ACQF

African Continental Qualifications Framework

Session 4: NQFs: a systemic view – Training Module 10

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NQFs are part of a broader qualifications system, and are an evolving construct. Linkages are made with other qualifications systems structures.

Case studies: Eswatini, Zambia

01

NQFs: What are they?

What is an NQF?

- A national qualifications framework (NQF) is 'A **policy and instrument** for the development and **classification of qualifications** according to a set of criteria for specified levels of learning achieved, which aims at integrating and coordinating national qualifications subsystems and improve the transparency, access, progression and quality of qualifications in relation to the labour market and civil society'.

    Source: EQF Recommendation 2017

What is a qualification?

Means a formal outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent authority determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards.
Source: EQF 2017

Therefore a qualification is a specification of learning outcomes that is approved by an authority (accrediting body) as meeting the requirements of the NQF.

Note: Qualifications are elaborated more in Session 7

What is a qualifications system?

- A national **qualifications system** includes all aspects of a country's activity that result in the recognition of learning. These systems include the means of developing and operationalising national or regional policy on qualifications, institutional arrangements, **quality assurance** processes, assessment and awarding processes, skills recognition and other mechanisms that link education and training to the labour market and civil society. Qualifications systems may be more or less integrated and coherent. One feature of a qualifications system may be an **explicit framework of qualifications**.

- Source: OECD 2006 p. 22

What is quality assurance?

- Quality assurance includes the **processes and procedures for ensuring that qualifications, assessment and programme delivery meet certain standards.**

Source: Tuck 2007

Quality assurance...

- Quality assurance can be at:
  - ✓ **Regional level**, e.g. quality assurance frameworks or agreements
  - ✓ **National level**:

    1. Qualification design, e.g. approval processes of qualification specifications

    2. Provision of the qualification, e.g. approval of providers and approval to provide a programme leading to a qualification on the NQF

    3. Monitoring and review of provider provision, process and outcomes, including student learning and employment outcomes, and student and user satisfaction levels

    4. Control, supervision or monitoring of assessment outcomes, certification and graduation procedures

    5. System wide evaluations of quality, including evaluations by external agencies and reviews of stakeholder engagement and implementation of related initiatives

    6. Provision of public information, e.g. databases/registers of qualifications that meet the requirements of the NQF, registers of approved providers of NQF qualifications, performance of providers such as programme and component completions, student and employer satisfaction, system wider evaluations.

  - ✓ **Provider level**, e.g. internal quality assurance
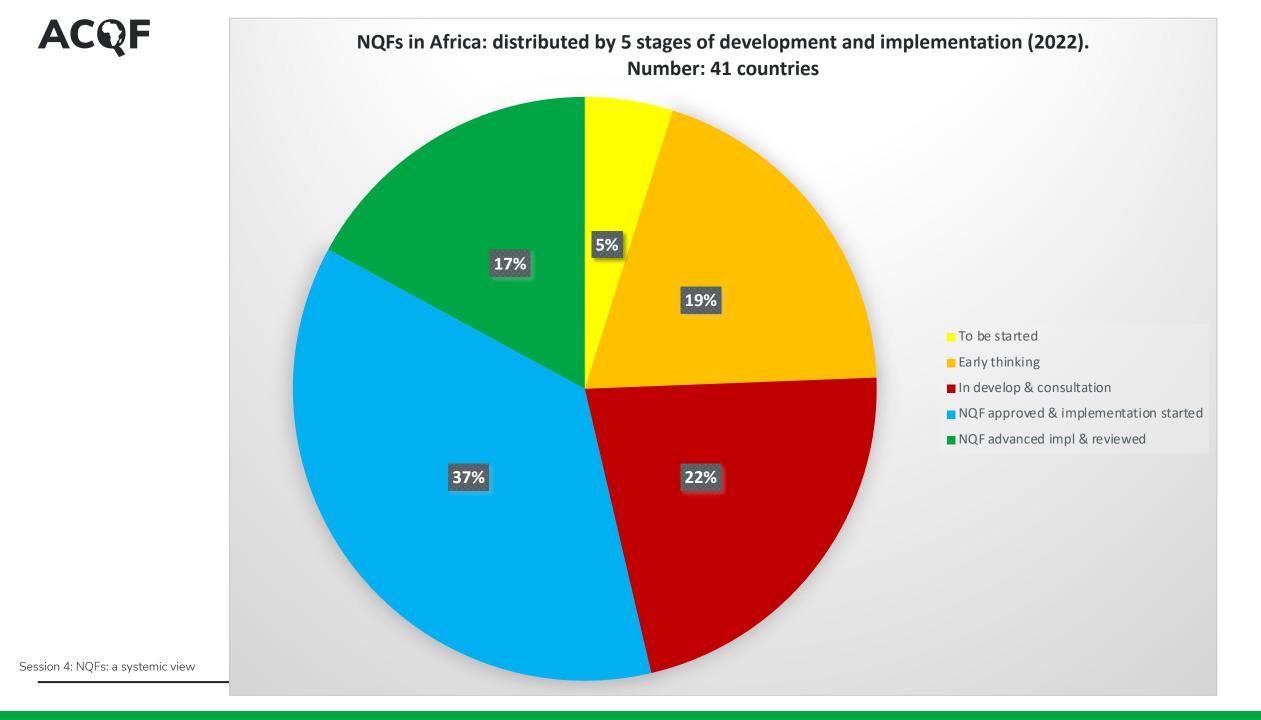
02

