

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE TO THE MSSEESA EVALUATION REPORT

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Assessment 1:

The network has been unable to realize all the self-set goals and objectives, such as gender equity, harmonization of curricula, publication of a newsletter, having a website, “real” complementary use of lab instruments due to acquisition of identical instruments at the different nodes, acquisition of additional third-party funding through joint-proposals, expansion within the sub-region.

Response:

The observation that not all the self-set objectives have not been achieved is correction but some there are generalizations that are incorrect. Achievement of gender equity must be seen in context. The growth in female student numbers at postgraduate levels as obtained in the various nodes reports to ISP must be appreciated. Gender non-parity in Physics is a global phenomenon. Secondly the curricula harmonization must not be seen from similar titles but more on content of the units taught in the various Universities’ syllabi. When we started, the transfer of credits was not accepted easily but now this now widely accepted within the region as seen from the regulations passed by the Senates of the various universities in the region. Thirdly, MSSEESA now has website – msseesa.org and this will be the vehicle to communicate the Network’s activities. Fourthly, to say that the nodes acquire identical equipment neglects the argument that the nodes are independent universities not run by the network. The common equipment are the basic equipment necessary for each laboratory, without which the mobility costs to visit various labs would be too much for the modest funding the Network receives. It was the very expensive equipment that the Network set out to minimize duplication of. Fifthly, yes the Network has relied on the financial support only. However, this must be assessed taking the actual workload the responsible node members have had to take up. This was an external parameter that was not effectively considered during the SWOT analysis but whose impact has become very critical. The attrition rate of the key senior scientists within the network contributed too. This was brought to the notice of the evaluators but this impact was not well recognized in their analysis.

Assessment 2:

Some of the realized goals were inefficiently accomplished, such as the training of technicians (technicians wished longer training periods!).

Response:

It ought to be realized that the element of longer training must be weighed against the amount of funds available and the time allowed to the technicians to be away from their institutions. The wish of the technicians is not the only parameter to consider.

Assessment 3:

Communication within and outside the network was inefficient due to lack of a network

communication platform such as a website. Most students who joined the nodes were aware of the network only prior to network scientific meetings.

Response:

This could only be true in some nodes and should not be generalized to the whole Network.

Assessment 4:

The greater share of the funding was spent on board meetings instead of students' activities.

Response:

This was true in the past, however, since 2018, this has changed, when the MSSEESA Board meetings became a parallel activity of a Conference held in Nairobi in September 2018.

Assessment 5:

Students were not involved in the decision-making and felt not to be part of the network.

Response:

This is not specific. It is not clear what decisions/suggestions they had that they wanted to participate in. They get partial scholarships, purchase of materials they suggest for their research, support to attend conferences, and support to visit laboratories at various nodes, etc. So it needs to be clear where they want an input.

Assessment 6:

The 3 years rotatory chief coordination is inefficient (as confirmed by 3 of the 5 node coordinators). The non-continuity of network leadership explains the non-realisation of many self-set goals as mentioned under 1.

Response:

The weakness of this rotational coordination has been pointed out. However, at the initiation of the Network, this was a sticky issue that threatened to derail the idea of the network at birth. With Kenya being the coordinating node, all the nodes will have had the chance to coordinate and the challenges can now be discussed at the next Board meeting to decide the way forward. Appreciation of where we came from was necessary.