

MAPPING REPORT

➤ Towards the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF)

➤ **SNAPSHOT** ➤



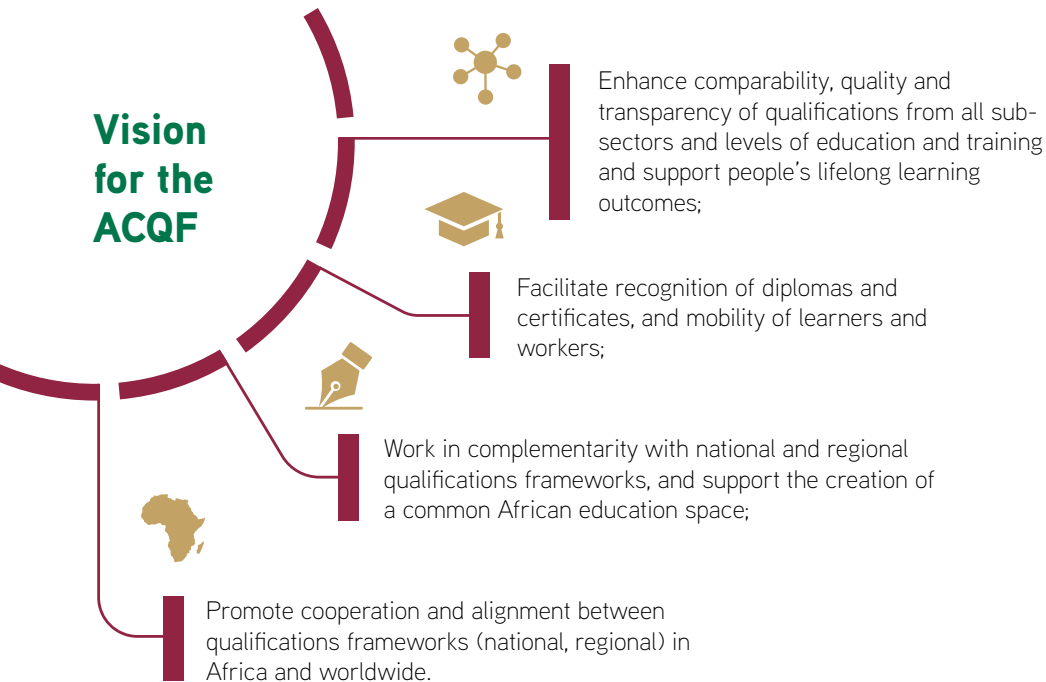
Overview: AU policy context of the ACQF

CESA's Strategic Objective 4 aims to 'ensure the acquisition of requisite knowledge and skills as well as improved completion rates at all levels and groups through harmonisation processes across all levels for national and regional integration'.

The goals below explicitly refer to the establishment of qualifications frameworks, notably a continental qualifications framework linked with national and regional qualifications frameworks:

- Set up national qualification frameworks (NQFs) and regional qualification frameworks (RQFs) to facilitate the creation of multiple pathways to the acquisition of skills and competencies as well as mobility across the subsector; and
- Develop continental qualifications framework linked to regional qualifications and NQFs to facilitate regional integration and mobility of graduates.

Vision for the ACQF



➤ Developing the ACQF: An AU-EU project

In the context of the AU-EU cooperation agenda, the European Union (EU) has committed to support the development of the ACQF, as defined in Action 4 of the Africa-Europe Alliance for Sustainable Investment and Jobs (adopted on 12/09/2018).

The African Union Commission (AUC) is partnering with EU, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and the European Training Foundation (ETF) in developing the ACQF over the period 2019-2022. The ACQF development activities are part of the AU-EU Skills for Youth Employability Programme, contributing to the Skills Initiative for Africa – a programme initiated by the AU in cooperation with the German government.

Main output of the project: ACQF policy and technical document and action plan technically validated for decision making by the AU.

The ACQF-development process is holistic, and builds on:



Evidence and analysis

Updated and comprehensive baseline analysis of the state-of-play, dynamics and issues of qualifications frameworks (national and regional) in Africa.



AUC political leadership and consultation of African stakeholders (national, regional and continental)

The success and sustainability of the ACQF as a policy instrument depends on the ownership and leadership by the AUC and the buy-in and support of the African stakeholders. Therefore, an ACQF Advisory Group composed of 38 representatives (national and regional levels) provides advice and reviews the outputs.

