

Article published in:

Frank Niedermeier, Xia Qin (Eds.)

Multipliers of Change

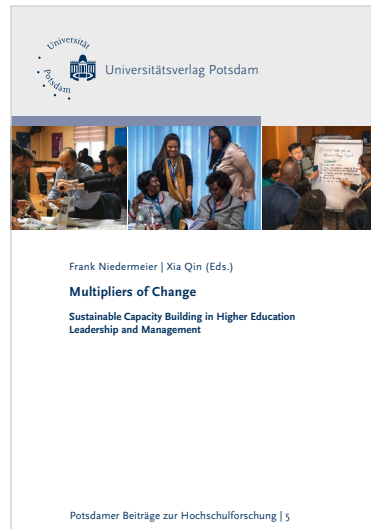
Sustainable Capacity Building in Higher Education Leadership and Management

Potsdamer Beiträge zur Hochschulforschung, Vol. 5

2020 – 223 p.

ISBN 978-3-86956-496-8

DOI <https://doi.org/10.25932/publishup-47549>



Suggested citation:

Michael Mawa: The Sustainability Mechanisms for Higher Education Quality Assurance Training in Uganda, In: Frank Niedermeier, Xia Qin (Eds.): Multipliers of Change : Sustainable Capacity Building in Higher Education Leadership and Management (Potsdamer Beiträge zur Hochschulforschung ; 5), Potsdam, Universitätsverlag Potsdam, 2020, S. 205–223.
DOI <https://doi.org/10.25932/publishup-49393>

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons License: Attribution-4.0

This does not apply to quoted content from other authors. To view a copy of this license visit: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Michael Mawa

The Sustainability Mechanisms for Higher Education Quality Assurance Training in Uganda

ABSTRACT: The paper investigates the question of sustainability of capacity-building initiatives by reporting about the multiplication training in the frame of DIES NMT Programme on quality assurance in Uganda and how it could make use of the social capital within the existing quality assurance network to sustain and address challenges during its implementation. The purpose of the article is to explore the nature of networking (social and institutional) which was established by the Ugandan Universities Quality As-

urance Forum (UUQAF) and share the strategies used in this training experience for future sustainable capacity building training initiatives in emerging economies. The paper employed a qualitative research method to describe and analyse the training framework based on primary and secondary documents.

KEYWORDS: social network, social capital, quality assurance, training for sustainability, benchmarking

1. Introduction

The question of sustainability of higher education initiatives has been a subject of major concern for both funding bodies and beneficiaries. This is often apparent, at least, at the conceptualisation stages of such initiatives. It is indeed not uncommon to see guidelines for calls for funding opportunities emphasising proposals that address issues of sustainability of the proposed programme. The German Academic Exchange Services (DAAD) and the German Rectors' Conference (HRK), in their joint Higher Education Capacity Development Programme—Dialogue on Innovative Higher Education Strategies (DIES), is no exception. The concern about the sustainability of a quality assurance training programme was also apparent to the DIES Alumni in Uganda who sought for funding support for the National Multiplication Trainings (NMT) in 2013. Core questions preoccupied the minds of the DIES Alumni at the conception of the NMT programme:

1. How can the national quality assurance training activities be sustained after the DAAD funding period?
2. What organisational structures and partnership frameworks can be used to support these training activities to ensure that they continue?
3. What training approaches should be employed to sustain this national training programme?

A fundamental decision made by these Alumni to mitigate the potential challenges of sustaining the proposed national quality assurance training programme was to embed it in an existing network of quality assurance practitioners in the country called the Ugandan Universities Quality Assurance Forum (UUQAF). It is worth noting here that the DIES Alumni who applied for the NMT funding are founding members of UUQAF and therefore chose to use the organisational framework of UUQAF to organise the NMT for Quality Assurance Managers in Uganda.

This paper investigated the question of the sustainability of capacity building training programmes for higher education managers. In the quality assurance network, UUQAF, the DIES Alumni recognised an intangible resource—*social capital*—that would address the question of sustainability of the quality assurance training activities in Uganda.

