



ASSOCIATION OF AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES  
ASSOCIATION DES UNIVERSITES AFRICAINES  
اتحاد الجامعات الإفريقية

ASSOCIATION OF  
AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES  
(AAU)

# OUR JOURNEY TO 2025

2020 - 2025 STRATEGIC PLAN



**Promoting Socioeconomic  
Development through Higher Education**



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# ACRONYMS

AAU	Association of African Universities
ACE	Africa Centres of Excellence
AFREN	African Research and Education Network
AfriQAN	African Quality Assurance Network
AQRM	African Quality Rating Mechanism
ASG-QA	African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance
ARUA	African Research Universities Alliance
AU	African Union
AUC	African Union Commission
AWAU	Association of West African Universities
CAMES	Conseil Africain et Malgache pour l'Enseignement Supérieur
CESA	Continental Education Strategy for Africa
COREVIP	Conference of Rectors, Vice Chancellors, and Presidents of African Universities
DAAD	German Academic Exchange Service
DATAD-R	Database of African Theses and Dissertations including Research
EARO	East African Regional Office
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EUA	European Universities Association
GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio
HAQAA	Harmonization of African Higher Education Quality Assurance and Accreditation
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
ICT	Information Communication Technology
IUCEA	Inter-University Council for East Africa
KRA	Key Result Area
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MRCI	Mobilizing Regional Capacity Initiative
NARO	North African Regional Office
NREN	National Research and Education Network
PAQAF	Pan African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Framework
PAU	Pan African University
PASET	Partnership for Skills in Applied Sciences, Engineering and Technology
RUFORUM	Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture
SARUA	Southern African Regional Universities Association
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
STISA	Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WASCAL	West African Science Service Center on Climate Change and Adapted Land Use

# FOREWORD

Over the years, the Association of African Universities' (AAU) outstanding support and advocacy for universities' teaching, learning, scholarship and community engagement activities have demonstrated the values of its commitment to Africa's higher education sector. The distinctive position of the Association was further demonstrated when the African Union Commission (AUC) named it as its lead Implementing Agency on Higher Education, and in December 2016 signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Association that established the framework for cooperation and collaboration covering a number of key areas that included promoting applied research in STEM and other disciplinary fields; supporting university linkages with external stakeholders; strengthening networks to promote research and enhance the capacity of Africa to contribute to the global pool of knowledge and innovation; facilitating leadership and management training programmes; promoting Africa scholarly works through data-mining and digitization; supporting the establishment of a Continental Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency; and strengthening internal quality assurance system in African higher education institutions and promoting best practices among sub-regional and national quality assurance agencies.

As AAU strides beyond our golden jubilee, it is the right time for us to consolidate our strengths and identify opportunities for further development to steer African higher education to its next level of excellence. After extensive consultations with various African higher education stakeholders, AAU went to work on a new Strategic Plan for 2020-2025.

This document has benefited from comprehensive stakeholder engagement and intensive review. The AAU Secretariat staff met at a retreat to review the 2016-2020 Strategic Plan and where the draft new plan should focus. AAU then hired a consultant to undertake a midterm review of the 2016-2020 Strategic Plan. An online survey was further conducted, where all higher education stakeholders were requested to share their views on what should be captured in the next AAU Strategic Plan to best meet their dynamic needs. Then -- at the July 2019 COREVIP in Cairo, Egypt -- a session was held with vice chancellors and other stakeholders to capture their views on the next Strategic Plan. The comments and suggestions of these stakeholders were used to shape the direction of this plan.

In the context of changing global trends and increasing competition in higher education, AAU considered it a priority to further strengthen intellectual engagement on topical issues that will address Africa's developmental goals. In this respect, AAU intends to continue to provide a platform where African higher education issues are discussed and accompanying key resolutions shared and disseminated to key stakeholders. The contribution of African higher education to the achievement of international development agendas including the SDGs, Agenda 2063, CESA, and STISA, lies at the heart of the goal of the current Strategic Plan.

We would like to take this opportunity to offer our sincere gratitude to all those who have contributed to the various stages of the formulation of this Strategic Plan. We call on the continued support of the entire African higher education community to make this plan a success.

**Prof. Orlando Quilambo**  
President

**Prof. Etienne Ehile**  
Secretary General





# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Background and context

The Association of African Universities (AAU) was established in November 1967 with the cardinal functions of coordinating and networking Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) at the continental level, and provide leadership in developing and promoting a common vision for African higher education. Currently, AAU has a membership of about 400 HEIs from 46 African countries. Given its continental scope of operation, inclusiveness, capacity and experience, AAU is the main advocate for and convener of all stakeholders on general matters of Higher Education (HE) in Africa. It is also entrusted by the African Union Commission (AUC) to coordinate the Higher Education Cluster of the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA16-15).

There is consensus that higher education is central to sustainable development and also posts the highest return on investment compared to other levels of education, however Africa is yet to fully leverage the potential of higher education in a manner that the emerging economies of Asia and developed countries have. Africa remains a net consumer of knowledge contributing only about 1% to global knowledge [citation to support?]. The CESA 16-25 urges African countries to invest more in higher education to accelerate national development and ensure global competitiveness.

Higher education is the promise for professionals with systemic and holistic thinking to provide leadership in addressing complex challenges such as poverty reduction, livelihood improvement, unemployment, sustainable resource utilization, and coping with adversaries of climate change. Realization of the Africa Union (AU) Agenda 2063, Building the Africa We Want, calls for, among other things, increased investment in higher education to contribute more to science, technology and innovation that will drive social and economic transformation.

The past two decades have registered impressive growth and expansion of African higher education in terms of number of HEIs (both government-supported and private), enrolment and diversity of programs. Demand for higher education in Africa supersedes the supply. Despite Africa being the most youthful continent, only 8% of the age cohort is enrolled in tertiary education, compared to the international average of around 22% [citation to support?]. While the private HEIs account for about 25% of enrolment, in many countries, public HEIs operate a dual system with a larger number of their enrolment being privately sponsored [citation to support?]. This phenomenon of privatization of higher education raises a major concern of equity of access to higher education especially by the poor and other marginalized groups of society.



Several challenges constrain African HE to play its rightful roles to development, namely; relevance - linking education, research, innovation, and development; quality of education and harmonization of standards; quality and ageing academic staff; inadequate and out-of-date infrastructure; and under-funding.

AAU is expected to champion transformation of HE in Africa through comprehensive interventions in key areas including but not limited to: building capacity for institutional leadership and management; facilitating collaboration and mobility of staff and students including Africans in the diaspora; building ICT capacity to support teaching, learning and research; enhancing contribution to global knowledge and innovation; and linking HEIs to the productive sector.

### **Rationale and process of developing the strategic plan 2020-2025**

Since 2003, successive strategic plans have guided AAU's programs and activities. The current strategic plan (2016-2020) will expire in June 2020. It is therefore imperative that a new strategic plan (2020-2025) is developed to guide programming and alignment of AAU's interventions to Africa's Agenda 2063 and the changing context.

This strategic plan has been developed through a reflective and consultative process managed by a task team and guided by a consultant. First, there were a series of internal reflections by AAU

management and staff, which culminated into a two-day staff retreat to consolidate ideas on current and future demands; new directions and trends in higher education; and strategic niche. Second, stakeholder consultations were conducted involving the AAU Governing Board and member HEIs throughout Africa.

The ideas generated through the consultations and internal reflections were synthesized and consolidated in a draft strategic plan. Third, the draft strategic plan was circulated to stakeholders for their input and validation before approval by the AAU Governing Board.

### **Performance of strategic plan 2016-2020**

A mid-term review of the 2016-2020 strategic plan commissioned in March 2019 reported on its relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, challenges, sustainability of interventions and lessons learned. This strategic plan seeks to build on these achievements while exploring means to minimize the challenges to increase impact of AAU and the entire higher education fraternity on Africa's development.

With regard to relevance, 60% of the sample indicated that the Strategic Plan contributed highly to the achievement of AAU mandate; two thirds were of the view that the AAU strategic plan addressed the needs and demands of stakeholders in Africa's higher education; and 75% rated the relevance of activities in the strategic plan to be between high and very high.

**The effectiveness of the seven key results areas in the strategic plan were as follows:**

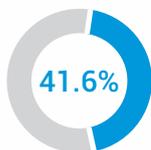
**Key Result Area 1**  
Strengthening HEIs  
Delivery Capacity In  
Africa Since 2016



**Key Result Area 2**  
Knowledge Generation,  
Management And  
Dissemination  
Since 2016



**Key Result Area 3**  
Supporting HEIs to  
respond to local and  
regional needs since  
2016



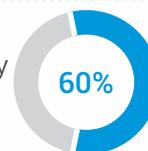
**Key Result Area 4**  
Engaging with African  
and development  
partners for improved  
collaboration since 2016



**Key Result Area 5**  
Promoting HEI's  
engagements in  
communities since  
2016



**Key Result Area 6**  
Strengthening capacity  
for service delivery at  
AAU Secretariat since  
2016



**Key Result Area 7**  
Improving AAU  
membership size,  
quality & commitment  
since 2016



The report explains that inadequate funding was the major cause of under-performance on most of the KRAs that scored below 50%.

Efficiency of timeline and quality of reporting was rated above average despite several constraints including inadequate staffing at the secretariat, limited participation HEIs from the non-English speaking countries (i.e Lusophone, Francophone and Arabophone), weaknesses in the monitoring tool, and insufficient ICT infrastructure. On sustainability, some stakeholders thought the results achieved were highly sustainable and had potential for scaling up while others thought that sustainability of AAU's interventions is highly limited by dependence on donor funding.

The major challenges identified included: inadequate funding and human resource capacity at the secretariat, limited participation of member HEIs, inadequate communication and publicity of AAU activities, weaknesses in the monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, and limited coverage – benefitting only a few HEIs.

