# FEASIBILITY REPORT

## DEVELOPING THE AFRICAN CONTINENTAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (ACQF)

## RATIONALE, LANDSCAPE, SCENARIOS AND PLAN

**June 2021**

This feasibility report towards the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF) is elaborated in 2021 in the context of the project AU-EU Skills for Youth Employability/Skills Initiative for Africa, Technical Cooperation – Developing the African Continental Qualifications Framework.

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# List of acronyms

| | |
|---|---|
| AAAP | Africa Adaptation Acceleration Program |
| ACQF | African Continental Qualifications Framework |
| AfCFTA | African Continental Free Trade Area |
| AFDB | African Development Bank Group |
| AQRF | ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework |
| ARES | Agência Reguladora do Ensino Superior |
| ASEAN | Association of Southeast Asian Nations |
| AU | African Union |
| AUC | African Union Commission |
| CAMES | Conseil Africain et Malgache pour l'Enseignement Supérieur/African and Malagasy Council for Higher Education |
| CAR | Central African Republic |
| Cedefop | European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training |
| CEMAC | Communauté Économique et Monétaire de l'Afrique Centrale |
| CESA | Continental Education Strategy for Africa |
| COMESA | Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa |
| DRC | Democratic Republic of the Congo |
| EAC | East African Community |
| EAQFHE | East African Qualifications Framework for Higher Education |
| ECCAS | Economic Community of Central African States |
| ECOWAS | Economic Community of Western African States |
| ENIC-NARIC | European Network of Information Centres in the European Region – National Academic Recognition Information Centres |
| EQF | European Qualifications Framework |
| ESTI | Education, Science, Technology and Innovation |
| ETF | European Training Foundation |
| EU | European Union |
| HE | higher education |
| HRST | Human Resources Science and Technology |
| ICT | Information and Communication Technology |
| IGAD | Intergovernmental Authority on Development |
| IUCEA | Inter-University Council for East Africa |
| LMD | Licence, Master et Doctorat |
| NEPAD | New Partnership for Africa's Development |
| NQF | national qualifications framework |
| NQS | national qualifications system |
| OECD | Organisation of Economic Development and Cooperation |
| PAQAA | Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency |
| PAQAF | Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Framework |
| QA | quality assurance |
| QRF | Qualifications Reference Framework |
| REC | regional economic community |
| RISDP | Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan |
| RPL | recognition of prior learning |
| RQF | regional qualifications framework |

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|---|---|
| SADC | Southern African Development Community |
| SADCQF | Southern African Development Community Qualifications Framework |
| SANQF | South African National Qualifications Framework |
| SAQA | South African Qualifications Authority |
| SIFA | Skills Initiative for Africa |
| STC-EST | Specialised Technical Committee on Education, Science and Technology |
| STEM | Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics |
| STI | Science, Technology and Innovation |
| SWOT | strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats |
| TCCA | Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation |
| TTTFP | Tripartite Transit and Transport Facilitation Programme |
| TVET | technical and vocational education and training |
| UC-SNQ | Coordination Unit of the National Qualifications System |
| WAEC | West African Examinations Council |
| WAEMU | West African Economic and Monetary Union |
| WEF | World Economic Forum |
| WHO | World Health Organisation |

# 1 Executive summary

**Paving the way to the ACQF**

The main question of this study is not whether to develop and operationalise the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF). The focus of this analysis is on how to develop and prepare the most adequate conditions for a pertinent and sustainable ACQF. The study is about the challenges, purposes, features, governance and instruments enabling effectiveness of the ACQF for African countries, regions and the continent as a whole.

The ACQF will be the largest of the regional qualifications frameworks (RQFs), as it cooperates with 55 countries and 8 regional economic communities (RECs). It is in fact the only RQF interacting with two different levels – national and regional!

Enablers and opportunities of the ACQF relate to the demographic dividend of the continent, projected advances in human development, the significant flagship policies and strategies for continental integration related to the African Union's Agenda 2063, but also those strategies promoting green recovery and digital transformation. Most importantly, there is growing number of national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) in development and consultation and NQFs approved and advancing in implementation. The continent is facing important challenges, and the education crisis is one of the most pressing priorities.

The ACQF is strongly anchored on key strategies and policies of the African Union (AU), spanning from education to free trade and free movement of people. Stakeholders, NQFs and the African Union Commission (AUC) have high expectations about the expected contribution of the ACQF towards transparency, trust and portability of skills and qualifications. As the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) becomes operational, stakeholders agree that free trade and free movement will be hampered if the continent does not enact a common framework for comparability of qualifications, facilitating recognition and validation of learning.

The vision of the ACQF combines inclusiveness, openness to mutual learning and stakeholders' needs and innovation. Innovation is a major foundation to build a 'future-ready ACQF', able to promote adaptation of qualifications in Africa to the multiple transitions (green, digital, technological, societal).

The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated and brought to light existing distortions and inequalities in all dimensions of human and economic development. As countries and regions are taking measures to begin post-pandemic recovery, wider access to retraining and reskilling will be indispensable to support people's transitions to different jobs and adaptation to new skills requirements. The post-pandemic recovery – *build back better* – must bring the world (and Africa) to a better place, in terms of equitable, safe and democratic societies, in which participation in the benefits of technology, new learning and work is a commitment of leaders and citizens across the continent and around the world. This the main agenda to which the future ACQF must contribute.

From the point of view of the ACQF, as an overarching referencing qualifications framework for the whole continent, the landscape found by the Mapping Study (ACQF, 2021b) of national qualifications frameworks in different stages of development and implementation is propitious for activities geared to cooperation, comparison and eventually referencing/alignment between countries' qualifications frameworks and the ACQF. At the moment of writing this report (March–June 2021), over twenty countries can be considered for preparatory actions leading to future referencing with the ACQF, and another group of less than ten countries can be candidates, once their NQFs reach the point of starting implementation.

**The ACQF context**

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, despite persisting and multiple challenges, economic growth in Africa was high for over a decade. In 2019 economic growth was 3.4%. Compared with the rest of the world, Africa's GDP growth was above the world average of 3% for 2019 and well above the average for advanced economies at 1.7%. There were six African countries among the ten fastest-growing economies in the world.

The Covid-19 pandemic hit all countries across the continent hard, albeit at different scale by regions and countries. The African Economic Outlook 2021 (African Development Bank, 2021a) reports that Africa is projected to recover in 2021 from its worst economic recession in half a century. Real gross domestic product (GDP) in Africa is projected to grow by 3.4% in 2021, after contracting by 2.1% in 2020. This projected recovery will be underpinned by a resumption of tourism, a rebound in commodity prices, and the rollback of pandemic-induced restrictions. The outlook is, however, subject to great uncertainty from both external and domestic risks.

Africa's growth trajectory over the last two decades had raised hopes that its economies would join the ranks of middle- and high-income countries and lift its people from poverty. But growth has not been inclusive, and job creation in high-productivity sectors lagged behind demographic growth. Large shares of the population remain employed in low-productivity jobs in traditional agriculture and informal sector.

African countries have much to gain from improving education to achieve inclusive growth. But many education indicators have stagnated and even deteriorated, and without a rapid acceleration of progress, the continent will be unable to achieve key education commitments by 2030. Dropout and out-of-school rates are higher in Africa than in other world regions. And, if current trends continue, Africa will fail to bring all children to school by 2030. Among African children of primary school age (typically 6–11 years), on average 14.7% were out of school during 2015–18, as were 31.9% of adolescents of lower secondary school age (12–14 years) and 50.2% of youth of upper secondary school age (15–17 years).

The contribution of education to increasing labour productivity growth is limited because of the weak complementarity between human and physical capital. Existing skills and qualifications are not adequately utilised in the labour market. Large shares of employed youth consider their skills mismatched with their jobs, and their education inadequate for work readiness. Employers identify inadequately skilled workforces as a major constraint to their businesses, and to recruitment of the right profiles.

**Qualifications and qualifications frameworks in Africa**

NQFs in Africa are at different stages of development and implementation. Considering a total of 41 countries included in the data collected by the ACQF Mapping Study (ACQF, 2021b), the continent has a higher number of qualifications frameworks (approved, implementation started or implementation advanced) than other larger regions had when they enacted their overarching RQFs. Although thirteen years separate the advent of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the development of the ACQF, it is very useful to note that when the legal base of the EQF was approved (2008), only three countries had NQFs in place and operational (France, Ireland and the United Kingdom).

By end 2020 the African continent had:

- three NQFs at the stage of advanced implementation (and already reviewed);
- nineteen qualifications frameworks at the stage where the relevant legal base had been approved and implementation had started. A number of these qualifications frameworks have substantial experience and could be considered to be part of the advanced implementation group. In seven

of these nineteen countries, the existing qualifications frameworks are sectoral, not integrated and inclusive. The majority of these cases are TVET qualifications frameworks (countries highlighted in Table 1);

- eight countries developing their NQFs, of which a share had entered the approval/adoption process;
- eight countries undertaking early steps towards the development of an NQF;
- one regional qualifications framework, the SADC Qualifications Framework (SADCQF), had been adopted and implementation started; and
- one regional qualification framework, the East African Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (EAQFHE), had been adopted, though implementation was limited to higher education qualifications

The interplay between emerging RQFs, the various NQFs across Africa and the proposed ACQF will be a critical factor for future work in this area. While NQFs are quite distinct in their orientation and purpose, the potential cooperation and complementarity between the RQFs and the ACQF needs a foundation based on a shared vision, acknowledgement of specific key regional interests and goals, and consideration of economies of scale. Dialogue, consultation and trust-building will be essential in shaping the priority functions and operational modes of the ACQF towards NQFs and RQFs in Africa.

## Scenarios and feasibility of the ACQF

The objectives of the envisioned ACQF are to support comparability, quality and transparency of qualifications and lifelong learning; to facilitate recognition of diplomas and certificates and support mobility (of learners, workers, services); to work in cooperation and complementarity with NQFs and RQFs and support the creation of an African education and qualifications space; and to promote cooperation, alignment/referencing between qualifications frameworks in Africa and worldwide.

The ACQF will emerge, develop and evolve in an environment marked by the post-Covid-19 recovery efforts, intertwined with the multiple transitions of our time. The emerging ACQF will face the challenges of economic slowdown and recession triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic, and the significant learning losses as a result of widespread school closures.

The future of work arrived ahead of schedule. At least four mega drivers of change are boosting the dynamics of this transformation and adaptation: digitalisation, automation and artificial intelligence; Covid-19; greening of the economy and society; and societal movements. In this context of transformation of work, reskilling and upskilling become urgent, as more workers transition to jobs that are based on a changing mix of tasks and skills. New types of qualifications and of modalities of recognition of learning emerge and the concepts of micro-credentials, digital certificates are becoming part of policies and practises of qualifications systems.

The role of qualifications frameworks in the context of transformation accelerated by the Covid-19 might usefully be unpacked under these three headings:

- recognition (individual learning achievements and newer forms of certification);
- accessibility (NQFs could do more to insist on access as a principle for qualifications to be included); and
- quality assurance of NQFs and constituent qualifications, so that Covid-19 does not present a threat to the quality, reputation or recognition status.

Principles underpinning NQFs may come to be just as important as technical features – fairness, transparency, quality, equality and relevance. Most important is that NQFs, or rather their design, implementation and use by stakeholders, don't make things worse for citizens. NQFs as policy instruments are only one of many that policymakers will need to employ in a coherent response to these wide issues.

The ACQF, as connector of NQFs and a promoter of trust and of new horizons for African integration and international transparency of skills and qualifications, benefits from a conjunction of opportunities on which to build. The expectations of African countries and citizens are high. The ACQF must respond through its ability to embrace the twin transition (green and digital), to foster inclusion by valuing all forms of learning, to be a catalyst for better qualifications systems and frameworks across the continent and to contribute to transparency and credibility of African education and qualifications in the world.

The proposed titles of each scenario underline its distinctive value:

1. **Scenario 1: 'ACQF connects'** – underscores support to effective networking, experience and knowledge sharing, capacity development and communication. The ACQF website is fundamental to this scenario, and the ACQF is a platform for all countries and RECs on the continent.

2. **Scenario 2: 'ACQF creates mutual trust'** – beyond the sharing of experiences and communication, this scenario focuses on the referencing of NQFs/RQFs to the ACQF, and eventually use of ACQF levels and label on qualifications of the linked NQF/RQFs.

3. **Scenario 3: 'ACQF opens new horizons'** – besides being a meta-framework for referencing, the ACQF promotes new qualifications (standards, profiles) of a continental nature, supports automatic mutual recognition of qualifications (based on quality assurance and other considerations) and supports digital certificates.

The construction and implementation of the ACQF occurs in a context marked by opportunities and challenges. The design of the ACQF and its supporting Action Plan should carefully consider and enable the virtuous interplay of strengths and weaknesses to leverage opportunities while mitigating challenges.

Considering the plans and needs of the period 2022–25, in which ACQF implementation should be initiated, the governance setting of the ACQF (Scenario 2) can be envisaged in a combination of functions:

- political steering: The AUC and the board of ACQF implementation body;
- implementation management: Professionally competent and credible structure. Two 2 options: a) Association of NQF Agencies (to be established); b) Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency (PAQAA), if encompassing all levels and subsectors of education and training;
- stakeholders' engagement: ACQF Advisory Group (renewed); networks, unions and associations: students, sectoral organisations, social partners, education and training organisations – through ACQF events, website, peer sharing, joint activities.

The proposed broad plan of ten outputs (2022–25) covers the critical aspects and components of the ACQF, from governance to technical foundations, capacity development and cooperation and partnerships with other frameworks globally. This output plan is wider than development, comparison and referencing of qualifications frameworks, as it is oriented to a perspective of impact on transparency, validation and recognition of learning, and its contribution to mobility – the essence of qualifications frameworks working in their eco-system.

The output plan includes:

1. ACQF governance setting established and operational
2. ACQF policy and technical document and Action Plan implemented and monitored
3. ACQF Database of qualifications designed / launched, and operations started with pilot countries
4. Skills and qualifications: analysis, intelligence, development
5. NQFs referenced to ACQF, in accordance to ACQF Guidelines
6. Increased number of NQFs at stage 4-5 (approved, implementation started and advanced) in African countries

7. Improved learning validation practices through application of high quality Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and credit accumulation and transfer systems, and cooperation with Recognition agencies (bodies)
8. ACQF contributes to better mobility and quality of qualifications in the context of the AfCFTA
9. ACQF Capacity development and awareness raising activities expanded to all countries
10. Dialogue, comparison and cooperation with other regional and national qualifications frameworks in the world

## 2    Introduction: Paving the way to the ACQF

This chapter contextualises the development process of the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF), and outlines the objectives and major strategic orientations of this report.

### 2.1    The foundations

The call for the establishment of a continental qualifications framework for Africa was formulated in crucial policy documents and strategic initiatives geared towards integration and prosperity on the continent. The African Union's (AU's) 'First Ten-Year Implementation Plan of Agenda 2063 (2014–2023)', the 'AU Free Movement Protocol' and the 'Continental Education Strategy for Africa (2016–2025)' explicitly include the continental qualifications framework among their goals. Moreover, the Agreement establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area, in its Protocol on Trade in Services, sets the frame for mutual recognition of education.

The development of the ACQF was launched at an official event held in September 2019 at the headquarters of the AU in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. This process is steered by the African Union Commission's (AUC's) Education Science and Technology (AUC ESTI) directorate, education division, and is technically supported by the European Union's (EU's) 'Skills for Youth Employability Programme', a contribution to the wider AU's Skills Initiative for Africa (SIFA).[1] The activities of the ACQF component run from 2019 to 2022, and aim to develop the ACQF policy document, accompanied by an action plan and technical guidelines; and to support networking of qualifications frameworks institutions and stakeholders, and development of expertise and capacities at national and regional levels.

This report identifies and analyses the key dimensions of feasibility and sustainability of the future ACQF. The study is placed at a crucial junction of the ACQF development process, since it establishes the link and transition between the phase of elaboration of the continental evidence base (the ACQF Mapping Study, 2020) and the phase of actual design of the overarching output of the project: the ACQF policy and technical document with action plan.

The question in this study is not whether to develop and operationalise the ACQF, but how to prepare the adequate conditions for a pertinent and sustainable ACQF. The study focuses on the challenges, purposes, features, governance and instruments enabling effectiveness and sustainability of the ACQF for African countries, regions and the continent. As highlighted above, the ACQF is strongly anchored in various policy areas of the AU, spanning from education to free trade and the free movement of people. Stakeholders, national qualifications systems (NQFs) and the AUC has high expectations about the anticipated contribution of the ACQF towards transparency, trust and portability of skills and qualifications. As the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) becomes operational, stakeholders agree that free trade and free movement will be hampered if the continent does not enact a common framework for comparability of qualifications, facilitating recognition and validation of learning.

This report aims to:

- identify and assess key future scenarios for the ACQF as a sustainable policy and instrument;
- elaborate on the essential features of the future ACQF policy and technical document with action plan; and
- propose the frame of ACQF technical guidelines and supporting instruments.

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[1] SIFA is an initiative of the AU and is implemented through a partnership comprising the EU and Germany (BMZ, the Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development), as co-funding partners. In the programme component responsible for development of the ACQF, GIZ partners with the EU Agency European Training Foundation (ETF). The ETF assures thematic and technical steering and coordination of the ACQF component.

The report is divided into five main chapters:

1. Executive summary
2. Introduction: Paving the way to ACQF
3. The context of the ACQF
4. Qualifications and qualifications frameworks in Africa
5. Scenarios and strategy for the ACQF.

The three proposed scenarios for the ACQF were presented and discussed with the AUC's ESTI department (Education division) and the ACQF Advisory Group (meeting of 8 April 2021) in a process of consultation contributing to co-creation of a commonly agreed continental framework. This consultation process aims to promote participation and buy-in.

## 2.2   ACQF in a context of crisis and transformation

The importance of innovation, on the one hand, and openness to good practice and mutual learning , on the other, cannot be overestimated in the context which ACQF is being shaped, marked by the unprecedented Covid-19 pandemic and multiple transformations of the society, economy, technology, work and climate.

The vision of the ACQF is aligned with *innovation*, which is a paramount foundation to build a 'future-ready ACQF', able to promote the adaptation of qualifications in Africa to the multiple transitions (green, digital, technological, societal). The ongoing pandemic has exacerbated and brought to light existing distortions and inequalities in all dimensions of human and economic development. As countries and regions are taking measures to deal with post-pandemic recovery, wider access to retraining and reskilling will be indispensable to support people's transitions to different jobs and adaptation to new skills requirements. The post-pandemic recovery – *build back better* – must bring the world (and Africa) to a better place, in terms of equitable, safe and democratic societies, in which participation in the benefits of technology, new learning and work is a commitment of leaders and citizens across the continent and around the world. This a frame work to which the future ACQF ought to contribute.

The ACQF development project was in its first stages when the Covid-19 pandemic hit the world. The mapping study collection was underway, and despite the sudden cancellation of the second ACQF consultation workshop once the World Health Organisation (WHO) announced the state of pandemic, discussions of the first findings of the mapping research were conducted in May 2020, via 3 online workshops, with representatives from over 35 AU countries and numerous regional organisations. Peer-learning activities via online workshops contributed to enriching the scope of information collected via different research methods, to expand the number of countries involved in the process (to 41) and to create a regular flow of experience sharing and networking.

This feasibility report was drafted in between February and July 2021. Throughout the disruption and silver linings of this unprecedented pandemic crisis, the ACQF development project relentlessly kept focused on its objective and outputs, but substantially changed its modes of working, communicating and researching. All activities were shifted to digital and remote mode, resulting in an expansion of networking and outreach actions with AU countries and stakeholders. These interactions and experience sharing have significantly contributed to the thinking reflected in this report.

The start of operationalisation of the AfCFTA in 2021 is considered a lever to shape the ACQF oriented to the largest African integration flagship. In complement to this feasibility analysis, a specific study will identify the areas and modalities of interplay between the AfCFTA and the ACQF.

## 2.3   ACQF development process: Main themes and sources

The ACQF process is holistic and integrated. Research, analysis and development of the key outputs are based on common policy and thematic dimensions, composed of a set of eleven thematic areas, elaborated in the initial ACQF project planning document (ACQF 2019) and in the terms of reference of the mapping study. These thematic areas guide analysis and reflection through the ACQF development project, from the Mapping Study to the ACQF policy and technical document, laying a coherent foundation for designing ACQF policy, ensuring that all key dimensions are taken into account.

A common set of policy and thematic dimensions for the project includes:

1.  policy and legal context: conceptual, policy and legal base of the national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) and regional qualifications frameworks (RQFs) – legal acts and policies that underpin the qualifications frameworks;
2.  governance: leading institutions and key agencies, the role of social partners and other stakeholders, partnerships, sector councils, resources, indicators and mechanisms to support implementation and monitoring;
3.  qualifications frameworks' vision, scope and structure: objectives and added value for education and training systems, employability policies, levels and descriptors, scope (partial, comprehensive coverage of levels/subsectors of education and training); place of non-formal/informal learning and validation/recognition of prior learning – practices and policies;
4.  quality assurance (QA): principles, policy, institutions, practice, registers, verification mechanisms;
5.  learning outcomes: concepts, use in different contexts (qualifications standards, curriculum, assessment) and subsectors, such as technical and vocational education and training (TVET), higher education, links with QA;
6.  credit systems: concepts, specifications, transferability/pathways between TVET, secondary education and higher education qualifications, status of development/implementation;
7.  alignment, referencing NQF-RQF: objectives, approaches, criteria and status of implementation;
8.  searchable databases/registers of qualifications, inclusion of qualifications, target users, governance, involved agencies;
9.  costs: financing of NQFs/RQFs;
10. dissemination, communication to end-users (learners, employers, education and training providers, career guidance advisors, employment/recruitment agencies): mechanisms, practice, public/online platforms, use of digital tools in qualifications management; and
11. role and place of RQFs in supporting development at a national level: for example, clarity of learning pathways and permeability, promoting mutual trust, use of common QA principles and mechanisms, use of learning outcomes, renewal and reform of qualifications, new technologies, improved approaches for better qualifications, employability and other aspects of the ecosystem of education and training.

The themes above cover the key policy and technical dimensions, which represent the foundation of qualifications frameworks and their implementation components. No qualifications framework can grow from infancy to full operational capability and impact if deprived of the mutually reinforcing dynamics of an *ecosystem*, with enablers, such as socio-political and economic roots and purpose, governance, viable instruments, resources and the ability to evolve and adapt to transformation and change.

The scenario development approach followed for this report is described in Chapter 5. The methodology focuses on qualitative aspects of the scenarios, and builds on the findings and analysis of the ACQF Mapping Study.

The list of references consulted for this analysis – research and policy documents – is regularly updated to include a wide range of most recent publications addressing issues and facets of transformation in Africa.

Chapter 6 of this report provides the full overview of used sources. The insights and trends elaborated in the following publications have been significant for this report:

- African Development Bank Group, 'African Economic Outlook 2020' (2020);
- African Development Bank Group, 'African Economic Outlook 2021' (2021a);
- Brookings Africa Growth Initiative, 'Foresight Africa 2021' (2021);
- AUC/OECD Development Centre, 'Africa´s Development Dynamics' (2021); and
- World Economic Forum, 'The Future of Jobs and Skills in Africa' (2017).

## 2.4  Concepts

In this report, we have made a distinction between a national qualifications system (NQS) and an NQF. This differentiation is essential when we argue that countries without established qualifications frameworks have qualifications systems with defined types and levels (cycles) of qualifications, including more or less developed QA of cycles, programmes and of design and award of qualifications. It is also important to emphasise that NQFs do not work effectively in isolation from other components of the qualifications system; and alone, NQFs cannot be the solution for all issues, problems and bottlenecks in the qualifications system.

*Qualification system*

This 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, QA 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 (OECD 2007).

*Qualification framework*

A qualification framework is an instrument for the development and classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for levels of learning achieved. This set of criteria may be implicit in the qualifications descriptors themselves or made explicit in the form of a set of level descriptors. The European Qualifications Framework Recommendation of 2017 defines a qualification framework as '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.'

The scope of frameworks may be comprehensive of all learning achievement and pathways or may be confined to a particular sector – for example, initial education, adult education and training or an occupational area. Some frameworks may have more design elements and a tighter structure than others; some may have a legal basis, whereas others represent a consensus of views of social partners. All qualification frameworks, however, aim to establish a basis for improving the transparency, quality, accessibility, linkages and public or labour market recognition of qualifications within a country and internationally (Tuck 2007).

*Regional qualifications framework*

A broad structure of levels of learning outcomes that is agreed by countries in a geographical region. A means of enabling one NQF to relate to another and, subsequently, for a qualification in one country to be compared to a qualification from another country. For example, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Qualification Reference Framework.

## 2.5   Panorama of qualifications frameworks on the continent

The ACQF Mapping Study (2019–2020) was developed on the basis of a combination of sources: continental survey, country visits, desktop research and information collected via online experience-sharing webinars. It established an updated and comprehensive dataset with information from 41 African countries, including the thirteen countries with a specific national ACQF mapping study report.

The output of the Mapping Study is a collection of country and regional economic community (REC) reports exploring the key issues and features of qualifications frameworks and systems in thirteen countries (Angola, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Ivory Coast, Morocco, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa and Togo) and in three RECs – the East African Community (EAC), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). It culminated in a comprehensive report outlining the findings from the country and REC reports, in the context of i) the AU polices and of ii) the international storyline of several generations of qualifications frameworks (1980–2020). The central piece of the comprehensive mapping report is the 75-page chapter synthesising the most salient features and trends of qualifications frameworks (national and regional) on the African continent, building on the continental ACQF survey, country and REC reports and exchanges and updates shared via peer-learning activities in 2020.

The ACQF Mapping Study identified a larger number and diversity of qualifications frameworks than previously known from such regular analyses as the Global Inventory of National and Regional Qualifications Frameworks, which is a joint initiative of the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), the European Training Foundation (ETF) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and is updated every two years (Cedefop, ETF, UNESCO, 2019).

Considering a total of 41 countries included in the data collected by the ACQF Mapping Study, the continent has a higher number of qualifications frameworks (approved, implementation started or implementation advanced) than other larger regions had when they enacted their overarching RQFs. Although thirteen years separate the advent of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the development of the ACQF, it is very useful to note that when the legal base of the EQF was approved (2008), only three countries had NQFs in place and operational (France, Ireland and the United Kingdom).