The concept of sustainability is a complex one and is widely used in economic, ecological, urban, and environmental studies. Sustainability, in its basic sense, relates to the ability to maintain or continue something at a certain rate or level well into the future. The concept is used to eval-

uate whether decisions made today will yield vitality and continuation into the future (Basiago, 1995). In this paper, the concept of sustainability is used to relate to the ability of the DIES Alumni and their national quality assurance network to mobilise and use social, material, and financial resources wisely without compromising the need for a programme that involves a continuous national quality assurance training for its members.

The paper explores the nature of networking (social and institutional) as established by UUQAF Constitutional order and demonstrates an operational framework of this network which informed the NMT approach adopted. In so doing, the paper documents and shares some of the strategies used in this training experience for sustainable capacity building training initiatives in developing countries. The paper adopted a case study research approach to describe and analyse the training framework used in this NMT. The case of UUQAF training framework was used to explore mechanisms for the sustainability of higher education training programmes.

Data were collected through documentary reviews of primary and secondary documents including the UUQAF Constitution, NMT Proposal, training reports, research reports, and other relevant publications. The following sections of the paper provide an analysis of the nature of the Quality Assurance Network (QA Network) to determine the source of the resources for sustainable national training, the NMT framework used, the potential challenges for sustaining training programmes, and the strategies used by UUQAF to ensure sustainability.

2. Establishment and Operation of UUQAF as a QA Network

The Ugandan Universities Quality Assurance Forum (UUQAF) is a quality assurance network founded in 2010 by a group of quality assurance officers working in different Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Uganda. Among the six founding members of the network, four of them were trained DIES Alumni under the German Academic Exchange Services (DAAD)—Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA) Quality Assurance Initiative (DAAD-IUCEA QA Initiative) which began in 2006. The first and second cohorts of participants from Uganda that trained under this initiative in 2007 and 2008, respectively, expressed the need for collaboration at their new QA jobs. The same desire to work together

for mutual peer support was also expressed by the other higher education quality assurance officers in the country. This desire to associate and work together is well captured in the preamble of the Constitution of UUQAF (2011) which states that:

WHEREAS it is desired that the Quality Assurance Officers in Universities and other Degree-awarding Institutions come together to form an association to contribute towards promotion of quality higher education in Uganda;

CONVINCED that through sharing of experience, expertise, and resources the members of such an association can contribute towards the promotion of quality of higher education in Uganda;

Now the Quality Assurance Officers gathered here in Kampala **DO HEREBY RESOLVE** to establish by this Constitution the Ugandan Universities Quality Assurance Forum (UUQAF), hereafter referred to as The Forum. (p. 2)

As principal social actors whose relationship is defined by mutual *sharing of experiences, expertise, and resources* for the common goal of *promotion of quality of higher education in Uganda* as outlined above, the members of UUQAF set to establish a social network of quality assurance officers. A social network is understood to be webs of personal connections and relationships intended to secure favours in terms of personal and/or organisational action (Burt, 1992). A social network, according to Ho and Chiu (2011), consists of a set of actors and the relationships among them, and the actors can be individual people, groups of people, objects, or events held together by certain relationships. Following this understanding of social networks, quality assurance networks in higher education are here defined as “social organisations of individuals or groups of individual quality assurance practitioners (actors) working closely together (social ties) to enhance their capacity in undertaking quality assurance tasks (operational framework) for quality higher education (shared goals) in their institutions, countries, or regions” (Mawa, 2018, p. 42).

The growth of UUQAF as a national QA Network is largely attributed to three major components: (a) the commitment of its members, the driving force of the Network; (b) the organisational structure of the Network which allows members and their partners to participate freely, actively, and meaningfully based on their capacities; and (c) the operational framework of the Network which allows for continuous

capacity building through training, benchmarking visits, mentorship, and research activities. The commitment of UUQAF members has been a major building block for the sustainability of this QA Network and its activities. The founding members of UUQAF established a culture of unswerving commitment to the goal of the QA Network. More often than not, members of UUQAF mobilised personal resources (social, material, intellectual, and financial) to support the activities of the Network.

