

## **Evaluation and Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions to Meet Social Expectations: Lessons to Ethiopia**

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**Abstract:** In a world transformed by major technological breakthroughs, the information revolution and the advent of the knowledge society, higher education is called upon to play an increasingly vital role. Its mandates have been diversified. Accordingly, it must simultaneously train young people for jobs demanding higher and more diverse skills, offer courses which are up to international standards, while instilling knowledge which is adapted to the local context; and it must contribute to resolving social problems like poverty, HIV/AIDS, threats to the environment, and violence. In times of uncertainty, higher education institutions are also expected to foresee future needs and know how to adjust to change. To effectively fulfill their missions, higher education institutions need to be independent, and this necessitates accountability and transparency in their management. In fact, numerous stakeholders (the government, employers, business community, parents, teachers, and students) are interested in obtaining information about how higher education institutions operate. How to evaluate and accredit higher education systems, therefore, has become a crucial concern at the present time. The task of evaluating and accrediting higher education systems and institutions, however, is not a simple matter. First of all, it should be defined in terms of needs for accountability. Who needs to know what, in order to make what decisions? The locus of decision-making also provides another perspective on the issue. Explaining how higher education systems and institutions can be evaluated and accredited implies considering them as important vehicles for implementing government policies, satisfying social expectations, and carrying through their own long-term strategy with the means at hand. In light of this view and based on the practice currently employed in some developing countries, this paper attempts to provide a clear overview of what is needed for national and institutional evaluation and accreditation capabilities and how to go about constructing and maintaining them. In particular, it tries to identify the problems observed in the practice of evaluating and accrediting Ethiopian higher education institutions (both private and public) and proposes ways of tackling these problems with a broad purpose of enabling the institutions meet social expectations.

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## The Evaluation Concept

There are several types of evaluation that are done differently according to the objectives targeted and the means employed. The many definitions of evaluation could be grouped into two broad categories as follows.

- a) 'measurement/quantification evaluation' is based on ratios, for example, *graduating students/enrolled students*, or *number of full professors/total number of lecturers* to establish comparisons over time or between similar departments with the purpose of statistical follow-up and/or improvements in management.
- b) 'diagnosis-expertise-control evaluation' is a procedure used to generate information about the results of an initiative—for example, violence on university campuses; or about measures adopted as part of public policy—for example, integrating delinquent young people into society and the workforce; or about the organization, itself, or a teaching staff, so that decision-makers can modify their activities in relation to the targeted objectives (Lamour-Rontopoulou,1999).

In practice, depending on the context and conditions of evaluation, and the objectives targeted, one or the other, or even both categories could be used. Institutional evaluation is generally introduced or developed according to the following circumstances: (a) when having granted greater autonomy to institutions, the state wants in return more openness about their operations, (b) in some decentralized countries, when the state wishes to align the 'output' of higher education with national objectives, which are often of an economic order.

In order to have a clear understanding of the concept, here it will be important to describe the relationship and distinction between evaluation and accreditation. The term accreditation is defined as granting a quality mark indicating that certain standards are met

(NAO, 2003). Accreditation is concerned with taking a formal, independent decision on whether or not certain requirements are met, whereas evaluation is aimed at quality improvement.

Accreditation is also perceived as the final formal yes/no decision following a multi-step evaluation procedure; it is an added, normative element to evaluations. Some countries (Germany and Norway) have difficulty with the relationship between evaluation and accreditation. They make a distinction between the two terms and consider them as separate systems. Although at times the impression is given that these systems are completely separate, it should be noted that accreditation usually follows from evaluation and the outcome of an evaluation can be used for the purpose of accreditation.

### **The Need for Evaluating and Accrediting Higher Education Institutions**

Within the education sector, “the development of higher education constitutes the most important evolution that has been observed since 1945 in countries around the world, whatever the political system, level of economic development or educational ideology”(Altbach, 1991, in Lamour-Rontopoulou,1999).

