

ACTIVITIES OF THE ASSOCIATION OF AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES IN AFRICA

A M Satti, Director of Programmes and Cooperation
Association of African Universities, PO Box 5744,
Accra-North, Ghana

ABSTRACT

Ever since its creation the Association of African Universities (AAU) has been involved in inter-university cooperation in Africa in areas of staff development and exchange programmes, conferences, seminars and workshops, and documentation and information.

The AAU supported Food and Nutrition project for Africa is being implemented. It is expected to contribute to training, equipment and literature in the field. The Association also sponsors scientific associations to bring together academic to discuss and solve common problems.

INTRODUCTION

Since the inception of the Association of African Universities (AAU) in November 1967, its activities have been carried out in conformity with its aims and objectives, namely:

- a. To promote interchange, contact and cooperation among university institutions in Africa;
- b. To collect, classify and disseminate information on higher education and research, particularly in Africa;
- c. To promote cooperation among African Institutions in curriculum development, and in the determination of equivalence of degrees;
- d. To encourage increased contacts between its members and the international academic world;
- e. To study, and make known the educational and related needs of African university institutions and as far as practicable, to coordinate the means whereby those needs may be met;
- f. To encourage the development and wider use of African languages;
- g. To organise, encourage and support seminars and conferences between African university teachers, administrators, and other dealing with problems of higher education in Africa.

In order to achieve the above aims, the Association has established:

- An INTERAF scholarship programme for the training of students and University staff
- A Documentation and Information Centre for the collection, classification and dissemination of information on higher education and research in Africa

A number of conferences and seminars have been organised to improve contacts among African university staff members and promote inter-university cooperation.

TRAINING PROGRAMMES OF THE AAU

Inter-African Universities Scholarship Programme (INTERAF)

Although African Governments were determined to see that the training of personnel became effective, they could not support all the various programmes involved. Thus some donor agencies were approached to help in implementing the programme (which is popularly known as the Inter-African Universities Scholarship Programme, "INTERAF"). These donor agencies were: Organisation of African Unity (OAU); US Agency for International Development (USAID); Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA); Inter-University Council for Higher Education of the United Kingdom (IUC); German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD); and UNESCO.

A programme was designed at first to provide undergraduate training in the US, but later on, it became obvious that it would be preferable to train African students in their own environment at least for their first degree not only because this would reduce costs and brain-drain, but also because the courses would be more relevant. Thus by 1967, the INTERAF Programme was launched and the AAU was made responsible for its administration. From 1970 to 1980, over 2000 students were placed through the Programme in different member universities.

In 1978, the Vice-Chancellors and Presidents of African Universities decided that a postgraduate training programme for university staff and research fellows should be launched as a second stage of the INTERAF Programme. This was prompted by the fact that most African universities were in an early stage of development and depended largely on expatriate staff - a situation neither possible nor desirable to continue.

The programme was, likewise, referred to the AAU for implementation which it did along two lines:

- i. Offering scholarships
- ii. Giving study leaves, sabbaticals, etc to academic staff members in African or non-African universities.

Although the undergraduate programme has now been phased out, the following priority areas for staff training have been identified:

- Food and agriculture
- Science and technology
- Medical science
- Economics

So far AAU has procured donations for awarding scholarships to be taken up in African member university. We expect to raise at least 100 for the first phase of the programme. Contacts and submissions have already been made to overseas universities and results are expected soon.

The programme also makes provisions for training middle level personnel, eg laboratory technicians and library assistants, and refugees through:

1. Regional training centres to be set up in the four main regions in the continent (North Africa, East and Southern Africa, Central and West Africa). Nucleii institutes will be modernised with appropriate equipment.
2. Overseas training is planned in cases where specialisation and facilities are inadequate.

FOOD AND NUTRITION PROJECT FOR AFRICA (JOINT AAU/UNU PROJECT)

It is expected that EEC will fund the project in the framework of Lome II Convention (\$7 million in five years). The first phase (\$1.5m) is envisaged to start in May 1985. The objective of this project is to strengthen existing food and nutrition institutes by way of training, equipment and literature. Stress will be made in the first phase on post-harvest and technology of food preservation. (It is estimated that between 35-40% of food is lost at this stage.) Two studies are planned within this programme:

Information on "centres of excellence"

This is to complement the programme of training of academic staff. It is intended to gather information on where such training can best be carried out in Africa.

Computer science programme

The role of computers in Universities is gaining importance everyday. A consultancy is, therefore, intended to survey the state of the art of the subject in the member universities and indicate ways and means of cooperation and development.

STAFF EXCHANGE

This is also believed to be a very important programme, since through such exchange, research experience is gained while contributing to teaching of courses for which staff are in shortage.

OTHER PROGRAMMES

Who-is-Who in African Universities

The preliminary stage was published following the 6th General Conference. The next stage is underway. A country by country list of staff of African universities including speciality, department, etc is being compiled and is expected to be completed before the end of 1985.

Directory of African Universities

This includes all the basic information on the 86 member universities and is to be revised and up-dated periodically.