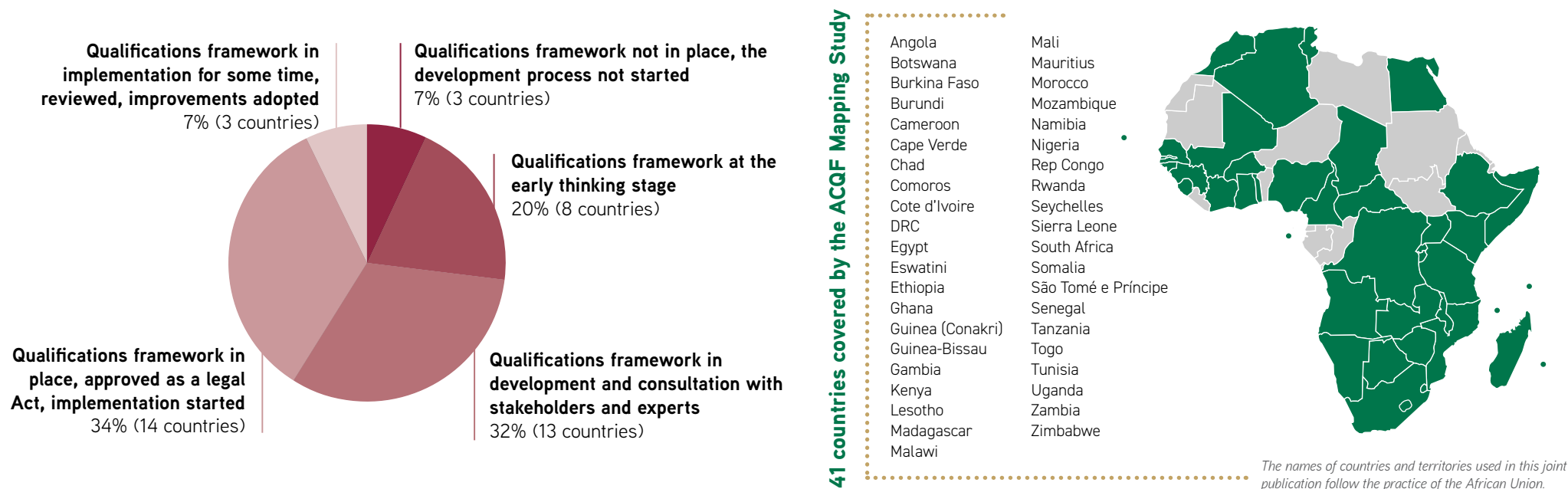


Awareness raising and capacity development of African stakeholders

Dissemination of information on the ACQF development as well as capacity development, peer-learning on qualifications frameworks in Africa and the rest of the world are embedded in the project activities. The ACQF Website will contribute to dissemination and networking of ACQF stakeholders in all AU states.

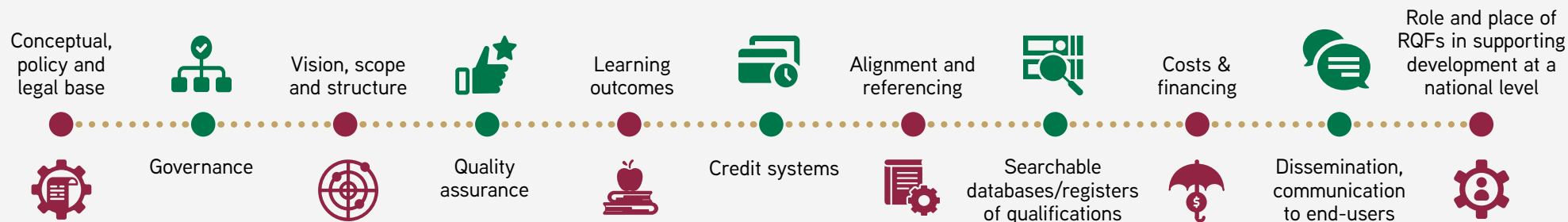
Overview of National Qualifications Frameworks in Africa

As anticipated, qualifications frameworks are at different stages of development and implementation across the continent. Discussion and exchanges unveiled NQF dynamics of different types and time frames. For dynamic analysis, the mapping study uses five stages to categorise the different situations of qualifications frameworks' development and consolidation:



ACQF mapping study design

The mapping study was designed according to eleven thematic areas, which provided the conceptual framework in which the analysis took place, elaborated in the main ACQF project planning document and in the terms of reference of the study. The themes cover the key policy and technical areas in which qualifications frameworks develop and are implemented, namely:



Collection of mapping study reports and analyses:

- 13 countries
- 3 regional economic community (REC)
- 1 comprehensive mapping report
- Comparison of level descriptors (LD)
- Comparison of qualifications
- Inventory of NQFs information

Key findings from the mapping study



Conceptual, policy and legal base

- The majority of qualifications frameworks in Africa are operational in countries of the southern Africa region, where the SADC RQF is well established.
- Recent developments in East Africa, notably in Kenya (since 2014) are noteworthy, with the establishment of the legal base, governance and register of qualification.
- In the north, Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia have had legally established NQFs for some time and continue working on implementation structures and registers of qualifications. Ethiopia designed the technical-conceptual bases of its NQF.
- In West Africa we found a more diverse panorama of qualifications frameworks: some countries, notably Senegal and Togo, have established qualification systems, such as the Licence Master Doctorat (LMD) system in higher education.
- In Central Africa, Cameroon has been implementing the LMD framework in higher education since 2007, as well as a system of qualifications levels and types for TVET.