One such demonstration of the commitment of the members was their resolve to establish what is called the *Chairman's Basket* where members voluntarily make their contributions into a common pool for a common task. The record of the meetings of UUQAF provides rich evidence of the contributions of members to the *Chairman's Basket*. Although a formal bank account for the Network has since been opened, the tradition of making voluntary contributions by members and their partners has continued to sustain many of the activities of UUQAF. It is worth acknowledging here that this tradition is akin to the African philosophy and practice of social solidarity. The African philosopher Mbiti (1969) defines this relational nature of the individual African with his/her community as one of "I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am" (p. 108).

The organisational structure of UUQAF is embedded in the Constitution and Articles of Association of the Network. The establishment of these legal norms and adherence to them by members of the Network have provided the necessary conditions for a culture of constitutionalism. Several organs and their roles are well-defined in the Constitution including the General Assembly and the Executive Committee. The General Assembly, an annual meeting of the Network, is the pinnacle of all social events for the social networking experience of the members. During the Assembly, members congregate to (a) share their experiences, expertise, and resources; (b) dialogue among themselves and with their partners; and (c) renew their loyalty to the Association. Through these mechanisms, the Network structures enable members and their partners to participate freely, actively, and meaningfully based on their capacities.

One measure for cost-effectiveness in organising these events is that all the General Assemblies and other meetings and training workshops of the Network are held in facilities of member institutions on a rotational basis. This is important for the Network especially in the absence of its physical secretariat. Moreover, the hosting of UUQAF events at member institutions on a rotational basis provides the opportunity for continuous learning through benchmarking techniques.

The operational framework of UUQAF is largely informed by the two components discussed above. The Constitution of the Network provides for a process of continuous capacity building of members through such activities as dialogue meetings, benchmarking visits, training (including mentorship), and research. These operational activities of the Network are guided by its objectives as defined under Article 5 of the UUQAF Constitution (2011), of which members are to:

1. Share experiences on quality assurance issues among Quality Assurance Officers;
2. Promote awareness on the relevance of quality assurance matters in institutions of higher learning;
3. Build the capacity of Quality Assurance Officers through training;
4. Share expertise on quality assurance processes;
5. Monitor implementation of quality assurance improvement plans;
6. Mobilise resources for quality assurance activities;
7. Mentor Quality Assurance Officers;
8. Carry on quality assurance-related issues.

The capacity building of Quality Assurance Officers (QAOs) through training and mentorship programmes has been one of the core motivations and thus key activities of UUQAF since its inception. The underlying rationale for this objective was the need to build a critical mass of knowledgeable and skilled quality assurance practitioners in higher education institutions in Uganda who will then champion the cause for quality higher education in the country. Thus, the NMT Programme goal and UUQAF objectives of the capacity building were at a perfect convergence. For UUQAF, the achievement of its capacity-building objective lies not only in the power of networking among its members but also in building sustainable partnerships with higher education organisations within the country, the East African region, and beyond. The subject of higher education partnerships will be taken up later in this chapter. However, at this point, a conclusion on the discussion on networking is warranted.

It was observed earlier in this chapter that in addressing the questions of sustainability of the proposed NMT programme, the DIES Alumni sought recourse in an intangible resource called *social capital* which is found in networking. The importance of networking in higher education cannot be understated. For in networking, “there lies an intrinsic power in social and professional relationships necessary for the establishment and development of sustainable systems and cultural norms for quality

promotion” (Mawa, 2018, p. 46). This intrinsic power of networking is recognised as *social capital*, which, according to Bourdieu (1985), is understood to be the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or group, by possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition. According to Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998), social capital is “the sum of the actual and potential resources embedded within, available through, and derived from the network of relationships possessed by an individual or social unit. Social capital thus comprises both the network and the assets that may be mobilised through that network” (p. 243).

UUQAF has been a necessary vehicle through which the quality assurance practitioners have been able to mobilise and put to use social, material, intellectual, and financial resources necessary to achieve its objectives. The conceptualisation and implementation of the NMT programme in Uganda were thus informed by the availability of this intangible resource.

3. A Description of the NMT Programme in Uganda

3.1 The Uganda NMT Rationale, Goals, and Expected Learning Outcomes

The call made by DAAD to DIES Alumni in Uganda to conduct national multiplication training in 2013 was received with great excitement and enthusiasm. The DIES Alumni in Uganda, who had participated in the DIES Higher Education Quality Assurance Trainings, proposed an NMT title: *Quality Assurance Training For QA Directors in Uganda* and used their QA Network UUQAF as a body to apply for and organise this capacity building training. The training sessions were proposed to be held in November 2013 and March 2014.