Universities share common historical origins, while being profoundly affected by the national, socio-economic and cultural environment. Existing universities, no matter where they are located, are inspired by the same European model which was operating during the Middle Ages. Teaching was their main and, for a long time, their only mission. It was not until the 19<sup>th</sup> century that a research university was created in Berlin by Wilhelm von Humboldt so that research, being done randomly up until then in various institutions, progressively became the other great mission of the university.

The boom in school enrolments, observed internationally, has led to a move towards higher education for the masses in several industrialized countries. The resulting social and educational diversity, the pressure from national policies to move closer to business and

professional interests, the search for closer links between higher education and the job market in a context beset by unemployment can be considered as the prime factors driving the growing diversity of the educational offer during recent decades.

Also, in countries with a centralized economy is added the desire of institutions, especially universities, to acquire a greater degree of autonomy, which would offer them an additional margin of freedom in decision-making and the management of their resources. If the regulatory authority does not constantly thwart this demand, we have to recognize that autonomy is not obtained by force, but is achieved through negotiations between the institution and the state. Thus, it is the responsibility of the former to demonstrate its decision-making capability concerning organization, management and control to express long-term strategic objectives and not only to break free from regulatory constraints.

Moreover, the democratization of governments and political institutions offers new opportunities for defining the relationships with the state, in the direction of increased autonomy for the university. This objective requires greater financial independence; and this means diversifying resources, setting up of efficient management systems, and defining a consistent policy for the institution. These are the conditions needed to improve the quality of higher education, assure fairer access for the young people of each country, and stimulate the remodeling of the overall education system. Finally, growing internationalization, expressed in the mobility of students from developing countries to the developed ones, and the rapid spread of new technologies, which encourage exchange in all areas of knowledge, effectively challenge institutions of higher education to adapt (Lamour-Rontopoulou, 1999).

### **Conditions for Evaluation**

Evaluation, which seems to be accepted in largely decentralized higher education systems, is also relevant in centrally managed

countries. To be implemented properly, evaluation must satisfy a certain number of conditions. According to Lamour-Rontopoulou (1999) the conditions, among others, include: keeping the actors involved fully informed, defining its field of endeavor and its aims, and adhering to a certain number of principles concerning the independence of the evaluator and the sharing of results. A brief description of these conditions is presented below.

#### **a) Keeping the Actors Informed**

All evaluations have a control aspect that can raise eyebrows and even deep concerns among the personnel, who see it as a judgment leveled against their activities, even if it does not focus on them individually. And yet, the cooperation of those involved is a necessary precondition for its successful completion and the quality of results. Thus, in order to quell their fears and deactivate their defence mechanism, one should keep them informed from the very outset by defining the area of evaluation, its purpose, the methodology to be used, the operational flowchart and timetable, the objectives targeted and the use to be made of results.

#### **b) Defining the Area and Aims of Evaluation**

One must frankly ask: "What are we actually evaluating?" to define the data to be gathered, and to circumscribe the content and the impact of conclusions at the end of the exercise. If the field chosen is the institution, itself, one must also define the target objective(s): management, teaching, research, a particular sector of activity, or else institutional operations, performance, etc.

Whatever the subject chosen, evaluation should base itself on the institution's set objectives, whether they are clearly stated in an overall 'project' or implicit, so as to measure the results obtained, taking into account the means available for implementation. Since an institution's objectives can be diverse and complex, evaluation cannot claim to measure and analyze everything. This means making

choices, which is a precondition if diagnosis and conclusions are to be clearly and unambiguously interpreted.

### **c) Choosing an Evaluator**

In the framework of external evaluation, it is essential that the evaluating authority be independent. Indeed, it is impossible to be simultaneously policy-maker, sponsor, and evaluator without running the risk of confusing roles and drawing conclusions, which are largely false. In countries, that do not have specialized authorities, evaluation procedures must be entrusted to external organizations, which offer guarantees of independence and recognized expertise. It seems obvious that in countries where evaluation practices are not widespread, an effort must be made to adapt methodologies and train experts (Crozier as cited in Lamour-Rontopoulou, 1999).

The principle of giving the evaluator a free hand, whether as an expert or an organization, has special significance in the case of self-evaluation. Attractive in itself, the advantage of self-evaluation is that it can become a regular administrative procedure within the institution. It does run the risk, however, of being overly self-critical or self-congratulatory.