The lessons learned based on the findings of the mid-term review suggest that AAU needs to align all its projects and activities to the key results areas and prioritize those that benefit a larger proportion of its members; the current human

resource capacity at AAU secretariat is inadequate (in terms of numbers and technical capacity) to implement all activities of the key results areas in the strategic plan; AAU will need to explore alternative and multiple sources of funding to support Africa-wide interventions and ensure sustainability; and AAU needs to explore ways of enhancing participation of HEIs from the Lusophone, Francophone and Arabophone countries.

**Strategic directions for 2020-2025**

AAU will continue to pursue its vision: "to be the leading advocate for higher education in Africa, with the capacity to provide support for its member institutions in meeting national, continental and global needs" and its mission: "to enhance the quality and relevance of higher education in Africa and strengthen its contribution to Africa's development". In pursuance of its vision and mission, AAU will uphold the following core values: transparency, accountability, equity and inclusiveness, excellence and professionalism, responsiveness, sustainability, and teamwork and collective action.

For the 2020-2025 period, AAU will pursue four strategic results as outlined in Table 1.

**Table 1: Strategic results and corresponding strategies and performance indicators**

Strategic Result	Strategies	Performance Indicators
<b>Favourable policy environment and higher education in Africa prioritized at national, regional and continental levels resulting from evidence-based advocacy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Setting intellectual agenda and advancing knowledge by generating credible evidence as basis for providing reliable advice on policies and practices in higher education in Africa</li> <li>• Convening and facilitating fora for debate and dialogue on higher education in Africa</li> <li>• Lobby African states to domesticate and operationalize continental and regional frameworks for higher education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A mechanism for generating evidence on HE in Africa</li> <li>• Advocacy strategy for AAU-developed and operationalized</li> <li>• Number of publications commissioned by AAU on the state of HE in Africa.</li> <li>• Number of continent-wide programs on HE initiated and implemented by AAU</li> <li>• Changes in HE policies and practices resulting from programs initiated and implemented by AAU</li> <li>• Number of events and policy dialogues on HE in Africa</li> <li>• Number of recommendations on HE in Africa from AAU endorsed by African Union Commission (AUC)</li> <li>• Advocacy and lobbying strategy developed and operationalized</li> </ul>
<b>The capacity of AAU Secretariat and member universities strengthened to deliver on their mandates</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthening the AAU secretariat with adequate and competent staff and updated facilities.</li> <li>• Decentralisation of AAU functions and service delivery to increase effectiveness in mobilisation, reaching out, and delivery of services to all members across the continent</li> <li>• Develop and implement strategic capacity strengthening programs for member HEIs to improve governance and management of HEIs in Africa</li> <li>• Harness Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to enhance AAU's effectiveness, efficiency and visibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proportion and extent of AAU targets achieved</li> <li>• Functional AAU branches in different regions of Africa</li> <li>• Proportional increase in members involved and accessing services of AAU</li> <li>• Strategic capacity strengthening programs developed and implemented for AAU members</li> <li>• Dissatisfaction about management of AAU member HEIs reduced as stakeholder confidence in the institutions increases.</li> <li>• Teams of African academics in the diaspora interacting with African HEIs</li> <li>• Increase in online visibility of AAU and member HEIs</li> <li>• Increase in interactions and effective communication between AAU secretariat and member HEIs</li> </ul>

Strategic Result	Strategies	Performance Indicators
<b>Higher education in Africa harmonized and standardized to enhance inter-institutional collaboration, networking and competitiveness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish the African higher education data bank to profile HEIs to facilitate partnership and networking within and outside Africa</li> <li>• Facilitate the harmonization of higher education standards and guidelines in Africa's HE with a focus on operationalization of the African Quality Rating</li> <li>• Develop platforms for knowledge exchange and visibility of member HEIs Mechanism (AQRM) to rate African HEIs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Functional and regularly updated database for HEIs in Africa</li> <li>• Percentage increase in institutional collaborations and partnerships among African HEIs including mobility of students and staff</li> <li>• Acceptable common standards and guidelines enforced among African HEIs for quality control</li> <li>• African HEIs regularly rated based on AQRM</li> <li>• Percentage increase in citation of African scholars and reference to leading practices and innovations from African HEIs</li> </ul>
<b>Sufficient financial resources mobilized and sustainable financing mechanisms for AAU's initiated</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mobilizing more members and increasing member financial commitment to AAU</li> <li>• Strengthening capacity for grant making to mobilize resources</li> <li>• Pursuing alternative approaches to resource mobilization including fundraising campaigns, creating an endowment fund, commercialization of services; and investments.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A resource mobilization strategy developed and operationalized</li> <li>• Percentage increase in AAU membership</li> <li>• Percentage increase in funds mobilised from different sources and investment portfolio</li> <li>• Number of initiatives in place for generation of finance on a sustainable basis</li> </ul>

### Implementation of the strategic plan

In general, this strategic plan focuses on catalysing higher education to significantly contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and African Union's Agenda 2063 (The Africa We Want) characterized by inclusive growth and sustainable development; good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law; people-driven development unleashing the potential of women and youth. The strategic plan is directly anchored in CESA-16-25 that aspires for a qualitative system of education and training to provide the African continent with

efficient human resources adapted to African core values. It is anticipated however, that successful implementation will require: political will and commitment at the African Union Commission and Government levels; shared ownership by key stakeholders; preparedness and capacity of AAU secretariat to coordinate, manage and monitor continent-wide interventions; and mobilization of sufficient resources.

For systematic and precise implementation, a medium-term operational plan 2020 – 2023 will be developed with specific deliverables, milestones and corresponding activities for each



year in line with each of the strategic result areas. Annual reviews of the operational plan will be performed to take stock of the achievements, challenges and draw lessons to inform implementation of the following year's activities. The AAU Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) framework of 2018 will be reviewed and adapted to the 2020-2025 strategic plan and to make the processes as participatory as possible. Linked to the MEL is the communication strategy to guide sharing information on various platforms for joint learning and for visibility and transparency of AAU.

A mid-term evaluation of the strategic plan will be conducted by 2023 to establish how well the strategies are working and accordingly refocus implementation of the second half of the period. A comprehensive final evaluation will be conducted by the end of the fifth year (2025) of the strategic plan to establish the extent to which the anticipated outputs and outcomes were achieved and the lessons learnt therefrom. For inclusivity,

implementation will have to be sensitive to gender at all levels. To maintain focus on gender throughout implementation, the MEL will provide specific indicators on gender that compels all actors to give due attention and to capture the relevant data and information.

To enhance effectiveness and efficiency, AAU will deploy appropriate ICT and encourage member HEIs to develop robust ICT infrastructure to, among other things, increase access to education; improve delivery of learning, communication and dissemination of knowledge; interactions with stakeholders; and increasing visibility. The AAU organizational structure and systems will be reviewed and adjusted to increase participation of the member HEIs through decentralization and ensure effective implementation of the strategic plan. Priority will be placed on recruitment of competent personnel into established, but vacant positions, and introduce staff development programs to enhance performance.

# 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background to Association of African Universities (AAU)

The Association of African Universities (AAU) was established in November 1967 with the cardinal functions of coordinating and networking Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) at the continental level, and to provide leadership in developing and promoting a common vision for African higher education. The Association has grown from the initial membership of 34 public universities in 1967 to 400 member HEIs (both public and private) in 2020 from 46 African countries.

AAU is headquartered in Accra, Ghana, where it is privileged to own a permanent home constructed with support from the Government of the Republic of Ghana. Cognizant of other associations involving HEIs in Africa that have emerged over the years, AAU remains the only one with the continent-wide scope and embracing all forms of disciplinary orientation.

Its broad-based nature, inclusiveness and capacity have made AAU the main advocate for and convener of stakeholders on general matters of Higher Education (HE) in Africa. AAU commissions strategic research to generate evidence for advocacy and inform continental

higher education policies and practices and serves as the intelligence arm of HE in Africa. Because of its experience, expertise and scope of operation, the African Union Commission (AUC) has entrusted AAU to coordinate the Higher Education Cluster of the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16-25).

### 1.2 Objectives

The main objectives of AAU are to:

1. Strengthen Higher Education Institutions' Delivery Capacity in Africa
2. Improve Knowledge Generation, Management and Dissemination
3. Improve Collaboration with African and International Development Partners
4. Enhance Quality Assurance, Harmonization and Accreditation
5. Strengthen Capacity for Service Delivery at the AAU Secretariat
6. Improve AAU Membership Size, Quality and Commitment

## 1.3 Status of Higher Education in Africa

### 1.3.1 Importance of Higher Education

There is consensus that higher education is central to development of any nation. The emerging economies of Asia as well as the developed countries are consistently and strategically investing in higher education as the driver and enabler of sustainable development. Africa has lagged behind in this regard and will need to do much more to catch up with the rest of the world. The CESA 16-25 for example puts it emphatically that; *"...building a tertiary education system is no more a luxury for African countries .....but a critical imperative for national development and global competitiveness"*.<sup>1</sup> The concern for the sustainability of Africa's development is a call on HEIs to build capacity for a generation of professionals who are trained in systemic and holistic thinking, familiar with field-based conditions, experienced in problem-solving approaches and endowed with leadership qualities for mediating among multiple groups of stakeholders, and who are ready to tackle complex issues that include poverty reduction, rural and urban livelihood improvement, resource development, management and conservation and biodiversity preservation.<sup>2</sup>

The demand for higher education in Africa supersedes the supply albeit impressive growth of the sector in the past two decades. In Africa only 8% of the college-age cohort is enrolled in tertiary education, compared to an international average of around 22%,<sup>3</sup> yet Africa is the most youthful continent.<sup>4</sup> For a long time, higher education was a preserve of governments, however, in recent times, the private providers are increasingly becoming stronger players in the sector and currently estimated to be accounting for about 25% of enrolment in higher education (CESA 16-25). Amidst this progress is a major concern of the

relevance and quality of higher education with respect to the extent to which higher education addresses the development challenges of their respective countries and the African continent in general and contribution to global knowledge. Africa remains a net consumer of knowledge and contributes only a decimal 1% to global knowledge. Doran (2017)<sup>5</sup> challenges this situation that in the long run, no region or nation can remain a simple "user" of new knowledge, but must also become a "creator" of new knowledge. Realization of the Africa Union (AU) Agenda 2063 calls for among other things increased investment in higher education to contribute more to science, technology and innovation that will drive social and economic transformation. Reforms in higher education can be instrumental in addressing Africa's socio-economic challenges such as unemployment and environment management, and being a tool for promoting democratic governance (see Doran 2017).