It is worth noting here that the Uganda NMT programme was proposed based on a training approach adopted by UUQAF in 2012. This UUQAF capacity-building event had introduced sustainability mechanisms which included institutional support, cost-sharing by participants, and partnerships with national, regional, and international agencies for financial support and nomination of training experts. Indeed, these, and other measures, became the benchmarks for developing and implementing the NMT programme in Uganda. The major justification for the NMT programme in Uganda was the lack of skilled QA managers in HEIs and

the need to achieve this through national QA training. This was clearly articulated in the Uganda NMT proposal (2013):

... institutions in Uganda have shown great commitment to enhance the quality of education in the country except for the evident lack of trained QA Officers to guide the process of establishing IQA systems. Efforts by IUCEA and DAAD to train some Quality Assurance Officers in the region have certainly increased the demand for trained quality assurance officers by many universities. These efforts can only be sustained through continuous national QA training. (p. 1)

The NMT programme in Uganda was conceived from a real need to address the shortage of knowledgeable and skilled personnel to establish and manage internal quality assurance systems in HEIs. The desired goal was to have a pool of QA experts to drive the establishment and management of quality assurance systems in HEIs in the country. Based on this broad goal, the following expected learning outcomes were defined for the NMT Programme in Uganda (2013):

1. Demonstration of a capacity to establish Internal Quality Assurance Systems;
2. Development of QA Policies, procedures, and evaluation/monitoring instruments;
3. Organisation and conduct of institutional self-assessment of IQA systems;
4. Development of quality institutional self-assessment reports of their IQA systems for quality improvement.

3.2 Training Methodology and Approach

The Training Methodology and Approach adopted in the NMT programme paid attention to adult learning which employed both workshop-based sessions and practical self-assessments exercises. Several pre- and post-training activities, including assessments, reporting, and reflections were conducted. As a pre-training activity, participants were required to write brief, five-page reports on the status of QA System in their institutions to show the pre-training status of QA Systems in HEIs in Uganda. This individual writing allowed the participants to observe and reflect on their concrete experiences in ensuring quality in their institutions. The training methodology was also one of action base in which participants were required to develop and implement action plans that would lead to self-assessment and improvement of the internal quality assurance system in their institutions. A thorough analysis of

the outcomes in the implementation of the action plans for this training is desirable but is not the focus of this chapter. The scope of this chapter is the sustainability of the training beyond the NMT programme timelines. Therefore, a description of the training phase is necessary here.

A two-phased training workshop approach was adopted. The first phase of the workshops focused on the establishment and management of Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) systems. The four-day training session covered topics such as the concept of quality and quality assurance in HEIs, aspects of IQA System including QA Policies and Procedures, QA Units, and IQA Mechanisms and Instruments. The second phase of the workshop sessions covered aspects of Assessment of Internal QA Systems. In the sessions, participants were introduced to the concept of self-assessment, the organisation and management of self-assessment processes, the tool and criteria for assessing IQA systems in HEIs, and the development of a quality self-assessment report.

3.3 The Uganda NMT Programme Participants and Trainers

The programme aimed to train the staff who were working or who were expected to work as quality assurance officers or managers from 20 universities and degree-awarding institutions in Uganda. It was expected that each institution would send two representatives for the training thus a total of 40 participants was expected to be trained. However, the actual total number of participants rose to 48 because some HEIs expressed commitment to fully support a bigger number of their staff.

A team of 6 principal trainers and 4 mentees were mobilised. The six experts included three national experts supported by the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE), two regional experts supported by IUCEA, and one international expert supported by DAAD. All the six trainers were themselves quality assurance experts who were actively involved in the East African Quality Assurance initiative as training experts and peer assessors. This blend of national, regional, and international experts served well to enrich learning experiences and to build local capacity for continuous quality assurance training programme in Uganda.

