

PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS OF A VIABLE REGIONAL INTER-UNIVERSITY NETWORK IN WEST AFRICA

By

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PRELUDE

It has been variously established that networking, linkages and co-operation are essential for the survival of corporate bodies and individuals in the contemporary age where inter-dependence is more critical than ever as a developmental factor. Globalization and its attendant consequences have opened up many areas and concerns hitherto considered as private and confidential. In addition, identities have become so mobile and shifting that every individual, corporate body or nation belongs, as a matter of necessity, to different layers of complex and ordinary caucuses, groups and subgroups with a view to tapping into different affinities for a competitive advantage in the pursuit of ultimate goals and objectives. At the socio-political global level, a number of clusters have emerged. They include G15, G6, OPEC, African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACPGS) Organization of American States (OAS), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASAN), Britain, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS), ACMECS, Inter-Action Council of Former Heads of State, Government Forum of Federations, etc. The various groups and Associations are not mutually exclusive. Almost everyone serves a unique purpose for each of the member states.

Traditionally, universities were regarded and actually acted as ivory towers not only in their lack of interaction with the society but also in interaction with one another. Each university used to be a unique institution which jealously guarded its ethos, values and uniqueness against all intrusions. Collectively, they have been protective of their institutional autonomy, academic 'standards' and freedom as well as uniqueness of their products.

By the middle of the 20th century, the demand for Universities to have a global presence and be visible at the international fora has put pressure on Universities to collaborate. Furthermore, the general positive reception of University rankings by accredited and self-proclaimed organizations made universities to look beyond their physical boundaries. Additionally, financial constraints of the last 20 years have encouraged institutional co-operation so as to enjoy cost-sharing benefits on expensive course development and equipment. Universities in the West Africa sub-region have

therefore started to develop bi and/or multilateral co-operation with one another. Nevertheless, West African Universities tend to prefer collaborations with their North American or West European counterparts, to those from Africa.

This paper was originally intended to be a concept paper for the establishment of AWAU. It therefore focuses only on AWAU as a viable platform for the integration of universities within the West African sub-region.

GROUND FOR PARTNERSHIPS AMONG UNIVERSITIES

Self interests dictate the extent, nature and choice of partnerships among the universities. It is not difficult, therefore, to understand why Universities in developing countries prefer universities in developed countries to universities in fellow developing countries. It is largely because universities of the developed countries are better endowed to share some of their facilities with their partners in the developing countries. The expectations of the universities of the developing countries are, more often than not, largely unmet. This is because the other party also has purpose(s) other than charity for the partnership.

Geographical proximity rather than political and socio-economic considerations counts less in the determination of interaction among universities. Geography was not a major factor because of the elitist nature of the universities. Consequently, the aspirations and hopes of the universities dictated their partnerships which have produced many inter-university institutions. Universities established platforms and Associations based also on socio-political interests. Hence the formation of International Association of Universities (1950) which was based in UNESCO, Association of African Universities which was facilitated by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU – now African Union) in 1967, Association of Arab Universities (AArU) (1964), Association of American Universities (1900), European Universities Association (2001), Association of Commonwealth Universities (1913), Federation of the Universities of the Islamic World (1987), Association Internationale de la Pedagogie Universitaire (AIPU) (1980), Agence Universitaire de la Francophone AUF (1989) and Assoiacao das Universidades de Lingua Portuguesa (AULP) (1986).