Sustained investment in higher education by African nations -- especially in the sub-Saharan Africa -- has been distorted by conflicting reports on the value of investment in higher education. Four decades ago, the World Bank (1980) reported that in developing countries, returns to investment in higher education, secondary education and basic education were 12%, 17% and 27% respectively<sup>6</sup>. This made African nations invest more in expanding access to primary education and higher education was accorded least attention. Recent evidence however shows that higher education posts the highest returns to investment<sup>7</sup> especially in addressing the critical challenges of productivity, poverty, and employment. There is now renewed attention and increasing investment in higher education as an instrument of development by both governments and development partners.

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<sup>1</sup>The Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2016 - 2025

<sup>2</sup>Mutisya, E., Nagao, M. (2014) The role of higher education for sustainable development in Africa, African Journal of Sustainable Development, vol 4(3).

<sup>3</sup>MacGregor, K. (2016) The world needs strong higher education in Africa, University World News, accessible at: <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20160305082428546>

<sup>4</sup>College age is 18 – 24 years (though based on the United States of America standards) – a cohort therefore is a group of people in that age bracket.

<sup>5</sup>Doran, G. (2017) The role of higher education in Africa's sustainable development, NCURA Magazine, October/November 2017

<sup>6</sup>The World Development Report 1980

<sup>7</sup>Psacharopoulos, G., Patrinos, A.H., (2018) Returns to Investment in Education: A decennial Review of the Global Literature, Research Working Paper 8402, World Bank.

### 1.3.2 Challenges of Higher Education in Africa

Individual HEIs and countries have their peculiar challenges but there are also differences associated with the colonial influences in Anglophone, Francophone, Lusophone and Arabophone countries. Generally, higher education in Africa faces the following challenges:

- Relevance – the challenge of linking education, research and innovation, and development. The rising levels of unemployment of graduates from HEIs haunts the relevance of HE in Africa;
- Quality – the harmonization of standards and quality assurance mechanisms to increase global competitiveness of African HEIs;
- Equitable access - the capacity to absorb the massive number of secondary education leavers requires expansion of infrastructure and facilities and deployment of ICT-supported learning models such as distance learning. The increasing cost of higher education is excluding the socially marginalized groups in society, particularly the poor;
- Quality and ageing academic staff – a large proportion of experienced staff are ageing and there is an urgent need for renewal of the teaching force notwithstanding the brain drain that continues to hemorrhage the African academia. Retention of high-quality staff calls for improvement in working and living conditions and remuneration;
- Inadequate and out of date infrastructure – that do not match the current level of modernization. ICT infrastructure in most HEIs in Africa is underdeveloped and access to the Internet remains very costly and yet it is essential in all functions of HEIs;
- Under funding of HEIs – is the cause of most other challenges in HEIs. There is need to significantly increase funding if it is to transform to cope with the current and future demands and expectations.
- In view of these challenges, AAU and its partners will have to design comprehensive interventions in key areas including but not limited to: building capacity for institutional leadership and management; facilitating collaboration and mobility of staff and students including Africans in the diaspora; empowering women and promoting gender equality; building ICT capacity to support teaching, learning and research; enhancing contribution to global knowledge and innovation; and linking HEIs to the productive sector.



## 1.4 Rationale for the strategic plan

The challenges of higher education in Africa are enormous and complex. The urgency to reform higher education in Africa requires multiple interventions at all levels -- institutional, national, regional and continental. Higher education is key to implementation of the Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa (STISA)<sup>8</sup> and CESA 16-25, both of which are core to building the Africa we want (Agenda 2063) and consistent with the SDGs. Achievement of Aspiration 1 of Agenda 2063 namely, "A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development" is premised on the hope that substantial investments will be made in education to develop human and social capital through an education and skills revolution emphasizing innovation, science and technology. The impact of AAU on higher education in Africa is to the extent it can catalyze transformational changes at all those levels. For this reason, AAU has to focus on strategic areas within its mandate that will trigger and influence the desired changes in the higher education sector.

Since 2003, AAU's programs and interventions have been guided by successive strategic plans. The current strategic plan expires in June 2020 (2016-2020). It was imperative that a new strategic plan (2020-2025) focused on Africa's

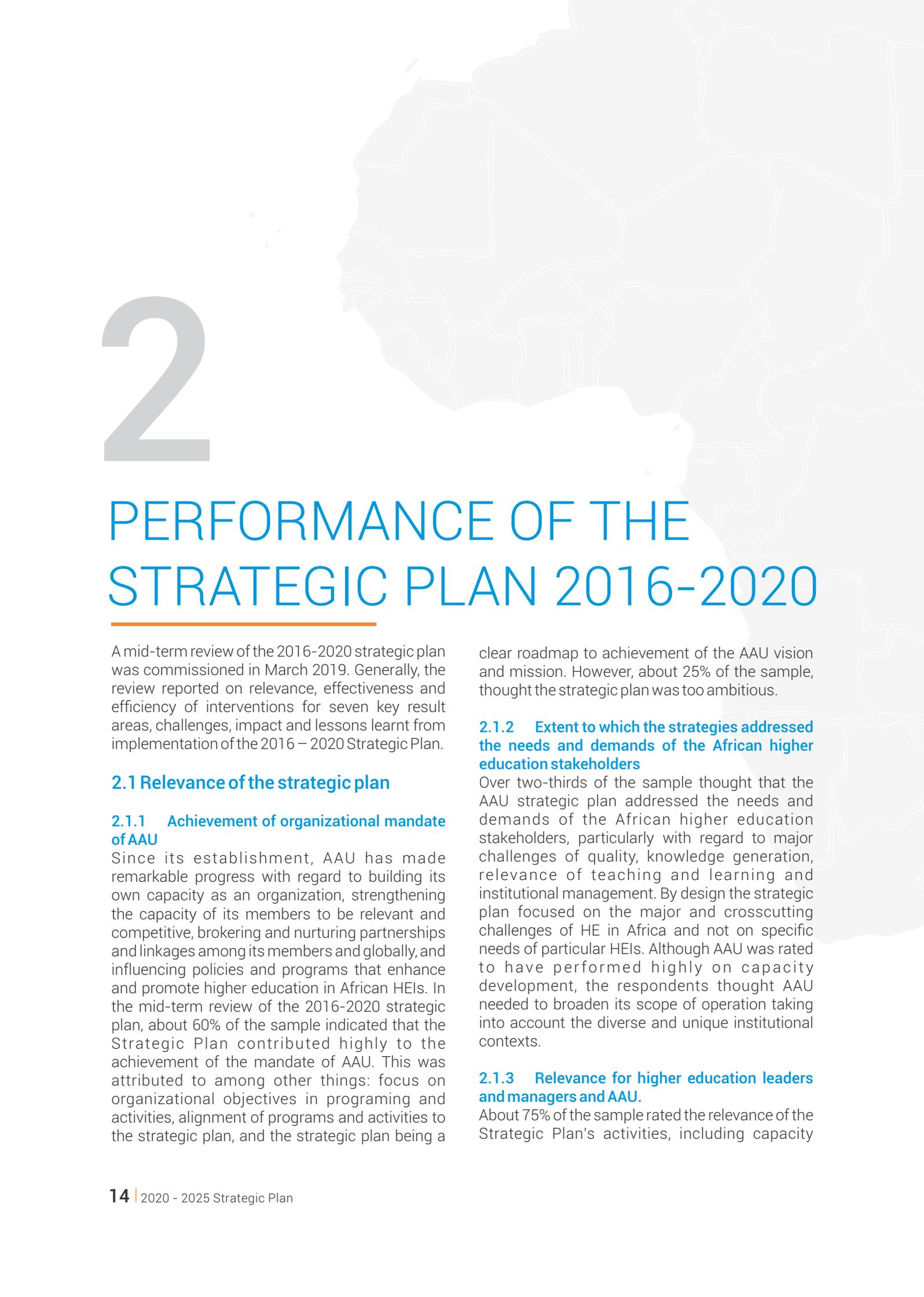
agenda 2063 and SDGs is in place to guide programming of AAU interventions and activities in the context of changing geo-political, socio-economic, technological, and ecological environments.

## 1.5 Process of developing the strategic plan 2020-2025

The strategic plan was developed through a reflective and consultative process managed by a task team and guided by a consultant. The process started with a series of internal reflections by AAU management and staff. These reflections culminated in a two-day staff retreat to consolidate ideas on current and future demands from the member HEIs and other stakeholders; new directions and trends in higher education; and clarification of AAU's niche and strategic direction. The internal reflection processes were followed by stakeholder consultations involving the AAU Governing Board and HEIs all over Africa. The ideas generated through the consultations and internal reflections were synthesized and consolidated in a draft strategic plan. Drafting of the plan was informed by review of relevant literature to contextualize the aspirations of AAU as expressed in this strategic plan. The draft strategic plan was circulated to stakeholders for their further input and validation before approval by the AAU Governing Board.

