

Working Group 2

Sustainable funding mechanisms for regional Quality Assurance

Obstacles and options.

Dr. Amelia Guevara from the University of the Philippines presented the experience of the ASEAN University Network in Quality Assurance AUN-QA. Since 1998 a series of 7 regional workshops have been carried out. Some of the outcomes of this process are a manual and common guidelines for quality assurance for the universities of the region. For this, they have used a cost-sharing scheme among participant universities, each university pays the travel expenses of their representatives and the host university covers local expenses during the workshop. It is a successful experience of cooperation between universities that shows that an scheme of cost-sharing among universities works well in quality assurance during the stage of learning from each others, developing a common view, drafting manuals and instruments and even for doing evaluation for quality improvement. It has also been shown in the experience of evaluation for quality improvement that have been done for several years by SICEVAES in Central America, which has successfully worked by a similar scheme of cost-sharing among public universities.

However, when we go to an stage of regional accreditation with regional independent plural organisms that have to carry out the evaluation the question of financing the operation become much more difficult and complex, as it was shown by Dr. Orlando Morales, representative of the Ministries of Education in the Central American Council of Accreditation CCA. Dr. Morales explained that the regional agreement through which CCA was established indicates that the financing of the Council will be under the responsibility of the Ministries of Education, public and private universities and the professional associations of the region. However, as the experience shows only some of the founders of CCA have been paying their contribution to the Council. Many others have not fulfilled their commitment to the Council, so far. It shows that these regional schemes, with independent plural accreditation systems, as regional public goods might be very fragile in terms of its financing.

Ms. Kea Wollrad, representative of the Inter-American Development Bank presented a Regional Public Goods Program established by the Bank in 2004 for promoting regional solutions for regional problems. It might serve for enhancing quality across borders through regional cooperation in higher education. There is a annual call for proposals, countries can present proposals in any sector that they consider important for cross-border cooperation. Through this program the Bank might fund regional decision making meetings and workshops, regional products such as design of policy tools and standards, regional training (on pilot base), regional coordination to ensure progress in regional decision making, etc. One of the examples presented by Ms. Wollrad was a project for Regional engineering accreditation system for the Great Caribbean with the participation of Dominican Republic, Jamaica and Panama, which attract the attention of many participants in the working group.

It was also commented in the group that in the case of the regional European experience funding has not been a problem, and it has been the peer pressure among countries that has driven the regional efforts, no country want to be left behind their neighbors, but they don't like to be told what to do by any regional authority such as the European Commission. The use of score-cards that shows the progress of the countries in fulfilling the regional commitments have been more successful.

It also was mentioned in the group the experience of South America where in the majority of the cases the governments fund the quality assurance agencies and also the regional initiatives such as the experimental mechanism of quality assurance known as MEXA within MERCOSUR. However in other countries in South America, where there is a great distance between governments and universities, such as Peru and Ecuador, and in some extend in Central America, governments do not usually fund the Quality Assurance systems.

That is for the Working group Number 2.