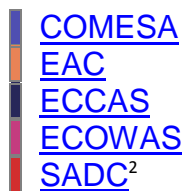
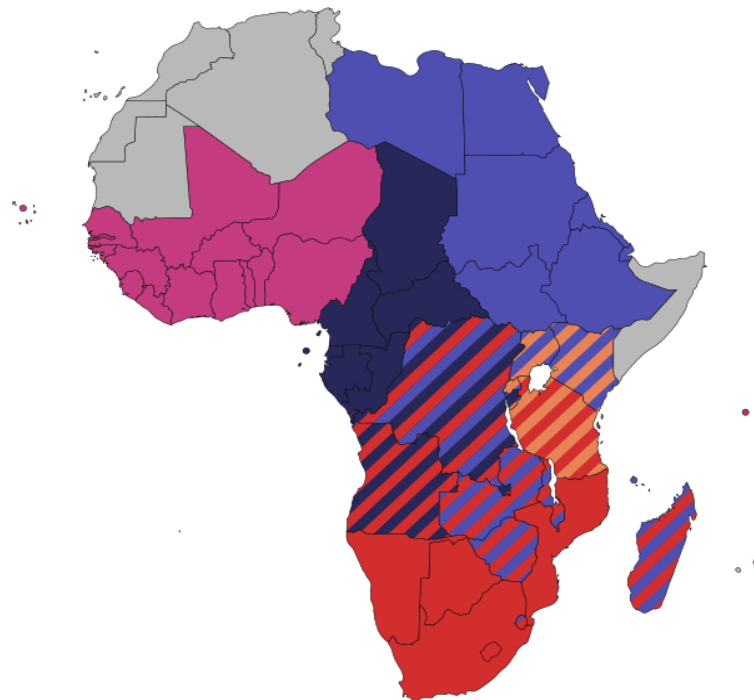
REGIONAL ECONOMIC COMMUNITIES AND THE NECESSITY FOR THEIR UNIVERSITY COUNTERPARTS IN AFRICA

When the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) was established in 1963, it identified¹ the need for economic integration as a necessity for economic development. The establishment of regional economic communities as a means of achieving this objective was adopted with a protocol for relations between the African Union and the regional communities developed.

African Union currently has eight regional economic communities (five of which are active). These are:

- Arab Maghreb Union (UMA)
- Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA)
- Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD)
- East African Community (EAC)
- Economic Communities of Central African States (ECCAS)
- Economic Communities of West African States (ECOWAS)
- Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)
- Southern African Development Community (SADC)

¹ African Union website: www.au.int/en/recs accessed 10th of October 2013.



The establishment of these regional economic bodies has advanced economic integration in the sub regions. For example, individuals from ECOWAS no longer need entry visa to move around within ECOWAS.

The Universities in Africa, and the AAU itself, encourage African Universities to forge closer links and partnership at the sub-regional levels. This has led to the formation of Association of Arab Universities (AARU) in 1964 (serving North Africa), Inter-University

² African Union website: www.au.int/en

Council of East Africa (IUCEA) in 1980, Southern African Region University Association (SARUA) in 2005, and the Association of West African Universities (AWAU) in 2011.

A BRIEF ON SARUA, AArU AND IUCEA

SARUA³ was established to assist in the revitalisation and development of the leadership and institutions of higher education in the Southern African region, thus enabling the regional higher education sector to meaningfully respond to the developmental challenges facing the region. SARUA is open to all the public universities of the 15 countries that make up the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and as at September, 2013, it has 57 members. SARUA's overall aim is thus to strengthen the leadership and institutions of higher Education in the Southern African region, thereby consolidating a Southern African agenda for higher education, and enabling higher education to make a significant contribution to national and regional development.

In North Africa, the Association of Arab Universities (AArU) was founded in 1964. Just as the case with SARUA, AArU's objectives are mainly to enhance cooperation amongst Arab universities and coordinate their efforts with a view to raising the quality of university and higher education; enhance cooperation among Arab universities and institutes of higher education and the coordination of their efforts to realize the Arab national goals; cooperate to raise the level of higher education and promote joint research projects and exchange of results; enhance cooperation between Arab and Islamic universities and other universities throughout the world; encourage mutual student activities between Arab universities; arrange cooperation amongst Arab universities in terms of teaching methods and facilities, including libraries and laboratories⁴. All Arabic-speaking countries of Africa (essentially Northern Africa) are members of the AArU.

³ SARUA website: www.sarua.org

⁴ AArU website: www.aaru.edu.jo/index

Similarly, in East Africa⁵, regional higher education interactions and cooperation dated back to the pre-independence era when Makerere University College was the only higher education institution in the region (serving students from Kenya, and in the then Tanganyika, and Zanzibar in East Africa as well as from the then Rhodesia and Nyasaland in Central and Southern Africa, which now consist of Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe).