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<sup>8</sup>Science Technology and Innovation for Africa 2024 accessible at: [https://au.int/sites/default/files/newsevents/workingdocuments/33178-wd-stisa-english\\_-\\_final.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/newsevents/workingdocuments/33178-wd-stisa-english_-_final.pdf)



# 2

## PERFORMANCE OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN 2016-2020

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A mid-term review of the 2016-2020 strategic plan was commissioned in March 2019. Generally, the review reported on relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of interventions for seven key result areas, challenges, impact and lessons learnt from implementation of the 2016 – 2020 Strategic Plan.

### 2.1 Relevance of the strategic plan

#### 2.1.1 Achievement of organizational mandate of AAU

Since its establishment, AAU has made remarkable progress with regard to building its own capacity as an organization, strengthening the capacity of its members to be relevant and competitive, brokering and nurturing partnerships and linkages among its members and globally, and influencing policies and programs that enhance and promote higher education in African HEIs. In the mid-term review of the 2016-2020 strategic plan, about 60% of the sample indicated that the Strategic Plan contributed highly to the achievement of the mandate of AAU. This was attributed to among other things: focus on organizational objectives in programing and activities, alignment of programs and activities to the strategic plan, and the strategic plan being a

clear roadmap to achievement of the AAU vision and mission. However, about 25% of the sample, thought the strategic plan was too ambitious.

#### 2.1.2 Extent to which the strategies addressed the needs and demands of the African higher education stakeholders

Over two-thirds of the sample thought that the AAU strategic plan addressed the needs and demands of the African higher education stakeholders, particularly with regard to major challenges of quality, knowledge generation, relevance of teaching and learning and institutional management. By design the strategic plan focused on the major and crosscutting challenges of HE in Africa and not on specific needs of particular HEIs. Although AAU was rated to have performed highly on capacity development, the respondents thought AAU needed to broaden its scope of operation taking into account the diverse and unique institutional contexts.

#### 2.1.3 Relevance for higher education leaders and managers and AAU.

About 75% of the sample rated the relevance of the Strategic Plan's activities, including capacity

building for higher education leaders and managers and AAU Staff to be between high and very high. Different levels of managers in HEIs

have been targeted with appropriate training though not all member HEIs benefitted.

## 2.2 Effectiveness of the strategic plan

Table 2 presents the mean scores of effectiveness for the seven key results areas of the AAU strategic plan 2016-2020.

Key Result Area (KRA)	Mean effectiveness score (%)
<b>KRA 1</b> : Strengthening HEIs Delivery Capacity In Africa Since 2016	66.7
<b>KRA 2</b> : Knowledge Generation, Management And Dissemination Since 2016	41.6
<b>KRA 3</b> : Supporting HEIs to respond to local and regional needs since 2016	41.6
<b>KRA 4</b> : Engaging with African and development partners for improved collaboration since 2016	41.6
<b>KRA 5</b> : Promoting HEIs engagements in communities since 2016	41.6
<b>KRA 6</b> : Strengthening capacity for service delivery at AAU Secretariat since 2016	60
<b>KRA 7</b> : improving AAU membership size, quality & commitment since 2016	16.7

It is explained that inadequate funding was the cause of under-performance on most of the KRAs that scored less than 50%.

## 2.3 Efficiency

AAU's efficiency of timeline and quality of the reporting was rated above average. Some of the factors that constrained efficiency included: limited funding, inadequate staffing at the AAU secretariat, diversity of languages of communication – participation of HEIs from the non-English speaking (i.e Lusophone, Francophone and Arabophone) countries was less, weaknesses in the monitoring that did not capture comprehensive data, and low levels of ICT utilization.

## 2.4 Sustainability and Impact

On the issue of sustainability and impact of the strategic plan, the respondents had mixed views. Some thought the results achieved were highly sustainable and would be scaled up to have continent-wide impact while others thought that unless AAU pursued alternative resource mobilization (other than donors) and from multiple sources, their activities would not be sustainable. Because of dependence on donors for funding, AAU is in some cases tempted to engage in small projects that do not have continent-wide impact on higher education.

## 2.5 Challenges of implementation of the strategic plan

The general challenges that affected the effectiveness and efficiency of implementation of the strategic plan included inadequate:

- Funding was the major limitation as the sources of funding are limited
- Human resource capacity at the AAU secretariat to implement all programs and activities of the strategic plan
- Participation of all member HEIs limiting the scope of operation and non-fulfilment of member's obligations including payment of subscription
- Publicity and communication of the activities and programs of AAU
- Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms or systems to guide the implementation of the plan and to detect challenges early enough for corrective actions
- Coverage benefiting only a few HEIs near the AAU secretariat
- Capacity to influence policies and practices in the member HEIs.
- Sensitization about AAU beyond the Vice-Chancellors and Rectors requiring continuous



sensitization due to high turnover of the leaders of HEIs.

## 2.6 Lessons Learned

Based on the mid-term performance of the strategic plan 2016-2020, the following lessons have been learned to inform implementation of the remaining period of the plan and for the future strategic plans;

- AAU is currently engaged in very many projects some of which are not properly aligned to Key Results Areas in the Strategic Plan and without proper implementation schedules of activities. This makes it difficult to aggregate all activities of AAU in line with the Strategic Plan. In the future, AAU will have to prioritize and focus on broad interventions that benefit most of its membership across the continent.
- The current human resource capacity of AAU secretariat is inadequate (in terms of numbers and technical capacity) to implement all activities of the key results areas in the Strategic Plan. Even if funding was not limiting, achievement of the Strategic Plan would require more staff who are also provided with capacity enhancement training based on a comprehensive competence assessment.
- Funding is the most limiting factor for AAU to implement all that is articulated in the Strategic Plan. Currently AAU relies on member contributions and grants from donors. AAU will need to explore alternative sources of funding including generation of funds through service provision, fundraising, approaching African philanthropists and private sector with viable proposals, and soliciting support from the African governments. This is very critical for the sustainability of AAU programs and activities.
- There has been less participation of HEIs from French, Arabic, and Portuguese-speaking countries. This may create a sense of exclusion and resentment among such HEIs. AAU will need to address these disparities in terms of service delivery to increase ownership and commitment to AAU. All AAU member HEIs need to fully participate in the formulation and implementation of the Strategic Plan.

# 3

## SITUATION ANALYSIS: THE STATE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN AFRICA

### 3.1 Progress in higher education in Africa

In the current knowledge and technology driven global economy, higher education is increasingly becoming central to the development of any country. This is well articulated in the United Nations' 2030 Agenda (or the SDGs), and African Union's Agenda 2063 where higher education is expected to solve societal problems and spearhead socio-economic development through research and innovation and training the experts to champion development. It is now acknowledged that investing more in higher education can accelerate Africa's development as Nilekani and Lewis (2009) emphatically stated:

*"Contrary to the conventional wisdom that investment in basic education is sufficient for African development, higher education builds the intellectual capital required for sustainable development. A core mission of higher education is creating knowledge that offers solutions to the most critical problems faced by society, including*

*public health crises, endangered environment and food security, growing energy needs and an urbanizing population. A relevant, sustainable basic education system cannot be achieved without investing in higher education.....".*

Overall, there has been tremendous growth in higher education in Africa in the past two decades but this growth lags behind the demand. There has been significant increase in both public and private HEIs, which have also been expanding in terms of enrolment and programs offered. In sub-Saharan Africa, the number of public universities grew from about 100 to 500 between 1990 and 2014 while in the same period, the number of private tertiary institutions grew from about 30 to over 1,000. Enrolment has grown from less than 400,000 in 1970 to 7.2 million in 2013, posting the highest annual Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of 4.3% compared to the global annual average of 2.8% for the same period. Despite this growth, the demand for higher education remains higher than what the current HEIs can absorb. Enrolment is still the lowest (about 7%) in the world.

The renewed importance of higher education has inspired the development of continental strategies such as the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16-25), the Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa (STISA-2024) and the global Education 2030 Agenda of the United Nations. These strategies are intended to guide the implementation of higher education to better contribute to development. To regulate quality standards in higher education, several mechanisms have been put in place, namely; the Pan African Quality Assurance Framework (PAQAF), the African Quality Rating Mechanism (AQRM), the Harmonization of African Higher Education Quality Assurance and Accreditation (HAQAA) Initiative and the African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ASG-QA).

Cooperation, partnerships and collective action among HEIs in Africa continue to increase as exemplified by the emergence and growth (activity and scope) of various associations such as the Association of West African Universities (AWAU), Southern African Regional Universities Association (SARUA), Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM), West African Science Service Center on Climate Change and Adapted Land Use (WASCAL), Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA), the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA), among several others. These associations however restrict themselves with respect to disciplinary focus and/or scope of operation. Beyond the operations of these associations, AAU, being the apex higher education body for the entire continent, offers the space for collaboration and engagement to harness the collective potential of HEIs on the African continent to perform their expected roles in transforming African societies and contributing more to global development.

Governments and development partners are now increasing investment in higher education. This is seen in examples such as the Africa Higher Education Centres of Excellence (ACE) which is co-funded by African governments and the World Bank. Specific funding mechanisms such as the Partnership for Skills in Applied Sciences, Engineering and Technology (PASET), Intra-Africa Mobility Schemes - Julius Nyerere Scheme and several others present new opportunities for funding but also inherently facilitate collaboration between institutions through student and staff exchanges.