By end 2020 the African continent had:

- three NQFs at the stage of advanced implementation (and already reviewed);
- nineteen qualifications frameworks at the stage where the relevant legal base had been approved and implementation had started. A number of these qualifications frameworks have substantial experience and could be considered to be part of the advanced implementation group. In seven of these nineteen countries, the existing qualifications frameworks are sectoral, not integrated and inclusive. The majority of these cases are TVET qualifications frameworks (countries highlighted in Table 1);
- eight countries developing their NQFs, of which a share had entered the approval/adoption process;
- eight countries undertaking early steps towards the development of an NQF;
- one regional qualifications framework, the SADC Qualifications Framework (SADCQF), had been adopted and implementation started; and
- one regional qualification framework, the East African Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (EAQFHE), had been adopted, though implementation was limited to higher education qualifications

**Table 1**: Qualifications frameworks in Africa by stage of development and implementation - overview (end 2020). Highlighted: countries with qualifications framework of sectoral scope (mostly focused on qualifications of TVET systems)

| Stage of NQF development and implementation | Countries |
|---|---|
| **No NQF** | Chad, Republic of Congo, São Tomé e Príncipe |
| **NQF in early thinking** | Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Union of Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Togo |
| **NQF in development and consultation** | Angola, Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Madagascar, Morocco, Sierra Leone, Somalia |
| **NQF legal act approved, implementation started** | Botswana, Eswatini, Ethiopia, The Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Seychelles, Tanzania, Tunisia, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Zambia |
| **NQF in advanced implementation and reviewed** | Cape Verde, Mauritius, South Africa |

*Source: Dataset of ACQF Mapping Study*

From the point of view of the ACQF, as an overarching referencing qualifications framework for the whole continent, this landscape is propitious for activities geared to cooperation, comparison and eventually referencing/alignment between countries' qualifications frameworks and the ACQF.

At the time of writing this report (March–June 2021), over twenty countries can be considered for preparatory actions leading to future referencing with ACQF, and another group of less than ten countries can be candidates, once their NQFs reach the point of starting implementation.

Besides transparency, comparability and referencing, the objectives of the ACQF include working in cooperation and complementarity with the countries and regions, supporting the development of their qualifications frameworks. This strand of work has a wide scope and scale, considering the ambition of the AU not to leave any country behind, as per the vision for 2063, 'The Africa we want'. Actions to support the development, consolidation and active implementation of NQFs on the continent shall consider all countries:

- those that have yet to start the first steps to start developing an NQF;
- those with slow or discontinued processes of NQF development;
- those with an adopted NQF legal act, but with limited or no operational decisions and capacity to implement;
- those with NQFs starting implementation but requiring coaching, training, good practice, dialogue and other support; and
- those with extensive implementation experience, and in need of renewing their national dialogue on new issues and challenges to be addressed by the NQF, and of reviewing their NQF legislation and related practical implementation policies and instruments.

## 2.6   The African Union policy context

Skills and qualifications of the people in Africa are crucial for the transformation of the continent. Skills and qualifications are strategic in the context of the demographic bulge of the continent, which some see as the 'youth repository of the world'. Therefore, the ACQF is a vital policy initiative of the AU.

The ACQF is being developed in a time of great transformations, and this represents a new horizon and perspective for the ACQF and its ecosystem. It is strongly anchored on AU policies and strategies, especially:

- Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want
- African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)

- [Protocol to the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community relating to Free Movement of Persons, Right of Residence and Right of Establishment](#) (AU Free Movement Protocol);
- [Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2016–2025](#) (CESA 16–25).

The most explicit references to a continental qualifications framework are found in:

- CESA 16–25: strategic objectives 4 (c) and (d); and
- the AU Free Movement Protocol, Article 18.

CESA 16–25 strategic objective 4 aims to 'ensure acquisition of requisite knowledge and skills as well as improved completion rates at all levels and groups through harmonization processes across all levels for national and regional integration'. Particularly, goals (c) and (d) of strategic objective 4 explicitly refer to the establishment of qualifications frameworks, notably a continental qualifications framework linked with NQFs and RQFs:

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

Integrated Africa is a major transformational outcome of Agenda 2063. The First Ten-year Implementation Plan 2014–2023 of the Agenda 2063 sets goals directly related to ACQF, notably in Aspiration 1: A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development.
- Goal 2: Well-educated citizens and skills revolution underpinned by Science, Technology and Innovation (STI)
- Priority areas: Education and STI skills-driven revolution.

The relevant 2023 targets on the continental level are structured as follows:

1. Continental African Education Accreditation Agency is fully operational
2. **Common continental education qualification system is in place**
3. African e-University is established
4. Pan African University is consolidated with at least 25 satellite centres
5. African Education Observatory is fully operational
6. At least 50% of member states have national accreditation systems in place by 2023
7. Framework for Harmonization of Teacher Education is completed by 2018.

Most importantly, for the purpose of the ACQF project, the AU Free Movement Protocol adopted by the 30th Ordinary Session of the AU Assembly (20 January 2018), in its Article 18 (on 'Mutual Recognition of Qualifications'), specifies that 'The States Parties shall establish a continental qualifications framework to encourage and promote the free movement of persons, Right of Residence and Right of Establishment.'

The ACQF is linked with the Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Framework (PAQAF) and will work in synergy with the [Revised Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and Other Academic Qualifications on Higher Education in African States](#) (Addis Convention).

Other AU education policies and frameworks to be considered as orientation points for ACQF development are addressed in the process of the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA) Clusters. Among these policy areas, it is worth emphasising the importance of the 'African Teacher Qualification Framework', and work in development relating to qualifications of human resources in early childhood education and development.

As the continent adopts new strategic initiatives to *build back better* beyond Covid-19, the ACQF will continue to shape links and complementarities addressing the skills and qualifications dimensions of continental policies supporting the twin green and digital adaptation.

The ACQF, as a meta-qualifications framework, has the potential to cooperate with other regional and national qualifications frameworks beyond Africa, contributing to referencing, and to improve transparency and mobility international currency of African qualifications. Such cooperation between continents can be envisaged with Europe, the closest neighbour of Africa, and other regions.

The EU has committed to supporting the development of the ACQF, as defined in Action 4 of the Communication – 'Africa-Europe Alliance on Sustainable Investment and Jobs', adopted on 12 September 2018 by the European Commission. This communication was endorsed by all heads of state of the EU, at the European Council meeting on 18 October 2018.

# 3   The context of the ACQF

This overview of key trends, perspectives and challenges characterising the African economic outlook, human capital utilisation, education indicators, skills governance, and the features of five of the (RECs) helps to place the ACQF in the continental context, pinpointing major challenges its strategy should aim to address.

## 3.1   The African outlook in the period before and during Covid-19

### 3.1.1   Economic growth

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, despite persisting and multiple challenges, economic growth in Africa had been high for over a decade, albeit with a slower pace in the last four years. In 2019 economic growth was 3.4%. This growth rate was 0.6 percentage points less than the rate projected in the 2019 African Economic Outlook (AFDB 2020). It was also below the decadal average growth of 5% for the continent. Compared with the rest of the world, Africa's GDP growth was above the world average of 3% for 2019 and well above the average for advanced economies at 1.7%. There were six African countries among the ten fastest-growing economies in the world: Rwanda (at 7.4% growth rate), Côte d'Ivoire (7.4%), Ghana (7.1%), Tanzania (6.8%) and Benin (6.7%).

There is substantial regional and country variation in economic growth in Africa (AFDB 2020). For example:

- In 2019 East Africa was the fastest-growing region, with an estimated 5% growth rate, with Rwanda, Ethiopia and Tanzania leading. Kenya's growth fell from 6.5% in 2018 to 5.9% in 2019.
- North Africa was the second fastest-growing region, with an estimated 4.1% growth rate in 2019. This performance was explained by the growth momentum in Egypt, increasing from 5.3% in 2018 to 5.6% in 2019, driven by economic reforms and the start of gas production. Other growing countries in North Africa were Algeria and Mauritania, unlike Libya that slowed down.
- In West Africa growth increased from 3.4% in 2018, to 3.7% in 2019. Major contributors to this performance were Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire. Nigeria registered a gradual recovery – from 1.9% growth in 2018 to 2.3% in 2019.
- Central Africa recorded higher economic growth, from 2.7% (2018) to 3.2% (2019), thanks to increases in most countries in the region.
- Southern Africa recorded a declining growth rate, falling from 1.2% in 2018 to 0.7% in 2019. The region was afflicted with extreme weather conditions, notably the cyclones Idai and Kenneth, which devastated urban and rural infrastructure and agricultural production, and displaced populations. Other structural factors have contributed to declining growth, notably in Zimbabwe, which experienced a notable contraction of 12.8% in 2019, due to monetary issues related to currency convertibility that have distorted the efficient functioning of markets. South Africa's growth slowed to 0.7% in 2019, and Namibia recorded a weak growth.

The big five economies in Africa – Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Nigeria and South Africa – jointly contributed 55% of the continent's growth in 2019.

### 3.1.2  Growth and the Covid-19 pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic hit all countries across Africa hard, albeit at different scales in the various regions and countries (Figures 1 and 2). (AFDB 2021a).

**Figure 1**: Real GDP growth (percent), by region



**African regions - real GDP growth: 2019-2022 (%)**

| | Africa | Central Africa | East Africa | North Africa | Southern Africa | West Africa |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2019 | 3.3 | 2.9 | 5.3 | 4 | 0.3 | 3.6 |
| 2020 estimated | -2.1 | -2.7 | 0.7 | -1.1 | -7 | -1.5 |
| 2021 projected | 3.4 | 3.2 | 3 | 4 | 3.2 | 2.8 |
| 2022 projected | 4.6 | 4 | 5.6 | 6 | 2.4 | 3.9 |
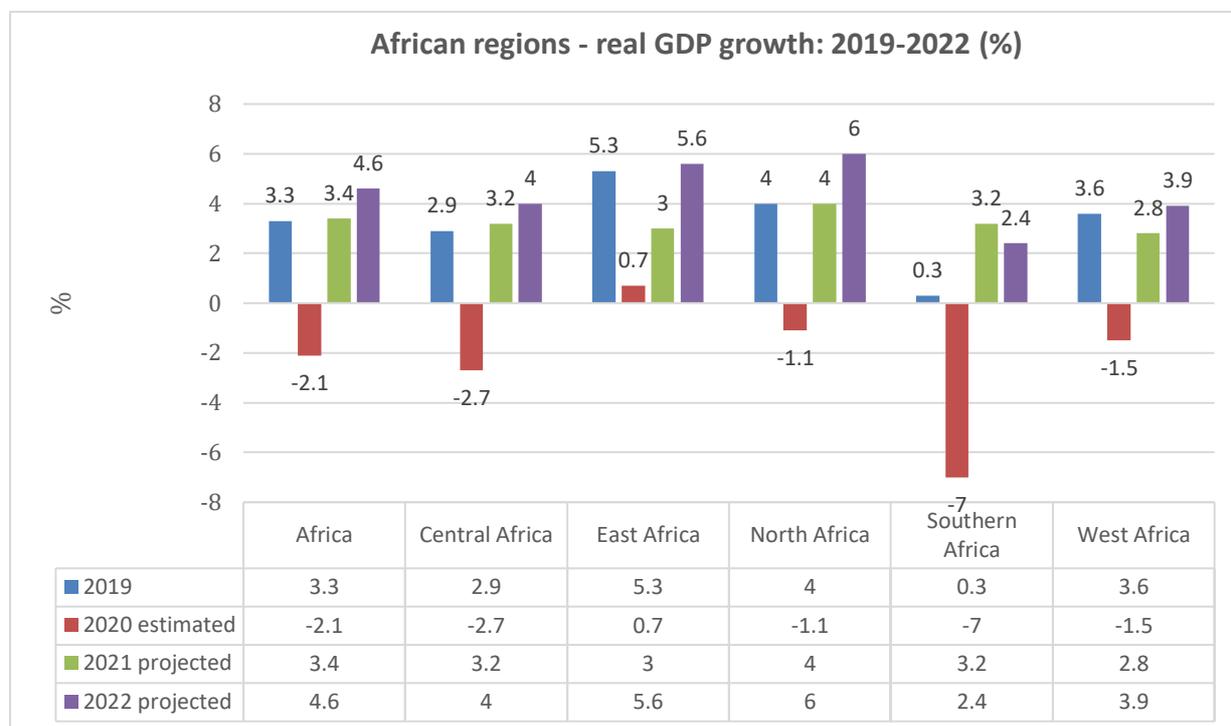
*Source: AFDB (2021a). Statistical Annex, p.38. Author's graph based on the source.*

**Figure 2**: Real GDP growth (percent), by countries (2019, 2020, 2021)
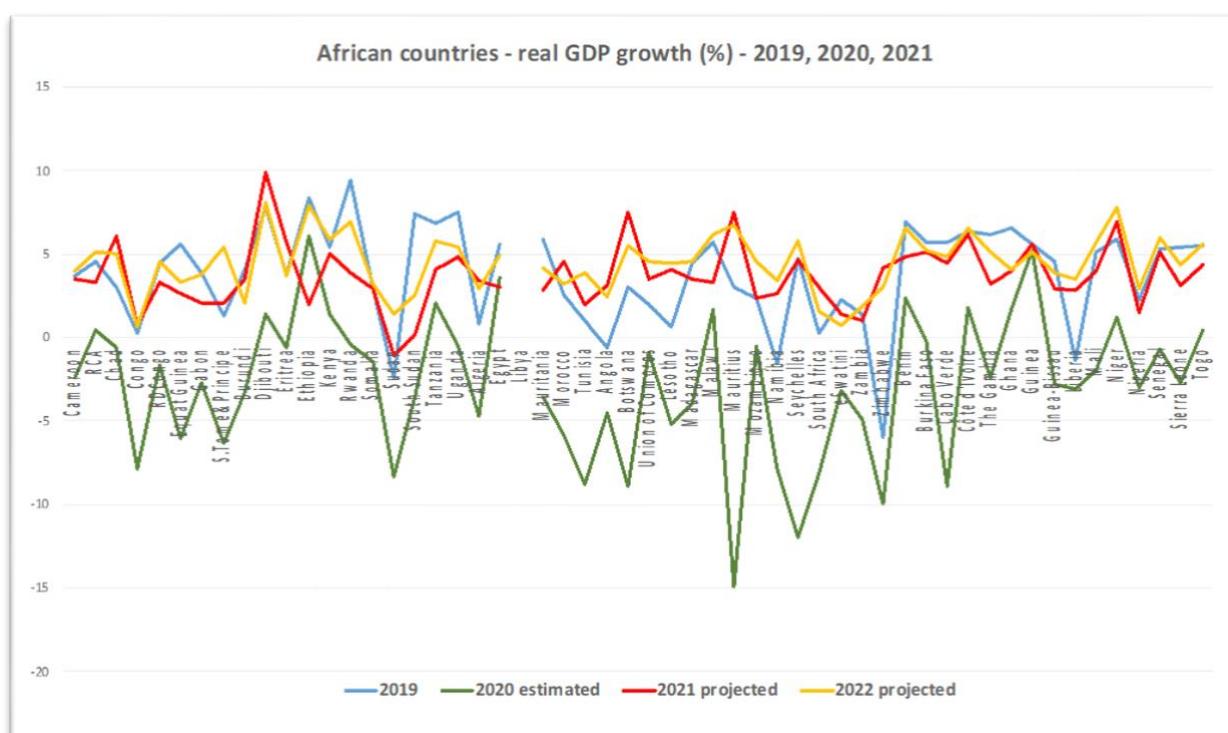


*Source: AFDB (2021a). Statistical Annex, p.38. Author's graph based on the source.*

The 'African Economic Outlook 2021' (AFDB 2021a) reports that Africa is projected to recover in 2021 from its worst economic recession in half a century. Real GDP in Africa is projected to grow by 3.4% in 2021, after contracting by 2.1% in 2020. This projected recovery will be underpinned by a resumption of tourism,

a rebound in commodity prices and the rollback of pandemic-induced restrictions. The outlook is, however, subject to great uncertainty from both external and domestic risks.

The economic impact of the pandemic varies across economic characteristics and regions, but the projected recovery is broad-based (AFDB 2021a). Although all economies in Africa have been affected by the pandemic, tourism-dependent economies, oil-exporting economies and other resource-intensive economies were the most significantly hit by the pandemic. Tourism-dependent economies are projected to recover from an 11.5% GDP decline in 2020 to grow by 6.2% in 2021; oil-exporting countries from a 1.5% decline to grow by 3.1%; and other resource-intensive economies from a 4.7% decline to grow by 3.1%. Non-resource-intensive countries, where output shrank by 0.9% in 2020, are projected to grow by 4.1% in 2021.

Economically, business and employment has been greatly affected by the pandemic. Despite Africa generating much of its employment within the informal sector, the closure of most formal sector companies and organisations has had a detrimental effect on the informal sector. This is largely because the informal sector has had much of its resources coming from the formal sector, which has had closures, and the informal sector has been affected because it has had restrictions on how business should be done. The laid-off personnel in the formal sector have also found it difficult to survive because even the informal sector, into which they have been pushed, has been affected.

Human and labour force mobility across countries has also been affected. This means a shortage of labour where it is needed, affecting the production and provision of goods and services. This will affect the implementation of the AfCFTA. The principal objective of AfCTA is to create a liberalised market for trade in goods. In this, it upholds the aspirations of Agenda 2063 for a continental market with the free movement of persons, capital, goods and services, which are crucial for deepening economic integration, and promoting agricultural development, food security, industrialisation and structural economic transformation.

The achievement of the stipulation of the AfCFTA has greatly been compromised in the past two years by the COVID-19 pandemic. As highlighted above, the free movement of personnel, goods and services slowed, the liberalisation of the market hampered, and the production of goods and services slowed. The start of trade in goods was postponed and affectively started in January 2021.

### 3.1.3  Remittances and labour migration

Remittances sent by migrants to families in their countries of origin provided a financial lifeline to millions of households. In certain African countries remittances represent a large share of GDP, spanning from 34.4% in South Sudan to 20.1% in Lesotho, 11.9% in Cape Verde, and 10.7% in Senegal. In 2019 the total amount of remittances in sub-Saharan Africa reached US$48 billion. This amount is projected to decline by 8.8% in 2020, followed by another decrease by 5.8% in 2021. (Brookings Africa Growth Initiative, 2021)

The pandemic has hit the stability of remittances in several ways. Many migrants in high-income countries lost their jobs and saw their incomes plummet. Weak oil prices have also affected outward remittances from the Gulf Cooperation Council countries.

The decline in remittances is particularly problematic given the severe poverty circumstances of millions of people and households on the continent, who depended on this source of income to feed and, especially, to educate their children.

The travel restrictions and dangers of the Covid-19 pandemic stifled new migration flows, and forced many unemployed labour migrants to return home. In the medium-term large income gaps (compared with high-

income countries) are likely to drive up outward migration. The rapid growth of the working-age population and the effects of climate change on livelihoods will also exacerbate the root causes of migration.

Effective recognition of qualifications and especially validation and certification of individuals' knowledge and skills acquired in migration experiences are essential policy instruments yet to be further improved across all countries and regions on the continent. A wider agenda/campaign for fair and trusted recognition of prior learning (RPL), should be part of the ACQF strategy, to enable easier access of potential beneficiaries and candidates and dissemination of good practice and eventually, the adoption of commonly agreed technical and methodological guidelines and quality assured tools for RPL for the continent.

### 3.1.4 Growth, inclusiveness and poverty reduction

Africa's growth trajectory in the period 2000–15 was sustained and raised hopes that its economies would join the ranks of middle- and high-income countries and lift its people from poverty. But growth has not been inclusive, and job creation in high-productivity sectors lagged behind demographic growth. Large sectors of the population remain employed in low-productivity, low-paying jobs in traditional agriculture and the informal sector.

For the populations quality of growth matters most, especially the extent to which growth is equitable and inclusive. Growth is generally considered inclusive when its benefits are widely shared across all the segments of the population, and when it contributes to reducing both extreme poverty and inequality.

On average, the consumption of Africa's poor has been growing slower than the consumption of the average population (sub-periods 2000–05, 2005–10 and 2010–17). Africa's economic growth has not been inclusive enough, as seen by persistently high inequality and poverty (AFDB 2020). Only one-third of African countries have achieved inclusive growth: 18 of 48 countries with data had growth patterns leading to faster than average consumption growth for the poor, and lower inequality between different population segments. According to African Development Bank (2020) estimates, only seven countries have achieved both pro-poor and inclusive growth in each of the indicated sub-periods. Some countries improved the inclusiveness of their growth in the last sub-period, while others conducted pro-poor and inclusive growth policies in the first sub-period, but not in the most recent.

There remain many unresolved issues about the sustainability of the Africa's economic growth and transformation. Questions have been raised about whether this growth narrative will be sustained in the long term, given that it has been sustained by primary commodity price booms and that this transformation is occurring without industrialization or significant poverty reduction.

Several key factors have contributed to Africa's recent rapid economic growth and their relative importance varies between countries. Economists have attributed this rapid growth to endogenous growth of the informal economy and to foreign financial inflows. There has also been rapid urbanisation, rising incomes and significant dietary transformations. The continent has also witnessed a steep rise in the number of small- and medium-scale trading firms that have played a critical role in powering employment growth and the development of valuable agricultural value chains. Rapid population growth, especially in urban areas, has provided a rapidly growing market for local food production. Hence, local food production and small industries have benefited, especially when global commodity prices rose for a sustained period, starting in the mid-2000s. An often under-appreciated contributory factor to economic growth has been changes in the agricultural markets and economy-wide policy reforms undertaken during the 1990s. These policy reforms removed major barriers to private trade. The effects of the reforms were mostly dormant until the mid-2000s when world food prices suddenly skyrocketed, enabling thousands of small-, medium- and large-scale private firms to rapidly respond to profitable incentives, thereby rapidly building up Africa's agri-food systems during this period.

The basic policies for fostering inclusive growth are debated, but two major policies are consistently found to play a key role: human capital (especially education) and the creation of jobs in high-productivity sectors.

There is a negative association between poverty and years of schooling (AFDB 2020):

- African countries with higher average years of schooling are characterised by lower levels of poverty after accounting for initial GDP; and
- in addition, other indicators such as government spending on education and the enrolment rates in primary, secondary and tertiary education are negatively associated with poverty.

Education contributes to reducing both poverty and inequality:

'From a theoretical point of view, education can reduce poverty by increasing the stock of human capital of the population, inducing higher labour productivity and subsequently faster growth and lower poverty.' (AFDB 2020: 34).

'Beyond its poverty-reducing effect, building human capital can also reduce inequality. Higher educational attainment and lower inequality in education can reduce income inequality. By fostering social mobility, education gives greater opportunities to people to change their social status with better earning opportunities than their parents. African countries with a larger share of secondary or higher educated populations have lower wealth inequality.' (AFDB 2020: 34).

## 3.2  Crisis and opportunity for education and skills

African countries have much to gain from improving education to achieve inclusive growth. The slow pace of structural transformation stems from shortcomings in human capital, reflecting low skills and low education levels.

Despite progress in recent decades, Africa still lags behind other developing regions in education and skills development (AFDB 2020). Many education indicators have stagnated and even deteriorated and, without a rapid acceleration of progress, the continent will remain unlikely to achieve key education commitments by 2030. A selection of indicators on quantity and quality of education provides an overview of substantial challenges and opportunities for African leaders and people to take action.

**School enrolment rates**: progress has been tangible in the period 2000–16, but with great variation between cycles of education (Table 2). While the enrolment rates in primary education have significantly improved and reached a range close to other regions of the world, consistent effort will be required to diminish the distance between Africa and other regions on enrolment in secondary and tertiary education.

**Table 2:** Trends in enrolment rates across regions (2000–2016) – percent

| Region | Primary education | | Secondary education | | Tertiary education | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **2000** | **2016** | **2000** | **2016** | **2000** | **2016** |
| **Africa** | 66 | 82 | 32 | 44 | 6 | 16 |
| - Central Africa | 58 | 84 | 7 | 32 | 3 | 10 |
| - East Africa | 54 | 79 | 35 | 41 | 2 | 9 |
| - North Africa | 82 | 91 | | 54 | 26 | 29 |
| - Southern Africa | 78 | 90 | 39 | 47 | 4 | 18 |
| - West Africa | 59 | 77 | 20 | 44 | 6 | 12 |
| **Asia** | 88 | 93 | 61 | 77 | 23 | 43 |
| **Latin America and Caribbean** | 92 | 92 | 63 | 78 | 28 | 53 |
| **Europe** | 95 | 95 | 86 | 92 | 45 | 68 |

**Dropout and out-of-school rates** are higher in Africa than in other world regions.

- More than half of the world's out-of-school children live in sub-Saharan Africa (33 million). More than one third of students in Africa dropped out between 2010 and 2017, compared with 11% in Latin America and 8% in Asia.
- Among African children of primary school age (typically 6–11 years), on average 14.7% were out of school during 2015–18, as were 31.9% of adolescents of lower secondary school age (12–14 years) and 50.2% of youth of upper secondary school age (15–17 years).
- While the average dropout rate is 35% for boys and 33% for girls, there is considerable cross-country variation: in the best-performing countries dropout is below 6% (Algeria, Botswana, Egypt, Mauritius and Seychelles); other countries have dropout rates over 60%.
- This raises a red flag, as children who drop out before finishing their primary schooling face greater difficulties in acquiring further formal education and getting a qualification. In terms of current trends, Africa will fail to bring all children to school by 2030.

**Average years of schooling**: in 2018 Africans completed an average of over five years of schooling – five for women and six for men. This indicator hides high country differentiation: the best-performing countries averaged ten to eight years of schooling, whereas countries in more vulnerable circumstances did not reach four years of schooling (and the female population was even more worse off).

**Education and skills across generations**: overall, sub-Saharan Africa's younger generations are considerably more educated than their predecessors. In countries such as Botswana, Benin, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, and Uganda, the contrast in the education levels of older and younger generations is remarkable. This contrast is high in educational achievement of primary and secondary education.

**Projection of Africa's working-age population by level of qualification, 2016–30**: the share of this population with at least secondary education (secondary and higher education) is set to increase from 36% (2016) to 52% in 2030. This progress holds promise, but the challenges should not be underestimated. The projected growth of educational attainment shows that a very significant portion of the population will stay behind on education, with inter-generational consequences. There is a very large gender gap in the education of boys and girls, furthering social and economic disparities.