4. Potential Challenges for Sustaining NMT Programmes

The task of conceptualisation of the quality assurance training in terms of defining its objectives, content, and methodology was largely an easy one for the Organising Committee of the NMT programme in Uganda. The reason for this was that the Team had a good grounding of such training methodologies and had access to sufficient training materials. However, the task of envisioning the potential challenges of, and setting strategic mechanisms to sustain these national training programmes, was a daunting one. Following intense planning discussions among the Team members on the potential challenges of sustaining DIES training programmes in East Africa, it was noted that the absence of a somewhat formal organisational structure and support, the high training costs, and total reliance on external agencies for funding and training experts are all potential challenges.

4.1 Absence of a Clear Organisational Support Structure

It was observed that several higher education managers in the region had participated in different DIES training programmes in Germany including the Deans' Course and organised similar training sessions upon their return. But these alumni-organised training activities did not continue after the inaugural sessions largely because of the absence of a formal alumni organisation to support continuity. Cognisant of this observed phenomenon, the DIES Alumni who organised the NMT for quality assurance in Uganda, looked to its national quality assurance network, the UUQAF, for an organisational and operational support framework.

4.2 High Training Costs

The training of higher education managers is often an expensive undertaking. This is particularly true when the managers are called from different HEIs into residential training workshops in hotel venues. The cost of transport, boarding, and other logistical requirements can be prohibitive in the participation of many higher education managers from financially-challenged institutions. Indeed, on drawing experiences from national training programmes organised under UUQAF, many HEIs in Uganda are financially constrained to support more than one staff for higher education management training courses. With the availability of support from other sources, many HEIs are indeed committed to send

their staff for management training. Unfortunately, such external funding opportunities for capacity building are often specific, one that continues only as long as the training project lasts. Moreover, the overall cost of organising national training supported by external trainers can be high. All these present serious challenges in sustaining capacity building for higher education managers and therefore require the implementation of strategic measures.

5. Strategic Mechanisms for Sustainable National Training

5.1 Cost-sharing Mechanisms

One of the strategic decisions made by the Organising Committee for the NMT programme in Uganda was the infusion of cost-sharing mechanisms. All participants and their institutions were required to cover certain costs including their transport and personal expenses. This requirement was communicated clearly in the call for participation and was embraced by participants since it had been a continuing practice in UUQAF. The cost-sharing paradigm in this particular case of the NMT Programme had yet another dimension—it offered an opportunity to some UUQAF Member Institutions with the financial capacity to support additional staff for the training. From the perspective of UUQAF, the cost-sharing mechanism was motivated by the considerations of equity, efficiency, and necessity.

The principle of equity was applied in determining institutions that allowed the nomination of additional participants. The Organising Committee reviewed the level of participation of all institutions in previous national and regional quality assurance training programmes. For the sake of equity, institutions that had no record of participation in previous quality assurance training were given additional places for participants whose costs of lodging and food, and other costs mentioned above, had to be borne by the sending institutions. The efficiency consideration was based on the fact that space was adequate and that mentors were available to train up to 50 participants. It was therefore efficient to have additional training participants within the overall cost of NMT programme training sessions than to organise other similar training for another group of participants. Finally, it was deemed necessary to share costs and expand the pool of trained UUQAF members to increase the national representation for quality higher education in Uganda.

5.2 Social Networking Events and Commitment to the QA Network

A fundamental argument of this paper has been that the sustainability of alumni-organised training lies in their own recognised and established organisational and operational structures such as an alumni network. One way to strengthen this power of networking is to integrate social networking events in the training programmes, one of the several sustainability strategies considered in the NMT programme of quality assurance training in Uganda.

Social networking events, such as games and sports, cultural events, and organised dinners, were therefore organised as part of the training strategy. It was reasoned that through these social events, certain qualities and competencies of quality assurance officers such as planning, organising, coordination, negotiation, communication, and teamwork are equally enhanced. Moreover, these events gave the training participants not only the opportunity to build effective bonds among themselves but the social space to nurture a commitment to the Network, a necessary organisational structure for continued personal and professional development in the quality assurance work.