### 3.2 Challenges of Higher education in Africa

Amidst the progress elaborated above, African higher education still faces numerous challenges including but not limited to:

- Quality and relevance of education. There is increasing concern about the quality of graduates from HEIs in Africa and their inability to translate knowledge into practice to influence change. Reorientation and contextualization of education to address African development challenges such as poverty, democracy, corruption and now the burgeoning unemployment are some of the dilemmas for HE.
- Inadequate funding. HE in Africa remains grossly underfunded with out-of-date infrastructure and lack of state-of-the-art technologies for learning and research and management. Inadequate funding is perhaps the single most important constraint for African HEIs.
- Inadequacies in curricula delivery. Deficiencies in quality of graduates is associated with weaknesses in the curricula and how they are delivered. The orientation of curricula needs to shift away from producing theoretical elites and administrators to producing doers and entrepreneurs who are transformational wherever they find themselves. Due to inadequate remuneration and poor facilities, African HEIs are not competitive in attracting and retaining top instructors.
- Governance and management of HEIs. Most HEIs in Africa suffer from inadequacy of competent leadership. The top managers of HEIs are largely selected on the basis of their academic performance in their respective disciplines rather than their managerial competence. Further, they are not provided with necessary management training and orientation to enhance their leadership capabilities.
- Equity in access to HE. The trend towards commercialization of HE will continue to disadvantage and exclude some sections of society especially the poor from accessing HE and therefore create an 'elitist system'. Similarly, although there have been significant achievements in bridging the gender gap, women and girls are still under-represented especially in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields due to structural, cultural and social factors.



### 3.3 Towards improving higher education in Africa and the role of AAU

The mega challenges of higher education in Africa call for collective action to influence continent-wide policies and guidelines, mobilize massive resources for investment and harness existing capacities while building beneficial global partnerships for leverage of capacity and joint undertaking. The relevance of AAU is nested in this noble cause to mobilize and coordinate all HEIs towards a continental development agenda where HE plays a critical role. Moving together, it is imperative that HE is prioritized as a key ingredient in development and therefore allotted substantial resources for the development of the sector. Improving the HE sector also calls for heavy investment in infrastructure (including ICT) and human resources to cope with the demand for HE; harmonization of standards to ensure quality and enable inter-institutional collaborations including mobility of students and staff; and building strong partnerships and networks to strengthen the capacities of HEIs in Africa.

Being an association, AAU is expected to undertake interventions that benefit the majority of its members. Specifically, AAU has a strategic niche in advocacy at the continent level to influence policies, practices and set the higher education agenda; convene dialogues, debates and conferences such as COREVIP to create more awareness on the importance of HE in African development. It also has the niche to influence support from policy makers and development partners; facilitate harmonization of standards and quality assurance; coordinate professional associations in HE and initiate mechanisms for sharing capacity including organizing professionals in the diaspora to leverage capacity of HEIs in Africa; broker partnerships and mobilize resources for continent-wide interventions in HE.

### 3.4 Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats for AAU

#### 3.4.1 Strengths

A major strength of AAU is its continental mandate for all categories of HE regardless of their disciplinary focus. Specifically, AAU:

1. Has over fifty years of experience in HE, with a good track record and membership across the continent;
2. Recognized by major continental bodies such as the African Union Commission and

globally as the voice of higher education in Africa;

3. Has established partnerships with international agencies and donors including Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Commission, African Union Commission (AUC), European Commission (EC), Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), The World Bank and African Development Bank (AfDB);
4. Institutional capacity for programming and implementation of continent-wide interventions in HE – with tested governance and management structures including accountability systems;
5. Capacity and experience in mobilizing and convening a wide range of stakeholders to engage (virtually and physically) on matters of HE in Africa and established communication channels and platforms for interaction.

#### 3.4.2 Weaknesses

1. Inadequate funding resulting from over-reliance on external grants and membership dues as primary sources of funding, and weak resource mobilization capacity at the AAU secretariat;
2. Weak strategic partnerships and networks including with Africans in the diaspora;
3. Limited ownership and commitment of members to the association;
4. Limited connectivity with other education sectors such as TVET, Secondary and Primary Education;
5. Limited thinking out of the box and creativity to develop programs and interventions that are responsive and attractive to members' needs and donors;
6. Inadequate marketing of the impact of AAU due to weak Monitoring Evaluation and Learning (MEL) systems;
7. Unsatisfactory ICT infrastructure and services.

#### 3.4.3 Opportunities

1. Renewed recognition of the importance of higher education, and increasing demand for higher education to contribute more to Africa's development;
2. Growing higher education sector in terms of number of institutions and enrolment;
3. The continental mandate in higher education in Africa and increased activity and visibility of AAU programs;

4. The trend towards greater partnerships and networks within and outside the African higher education system and with the private sector – an opportunity for AAU to broker partnerships;
5. Increasing investments in the Africa's higher education e.g. the Africa Centres of Excellence (ACE) and confidence the development partners have in AAU to participate in or lead continent wide initiatives;
6. Decentralization to regional level (under pilot) can greatly increase reaching out with services to member HEIs and mobilization of new membership.

#### 3.4.4 Threats

1. Competition with other networks and associations addressing specific needs of AAU member institutions;
2. Dissatisfaction of member HEIs with AAU

services. If many of them do not realize tangible benefits, they may choose to withdraw their membership or withhold their subscriptions;

3. Persistent insecurity in some African nations scaring away potential development partners and investors in higher education;

#### 3.5 Stakeholder analysis

In the next five years, AAU will seek to engage more with stakeholders in formulation and implementation of programs to address the various continental challenges of higher education. There are many stakeholders that AAU interacts with, however, the boundary stakeholders (those that AAU interacts with directly) and their expectations are listed in Table 3. Being a membership-based organisation, AAU will harness relationships with all stakeholders to primarily serve the interests of her membership.



**Table 3: Stakeholders and their expectations**

Stakeholder	Expectations from AAU
African Union Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide technical support in implementing AUC higher education agenda</li> <li>• Coordinate and mobilize HEIs for collective actions towards realization of Africa's development aspirations.</li> <li>• Initiate and develop programs for continuous improvement of HE in Africa</li> </ul>
Member Institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinate and advocate for and provide policy guidance for HEIs in Africa to be priority for investment at national and continental levels</li> <li>• Facilitate harmonization and quality assurance among African HEIs</li> <li>• Provide leadership and represent African HEIs in global dialogues and discourses on HE</li> <li>• Broker and facilitate partnerships among African HEIs and global institutions to share capacities, experiences and practices that enhance their relevance, performance and competitiveness.</li> <li>• Organize dialogues, debates and conferences on HE in Africa to engage a wide range of stakeholders and lobby for HE.</li> <li>• Provide strategic capacity building for HEIs in Africa on various themes, such as in governance and management of HEIs in the 21st century</li> <li>• Develop and manage databases on HE in Africa and facilitate information and experiences sharing for purposes of cross-learning and fostering partnerships between African HEIs and between them and other HEIs outside Africa</li> <li>• Mobilize resources for implementation of transformational programs and scaling up of interventions such as the Africa Centres of Excellence (ACE).</li> </ul>
Governments and National Regulatory Agencies for Higher Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technical guidance on domestication of continental policies and practices in higher education</li> <li>• Create awareness on the state of higher education in Africa and specific challenges confronting HE;</li> <li>• Fulfillment of statutory obligations as assigned by the AU Commission</li> <li>• Build the capacity of HEIs to be competitive and relevant to national development needs;</li> <li>• Promote and facilitate collaboration and networking among universities across the continent;</li> <li>• Nurture leadership and governance of African HEIs to be adaptive and responsive to emerging conditions and needs.</li> </ul>
Development Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initiate and implement plausible programs for advancing the continental higher education agenda;</li> <li>• Advocate for increased investment and political support for HE in Africa</li> <li>• Mobilize resources from multiple sources including African governments and AAU's income generation/investments for sustainability of HE programs in Africa</li> <li>• Transparency, equity and accountability for resources mobilized</li> <li>• Internal systems that guarantee effectiveness and efficiency of resource use and service delivery</li> <li>• Demonstrate impact of AAU on higher education in Africa</li> </ul>
Other Associations and Networks on HE in Africa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinate all actors in HE to focus and contribute to Africa's HE agenda in a complementary manner;</li> <li>• Collaborate with associations and networks in formulation and implementation HE programs on the continent.</li> </ul>
Student Associations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formulation of the HE agenda in Africa;</li> <li>• Opportunities for students' career advancement and exposure.</li> </ul>

In view of some of the stakeholders especially the member HEIs, AAU had performed relatively well in convening of conferences in particular the COREVIP; capacity building in leadership, quality assurance, management of learning resources; and improvement in communication and outreach using a variety of ICT based media such as social media, website, AAU Television Station (AAU TV) and monthly Newsletters. They however

encouraged AAU to shift away from training workshops that only engage a few members to implementation of broader programs and activities that benefit majority of the members and have impact on the HE sector at continental level. Further, it was advised that AAU finds entry points for systemic influence rather than targeting only the Vice-Chancellors and Rectors of the institutions.



# 4

## THE STRATEGIC DIRECTION FOR 2020-2025

### 4.1 Vision, Mission and values

#### 4.1.1 Vision and motto

The vision of AAU is ***“to be the leading advocate for higher education in Africa, with the capacity to provide support for its member institutions in meeting national, continental and global needs”***.



The motto is “The Voice of Higher Education”

#### 4.1.2 Mission

The mission of AAU is ***“to enhance the quality and relevance of higher education in Africa and strengthen its contribution to Africa's development”***.



#### 4.1.3 Core values

AAU will operate in a value system comprising of the following core elements:



##### a) Academic freedom

Academic freedom provides the space for academic staff and students to engage in intellectual debates, knowledge generation and exchange without fear of censorship or retaliation. This includes addressing controversial issues of public interest such as governance and democracy that accommodates and exploits diversity of ideas and worldviews to advance social, and economic growth of societies.



##### b) Transparency

Transparency fosters mutual trust among stakeholders including the member HEIs. During consultations with stakeholders, it was indicated that AAU needed to focus more on programs



and activities that benefit most members. AAU will therefore endeavour to be as consultative as possible to inform fair decisions that will be made available to all stakeholders.

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**c) Accountability**

AAU will promote the principle of value for money in all its undertaking and enforce prompt accountability for resources expended and services rendered.