Most importantly, subsectors and pathways in education and training are often poorly connected and articulated, hampering the progression and mobility of learners. This is caused by limited coordination between primary, secondary and higher education provision and uneven development of pre-school, TVET and adult training (formal and non-formal modalities).

Policy actions

Improving basic literacy, expanding higher education, and renewing initial and continuing training (reskilling, upskilling) together form the indispensable package to make the 'skills revolution' of Agenda 2063 happen. Expanding and diversifying the continent's productive capacity requires improvements of key competences for lifelong learning, especially literacy, numeracy, entrepreneurship, science and mathematics, digital and green skills, and highly skilled managers to access new markets.

Policy actions in the vast domain of education and skills development should include measures to improve both the quality and quantity of education and training, taking account of skills needs of today and tomorrow in the labour market and society. Innovation in learning, new technologies, digital and remote learning offer opportunities to help African countries leapfrog in education and training.

Qualifications frameworks – national, regional and continental – are one of the essential policy instruments to address the misarticulation between learning pathways and subsectors, and inflexible progression routes, which deprive people from the benefits of accessible lifelong learning and qualifications.

## 3.2.1 Education and the Covid-19 pandemic

The pandemic has not only affected education and training; Africa has suffered socially – its culture has been altered, the warmth of family and societal ties has been shaken, organic societies have moved more towards mechanical societies, and the ubuntu philosophy common to so many African cultures has been challenged.

Education losses for children in sub-Saharan African countries caused by school closures and other pandemic-related impacts have been immense (Brookings Africa Growth Initiative 2021). In the countries surveyed, less than half of the households with children who attended school before the pandemic have participated in any learning activities in the months following the school closures. In rural areas the situation was even more difficult: only four in ten households reported participating in educational activities since schools closed in their area.

**Figure 3**: Children engaged in any learning/education initiative since school closures (percentage of households with school-age children who attended school before the pandemic)
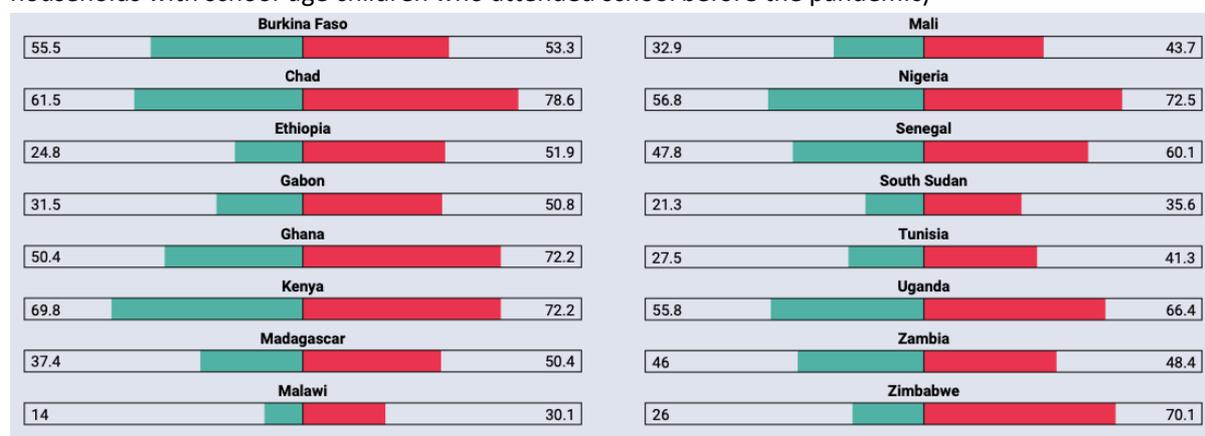


Key: ■ Rural ■ Urban

*Source*: Brookings Africa Growth Initiative, 2021. Dataset: World Bank, "Covid-19 High-Frequency Monitoring Dashboard".

## 3.3 Qualifications, skills and employment

Education, skills and work will determine the improvement to livelihoods of the more than 1.3 billion people on the African continent, and drive growth and development for the generations to come.

The great transformations of our era allow and invite a reset of views on how learning and employment interact. Instead of separate subsystems with borderlines, let us work towards *skills ecosystems*, in which qualifications and work, supply and demand articulate in a more fluid manner, using feedback loops and reference points to steer the tension between stability and transformation. Learning takes place anytime, anywhere.

## 3.3.1 The continent with the youngest population

Africa has the youngest population in the world: more than 60% of its population is under the age of 25 and by 2030, it will be home to more than one-quarter of the world's total under-25 population. In comparison, the share of the world population below 25 is slightly over 40%. Over this period the continent

is expected to expand the size of its workforce by more than the rest of the world combined, as its young population, the best educated and connected the continent has ever had, enters the world of work (WEF 2017). The projected working-age population of Africa by 2030 exceeds 600 million people.

It is crucial that adequate policies and investments support education and training, skills development and skills recognition, flexible qualifications adaptable for lifelong learning, real-time labour market intelligence connected to credible systems of career information and guidance supporting transitions between work and learning.

### 3.3.2 Labour market overview

Labour force participation in Africa is high and this holds much promise. There is strong participation of women, although substantial gender gaps remain high in countries such as Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Mauritius, Nigeria and Senegal.

The employment rate – as a percentage of the population of age above fifteen years old – is higher than the world average. There are slight variations of this indicator between African regions, with the exception of North Africa which displays a rate 20 percentage points lower than the African average (Table 3).

**Table 3:** Employment as a percentage of the population of age 15+, 2019 (%)

| Africa | Southern Africa | Central Africa | East Africa | North Africa | West Africa | World |
|--------|-----------------|----------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|-------|
| **64.7** | 69.7 | 67.0 | 68.2 | 45.8 | 64.6 | 61.8 |

*Source: AUC/OECD (2021). https://www.oecd.org/development/africa-s-development-dynamics-2021-0a5c9314-en.htm*

Challenges remain when it comes to the creation of quality, formal-sector jobs. Growth of formal employment in the past two decades did not keep pace with population growth, resulting in fewer opportunities in the formal labour market for the increasing numbers of young school and university graduates. Employment in the formal sector is often in small-sized companies, with limited resources to invest in upskilling and reskilling. Most importantly, large proportions of the African population continue to work in the informal economy, on family farms and urban self-employment, where the skills of educated youth are not adding value. This contributes to the low utilisation of human capital described in the next section.

On average, sub-Saharan Africa exhibited a share of high-skilled employment of just 6%, which contrasts with the global average of 24%. Some countries have large proportions (20 to over 30%) of workers in low-skilled jobs (WEF 2017).

Women have become considerably more active in labour markets and many are gaining greater influence over household resources in many areas. Poverty rates have declined significantly for the region since 1990 (from 56% in 1990 to 40% in 2018), while nutritional indicators also show gradual but clear improvement.

### 3.3.3 The issue of labour mobility

Among its policy recommendations, the 'African Economic Outlook 2020' (AFDB 2020) emphasises the need to address obstacles to labour mobility to enhance growth's inclusiveness within sector productivity growth and cross-sector labour reallocations to reduce poverty in Africa.

Merely by allowing labour to move freely across sectors, African countries could increase incomes and reduce poverty and inequality. To this end, policies should reform labour regulations and employment policies to ensure the free movement of labour. In addition, while the labour movement within countries

is less prone to restrictions, cross-border labour mobility is often discouraged on the grounds of protecting local labour markets.

Implementing international agreements, such as the AfCFTA, would help to remove most obstacles to the free movement of workers between countries (AFDB 2020). Moreover, policies should contribute to increasing the transferability of skills and qualifications across sectors or the acquisition of sets of new skills and qualifications to meet the requirements of receiving sectors.

### 3.3.4  Human capital utilisation

The contribution of education to increasing labour productivity growth is limited because of the weak complementarity between human and physical capital. Existing skills and qualifications are not adequately utilised in the labour market. Large shares of employed youth consider their skills mismatched with their jobs and their education inadequate for work readiness. Employers in many countries identify inadequately skilled workforces as a major constraint to their businesses and to recruitment of the right profiles.

Research of the World Economic Forum (WEF 2017) found that sub-Saharan Africa currently captures only 55% of its human capital potential, compared with a global average of 65%. The WEF's Human Capital Index measures the extent to which countries and economies optimise their human capital through education and skills development and its deployment. The Human Capital Index for 2016 reveals large country differentiation in Africa, spanning between 67–61% (Mauritius, Ghana, South Africa, Zambia, Cameroon, Botswana) and 44–49% (Mali, Nigeria and Chad) (WEF 2017).

### 3.3.5  Readiness to adapt to transformation of jobs and technologies

A major challenge facing countries, regions, policymakers and employers is the adaptation to transformation and disruption triggered by the Fourth Industrial Revolution, and in more general terms by the Covid-19 pandemic, and the twin green and digital transitions.

Research on the incidence and impact of automation in tasks, jobs and skills predict that approximately 40% of all work activities in South Africa are susceptible to automation, as are 44% in Ethiopia, 46% in Nigeria and 52% in Kenya. In South Africa, approximately 40% of the core skills required across occupations will be different in the 2020s. The average Information and Communication Technology (ICT) intensity of jobs in South Africa increased by 26% over the last decade, and the share of formal sector employment in several countries is increasing in occupations with high digital skills intensity. This rapid skills transformation relates to new tasks in existing occupations, new/emerging occupations, and the sudden high growth of remote and digital work and learning that has marked most countries' responses to the Covid-19 pandemic.

According to LinkedIn's data used by the WEF (2017) some of most common types of high-skilled employment on the continent include business analysis, schoolteachers and academics, commercial bankers, accountants, human resources managers, marketing and operations specialists, customer service specialists, advertising professionals, health workers, creative industries, information technology workers, 3D designers and software and app developers.

There is strong job growth potential in hard and soft infrastructure (architecture, construction, engineering), greening and green jobs, the ICT sector and through new forms of work.

Expected long-term benefits of ICT-intensive jobs in Africa will relate to digital design, creation and engineering. To make this happen leaders and educators need to build pipelines of future skills, renew and innovate content of education by encouraging critical thinking, creativity, self-management and emotional intelligence and boost skills in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) and digital skills.

## 3.4 Digitalisation

The African continent has also seen massive transformation and movement in ICT and the digital world. To date, few economic sectors are untouched by the influence of digital platforms. One of the many studies (Oladipo and Gobler 2020) which have focused on ICT penetration, growth and trends, based on ICT indicators (mobile telephone, fixed-line telephone and Internet access subscriptions) reduced to a single index through principal components analysis, shows that mobile telecommunication is growing faster than other telecommunication indicators. Research shows that there has been a 37% increase in mobile network utilisation, bringing Africa to 63% of the population having access. The studies further indicate that this has had a positive impact on economic growth and development in Africa. In investigating how ICT has enabled this, Ngozi and Chiamaka (2019), recognise leapfrogging as one fundamental aspect. They stipulate that ICT has allowed countries to sidestep traditional stages or processes required for development and capability building, a situation termed as 'technology leapfrogging'. In other words, it has allowed countries to skip traditional paths through bypassing some of the processes of accumulation of human capabilities and fixed investment in order to narrow the gaps in productivity and output.

ICT infrastructure has enabled faster growth in digital platforms, with South Africa having the most platforms, though Kenya is experiencing the fastest growth. Indications show that home-grown platforms in Africa account for 80% of the available digital platforms, with an annual growth rate of 18% in monthly users across countries.

Besides business and office use, digital platforms have greatly changed the education space. The proliferation of ICT-based education has created an education style where institutions have stated having an ICT-based library, including its management like Online Public Access (OPAC) platforms, online learning, and e-based assessments. The most recent development has been in skills development, where RPL and competency-based education have also gone digital.

The digitalisation of education has helped during the COVID-pandemic since face-to-face education and training delivery was stopped and business was not usual. The pandemic therefore has brought in an era where digitalisation of education processes and systems in all areas will not be a luxury but a basic resource and provision to be embedded within education and training provision.

## 3.5 Skills governance in Africa

Skills governance is seen as a system aimed at balancing supply and demand of skills for both today and tomorrow and providing a good skills base for further economic development. Stakeholders from the public, private and non-governmental sector should be involved in implementing and using the skills governance system. When well designed, the system should include planning and controlling – to different degrees – national, regional and continental education and training to ensure that it produces skills that are in demand and has the promise of accelerating economic development. In doing this there is a need to harmonise and align accreditation, credit accumulation and transfer, as well as quality assurance to ensure that educational standards are similar across member countries. Good governance of the skills sector seeks to build on and optimise the individual competences of the (future) workforce. The system should be largely negotiated and must be representative of the needs of employers and (future) employees and meet the education system goals (for each country, region and continent). The system should have, short-, medium- and long-term goals that ideally cover skills needs at the entry point into the labour market. Future skills need to support the transformation of the labour market. The system should be designed to tackle issues of employability of the workforce in a lifelong perspective.

For Africa to grow and promote the AfCTA, there is a need to create a system that caters for labour market destination needs of graduates and migrants. This will require that countries, regions and the African continent as a whole develop and improve skills governance and put in place a transparent and sustainable system to govern the same. This will help relevance of training and curb wastages in the training sector. The continent urgently requires this system owing to the current high incidences of skills shortages, skills mismatch, unemployment, over-and under-qualification and migration. The performance of the labour market and skills matching are emerging as key drivers of economic development and transformation. Increasingly, employers are demanding skills determined by product market development and technological development, while workers supply skills, using their own competencies and preferences and expected demand for the skills as well as expected income.

## 3.5.1 Coordinating education and training in Africa

In steering the provision of education and training, countries, regions and even continents should pursue various policies and strategies to adapt the supply of the educational outcomes to the demand for skills within the labour market. Most of these measures focus in one way or another on the content of the education and training offered (adjusting the curriculum, promoting specific courses, ensuring consistency and quality) or its format (moving towards or increasing provision of existing work-based learning and apprenticeships).

In Africa, previous efforts to create better links between employers and educational institutions have not yielded fruits. Currently, the continent has put in place a pan-African quality assurance and accreditation framework for higher education (PAQAF). But there are still large gaps in developing a harmonised system for accreditation recognition of qualifications or even having common databases of who has been awarded what qualifications in each country. It makes it difficult to plan for future skills if the continent does not know what skills are available; what skills are missing; which institutions are training in a particular discipline or trade? Furthermore, what skills and competences are needed and where are they required? It has to be acknowledged that countries have put in place different modalities in data management regarding education and employment, but so far no country has a comprehensive database for planning the coordination of education and training and the world of work.

Again, the different subsystems of education and training within each country have different policies and strategies. Some governments have introduced financial, non-financial and other incentive measures to steer education and training provision in their countries. These incentives may be directed at employers, education and training providers, or the learners themselves. Their aims are to increase the training offered (in certain subjects), to encourage learners to take up training (in specific subjects) and to encourage flexibility/mobility. African governments are increasingly involving key stakeholders in mechanisms to design and steer what education to offer. The range of stakeholders involved differs within countries, depending on the sector of education and training concerned, as well as on the way in which the country allocates responsibility for steering education and training (centralised or decentralised). For instance, higher education tends to give more autonomy to individual institutions, whereas vocational provision can be more collaborative. Stakeholders may be involved through national or regional/ local platforms and committees, through consultations, or through participation in the governance of individual HE institutions. What is important is to ensure that their involvement improves the alignment of skills supply and demand, rather than imposing further constraints. There is a need for better coordination of education and training in the continent to assure quality and also to give confidence to employers that learning outcomes are comparable in all member countries.

## 3.6  Regional economic communities in Africa

The ACQF will interact with RQFs on the continent. At this moment, only one RQF (the SADCQF) is viable and operational, and despite challenging conditions and asymmetries, it has been able to gradually show progress in most of its implementation programmes.

The solutions to win-win cooperation between the ACQF and the RQFs should build on common interest and acknowledgement of the benefits of complementarities and synergy between RECs and the ACQF. This chapter provides an overview of five of the African RECs – the EAC, ECCAS (Economic Community of Central African States), ECOWAS, SADC, and COMESA (Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa), with a focus on key regional integration policies for the place of education and qualifications therein. Specific information on the state of play of the three regional qualifications frameworks (EAQFHE, SADCQF and ECOWAS) is included in section 4.2.2 of this report.

## 3.6.1  East African Community (EAC)

The treaty that established the EAC was signed on 30 November 1999 and entered into force on 7 July 2000, following its ratification by the three original partner states – Kenya, the United Republic of Tanzania, and Uganda. Rwanda and Burundi acceded to the EAC treaty on 18 June 2007 and became full members of the community on 1 July 2007. South Sudan acceded to the treaty on 15 April 2016 and became a full member on 15 August 2016.

The main objective of the EAC is to introduce policies and programmes to promote cooperation among its member states for their mutual benefit in a wide range of areas including political, economic, social and cultural affairs, research and technology, defence, security, and legal and judicial affairs.

Through the various ministries of education, the EAC has also established the region as a common higher education area, thereby facilitating movement of students and teachers across the region. Through the Inter-University Council of East Africa, the region has also developed the EAQFHE, whose implementation has not yet materialised. Unfortunately, within the EAC, different parts of the education and training systems are administratively located in different institutions, making implementation of a comprehensive RQF rather challenging. For example, while university education is managed by the Inter-University Council of East Africa , TVET education is handled by the educational department of the EAC based in Arusha, and basic education does not seem to have a permanent home. Additionally, some member countries of the EAC are also members of SADC (for example, Tanzania) while others are members of the Intergovernmental Authority of Development (such as Kenya). That means that potentially some countries may belong to two or three RQFs, which may result in confusion. It is hoped that the ACQF will be developed and implemented in such a way that it resolves some of these overlaps.

The EAC Common Market, which has been in force since 2010, is in line with the provisions of the EAC Treaty. It forms the second regional integration milestone after the Customs Union, which became fully-fledged in January 2010. The Common Market implies that the EAC partner states maintain a liberal stance amongst themselves towards freedoms of movement for all the factors of production and products mentioned below, as well as the rights:

- free movement of goods;
- free movement of persons;
- free movement of labour/workers;
- free movement of services;
- free movement of capital;

- right of establishment; and
- right of residence.

The operational principles of the community that underlie the EAC Common Market are:

- non-discrimination of nationals of other partner states on grounds of nationality;
- equal treatment to nationals of other partner states;
- assurance of transparency in matters concerning the other partner states; and
- sharing of information for smooth implementation of the protocol.

### 3.6.2 Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS)

ECCAS, established on the 18 October 1983 is constituted by former Union Douanière et Économique de l'Afrique Centrale (UDEAC) members and members of the economic community of the Great Lakes states. ECCAS has eleven member states, with an average population in 2017 of 187 millions, and a territory covering an area of 6 667 047 km².

ECCAS is bound by a vision of ensuring peace, prosperity and solidarity of its members based on an unified economic space, with free movement among the states. The states also ensure regional integration based on five pillars: peace and security; a common market; environment and natural resources; land use planning and infrastructure; gender and human development. In order to ensure its multiple missions, the ECCAS Commission is financed by its member countries and carries out in parallel several programmes in collaboration with international partners. The framework of ECCAS activities is defined by the Conference of Heads of State and Government of member countries while programmes are established by the Council of Ministers according to each specific sector. As such, ECCAS is recognised by the deliberative organs of the AU as the reference framework for the achievement of the missions and objectives of the Abuja Treaty and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) in the Central African region.

ECCAS member states have been working hard to improve the literacy of young people, especially young women; a sub-regional strategy based on the development of cultural industries has been put in place. However, most ECCAS member states face institutional challenges – organisational, human, material and technical – at different levels and stages of the process of production of education statistics. The harmonisation of statistics at regional level remains a major concern as countries are still at different stages in terms of their overall coverage of the education system. Nearly all countries in the region produce indicators for monitoring and evaluation of the Plan of Action for the Second Decade of Education in Africa (ADEA, 2014a).

ECCAS member states are working in order to revitalise higher education. Various actions have been taken, including:

- the creation of Technological Poles of Excellence;
- the creation of the Centre for Mathematics, Science and Technology Education in Africa (CEMASTEA) by NEPAD;
- the establishment of the framework of the Pan-African University under Yaoundé II since the year 2010; and
- the introduction of centres of excellence as an implementation strategy recommended by the AU.

ECCAS has a partnership agreement establishing the Consortium for Research, Innovation and Training in Central Africa with the Inter Research agency establishment for development. Studies (ADEA 2014) reveal that from 2006 to 2012, there was a massive increase of enrolment in higher education, by 180.6% in the

Central African Republic (CAR) and 122.8% for the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Despite this improvement, access to tertiary education remains low in CAR with only 287 students per 100 000 inhabitants.

In the sector of higher education, member countries of the Economic and Monetary Community of Central African States (CEMAC) have endorsed the introduction of the model of Bologna in their universities, through the Libreville Declaration in February 2005, which created the CEMAC space of higher and university education. Since then, the different CEMAC countries have started to reflect on the introduction of the Licence, Master et Doctorat (LMD) system in their universities. At present, this LMD reform has been introduced in almost all the countries of the region (ADEA, 2014c).

Regarding TVET, the system is based on the competency-based approach as a methodology for developing the contents of training, with a view to promoting a better match with the world of work and a better professionalisation of teaching. Very few countries in the region have an observatory or efficient Labour Market Information System to identify and anticipate labour market needs.

ECCAS states have adopted curricula reform as one of the axes of their action plan. The various reform processes in the countries of the region have experienced certain difficulties, mostly related to the modalities of their implementation, coordination and steering, as well as to the shortage of qualified teachers and supervisors, insufficient material, educational and financial resources.

To follow up on the quality assurance of contents, bodies should be put in place by different governments, but only Cameroon has a formally established quality assurance body, the Council for Higher Education and Research, created in 1991. In the other countries of the region, it is the various ministries of education that are responsible for quality assurance, through their different services.

On 25 May 2015, a reform to initiate a profound reform of ECCAS was ordered by the assembly of heads of states and government of the ECCAS:

> It aimed improve the effectiveness and efficiency of ECCAS with the aim of achieving a major qualitative leap in the governance of the Organization to make it a viable and strong Regional Economic Community, endowed with an Executive architecture renovated and adapted to the challenges of the day. This objective falls within the framework of strategic axis n° 9 of ECCAS Vision 2025, which recommended by 2015, to transform the General Secretariat into a Commission to enable it to respond to new strategic challenges and operational integration (ADEA, 2014b).

### 3.6.3 Economic Community of West Africa (ECOWAS)

ECOWAS was established in 1975. It is composed of sixteen countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Senegal and Togo. The region covers an area of 5 112 903 km². However, the main regional organisation, ECOWAS, does not include Mauritania. According to World Development Indicators (WDI) over the past three decades, West Africa's population has more than doubled, from 165 million in 1987 to 368 million in 2017. It is estimated to be 387 million in 2019 (AUC/OECD, 2021, see statistical annex: https://oe.cd/AFDD-2021)

**ECOWAS vision 2050**

Development of ECOWAS Vision 2050 and its implementation framework started in June 2020. Vision 2050 aims to create a borderless, peaceful, prosperous and cohesive region, built on good governance and where people have the capacity to access and harness its enormous resources through the creation of

opportunities for sustainable development and environmental preservation. As can be clearly observed, expectations of economic integration have always been high and a lot has been accomplished by the regional group since the endorsement of the treaty, which gave it the required legal teeth. Going by current assessments, the regional body has exceeded the expectations of its founding fathers. Today, the organisation is being acknowledged globally as a successful regional body, a toast to a workable integration and regional coexistence.

**Education context**

ECOWAS, as a REC, integrates its educational actions into the AU's major education policies, such as the current CESA 2016–2025 and the [Continental Strategy for Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) to Foster Youth Employment](#).

Education challenges in the ECOWAS region persist in the areas of gender equality, supply of qualified teachers, availability of quality education statistics and quality management, reduction in the out-of-school population, eliminating school dropouts and improving access to higher education levels. Faced with country-by-country education policies and practices, regional undertakings are being focused on harmonising them.

The ECOWAS 2016 Annual Report (ECOWAS, 2016: 97–98), in the area of Education, Culture, Science and Technology, highlights the response to the challenges in basic education:

> A framework for the harmonization of basic education was developed with the ultimate goal of ensuring inclusive, equitable and quality education and learning in the ECOWAS Region. The framework focused on: Policies, Strategies and Planning; Curriculum enrichment; Vigorous promotion of Cross Border Languages; Vigorous promotion of Second International Languages (English, French and Portuguese) and Capacity Building for Quality Enhancement in Education. The framework also covers empowerment of the out-of-school populations, addressing learning crisis through periodic Monitoring of Learning Achievements (MLA), mobilizing internal and external resources, and implementation of the ECOWAS Convention on mutual recognition of certificates.

As for TVET, the UNESCO-UNEVOC Regional Forum Advancing TVET for Youth Employability and Sustainable Development, held on 17–18 September 2013, in Abuja, Nigeria, was an opportunity to discuss two approaches that can be taken into consideration in order to achieve a regional framework: one is the regional harmonisation of the current systems of qualifications, based on a common design of the related curricula; and the second has to do with the description and classification of vocational skills to permit comparability with other countries' qualifications for the mobility of individuals. The above-mentioned report indicated:

> ECOWAS Commission developed a revitalization strategy for TVET that focusses on key strategic issues. These include Policies and Action Plans, Structure, Existing TVET Legislations and Legal Frameworks, Funding, Staffing, Qualifications Frameworks, Career Guidance and Counselling, Curriculum Employability, Access and Participation, Linkages between Formal, Non formal and Informal sub-sectors, Management Information Systems, Open and Distance e-Learning (ODeL), Entrepreneurship; Assessment, Validation and Certification, Participation of the Private Sector and other Non-State Actors, Skills Development Initiatives for out-of-school youths, persons with disability and other disadvantaged groups, and Gender Mainstreaming. (ECOWAS 2016: 98)

In line with the ECOWAS harmonisation policy, ministers of higher education of member states met in December 2019 to validate the experts' work on the Framework for Recognition and Equivalence of Certificates in the ECOWAS Region, based on the ECOWAS Convention for the Recognition and Equivalence of Certificates adopted in 2003. They also adopted the draft ECOWAS Benchmarks for the Harmonisation

of University Education. Both documents and other supporting documents await approval from the ECOWAS Parliament, Council of Ministers and finally heads of governments of the ECOWAS region.