Governance

- More advanced NQFs in Africa tend to be overseen by qualifications agencies (authorities, coordination units) but also to a large extent by QA agencies and specialised commissions.
- Overall, there is a trend towards national settings, rather than sectoral agencies.
- In cases where sectoral agencies are well established – in TVET, higher education and general education – the national ministries provide more of a coordinating and oversight function.
- Ministries always play a key role in NQF governance and often act as incubators for the national and/or sector agencies that follow later.
- The risk of a multiplicity of departments and agencies with overlapping mandates is very real, more so in countries with sparse resources.



Vision, scope and structure

- In terms of scope, the analysed African qualifications frameworks can be clustered in several situations:
 - Sector-specific frameworks that operate independently, that is, in TVET and in higher education, without an integrated unifying framework.
 - Sector-specific qualifications frameworks that are operational but are linked and work together with the wider integrated NQF.
 - National qualifications frameworks that are comprehensive and inclusive, without sub-sector frameworks.
- The level structure of the analysed NQFs is diverse.
- Regional integration plays an important role in defining the NQF structure in certain parts of the continent.
- NQFs in the analysed cases are associated with a range of objectives, which can be clustered as related with:
 - Coherence and permeability between sub-systems' learning outcomes and qualifications.
 - Quality, transparency, enhanced visibility, and trust of end-users: by introducing learning outcomes approaches,

stakeholders' participation in qualifications development and approval, and accessible users' information through digital and online instruments.

- Parity of esteem and value of learning in different contexts and sub-systems: academic, vocational, formal, non-formal.
- Inclusion: qualifications can be obtained via validation of non-formal learning, recognition of experience from work and life.
- Regional and global comparability and recognition of diplomas and certificates.
- Wider societal and economic goals, in particular: increase the stock of qualified labour force; enhanced employability of holders of qualifications; strengthen competitiveness and productivity of the economic sectors; align the qualifications system with demand and changing skills needs.



Quality assurance

- QA systems were found to be strongly associated with the sub-systems linked with the analysed NQFs.
- In most cases the higher education sector tends to have better structured QA mechanisms than TVET and general education, having adhered to policies and practices of internal and external evaluation and accreditation, led by QA agencies (and departments) with varied degree of autonomy and capacity.
- National and regional levels interact through the activities of regional higher education councils, playing an important role in disseminating good practice and QA guidelines, and providing methodological support to member states. Examples include:
 - The umbrella organisation, the Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Framework (PAQAF)
 - African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ASG-QA) developed by the Harmonisation of African Higher Education Quality Assurance and Accreditation (HAQAA) initiative and approved in 2019.
 - The system LMD is associated with the QA framework overseen by the Conseil Africain et Malgache pour L'enseignement Supérieur (CAMES).



Learning outcomes

Learning outcomes-based qualifications enable recognition of learning from non-formal and informal contexts, such as in informal employment, and in labour migration, contributing to social inclusion and to lifelong learning.

- › The use of learning outcomes has become pervasive internationally, and African countries have also been part of this shift, specifically in how learning outcomes are defined, described and used in different contexts; in level descriptors, in standards underlying qualifications, in training standards, curricula, and assessment standards.
- › The strong presence of TVET systems with competency-based models in many African countries is important to recognise, as well as the shift that these systems will need to make to utilise learning outcomes in the new paradigm.
- › Clarification on the application of learning outcomes in curricula and learning programmes, in addition to qualifications, also seems to be a persistent issue.
- › The range of level descriptors captured by the survey shows some diversity, but in the comprehensive NQFs, and in some sector-specific (TVET and higher education) there is clear predominance of the domains: knowledge, skills, competence and autonomy and responsibility.



Credit systems

- › Credit systems are also widely used, although there are some differences across countries and across sectors.
- › In a number of countries, the levels of the NQF are associated with defined credit value of the qualifications.
- › In other countries the comparison of qualifications in the context of the NQF combines both the level complexity (based on the level descriptors) and the volume of learning (based on the credit system).
- › The LMD system in higher education, adopted by a large number of countries in West and Central Africa, is associated with a standardised model of 25–30 credits (student workload) per semester.