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**d) Equity and Inclusiveness**

AAU will create space for all stakeholders to participate and contribute and ensure a fair distribution of resources and services to all regions of the continent as well as in different categories of HEIs. AAU will also advocate for and promote equity in access to higher education taking into account the social and cultural diversity including gender. Africa is diverse in many aspects and AAU will seek to exploit that diversity to build a unified continental higher education system.



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**e) Excellence and Professionalism**

AAU will aspire for the best quality in all her interventions, apply high level performance standards and promote competitiveness of HEIs while maintaining the highest degree of credibility. Excellence also refers to the influence and impact of HEIs on societal transformation and empowerment through quality learning, research and outreach.



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**f) Responsiveness**

Being aware of the dynamic global environment in which HEIs operate, AAU will seek to adjust to the emerging trends and patterns including technology, and also be sensitive to the changing needs of her members and other stakeholders.



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**g) Sustainability**

To ensure continuity of interventions and programs, AAU will seek to empower her beneficiaries to own interventions and take and proactively mobilize resources to support their own transformation, and discourage a dependency syndrome. In the same way, AAU will continue to explore means for sustainability of her programs.



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**h) Teamwork, cooperation and solidarity**

The principle of teams and shared responsibility will be promoted at the AAU secretariat, her regional branches and amongst the member HEIs to harness all available resources and expertise. As a member-based organisation, AAU will seek to strengthen cooperation and solidarity of the member HEIs to leverage on their relative strengths for continent-wide and global impacts.



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## 4.2 Key Strategic Results

For the period 2020-2025, AAU aspires to achieve specific results in pursuance of her vision. Broadly, the results are framed in the areas of: advocacy; capacity strengthening; coordination, harmonization and networking; and resource mobilization. The overall result for AAU is to enable HEIs in Africa increase their impact in development and social well-being of African people and to contribute more to global knowledge and innovation. In contributing to this overall objective, AAU will for the next five years focus on four result areas, namely: advocating for supportive policies and prioritization of HE in Africa; strengthening capacity of the members;

coordinating and harmonizing HE in Africa; and building a resource base for sustainability of AAU interventions. These result areas and their respective strategies are further described here:

**Strategic Result 1:** Favourable policy environment and higher education in Africa prioritized at national, regional and continental levels resulting from evidence-based advocacy

Advocacy and lobbying for higher education in Africa among policy and development actors is more critical now than ever before. Higher Education in most African countries has not been given due attention for the last two decades following the Structural Adjustment Programs

that encouraged governments to invest more in primary education on the pretext that primary education offered more returns to investment than higher education. A recent study (World Bank, 2018) has shown the reverse, hence the need to heighten the advocacy and lobbying to change the mindsets of decision makers to increase investment in higher education as a means to accelerate economic growth in African countries. Advocacy takes different forms and approaches but irrespective of whichever method is adopted, it has to be evidence-based. There is limited reliable evidence generated by African institutions to demonstrate the importance and contributions of higher education in the growth and development of African nations. It is common concern that HE in Africa is currently not contributing enough to the development of African countries and continent at large or that the contribution is not clearly visible. AAU being the collective voice for HEIs in Africa must apply credible evidence and eminent people to advocate and lobby for increased investment in higher education and providing space for the essential academic freedom and institutional autonomy for HEIs to execute their functions uncensored.

The three core functions of HE namely; (1) education/learning, (2) research and (3) outreach are intended to serve people irrespective of their social, economic and political orientations. This is however possible in an environment of academic freedom and autonomous governance of the academic institutions. Cognisant that some African countries are shifting their higher education policies to make public HEIs semi-autonomous, in other countries, the leadership of public HEIs are still selected and appointed by government. In such circumstances, there is a tendency towards patronage of the leadership of HEIs to existing political system, which curtails the academic freedom that is essential for HEIs to model and nurture the practice of democratic governance, conflict resolution and respect for human rights (also see Gai Doran, 2017)<sup>13</sup>. There is growing concern about the threats to academic freedom and the impact of this phenomenon on the relevance of HE to society. In the context of pluralistic political systems that currently exist in most African countries, academic freedom and autonomy of HEIs is critical to guarantee a safe space for academic staff and students to engage

in intellectual debates, knowledge generation and exchange without fear of censorship or retaliation. The entry point to influence favourable policies for HE is through the African Union (AU), which provides a high-level political framework for lobbying and influencing African governments and development partners. AAU has gained confidence within AU as a champion for transformation of HE on the continent. For example, in 2017, AAU was entrusted by the AU Commission to coordinate and provide technical leadership for the Higher Education Cluster of the Continent Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16-25). Stakeholders therefore expect AAU to use her collective voice to influence policies that space for academic freedom and increased investment in HE in Africa. In addressing this result area, the following strategies will be pursued:

- Advocate for protection of academic freedom in HEIs in Africa to nurture free-thinking and independent framing of research, tolerance and co-existence of divergent views even on controversial societal issues such as democracy, human rights and social exclusion. Academic freedom is of fundamental importance and value to society. AAU will therefore advocate for HE policies that promote academic freedom by guaranteeing freedom of teachers and students to teach, study, and pursue knowledge and research in order to serve the African society.
- Setting intellectual agenda and advancing knowledge by generating credible evidence as basis for providing reliable advice on policies and practices in higher education in Africa. Robust evidence grounded in African context is the instrument for influencing transformative changes in policies and practices of HEI in Africa towards increased relevance. The AAU program on Mobilizing Regional Capacity Initiative (MRCI) initiated in 2007 is one example of raising awareness on the relevance of higher education to contribute to achievement of the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) and now the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through relevant policy research. AAU seeks to broaden and scale out such initiatives to make African nations benefit more from the intellectual capacity of their HEIs. Additionally, the AAU will

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<sup>13</sup>Doran, G. (2017) The Role of Higher Education for Africa's Sustainable Development, NCURA Magazine, October/November 2017.

launch the biannual International Journal of Higher Education Policy in Africa (IJHEPA). The goal here is to lead the debate and set intellectual agenda on how cutting edge and policy relevant research can meaningfully contribute to solving Africa's developmental challenges. IJHEPA further seeks to engage, inform, and stimulate scientists, professionals, academics, policy makers and researchers in ways that enable them to make better decisions and improve outcomes for Africa's socioeconomic development.

- Convening and facilitating fora for debate and dialogue on higher education in Africa. Advocating for HE is a continuous exercise that

also engages wide-range of stakeholders. The Conference of Rectors, Vice Chancellors, and Presidents of African Universities (COREVIP) is just one of such fora that can be used to create awareness on the state of HE in Africa.

- Lobby African states to domesticate and operationalize continental and regional frameworks for higher education. Aware that the context in African states varies, AAU will make deliberate efforts to reach out and support individual countries through their respective regulatory authorities on HE to domesticate the continental policy recommendations for purposes of implementation.

**Strategic Result 2:** Institutional capacity of member HEIs and AAU strengthened to deliver on their mandates

A core function of AAU is to strengthen the capacity of her member institutions to effectively deliver on their mandates of training, research and innovation and outreach. The uniqueness of HE lies in its capacity to generate knowledge (through research) and champion innovations that transform societies. The research function of African HEIs remains weak and yet it is the mechanism for influencing policies and promoting innovations that will accelerate development of African societies. The current attempt by AAU to do this through workshops in various thematic areas is limiting in terms of number of HEIs that benefit and further requires refocusing to strategic areas where AAU can make impact at the institutional level. AAU will support strengthening the institutional capacity of member HEIs not only to conduct quality research but also apply the evidence generated to influence policies and more importantly to translate research results into innovations that transform the livelihoods and welfare of the people, while taking care of environmental health. In this case, HEIs will have to build strong and mutual relationships with the private sector and other support services providers to cultivate tangible development. It is through this that HEIs will actualize their direct contribution to national development.

Through decentralization, AAU will strengthen stakeholder engagement to among other things facilitate partnerships between HEIs and private

sector players, improve resource mobilization at the regional level, and coalesce linguistic zones like the Arab and Lusophone member countries. There is an on-going experiment for AAU to create regional offices with the intention of decentralizing its service delivery to better reach out to member HEIs. These include the East Africa Regional Office (EARO) established in March, 2018 and hosted by the University of Khartoum, Sudan; and the North Africa Regional Office (NARO) established in March, 2019 and hosted by Al Azhar University, Cairo, Egypt. AAU secretariat will endeavour to recruit and/or outsource the best-qualified personnel to perform the functions of the secretariat and continuously upgrade their competences through staff development interventions. To enhance effectiveness and efficiency, AAU will harness Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and support her members to do the same to enhance interactions, visibility, and service delivery.

Programs for strengthening the capacities of the members in priority areas such as governance and management of HEIs, enhancing research and innovation capacity, and teaching/learning approaches will be developed to enhance the impact of HEIs on development. The Leadership Development (LEDEV) and Management Development (MADEV) workshops conducted by AAU are a good start in developing fully-fledged programs for current and future leaders and managers of HEIs in Africa. Further, AAU will broker partnerships with the member HEIs to strengthen their capacities in different areas of need. It is noted that there is a large number of African academics and professionals living in the diaspora

– a huge resource that has not been fully utilised yet. In collaboration with key stakeholders like the African Union Commission, Regional Economic Communities, and their missions outside Africa, AAU will mobilize African academia in the diaspora, link them to leverage capacity in African HEIs, physically or virtually, and create platforms that increase interaction among mainland Africans and those in the diaspora. For purposes of coordination with Africans in the diaspora, AAU has for example in 2019 established North America Regional Office (NAMO) in Washington DC, the United States of America. Similar coordination offices will be considered in other parts of the world.