In 1980, after consultations involving permanent/principal secretaries responsible for higher education in Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya, the Vice Chancellors of the universities in the three countries met in Nairobi (Kenya) and agreed to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) committing them to maintain cooperation among their universities within the IUC framework. The MoU was subsequently signed, which also led to the transformation of IUC into the current Inter-university Council for East Africa (IUCEA).

Again, the main objectives are to:

- facilitate networking among universities in East Africa, and with universities outside the region;
- provide a forum for discussion on a wide range of academic and other matters relating to higher education in East Africa; and
- facilitate maintenance of internationally comparable education standards in East Africa so as to promote the region's competitiveness in higher education⁶.

In essence, four of the five regions of Africa have established formal universities' regional networks to complement their respective economic communities with AAU providing the link with the African Union as the lead implementer of the Union's mandate in the area of Higher Education.

⁵ IUCEA: www.iucea.org

⁶ www.iucea.org

RAISON D'ÊTRE FOR AWAU

The 1975 treaty of ECOWAS creates a solid foundation for the establishment of AWAU. A principal *raison d'être* for the establishment of Universities is the pursuit of national goals and aspirations. Nation states of West Africa came together to establish ECOWAS for the purpose of promoting regional co-operation and integration. It is therefore imperative for universities in West Africa to support the governments in achieving the lofty goals. For example, Article 60 of the treaty of ECOWAS states⁷:

1. *Member States undertake to co-operate in the full development and utilization of their human resources.*
2. *To this end, they shall take measures to:*
 - (a) *strengthen co-operation among themselves in the fields of education, training and employment, and to harmonise and co-ordinate their policies and programmes in these areas;*
 - (b) *consolidate their existing training institutes, improve the efficacy of their educational systems, encourage exchanges between school and universities, establish equivalence of academic, professional and technical qualifications, encourage literacy, promote the teaching and practice of the official languages of the community and establish regional centres of excellence in various disciplines; and*
 - (c) *encourage the exchange of skilled manpower between member states*

The treaty establishes collaboration in trade, finance, political affairs, legal and judicial security, social affairs, cultural affairs, development and communication among other areas.

In addition, Research is one of the strategic features of universities. More often than not, research is dictated by the existence or projection of problem(s) for which the research is to provide a solution. Shared problems have led to the emergence of many regional research societies and institutions. Such include: African Economic Research Consortium (AERC), Eastern European Economic Research Institutes Network (CERGE), East Asian Development Research Network (EADN), Mediterranean

⁷ ECOWAS "Revised Treaty of ECOWAS" www.refworld.org/docid/492182d92.html accessed 10th October 2013

Economic Research Council (MERC), South Asian Network of Economic Research Institutes (SANEI), Southern African Research in Management Association (SARIMA) and West African Research in Management Association (WARIMA). The proliferation of such regional research networks calls for closer interaction of universities in each of the regions or sub-regions of the world to address problems that are common to the region. The table below shows that countries in West Africa share a lot in common particularly in the area of problems.

Table I

Vital Statistics on Countries of West Africa

S/ no	Countries	HDI out of 187	GER (TER) %	CPI out of 176	GDP out of 189	LE out of 222	SHI out of 180	No. of Univer sity	Population
1	Benin	166 th	11%	94	139	189	145 th	2	10.3
2	Burkina Faso	183 rd	4%	83	128	203	98 th	3	17.3
3	Cape Verde	132 nd	20%	39	165	144	181 st	5	0.5m
4	Cote D'Ivoire	168 th	8%	130	98	195	29 th	4	23.2m
5	Gambia	165 th	4%	105	174	174	129 th	1	1.9m
6	Ghana	135 th	12%	64	85	188	67 th	13	24.6m
7	Guinea	178 th	11%	154	143	192	159 th	1	10.8
8	Guinea Bissau	176 th	?	150	175	?	110 th	4	7.1
9	Liberia	174 th	?	75	167	194	90 th	4	4.3
10	Mali	182 nd	6%	105	129	207	101 st	4	15.3
11	Niger	187 th	2%	113	144	204	115 th	2	17.1m
12	Nigeria	153 rd	10.3%	139	38	212	8 th	128	173.6m
13	Senegal	154 th	8%	94	118	190	153 rd	2	13.5m
14	Sierra-Leone	177 th	?	123	155	197	133 rd	2	6.2m
15	Togo	159 th	11%	128	154	176	146 th	3	6.2m
16	Mauritania	155 th	5%	123	152	186	99 th	5	3.5

