

# Effective partnerships – building capacity for quality in Saudi Arabian Higher Education institutions: an evaluation

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# The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) – largest country in the Gulf Cooperation Council - population between 26 and 28 million
- King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud – reformer
- Governed by Shariah law – birthplace of Islam
- Growing youth population – 32.4% of the population below 14 in 2008; with a population growth of more than 2%
- Rich country with an oil-based economy – spends approximately 7% of GDP on education

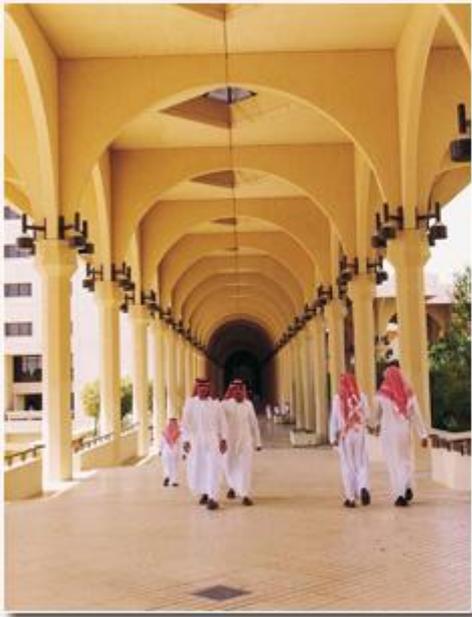
References – [www.data.UN.org](http://www.data.UN.org)



# Higher education in Saudi Arabia – a growth sector

- Very rapid growth in the higher education sector
- Until recently, there were seven universities
- Now 24 public universities
- 8 private universities
- 20 private colleges
- Established universities are in the main cities, newer ones in outlying areas





# The National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment (NCAAA)

- The NCAAA - established in 2004
- Has the task of ensuring the quality of all HEIs in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.
- Before this - no national quality system
- Accredits both institutions and programs
- National qualifications framework



# NCAAA Mission

- Specifically mentions support for HEIs, linked to the evaluation of “...post-secondary institutions and programs.” (NCAAA, 2007).
- Responsibilities of the NCAAA include training and support for faculty and staff involved with quality assurance.
- NCAAA supports continuous quality improvement. Accreditation is the means to this.



# Training challenge: developing a quality culture and skills

- The NCAAA introduced the new quality system with extensive training programs in the major regions (2500 participants)
  1. Introduction to the QA system and processes
  2. Institutional and program QA
  3. Processes for program and course planning and reporting



# Barriers to effective implementation

- A study done after this training showed that the major barrier to the implementation and evaluation of quality assurance and accreditation in HEIs was lack of training and experience in the KSA quality system
- It also showed that institutions were not achieving at the same level – and that the ability to do this was dependent on skilled human resources



# The British Council - NCAAA partnership training

- Started with a few once-off workshops. By 2008 these had become regular and the relationship between the NCAAA and the BC became a formal partnership
- By the end of 2010 / early 2011 more than 1000 professionals had attended and six study tours to the UK had been run
- In addition, almost 180 local reviewers had been trained in NCAAA system by QAA



# The British Council NCAAA partnership

- The NCAAA – British Council training: a way to enhance the training process
- NCAAA still trains independently but demands are increasing and the BC work provides valuable experience and enrichment
- The BC - aims to build engagement and trust for the UK through the exchange of knowledge and ideas
- Training meets its cultural relations objectives



# Evaluation – a planning tool

- The evaluation was carried out to enable the NCAAA and the British Council to plan and target future partnership work as the needs of sector change
- Aim was to find out what the partnership had achieved



# The evaluation:

- A profile of participants
- Whether participants implemented or applied what they learnt
- Whether their expectations were met
- To identify where / why pockets of excellence have developed
- To use what has been learnt to strengthen areas of best practice



# Methodology

- Study based on standard evaluation forms
- The study used a descriptive-analytical method based on a mixed research-design
- both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to collect and analyse data from participation records and evaluation sheets filled out by participants (832 participants)
- NCAAA reports were used as well as open-ended questionnaires (92 participants)
- Further surveys and interviews were also conducted (24)



