university education up to the government system, and, sub-regional (EAC) level;
- (d)** Non-prescriptiveness that provides institutionalization of the system through “speaking the same language but in different ways that accommodate national/institutional diversities”, hence promoting creativity and competitiveness; and
- (e)** System internationalization that facilitates its international recognition and legitimacy. Furthermore, sustainability of the process is continuously built in through enhancement of quality culture by carrying out human resources capacity development, supporting networking of quality assurance practitioners through the East African Quality Assurance Network, and establishment of a pool of regional experts that spearheads the capacity building process.

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