Alignment and referencing

- › Alignment is not a priority for most countries, except for members of RQFs in the operational phase, such as the SADC RQF and the EaQfhe, which are more advanced in implementation.
- › NQFs of some SADC member states are reported to have been referenced to the SADCQF (South Africa and Seychelles have completed the alignment and Mauritius is underway). In 2016, the region through the SADC TCCA adopted alignment rather than referencing as a feasible methodology for linking and comparing the level descriptors of NQFs to those of the SADC RQF, due to the resource constraints (technical, financial and institutional) for implementation of the SADC RQF (SADC TCCA, 2017).
- › The EAC has taken a step-by-step approach, by first developing a framework for higher education qualifications. The realisation that a higher education framework needed to be linked to other qualifications led to the IUCEA developing a full eight-level qualifications framework.
- › One country (Kenya) reported that its NQF has been formally aligned to the regional qualification framework (EAQFHE).



Searchable databases/register of qualifications

- › Not all countries link qualifications with International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) fields of education 2013 (UNESCO, 2013) or to the national occupational classifications.
- › Databases of quality assured qualifications linked with the NQF, accessible and searchable online, notably via the website of the NQF institution. Examples of this include:
 - Well-developed [South African Qualifications Authority \(SAQA\) National Learners' Records Database](#)
 - New development of the [Kenyan National Qualifications Management Information System \(Naqmis\)](#)
 - [Emerging online National Catalogues of Qualifications of Mozambique and Cape Verde.](#)



Costs & financing

- › Many multilateral projects have taken place in Africa over the last few decades, but these have lacked coordination and often led to duplication of effort.
- › More concerning is the limited ability of countries to continue with such programmes after external funding is exhausted.
- › New innovative private-public funding models (De Witt et al., 2020), based on the achievement of key outcomes, are important to explore and have not been used in the context of qualifications frameworks before.



Dissemination, communication to end-users

- › Governments and socio-economic partners agree on the need to improve and better use information on demand and supply dynamics, including employability.
- › Mega trends, such as digitalisation and ecological transformation continue to impact on the reorientation of qualifications
- › The mapping study identified a number of labour market observatories working with different technical and analytical capacity in countries such as Angola, Morocco, Mozambique, and Tunisia.
- › NQF websites contribute to inform the wider public, but more and better dissemination for different users is necessary.



Role and place of RQFs in supporting development at a national level

- › Among the RQFs, the SADCQF was found to be the most advanced in terms of its legal, technical and institutional basis, with the SADC RQF having been approved since 2011, and reactivated in 2017.
- › In the ECOWAS, the ministers of education approved in October 2013 the guidelines and roadmap for implementation of NQFs and RQFs in the region.
- › In the EAC, the East African Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (EAQFHE) was adopted by the ministers in April 2015, working in complementarity with the regional quality assurance systems.

Key considerations for qualifications harmonisation in Africa



Angola - App 'Qualificar': Information on all courses of all levels of qualification in one click!

<https://qualificar.gov.ao/>

- #1 Fit for purpose qualifications systems should be developed in Africa
- #2 Countries are encouraged to document and disseminate information related to NQF processes
- #3 Form should follow function for NQFs to be effective
- #4 There is a strong convergence to learning outcomes, parity of esteem and articulation
- #5 The global trend towards increased automation provides an opportunity for innovation to be introduced through the ACQF
- #6 The ACQF can act as a catalyst for CESA
- #7 There is an influx of development aid in support of qualifications framework development at multiple levels
- #8 Start with the end-user when communicating
- #9 Alignment and referencing can contribute to improved harmonisation
- #10 Build on existing continental and regional initiatives
- #11 The relationships between NQFs, RQFs and the proposed ACQF is a critical consideration
- #12 Depending on the model of ACQF that is preferred in Africa, the supporting policies may need to be adjusted and/or developed
- #13 The technical support required for qualifications framework development, across national, regional and continental levels, is an area that requires serious consideration for any of the models outlined above to be successful.
- #14 There is a case to be made for differentiated support to countries
- #15 If the ACQF is to become a new-generation framework, then sustainability will be integral to its design, as much as its digital, green and social inclusion orientation

The ACQF will be:

INCLUSIVE
qualifications of all levels and sub-systems of education and training



RECEPTIVE TO INNOVATION
from new trends and technologies



OPEN
to stakeholders' contribution; good practice from Africa and the world



The ACQF is vital to the processes that contribute to create an African education space:

- Advance the implementation of CESA 2016-2025
- Harmonise higher education in Africa and implement the Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Framework (PAQAF)
- Implement the AU TVET Strategy to Foster Youth Employment

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The names of countries and territories used in this joint publication follow the practice of the African Union.