# Building Capacity of Saudi HEIs

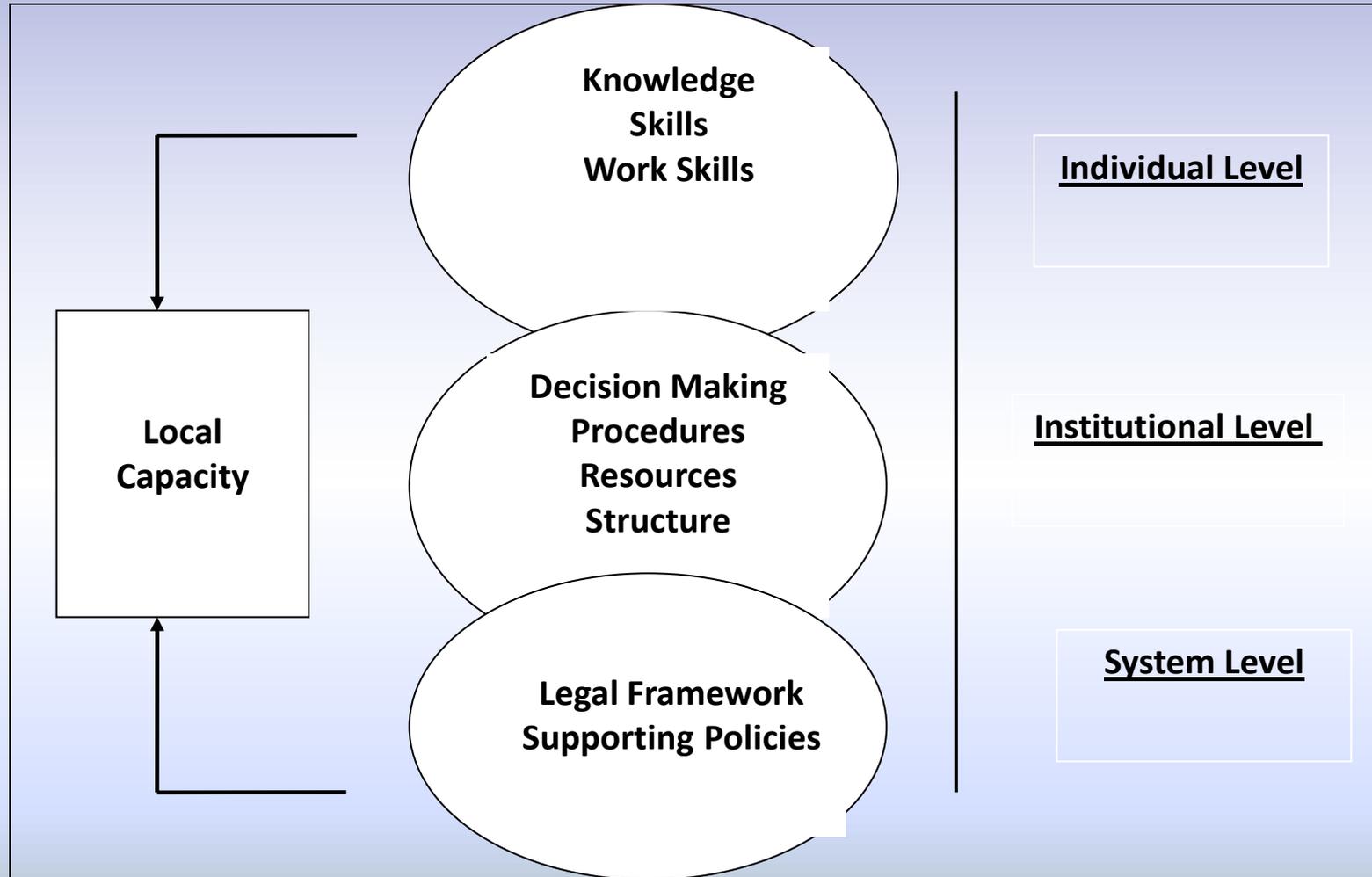


Figure 1: Capacity Building Levels

# Who attended the workshops?

*Participant records from 26 workshops March 2006-February 2011 show that:*

- 1065 Saudi participants in total
- Workshops were run in Riyadh (central region); Dammam (Eastern Region) and Jeddah (Western Region).
- The majority of participants (40.3%) came from the central region, while the Western Region (31.5%), and the Eastern Region (17.8%). These areas are the largest in size and have the greatest number of established universities.
- The smallest number of participants came from the Northern region (1.8%) and the Southern region (8.6%).
- 56.5% of participants were male while 43.5% were female.