Phases of an NQF

Stages of an NQF

- NQFs have a life cycle and are not all at the same stage of implementation.

- Stages:
  - ✓ Not in place
  - ✓ Early steps
  - ✓ In development and consultation
  - ✓ Approved and started implementation
  - ✓ Operational for some time and reviewed

Poll #1: At what stage of development is the NQF in your country?

NQFs in Africa by stage of development

Stage of NQF development and implementation	Countries
NQF development to be started - 2	Chad, Republic of Congo
NQF in early thinking - 8	Burkina Faso, Union of Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, São Tomé e Príncipe, Togo • São Tomé e Príncipe started 1st steps – political commitment, baseline analysis, dialogue • Guinea-Bissau started 1st steps: baseline analysis, working group, roadmap
NQF in development and consultation - 8	Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Madagascar, Morocco, Sierra Leone, Somalia. • Malawi is developing the comprehensive NQF – draft concept discussed, legal act for approval • Mozambique: advanced stage consultation integrated / comprehensive NQF; in approval
NQF legal act approved, implementation started* **Grey-shaded countries: sectoral NQFs in implementation (TVET / HE)**	Egypt, Eswatini, Ethiopia, The Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Tanzania, Tunisia, Uganda, Zimbabwe • Egypt approved the NQF-related law amendments in 2021 • Rwanda adopted the integrated NQF in Oct/2021
NQF in advanced implementation and reviewed (7)	Botswana, Cape Verde, Mauritius, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Zambia

NQFs in Africa: distributed by 5 stages of development and implementation (2022). Number: 41 countries

- To be started — 5%
- Early thinking — 19%
- In develop & consultation — 22%
- NQF approved & implementation started — 37%
- NQF advanced impl & reviewed — 17%

Phases of an NQF

- For closer scrutiny, we look at the life cycle of an NQF according to 3 phases:
    1. Design and development
    2. Implementation
    3. Review (including monitoring)

2A

NQF design and development

What is included in this phase?

1. Conceptualisation and design of the NQF during which countries analyse and define the "why, what for, what, how, with whom, when" of the NQF - rationale and main objectives of the future NQF. Results in:

    - Outline of the NQF providing the basis for wider dissemination and discussion within a smaller group of key stakeholders.

    - Key architectural features, such as purpose, scope and structures, are drafted.

2. Consultation and testing stage. Future NQF proposal is presented to and discussed within a broader group of stakeholders, normally as part of a public consultation process. Countries may choose to test the proposed NQF levels and qualification types through projects or targeted consultations.

3. Official establishment/adoption stage. NQF is formally documented and agreed to through a decree/law or a formal agreement between stakeholders.

Critical questions for proposed NQF

Focus	Questions
Plan for development	'Why, what for, what, how, with whom, when?' Overall approach to development? Who will manage development? Stakeholder engagement? Tested or trialled?
NQF design: Purpose and scope	What are the goals to be achieved? Scope of NQF? How will it link to other QFs within the country?
NQF design: Structures	Levels and descriptors: Number of levels, domains? Volume of learning measure: What will measure? How will it be used? Qualification type descriptors: How will be documented? Map/table or text based?
NQF general queries	Does design of NQF promote use of learning outcomes, life long learning, learning pathways, and access and equity principles? Does the structure reflect 'common sense'?
Legal basis	How will the NQF be formalise, e.g. decree, regulations, agreed in policy?
Governance and funding	How will the NQF be managed and governed? How will the NQF be 'owned' by stakeholders? How will it be funded? How will it be staffed?