In short, it should be borne in mind that one of the aims of external evaluation is to help the institution employ tools capable of generating trustworthy and ongoing data about the essential aspects of its activity. External evaluation and self-evaluation should therefore not be seen as being in contradiction with each other, but rather considered as two complementary aids to institutional decision-making.

### **d) Dissemination of Results**

Should one make evaluation results public? Indeed, the question only makes sense in terms of the appropriateness of making all, or only a part of the results, public. If it is considered that one of the aims of

evaluation is to 'render an account' of the institution's results and the means used to obtain them, evidently the results should be published in their entirety. Nevertheless, in some cases, recommendations might have more of an impact if only selective aspects were made public.

### **Issues to be Considered During Data Collection/ Inventory of the Institution**

Collecting data about the institution's main spheres of activity makes it possible to draw up an overview, which is the first step towards a detailed analysis. The evaluator should thus become acquainted with the institution and, at the same time, discern trouble areas on which further investigations could concentrate. This descriptive information needs to be completed and eventually clarified by analyses about the strengths and weaknesses, as well as the aims of all spheres of activity and their elements. In this regard, the data to be collected should include the following:

- history of existing structure (founding date, structural development, transformation due to reforms, statutory changes),
- premises and layout (date of construction, ownership, location/layout, surface area, condition, assignment and use of premises, etc.),
- students (evolution of enrolment in terms of flow and absolute numbers for a given period as well as indicators about teaching performance for various training courses and streams, socio-demographic characteristics, learning indicators),
- personnel (teaching and non-teaching staff, i.e. evolution of the total number and academic specialty of teachers, evolution of the teaching and non-teaching body according to status, age-scale, recruitment needs, evolution of student/teacher ratios, etc.),
- financing (evolution of the budget over a given period, the difference between self-generated and total resources, the

- origin of self-generated resources, the average cost per student according to academic course),
- outside relationship (with the environment, the local community, businesses, professional organizations, associations, international institutions, etc.),
  - governance (the regulatory frameworks and process),
  - management of resources (human, financial, and material),
  - management of academic life (controlling the flow and number of enrolments, individual follow-up according to the course of study, graduation/failure from various channels and types of training, the professional integration of students, etc.),
  - information system (the tools and management techniques used),
  - teaching (the educational offer, variety of course of study, the quality of instruction, etc.), and
  - student living conditions (reception, teaching support, teaching facilities and student timetable, sports and cultural services, social services, residences, cafeterias, participation in the institution's operations).

### **Evaluation and Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions in Developing Countries**

Developing countries have inherited models that differ from those of industrialized countries. The gaining of independence during the years following the Second World War revealed a great need for highly qualified civil servants for the public administration, teaching and all sectors of an economy striving to get on its feet. The result was the spectacular development of higher education, which is shown by the high growth of university enrolments in these countries.

The evaluation and accreditation of higher education institutions in developing countries is not based on a uniform model. It is very diverse, as is shown by the emergence of national evaluation systems sensitive to political, social or economic factors. As Cowen (1996) noted, a nation's historical development, the political context, the level

of economic and social development, the relations between the state and the academic world, the fears and conflicting interests of stakeholders which can arise when evaluation is introduced, generate tensions which, depending on the country involved, contribute to 'shaping' a national model for the evaluation and accreditation system. The following examples of quality assurance systems that were put in place in India, Egypt, and Ethiopia make it possible to appreciate the diversity of approaches and procedures.

#### **a) India**

The system of higher education in India has expanded rapidly during the last fifty years. In spite of the built-in regulatory mechanisms that ensure satisfactory levels of quality in the functioning of higher education institutions, there have been criticisms that the country has permitted the mushrooming of institutions of higher education with fancy program and substandard facilities and consequent dilution of standards. To address the issues of deterioration in quality, the National Policy on Education (1986) and the Plan of Action (POA-1992) advocated the establishment of an independent national accreditation body. Consequently, the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) was established in 1994 to evaluate and accredit higher education institutions in the country (NAAC, 2005). The activities and future plans of the NAAC are guided by its vision and mission that focus on making quality assurance an integral part of the functioning of higher education institutions. Accordingly, the following key tasks are defined for the organization:

- To arrange for periodic evaluation and accreditation of institutions of higher education or units thereof, or specific academic program or projects.
- To stimulate the academic environment for promotion of quality of teaching-learning and research in higher education institutions.
- To encourage self-evaluation, accountability, autonomy and innovations in higher education.