Source: Constructed from data from: UNDP, UNESCO, T.I, WHO and Pew Research Centre

Key

- ? - Data Unavailable
- HDI - Human Development Index
- GER (TE) - Gross Enrolment Ratio for Tertiary Education
- CPI - Corruption Perception Index
- GDP - Gross Domestic Product
- LE - Life Expectancy
- SHI - Social Harassment Index

16 Countries of West Africa, expectedly, have many common features which include physical characteristics, common goals and aspirations, common problems, likelihood of common solutions, weakness, helplessness, historical affinity, needs, cultural relationship social economic status, attitudes and more importantly resentment to the parlous situation in the region.

Furthermore, long period of frustration must have convinced universities in the developing countries that their counterparts in the developed countries were not established for charity and that partnership is different from affiliation. The Universities in West Africa also share some common difficulties such as incapable and unwilling (public and private) proprietors, impatient private proprietorship, massification in enrolment, brain drain, infrastructural deficit, (equipment and other facilities) bad governance, lack of or inadequate planning and data, ambitious clients, lack of endowment, young age of alumni (and existence), low industrialization, taste for foreign goods, neo-colonialism, low level technology, corruption and high level of poverty among others. The precarious situation should engender a strong commitment for positive change which is a catalyst for rapid development.

Cost sharing mechanism, division of labour, experience sharing and improvisation of necessary tools make intra-regional University collaboration an inescapable route out of the myriad of problems bedeviling the countries of West Africa and their universities. Complementarity rather than supplementality is the answer.

THE ILORIN DECLARATION⁸

On the 10th of January 2011, at the University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria, Vice Chancellors of Universities across the West Africa sub-region (including observers from IAU and other regions) met to deliberate on the state of education in the region and observed that:

⁸ The Declaration of the establishment of Association of West Africa Universities at the University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria on the 10th of January, 2011. www.awau.org

- Education remains the bedrock of development across the West Africa sub-region and should therefore be rigorously pursued.
- The West Africa universities have great roles to play in ensuring that education is truly functional in the sub-region, especially for the development of the countries.
- No individual University in the Sub-region could achieve the goal of making education functional without collaborating with other Universities.
- The need to face the challenges of this era of globalization by associating, integrating and collaborating among universities necessitated the establishment of the Association of West Africa Universities (AWAU).

The Association of West Africa Universities (AWAU) was inaugurated for the purpose of:

- Initiating collaboration among Universities in West Africa.
- Enhancing higher Education in the sub-region as it is the case in other Africa sub-regions.
- Enhancing the improvement of infrastructure across the sub-region which will also serve to improve manpower development
- The Association will seek to:
 - coordinate and promote the ideals of University education in West Africa;
 - strengthen and develop the leadership of the University Education System in West Africa, so as to make the institutions more responsive to the various development-related challenges confronting the region;
 - empower the leadership of the University Education System in West Africa to formulate a viable sub-regional Agenda for University Education, which shall contribute to national, regional, continental and global development;
 - provide an effective forum for the leadership of the West African University Education System to engage in regular brainstorming over development-related issues;
 - work in collaboration with the AU, AAU, CAMES, ECOWAS and other related bodies in order to create an effective platform for dialogue, bilateral, and

multilateral linkages among the leadership of the West African University Education System through the:

- organization of regular meetings to promote bilateral and multilateral linkages among members;
- identification of the core niche areas for research endeavours and development of centres of excellence;
- promotion of knowledge acquisition and capacity building of University Education leadership in West Africa; and
- development of a unique identity for the West African University Education system which shall reflect the diversity of the region.