To effectively facilitate institutional capacity building of the member HEIs, AAU must enhance its internal capacity and improve on its structures to deliver such services. Decentralisation of service delivery to regional centres is one way of extending service delivery closer to the member HEIs and increase participation. In addition, AAU will recruit competent staff at the Secretariat and strengthen ICT infrastructure to serve her membership better. Strategies that will be deployed to pursue this result include:

- Develop and implement strategic capacity strengthening programs for member HEIs. AAU will develop and implement strategic capacity development programs to strengthen capacity of her members to conduct research, influence policies with credible evidence and champion innovations. In this regard, AAU will source for opportunities for staff capacity building, promote tested models for innovations including centres of excellence and technology incubation, broker partnerships with member HEIs and short courses related to research, innovation and dissemination. Other strategic areas for capacity building include governance and management of HEIs; managing change processes in HEIs; lobbying and influencing while remaining independent; and resource

mobilisation for sustainability.

- Decentralisation of AAU functions and service delivery. To increase effectiveness in mobilisation, reaching out, and delivery of services to all members across the continent, AAU will pursue a phased decentralisation at regional level. This will among other things enhance inclusiveness in member involvement in AAU activities and collective ownership.
- Organize Africans in the diaspora to leverage capacity in African HEIs. AAU will seek to organize African academics in the diaspora and develop mechanisms through which they can leverage capacity in African HEIs.
- Harness Information and Communication Technology (ICT) among the member HEIs to enhance their access to and sharing of knowledge. Emphasis will be placed on linking the member HEIs to the Open Access digital libraries to tap into the current global knowledge systems for learning and research. AAU will support the development of new and strengthening of existing National Research and Education Networks (NRENs) as internet infrastructure providers for education and research constituencies. Further, to enhance effectiveness, efficiency and visibility, a robust ICT infrastructure at AAU secretariat and regional branches to interact more and improve service delivery to the member HEIs and other stakeholders.
- Strengthening the AAU secretariat with adequate and competent staff and up-to-date facilities. Aware of the challenges of an expanded secretariat, AAU will have to decide on functions for which they require permanent staff and those whose expertise can be outsourced. For effectiveness, the capacity of staff will have to be enhanced through professional development activities, and

adequately facilitated to perform their duties.

**Strategic Result 3.** Higher education in Africa harmonized and standardized to enhance inter-institutional collaboration, networking and competitiveness

There is consensus among development actors that higher education is a key driver of sustainable

economic growth of any country. Higher education has the responsibility to produce the human resources that govern and provide leadership in development, and generate the knowledge, technologies and innovations for transformation of African societies. To do that, higher education must be of the right quality. Quality and relevance of higher education is a matter of serious concern

(CESA 16-25) in Africa. This concern is evidenced in the low global ranking of African HEIs, minimal contribution (about 1%) to global knowledge and the growing unemployment of graduates of higher education. The rapid growth of enrolment and proliferation of HEIs in Africa call for universal standards across the continent to guarantee minimum quality expectations. In 2017, AAU developed a databank for African Theses and Dissertation (DATAD) but this is only a small component of the necessary data on higher education in Africa. A comprehensive data bank that profiles HEIs in Africa and their programs, activities and outputs will aid not only to monitor the quality but also facilitate partnerships within and outside Africa, knowledge and experience sharing.

AAU has engaged in several initiatives to harmonize higher education standards and guidelines. For example, by establishing the African Quality Assurance Network (AfriQAN), a continent-wide network for national quality assurance agencies involving the Conseil Africain et Malgache pour l'Enseignement Supérieur (CAMES) and the Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA); and has actively participated in the development of the African Union's Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Framework (PAQAF), African Quality Rating Mechanism (AQRM); and Pan African University (PAU). Recently, AAU and its collaborating consortium of four partners namely; University of Barcelona; European Universities Association (EUA); German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD); and European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) have developed the African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ASG-QA). In this strategic plan period, AAU will seek to test and institutionalize the ASG-QA. When

strengthen/broaden partnerships.

**Strategic Result 4:** Sufficient financial resources mobilized and sustainable financing mechanisms for AAU initiated

Execution of AAU's mandate and provision of service to her membership depends on the capability of the secretariat to mobilise adequate resources. AAU will explore a variety of options for mobilizing resources to support continent-wide initiatives in HE. Expanding membership of AAU will serve a dual purpose; first, to strengthen the mandate of AAU as a member-based organisation

operationalized, these standards and guidelines should enhance the competitiveness of HEIs on the continent. The strategies for achieving this result are:

- a) **Establishing a comprehensive African higher education data bank.** AAU will develop a comprehensive database that among other things profiles HEIs to facilitate partnership and networking within and outside Africa. The database will be a one-stop information centre for HEIs in Africa.
- b) **Harmonize higher education standards and guidelines in Africa's HE.** While the Addis Convention and African Credit Transfer System will harmonize credit transfer in African HEIs, for period of this strategic plan, AAU will focus on operationalization of the African Quality Rating Mechanism (AQRM) to rate African HEIs as a way to engender competition and catalyse quality improvement in HE. Harmonisation of credit transfer system will enhance the mobility of students and staff and institutional collaboration and partnerships.
- c) **Establishing platforms for knowledge exchange and visibility of member HEIs.** To facilitate learning from each other, AAU will establish various platforms for HEIs to share their research outputs, best practices and innovations including centres of excellence, and increase visibility of HEIs in Africa. These platforms will ease access to knowledge, practices and innovations generated in African HEIs internationally. AAU will build on its experience with DATAD and the AAU-Television to develop robust knowledge platforms to enhance sharing of experiences, increase visibility of African HEIs and

and secondly, expand the resource base through membership subscriptions and other contributions are collected. It is estimated that AAU's current memberships is only about 18% of the potential member HEIs in Africa. While designing services that create value for the members, the AAU secretariat will also undertake a protracted initiative to significantly increase its membership and implore existing members to fulfil their obligations. In addition to membership subscriptions and grants from development partners, AAU will explore other mechanisms for sustainable financing including fundraising,

endowments, investments and partnerships with support agencies including the private sector. Specifically, the following strategies will be pursued:

- **Mobilizing more members and increasing member commitment to AAU.** A combination of techniques will be applied to mobilize and increase membership, including using the concept of AAU ambassadors – in each country, AAU will identify an influential person to serve as AAU ambassador to reach out to potential members; use peer-to-peer influence where the leaders of member universities reach out to potential members in their respective countries; and identifying a team of eminent persons to travel to selected countries to mobilise membership. Mobilizing for additional members will go hand-in-hand with designing clear benefits and services for member institutions.
- **Strengthening capacity for grant making.**

Mobilizing resources from development partners remains a major source of funding. AAU will identify experienced professionals to support the secretariat in grant making through responding to calls for funding and preparing and marketing unsolicited proposals and develop initiatives for enhancing skills for grant making in the member HEIs. Encouraging and strengthening partnerships between member HEIs is also one way of building capacity especially among the weak HEIs.

- **Pursuing alternative approaches to resource mobilization** including various forms of fundraising campaigns, creating an endowment fund, commercialization of services such as the AAU television and fee-based institutional / continental capacity building programs; and investments. AAU will source for partners (private sector) to explore and pursue potential investment ventures and/or broker such partnerships with AAU member HEIs.



### 4.3 Performance measurement of the strategic plan

To measure the effectiveness of AAU in applying this strategic plan towards its vision and mission, appropriate indicators for the respective result areas have been identified as presented in Table 4.

**Table 4: Key performance indicators**

Strategic Result	Performance Indicators
<b>Favourable policy environment and higher education in Africa prioritized at national, regional and continental levels resulting from evidence-based advocacy</b>	Number of African states that develop policies that guarantee academic freedom and autonomy of governance of HEIs
	Extent to which HEIs provide plausible options for good governance and influence inclusive growth.
	A mechanism for generating evidence on the impact of HE in Africa
	Advocacy and lobbying strategy for AAU developed and operationalized
	Number of publications commissioned by AAU on the state of HE in Africa.
	Number of continent-wide programs on HE initiated and implemented by AAU
	Changes in HE policies and practices resulting from programs initiated and implemented by AAU
	Number of events and policy dialogues on HE in Africa
	Number of recommendations on HE in Africa from AAU endorsed by African Union Commission (AUC)
<b>The capacity of AAU Secretariat and member universities strengthened to deliver on their mandates</b>	Impact of innovations associated with HEIs
	Quality of relationships and interdependence between the academia, policy actors, and development actors including the private sector
	Functional AAU branches in different regions of Africa
	Proportional increase in members involved and accessing services of AAU
	Strategic capacity strengthening programs developed and implemented for AAU members
	Dissatisfaction about management of AAU member HEIs reduced as stakeholder confidence in the institutions increase.
	Teams of African academics in the diaspora interacting with African HEIs
	Number of African HEI linked and extent of use of the Open Access digital libraries
	Increase in online visibility of AAU and the member HEIs
	Increase in interactions and effective communication between AAU secretariat and the member HEIs
	Proportion and extent of AAU targets achieved
<b>Higher education in Africa harmonized and standardized to enhance inter-institutional collaboration, networking and competitiveness</b>	Functional and regularly updated database for HEIs in Africa
	Percentage increase in institutional collaborations and partnerships among African HEIs including mobility of students and staff
	Acceptable common standards and guidelines enforced among African HEIs for quality control
	African HEIs regularly rated based on AQRM
	Percentage increase in citation of African scholars and reference to best practices and innovations from African HEIs
<b>Sufficient financial resources mobilized and sustainable financing mechanisms for AAU's initiated</b>	A resource mobilization strategy developed and operationalized
	Percentage increase in AAU membership
	Percentage increase in funds mobilised from different sources and investment portfolio
	Number of initiatives in place for generation of finance on a sustainable basis



# 5

## IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN (2020-2025)

### 5.1 Orientation and pre-requisites for implementation of the plan

Implementation of this strategic plan will be oriented towards contributing to the African Union's Agenda 2063 (The Africa we want) broadly aiming at achieving inclusive growth and sustainable development; good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law; people-driven development unleashing the potential of women and youth. The plan is situated in the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and UNESCO Moving Forward the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, reaffirming the importance of higher education institutions in the attainment of development targets.

