

**Conference Sub-Theme 3: Impact of QA and the Effects of External and Internal QA: Regional Perspectives to a Shared Issue**

**Paper Topic: Perceived Impacts of the First External Quality Audits carried out in Ethiopian Public and Private Higher Education Institutions**

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### **Abstract**

The formal introduction of the QA regime in Ethiopia dates nearly a decade back when the practice was legally institutionalized and the establishment of the Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA) was heralded through the first Higher Education Proclamation of 2003. On the basis of the systems and structures created since then, HERQA has managed to carry out external quality audits in different phases, the first one of which was undertaken on nine public and five private institutions from 2007-2009. The findings of this national initiative were published and made available to the government and the wider public. Although both HERQA and audited institutions claim to have benefited a lot from this exercise, no research has been done so far to delve into and outline the actual benefits obtained and the challenges encountered. This research attempted to fill this void by exploring the actual benefits and effects of the external quality audit carried out with the following major objectives:

- (a) To identify what institutions perceive to be the impacts and challenges of the external quality audits carried out by HERQA;
- (b) To identify what HERQA considers as the major effects and challenges of the external quality audits it carried out; and
- (c) To see if there is any congruence between what institutions and HERQA perceive as impacts and challenges.

The major findings of the study and the lessons learnt are discussed on the basis of qualitative & quantitative data gathered and derived implications.

**Audiovisual Requirements: LCD and Laptop**

## **Paper Proposal**

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**Wondwosen Tamrat**

Having been established in 2003 as a quality watch-dog, the Ethiopian Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA) has spearheaded national efforts in the accreditation and quality assurance of the higher education sector. Among such efforts is the external quality audit practice it initiated in 2007. In its first external quality assessment which took two years to complete, HERQA managed to audit 9 public and 5 private institutions. The results indicated that, by and large, the Ethiopian higher education sector is at its nascent stage and requires significant improvements before it claims to be a guarantor of quality education. The major findings that came out in the publications of HERQA (2009) after its first external audit are:

- The lack of clear and well-established system of quality management in most of the public and private institutions audited;
- The absence of quality management units in most of the institutions audited;
- The unavailability of quality assurance policies at institutional level;
- Lack of awareness among some university staff about quality considerations and HERQA's expectations;
- Misunderstandings and confusions about quality assurance concepts and practices at various levels of the university system.

The above are clear indications of the hurdles Ethiopian HEIs face in terms of institutionalizing a quality management system that should allow them to meet the challenges of an ever expanding higher education sector. Notwithstanding the above, the demand from HERQA and the government continue to emphasize that the only available route for higher education institutions (HEIs) is to realize their existing weakness and work towards improving their system of quality management. The Higher Education Proclamation the government issued in 2009, for instance, stipulates that HEIs, should "provide for clear and comprehensive measures of quality covering professional development of academic staff, course contents, teaching-learning processes, student evaluation, and assessment and grading systems". (HEP 2009: Article 22.2). In addition, HEIs are expected, as per the provisions of the Proclamation, to comply with the requirements given by HERQA with regard to their quality enhancement efforts.

After the 2007-2009 external quality audits and the continuing demands of the government, there seems to be a growing realization that HEIs are doing their best to get

their house in order. HERQA's management feel that there is a gradual change in terms of the quality culture being created as attested by the behavior of an increasing number of institutions that are vigorously working towards improving their quality management systems (Wondwosen 2012). HEIs also claim that the external quality audit HERQA carried out had a lot of benefits in terms of responding to the demands of the agency and the government with regard to the provision of quality education. These claims, however, have not been substantiated with empirical findings that show how and in what specific areas the external quality audit carried out by HERQA has been useful in improving the quality management system being created anew in the higher education sector. Hence the need for this study.

The study used both questionnaires and interview as major sources of data collection. HERQA as an institution and all the 14 institutions that were audited from 2007-2009 were taken as samples of the study. The external quality audit reports published were also used as secondary sources of data.

Preliminary findings of the study indicate that the preparation towards the external quality audit and the findings of the audit have been beneficial to institutions in terms of reflecting on their current practices and improving their mode of operation. The Enhancement Plan HERQA demanded from HEIs after its external audit and its supervisory follow up have also been regarded as additional measures that impinge on the quality improvement trajectory HEIs claim to be experiencing after the audit. The overall findings of the research indicate that HEIs perceive a substantial positive impact of the external quality audit exercise implanted in the Ethiopian higher education sector since 2008. The full research report identifies specific areas of importance and challenges together with their implications.