Since qualifications and their classifications are related to societal values and occupational roles and are responsive to labour market imperatives, both at national and regional levels, many trade-offs are expected to occur between ECOWAS and member states to arrive at common understandings with the harmonisation process in view. Although it is difficult to discuss such a relationship, it seems most likely that the future ECOWAS RQF will relate to current sub-regional and regional instruments like the West African Examinations Council (WAEC),[2] the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU),[3] and the Conseil Africain et Malgache pour l'Enseignement Supérieur/African and Malagasy Council for Higher Education (CAMES) for their qualifications regulatory instruments and quality assurance initiatives.

### 3.6.4  Southern African Development Community (SADC)

SADC is a major REC, and consists of sixteen member states: Angola, Botswana, United Republic of the Comoros, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Kingdom of eSwatini, Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. It is guided by a vision of a shared future, to be attained through regional cooperation and integration in the socio-cultural, economic and political areas.

The main objectives of SADC are to achieve development, peace and security, and economic growth; to alleviate poverty, enhance the standard and quality of life of the peoples of southern Africa, and support the socially disadvantaged through regional integration, built on democratic principles and equitable and sustainable development. SADC seeks to deepen cooperation and integration so that the region emerges as a competitive and effective player in international trade and the world economy (SADC Secretariat, 2017). Since its inception, SADC has adopted principles such as concerted agreement and variable progression for cooperation and integration with its member states in the implementation of its programmes. SADC programmes are guided by SADC Vision 2050 and the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) 2020–30.

According to the 2019 Africa Regional Integration Index, SADC scores low in regional integration of its economies and infrastructure base. Free movement of people is the best-performing dimension of the SADC integration index.

The economy of the region is diverse, spanning a range of sectors from agriculture to manufacturing, with the majority of the population dependent on agriculture for their livelihoods. However, the manufacturing sector has been prioritised as the key engine of growth to drive the industrialisation process in the region.

The region is endowed with both natural and human resources, its most valuable resource being human capital, with an estimated population of 353.9 million in 2019 (AUC/OECD, 2021), growing at an estimated average rate of 1.8% in 2018. Average life expectancy in the region was estimated to be 61 years in 2018. The population structure is young, with 76.4% estimated to be younger than 35 years, 35% of which are youth aged 15–34. About 51% of the population is female. There is a total labour force of about 140 million, with labour force participation rates ranging between 44.8 and 87.6%. The unemployment rate among aged 15–24 years ranged between 3 and 57.4% in SADC member states in 2017. Graduate unemployment is an increasing phenomenon in the region, with some SADC member states recording about 12% graduate unemployment (ACQF Mapping Study: SADC. 2020).

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[2] Africa's foremost examining body, providing qualitative and reliable educational assessment, encouraging academic and moral excellence, and promoting sustainable human resource development and international cooperation.
[3] UEMOA in French.

As the AU's 2017 estimates show, SADC is host to 37.5% of Africa's 14.2 million international migrant workers, totalling an estimated 5.4 million. At the same time, the southern African region is home to the largest stock of international migrant workers – up to 4.2 million – ahead of both East Africa and West Africa, with intra-SADC migration accounting for about 45%.

Mobility of human resources and services is at the centre of the integration agenda of SADC. The SADC region is implementing or has embarked on a number of initiatives at both national and regional level to support mobility of human resources and services. This includes the establishment, improvement and implementation of qualification framework, quality assurance and accreditation systems; the introduction of a regional visa for students, academics, researchers; customs exemptions; and the development of mutual recognition of professional qualifications.

Development and enhancement of relevant educated skilled human capital is one of SADC's broad strategic objectives for regional integration to foster sustainable development of the region. This objective is supported by SADC legal and policy instruments and strategic frameworks, notably: the SADC Treaty 1992; the Protocol on Education and Training 1997–2020; the Protocol on Science, Technology and Innovation (2009); the Protocol on Facilitation of Movement of Persons (2005); the Protocol on Trade in Services (article 7) 2012, updated in March 2017; the SADC Industrialisation Strategy and Road Map 2015–63; the RISDP (2020–30); and the Labour Migration Action Plan (2020–25).

The SADCQF has acquired a stronger centrality in the region's development plans for the decade (2020–30). This new impetus to strengthen implementation of the SADCQF capitalises on the outcomes of the first phase of implementation (2017–20) and aims to incentivise the development of NQFs aligned with the SADCQF, and work in complementarity with other tools supporting recognition of qualifications across the region. This renewed support to SADCQF is consistent with the place of education in SADC strategies, listed above. In 2020 SADC reaffirmed its intent to give a new impetus to promote and implement the SADCQF, by including relevant measures in two key strategic plans for the decade: RISDP 2020–30 and the SADC Labour Migration Action Plan (2020–25). More comprehensive information on the SADCQF is available in chapter 4.4 of this report.

### 3.6.5 Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA)

COMESA was established on 8 December 1994, as the successor to the Preferential Trade Area (PTA). COMESA's current strategy can be summed up in the phrase 'economic prosperity through regional integration'. With its 21 member states, population of over 583 million and a GDP of US$805 billion, a global export/import trade in goods worth US$324 billion, COMESA forms a major marketplace for both internal and external trading. Geographically, COMESA covers almost two-thirds of the African continent, with an area of 12 million km$^2$.

The member states have come together with the aim of promoting regional integration through trade and the development of natural and human resources for the mutual benefit of all people in the region. Its programmes are therefore in four areas: infrastructure development; agriculture, industry and private sector development; trade and customs services; and gender and social affairs.

COMESA has dedicated institutions to facilitate its work and these have become an integral component of its operations. The institutions are needs-based and respond to very specific niches in the region. In addition to providing expertise in specific areas, the institutions are involved in skills development and extensive market research that allows them to link evidence to their decision-making processes. COMESA as an organisation is committed in developing its human resources in all areas. The year 2021 has seen COMESA taking much affirmative action towards women, with the launch of 50 Million African Women Speak Platform in Malawi on 18 February and Mauritius on 11 February. The platform aims to facilitate a

dynamic and engaging exchange of ideas among women entrepreneurs, using built-in social media functionality to connect them with one another in ways that will foster peer-to-peer learning, mentoring and the sharing of information and knowledge within communities, and access to financial services and market opportunities between urban and rural areas, and across borders. More than half of its membership is connected within the platform. COMESA has several other initiatives and platforms aimed at developing the capacity of the members' citizens, so that they can benefit and contribute towards the growth of the region.

The Mlillennium Development Goals (MDG) report (United Nations, 2015) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) report (United Nations, 2018) indicate that youth unemployment has remained a challenge and Africa has been greatly affected in this area. The youth are three times more likely to become unemployed than the adults. To address the youth employment challenge and sluggish employment creation, in 2015 COMESA adopted the COMESA Youth Programme, aimed at empowering young people in the COMESA region by promoting the creation of decent and productive work opportunities for youth in the private sector, and by enhancing youth's political participation, civic engagement and active involvement in the regional integration process. As a catalyst for this initiative, COMESA hosts youth boot camps to increase the meaningful participation of youths in both policy formulation and governance.

To facilitate trade networking and transport, COMESA launched the harmonised driver's licence initiative known as Tripartite Transit and Transport Facilitation Programme (TTTFP) standards in 2021. From the first of March 2021, Uganda will become the first country to adopt the initiative. This broadens the other regional block initiatives, like those of SADC, in ensuring regional integration and free movement of goods and persons.

However, to support this TTTFP, COMESA recognises that partner states should fast-track the negotiations for mutual recognition of academic and professional qualification certificates to encourage the free movement of service suppliers across the region. Harmonisation of professional and academic qualifications, curricula and training will go a long way to unlocking the existing impediments to movement of professional service suppliers within the region (COMESA, 2017). At the tripartite level, COMESA, the EAC and SADC recognise their critical role and have been discussing on the framework for the movement of business persons under TTTFP Agreement, launched in June 2015.

It is also worth noting that beyond Africa COMESA extends its outreach to other parts of the world through accreditation of diplomats. The accreditation of top diplomats is envisaged as a way of extending deeper and strong economic ties to other regions of the world. February 2021 saw three new heads of diplomatic missions of Canada, Germany and France being accredited as special representatives to COMESA.

## 3.7 Qualifications frameworks and the ACQF: Contributors towards African integration?

As mentioned earlier in this report, there has been an accelerating trend towards the establishment of national and regional qualifications frameworks in Africa. These have mostly been touted as instruments that can be used to develop, classify and recognise formal learning and to promote comparability and mobility of qualifications across the regions and the continent. In doing this, Africa has been following in the footsteps of Europe, Australasia and the Asia-Pacific region. Qualification frameworks help to improve aspects of common understanding and trust between education and training systems, as well as comparability of qualifications. As more countries and regions across the world developed qualifications frameworks during the 1990s it was felt that Africa was lagging behind.

Although the AU (and its precursor, the Organisation for African Unity) was established more than 60 years ago, Africa remains largely fragmented and has the lowest levels of mobility of its citizens, trading with each other and even integration and comparability of its training and education sectors. While this can be explained by the different colonial histories of the countries in the continent, formal education and training is a new phenomenon in this part of the world. But things are changing – in the recent past there has been a new awakening. Africa is seeking to create more mobility of its citizens and to promote trade through the establishment of AfCFTA. Trade between countries requires and benefits from mobility of people, increased recognition of qualifications across the countries as well as improved harmonization and comparability of qualifications. Hence, the ACQF can be an enabler of trade and integration in Africa.

However, the ACQF is developing at a time when many countries (and even regions on the continent) have already established their qualifications frameworks. At present, nineteen African countries have active qualifications frameworks approved, (with varying levels of success in implementation), and eight countries have NQFs in development and consultation. At the regional level, there is the SADCQF and developments emerging in other regions, notably, in East Africa (EAQFHE) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). Countries that have qualifications frameworks are more numerous in southern Africa, but a few are getting consolidated in East Africa (Kenya, Rwanda). In the north (Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt) NQFs have been in development and consultation for a number of years, and recently governments have taken measures to move towards effective implementation. In the west of the continent, a few countries have established TVET qualifications frameworks (Ghana, The Gambia and Nigeria), and one has an integrated NQF with over a decade of experience (Cape Verde). The challenge – and opportunity – for the continent is how to create an ACQF that works for all, supports national and regional developments and does not disrupt qualifications frameworks that are already established and working.

The continent is hoping to develop and implement an ACQF that will work as a translation device to make national qualifications more readable across Africa, promoting workers' and learners' mobility between countries and facilitating their lifelong learning. The ACQF aims to relate different countries' national qualifications systems to a common African reference framework. Individuals and employers will be able to use the ACQF to better understand and compare the qualifications levels of different countries and regions, as well as different education and training systems.

# 4 Qualifications and qualifications frameworks in Africa

This chapter explores data and insights on the state of play and dynamics of qualifications frameworks (NQFs and RQFs) in Africa. An overview of qualifications included in the registers of the NQFs of five countries allows a comparison of the panorama of qualifications, distributed by levels of the NQF and by sectors. The countries were selected based on the ready availability of online NQF registers (Cape Verde, Kenya, Morocco, Mozambique, South Africa).

## 4.1 Mapping main features of qualifications frameworks

The ACQF mapping study integrates knowledge and data collected through a combination of information sources:

   a) The online survey, which received responses from 33 countries;
   b) Deeper analyses at country and regional levels; and
   c) Desktop research
   d) Online experience-sharing with countries and RECs

The ACQF peer-learning webinars, conducted from July 2020, turned out to be major sources of updated information on the ongoing dynamics and initiatives related to NQFs and RQFs in Africa. In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, these seven peer-learning webinars largely replaced the originally planned conventional ACQF workshops in 2020 and allowed the ACQF stakeholders to stay connected, aware and informed.

In total, by October 2020 the mapping study had collected relevant information from 41 countries. The scope, completeness and documentation collected from different countries and RECs vary. During the span of the current ACQF project the information baseline established by this mapping study ought to be updated and embedded in the planned ACQF website. The ACQF inventory and other reference instruments elaborated together with the mapping study will be further developed and supported by the ACQF website and advertised in the community of institutions and bodies coordinating and managing NQFs and qualifications on the continent.

The mapping study comprises several types of analysis: a) online survey report; b) thirteen country and three REC reports, including Angola, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Morocco, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Togo, the EAC, ECOWAS and SADC; c) final reports, which include comprehensive analysis and synthesis with infographics. Additional reports are planned to include countries and regions with limited coverage in published research.

Countries and RECs were selected for the technical visits based on four criteria: 1) coverage of all four languages of the AU; 2) coverage of different stages of development/implementation of NQFs; 3) coverage of different African geographical regions; and 4) RECs with more tangible development of their RQFs.

The ACQF mapping study pioneered the publication of analysis on qualifications frameworks/systems of several African countries and RECs, not included in the recent editions of the Inventories of Qualifications Frameworks.[4] These are countries whose qualifications frameworks experiences and dynamics are rarely known: Angola, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Mozambique, Senegal, Togo and the EAC. These cases have enriched our knowledge of the diversity of relevant approaches in the different cultural and regional contexts of the continent. This is a fundamental issue for the ACQF development process.

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[4] CEDEFOP, ETF, UNESCO and UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning, Global Inventory of Regional and National Qualifications Frameworks (edition 2019). https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news-and-press/news/2019-global-inventory-qualifications-frameworks-out. Three previous editions are available online.

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 perspectives. For dynamic analysis, the mapping study uses five stages to categorise the different situations of qualifications frameworks' development and consolidation:

1. Qualifications framework not in place, the development process not started;
2. Qualifications framework at the early thinking stage;
3. Qualifications framework in development and consultation with stakeholders and experts;
4. Qualifications framework in place, approved as a legal Act, implementation started; and
5. Qualifications framework in implementation for some time, reviewed, improvements adopted.

Some countries moved from the early thinking stage to tangible steps of analysis and consultation towards an NQF (for example, Angola and Cameroon). Other countries are now moving from parallel sectoral frameworks (TVET, higher education) to establishing integrated, comprehensive NQFs (for example, Malawi, Mozambique and Rwanda). Other countries have moved to stage 4, following official approval of their NQF (for example, Eswatini, in August 2020). Another recent development concerns Lesotho: the country approved its revised NQF in June 2019 and uploaded the NQF Manual of Procedures, which can be viewed by any country interested in home-grown NQF experiences.

The following situations can be found in the different African geographical regions:

a. The majority of qualifications frameworks in Africa are operational in countries of the Southern Africa region, where the Southern African Development Community Qualifications Framework (SADCQF) is well established. These NQFs have been implemented for a longer period and, as a result, have more mature legal bases, operational instruments and governance structures maintaining and assuring the integrity of the NQFs. As noted above, two of the newest NQFs are located in SADC: Eswatini (approved in August 2020) and Lesotho (approved in June 2019).

b. Recent developments in East Africa, notably in Kenya (since 2014, KNQA), are noteworthy, with the establishment of the legal base, governance structure, new information system and online register of qualifications and progress in RPL policy and implementation.

c. In the north, Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia have had NQFs designed or legally established for some time and continue working to put in place implementation structures and registers of qualifications.

d. In the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) region, Ethiopia has designed the technical-conceptual bases of its NQF, but the start of implementation still requires enabling drivers.

e. 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 et Doctorat (LMD) system in higher education, but there is no comprehensive, integrated NQF yet. Ghana implements an eight-level TVET framework and is developing a comprehensive NQF encompassing higher education. Cape Verde is a rare example in the region of a comprehensive NQF, with a decade of operational experience governed by a specialised entity, which was not well known before the ACQF mapping process. Other West African countries, such as Sierra Leone and Guinea-Bissau, have started the early stages of their NQF development processes in 2020.

f. In Central Africa, Cameroon has been implementing the LMD framework in higher education since 2007, and a system of qualifications levels and types for TVET. As the country's Education Strategy 2020 gives priority to establishing an NQF, a stakeholders' group started reflection in 2017, and a specific project with sizeable resources has been approved to start in 2020.

Angola is worth noticing, as the NQF coordination unit in charge of steering the development process made substantial progress in 2020, finalising the technical-conceptual design of NQF and the proposal for the

governance structure and register of qualifications. The process is based on strong national ownership, and participation of stakeholders, supported by EU cooperation.

In several analysed cases, the NQF is seen and designed as one of the pillars/components of the **national qualifications system**, or of the wider education system. This is the case in Cape Verde, Mozambique and, more recently, Angola. The latter provides a useful example of a country where the NQF has become firmly entrenched in key national strategic documents, notably in the National Development Plan 2018–2022 of Angola. In August 2020, the new law, 32/20, introduced modifications to the Law of Bases of Education (17/16), which for the first time mentions the national qualifications system (section 19), defining it as the guarantor of the articulation between the levels and domains of learning outcomes from the different sub-systems of education and the National System of Professional Education.

The question of NQF scope concerns levels but also types of qualifications, and the extent to which frameworks accommodate non-formal and informal learning paths to qualifications. In terms of scope, the analysed African qualifications frameworks can be clustered in several situations, all considered in this feasibility report:

a. Sector-specific frameworks that operate independently, that is, in TVET, and higher education, without an integrated unifying framework;

b. Sector-specific qualifications frameworks that are operational but are linked and work together with the wider integrated NQF; and

c. One type of qualifications framework: national, comprehensive and inclusive.

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. In southern Africa, the ten-level structure predominates. In the north, two of the NQFs have eight levels, one has seven. In West Africa, an eight-level structure is established in some of the NQFs. Ethiopia moved from an initial ten-level concept to an eight-level comprehensive framework. Although the sectoral scope of the framework conditions the level structure, there are several cases of sectoral frameworks spanning a large part or the full set of levels: this is the case of the TVET framework in Ghana (eight levels), the Occupational Qualifications Subframework in South Africa (eight levels), and the proposed architecture of the revised professional qualifications sub-framework in Mozambique (nine levels). The Kenya NQF and the Lesotho NQF both have TVET qualification pillars spanning to higher levels.

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 frameworks, there is a clear predominance of the domains: knowledge, skills, competence and autonomy and responsibility. The newest of the approved NQFs (eSwatini) combines the domain 'personal attributes' to the two usual domains 'knowledge' and 'skills'. Lesotho opted for a combination of 'areas of knowledge (depth, breadth and complexity)', 'nature of skills' and as a third domain 'agency and context'. Two countries (Morocco and Tunisia) opted for a combination of more than three domains of learning, adding 'complexity', 'adaptability' and 'communication'.

NQFs are associated with a range of strategic and policy objectives, which can be clustered as related as:

a. Integration, coherence and permeability between the learning outcomes and qualifications of sub-systems;

b. 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;

c.  Parity of esteem and value of learning in different contexts and sub-systems: academic, vocational, formal and non-formal;

d.  Inclusion: qualifications can be obtained via validation of non-formal learning, recognition of experience from work and life, accessible for people with little schooling;

e.  Regional and global comparability and recognition of diplomas and certificates; and

f.  Wider societal and economic goals, in particular: increase the stock of the 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.

In terms of the **governance** of NQFs, it was found that more advanced NQFs in Africa tend to be overseen by qualifications agencies (authorities, coordination units) but also to a large extent by quality assurance (QA) agencies and specialised commissions. Overall, there is a trend towards national settings as opposed to sectoral agencies. In cases where sectoral agencies, in TVET, higher education and general education, are well established, 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 diversity of departments and agencies with overlapping mandates is genuine, more so in countries with sparse resources. Some countries are trimming their institutional set-up of education and training, seeking to optimise resources, roles and outputs.

**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 varying degrees of autonomy and capacity. National and regional levels interact through the activities of regional councils, which play an important role in disseminating good practice and QA guidelines and providing methodological support to member states. Examples include the African and Malagasy Council for Higher Education (CAMES) and, at a different level, the Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Framework (PAQAF). The African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ASG-QA) developed by the Harmonisation of African Higher Education Quality Assurance and Accreditation (HAQAA) initiative were approved in 2019. The ASG-QA comprise guidelines recommending that learning outcomes be defined and documented for all programmes and benchmarked against level descriptors of NQFs or RQFs. In 2019, eight African national quality agencies participated in pilot external evaluations testing the ASG-QA.

In several countries (Cape Verde, Cameroon, Morocco, Mozambique, Tunisia), the QA framework in TVET is closely associated with the principles and methods of the **competence-based approach** (approche par compétences - APC). The cycle of the APC involves upstream prospective skills analysis, mostly with a sector delimitation, leading to the design of standards of competence and of assessment. Graduate tracer studies are known to usefully contribute to evidence-based monitoring of the quality and relevance of learning and qualifications. Still, the mapping study found only rare cases of such studies being regularly conducted and findings being used to improve quality (Morocco is one of these cases).

The adoption of learning outcomes as a fundamental concept and instrument to design and organise qualifications and learning has gained ground in many countries. With this affirmation of learning outcomes approaches, firstly in TVET qualifications, but also gradually in higher education, systems and frameworks increasingly open up to the recognition of prior learning (RPL)/validation des acquis de l'expérience (VAE)/recognition, validation and certification of competences (RVCC).

Many NQFs acknowledge the place of outcomes from **non-formal and informal learning**. Terminology and concepts matter in the diverse context of the African continent. Among the French-speaking countries, the

term validation des acquis de l'expérience (VAE) is widely used and relates to documenting and assessing the knowledge, skills and competencies developed through work and life experience against qualifications standards valid for other forms of learning (formal). VAE can take various forms and encompasses a sequence of steps – candidate-centred. Among the Portuguese-speaking countries, especially Angola and Cape Verde, the predominantly used term is Reconhecimento, validação e certificação de competências (RVCC). At the same time, in Mozambique, there is a preference for the term 'Reconhecimento de competências adquiridas'. In general terms, the meaning of RVCC and VAE is quite similar. In the context of English-speaking countries, the term RPL has general currency. Still, its meaning can have a different interpretation encompassing recognition of any form of learning (not only non-formal and informal, from life and work experience).

The ACQF country reports found that VAE, RVCC, and RPL have reached a differentiated degree of integration and visibility in education and training policies and qualifications systems. In some countries, the qualifications framework is welcoming to non-formal and informal learning, and regulatory-technical implementation mechanisms and capacities are in place or development. A few selected examples illustrate the range of situations in respect to RPL/RVCC/VAE:

- In Angola, the establishment of the system of RVCC is defined in the National Development Plan 2018–2022 of Angola as one of the key objectives of the national qualifications system. Two targets of the programme concern the operationalisation of RVCC: the approval of the legal basis of RVCC and completion of 80 experiences of RVCC.
- The Law on Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences (Decree-Law 54/2014 of 22 September) of Cape Verde states: 'People acquire, with their life experience, namely in professional activities, knowledge and competencies relevant for the exercise of many activities. Those competencies can and shall be formally certified, and, if necessary, complemented with training adjusted to individual needs, thereby promoting access to higher levels of qualification.' The law also defines the RVCC processes over three phases, starting with information and guidance, followed by the recognition and validation of competencies, and then the certification of competencies. RVCC is flexible and linked with the NQF. To support practitioners and implementation agencies, the Coordination Unit of National Qualifications System (UC-SNQ) issued guidance materials, notably: a) Guide supporting the operationalisation of processes of professional RVCC, March 2016, and b) Process of recognition, validation and certification of professional competencies, March 2013.
- In Morocco, the Strategic Vision 2030 for a School of Equity Quality and Promotion foresees the development of a comprehensive system of VAE, noting: 'Adopt a unified system of validation of individuals' cognitive and professional achievements, overseen by an independent national body, where the various departments of education and training and professional sectors will be represented' (Lever 19, p.70). In the past ten years, VAE has gathered some experience, based on partnerships of the Department of Professional Training with sector federations and sector ministries, which carried out several VAE projects in sectors with high demand for labour with qualifications. The VAE process is structured in four phases: a) Information and counselling of the candidates; b) Admissibility: instruct the application file and decide on the eligibility; c) Follow-up with the candidate; and d) Certification: the jury decides on the validation of the competencies from professional experience – on the base of the certification standard.
- Since its inception, South Africa's NQF has made provision for the achievement of qualifications and part-qualifications through RPL. Since 2014, when the submission of the data became mandatory, the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) has made systematic efforts to make NQF stakeholders aware of this aspect and to enable the RPL data loads into the National Learners' Records Database (NLRD). RPL in South Africa is undertaken and awarded in a holistic

way, which includes the principles and processes through which the prior knowledge and skills of a person are made visible, mediated and assessed, and requires the involvement of the full range of NQF stakeholders. Two primary forms of RPL are distinguished, one to provide alternative access routes into learning programmes professional designations, employment and career progression and the other to provide for the awarding of credits towards a qualification or part-qualification registered on the NQF. The Ministerial RPL Coordination Policy provides for the coordination and funding of RPL and elaborates and holds SAQA and the quality councils accountable to perform their roles in relation to RPL as stated in the NQF Act. The Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development study of RPL, involving over 20 countries, positioned South Africa in a cluster of only 5 countries at 'Stage 5 of 7', which signified a country with 'islands of good RPL practices'.

**Credit accumulation and transfer systems** are widely used, although there are some differences across countries and sectors. 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 30 credits (student workload) per semester. In one of the analysed countries, the higher education system follows the model of 1 credit = 25–30 hours of student workload, while the TVET system uses the model of 1 credit = 10 hours of student workload. In a number of countries, the model of 1 credit = 10 hours is established. The use of notional hours is widely used, although different interpretations of the concept can be found in different sectors.

International practice shows that the establishment of **qualifications databases / registers** contributes to making NQFs operational, improving transparency, outreach and public use. Repertoires and registers of qualifications cannot be disconnected from taxonomies and classifications. Not all countries link qualifications with International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) fields of education, but many link to the national occupational classifications. This issue can be addressed in a harmonised manner at the regional and continental level, and the ACQF could play a role. The ACQF mapping study found different situations and dynamics with respect to qualifications databases and registers, which can be grouped as follows:

a.  Databases of quality-assured qualifications linked with the NQF, accessible and searchable online, notably via the website of the NQF institution. Examples of this situation include the well-developed SAQA NLRD, which includes all qualifications of all sub-frameworks and levels and part-qualifications. The Kenyan National Qualifications Authority (KNQA) is finalising the development of the National Qualifications Information Management System (NAQMIS), which will bring together the qualifications-awarding institutions, the qualifications that they award and the learners (launch foreseen in 2021). The online national catalogues of qualifications of ANEP (Mozambique) and Cape Verde can be included in this group, although they comprise only pre-tertiary vocational-technical qualifications linked with the NQF.

b.  Listings and repertoires of courses and qualifications under the oversight of the different sub-systems (such as QA agencies) and institutions (providers, sectoral organisations), accessible online in yearbooks, tables and legal acts of authorisation. The mapping study found a range of different examples with these characteristics, such as in Angola, Morocco and Senegal.

c.  Information on authorised, accredited courses and qualifications available upon request or without internet support (in printed publications), as in the case of Cameroon. Some types of qualifications databases provide structured and detailed information on the qualification profile and exit outcomes, associated units of competence, assessment criteria and credits. Others are much more terse listings of titles of qualifications by sectors.