- To undertake quality-related research studies, consultancy and training program.
- To collaborate with other stakeholders of higher education for quality evaluation, promotion and sustenance.

Guided by its vision and striving to achieve its mission, the Council primarily evaluates the quality of institutions of higher education that volunteer for the process, through an internationally accepted methodology. NAAC's process of assessment is towards holistic, systematic, objective, databased, transparent, and shared experience for institutional improvement. To this effect, it has formulated a three-stage process for assessment and accreditation as given below:

- Preparation and submission of the self-study report by the institution, its submission to NAAC and in-house analysis of the report by NAAC.
- Peer team on-site visit to the institution for validation of the self-study report followed by presentation of a comprehensive assessment report to the institution.
- Grading, certification, and accreditation by the Executive Committee of the NAAC based on the evaluation report by the peer team.

The self-study report to be validated by peers is the backbone of the whole exercise. Manuals have been developed to suit different units of higher education, with detailed guidelines on the preparation of the self-study report and the other aspects of assessment and accreditation. Any assessment and subsequent accreditation is made with reference to a set of parameters so that the standing of an institution can be compared with that of other similar institutions. The Council has identified the following seven criteria to serve as the basis of its assessment procedures:

- Curricular Aspects
- Teaching-Learning and Evaluation
- Research, Consultancy and Extension

- Infrastructure and Learning Resources
- Student Support and Progression
- Organization and Management
- Healthy Practices

To assess and grade the institutions of higher education using the three-step process for accreditation and make the outcome as objective as possible, NAAC has developed an instrument. Though the methodology and the broad framework of the instrument are the same, there is a slight difference in the focus of the instrument depending on the unit of Accreditation.

***Institutional Accreditation:***

- **University:** University Central Governance Structure along with all the Under Graduate and Post Graduate Departments.
- **College:** Any College - affiliated, constituent, or autonomous with all its departments of studies.
- **Department Accreditation:** Any department/school/centre of the University.

Taking cognizance of differences in the unit of assessment, NAAC has made changes in the focus of the instrument. Thus, separate instruments have been developed to suit different units of higher education. The manuals give details of the criteria on which value judgment on institutional accreditation will be taken by the peer as well as operational suggestions to get ready for the process. Separate manuals and criterion-wise aspects are being developed by Expert Committees in each subject for this purpose.

**Grading System:** Understanding variance in the type of institutions, the seven criteria have been allotted differential weightages. The weightages marked in Table 1 below are used for calculating the institutional score.

**Table 1: Differential Weightages Allotted to the Seven Criteria**

| Criteria                              | Unit of Assessment |                                 |                     |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------|
|                                       | Universities       | Affiliated/Constituent Colleges | Autonomous Colleges |
| Curricular Aspects                    | 15                 | 10                              | 15                  |
| Teaching-Learning and Evaluation      | 25                 | 40                              | 30                  |
| Research, Consultancy and Extension   | 15                 | 05                              | 10                  |
| Infrastructure and Learning Resources | 15                 | 15                              | 15                  |
| Student Support and Progression       | 10                 | 10                              | 10                  |
| Organization and Management           | 10                 | 10                              | 10                  |
| Healthy Practices                     | 10                 | 10                              | 10                  |

The criterion-wise judgment of peers and the weightage to criteria will be used for calculating the composite score as follows:

$$\text{Institutional Score} = \sum C_i W_i / \sum W_i \quad (i = 1, 2, \dots, 7)$$

Where  $W_i$  = weightage of the  $i^{\text{th}}$  criterion and  $C_i$  = score of the  $i^{\text{th}}$  criterion.