Specifically, the AAU strategic plan will be directly anchored by the Africa Comprehensive ten-year Continental Education strategy for Africa (CESA 16-25) that aspires for a qualitative system of education and training to provide the African

continent with efficient human resources adapted to African core values.

Successful implementation of the plan will be influenced by some pre-requisite conditions namely;

- (i) Political will and commitment at the African Union Commission and Government levels;
- (ii) Shared ownership of the plan and its implementation by key stakeholders;
- (iii) Preparedness and capacity of AAU secretariat to coordinate, manage and monitor continent-wide interventions;
- (iv) Mobilization of sufficient resources to support continental interventions in higher education.

### 5.2 Medium-term operational plan

For systematic and precise implementation of the strategic plan, a medium-term operational plan 2020 – 2023 will be developed with specific deliverables and milestones for each year in line

with each of the strategic result areas. The medium-term operational plan guides the incremental achievements of the strategic plan grounded in key lessons learned during implementation and adjustments to changing contexts, capacities and resource availability. The plan will identify the activities under each strategy to be implemented and the persons responsible for the respective outputs/deliverables. Annual reviews of the operational plan will be performed to take stock of the achievements, challenges and draw lessons to feed into implementation of the next year's activities.

### **5.3 Monitoring, evaluation and lesson learning**

Effective monitoring serves two main purposes, first is to enable early detection of errors and quick remedy or detection of best practices to be promoted, and secondly, generation of data/evidence for determining impact or relevance of an intervention. AAU developed a Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) framework in 2018 to aid tracking of performance and reporting on the strategic plan. The MEL framework will be reviewed and adapted to the 2020-2025 strategic plan. Specific measurable indicators will be developed for each of the specified deliverables/outputs and the means of verification to enable the different stakeholders capture the relevant information and data. Important considerations in the review of MEL is how to make the processes of monitoring and evaluation as participatory as possible, involving the decentralised/regional offices (when it happens) and ensuring that all stakeholders involved in an intervention participate in the monitoring of activities and tracking outcomes and impacts. Adequate documentation and information capturing is required at all levels of implementation to ensure there is sufficient data to be used in the mid-term and final evaluation of the strategic plan.

#### **5.3.1 Sharing and learning from experience**

Linked to the MEL is the communication strategy that provides information on the various platforms for sharing information and data and joint learning from experiences. Such platforms should engage all stakeholders involved in implementing an intervention and allow for sharing of the information and data being captured at different levels. The emerging lessons will be used to continuously adapt the implementation to enhance effectiveness and efficiency.

#### **5.3.2 Mid-term review of the strategic plan**

A mid-term evaluation of the strategic plan will be conducted in 2023 (2½ years) into its implementation to consolidate the achievements and experiences and determine how well the strategies are working to achieve the overall results. This review will rely to a great extent on accumulated information and data from implementation monitoring and interaction with stakeholders. Outcomes of the mid-term evaluation will be used to refocus implementation in the remaining 2½ years to end of the strategic plan.

#### **5.3.3 Final evaluation of the strategic plan**

A comprehensive final evaluation will be conducted by the end of the fifth year of the strategic plan to establish the extent to which the anticipated outputs and outcomes were achieved and the lessons therefrom will inform the next strategic plan.

### **5.4 Mainstreaming cross-cutting issues**

#### **5.4.1 Gender**

Sensitivity to gender is a matter of great concern in higher education. At all levels, stakeholders do not only have to be aware but able to take action to minimize the gender inequality starting from the students enrolled, the staffing in HEIs and AAU secretariat. AAU will at all times be sensitive to gender in all interventions. All AAU interventions will inherently provide ways of addressing social structures and other barriers that may disadvantage any gender but with special attention to women. Cognisant that there is evidence that increasing women participation accelerates economic growth among other things, inclusivity will be a guiding principle in all AAU interventions.

To ensure a deliberate focus on gender, the MEL will provide specific indicators on gender that compels all actors at different levels to give due attention and capture the relevant data and information. In this way, reporting on gender-based performance indicators will be unavoidable.

#### **5.4.2 ICT for efficiency and effectiveness**

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is now an essential tool in everyday life for individuals and organizations to ease work and increase effectiveness and efficiency. Most organisations are deploying ICTs in all aspects of their functions for that reason. The application of



ICTs is even more critical in the higher education sector as among other things, they significantly increase access to education; effectiveness in delivery of learning, communication and dissemination of knowledge; interactions among stakeholders including conducting virtual meetings; improving management and administration and increasing visibility. Because of the importance of ICTs, AAU has a Directorate of ICT, Communication and Knowledge Management (DIKM) and will therefore endeavour to develop robust ICT infrastructure at the secretariat and its regional offices and deploy appropriate state of the art ICTs in its operations and service delivery to enhance effectiveness, efficiency, and visibility.

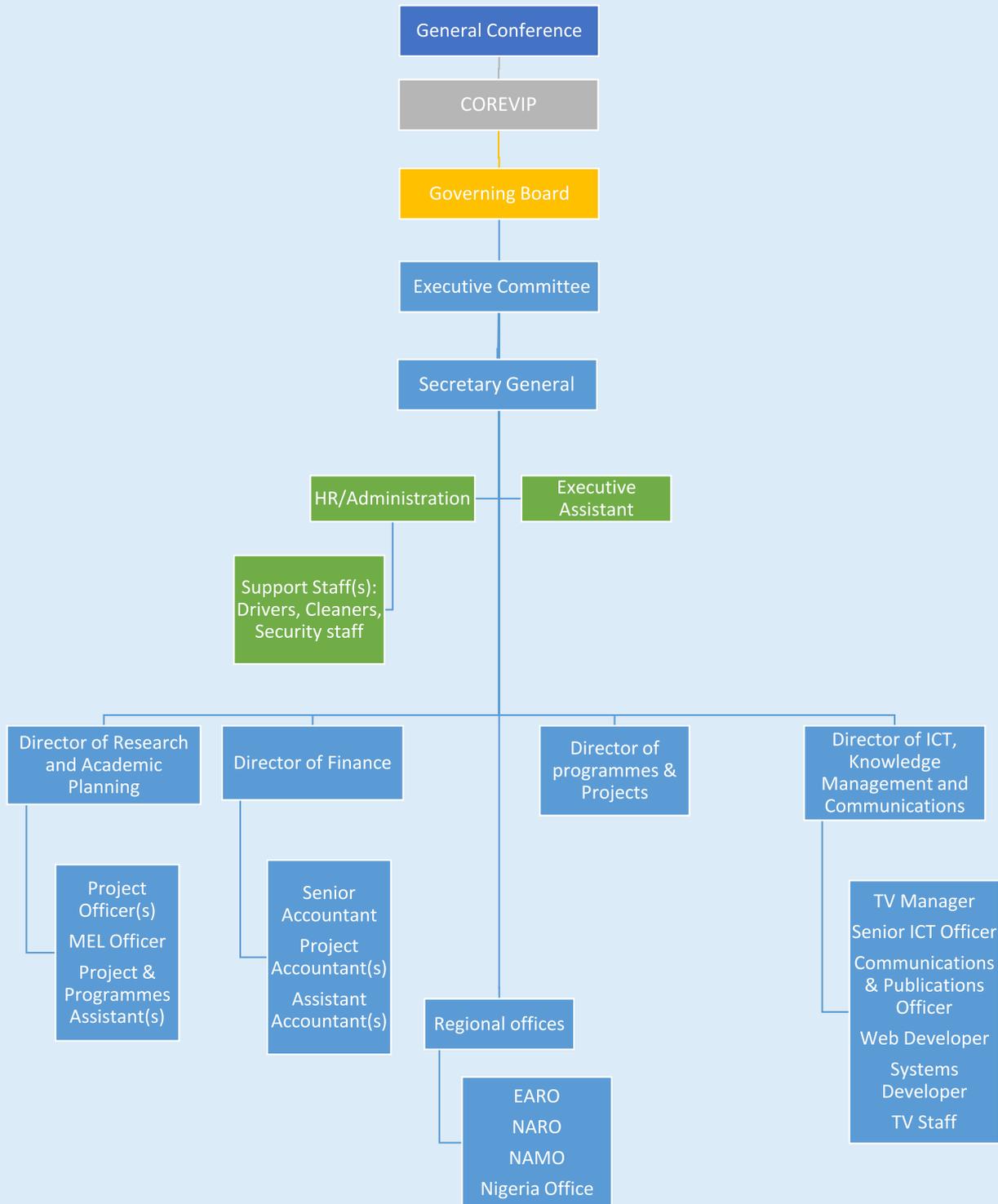
AAU will also continue to promote the development and strengthening of National Research and Education Networks (NRENs) through the African Research and Education Network (AFREN) community. NRENs are established to be the internet service providers of educational and research institutions/communities- and are fundamental for the improvement of ICT infrastructure in

African Universities. Recent examples of such networks championed by AAU include the Senegal Research and Education Network (SenREN) and West and Central African Research and Education Network (WACREN).

### **5.5 Organizational Structure to implement the strategic plan**

AAU has an elaborate governance and organisational structure with systems to effectively implement the strategic plan. Figure 1 below presents the organisational structure after restructuring in 2018. Minor adjustments to the structure could be considered to take into account the regional offices (if this is done) and how they link with the member HEIs. To operationalize the structure, priority will be placed on recruitment of competent personnel into established positions and/or outsourced through consultancies when needed. Regular staff performance appraisals will guide the staff development interventions and facilitation to maintain high level of integrity and effectiveness of AAU secretariat.

# Figure 1: The AAU Organogram





**ASSOCIATION OF AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES**  
**ASSOCIATION DES UNIVERSITES AFRICAINES**  
**اتحاد الجامعات الإفريقية**

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