Critical questions for proposed NQF: Linkages

Focus - Linkages	Questions
Recognition of NF and IF learning	How will the NQF provide the policy basis and support access to the validation of nonformal and informal learning? What policy linkages need to be made with the quality assurance strategies, e.g. embedded in quality standards for qualification specifications and for provider provision?
Credit transfer	How will the NQF provide the policy basis and support access to the validation of formal learning? Will it be only policy advice or will it link to a credit accumulation and transfer system?
Registers	What registers need to be established for those qualification located and accepted onto the NQF? Who will be responsible for these registers, e.g. centralised NQF body or sectoral QA body?
Quality assurance	How will the NQF be linked to QA strategies? Especially: development, design and approval of qualification specifications; and approval of providers and approval of programmes leading to a NQF qualification? How will policy coherence of QA strategies be achieved?
Other laws etc	other laws and regulations will be affected by the proposed NQF? Who will be responsible for ensuring coherence across laws and regulations?
Microcredentials	How will microcredentials be recognised within the qualifications system?
Recognition of foreign qualifications	What information needs to be made available to support the country's citizens as a sending country? What linkages with other frameworks would be made? What information needs to be made available as a receiving country?

What is usually in NQF texts (suggested)

On NQF

- Background: wider issues addressed, benefits people, LLL

- Objectives, principles, scope, NFIL

- Technical design: levels and descriptors, qualifications types, NQF map/table, volume of learning measure, e.g. credits

- Quality assurance linkages

- Components / instruments (register / database, monitoring & evaluation, standards, classifications)

On NQF governance

- NQF lead entity: different models apply

- Roles, responsibilities and key functions

- Interactions sub-sectors education and training – on NQF

- Interplay between stakeholders

- Resources

NQF policy / legal act is supported by regulations, guidelines that develop over time.

Short break (15 minutes)

Case study: Eswatini

Chat: Please put any questions in the chat facility.

2B

NQF implementation

Implementation phase

- Move from initial policy design and legal framework of the NQF to the operationalisation of the framework., focussing on:

    ✓ Consolidating governance and associated laws

    ✓ Establishing and practically applying the linkages to associated structures and the quality assurance arrangements, and moving to full practical implementation

    ✓ Consolidating administrative and technical capacity and expertise.

- Full implementation requires time and not all strategies and capacities will be available at the same time.

Critical questions

Focus	Questions
Design to full implementation	How will aspirations and vision for the qualifications system be articulated? Who will develop an implementation plan? Who needs to agree to it? How funded, resourced, and monitored?
QA of qualifications	How will the link be made between NQF and the requirements for development and approval of qualifications?
QA of provider provision	How will the link be made between NQF, qualifications and the programmes leading to them? Who will approve and monitor? What sanctions and rewards will be applied?
Assessment	Who is responsible for assessment of individual achievement? How will assessment decisions be validate/moderated?
Certification	Who will issue NQF documentation? Who will monitor?
Data collection	Who is responsible for setting data standard? Who will collect and retain data?
Registers	How will registers be made public? What information should be public?
Credit transfer system	How will system be negotiated? Will it be part of or separate to the NQF?
Visibility of the NQF	How will NQF be communicated? How will dialogue with stakeholders be facilitated?
Technical capability	How will QA agency staff and provider staff capability and expertise be developed?

2C

NQF monitoring and review

Monitoring of NQF implementation

- How will implementation be monitored?

- What data exists that can be used to monitor implementation?

- Regional examples for monitoring NQF implementation within the qualifications system:

  - ACQF Guideline and TM on M&E (N° 7)

  - Aspects within quality assurance frameworks or guidelines:

    - UNESCO for the Asia Pacific TVET sector, https://bangkok.unesco.org/content/guidelines-quality-assurance-tvet-qualifications-asia-pacific-region

    - EQAVET framework for TVET sector, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32020H1202(01)&from=EN

Review of NQF

- Major reviews can occur at any time, can draw on monitoring activities
- Qualifications frameworks are used to promote the trust and transparency of individual qualifications and the qualifications systems to which they belong. In doing so, they:

  1. Act as a classification device to organise qualifications according to type and/or level
  2. Set down (or link to) the quality measures for qualifications to be entered or accepted onto the qualifications framework
  3. Act as an official bridge to international users of domestic qualifications and holders of international qualifications.

Source: Quality and Qualifications Ireland 2017.