**Outcome of Grading:** The Institutional score will further be used to assign the overall grade. If the overall score is more than 55%, the institution gets the "Accredited" status and any score less than that will lead to "Non Accredited" status. As illustrated in Table 2 below, the accredited institutions are graded on a nine-point scale with the following scale values:

**Table 2: Scale Values Used to Grade Accredited Institutions**

| Institutional score<br>(upper limit exclusive) | Grade           |
|------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| 95 -100                                        | A <sup>++</sup> |
| 90 -95                                         | A <sup>+</sup>  |
| 85 -90                                         | A               |
| 80 -85                                         | B <sup>++</sup> |
| 75 -80                                         | B <sup>+</sup>  |
| 70 -75                                         | B               |
| 65 -70                                         | C <sup>++</sup> |
| 60 -65                                         | C <sup>+</sup>  |
| 55 -60                                         | C               |

The grade will also be supplemented by a qualitative report by the team that would highlight the strengths and weakness of the institution under various criteria. Institutions which do not attain the minimum 55% points for accreditation, would also be intimated and notified indicating that the institution is "Assessed and Found not Qualified for Accreditation". The assessment outcome is valid for a period of 5 years.

The range of marks of each letter grade and actual total marks obtained as well as criterion-wise marks will be notified to the institution.

**Sustenance of Quality:** As mentioned earlier, the quality assurance procedures of the NAAC have triggered a lot of healthy practices in the system of higher education and the institutions that have undergone the process have become quality conscious. At this juncture one of the biggest challenges for the Council is to help higher education institutions in sustaining these efforts. Institutionalizing and internalizing the quality assurance processes has the key to this challenge. To make quality assurance an integral part of functioning of institutions, the Council is promoting the establishment of Internal

Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) in all higher education institutions in general, and in accredited institutions, in particular. Establishing an IQAC is a pre-requisite for any institution that comes forward for re-accreditation (NAAC, 2005).

## **b) Egypt**

The Egyptian higher education system has faced enormous challenges because of the political decision to absorb all graduates from the secondary school level into the system, and at the same time improve the level of quality in accordance with international standards. Over two million students representing about 30.5 per cent of the age group (18-23), are admitted into the Egyptian higher education system. Fifteen public universities currently absorb over 1.3 million students; six private universities absorb nearly 40 thousand students. The number of institutions in public universities is 278 and this number exceeds 500 institutions that would undergo the accreditation process (Said, 2005).

As noted by this writer, the process of establishing a National Quality Assurance and Accreditation Committee (NQAAC) in Egypt was started after the Egyptian higher education strategic reform plan was developed, and endorsed nationally by all concerned stakeholders in February 2000. The NQAAC was formed to look into establishing a national system through which the quality of the Egyptian higher education system can improve, and produce quality graduates that Egypt needs to meet the challenges of the twenty first century.

The comprehensive study to establish the Egyptian National Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency (NQAAA), finalized almost a year ago, have been officially announced by the President of Egypt, and currently waiting for endorsement by the Peoples Assembly. Meanwhile, the NQAAC is currently acting as a shadow to the NQAAA until it is formed and ready to resume its activities. Extensive work has been done by the NQAAC over the past three years, mainly to create awareness, piloting and to prepare higher education

institutions for the accreditation process. There is an ongoing comprehensive program involving all the universities and higher education institutions.

According to Said (2005), the task of developing the QAA system was carried out by adopting core elements and relevant practices from the accepted methodology of other quality assurance agencies and making it suit the Egyptian context. British consultants from the UK have helped the NQAAC in the development of the system that leads primarily to institutional accreditation, and eventually to program accreditation.

In the Egyptian model, the full autonomy and total independence of the NQAAA has been emphasized with no influence or interference whatsoever from the government and/or other concerned entities to affect the decisions made by the agency. For this reason, a law has established the NQAAA that, not even the President of Egypt can change without referring to the Peoples Assembly. The independence is from the service providers, namely the ministry of higher education and the higher education institutions. The Egyptian constitution stipulates that education is free at all levels, and that the government of Egypt, through the Ministry of Higher education (MOHE), is the responsible body. Usually governments, being the main sources for funding, like to have a say in the decisions related to the higher education system they are responsible for, and it would be interesting to note out of previous experiences what to expect when the NQAAA is in place to resume its mandate.