Resource and capacity constraints determine the quality and completeness of these instruments, notably the frequency of their updates. To ensure transparency and integrity of qualifications databases, some countries issue specific legislation and methodological guidance (for example, Cape Verde).

In one of the countries in the study (Angola) we identified an interesting example of a mobile app (Qualificar), supported by the large government's National Programme of HR Training, which includes information on all courses of the whole education and training system, searchable by different variables (sector, level of qualification, geographic location, institution). This app aims to support career and study choices of young people and to enhance transparency in the qualifications system.

**Monitoring and evaluation** of NQFs and measurement of their contribution towards wider objectives are not often considered and organised early on. An increasing number of countries in Europe and other continents are undertaking reviews and evaluations of their NQFs. The South African NQF went through several evaluations underpinning structural transformations and the new legal basis. Discussions during the mapping study with NQF instances showed that the problematic of monitoring and evaluation of NQF is not underestimated and many countries welcome support to develop adequate tools and systems. In some countries, the NQF legislation stipulates the obligation to monitor progress and measure impact (Cape Verde). In other countries, the education law mandates the state to assure regular evaluation of the education and training system by specialised organs (Cameroon). Morocco's National Council of Education Training and Scientific Research is entrusted and equipped with the resources to conduct regular evaluation of all sub-systems of education and training and other specific thematic analyses.

Governments and socio-economic partners agree on the need to improve and better use labour market information to monitor and anticipate demand and supply dynamics, employability, the impact of megatrends (digitalisation, ecological transformation and events such as the Covid-19 pandemic) on skills and qualifications – seen as indispensable to improve matching and to adjust/reorient qualifications systems. Today, this implies engaging in innovation to improve labour market intelligence: reinforce labour market observatories, explore the potential of existing and new data sources (internet and administrative, under strict data protection rules), interconnect databases and information systems, use new visualisation tools and novel data analytics. The mapping study identified several labour market observatories working with different technical and analytical capacity in countries such as Angola, Morocco, Mozambique and Tunisia.

## 4.2 Qualifications in qualifications frameworks' registers: A panorama from a sample of cases

Registers of NQFs are important instruments for transparency across the panorama of qualifications of different countries. The quality, completeness and accessibility to this information is fundamental for the end-users (learners, employers and workers). Registers of qualifications also offers a view on the actual status of implementation of NQFs. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the path from concepts to approved legal and technical foundations of NQFs can be long and uneven. But the path from approving legislation to translating it into actions is another stage of the policy cycle, focused on delivery of the fundamental outputs, such as qualifications in the NQF and instruments to deliver these social goods to the population.

This brief section explores two main questions:

- What can we learn from NQF registers and databases?
- Which qualifications are included in NQF registers and databases – by levels and by sectors?

For the purpose of this brief analysis, we explored existing and accessible registers of qualifications in five countries: Cape Verde, Kenya, Morocco, Mozambique and South Africa. The ACQF Mapping Study includes

country reports on these five NQFs, but this section goes beyond the Mapping Study, as it analyses data retrieved from the NQF registers. We are grateful to the national experts who helped us to access data.

The NQF qualifications registers and databases of the five cases are differently structured.

- With the exception of Morocco, the NQF registers of qualifications are available online and maintained on the website of the institution tasked with the coordination and implementation of the NQF. Morocco publishes information on its existing qualifications and is currently developing a comprehensive searchable information system on TVET standards, programmes and qualifications, and plans to establish a comprehensive register of the NQF at a later stage. Analysis: Figures 8-9.

- In the cases of Kenya and South Africa, the NQF registers are comprehensive and inclusive, consisting of all qualifications across subsectors and levels. The respective registers are searchable, and available online for users. In both cases, the register includes the detailed qualifications' descriptions, presented according to standard requirements/data fields. Figures 6, 7, 13, 14.

- Cape Verde is implementing an inclusive and already reviewed eight-level NQF. The NQF register (National Catalogue of Qualifications) is available online and is managed by the leading NQF institution – the Coordination Unit of the National Qualifications System (UC-SNQ). However, it includes only TVET qualifications (levels 2–5). All qualifications in the NQF register are fully displayed according to a standard template, which includes the qualifications profile, the training standards and assessment, described in learning outcomes of varied granularity. Qualifications of the higher education system are registered by the regulatory authority of higher education, Agência Reguladora do Ensino Superior (ARES). Analysis: Figures 4 and 5.

- In Mozambique two sectoral QFs work in parallel (TVET and Higher education), each based on a different legal basis, defining the level descriptors, types of qualifications and quality assurance requirements. The TVET QF is implemented by the National TVET Authority (ANEP), while the Higher education QF is coordinated by National Council for Quality Evaluation (CNAQ). Data on the higher education qualifications is not available in an online register, but was obtained via a request to CNAQ. All qualifications in the TVET QF register (National Catalogue of Qualifications) are fully displayed according to a standard template, which includes the qualifications profile, the training standard and assessment, described in learning outcomes of varied granularity. Fig. 10. 11, 12.

The distribution of the number of qualifications in the indicated NQF registers, by levels and by sectors, is visualised below by two graphs by country. One graph depicts the distribution of qualifications by levels; the other shows the distribution by sector.

- A salient finding concerns the large difference in the total number of qualifications included in the NQF registers. Comparing the two cases that have comprehensive registers comprising all levels: Kenya has 1 262 qualifications, while South Africa has 22 026 qualifications. The distribution by levels in these two cases shows a different pattern of concentration of qualifications in higher, medium and lower levels. The South African NQF register displays a clear concentration of qualifications in the higher levels (especially levels 8 and 9), while the NQF register of Kenya shows a balanced distribution across levels 3 to 7.

- A fine and contextualised analysis of the distribution of qualifications by sectors is not necessary in the chapter, and will be done with a larger sample of countries at a later stage of the ACQF project. For this report, it is important to take note of the following findings:

  ○ Different sectoral classifications in use: different underlying concepts, different range and number of sectors. Some countries use a classification based on education sectors

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(Mozambique higher education register), others use a mix of education and economic sectors, while others apply occupational structure of their classification of qualifications.

○ A closer analysis of the concentration of the distribution by sectors shows that, for now, most of these NQFs have a rather limited number of qualifications in ICT, which raises questions about the ability of the qualifications system to enable the digital transition, and the adaptation of the labour force to the requirements of automation and the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

○ The analysed NQF registers have qualifications in all sectors of the used classification, broadly speaking in different sectors of services, industry and agriculture. There are asymmetries to be noted, such as high concentration (over 40%) of qualifications in one sector (for example, in social sciences, business and law) in one the analysed cases.

**Cape Verde**

**Figure 4**: TVET qualifications in the NQF Catalogue of Qualifications, by levels
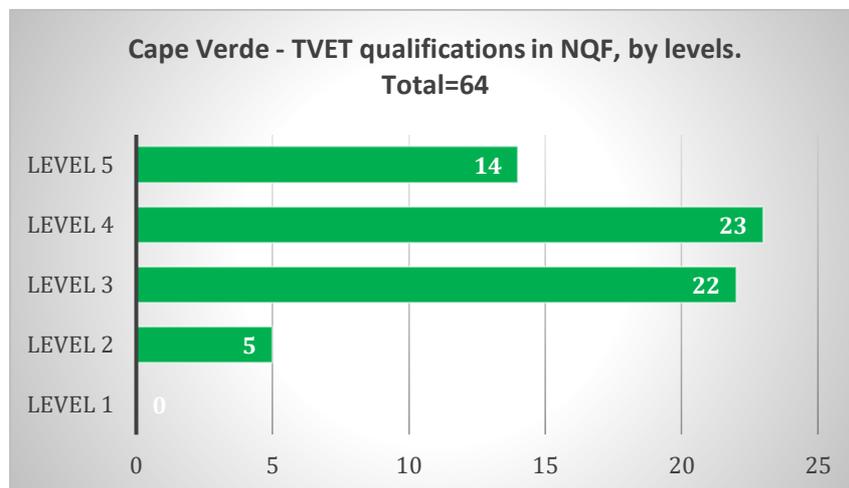


**Figure 5** : TVET qualifications in the NQF – National Catalogue of Qualifications, by sector
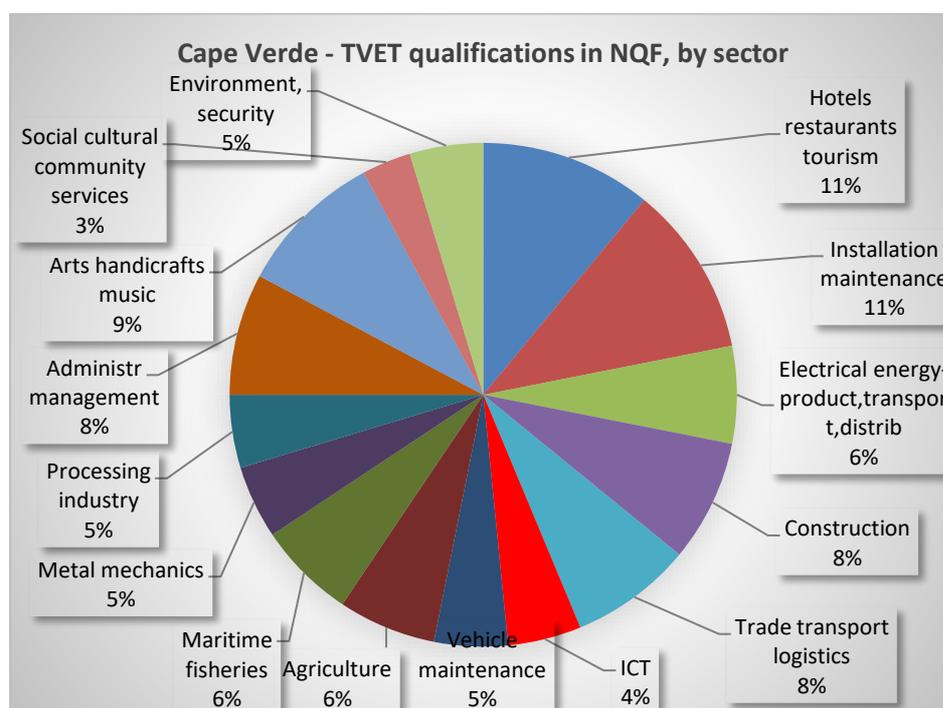
**Kenya**
**Figure 6**: Qualifications in the NQF register, by levels



Kenya - qualifications in the NQF, by level.
Total=1262

| Level | Value |
|-------|-------|
| LEVEL 10 | 47 |
| LEVEL 9 | 89 |
| LEVEL 8 | 10 |
| LEVEL 7 | 183 |
| LEVEL 6 | 197 |
| LEVEL 5 | 190 |
| LEVEL 4 | 227 |
| LEVEL 3 | 190 |
| LEVEL 2 | 129 |
| LEVEL 1 | |
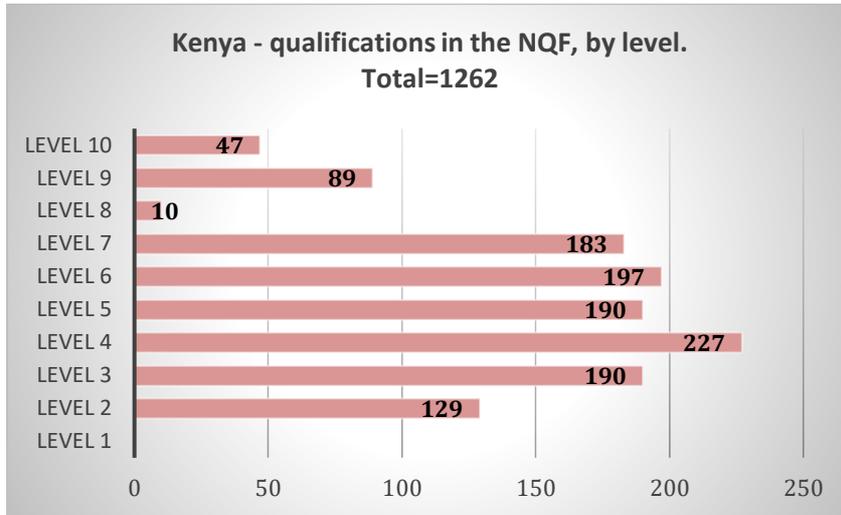
**Figure 7**: Qualifications in the NQF register, by sectors



Kenya - Qualifications in NQF, all levels by sector

- Education 5%
- Arts and humanities 6%
- Social sciences, journalism and information 4%
- Business, administration law 11%
- Natural science, statistics, mathematics 4%
- ICT 4%
- Engineering, manufacturing, construction 39%
- Agriculture, forestry, fisheries, veterinary 8%
- Health and welfare 7%
- Services 12%

## Morocco

**Figure 8**: Qualifications in the TVET register, by levels
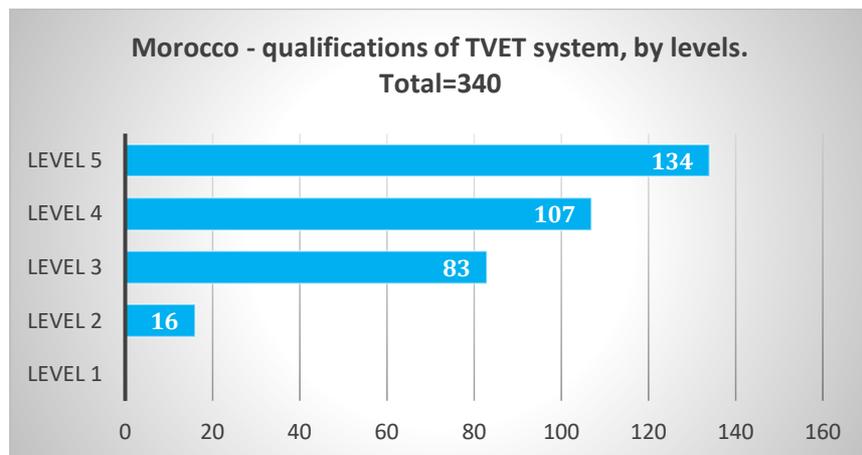


**Figure 9**: Qualifications in the TVET register, by sectors

## Mozambique

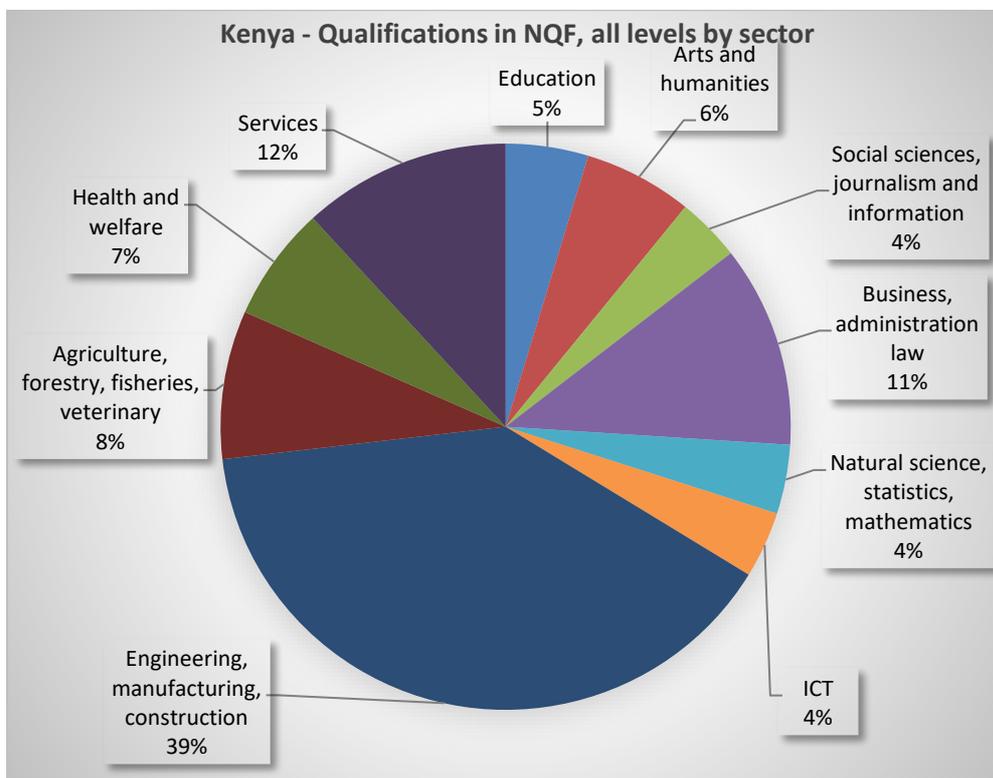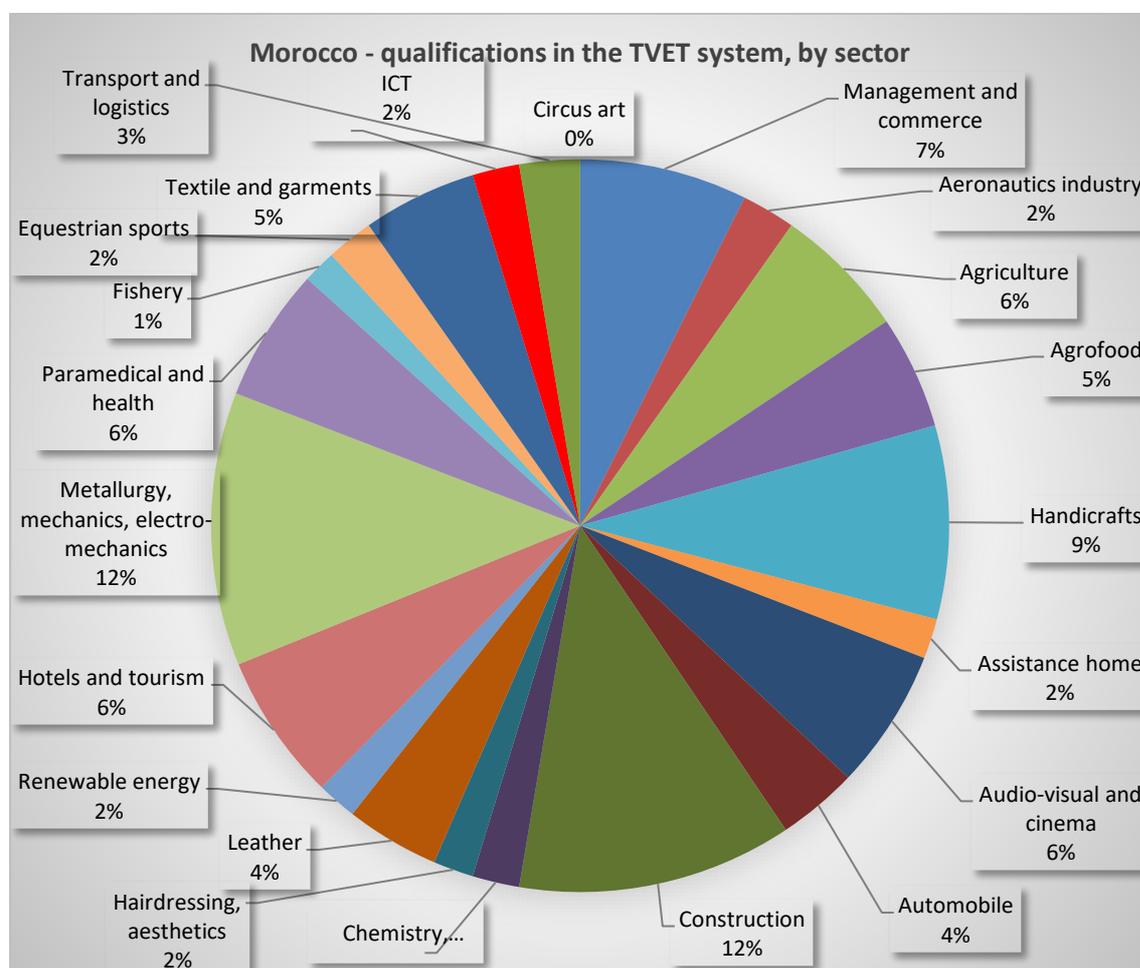**Figure 10**: Qualifications (TVET and Higher education), by levels
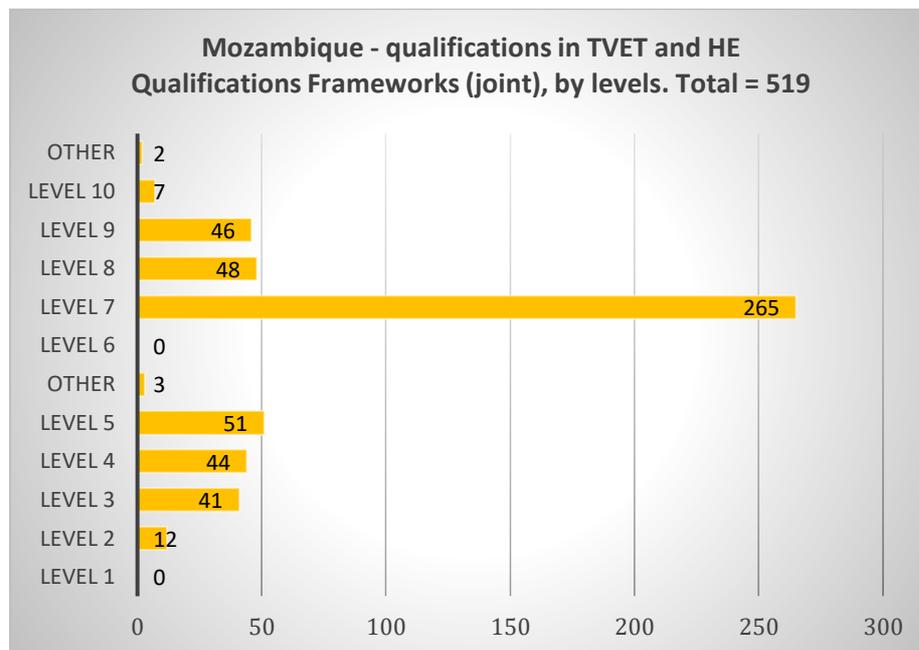


**Figure 11**: Qualifications in TVET QF National Catalogue (register), by sectors
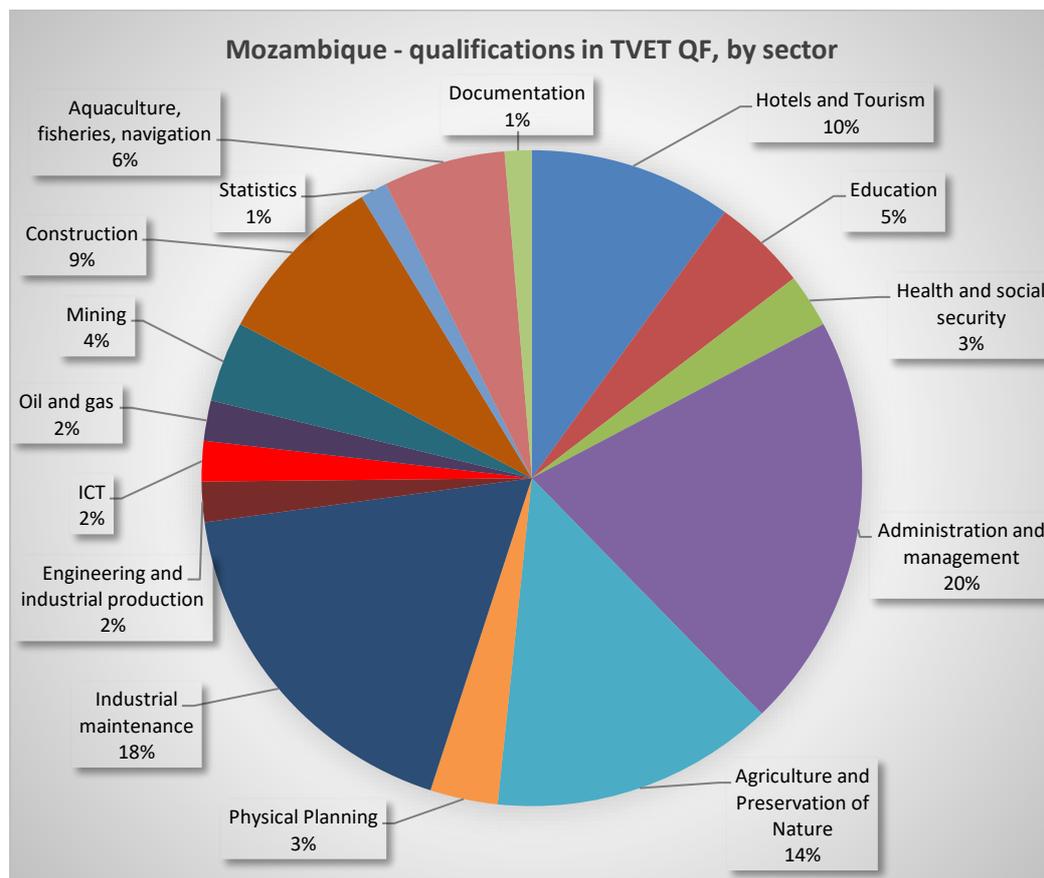
**Figure 12**: Qualifications in Higher Education register, by sectors