Accordingly, the intense social networking experience of the participants of the NMT has not only strengthened the bonds among the UUQAF members, but has also helped to sustain a strong commitment to, and support of, the QA Network. This has, in turn, enhanced the capacity of the QA Network to organise QA training on an annual basis. Since 2014, UUQAF has been able to organise five national quality assurance training workshops covering different aspects of higher education quality assurance including data management and use for quality improvement, self-assessment at the institutional level, and curriculum development, review and programme assessment.

5.3 Institutional Benchmarking Visits

A key training strategy adopted in the NMT Programme in Uganda was benchmarking. Schofield (1998) has observed

that the desire to learn from each other and to share aspects of good practice is almost as old as the university itself. Such desires have traditionally manifested themselves in numerous ways: professional associations, both academic and non-academic; meetings to share common interests; and numerous visits by delegations from one higher education system to examine practice in another. (p. 6)

Today, benchmarking is a major quality enhancement technique used by many higher education managers to learn and improve on the quality of their institutions. Although benchmarking has many meanings, it is broadly defined as “a continuous and systematic process for evaluating the product, service, and work processes of organisations that are recognised as representing best practices for organisational improvement” (Spendolini, 1992, p. 91).

Within the context of the NMT programme and in the practice of UUQAF, benchmarking involves quality assurance officers visiting a higher education institution to learn from it the quality assurance mechanisms set in place, such as processes, structures, tools, and facilities (the totality of the QA system), and then, based on their findings, improve on the QA system of their institutions. The training approach here was a practical one, that is, an exposure of the training participants to the QA system of a member institution not merely to copy what is in another institution but to compare processes, structures, and tools with their own and thereby learn new ideas and best practices for improvement. The process for the benchmarking visit involved four key activity steps: planning the visit, conducting the visit, analysing the findings, and adopting best practices for improvement. These steps are akin to the Deming Cycle marked by Plan—Do—Check—Act (PDCA) (Deming, 1989).

During the planning process, the participants were exposed to the national and regional QA standards and tools, mechanisms, and processes. The Organising Committee sought permission from the institution to be visited and informed it about the scope and expectations of the benchmarking visit. The host institution was expected to prepare information materials to share, make presentations, and conduct discussions with participants about the internal quality assurance system and to organise facility tour. The visit was planned to last a full day to enable participants to have a thorough learning inquiry of the QA system of the host institution. Upon returning to the training venue, participants were given opportunities to discuss their findings in small groups and in plenary. Emerging best practices were identified, analysed, and recommended for adoption, adaption, or improvement by the different institutions. It should be noted here that the NMT participants expressed great satisfaction with the benchmarking experience. It enabled the practitioners to search for best practices and learn from the institutions visited.

Following the successful benchmarking experience during the implementation of the NMT, UUQAF has made this practice part of all its

training activities. It is now firmly established in the practice of UUQAF that its training activities are held in member institutions to give host institutions direct exposure to benchmarking purposes and procedures.

5.4 Mentorship of National Resource Persons (Trainers)

Mentorship of Quality Assurance Officers is one strategic objective of UUQAF that has remained core to the sustainability mechanisms of the Network. Although UUQAF has no formal programme of mentorship, the mentoring process is made a practice in the conduct of all activities of the Network including training. The rationale for this mechanism is to build internal capacity among UUQAF members to create a pool of quality assurance experts who can play more meaningful roles in the activities of the Network. The methodological approach to this mentoring strategy is based on the philosophy of *learning by doing*. Holliday (2001) has defined such methodology for achieving successful mentoring process for adults in the following statements:

True learning works the same way with adults. When you tell an adult how to do something, she will remember 10 per cent of what you say. If you show an adult how to do something, she will remember 60 per cent. But if you do something with that same adult, she will remember 90 per cent or more. Mentoring is about doing and about understanding. (p. 142)

In addition to the philosophy of learning-by-doing highlighted above, the NMT programme in Uganda has been influenced fundamentally by the four-stage model of experiential learning introduced by Kolb (1984) that is now widely used in adult education. According to Kolb, learners need four different kinds of abilities to be more effective: “concrete experience abilities (CE), reflective observation abilities (RO), abstract conceptualizing abilities (AC), and active experimentation abilities (AE)” (p. 30). The two interrelated concepts of experience and reflection are particularly central to the learning process and thus affect the ability to actively participate in the training. As Miettinen (2000) has rightly observed, experiential learning is significant to adult educators because

it combines spontaneity, feeling, and deep individual insights with the possibility of rational thought and reflection. It maintains the humanistic belief in every individual's capacity to grow and learn, so important for the concept of lifelong learning. It comprises a positive ideology that is evidently important for adult education. (p. 70)

