

MEDITERRANEAN INTEGRATION TROUGH QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

1. *Background*

Education and labor market links are central to the Bank's role of poverty alleviation. To bridge the gap between education supply and labor market demands, more systematic attention to tertiary education and greater emphasis on accountability and incentive systems to improve service delivery are essential. Tertiary education enrollment is growing rapidly in the MENA Region. The average enrollment in MENA countries is above 30% of the population aged 18-24, which is high compared to other regions. Many countries have experienced rapid enrollment increases in the past five years, and with the expansion of secondary education and increased number of secondary graduates throughout the region, this trend is likely to increase in the coming years. In addition to this rapid expansion, tertiary education systems are seeking to diversify the type of tertiary education available, ranging from University graduate and undergraduate programs, to technical and professional degrees granted by polytechnic institutes, Community Colleges, as well as Open University programs. There is also a wide interest in the region for developing e-learning and distance education tertiary programs, and for many of the countries in the region, the expansion of the provision of private tertiary education is stated as one of their goals for the near future.

Universities are relevant institutions in promoting economic growth and promoting civil society participation. Not only for their capacity to create and disseminate knowledge, but also as organizations that attract talented people, inject new ideas, enrich cultural life and are regarded as encompassing the whole social fabric of which they are part. They are interesting development partners because they are resourceful actors and they link up with many realms of society and strands of activity. Modern universities are linked to the economic and political environment in which they operate.

With the variety of programs and institutions available, and the increasing levels of population migration, it is important for service providers, as well as for consumers and students, to have good regulation systems for the provision of services. Particularly it is important to provide quality assurance of the educational inputs and outputs and the academic and professional programs offered by the variety of tertiary education institutions. Professional associations and accrediting bodies help to improve the quality of tertiary institutions, in addition to developing clear definitions of standards. Accreditation and licensing systems are at an embryonic stage in most countries in MENA. Some of the initiatives are seeking to evaluate the quality of institutions and programs, and developing international standards that could allow the mutual recognition of credits facilitating the mobility and transfer of credits for students between institutions and countries. Most of these initiatives are recent, and therefore there is lack of a critical mass of professionals needed to conduct the necessary reviews to evaluate programs and institutions. Building this critical mass takes time, and is a key element in the process of building national quality assurance systems.

Although the ultimate goal in developing international standards is to obtain mutual recognition of credits among institutions, there are no formal efforts to link the Quality Assurance initiatives of countries in the MENA region with the similar activities going on in Europe.

Quality Assurance (QA) is an essential prerequisite for the development of relations between countries and institutions on an equal basis. This is a well known fact which was

one of the factors at the origin of the Bologna process in Europe. Without quality assurance, it is nearly impossible to discuss and negotiate agreements on mutual recognition of studies and credentials, which therefore limits drastically the mobility of professionals and students. Furthermore it may lead to additional controls on the exports of students in countries where QA is weak or non-existent. For students themselves, the absence of QA mechanisms may lead some of them to undertake their studies in low quality institutions, limiting their potential and their opportunities in life.

2. THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

As part of the Bologna process, in 2003, the Ministers of Education of European countries commissioned the *European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education* (ENQA) the preparation of *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*. The Guidelines prepared by ENQA were endorsed by the European Ministers of Education in 2005 and include three main sets of Standards for QA: 1) European Standards for QA within Higher Education Institutions (HEI); 2) European Standards for QA for External Evaluations of HEI, and 3) European Guidelines for Quality Assurance Agencies. Thus ENQA has also been mandated by the Ministers of Education to establish a European register of trustworthy QA agencies, based on their compliance with the ENQA's Standards and Guidance. It is hoped that this will help to increase trust between universities, favor student mobility and recognition of diplomas.

Quality Assurance in the MENA region

Countries in North Africa and the Middle East are not part of the European Higher Education Area. Most of them have weak QA mechanisms, if any. Cognizant of the growing demand for tertiary education in the region, and the need to provide Quality Assurance services across countries, in addition to the country-level efforts- there are several initiatives that seek to build capacity and provide technical assistance at a regional level. Through a DGF, the World Bank has promoted the establishment of a MENA Quality Assurance Network with the following objectives:

- 1 To consolidate the existing regional initiatives into a Network of organizations dedicated to the promotion and enhancement of National Quality Assurance Systems in the MENA region.
- 2 To develop a comprehensive scheme for QA that will enable countries in the region to develop National Quality Assurance systems, relevant for their tertiary Education Systems
- 3 To build Capacity at national and regional level to help participating countries to establish, consolidate, expand or improve their higher education quality assurance systems
- 4 To promote and disseminate the exchange of knowledge and expertise in the practice of institutions and programs self-assessment, in setting up peer reviewing systems, external evaluations, and development of improvement plans for institutions and programs.