Critical questions

Classification device	Sets out (or links to) quality measures	Bridge between domestic and international qualifications
Is the NQF helping to raise aspirations to learn? Do citizens use the NQF to see progression opportunities? Does the NQF assist in overcoming barriers to qualifications, including the validation of nonformal and informal learning? Are valuable qualifications sitting outside the NQF that should be brought in?	Is the NQF raising the standard of qualifications in terms of the use of learning outcomes, content, assessment, and certification processes? Is the NQF applying the right kinds of pressures to qualification owners to describe and operate their qualification appropriately? Is the NQF helping to increase the potential of qualifications to provide social and economic returns to holders?	Do people abroad use the NQF to appreciate elements of specific domestic qualifications? Is it easy to make comparisons between the domestic qualifications and international qualifications? Are the links to international qualifications clear? Is the quality assurance functions of the NQF inspiring confidence among international application to domestic education and training programmes?

Steps and considerations when planning the review

Steps:

1. Develop a terms of reference for the review

2. Identify a coordinating committee (or similar) to manage the review, and include key stakeholders

3. Identify the scope and extent of the review

4. Develop a strategy and timelines for the review and full engagement of stakeholders.

Considerations:

- Base some of the research on the data gained during monitoring of implementation, but also on stakeholder consultations.

- Consider incremental change to the NQF to reach an end goal, rather than major changes in a short period of time.

Session 4: NQFs: a systemic view

Case study: Zambia

Chat: Please put any questions in the chat facility.

03

Structures of an NQF

Overarching considerations

- Key purpose is to reflect the needs of the country's qualification system, or be a catalyst for change of the system

- NQFs function within a regional context and the influence of RQFs cannot be ignored. RQFs can aspire to have a neutral influence, e.g. EQF, AQRF; whereas others aim to directly influence the NQF

- Consider:
    - What stakeholders need to be involved in the development?
    - How will the design be negotiated and agreed?
    - How will the NQF be tested and trialled?

Scope and purpose

- Scope and purpose need to logically align, and inform the further development of the technical aspects of the NQF

- **Scope:**
  - NQF does not need to address all stages of the education and training system, only the qualifications system (i.e. where qualifications are issued)
  - No need for the NQF to address all stages of International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), nor to align the level descriptors to these stages

- **Purpose:**
  - Analysis of African NQFs indicates that the purpose or objectives vary; some NQFs have highly detailed lists and others less so; some have varied over time e.g. Rwanda
  - Purpose or objectives need to be clear and concise

Poll #2: Scope of the NQF

Levels and level descriptors

- Number of levels of **learning complexity** – affected by the implicit levels of learning complexity of various qualification types and international/regional influences

- Purpose of levels is to be able to locate a qualification on the NQF

- Needs to have a vertical and horizontal logic

Levels and level descriptors

Approaches to design of level descriptors	Pros and Cons
Qualifications types are aligned to level descriptors [using map/table or text based descriptor]	Allows for: • Multiple qualification types to be ascribed to a level of learning complexity • Levels to be interpreted holistically as a qualification type outcome, and that the levels build on the level below • The knowledge, skills and other domains at one level include those at the lower levels.
Level descriptors are written for each qualification type	• May potentially limit the descriptor to only one qualification type per level descriptor • May force the levels to be read independently of each other, and ascribes only information in this level to the qualification type • May be a confusion as to what is a qualification type descriptor • Usually only used in NQFs that have a limited number of qualification types

Poll #3: Level descriptors

Overview – status in Africa

QFs	Number	Comments
NQF 10 levels	16	13 in SADC, 1 Kenya, 1 Rwanda, 1 The Gambia,
NQF 8 levels	6	in West, East, North Africa
NQF 7 levels	1	Tunisia
Sector QF 6 levels	1	Nigeria (NSQF - TVET)
Sector QF 5 levels	1	Senegal (TVET)

Level descriptors and domains

- Written as learning outcomes
- Need to agree on the definitions of each domain, and the principles for drafting

Level descriptors and domains	Pros and Cons
Separate multiple domains	Provides clarity for reader and ability to compare the 'build' of each domain. Assists in horizontal and vertical logic.
Merged statement with domains embedded	May be difficult to compare the different levels of complexity, and harder to determine the horizontal and vertical logic.

Poll #4: Level descriptors and domains

Volume of learning

- Is amount of learning required to successfully complete the qualification
- May be described as a duration or hours measure (often translated into a credit value). Can assist in:
  - Consistency of size of qualification
  - Credit transfer processes
- A review of the definitions indicates that the volume of learning across the following examples are based on:

  - **Notional hours** or estimated hours and are not a 'fixed' figure

  - **An average learner**. Within this notion of an average learner is also a consideration that the learner has limited knowledge and skills of the field of study/practice. Some frameworks indicate that the average learner has 'no underpinning knowledge and skills in the field of study.