In the context of the NMT programme in Uganda, the mentoring process involved pairing the experienced national, regional, and international quality assurance expert trainers with new but potentially quality assurance officers. A short protocol for the mentor-mentee engagement was developed and shared with the trainers and identified mentees. The protocol provided for joint planning and execution of presentations, group discussions, reflection and feedback sessions for an improved learning experience. Like any other mentorship activity, the NMT programme mentors were expected to provide support, advice, encouragement, and even friendship to their mentees to give them a sense of connectedness to the wider community of expert QA practitioners. This way, mentors helped to develop the competencies and interests of the mentees in quality assurance as evidenced by the growth of numbers, from four to ten national quality assurance trainers in Uganda. On top of this, four quality assurance officers are pursuing PhD studies and professional career development in higher education quality assurance.

5.5 Partnerships with National and Regional Institutions

The establishment and development of educational partnerships have become a common practice. Recognized in different forms and for different reasons, educational partnerships with local regional and international agencies have remained important today as they were before. Nowadays, global relationships and partnerships are essential to an institution's growth and development (Chou, 2012). A key tenet of partnering is that a benefit comes from creating a collaboration based on the ideal that the individual partners cannot accomplish their goals on their own: the partnership creates the ultimate win-win situation (Eddy, 2010).

The creation of partnerships through networking and collaboration with educational institutions and agencies for capacity enhancement has been at the core of UUQAF's strategic sustainability mechanisms. The implementation of the NMT Programme under the DIES initiative was a perfect opportunity for UUQAF to bolster the existing partnerships with the NCHE, IUCEA and DAAD, all of whom have a common goal of promoting quality higher education. Moreover, the building of trust between UUQAF and its partners, enhanced by clear and continuous communication between the key decision-makers of the partner organisations, has helped to sustain the partnerships and achievement of the quality assurance capacity building objective.

As already highlighted in this paper, UUQAF benefited in this partnership framework through the availability of training resources (materials, experts, and funds). Since 2012, UUQAF has continued to benefit from the support of its partners. The NCHE has institutionalised its support for UUQAF in the annual budget of the Quality Assurance Directorate of the Council. The Annual Quality Assurance Forum of the IUCEA continues to offer opportunities for professional growth of UUQAF members who are active in the regional East African Higher Education Quality Assurance Network (EAQAN).

5.6 Research and Documentation

Research and documentation are mechanisms through which UUQAF has sustained its capacity building programme. Research, understood here as the search for pertinent information, on the status of quality assurance in HEIs in Uganda, has defined the strategic actions and training scope of UUQAF. For instance, the formulation of the UUQAF 2012 training and the 2013 NMT programme was based on the findings of a Quality Assurance Personnel Training Needs Assessment conducted in 2011. The needs assessment survey report concluded that the “QA officers of the UUQAF member institutions are quite certain of the training needs of the QA staff/personnel in their respective institutions. These needs are spread across various areas of competence” (UUQAF, 2011, p. 7).

Also, as part of the selection criteria, all NMT programme participants were required to submit write-ups on the status of quality assurance in their respective institutions. This baseline survey provided useful insights into the status of QA in member institutions. This tradition of collecting and documenting information about QA in HEIs in Uganda has continued and has since been formalised with the establishment of the UUQAF Magazine in 2016 and the production of a major research report in 2018. In the Foreword to the First Edition of the UUQAF Magazine (2016), the Founding President of the Network observed that

UUQAF was established, among other core functions, to support the development and dissemination of innovative quality assurance practices and to collect and collate information on important quality assurance case studies as a basis for benchmarking, information exchange and capacity building. The quality assurance experiences and practices shared by the different institutions in this edition provide a rich source of information on quality assurance activities, mechanisms, systems, and practices. (p. 1)

A continuous process of learning has, therefore, been established through research and documentation for sustainable national quality assurance capacity building.