## Map showing the different regions of Saudi Arabia

Many of the established universities are in the Central and the Western Region with many of the newer institutions in the Southern and Northern regions

# Who attended the workshops?

- The majority - 59.6% were teaching staff
- 19.3% were specialist quality staff
- 11.4% were academic deans, department chairs and deputy chairs
- 6.1% deans or directors of administrative units
- 0.7% vice rectors/rectors

This distribution may indicate a less-than strategic approach in terms of how staff are selected for workshops and a low level of leadership



# Did the same people attend the workshops?

- Most participants (almost 76.8%) - only 1 workshop
- about 21.7% attended between 2-4 workshops
- about 1.6% attended 5-13 workshops

It may be that having the same staff attend more workshops would help build skills and support a more strategic approach to quality development





**Reviewer training run by the UK Quality Assurance Agency**

# Which universities sent the most participants to the workshops?

- More participants attended from the older, public universities.
- Two women's universities (Princess Noura Bint Abdulrahman University and Effat University) were among the top six universities to send participants.
- This may reflect the seriousness with which Saudi women approach education and wish to ensure that modern Saudi women - as well as men – have access to quality tertiary education.





**Men and women are separated in the sessions and have separate refreshment facilities**

**Facilitators often comment that women often participate more actively in the workshops and ask more insightful questions than their male counterparts (Wilkinson, 2011).**



# Map showing main regions of KSA



# Broadening participation

- Of the ten universities that sent the most participants, all are situated in larger cities
- Over the years there has been a relative increase (but not enough) in participation from Northern and Southern regions where there are more newer universities
- High participation from the middle and western regions has continued
- The balance needs to be changed. This would need specific communication with the 'newly established' HEIs and workshops held in more outlying areas



## Which workshops drew the most participants?

- Workshops covered a range of topics and some topics were repeated several times over the four years
- Some topics were directly related to the requirements of the NCAAA system; others were related to specific standards and functions
- Seven workshops were run under ***program and institutional evaluation and self study*** . These workshops were the best attended.
- May be because they were related directly to the NCAAA system and participants felt they needed to develop their skills in these areas



# How did participants rate the workshops?

- Standard evaluation form - quantitative evaluation results were based on these
- Forms also analysed qualitatively.
- Response rates were good:
- workshops - 53%, study tours 71%
- 79% of participants = expectations fulfilled
- 84% of participants = workshops were of high quality



# Qualitative data showed

- Workshops were useful
- Participants felt they had gained knowledge about quality
- Covered important areas of learning
- Provided tools to build own quality systems
- Kept participants up to date
- Provided important networking opportunities



# Quality workshops and the Saudi universities

- The evaluation provided a more formal understanding of quality developments in the Saudi HE sector.
- A generalized clustering of universities emerged:
  1. **Private institutions – which participated - strong leaders and flexible management**
  2. **Public / old institutions – top down management structures; strong or weak control prevents initiative**
  3. **Public / new institutions - at extremes in terms of quality. Some with vision and leadership providing supportive management or conflicting priorities**





# Conclusions

- Participants learn from the training and can implement at least some of what they learn
- Leadership is crucial- leaders are the gatekeepers
- Not all universities are equal – training needs to better connect with the leaders as well as quality staff and encourage a more strategic approach to building capacity
- Developing leaders might facilitate a more structured approach to participant selection and quality management as well as a more successful cascading of information and skills



## Conclusions (cont.)

- Networking is important. Participants need to find ways to effectively work together to share resources and information
- Networks of HEIs could provide support for those with fewer resources and promote learning
- Focus needs to be on the newer universities – may mean running more workshops outside the main centres
- The approach to the training will need to evolve – using case-based examples and tailoring the training



# Moving forward

- The NCAAA is working with the British council on plans that align with new NCAAA training programs and take into account emerging needs
- More focus on helping HEIs to plan strategically as well as to building their capacity in quality skills
- More time will be spent on case studies and project-based learning
- Plans are for more individualized feedback and for more localised training.



# Quality in Higher Education – INQAAHE 2009



QHE Special Edition for GCC (including KSA). The Quality Assurance System for Post-Secondary Education in Saudi Arabia: A Comprehensive, Developmental, and Unified Approach, Quality in Higher Education, 15 (1), 39-50.