The constitution of the Association was considered and adopted. The headquarters of AWAU is located in Abuja, Nigeria. The present writer is charged with the responsibility of coordinating the Secretariat of the Council, while the then Vice Chancellors of the University of Cape Coast, Ghana and Federal University of Technology, Akure, Nigeria were elected President and Vice President respectively.

In 2012, the Association held a meeting at the University of Cape Coast Ghana where the bye laws of the Association were adopted. The West Africa caucus meeting of the Association of African Universities (AAU) was also held during the 13th General Assembly of the Association in Libreville, Gabon. Presently, Universities in the sub region are a strong backbone for the Association of African Universities. The AAU Secretariat is also located in Accra, Ghana (West Africa).

Presently both the President and Secretary-General of the AAU are from West Africa. It is therefore clear that we have the requisite skills and experience to come together to provide an effective forum for the leadership of the West African university education system thereby promoting regional development through the Universities.

PROBLEMS OF AWAU

The Association of West African Universities (AWAU) cannot be immune from teething problems expected of a new organization. Such problems include those of structure, commitment, resource mobilization and take-off momentum. There are however some

structural problems which the establishment of a network such as AWAU must address in order to achieve its purpose. These are examined thus:

LANGUAGE DIVERSITY

The linguistic diversity of West Africa is considered to be a problem for its people. West Africa consists of sixteen countries with three different official languages. Table II reflects number of countries speaking the various languages.

Table II: Language Diversity of West Africa

Language	Number of West Africa Countries
English	6
French	8
Portuguese	2

Mobility among citizens of these Universities is therefore limited by language. Same is also the case among scholars and students even though a close look at the distribution of Universities in the sub-region reveals that there are more Universities in the Anglophone countries.

Table III: Distributions of Universities in West Africa

S/No	Country	Number of Universities
1	Benin	2
2	Burkina Faso	3
3	Cape Verde	5
4	Cote D'Ivoire	4
5	Gambia	1
6	Ghana	13
7	Guinea	1
8	Guinea Bissau	4
9	Liberia	4
10	Mali	4
11	Mauritania	5
12	Niger	2
13	Nigeria	128
14	Senegal	2
15	Sierra Leone	2
16	Togo	3

TRANSPORTATION AND CONNECTIVITY

Connectivity among West African states is also often usually not so easy. In most cases, it is easier and faster to fly to Europe than between two West African countries. Permit me at this juncture to relate our recent experience in flying from Nigeria to The Gambia. A journey of 2315 kilometers, 1439 miles or 1250 nautical miles took a total of 11hrs due to non-availability of frequent direct flights among countries in the region. It will take about 6hrs to fly from Nigeria to United Kingdom which is 5004 kilometers or 3110 miles or 2702 nautical miles.

This is apparently due to the low level of air travelers within the sub-region. Universities in the sub-region therefore need to come together to address issues of common interest that would facilitate closer ties for overall development of the region.

LOW SELF-ESTEEM

We do not sufficiently appreciate resources that are locally available in the sub-region. We generally believe that everything within is not as good (if at all good) as those exported to us. This low self-esteem has made it difficult for the sub-region to advance in knowledge and even in economy. Universities now are advocates for importation of technology from the west rather than development of local and appropriate technology. Similarly, more than 70% of collaborations of many universities in the sub-region are outside the sub-region. Although research collaboration among academics is an essential feature for innovation, the slow pace of technological advancement and innovation from the region may therefore be a reflection of the non-collaboration of universities in research especially to address issues of common concern.

KNOWLEDGE / INFRASTRUCTURAL GAP

West Africa is ravished by same problems which could be solved together at the sub-regional level. Some of these gaps include access to quality education, telephone, electricity, potable water and other infrastructure. The lack of adequate teachers and researchers also constitutes an issue of common concern for all West African countries. West African Universities need to come together to address priority gaps to inform decision-making processes and information.

DISCONNECT BETWEEN UNIVERSITIES AND POLICY MAKING PROCESS

The governance structures in many African countries do not countenance research findings as a major factor in the decision- making process. This robs African universities of the opportunity to positively impact on the society. There is the need for policy makers and Universities to forge a collaboration that would facilitate meaningful interaction for the benefit of the society.