**Mozambique - higher education qualifications, by sector**

Health and Wellness 6%
Agriculture 3%
Engineering, Industry and Construction 25%
Natural and Technological Siences 2%
Education 21%
Art and Humanity 1%
Social Siences, Busness and Law 42%
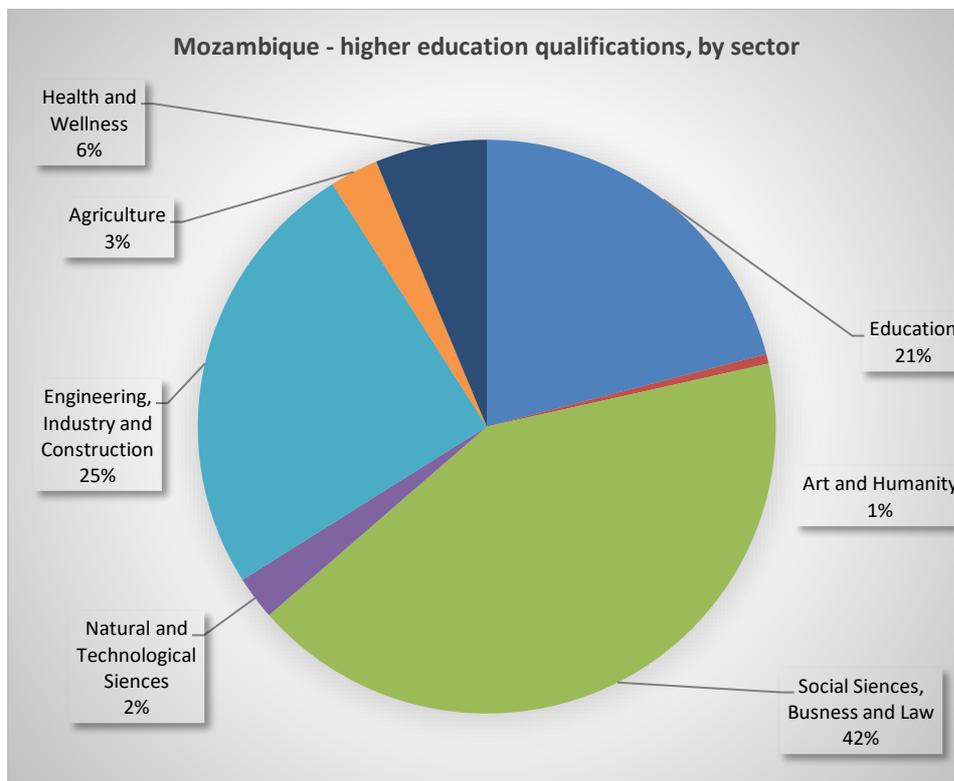
## South Africa

**Figure 13**: Qualifications in SANQF register, by levels



**South Africa - qualifications in NQF, by level (20/04/2021). Total=22026**

| Level | Count |
|---|---|
| OTHER | 5286 |
| LEVEL 10 | 1862 |
| LEVEL 9 | 4149 |
| LEVEL 8 | 4129 |
| LEVEL 7 | 2186 |
| LEVEL 6 | 1817 |
| LEVEL 5 | 790 |
| LEVEL 4 | 723 |
| LEVEL 3 | 533 |
| LEVEL 2 | 457 |
| LEVEL 1 | 94 |
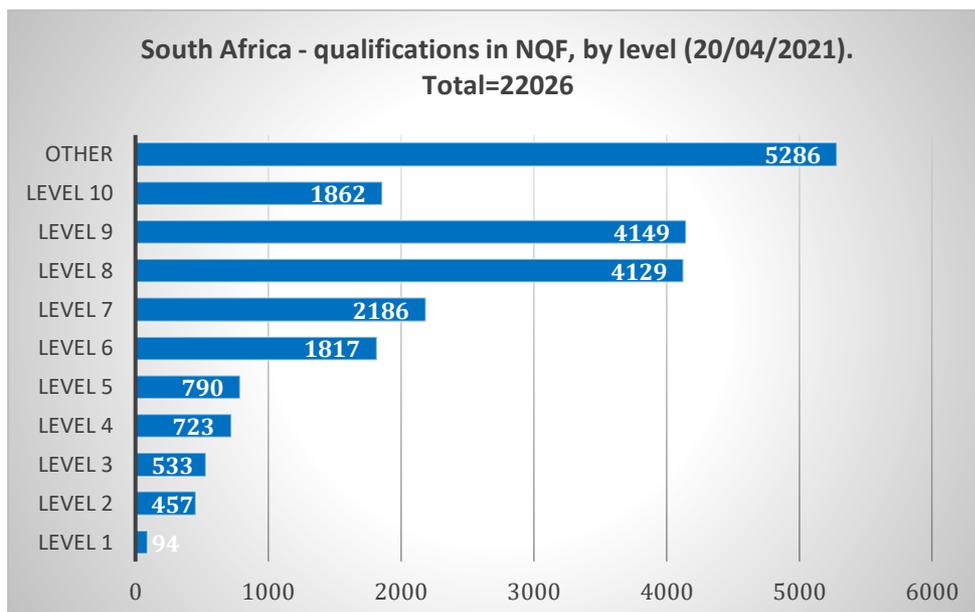
**Figure 14**: Qualifications in SANQF register, by sectors

**South African NQF - Qualifications all levels, by sector (20/04/2021**

| Sector | Value |
|--------|-------|
| VISUAL ARTS | 65 / 185 |
| UNDEFINED | 22 / 6 |
| TRADITIONS HISTORY AND LEGACIES | 162 / 173 |
| SOVEREIGNTY OF THE STATE | 289 / 43 |
| SCHOOLING | 194 / 1038 |
| RURAL AND AGRARIAN STUDIES | 208 / 19 |
| REHABILITATIVE HEALTH/SERVICES | 546 / 260 |
| PUBLIC POLICY POLITICS AND DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP | 111 / 200 |
| PSYCHOLOGY | 265 / 223 |
| PROJECT MANAGEMENT | 850 / 74 |
| PRIMARY AGRICULTURE | 41 / 496 |
| PHYSICAL SCIENCES | 757 / 631 |
| PERSONAL CARE | 313 / 75 |
| PEOPLE/HUMAN CENTRED DEVELOPMENT | 171 / 137 |
| NATURE CONSERVATION | 258 / 156 |
| MEDIA STUDIES | 242 / 24 |
| MARKETING | 288 / 322 |
| LITERATURE | 772 / 65 |
| LANGUAGE | 312 / 469 |
| IT AND COMPUTER SCIENCES | 555 / 556 |
| INDUSTRIAL & ORGANIZATIONAL GOVERNANCE AND HR... | 168 / 58 |
| HOSPITALITY, TOURISM, TRAVEL, GAMING AND LEISURE | 360 / 403 |
| HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING | 83 / 658 |
| GENERIC | 1159 / 1 |
| FORESTRY AND WOOD TECHNOLOGY | 732 / 69 |
| FILM TELEVISION AND VIDEO | 1555 / 142 |
| ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES | 201 / 205 |
| ENGINEERING AND RELATED DESIGN | 100 / 895 |
| EARTH AND SPACE SCIENCES | 140 / 123 |
| DESIGN STUDIES | 67 / 417 |
| CULTURAL STUDIES | 1397 / 82 |
| COMMUNICATION STUDIES | 210 / 512 |
| CIVIL ENGINEERING CONSTRUCTION | 36 / 282 |
| ADULT LEARNING | 196 / 202 |

## 4.3 Analysis of qualifications

An analysis of a selection of qualifications from Kenya, South Africa, Botswana and Namibia was also undertaken. The approach was based on a set of agreed criteria to select a sample of qualifications from African countries that could be matched to European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO), and presented as qualifications profiles.

In the context of this mapping study comparable examples of qualifications in hotel assistant were not found and were replaced with qualifications that are common in the hospitality training sector and reflect broad training in hospitality services at certificate level. In the case of qualifications for an accountant, it was found that first degree courses in accounting were not common. Teaching coding courses were also included in the analysis. It was found that the hospitality qualifications did not necessarily have the same focus as ESCO qualifications, while the breadth and depth of accounting qualifications also differed from

ESCO qualifications at the same levels. The analysis of the coding course profile to ESCO is presented in Figure 4 below.[5]

**Figure 4**: Learning outcomes of coding courses – profile of comparison with ESCO skills
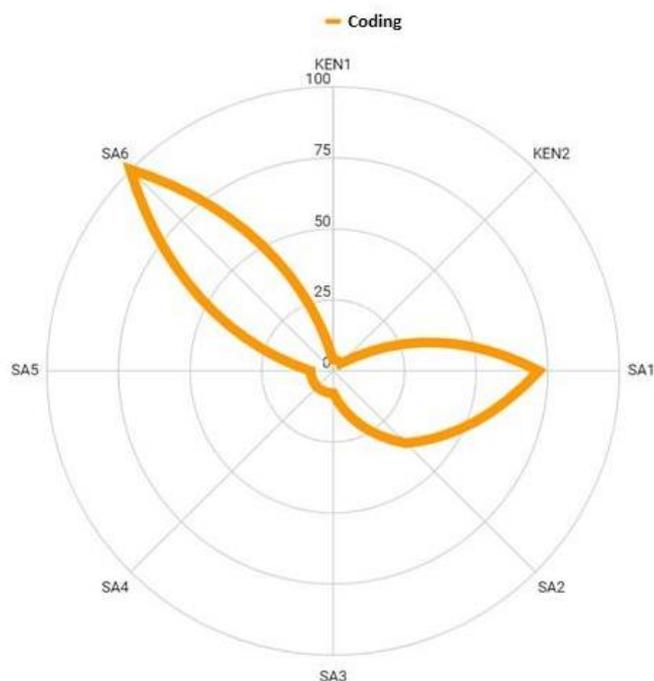


| Coding, Digikids and @iLabAfrica, Strathmore University | Coding workshops, Pwani Teknogalz | WeThinkCode | Umuzi | Project CodeX | CodeSpace | Quirky30 | CapaCiTi |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| KEN1 | KEN2 | SA1 | SA2 | SA3 | SA4 | SA5 | SA6 |

## 4.4   Regional qualifications frameworks

Among the RQFs, SADC was found to be the most advanced in terms of its legal, technical and institutional basis, with the SADCQF having been approved since 2011, and reactivated in 2017. In the ECOWAS the ministers of education approved the guidelines and roadmap for implementation of NQFs and RQFs in the region in October 2013. In the EAC, the EAQFHE was adopted by the ministers in April 2015, working in complementarity with the regional QA systems. The EAQFHE has eight levels, from lower primary education to a doctorate degree. The SADC Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation (TCCA) stood out as a long-standing oversight body that has promoted the SADCQF. In the EAC, the overall coordination for the higher education section of the RQF rests with the Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA), which is the custodian and governing body delegated by the EAC. The NQFs of two SADC member states have been aligned to the SADCQF (South Africa and Seychelles) and alignment is underway in Mauritius.

**ECOWAS**

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[5] The analysis of the accounting and hospitality qualifications profiles to ESCO is presented in a similar manner in the mapping report.

The ECOWAS RQF has not been approved, despite preparatory work done in 2012 and the endorsement by the ministers of education (2012) of the guidelines and roadmap annexed to the UNESCO-ECOWAS-UNDP (2013) report.

The ECOWAS RQF will be able to draw on the work underway in member states, notably Nigeria, The Gambia, Ghana, Cape Verde and Senegal. At present, Nigeria, The Gambia, Ghana, Cape Verde and Senegal in the ECOWAS region have NQF levels described: Nigeria has six levels (up to postgraduate qualifications), The Gambia has five (including a fundamental level), Senegal has five levels (up to Engineering Level), Cape Verde has eight levels (from basic education diploma to doctorate degree), and Ghana has eight levels (national TVET qualifications framework). In addition, over the past years, many countries in the ECOWAS sub-region have developed policies and strategies aimed at strengthening their TVET institutions and skills development programmes.

In the same way that a common approach will be needed to harmonise learning outcomes descriptions, the development of qualifications in general and NQFs and RQFs in particular requires a common approach. The 'Global Inventory of Regional and National Qualifications Frameworks' (Cedefop, ETF, UNESCO and UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning 2017, 2019) indicates that many countries are now involved in some way in designing or implementing qualifications frameworks. Whether the emphasis is on increasing the relevance and flexibility of education and training programmes, easing RPL, enhancing lifelong learning, improving the transparency of qualifications systems, creating possibilities for credit accumulation and transfer, or developing quality assurance systems, governments are increasingly turning to qualifications frameworks as a policy tool for reform (UNESCO, ECOWAS and UNDP 2013).

**SADCQF**

A strong policy context for SADCQF

The SADCQF has acquired a stronger centrality in the region's development plans for the decade (2020–30). This new impetus to strengthen implementation of the SADCQF capitalises on the outcomes of the first phase of implementation (2017–20) and aims to incentivise development of NQFs aligned with SADCQF, and work in complementarity with other tools supporting recognition of qualifications across the region. This renewed support to SADCQF is consistent with the place of education in SADC strategies, listed above.

In 2020 SADC reaffirmed its intent to give a new impetus to promote and implement the SADCQF, by including relevant measures in two key strategic plans for the decade: RISDP 2020–30 and the SADC Labour Migration Action Plan (2020–25). The RISDP 2020–30 has a comprehensive set of measures shaped for social and human capital development (Pillar 3). Enhanced implementation of SADCQF and skills development for regional industrialisation are part of these priorities, under the umbrella of 'access to quality and relevant education and skills development, including in science and technology, by SADC citizens' (Strategic objective 2).

In its third outcome ('Enhance participation of migrant workers in socio-economic development processes in countries of origin and destination') the Labour Migration Action Plan 2020–25 specifies actions to promote SADCQF:

- support member states in the development of NQFs that are aligned to the SADCQF;
- support the development of sector-specific regional mutual recognition arrangements in line with the SADCQF;
- conduct awareness and capacity-building workshops, as appropriate, targeting labour and employers' representatives in the region to promote the SADCQF; and
- conduct skills audits to profile supply and demand for selected sectors.

SADCQF: Features, governance and implementation

The SADC RQF was formally named the SADCQF at a September 2016 meeting of the SADC TCCA. SADCQF's main policy and technical document, as revised in 2017, defines the purpose, scope, design features and underlying principles underpinning the SADCQF, as well as its governance structure. Annex 1 of the SADCQF document specifies the SADCQF level descriptors and Annex 2, the SADCQF quality assurance guidelines.

The SADCQF is a regional mechanism for comparability and recognition of full qualifications, credit transfer, creation of regional standards and facilitation of quality assurance. It consists of a set of agreed principles, practices, procedures and standardised terminology intended to meet the purposes of the SADCQF:

- providing a mechanism for comparability and recognition of qualifications in SADC;
- facilitating mutual recognition of qualifications in all member states;
- harmonising qualifications wherever possible;
- promoting the transfer of credits within and among member states and even beyond; and
- creating SADC regional standards where appropriate.

The SADCQF was established as a ten-level reference framework, with level descriptors based on learning outcomes with three domains of learning: knowledge, skills, and autonomy and responsibility. Its scope is based on the principle of inclusiveness encompassing all forms, types, levels and categories of education and training. This includes out-of-school, formal, non-formal and informal learning; general education, TVET, higher education and various modes of learning, including distance and online. It specifies sixteen principles of quality assurance for the government and relevant institutions in every member state. Quality assurance and verification are important objectives of the SADCQF, working in complementarity with the SADC Qualifications Verification Network and the Southern African Quality Assurance Network.

The SADC Council of Ministers, the ministers responsible for education and Training, the TCCA, the TCCA Executive Committee and an Implementation Unit are the main governing structures for the implementation of the SADCQF. However, the Implementation Unit has not been put in place yet, so its role is assured by an arrangement of shared responsibility of SADC member states and the SADC Secretariat for the six implementation programmes of SADC. Member states volunteered to augment the capacity of the SADC Secretariat by providing administrative support on a rotational basis, using their capacities (human, technical expertise and funding) in the absence of the Implementation Unit to drive the implementation of the six SADCQF programmes:

- Programme 1: Alignment of NQFs to SADCQF – South Africa;
- Programme 2: Quality assurance – Botswana;
- Programme 3: Verification – Kingdom of eSwatini;
- Programme 4: Articulation, RPL and credit accumulation and transfer – Namibia;
- Programme 5: Advocacy and communication – Zambia; and
- Programme 6: Governance – TCCA and SADC Secretariat.

Implementation of the SADCQF

A guideline for alignment with the alignment criteria and steps for the alignment process (self-assessment exercise) and adjudication process has been developed for the SADCQF. Member states have started aligning their NQFs to the SADCQF using the guideline. To date, two countries have completed the

alignment process – South Africa (SAQA 2019)[6] and Seychelles (SQF 2018)[7]– and Mauritius (MQA 2019)[8] has submitted  its alignment report to SADC Secretariat for validation (MQA 2019).

| SADCQF Alignment Criteria |
|---|
| 1.  Responsibilities of relevant national bodies involved in the alignment process are determined and published by the relevant competent authorities |
| 2.  There is a clear and demonstrable link between qualification levels in the NQF/NQS and level descriptors of the SADCQF |
| 3.  The NQF/NQS is based on learning outcomes and links to non-formal and informal learning and credit systems (where these exist) |
| 4.  Procedures for including qualifications in the NQF or describing the place of qualifications in the NQS are transparent |
| 5.  The national quality assurance system for education and training refers to the NQF/NQS and is consistent with quality assurance guidelines of the SADCQF |
| 6.  There is a clear indication of the relevant national authorities responsible for the verification of the qualifications obtained in the national system |
| 7.  The alignment process shall include a stated agreement of relevant quality assurance bodies |
| 8.  Competent national bodies shall certify the alignment of the NQF/NQS with the SADCQF. A comprehensive report on alignment and its evidence must be published by competent national bodies |
| 9.  The official platform of the country must provide for a public comment process for the alignment report |
| 10. Clear plans have been made to make changes to legislation and policy supporting alignment to SADCQF levels on new qualification certificates, diplomas and other documents issued by competent authorities |

To support implementation, SADCQF developed a set information booklets and infographics and guidelines for accessible dissemination. The SADC 'Qualifications Recognition Manual' (12/2020) was compiled by a task team of country representatives (Botswana, eSwatini, Namibia, South Africa and Zambia). The ´Guidelines for SADC Credit Accumulation and Transfer' were presented to TCCA in October 2020 and reviewed for validation in April 2021.

State of play of NQF development in SADC (ACQF, 2021)

Over 50% of SADC member states have comprehensive NQFs, encompassing all levels and subsectors of education and training: (i) three countries have NQFs in place (legal act approved, implementation started): eSwatini, Lesotho and Zimbabwe; (ii) six countries have NQFs operational for some time and even reviewed: Botswana, Mauritius, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa and Zambia. Four other countries are at the stage of development and consultation for their NQFs, some with good progress in 2020: Angola, Malawi, Mozambique and Tanzania. Two countries are at very early thinking stage of NQF development: Comoros and DRC. Madagascar has progressed in development and consultation of the NQF concept. Some countries have sectoral qualifications frameworks operational (TVET and higher education), and at the same time started developing integrated/comprehensive NQFs – for example, Mozambique.

Countries such as Botswana, Mauritius, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, and Zambia have well established national qualifications authorities, responsible for the integrity of the NQF, national qualifications databases, registration of qualifications, verification of qualifications, setting of standards and dissemination of information for end-users via websites and digital services. Lesotho and eSwatini have

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[6] Final report: SAQA (2019), Report on the alignment of the South Africa National Qualifications Framework (SANQF) to the Southern African Development Community Qualifications Framework (SADCQF). https://www.saqa.org.za/sites/default/files/2020-02/SADCQF%20alignment%20report%20%28js%2907012020.pdf

[7] SQF (2018). Draft report: SQF (2018), Draft Report on the Alignment of the Seychelles National Qualifications Framework (SNQF) to the Southern African Development Community Qualifications Framework (SADCQF). http://www.sqa.sc/Resources/DocsForComment/DraftReportAlignmentSeychellesNQFSADCQF.pdf

[8] MQA (2019), Report on alignment of the National Qualifications Framework of the Republic of Mauritius to the SADC Qualifications Framework. http://www.mqa.mu/English/Documents/FS/Report15042019.pdf

the most recent NQFs (approved in 2019 and 2020, respectively, with guidelines and tools). Angola, Malawi and Mozambique are in the process of adopting comprehensive NQFs. Angola has developed a ten-level NQF, in the context of the construction of a reformed NQS, integrating a comprehensive technical and policy proposal for the register of qualifications, governance setting and system of validation of non-formal and informal learning -– this package is in the legislative consultation process at the time of writing of this report. Four countries are piloting a regional e-certificate initiative (Botswana, Namibia, South Africa and Zambia).

The ten-level structure is used by all comprehensive NQFs in SADC, whatever the stage of development. Examples of domains of level descriptors applied in SADC NQFs are:

1. knowledge, skills and competence (Botswana);
2. knowledge, skills, autonomy and responsibility (Mozambique, Angola) – comprehensive NQFs in advanced stage of development;
3. areas of knowledge; nature of skills; agency and context (Lesotho)
4. degree of complexity; reasoning and problem solving; knowledge; autonomy and responsibility (Zambia);
5. applied competencies: Scope of knowledge; knowledge literacy; method and procedure; problem solving; ethics and professional practice; accessing, processing and managing information; producing and communicating information; context and systems; management of learning; accountability (South Africa).

International dimensions of SADCQF

SADC has the most advanced regional qualifications framework in Africa, and is likely to benefit from the fact that SADC's development strategy contains measures dedicated to strengthening and consolidating implementation of SADCQF. The number of countries aligning to SADCQF is expected to grow in the coming years, as a result of new support measures and availability of resources.

From the launch of implementation in 2017, SADCQF sought cooperation and peer learning with other regional frameworks The SADCQF is currently not referenced to any continental or other regional qualifications frameworks, but has benchmarked with the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (ASEAN QRF) and the EQF in terms of the level descriptors, coordination and implementation mechanisms of these RQFs. The benchmarking was facilitated by a study that compared, among others, the SADCQF with three NQFs and with the ASEAN QRF and EQF (SADC 2017). The alignment/referencing criteria of SADCQF, EQF and ASEAN QRF are very similar

In 2017 the TCCA Executive Committee undertook a peer-learning visit to the EU to study the EQF institutional arrangements and their applicability to the SADCQF.

Cultural and political sensitivity embedded in SADCQF principles shall be given consideration in managing the comparison exercises with other RQFs: 'The SADCQF will facilitate interaction with relevant international developments and standards in a way that enhances the global standing of and respect for the region while effectively affirming local cultures, values and good practices.' (SADCQF, 2017)

**EAC**

The first RQF to be developed by the EAC was the EAQFHE. This framework was developed in 2015 by the IUCEA, with funding from the Swedish International Development Cooperation. The EAQFHE is an eight-level qualifications framework, with level descriptors for all levels. The framework is based on a credit system based on notional hours in which one credit is ten notional hours.

The EAQFHE relates the EAC partner state national qualifications systems to a common EAC reference framework. It also claims to be an 'independent reference point' aiming to develop trust between the different stakeholders in the region. The stated purpose is that the EAQFHE provides the set of policies,

objectives and information central to the organisation, management, implementation and monitoring arrangements for the qualifications framework. The EAQFHE:

- provides important points of reference for setting and assessing academic standards for higher education providers;
- assists in the identification of potential progression routes, particularly in the context of lifelong learning; and
- promotes a shared and common understanding of the expectations associated with typical qualifications by facilitating a consistent use of qualification titles across the higher education sector within the region (EAQFHE 2015: 11).

The EAQFHE is aimed at:

- ensuring the description of higher education qualifications based on learning outcomes attainable through successful completion of an educational and training regimen and certified by an award issued by a higher education/professional institution;
- enabling individuals and employers to better understand and compare the qualification levels of education and training systems among the EAC partner states and in other countries;
- enhancing international recognition of qualifications obtained in the partner states both for studies and employability;
- enabling employers to better understand the education process and the expected skills and competences of job applicants;
- enabling learners to choose education programmes according to their interests and needs and to understand requirements in each study area, and therefore being able to plan their learning more successfully; and
- providing wider possibilities to lifelong learning and for RPL.

In addition to the EAQFHE, it has been noted that from 2020 the EAC embarked on a process of developing a TVET qualifications framework, with assistance from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and the World Bank. Plans are also underway for the development of a teacher education qualifications framework for the region.

Assessing the contribution of the EAQFHE in education and training and qualifications systems in the region will require specific data and analysis, and the EAC is aware of the relevance of monitoring and evaluation of this policy instrument. Analysing the impact or contribution of the EAQFHE in the region and for its member countries in terms of referencing, mutual recognition and quality of education and training qualifications can also contribute to enhance regional cooperation and integration.

With regard to its stated scope,

> The EAQFHE, applies to all types of education, modes of delivery, training and qualifications from basic to higher education, professional and vocational institutions, obtained through formal, and/ or non-formal, and/ or informal learning. The EAQFHE is central to education reforms currently being undertaken in the Community. The Framework does not distinguish between any profiles or orientations of qualifications, as such distinctions shall be made in the national qualifications frameworks. Given that the partner states have different titles for qualifications obtained in professionally or academically oriented higher education programmes, this distinction is illustrated in the EAQFHE. This means that in addition to distinguishing between the levels of programmes, the EAQFHE also specifies their orientation. (EAQFHE 2015).

The following legal instruments provide the legal framework for the EAQFHE:

- the treaty establishing the EAC;

- the Protocol on the East African Community Common Market (PEACCM);
- the IUCEA Act;
- national higher education policy and legislation of each partner state; and
- EAC legislation for the EAQF.

The heads of state signed the Declaration for EAC as a Common Higher Education Area. IUCEA pursues the vision to be the 'lead EAC institution for an exemplary Common Higher Education Area (CHEA) for a prosperous and sustainable EAC'. On its website, IUCEA publishes a range of tools (handbooks and benchmarks) supporting harmonised approaches, notably to quality assurance.

The EAQFHE refers to Article 102 of the Treaty of the EAC, which has four pillars of integration, one of which is Common Market Protocol. Article 102 of the treaty is mainly to do with a commitment to cooperate in education and training, thus the basis for harmonisation and development of these regional frameworks. It does address the Common Market Protocol, but not quite all other pillars of integration.

Article 11 of the treaty states that mobility of professionals within the East African community needs to be facilitated (EAC, 1999). To this end, the EAC states undertook to sign a mutual recognition agreement between competent authorities regulating the different professions. By 2019 mutual recognition agreements had been signed for accountants, architects, engineers and veterinarians. Negotiations for mutual recognition agreements for land surveyors and the advocates of East Africa have been concluded and are waiting for signature. A study on effectiveness of mutual recognition agreements has since been undertaken. Sensitisation meetings for the mutual recognition agreement for pharmacists commenced in 2017 and are ongoing.