Overview – status in Africa (sample)

Country	Definition	Volume
Cape Verde	All forms of academic work	HE: 25-30 notional hours of workload. 1 curricular year = 60 credits (aligned with ECTS)
Mozambique	Notional hours: contact hours (theoretical, practical, laboratory), individual learning, projects, preparation for exams, exams	HE: 1 credit = 25-30 hours; 1500 h year TVET: 1 credit = 10 hours
Namibia	Directed and self-directed learning and assessment	1 credit = 10 notional hours
Rwanda	Notional learning hours include direct contact time with teachers or trainers ('directed learning'), time spent in studying, doing assignments, and undertaking practical tasks ('self-directed') as well as time spent in assessment	1 credit = 10 notional hours, 1200 hours for an academic year
South Africa	Notional hours includes contact time, research, completion of assignments, time spent in structured learning in the workplace, individual learning, group work, projects and others	1 credit = 10 notional hours

Qualification type descriptors

- Bring together the two metrics: level of complexity and volume of learning.

- May be dealt with as:
  - Simply the level descriptor specifically for a qualification type
  - A map/table that brings together the two metrics
  - A text based descriptor [e.g. Botswana, Namibia]. Proposed headings:
    - ❖ Entry requirements (only for Bachelor and above to promote access into qualifications)
    - ❖ Purpose as this assist especially in distinguishing between two qualification types at the same level
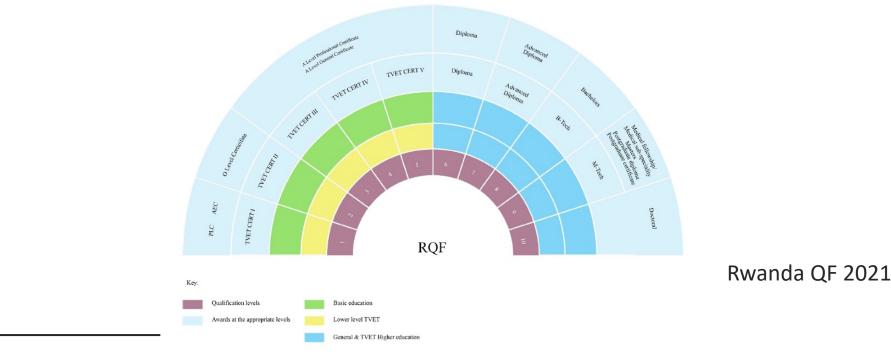   - ❖ Linkages to other qualification types as this promotes pathways discussions
    - ❖ Level
    - ❖ Credit value.

Logic and coherence of the NQF

- The NQF specifications need to have logic and coherence. Do all the component parts align?

- Do the diagrams promote a range of pathways or articulation, or do they reinforce current barriers and perceptions?

Rwanda QF 2021

04

Linkages to QA

Linkages to QA

- Strength of an NQF lies in its linkages with quality assurance processes. NQF may be qualifications system wide, but QA processes may be sectorally managed and implemented. QA relates to:

  - Linkages to the qualification formulation, development, approval and review

  - Linkages to providers and the provision of programmes leading to a qualification

  - Registers of quality assured qualifications and providers

  - System wide monitoring and evaluation.

05

Homework

Refer to Assessment #1: NQF coherence and logic

- Select an NQF and provide a brief analysis of its coherence and logic. What suggestions for improvement could you provide?

Volunteers!

- We need to 2 people to volunteer to present a quick reply (in writing – PPTs) to aspects of Assessment #1 on Day 5.

- 5 minutes only for the presentation of responses!

06

Closing comments

Closing comments

- As a policy instrument, an NQF does not function in isolation but is part of a broader ecosystem, the qualifications system. It is intrinsically linked to its quality assurance arrangements and a range of associated structures (e.g. registers) and strategies (e.g. RPL), and needs to be part of a coherent response within the system.

- Qualifications frameworks should have at their core:

  - Accessibility for all citizens
  - Formal recognition regardless of how or where the learning was gained; formal, nonformal and informal learning
  - Transparency of learning outcomes as well as of quality assurance arrangements
  - Relevance to the needs of the country and citizens; not just limited to labour needs but relevant to the broader social and community needs
  - Quality assurance arrangements so that qualifications are recognised and accepted as an accurate reflection of what an individual knows, understands and can do.

Questions:
- 2 questions from participants