ABJECT POVERTY

The prevalence of poverty in the sub-region has created a gap of understanding between the elite and the majority of citizens who live in abject poverty. Mutual mistrust and stereotyping have led to unnecessary suppression of facts and ability for sufficient analysis and fashioning of appropriate device to combat developmental challenges.

DISTRACTION BY FOREIGN DONORS

African researchers and their institutions must resist the temptation of diversion from their original plan by the dictates of their funders. The universities are expected to assist their respective governments in remaining focused in the pursuit of their mandates. Foreign donors are in the habit of dictating the policy options for governments of developing countries who due to fear of poverty compromise on their well thought-out programmes and got diverted to the priority areas of interest of the donors. Universities must be vocal enough to attract sufficient attention to basic needs of development.

PROSPECTS OF AWAU

The problems are not insurmountable and the wherewithal is latent in the sub-region. All the problems can be converted to opportunities, if the universities in the region collaborate effectively as a political unit. This will be made possible by the existing affinity among member states of ECOWAS and collective self-determination to succeed. In addition, there are existing regional agencies to facilitate collaboration, they include⁹

WAHO	-	West African Health Organization
WAMA	-	West African Monetary Agency
WAMI	-	West African Monetary Institution
EYSDC	-	ECOWAS Youth and Sports Development Centre
EGDC	-	ECOWAS Gender Development Centre
WRCU	-	Water Resources Coordinating Unit
ECOWAS Brown Card		
WAPP	-	West African Power Pool
WARIMA	-	West African Research in Management Association

The World Bank recently instituted Centres of Excellence initiative for universities in West Africa. The initiative requires inter-university linkages among universities in West

⁹ ECOWAS website: www.ecowas.int

Africa as much as it requires partnership with other institutions outside the West African sub-region. The network would provide enough stamina to ensure the centres remain relevant and focused on the needs of the region.

Furthermore, the reverse-order of what John Holm and L. Malet¹⁰ enumerated as “9 problems of foreign partnership in Africa” is apposite as prospect for AWAU. The scholars have identified 9 reasons why partnership (and outside Aid to Africa) between Universities in developed countries and those in developing countries fails to achieve their purpose. They are:

- Academics from developed countries take the lead in research while their African colleagues are relegated to minor roles. This renders the African scholars as subordinates of their peers or even inferiors. Intra-regional collaboration would restore confidence and allow initiatives and free flow of ideas among partners.
- Outside scholars impose curriculum based on foreign exigencies. This situation in intra-regional collaboration makes the parties indigenous and ready to design the curriculum that is appropriate for the particular situation.
- Visiting Academics impose a top-down approach. Since the parties are partners, it is unlikely that a party would appropriate the power to instruct the others. Consultations shall be genuine and practicable.
- African Universities can't afford significant project costs. Staff and Student exchange are hindered by living costs which are unfavourable to visiting staff and students in the universities in developed countries. The living costs and conditions are relatively closer within the sub-region than between it and developed countries. This similarity shall enhance productivity of participants and ensure greater institutional benefits.
- Projects with developing countries are often done with multiple partners. Each partner in the developing nations is a sub-partner while the other party is the super-partner. Partnership in the sub-region, if properly structured, will not allow the emergence of a super-partner in the partnership

¹⁰ John D Holm and Leapetsewe Malet in the Chronicle of Higher Education, Washington D.C 13th June 2010, accessed on the 27th of October 2013 through www.chronicle.com/article/nineproblems