The institutional accreditation sought by the Egyptian model considers program evaluation to be the central backbone of the process. The rationale is that what makes an institution are the programs offered, and that without evaluating the programs to a certain extent, it would be very difficult to find rational basis on which to accredit institutions. A simplified institutional accreditation process has been developed in order not to over-burden institutes with a lot of paper work, but rather through a regular annual reporting system. The Handbook for Quality

Assurance and Accreditation in Egypt, which contains the detailed framework for the accreditation requirements and the reporting system, has also been developed, disseminated, and published on the website for anyone to access.

### **c) Ethiopia**

The evaluation and accreditation of higher education institutions in Ethiopia is currently carried out by the Higher Education Relevance & Quality Agency (HERQA), which is established through the Higher Education Proclamation (351/ 2003) as one of the key agencies responsible for guiding and regulating the higher education sector in the country. As stipulated in the aforementioned proclamation, the powers and duties entrusted to HERQA include the following:

- Ensuring that higher education and training offered at any institution are up to standard, relevant and high quality;
- Ensuring that higher education and training offered at any institution are in line with economic, social and other appropriate policies of the country;
- Evaluating higher education institutions at least once every five years with a view to ensuring whether such institutions are up to standard and competent, and submit its findings to the Ministry;
- Examine the applications submitted to the Ministry for pre-accreditation, accreditation and renewal of accreditation permits and submitting its recommendations to the Ministry within three months;
- Supervise standards and competence of the institution, and consult the Ministry in respect of merger or division of an institution;
- Give periodic information to the public about the current situation and status of the higher education institutions;
- Gather and disseminate information about the standards and programs of study offered by foreign higher education institutions as well as about their general status, etc.

In line with the mandate given to it, HERQA has set the following criteria to evaluate higher education institutions (HEIs).

- Curriculum (with clearly stated objectives, content, teaching methods, etc.)
- Physical facilities (area of the campus, buildings, classrooms, laboratories, workshops, computer center, language lab, library, sport and recreation field, etc.)
- Teachers (student /teacher ratio, number of tenured teachers, those with pedagogical training, weekly teaching load, availability of sufficient number of competent teachers, etc.)
- Guidelines and Regulations (such as academic, tuition fee, teachers' evaluation, students' affairs, etc.)
- Organization (organizational structure, budget, support staff, etc)

Since its establishment in 2003, HERQA has granted accreditation and pre-accreditation to the private as well as public higher education institutions based on the aforementioned criteria. The following tables present the number and type of higher education institutions accredited and pre-accredited by the Agency.

**Table 3: HEIs Accredited by HERQA**

| Type of HEIs                  | Program of Study      | Quantity         |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| Administered by Federal Gov't | Diploma and/or Degree | All federal HEIs |
| Administered by NGOs          | Diploma only          | 2                |
|                               | Diploma + Degree      | 1                |
| Administered by GOs           | Diploma only          | 2                |
|                               | Diploma + Degree      | 2                |
| Administered by Private firms | Diploma only          | 21               |
|                               | Diploma + Degree      | 13               |

**Table 4: HEIs Pre-accredited by HERQA**

| Type of HEIs                  | Program of Study | Quantity |
|-------------------------------|------------------|----------|
| Administered by NGOs          | Degree           | -        |
| Administered by GOs           | Degree           | 1        |
| Administered by Private firms | Degree           | 24       |
| Total                         |                  | 25       |

Source: [www.higher.edu.et](http://www.higher.edu.et)

Table 3 depicts that all of the federal HEIs (universities, colleges and institutes), depending on their year of establishment, were able to get accreditation either from the then Higher Education Commission or the present HERQA so as to run diploma and/or degree programs in various fields of specialization. Besides, one college administered by non-government organizations (NGOs), two colleges administered by government organizations (GOs), and thirteen private HEIs were able to get accreditation from HERQA so as to run both diploma and degree programs. On the other hand, two colleges from NGOs, two colleges from GOs, and twenty one private HEIs were accredited by the agency to run diploma programs only.