6. Conclusion

The challenges of a weak organisational framework and high costs to sustain higher education capacity building training are real. Overcoming these challenges requires investment in, and implementation of, strategic sustainability measures that include (a) instituting cost-sharing measures; (b) creating social networking; (c) establishing strong partnerships; and (d) setting up of a framework for a continued process of benchmarking, mentorship, research, and documentation. Nevertheless, the presence of a strong network of higher education managers remains a vital resource for sustainable training programmes for these managers.

The NMT programme for quality assurance training in Uganda paid great attention to the power of social networks as it employed the above strategies to sustain national quality assurance training in the country. A decision was made, as well, by the DIES Alumni in this programme to entrench their proposal on the objectives of UUQAF. The training philosophy and approach adopted in this NMT was thus anchored on the existing social and institutional bonds and training framework established by the QA network.

Furthermore, the partnership envisioned in the NMT framework and the training programme strategies adopted have all helped to build an enhanced framework for sustainable national quality assurance training and mentorship process. The national quality assurance training has continued since 2014 on an annual basis and so has the number of national QA experts who can train more quality assurance managers in the country increased.

References

- Basiago, A. (1995). Methods of defining sustainability. *Sustainable Development*, 3(3), 109–119.
- Bourdieu, P. (1985). *The forms of capital: Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education*. Greenwood.
- Bozeman, B., & Feeney, M. (2007). Toward a useful theory of mentoring: A conceptual analysis and critique. *Administration and Society*, 39 (6), 719–739.
- Burt, R. (1992). *Structural holes*. Harvard University Press.
- Chou, D. (2012). Building a successful partnership in higher education institutions. *International Journal of Information Systems and Change Management*, 6 (1), 84–97.
- Daloz, L. A. (1990). *Effective teaching and mentoring*. Jossey Bass.
- EAQAN. (2012). *Constitution of the East African Higher Education Quality Assurance Network*. <http://eaqan.com/>
- Eddy, P. L. (2010). Partnerships and collaborations in higher education. *William and Mary School of Education Book Chapters*. (pp. 1–15) Jossey-Bass. <https://scholarworks.wm.edu/educationbookchapters/38>
- Ekechukwu R., & Horsfall, M. (2015). Academic mentoring in higher education: A strategy to quality assurance in teacher education in Nigeria. *European Journal of Research and Reflection in Educational Sciences*, 3 (2), 37–45.
- Ho, Y., & Chiu, H. (2011). *A social network analysis of leading semiconductor companies' knowledge flow network*. Springer.
- Holliday, M. (2001). *Coaching, mentoring and managing: A couch guidebook*. The Career Press, Inc.
- IUCEA. (2010). *A road map to quality: A handbook for quality assurance in higher education*, (Vols. 1–4). Author.
- Kolb, D. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. Prentice-Hall.
- Mawa, M. (2018). Quality assurance networks and the development of quality culture in the East African higher education area. In L. W. Njanja (Ed.), *Enhancing quality in higher education for better student outcomes* (pp. 39–47). Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Mbiti, J. (1969). *African religions and philosophy*. Heinemann Educational Books Ltd.
- Miettinen, R. (2000). The concept of experiential learning and John Dewey's theory of reflective thought and action. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 19 (1), 54–72.

- Nahapiet, J., & Ghoshal, S. (1998). Social capital, intellectual capital and organizational advantage. *Academy of Management Review*, 23 (2), 242–266.
- Schofield, A. (1998). An Introduction to Benchmarking in Higher Education. In *Benchmarking in Higher Education: A study conducted by the Commonwealth Higher Education Management Service*. UNESCO.
- Spendolini, M. (1992). *The benchmarking book*. American Management Association.
- UUQAF. (2011). *Constitution of the Ugandan Universities Quality Assurance Forum*. Uganda. Author.
- UUQAF. (2016, May). *UUQAF Magazine*, (1), 1–45.
- UUQAF. (2011). *Quality Assurance Personnel Training Needs Assessment Report*. Uganda. Author.

Michael MAWA, Uganda Martyrs University, Uganda,
e-mail: michaelmawa2020@gmail.com,
ORCID: 0000-0002-6725-0384