- Researchers from developed countries are often tied to the interest of their financiers. University in the sub-region would be sufficiently involved in the identification of the problems and the design of solutions which would serve in the main societal needs of the universities. The universities are expected to accept only grants and supports which are in tandem with their own developmental needs and not the whims and caprices of a foreign interest.
- Top quality universities in Europe and America want to do projects only with institutions of comparable quality. AWAU creates a forum for all universities in the sub-region to learn from one another and improve on the quality of each of the members. The nature of relationship would not be subservient though there may be significant difference in the quality of the partners within the sub-region.
- The risks to the health and safety of students and staff members in Africa are exaggerated. The superiority complex which emanates from such feelings and the attendant inter-personal relations which have bearings on the outcome of the partnerships is non-existent in the partnership involving only members of the AWAU. It is instructive that while some developed countries such as Russia, U.K., Germany and France belongs to inglorious top levels of “Very High” and “High” in the social Hostilities Index, most countries of West Africa are pleasantly in the low level of the index. Except Nigeria which is on the infamous high position of 8th (Very High) and Ivory Cost 44th (High), 4 countries of the region are in the bracket of moderate SHI and the remaining 9 are in the enviable “low” level of the negative index.
- Efforts to teach African University staff members new skills are often done in quick workshops. With appropriate mechanism and cost saving measures, skill-transfer among university in the region would be more realistic, enduring and effective. Sufficient interactions with less cost shall promote in-depth training and assimilation of facts and competences.

In summary, exploitation will be removed as all countries are real partners. Exchange among one another would be quicker and more effective and appropriate technology for use in the sub-region can be jointly developed. Other educational, fiscal, social, and

political advantages in inter-institutional regional collaboration have been identified¹¹ to include:

- Potential for greater in-depth learning in particular subjects
- A wider range of pedagogical and technological strategies
- Access to more learning materials through resource sharing
- Development of critical mass of scholars which otherwise could have been scattered in individual Universities and institutions
- Cost effectiveness in the use of human and material resources, both within individual institutions and across the sub-region
- Avoidance of "unnecessary duplication"
- Increase in the range of programs/ courses accessible to geographically dispersed learners.

THE FUTURE OF AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES IS BRIGHT

The future of West African universities is not as gloomy as it appears. Some of the general comparison between developed and developing countries is akin to comparing oranges with apple. The table below shows, for example, the number of persons averagely being served by one university in some selected countries of the two worlds'. The result reveals that there is no basis for comparison more so when it is acknowledged that massification in entry into universities is exceptionally high in Africa:

Table IV Inadequate Universities

S/No	Countries	Population	No. of University	University per Population
1	France	65.8m	1,062	61,958
2	USA	317m	5,758	55,054
3	India	1,230 billion	8,407	146,307
4	Nigeria	173m	128	1,351563
5	Ghana	24.6m	13	1,892,308
6	Cote D'Ivoire	23.2m	4	5,800,000

¹¹ Neil M. W. (1981): Research Study on International Collaboration between Institutions of distance learning Milton Keynes: Open University Mugridge, I. (1983) Consortia in distance Education. Open Campus, 8, 22 – 29. Mugridge, I. (1989): Collaboration in distance education: British Columbia's Open Learning Agency in R. Sweet (Ed): Post-Secondary Distance Education in Canada (pp. 205 – 208) Alberta: Athabasca University/Canadian Society for Studies in Education.

7	Burkina Faso	17.3m	3	5,766,666
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In addition to large number of universities in the developed world, age also confers some comparatively high advantage on universities in the North of the hemisphere. The oldest university in West Africa was established in 1984, some 65 years ago whereas many of the leading universities of the West have existed for more than 600 years. While this does not call for complacency, it also does not justify unbridled pessimism of a bleak future for West Africa.

A comparison of the number of graduates being produced annually by the universities would further strengthen our hope of a better future for African universities through correct perception of reality. A recent sample of the performance of graduates of Nigerian universities who are pursuing their graduate studies in United Kingdom Universities does not support the popular view that graduates of universities of African countries are inferior in academic quality to those of developed countries.

CONCLUSION

Partnerships among universities are for varied reasons. Each university is expected to partner with other universities on the basis of needs and relevance. Similarities among West African universities and their countries recommend inter-university collaboration within the sub-region. This does not in any way prevent collaborations with other universities outside the sub-region. Legal and political frameworks provided by ECOWAS and other regional institutions should be leveraged upon by universities in the region for the overall development of the region. The Association of West Africa Universities is a veritable platform for the co-ordination and promotion of inter-university collaboration involving universities within and outside the region.

ECOWAS and its member states, African Union, UNESCO and other international Agencies should provide the necessary support for AWAU to deliver on its mandates for rapid socio-economic development of the least developed region of Africa which has all the potential to be among the most developed sub-regions of the world.