## 4.4.1  Differentiated approaches to support development of NQFs

The ACQF aims to contribute and enable qualifications frameworks' development on the continent. Supporting development of NQFs should be contextualised, while also learning from other experiences, and be fit for purpose. Several layers of differentiation of qualifications frameworks have been found by this mapping study. The stage of NQF development and implementation is a fundamental line of differentiation.

As highlighted above, African countries are clearly at different levels of NQF development. Most importantly, the allocation of countries to stages of development can be quite fluid given the current dynamics, and should therefore be reviewed and updated, as more countries are moving between stages.

This mapping study captures traces of these movements. Other specific characteristics cannot be overlooked – for example, those related with certain regional commonalities. A critical overlay across the groupings are the differences between anglo-, luso-, francophone and Arabic-speaking  countries. These differences should not be glossed over and specific engagements with countries in each of these language categories take place across the groupings summarised in the table below. The ACQF project continues engaging with the countries, to collect updates on their ongoing and planned NQF initiatives, and to fill in the information gaps on a number of countries.

**Table 4**: Differentiated support to NQFs – considering different stages of development

| Stage of NQF development | Type of support that could be the most valuable |
|---|---|
| NQF in place and implemented for some time, and reviewed | Networking, collaboration, peer review, referencing, explore new methodologies. Streamlined monitoring and evaluation. Alignment with other policies such as the labour market. These NQFs should share their experiences, challenges and perspectives with all other NQF initiatives in Africa. |

| | |
|---|---|
| NQF in place, legal base approved, implementation initiated. | Technical support, peer learning related with key implementation factors (dimensions), such as: organisational shaping and planning, operational instruments, register of qualifications, methodology package; governance and management of NQF for sustainability and impact; inventory of existing qualifications. Participation in regional, continental and international networks. |
| NQF in development and consultation | Technical support, peer learning related with major policy and technical issues and themes, unlocking key obstacles, guidance on regulatory-legal aspects. |
| NQF at early thinking | Technical assistance, peer learning, sharing of experiences supporting vision building and participation. Analysis of options, SWOT analysis, strategic planning, capacity development and stakeholders' buy-in. |
| NQF not in place, development not started | High-level technical support, peer-sharing of experiences – local capacity building, self-assessment and baseline analysis. |

## 4.4.2  The interplay between NQFs, RQFs and the ACQF

The mapping study has highlighted the fact that the interplay between emerging RQFs, the various NQFs across Africa and the proposed ACQF will be a critical factor for future work in this area. While NQFs are quite distinct in their orientation and purpose, the potential cooperation and complementarity between the RQFs and the ACQF needs a foundation based on a shared vision, acknowledgement of specific key regional interests and goals, and consideration of economies of scale. Dialogue, consultation and trust-building will be essential in shaping the priority functions and operational modes of the ACQF towards NQFs and RQFs in Africa. Of importance is a future-oriented vision, in which new learning, new types of certificates and of awarding tools are part of the menu for every qualifications reform and framework.

CESA 16–25 priority objective 4 (c and d) provides the political vision and foundation for the wide scope of the ACQF in its interrelations with regional and national qualifications frameworks on the continent. The findings of this mapping study and ongoing peer exchanges with RECs and national-level (NQF) authorities supply evidence supporting the ACQF´s development options for effective, sustainable and pertinent cooperation with the existing RQFs on the continent (such as the SADCQF, EAC RQF and others in development), and with RQFs involving African NQFs (such as the Arab Qualifications Framework). The concrete objectives, modalities and legal format of the interrelations between continental, regional and national levels will be the subject of political deliberations and technical and organisational analysis. The advantages and disadvantages of each scenario must be carefully unpacked and, critically, the process and reaching some form of consensus should be done through social dialogue. Building trust during this process will be essential to ensure that the implementation of the model can be done in a sustainable, constructive and coordinated manner.

## 4.4.3  The ACQF: An enabler?

Interest in experience sharing and peer learning regarding issues related to qualifications frameworks and systems is high among African countries. The ACQF is seen as a catalyst for policy learning, for convergence of practices and tools enabling comparable and transparent qualifications, and ultimately for fair mobility. Most countries expect the ACQF to support the development of qualifications frameworks and operational mechanisms at regional and national levels.

This feasibility study and the process and outputs planned in the context of the ACQF development project contribute to a first stage (or scenario) towards the future ACQF: a platform and network for increased

harmonisation, transparency and easily accessible information on qualifications frameworks and systems across the continent. Most importantly: a continental qualifications framework for the people.

# 5 Scenarios and strategy of the ACQF

This chapter describes the ACQF, from its vision and principles to a broad plan of outputs and indicators supporting its future establishment and implementation. The three scenarios for the ACQF were conceived on the basis of common features, and presented to ACQF Advisory Group at its second meeting on 8 April 2021. The chapter presents the used scenario-building approach. The section on drivers of change of work and skills emphasises the essential role of learning, reskilling and better skills ecosystems in the post-Covid-19 recovery period. The baseline information and considerations towards the construction of the ACQF presented in this chapter concern the technical-conceptual design, level descriptors, governance and monitoring and evaluation. A 10 points output plan sums-up the proposed strategy for implementation of the ACQF.

## 5.1 Vision for the ACQF

Development of the ACQF was officially launched at the inaugural workshop held at the African Union Commission (AUC) headquarters from 2 to 3 September 2019. This process is led by the AUC, working in partnership with the European Union, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and the European Training Foundation (ETF). The process is participative, based on analysis and evidence, and builds on African and global experience. By the third quarter of 2022, the ACQF policy and technical document, supported by an action plan will be submitted for AU decision-making. A set of technical guidelines, a web platform with tools, will accompany the ACQF document and a network of trained experts will offer capability for sustainable operations of the ACQF.

ACQF vision and aspirations

According to the initial vision for the ACQF presented at the inaugural workshop in September 2019, the ACQF is envisioned as an overarching qualifications framework for the continent, based on the principles of:

a) Inclusiveness of all types of learning and levels of qualifications (all sub-systems of education and training);

b) Openness to learners' and stakeholders' needs, to policy learning and lessons from other qualifications frameworks; and

c) Innovation-readiness: notably the transformation of skills and learning in the context of digitalisation, greening and beyond Covid-19 reconstruction.

The objectives of the envisioned ACQF are:

a) Comparability, quality and transparency of qualifications and support people´s lifelong learning;

b) To facilitate recognition of diplomas and certificates, and support mobility (learners, workers, services);

c) Work in cooperation and complementarity with NQFs and RQFs and support the creation of an African education and qualifications space; and

d) Promote cooperation, alignment/referencing between qualifications frameworks (national and regional) in Africa and worldwide.

As a policy instrument, the ACQF is anticipated as an enabler, fulfilling a range of functions, such as:

a) A platform providing benefits to countries and RECs, such as easily accessible and updated information on NQFs on the continent; databases and inventories; various capacity development, peer-learning and networking facilities and e-resources; public (users') outreach activities;

b) A hub and catalyst for development and support to operationalise qualifications frameworks at national level; and

c) A reference for cooperation with African and other international frameworks.

The ACQF will cooperate and interact with NQFs, with the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and the respective RQFs.


## 5.2 Developing the ACQF

The ACQF development process is already underway (2019–2022) and is based on evidence and analysis, stakeholders' participation, political lead of the AUC, awareness-raising, networking and capacity development. This process is organised into two phases:

Phase 1 (September 2019 to September 2020) (completed)

- Baseline evidence and analysis: mapping of the state of play, dynamics, main characteristics and perspectives of qualifications frameworks on the continent; and

- Engagement with stakeholders, start of capacity development and peer learning on key themes related to qualifications frameworks and systems.

Phase 2 (2020–2022): Development of the ACQF Policy and Technical Document and Action (underway)

- The process moves from evidence creation to the reflection on options and scenarios for the ACQF as a sustainable policy instrument;

- The ACQF policy and technical document will reflect the orientations from the discussion with AUC and the ACQF Advisory Group of the scenarios and options for the ACQF.

- Guidelines will accompany the ACQF policy and technical document. ACQF Guidelines will support further implementation of the ACQF and assist countries and REC stakeholders (institutions and practitioners) interacting with ACQF.

- The ACQF capacity development programme will build on a mix of delivery and networking modalities to disseminate information, coach national / regional teams, support a network of trained experts and conduct some research activities.

Building on the joint competence of a team of experts selected from different African countries, the reflection on possible scenarios for the ACQF consider edthe wider goals of continental integration (the aspiration), the findings of the mapping study (the current situation and foreseeable dynamics at national and regional levels), and the overall context of transformation of skills and learning accelerated by the response to Covid-19.


## 5.2.1 Thematic areas underpinning the ACQF analyses

The mapping study was designed according to eleven thematic areas, highlighted in chapter 2 of this feasibility report. These eleven themes 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.[9]

These thematic areas will guide the next phases of the ACQF development project, laying a coherent foundation in designing the ACQF policy and technical document, making sure that all key dimensions are taken into account. These themes include: objectives, and legal basis of qualifications frameworks;

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[9] Developing the ACQF: Scope of Work and Roadmap 2019–2022 (2019), technical working document, AU–EU Skills for Youth Employability Programme: SIFA Technical Cooperation.

governance and monitoring; conceptual-technical design, scope, levels and descriptors, validation of non-formal and informal learning; quality assurance; role and status of the learning outcomes approach; credit systems; registers and databases of qualifications; referencing / alignment NQF-RQFs; costs / financing; communication and dissemination to end-users; contribution to relevant national policies.

## 5.3 Baseline considerations

The transformation of work and learning has been at the core of much research and debate in the last decade across international, national, sectoral organisations and networks. A policy instrument such as the ACQF is particularly sensitive to the incidence and dynamics of change related to work, technology, societal demands, jobs and their changing skills genome.

Drivers of this change are multiple and their influence is intertwined. This overview concludes that transition is all about learning.

## 5.3.1 Drivers of change

The ACQF will emerge, develop and evolve in an environment marked by the post-Covid-19 recovery efforts, intertwined with the multiple transitions of our time (social, ecological, digital and technological); the emerging ACQF will face the challenges of economic slowdown and recession triggered by the pandemic, and the significant learning losses as a result of widespread school closures in 2020.

On the other hand, Africa has already adopted a range of policies responding to the needs of the green and digital adaptation and started in January 2021 with the operationalisation of trade under the AfCFTA. In May 2019, African leaders launched the AfCFTA. The corresponding agreement provides a framework for trade liberalisation of goods and services and, once fully implemented, it is expected to cover all 55 African countries, with an estimated combined GDP of US$2.5 trillion and a population of over 1.3 billion. In terms of population, the AfCFTA is the largest free trade area in the world.

Trade integration in Africa has long been seen by African policymakers as a mechanism for fostering prosperity. Several trade and regional economic integration groups have been formed over the years. The AfCFTA is the most ambitious initiative in this direction. It will support the realisation of the continent's economic promise by helping raise productivity and investment, and thereby increase income levels and reduce poverty. Most importantly, AfCFTA implementation will call for policy reforms to maximise its benefits, notably reforms in the domain of transparency and recognition of skills and qualifications across countries, seen as essential conditions for mobility and free trade.

**Transformation of work, skills and learning**

The future of work arrived ahead of schedule. At least four mega drivers of change are boosting the dynamics of this transformation and adaptation:

1. digitalisation, automation and artificial intelligence;
2. Covid-19 pandemic;
3. greening of the economy and society;
4. societal movements: rights, democracy, information, innovation.

The combined impact of these forces is reshaping the way people work, communicate, learn and build their qualifications. Business models must adapt to the new normal. This multidimensional crisis has also created a double-disruption scenario for workers – the tandem of the Covid-19 recession exacerbated by the disruption caused by automation and digitalisation. Short-term and long-term disruptions are intertwined.

Research from the World Economic Forum (WEF 2020a) on the future of jobs and of McKinsey Global Institute (2021) on the future of work after Covid-19 highlight the effects, challenges and opportunities for recovery, and for building back better countries' economies, employment and skills development systems.

This acceleration of transformation has been tangible in many parts of the world, including in Africa. Two years of digital innovation occurred in two months. Remote work and hybrid forms of work became the normal in many occupations and sectors, although not all occupations could adapt and reorganise. A wave of innovation and a new generation of entrepreneurs is emerging, tapping into the opportunity offered by the need for adaptation. Digitally enabled productivity gains accelerate the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

In this context of transformation of work, reskilling and upskilling become urgent, as more workers transition to jobs that are based on a changing mix of tasks and skills. Learning – anytime, anywhere, anything – must adapt to provide responses to such a massive need for reskilling of large parts of the working-age population. New types of qualifications and of modalities of recognition of learning are emerging and the concepts of micro-credentials and digital certificates are becoming part of policies and practices of qualifications systems.

**Green transition, green adaptation**

Green is seen as a major lever and indispensable component for post-Covid recovery plans and investment, as we see in the large-scale stimulus packages across the world.

To cope with the 2008–09 financial crisis, there were substantial government stimulus programmes, but few of them incorporated climate or environmental action. This time, it is different. It is not only the large scale of resources of the recovery plans, but also the philosophy of recovery. It is not about replicating the same model, but to recover through ecology.

Many countries and regions are using their recovery plans to push through environmental policy priorities. For example:

- The African Development Bank announced in January 2021 the launch of the Africa Adaptation Acceleration Program (AAAP) to mobilise US$25 billion to scale up and accelerate climate change adaptation actions across Africa. The announcement came during the Climate Adaptation Summit in 2021. The Youth Adaptation flagship of AAAP will unlock US$3 billion for the youth, support 10 000 youth-led small and medium-sized enterprises in climate resilience, and build capacity for a million youth on climate adaptation.

- In the European Union, the growth strategy is the European Green Deal. The EU adopted *NextGenerationEU*, a €750 billion temporary recovery instrument to help repair the immediate economic and social damage brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic. Post-Covid-19 Europe will be greener, more digital, more resilient and better fit for the current and forthcoming challenges. The [Recovery and Resilience Facility](#), adopted in February 2021, is the centrepiece of *NextGenerationEU* and offers an unprecedented opportunity to speed up the sustainable recovery in Europe and reinforce the commitment to the twin transitions: green and digital. The facility will make €672.5 billion in loans and grants available to support reforms and investments undertaken by member states. The facility supports investments and reforms in seven flagship areas: power up (clean technologies and renewables); renovate (energy efficiency of buildings); recharge and refuel (sustainable transport and charging stations); connect (roll-out of rapid broadband services); modernise (digitalisation of public administration; scale-up (data cloud capacities and sustainable processors); and reskill and upskill (education and training to support digital skills). Each recovery and resilience plan of EU member states shall include a minimum of 37% expenditure for climate investments and reforms and a minimum of 20% to foster the digital transition.

- France Relance, the new €100 billion recovery and growth plan for 2030 is built on three pillars: ecology, competitiveness and social cohesion. The ecology component benefits from a portfolio of €30 billion and aims to transform France into the first large carbon-free economy in Europe. This component dedicates a large investment develop skills required for greening of jobs and work.

- South Korea's New Deal plans to invest about US$144 billion in creating 1 900 000 jobs by 2025. The plan focuses on a Digital New Deal and Green New Deal and includes overarching policy support to strengthen employment and social safety nets. The Green New Deal focuses on renewable energy, green infrastructure and industrial sector. Its green car subsidy programme offers up to US$17 million in subsidies to people buying electric cars in 2021 and up to US$33.5 million for hydrogen fuel-cell electric vehicles.

- Canada is enhancing the scope and measures of its Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change of 2016.

- Nigeria plans to phase out fossil-fuel subsidies and to install solar-power systems for an estimated 25 million people.

Just as digital-economy companies have powered stock market returns in the past couple of decades, so green technologies could play that role in the coming decades. Green growth opportunities abound across massive sectors such as energy, mobility, construction and agriculture. Banking and investment are also entering the green space to support green recovery and adaptation – and this too requires new skills.

Greening of tasks, jobs and skills was already happening – but greening now has a new chance to move from the margin to take centre stage and become a mainstream driver. Major implications of greening for jobs, education, training and skills include:

- a need to develop environmentally friendly technologies, production processes, products, services, and business models across all sectors of the economy;

- changing the way traditional occupations are performed (and taught) and creating new tasks, processes and even new occupations;

- creating a demand for new skills and knowledge and the need to upskill and reskill large numbers of people;

- a need to increase environmental awareness in education and training curricula; and

- requires close interaction between education and training systems and their environments to build skills ecosystems in which skills development goes hand in hand with economic, technological and social change.

**Digitalisation, automation and artificial intelligence: Powerful driver of change of work, jobs and skills**

The World Economic Forum's report on the future of jobs (WEF 2020a) estimates that emerging professions will see a steeper growth than before the pandemic, accompanied by demand for new skills (transversal, hybrid and technical). Skills gaps continue to be high as in-demand skills across jobs will change in the next five years. On average, companies estimate that 40–50% of workers will require reskilling (of six months or less) and 94% of business leaders report that they expect employees to pick up new skills on the job, a sharp uptake from 65% in 2018.

The dynamics of jobs displaced and jobs emerging are impacting the mix of occupations within economies, and the mix of skills within occupations. Although the number of jobs destroyed will be surpassed by the number of 'jobs of tomorrow' created, in contrast to previous years, job creation is slowing while job destruction accelerates. Nonetheless, employers expect that by 2025 emerging professions will grow. The World Economic Forum estimates that by 2025, 85 million jobs may be displaced by a shift in the division

of labour between humans and machines, while 97 million new roles may emerge that are more adapted to the new division of labour between humans, machines and algorithms.

Covid-19 accelerated the future of work in the shift to remote and hybrid forms of work. In reaction to the risk to life caused by the spread of the Covid-19 virus, governments have legislated full or partial closures of business operations, causing a sharp shock to economies, societies and employment. The shift to remote work was massive. The pandemic has shown that a new hybrid way of working is possible at greater scale than imagined in previous years. The World Economic Forum (WEF 2020a) estimates that 84% of employers are set to rapidly digitalise working processes, including a significant expansion of remote work—with the potential to move 44% of their workforce to operate remotely in the future. Hybrid models of remote work are likely to persist in the wake of the pandemic, mostly for a highly educated, well-paid minority. The pandemic accelerated existing trends in remote work, e-commerce and automation, with up to 25% more workers than previously estimated potentially needing to switch occupations. Covid-19 may propel faster adoption of automation and artificial intelligence, especially in work arenas with high physical proximity. Furthermore, there is growing demand in health and care sector jobs, the emergence of telemedicine and the biopharma revolution taking hold.

Moreover, there is an emerging marketplace for remote work (demand and supply growth). LinkedIn Economic Graph data show that the number of workers looking for remote job opportunities has nearly doubled, while the number of job postings has gradually increased – with peaks of a two-fold increase in mid-April and a three-fold increase in mid-June 2020. The trends accelerated by Covid-19 may spur greater changes in the mix of jobs within economies than estimated before the pandemic. Research from the McKinsey Global Institute (2021) shows that a markedly different mix of occupations may emerge after the pandemic across the eight large economies of the United States, Spain, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Japan, China and India.

Compared to pre-Covid-19 estimates, the largest negative impact of the pandemic has fallen on workers in food service and customer sales and service roles, as well as less-skilled office support roles. Jobs in warehousing and transportation may increase as a result of the growth in e-commerce and the delivery economy, but those increases are unlikely to offset the disruption of many low-wage jobs. In the United States, for instance, customer service and food service jobs could fall by 4.3 million, while transportation jobs could grow by nearly 800 000. Demand for workers in the healthcare and STEM occupations may grow more than before the pandemic.

Given the expected concentration of job growth in high-wage occupations and declines in low-wage occupations, the scale and nature of workforce transitions required in the years ahead will be challenging.

In the post-Covid19 scenario a larger share of workers may need to transition to new occupations requiring a different mix of skills. Time spent in using social and emotional skills and technological skills will rise against a decrease in using basic cognitive skills and physical/manual skills.

**Technology adoption**

The past two years have seen a clear acceleration in the adoption of new technologies among all companies and institutions. Cloud computing, big data and e-commerce remain high priorities, following a trend established in previous years. However, there has also been a significant rise in interest in encryption, reflecting the new vulnerabilities of our digital age, and a significant increase in the number of firms expecting to adopt non-humanoid robots and artificial intelligence, with both technologies slowly becoming a mainstay of work across industries.

**Labour market changes affect the content of qualifications**

The 'Top 10 skills of 2025' list of the report of the World Economic Forum (WEF 2020a) is changing. The list shows that critical thinking and problem-solving top the list of skills that employers believe will grow in prominence in the next five years, and this has been consistent since 2016. But newly emerging in 2020 are skills in self-management such as active learning, resilience, stress tolerance and flexibility:

1. Analytical thinking
2. Active learning and learning strategies
3. Complex problem-solving
4. Critical thinking and analysis
5. Creativity, originality and initiative
6. Leadership and social influence
7. Technology use, monitoring and control
8. Technology design and programming
9. Resilience, stress tolerance and flexibility
10. Reasoning, problem-solving and ideation

Analysis also estimates the dynamics of cross-cutting specialised skills – those skills that are applicable and easily transferable across occupations. This consideration is important in a context of increasing workers' transitions to different occupations (WEF 2020a: 37).

**Qualifications in time of crises**

Qualifications in time of crises can be considered from at least three angles:

- the acquisition of new skills for the numerous transitions using a mix of instruments anchored on innovation: digital learning, micro-credentials, skills-based credentials and hands-on learning;

- knowledge is not less important in qualifications, but should be enriched with values, attitudes and behavioural dispositions; and

- Nelson Mandela's unforgettable message continues to inspire the world in this period of transformations: 'The power of education extends beyond the development of skills we need for economic success. It can contribute to nation-building and reconciliation. It is the most powerful tool to change the world.'[10]

**Renewal of qualifications in times of crises: Data helps!**

The era of digital data and artificial intelligence-based analytics offers new and quasi real-time labour market and skills intelligence.

- Novel data analytics can provide continuous flows of insights on changing demands and skills rates, by occupations and sectors, with great granularity and geo-reference – and this can be a major and unseen advantage for renewal of qualifications, redesign of courses and learning.

- Novel types of skills: Observatories have emerged, analysing terabytes of data and able to contribute to many questions – the principle is to 'let the data speak'.

- Data sources should be combined further on – to offer holistic, deep and future-oriented insights useful for design of qualifications standards and curricula. This complementarity means triangulation of data from graduate tracking, employers' demand studies, foresights and other sources.

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[10] https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2013/12/05/nelson-mandelas-famous-quote-on-education/

- Universities and professional training institutions can use the immense possibilities of novel data analytics and dashboards to capture and analyse the mismatch between demanded skills/by occupations on the one hand and the content and learning outcomes of their courses and qualifications on offer onthe other.

Real-time employers' demand data help to discover the DNA of jobs as bundles of skills, provide insights on sub-occupational diversity (core skills, building-block skills and distinguishing skills), and identify the emergence of a hybrid genome of skills of jobs in high-demand growth. Hybrid genome combines skills from different fields, such as technology and marketing, product management and data analytics.

**2021 a year of transition: Transition and recovery is all about learning**

The transition and adaptation is an immense soft construction site. Half of us will need to reskill in the next five years as the double disruption of the economic impact of the pandemic and the increasing automation transforming jobs takes hold. Skills shortages are more acute in emerging professions. A larger share of workers will have to do more transitions to occupations requiring different and higher skills. Under the Pact for Skills established in the European Union during the pandemic, companies and public authorities have dedicated €7 billion to enhancing the skills of some 700 000 automotive workers.

Transition and recovery is all about learning:

1. learning, re- and up-skilling – a major and pressing priority for the period of *building back better*;

2. systems too must learn – education, skills development and qualifications must capture the opportunity and pressing demand from many millions of people. This is the time because there is no time;

3. commitment from businesses and the public sector to inculcate a culture of lifelong learning. Support for a culture and practice of lifelong learning requires the right conditions, resources and incentives, such as validation of learning from different contexts, support for self-management of learning, and the introduction of such instruments as individual training accounts;

4. both businesses and policymakers should collaborate to support workers migrating between occupations. Stronger public-sector support is needed for training, reskilling of at-risk or displaced workers, youth and women, whose employment was most severely affected in the Covid-19 crisis. Governments could also consider extending benefits and protections to independent workers and to workers working to build their skills and knowledge mid-career; and

5. policymakers could support businesses by expanding and enhancing the digital infrastructure. Even in advanced economies, almost 20% of workers in rural households lack access to the internet.

## 5.3.2 Considerations for qualifications convergence/harmonisation in Africa

The ACQF Mapping Study proposes a set of key considerations for qualifications convergence in Africa, which are factored in the debate on the scenarios for the ACQF as a policy instrument for transparency of qualifications and meta-framework for alignment / referencing with NQFs.

1. Fit for purpose qualifications systems in Africa

2. Legal and policy foundations for NQFs: Documented reflection and analysis from consultation phase

3. Governance of NQFs: Form and function

4. NQF architecture: Strong convergence to learning outcomes, parity of esteem and articulation

5. Data and evaluation of NQFs: A risk and an opportunity

6. The ACQF can act as a catalyst for CESA and AfCFTA, and other policy initiatives to build back better Post-Covid-19

7. Financing NQFs: Less is more

8. Dissemination and communication on NQFs: Let's start with the end user

9. Alignment and referencing: Perspectives from NQF

10. Build on existing continental and regional initiatives

11. The relationships between NQFs, RQFs and the ACQF

12. Legal and policy foundations for RQFs: Getting the balance right

13. Governance of RQFs: The link to RECs and the AUC

14. A case for differentiated support to NQFs / countries

15. Sustainability and the harmonisation of qualifications in Africa

## 5.4 Scenario building approaches

### 5.4.1 In education

Scenario building is used in strategic thinking in various policy and business domains, including to identify future options and directions of change in education. A basic assumption of scenario building is that different futures, not only 'one' future, are possible and should, therefore, be envisaged.

Scenarios are carefully constructed snapshots of the future and the possible ways a sector might develop. Scenarios help to focus thinking on the most important factors driving change in any particular field. By considering the complex interactions between these factors, we can improve our understanding of how change works, and what we can do to guide it.[11]

**Scenarios and education**

Scenarios do not predict the future; they are tools to help us explore different ways the future might unfold, so that we may form a shared vision, develop strategies and create high-impact policies to be implemented now. A scenario for a given field, such as education or schooling, ought to tell us what each of the major stakeholders could expect in a certain set of circumstances, so decision-makers at all levels should find scenarios useful. In the case of schooling, a scenario should give us an account of the basic structure of schools of the future, as well as the attitudes of private and public sectors, teachers, students and parents towards schooling. Furthermore, it should give us information about each of these groups: Are the teachers of the future full-time professionals, or experts with short-term contracts? Do students expect to be taught information and facts, or skills that will help them later in life? And are the schools of the future focused on learning or on acting as broader social centres, or perhaps a mix of the two? Considering each scenario in isolation can help highlight different ways to achieve the same outcome.