Moreover, as shown in Table 4, one college from GOs and twenty-four from private firms, were pre-accredited by HERQA to run degree programs. It should be noted here that the number of private HEIs that were pre-accredited by HERQA for degree programs is greater than those which were accredited to run diploma programs. This difference existed due to the inclusion of eight colleges, which did not go through the process of accreditation for their diploma program. And this reflects the absence of uniform procedures in the accreditation of private HEIs by the Agency.

As indicated earlier, HERQA was established to accredit private HEIs, review the performance of both public and private higher education institutions and safeguard comparable standards of quality for degree programs in both public and private higher education. However, as Ashcroft and Rayner (2004:26) observed, “as yet it has made no progress towards thinking through how it might go about quality and

relevance assessment and how it might modify its accreditation process". Concerning the major problems observed in the evaluation and accreditation of private HEIs, a recently conducted research (Selamawit, 2004), enumerates the following:

- Rigid accreditation process, which does not consider the existing reality of the country in which the HEIs are working,
- Partiality of the MOE, which is reflected in the requirements to be fulfilled by private and public HEIs,
- Status of the assessors, i.e. they lack maturity in terms of expertise and value judgment,
- Long and bureaucratic accreditation process,
- Lack of clear understanding about accreditation, i.e. it is considered as a means to penalize private HEIs.

On top of these, the absence of uniform procedures in the accreditation of private HEIs is found to be a common pitfall of HERQA. As pointed out earlier, eight private HEIs were able to get pre-accreditation for their degree programs without being accredited for their diploma programs. This practice may lead someone to question the credibility of the Agency. When we look into the accreditation process of public HEIs, this problem becomes more common and visible. From our recent experience we have learnt that most of the upgraded institutions (TTIs to TTCs and colleges to universities) were without the necessary resources (instructors, books, laboratory equipment, etc.), which are important inputs for the provision of quality education to the students. Be that as it may, with the growing trend of expanding higher education in the country, there is a plan to open 13 universities in seven regional states, some of which do not have even a single feeder institution and the necessary resources. This practice will significantly affect the quality of higher education and the development of the country in general and the employability of the graduates in particular. And this calls for the evaluation of our quality assurance system and the implementation of uniform procedures of evaluation and accreditation in the country that applies to both private and public higher education institutions.

### **Concluding Remark**

Scholars in the field suggest that the quality and standards of academic outcomes is the most important feature of higher education institutions. To this effect, quality assurance systems are established in developing as well as developed countries.

Experience has shown that quality assurance in our higher education system focuses very much on the quality of certain inputs. Due attention has not been given to the quality and standards of the processes and outcomes of higher education. In this paper an attempt has been made to describe the what, why, and how of evaluation and accreditation, and to present an overview of quality assurance systems that are put in place in developing countries (India, Egypt, and Ethiopia).

Although there are many differences between the higher education systems in the three countries, it is possible that there may be lessons to be learnt from the experience of these countries about the evaluation and accreditation of higher education institutions that may be of real value to Ethiopia. In this regard, the author underscores the following points:

- Organizing rigorous training programs to create peer reviewers from the academic community to support the implementation of the quality assurance system;
- Focusing on innovative efforts of the private and public institutions and train peers to be able to pinpoint such innovations;
- Conducting impact analysis and handling the reactions to the accreditation process from the reluctance and indifference of institutions;
- Linking funding away from the regular fund to accreditation as an incentive scheme for higher education institutions to seek quality enhancement of their system;
- Establishing Internal Quality Assurance Units in all higher education institutions in general, and in accredited institutions, in

particular. And, considering the establishment of this unit as a pre-requisite for any institution that comes forward for re-accreditation;

- Creating an opportunity for collaboration and coordination among professional bodies, stakeholders, etc. (for recognition and approval), which is mandatory for the success of the quality assurance process;
- Evaluating the accreditation system itself periodically to create credibility and confidence within the system.

Apart from these, the quality assurance framework of India that combines the elements of the three basic approaches (assessment, accreditation, and audit) with multi-point grade and a report that is made public and valid for a specific period could be a model worth considering in depth by the Ethiopian HERQA.

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