The DGF is in its first year of operation, and has provided seed money for the network, however more efforts are needed to support the integration of QA between

both sides of the Mediterranean.

3. Challenges faced by Universities in MENA

Although in the MENA region there are important Universities that have high academic and technical standards, none of the Universities has ever been ranked in the top 500 World Universities. Higher education institutions are not exempt of the same type of governance and accountability constraints observed in the overall MENA context. According to the Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) produced by DEC and WBI, the MENA region scores lowest on Voice and Accountability, an aggregate indicator that measures perceptions of citizens' ability to participate in selecting their government, possibility of freedom of expression, freedom of association, and access to free and independent media. Most of the countries in MENA rank below the 15th percentile for Voice and Accountability. The only exceptions are Lebanon, Morocco and Jordan, which scores rank below the 30th percentile which is pretty low compared for their GDP levels. (See graph below) Most Higher Education Systems in MENA are highly centralized, with very little authority given to Universities in terms of how to appoint their staff, how to manage their budgets and in some cases even on what programs to offer. With very limited decision power they also lack accountability measures. Although in some countries, universities have Boards of Trustees, in public universities they barely function, and decisions are taken between the President of the University and the Higher Education Council which is mainly represented by the Presidents of all Universities and Chaired by the Minister of Education.

For Universities to operate as independent institutions, with freedom of expression and independent capacity to create and disseminate knowledge, they need to have more transparent governing arrangements.

Voice and Accountability are key governance indicators, as they signify a growing shift from hierarchical forms of organization to more heterogeneous ones in which network relations are based on conditions of trust, reciprocity, reputation, openness to learning and an inclusive and empowering disposition. It necessarily involves a more decentralized, open and consultative form of governing. Devolving power to lower levels of government creates the opportunity for more meaningful dialogue to take place at the regional level. An associate model of governance involves the devolution of greater degrees of autonomy and responsibility for policy outcomes to those organizations that will enjoy either the fruits of success or the consequences of failure. In this model of governance the devolution of responsibility is shared with a wide range of associative partners through the mechanisms of voice and consultation. (Amin 1996).

A key role for government lies in strengthening the governance capacity at local and community levels so as to deploy its enabling powers more effectively to promote a process of social learning among firms and local institutions. Universities constitute one of the key institutional supports for this process, and recent experience confirms that this role is increasingly being recognized. (Yusuf and Nabeshima, 2007).

4. Case for Bank involvement in A MEDITERRANEAN INTEGRATION PROGRAM

The objective of a Mediterranean Integration Program on Quality Assurance for Higher Education is to build the capacity of management and provision of Quality Assurance in Higher Education in the MENA countries, to enable them to participate in the mutual recognition of programs with international Universities. Towards this end, the Mediterranean Integration Program will help the TEI and the Quality Assurance Agencies in the MENA region to reach the

European QA standards. The Program would focus its efforts in building capacity in three particular fields: quality assurance, governance and innovation.

Developing national capacity on Quality Assurance requires major efforts, as it entails a comprehensive set of skills, and important efforts on consensus building among the academic and management communities. Setting up institutional and program self-assessment procedures, or peer reviewing system, coupled with the external evaluations or audits require of a critical mass of skillful and experienced professionals on a wide range of areas of expertise. Building this kind of critical mass takes time and can be costly. Regional networks are created in order to reach economies of scale, and build joint systems. In the MENA region, building this kind of expertise is key for the improvement of quality and relevance of tertiary education systems. It is also important given the current migration patterns, as developing accreditation systems facilitate mutual credit recognition among institutions and countries. Developing this capacity through the promotion of regional exchanges and joint training and other developmental activities can mean financial savings. The exchange of international experiences can be done jointly, and the capacity building of external evaluators and peer reviewers can be done through regional training initiatives.

The Bank can play a key role by facilitating the participation of different donor organizations, multilateral and bilateral, as well as providing a liaison with European networks aimed at building capacity on QA. The Bank can also play a key role in building a Partnership that will facilitate and improve the interaction among national private and public agencies, donor and multilateral organizations, and international bodies aimed at promoting quality assurance in the MENA region.

Lessons learned from Bank involvement in promoting Regional integration:

- 1 Provision of opportunities for approaching regional common problems in a more effective way than when relying on general international networks
- 2 Provision of opportunities to assist countries without QA mechanisms to set them up, and to enhance the existing capacity of those that have QA agencies
- 3 Provision of opportunities to develop common regional standards, and accreditation and assessment procedures
- 4 Enables the sharing of expertise among countries, including the sharing of peer reviewers,
- 5 Provision of opportunities to legitimize national initiatives
- 6 Allows to develop joint training programs for evaluators and peer reviewers
- 7 A regional organization helps to obtain funding to initiate and develop activities related with the promotion of QA practices in the region (such as the DGF from the WB).

5. OBJECTIVES

The MEDITERRANEAN INTEGRATION PROGRAM will support the following:

- (1) Development of a Comprehensive Framework for QA relevant for the Tertiary Education Systems in the MENA region in accordance to the ENQA Standards.
Technical assistance will be provided in order to develop a framework for Quality Assurance that enables the definition of a comprehensive framework relevant for the countries in MENA. Countries in the region have different levels of capacity and development of their quality assurance and /or accreditation systems. The common practice has been to import ready-made standards without necessary adjustments to the

institutions and programs in the client countries. There are also different levels of accountability and transparency in the use of accreditation services, and the concept of National Quality Assurance System is still embryonic in some countries and newborn in others.

(2) Capacity Building of national accreditation and quality assurance bodies

This component will build the Capacity on Tertiary Education Quality Assurance and management of national teams. Activities will be organized by regional and sub-regional groups in the form of training seminars, workshops, staff exchange and study visits. The Program will support regional seminars and sub-regional workshops on selected topics according to the needs of target countries. Staff exchange activities and study visits to countries in the Mediterranean with more advanced QA systems will take place.

(3) Knowledge sharing and Dissemination.

To promote knowledge sharing and dissemination in Arabic and French language, a web-based information Clearinghouse will be established. This Clearinghouse will provide information on research on QA in Tertiary Education, QA practices and procedures, professional associations and accrediting bodies available regionally and globally, credit transfer and recognition schemes available regionally and globally, links to other regional and global networks and resources available for capacity building in QA.

(4) Capacity Building at the Regional level.

This component will support the establishment of a pool of external reviewers from the region that will allow countries in the region to have Arabic speakers of international recognition and expertise to perform external evaluation of institutions and programs. A core group of experts from the region will attend training seminars and events organized by international accrediting and QA organizations. On the job training and staff exchange programs will be part of this scheme.

(5) Increase autonomy and public accountability of Public and Private Universities in selected countries, and increase their capacity to promote and disseminate transparency and accountability as good governance practices in their countries and the region.

The expected outcomes of a Three Year Program will be the following:

- A Quality Assurance Framework for the evaluation of institutions and programs, articulated in a comprehensive way that will assist countries in the development or consolidation of their national quality assurance systems.
- The development of protocols, self-assessment guidelines, evaluation and peer reviewing standards, as well as monitoring progress forms in Arabic and French language following common standards, and credit transfer and recognition schemes
- National Agencies in at least 2 of the participating countries, following up the European QA Standards
- At least 2 Universities in each of the participating countries, following up the European QA Standards for internal evaluation process
- A core group of trained professionals in the field of QA at the national level in the participating countries, qualified to conduct institutional self- assessments, and

- standards development, following European standards
- A body of knowledge in Arabic and French language on QA and Management available in electronic format, and with free access to all countries participating in the program
- At least two Universities in each of the participating countries are operating with a degree of autonomy and transparency following European standards.

6. Proposed Budget

Category	FY10	FY11	FY 12	TOTAL
Staff	160,000	180,000	190,000	530,000
Consultants	60,000	60,000	70,000	190,000
Travel	50,000	50,000	50,000	150,000
Workshops	20,000	20,000	30,000	70,000
Translation/ Disseminat	10,000	10,000	20,000	40,000
Other	30,000	30,000	30,000	90,000
TOTAL	330,000	350,000	390,000	920,000