**What do they contain?**

A well-constructed scenario must contain enough detail to be useful for strategic planning, but not so much as to become overly specific and irrelevant to the issues of interest. We must be inventive and imaginative, without letting our pictures become too obscure or fanciful. In brief scenarios:

- Present snapshots of possible futures;

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[11] Main source on scenario building considered in this chapter:
https://www.oecd.org/site/schoolingfortomorrowknowledgebase/futuresthinking/scenarios/whatarescenarios.htm

- Are tools for focusing thought, developing shared visions and determining policy; and
- Do not predict the future, but help us to decide what to do now in order to shape it.

## 5.4.2 Other scenario planning approaches

Scenario planning has become a widely used strategic management tool in order to understand future environmental uncertainty (Bowman et al. 2013). Hakyeon Lee and Youngjung Geum (2017) describe the use of scenarios as one of the most important issues in today's business, as the dynamic environment makes organisations more competitive. Therefore, companies need to respond to dynamic environments by creating a strategy that is sustainable in several futures.

Within the literature, multiple definitions of scenario planning exist. Peter Bishop, Andy Hines and Terry Collins (2007) propose that a scenario is 'a product that describes some possible future state and/or that tells the story about how such a state might come out'. In this definition, we find a distinction in which a scenario refers to an end-state and/or to to a chain of events. Furthermore, Paul Schoemaker (1993) argues that scenario planning is an important tool to assess fundamental uncertainties and expand people's thinking. He defines scenarios broadly as 'focused descriptions of fundamentally different futures presented in coherent script-like or narrative fashion'. This description clarifies that scenarios consist of coherent stories. Within these stories, each scenario reveals the interaction of various elements under certain conditions in which consistency among the stories is important.

Scenarios contain stories of multiple futures, varying from the expected to extreme futures (Bishop, Hines and Collins 2007). Bishop, Hines and Collins (2007) comment: 'A good scenario grabs us by the collar and says, "Take a good look at this future. This could be your Future. Are you going to be ready?"'

Joseph Coates (2000) states that scenario planning used in business can be broadly divided into two categories. On the one hand, scenarios can be used to tell about a future state or condition in which the situation is embedded. These scenarios are referred to as descriptive scenarios and are used to motivate users to develop practical choices, policies and alternative actions, which could deal with the consequences of the scenario. The second category of scenarios assume policy has been established and will be integrated with its consequences into a story about some future state. This category is referred to as normative scenarios and rather than stimulating policy choice, it displays consequences of a set of choices. So, the first category aims to stimulate thinking about policies and the second aims to explore the consequences of policy decisions.

**Approaches**

Bishop, Hines and Collins (2007) identify eight general categories of scenario techniques. The eight categories of scenario building consist of judgemental, baseline/expected, elaboration of fixed scenarios, event sequences, back-casting, dimensions of uncertainty, cross-impact analysis and modelling. These eight categories are briefly described below.

Judgemental techniques are easiest to describe and are considered the most common practice of scenario planning. Judgemental techniques rely on the judgement of an individual or group who describe the future. These techniques could use information, analogy and reasoning to support assertions.

Baseline/expected methods produce only one scenario, which is considered as expected or baseline future. This approach is considered as the foundation of all alternative scenarios. It is stated that the expected future is a plausible future state. Even though unexpected events change the future, they do not change the future in all ways according baseline/expected methods. The technique behind this approach is measuring existing trends and extrapolating effects into the future, which could be done by judgement or mathematical techniques. Besides judgement, this approach is considered as the most common approach of scenario planning.

The elaboration of fixed scenarios starts with considering multiple scenarios. In general, scenarios are developed from scratch and start with pre-specified scenarios. Thereafter, scenario logics and implications of alternative futures are discussed.

Event sequences assume that future series of events can be seen just as past sequences of events, except occurrence of events are not known. Therefore, probabilities will be assigned to events. If an event happens, the future will be steered in that direction.

The fifth collection of approaches, back-casting, consists of horizon mission methodology, the impact of future technologies and future mapping. These approaches assume most people see the future as an extension of the present, which is a disadvantage as 'baggage' of the past and present is carried into the future. This limits creativity and assumes a safe future. Therefore, the first step in this approach is to explore a future state at a certain time, which can be plausible or imaginable. Thereafter, it is a case of connecting the dots from the present to the future. So, instead of forecasting, this approach makes use of back-casting.

The dimensions of uncertainty assume the reason to use scenarios is uncertainty in predictive forecasting. Information is incomplete, theories of human behaviour are not as good as physical phenomena theories and an unpredictable state of chaos and emergent states exists. Scenario development in the dimension of uncertainty is created by identifying unpredictable states and using these as the basis for alternative futures.

The objective of the seventh stream, cross-impact analysis, is not only to identify characteristics of conditions, events and scenarios but also to calculate relative probabilities of occurrence. In this approach, it is also considered that probability of an event is also based on occurrences of other events. These conditions/events are inserted in the rows and columns of the matrix and the conditional probability is provided given the occurrence of other conditions/events. This matrix could be run in order to create a distribution of probabilities.

The last approach, modelling, makes use of equations that relate effects of variables on others to model the expected values of target variables. It is stated this method could also produce scenarios by changing inputs or structure of models.

## 5.5   Imagining the scenarios for the ACQF

This draft proposal reflects the analysis and discussion of the team of ACQF experts and takes into account knowledge acquired via the reports and analyses of the ACQF Mapping Study and selected international literature (see 'Sources'). The first ideas for scenario building were discussed at the team meeting of 25 November 2020. In the follow-up weekly team meetings in December 2020 (on 2, 9, 16 and 21), the initial ideas gained substance and a brief technical working note was drafted as the shared basis for further debate, questioning and fine tuning. The current proposal represents the fifth draft of this core component of output 1 of phase 2 of the ACQF project plan.

### 5.5.1   Linked scenarios

The three proposed scenarios are structured on the basis of a cumulative set of features: scenario 2 capitalises on the features of scenario 1; scenario 3 builds on scenario 2. This implies the existence of a common thread across the 3 'futures'.

The proposed titles of each scenario underlines its distinctive value-added:

- **Scenario 1: 'ACQF connects'** – underscores support to effective networking, experience and knowledge-sharing, capacity development and communication. The ACQF website is fundamental, and the ACQF is a platform for all countries and RECs on the continent.
- **Scenario 2: 'ACQF creates mutual trust'** – beyond experience-sharing and communication, this scenario focuses on referencing of NQFs / RQFs to ACQF, and eventually use of ACQF levels and label on qualifications of the linked NQF / RQFs.
- **Scenario 3: 'ACQF opens new horizons'** – besides being a meta-framework for referencing, ACQF promotes new qualifications (standards, profiles) of continental nature, supports automatic mutual recognition of qualifications (based on quality assurance and other considerations) and supports digital certificates.

All three scenarios are conceptualised on the basis of a set of key 'features', which act as the common references to compare the scenarios. The key features at this stage are as follows:

- Main objectives and functions;
- Instruments: website, NQF inventory, guidelines, methods, databases, e-learning platform;
- Architecture: scope, levels, descriptors;
- Governance;
- Resources;
- Advocacy, political support;
- Existing enablers: policies, conventions, tools, networks;
- Interplay with other frameworks, conventions; and
- Benefits, contribution, acceptability.

The conceptual matrix of the scenarios allows a horizontal view (across scenarios) of each of the common features and also a vertical view – scenario by scenario. At the next stage of the reflection, the ACQF experts and stakeholders can envisage adjustments in the combination of certain core features of the scenarios, and the inclusion of innovative elements coherent with transformation trends of societal, economic, technological and ecological nature.

All scenarios aim to:

- Take into due consideration the expected objectives of the ACQF, its inclusive scope (all levels and types of qualifications), its principles and main functions. All scenarios should comprise the functions and tools enabling the ACQF to (gradually) fulfil its promise. The ACQF is an 'enabler', supporting the development of national/regional qualification systems/frameworks and referencing, while taking into account diversity and heterogeneity of systems, qualifications concepts and levels, between countries and regions;
- Be oriented to innovation (skills, learning, qualifications, technologies) and should contribute to beyond Covid-19 recovery/transformation, green and inclusive societies. It should also consider the relevant perspectives relating to gender, rural-urban and digital divides;
- Be contextualised and fit-for-purpose in African systems and societies;
- Be open to cooperation with all types of qualifications frameworks on the continent, based on the criteria of transparency and comparability. If countries do not have integrated NQFs, the ACQF relates and works with their qualifications 'system' (qualifications levels, qualifications types, filières). Many francophone countries do not have integrated NQFs, but have defined qualifications levels and qualifications systems structuring the different subsystems, such as the TVET qualifications system in Senegal and the LMD system in all higher education systems in francophone countries;

- Be cognisant of commonalities and differences of concepts and structures of the education and training systems in French-, English, Portuguese and Arab-speaking countries. Consider the question: which are the prime interlocutors of the ACQF (at national level): NQFs, national qualification levels, national qualifications systems (NQSs); or all of them?

Questions and issues to be considered:

- Harmonisation: meaning, scope and implications in this context; trade-offs and balance (strong or loose harmonisation).

- Subsidiarity: between national prerogative for education and qualifications frameworks and systems vs continental cooperation/alignment on qualifications frameworks/systems.

- Interplay and mutual support between the three pillars of portability of qualifications in a continental perspective: ACQF – quality assurance – recognition (rules, practices and bodies). A virtuous circle and mutually supporting interplay of the three pillars is essential to reach the envisaged fair and facilitated recognition of learning periods and of qualifications, and the mobility of learners, workers and citizens across the continent. The ACQF needs to build its strength through links and networks with the relevant policies, conventions and components of the African education and qualifications area, enabling a continental ecosystem that works for people's lifelong learning, employability and fair mobility. At this stage of the reflection, two main paths for future systematic linkages between the three pillars have been considered: (i) systematic information-sharing between the ACQF and quality assurance bodies and recognition bodies; for example: peer-sharing, common events and activities, common information space on ACQF website; and (ii) Memorandum of cooperation between the ACQF and national and regional quality assurance organs and recognition organs – to support mutual understanding, mutual trust and inclusion of NQF/ACQF-related information in quality assurance and recognition practices.

- Covid-19-related impacts and responses, post-Covid-19 recovery: in the context of the AU, regions and countries, related to education and training, skills development for employment, governance and management of qualifications and qualifications frameworks. Gender equality, AU digitalisation agenda, social inclusion, green growth.

- Future of work and skills anticipated for Africa: in the context of Agenda 2063 and its flagship initiatives and policies, the ACQF policy and technical document should consider prospective information on top skills demanded at a five to ten years horizon. Such future-oriented information is highly relevant for a number of core components of the future ACQF, in particular, the design of level descriptors, the governance model(s), the links of the ACQF with the labour market and the ACQF action plan. As an initial and indicative reference, it is suggested to also use prospective analyses, foresights and reports on the theme Future of work and skills elaborated by different international organisations, notably the World Economic Forum and OECD (refer to 'Sources'), and newest publications on Africa development futures and prospects (AfCFTA Secretariat 2020; AUC-OECD Development 2021; Brookings Africa Growth Initiative 2021)

## 5.6 Three scenarios of the ACQF: synthesis

The three main scenarios of the ACQF are structured in accordance with the nine common features described in sub-chapter 5.5.

**Common features of the three scenarios**

1. Main objectives and functions;
2. Instruments: website, NQF inventory, guidelines, methods, databases, e-learning platform;
3. Architecture: scope, levels, descriptors;

4. Governance;
5. Resources;
6. Advocacy, political support;
7. Existing enablers: policies, conventions, tools, networks;
8. Interplay with other frameworks, conventions; and
9. Benefits, contribution, acceptability.

The three main scenarios of the ACQF are structured in accordance with the nine common features described in sub-chapter 5.5.

## Scenario 1: 'ACQF connects'

### Timeframe: 2023

The current ACQF project funds and supports the establishment of elements of this scenario at horizon 2022.

**Table 5**: Scenario 1 for the ACQF – synthetic description of the main features

| Features | Scenario description |
|---|---|
| 1.Main objectives and functions of the ACQF | • Transparency on NQFs/NQS/RQFs: accessible online information<br>• Platform for dialogue, peer learning, capacity development, benchmarking, good practice<br>• Monitoring NQFs/RQFs in Africa<br>• Contributes to achieving strategic objectives of CESA 16–25 (especially 4c and 4d) by supporting capacities and circulation of knowledge and experiences on NQFs. |
| 2.Instruments, guidelines, policies and networks | • ACQF policy and technical document<br>• 10 ACQF Guidelines: Learning Outcomes, Level descriptors, Referencing / alignment criteria and procedures, Validation of Learning (Credit systems, RPL, recognition), Quality Assurance, Registers of NQF / qualifications, Monitoring and review of NQFs, Innovation and Technology in NQFs, Communication, NQF / NQS – systemic view.<br>• Website – with database, inventory NQFs and regular updates<br>• Recognition of prior learning (RPL) models: knowledge-sharing, capacity development.<br>• E-learning platform<br>• Capacity-development activities<br>• Network of NQF/RQF institutions (authorities, agencies, commissions)<br>• Network of ACQF focal points – national, regional<br>• Network of ACQF coaches/experts<br>• Network with national recognition bodies |
| 3. Architecture of the ACQF: Levels and descriptors | • ACQF architecture: levels (10, 8 …levels…) and descriptors<br>• Descriptors: as reference for reforms – considering new skills – for example , green, digital, social skills and orientations related to beyond Covid-19 recovery<br>• As guidance for NQFs in development/review |
| 4.Governance of the ACQF | • Network of NQF bodies (agencies, commissions, coordination units) – main interlocutors for ACQF. Network supports implementation – Memorandum of cooperation with AUC.<br>• ACQF AG: strategic steering and oversight. Support participation of social partners, students, youth.<br>• AUC: political lead; supports coordination.<br>• RECs: focal points; links with education commissions/principals<br>• Network with recognition institutions/bodies<br>• Labour market players: involved in ACQF AG |

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| | • Note: establishment of Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency (PAQAA) unlikely by 2023 |
| 5.Resources of the ACQF: financial, HR, capacities | • AUC funding<br>• Until end 2022 the current ACQF project funds and supports several activities related to features of Scenario 1<br>• After 2022: AUC funds ACQF website – hosting, maintenance, updates<br>• Partners (African and international organisations): technical assistance to support capacity-development activities, analysis, monitoring NQFs |
| 6.Advocacy, political support | • Champions: at national and regional levels, CESA clusters, continental associations and unions<br>• Specialised Technical Committee on Education, Science and Technology (STC-EST) |
| 7.Existing enablers: policies, tools, networks, data | • Existing NQFs and RQFs in Africa are ready to share experience with other countries/NQFs<br>• 2020: Identified 22 cases of Qualifications Frameworks (national and sectoral) with legal basis approved and in implementation, and some already reviewed<br>• 2020: Identified 8 cases of NQFs in advanced process of development and consultation, and some with the legal base in the official approval process<br>• 2020: Identified 8 cases of NQFs at early development stage. They can be supported by the ACQF process<br>• Data and analysis: ACQF Mapping Study collection (13 country reports, 3 RECs, comprehensive report, inventory NQFs)<br>• Analysis of level descriptors<br>• Analysis of qualifications (manual and AI-based)<br>• ACQF peer-learning webpage<br>• Continental umbrella of quality assurance – PAQAF (ASG-QA, AQRM, African Credit System); Tuning Africa<br>• Addis Recognition Convention<br>• AfCFTA started operations |
| 8.Interplay with other qualifications frameworks, projects and conventions | • Addis Convention – systematic collaboration, piloting of joint activities related with recognition, quality assurance and NQFs<br>• Harmonisation of African Higher Education Quality Assurance and Accreditation (HAQAA) |
| 9. Benefits, contribution, acceptability | • 'Low-hanging fruit': accessible, feasible, and affordable. Builds on outputs of ACQF project<br>• Not 'invasive' but focused on synergy and mutual learning. Therefore: visibility, acceptability by countries and RECs<br>• Prepares wider development of NQFs across the continent |

## Scenario 2: 'ACQF creates mutual trust'

### Timeframe: 2025

**Table 6**: Scenario 2 for the ACQF – synthetic description of the main features

| Features | Scenario description |
|---|---|
| 1.Main objectives and functions of the ACQF | • Referencing meta-qualifications framework – working with NQFs and RQFs<br>• Translation device for comparison/referencing<br>• Quality and comparability of qualifications of NQFs /NQS referenced to ACQF<br>• ACQF levels applied on qualifications of NQFs/NQS referenced to ACQF<br>• ACQF common guidelines disseminated and domesticated<br>• ACQF levels, descriptors can be used as reference by qualification frameworks at national and regional level |

| | |
|---|---|
| | • Common African education and qualifications area<br>Analysis: trends in skills and qualifications |
| 2.Instruments, guidelines, policies and networks | • ACQF policy and technical document (upgraded)<br>• ACQF Handbook: including referencing criteria and procedures, ACQF guidelines, tools, including<br>• ACQF Digital Referencing – to ease referencing NQFs/RQFs to ACQF, with evidence and milestones<br>• Database of all referencing processes and reports – updated<br>• Database of qualifications of NQFs referenced to ACQF<br>• Tool for comparison of referenced NQFs<br>• Recognition of prior learning: common policy, tools |
| 3. Architecture of the ACQF: Levels and descriptors | • Cornerstone for referencing ACQF, NQF/RQF<br>• Descriptors: take account of the panorama of qualifications frameworks in Africa;<br>• Guideline on level descriptors: advance common goals related with Agenda 2063; inclusion of Knowledge-Skills-Competences related the societal, digital and green transitions. |
| 4.Governance of the ACQF | • Implementation body – options: a) Network of NQF Agencies; b) PAQAA – if inclusive of all levels and types learning[12]<br>• ACQF AG<br>• AUC<br>• RECs: focal points; links with education commissions/principals<br>• Network of NQF bodies (authorities, agencies, commissions)<br>• Network with recognition institutions/bodies<br>• Labour market players<br>• AfCFTA |
| 5.Resources of the ACQF: financial, HR, capacities | • AUC funding – for key ACQF operations, in particular: staff, website, communications, key meetings with ACQF AG<br>• Resources of AAA<br>• Partners, donors (African)<br>• International cooperation (EU, others)<br>• AfCFTA contribution[13] |
| 6.Advocacy, political support | • Champions: at national, regional levels and others (labour market players, students, teachers and youth sectors)<br>• STC-EST |
| 7.Existing enablers: policies, tools, networks, data | • New NQFs approved and entered into force – based on the data of the Mapping Study<br>• PAQAF (ASG-QA, AQRM, African Credit System);<br>• Cooperation with African Qualifications Verification Network (AQVN)<br>• Tuning Africa<br>• Addis Recognition Convention<br><br>Expected in a medium-term horizon:<br>• AAA<br>• New-generation CESA and clusters<br>• Reformed AUC – resources<br>• AfCFTA in operation across a large number of countries |

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[12] A feasibility analysis is underway supporting development of the African Accreditation Agency (AAA). To be explored: options for inclusion of a qualifications (ACQF) component in its remit and functions.

[13] Format and sources to be explored – for example, small fee to support AfCFTA-related skills training and capacity development, including ACQF activities.

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| 8.Interplay with other qualifications frameworks, projects and conventions | • Cooperation/referencing with other meta-frameworks: European Qualifications Framework (EQF), Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) Qualifications Reference Framework, Transnational Qualifications Framework (TQF), amongst others<br>• Regular participation in international networks and platforms |
| 9. Benefits, contribution, acceptability | • Contribution: more NQFs developed and established across the continent<br>• Referencing to ACQF is feasible – given the current state of play of NQFs. As per 2020: approx. 22 NQFs approved, started or advanced implementation<br>• Structured and deeper cooperation and convergence of NQFs/RQFs – with ACQF<br>• African education and qualifications area for the African people<br>• Benefits for learners: easier recognition of qualifications, fair mobility, better employability prospects across the continent<br>• International visibility and recognition of ACQF |

## Scenario 3: 'ACQF opens new horizons'

### Timeframe to start: approx. 2027

**Table 7**: Scenario 3 for the ACQF – synthetic description of the main features

| Features | Scenario description |
|---|---|
| 1.Main objectives and functions of the ACQF | • Qualifications framework with continental qualifications (standards, profiles, units) with ACQF levels<br>• ACQF contributes to the AfCFTA<br>• Supports automatic mutual recognition of qualifications<br>• Issuance of digital certificates<br>• Common African education and qualifications space<br>• Analysis: trends in skills and qualifications |
| 2.Instruments, guidelines, policies and networks | • ACQF policy and technical document (upgraded)<br>• Continental qualifications (common minimum standards, profiles, units, trusted assessment), especially for new fields, new tasks/jobs, and new skills[14]<br>• Continental agreement on automatic mutual recognition (linked with transparency factors such as: existence of operational NQF, quality assurance, referencing to ACQF)<br>• Digital certificates infrastructure: for issuers and users<br>• Data analytics |
| 3. Architecture of the ACQF: Levels and descriptors | • As reference for development of continental qualifications (standards, profiles) |
| 4.Governance of the ACQF | • ACQF AG<br>• Implementation body: Network of NQF Agencies, PAQAA or similar with extended functions and capacities<br>• RECs: focal points; links with education commissions/principals<br>• Network with recognition institutions/bodies<br>• Labour market players<br>• AfCFTA |
| 5.Resources of the ACQF: financial, HR, capacities | • Blended funding: AUC, national, African, international<br>• Private sector |

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[14] Continental qualifications – ACQF develops and registers them, but award is carried out by the awarding bodies and institutions at country level, according to applicable regulations.

| | • AfCFTA contribution |
|---|---|
| 6.Advocacy, political support | • Champions: at national, regional and other levels (labour market players, students, teachers and youth sectors)<br>• STC-EST<br>• AfCFTA support and partnership on skills and qualifications |
| 7.Existing enablers: policies, tools, networks, data | • PAQAF, AAA<br>• Addis Recognition Convention<br><br>Expected<br>• AAA<br>• New-generation CESA and clusters?<br>• Reformed AUC – resources?<br>• AfCFTA in full operation |
| 8.Interplay with other qualifications frameworks, projects and conventions | • Regular and influential contributor/member of global initiatives and networks related to qualifications/learning<br>• ACQF qualifications recognised by other meta-frameworks (EQF, ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework, and others) |
| 9. Benefits, contribution, acceptability | • Based on features of Scenario 3, ACQF reaches a new horizon: a range of common continental qualifications / profiles and automatic mutual recognition<br>• AfCFTA benefits of comparable and easily recognised qualifications for the priority sectors of trade in services<br>• International visibility and recognition of ACQF and the ACQF qualifications |

## 5.7  SWOT analysis of the scenarios

This SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats/challenges) analysis is presented at a critical junction of the assessment of the identified scenarios.

The identification and assessment of strengths and weaknesses and their interplay with opportunities and challenges of each of the scenarios is based on the current knowledge of internal and external factors likely to influence the ACQF development and implementation roadmap in the given context.

The SWOT analysis is a decision-making support tool, and in the context of this report, it contributes to the definition of the action plan for further development and implementation of the ACQF. Indications from this SWOT analysis concerning threats and challenges are considered in conjunction with mitigating factors and measures proposed in the action plan.

This report highlights old and new challenges faced by the African continent as a whole, and by the countries in their diversity. The way forward towards a brighter future is influenced by the path, but is not entirely path-dependent. Innovation, new thinking and the lessons shaped through an unprecedented crisis triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic must play a role.

The African continent is interested in having its own meta-qualifications framework because it sees it as a policy instrument for improving transparency and portability of qualifications, and facilitating mobility of learners and workers. These objectives are essential for African integration, free trade and free movement of persons. The ACQF is expected to contribute by supporting referencing and comparison of qualifications and qualifications frameworks/systems of the AU member countries. Ultimately, the ACQF will contribute to improving the approximation and interplay between labour market players and education and training institutions.

The achievement of these objectives will be the result of the interplay of all named policies, of the cooperation between the diverse layers of continental governance (national, regional and continental), of effective technical implementation, meaningful involvement of stakeholders, dissemination of results and good practice to promote buy-in, and finally, networking and capacity spreading.

For a dynamic view on the possibilities to manage risks and challenges, we have selected four of the identified challenges and matched them with realistic mitigation strategies:

1. **Education and training systems and the qualifications they award are diverse**

Differences of a conceptual, structural and cultural nature are a major characteristic to be taken into account. This diversity is not a deterrent for cooperation and referencing in the context of a meta-qualifications framework such as the ACQF. Diversity of education and training systems can be turned from challenge into opportunity, viewed from the perspective of richness of cross-fertilisation between countries and experiences. Dialogue, comparison and eventually referencing between systems and frameworks are effective ways to generate transparency and mutual trust – eventually one of key outcomes of the ACQF.

- The ACQF action plan includes measures to support dialogue between qualifications frameworks, making information-sharing easily accessible and eventually comparison/referencing between NQFs/NQSs and the ACQF.
- Comparison and referencing between qualifications frameworks/systems with different structures (levels and descriptors) works on the basis of tested methods and processes, which aim at clarifying the differences and highlighting compatibility. The outcome of referencing is a renewed picture of linkages between levels of qualifications

2. **Countries are at different stages of development and implementation of their qualifications frameworks and there is large number of countries having no operational qualifications framework**

The ACQF aims to support countries and regions to develop capacities and promote policy and stakeholders' dynamics, enabling the operationalisation of qualifications frameworks and their implementation tools. The toolkit of supporting modalities and instruments is diverse, spanning from training programmes and experience-sharing to coaching and direct technical advice to national teams working on NQFs.

- The ACQF action plan consists of activities focused on capacity development and support to countries in shaping, consolidating and implementing their NQFs and systems.
- The ACQF website will be a source of information, experiences and tools relevant for any country interested in developing an NQF.

3. **Capacities within many countries to implement the ACQF are scarce/limited**

Country's capacity to purposefully and effectively contribute and benefit from the ACQF implementation process depends on a mix of factors, including government support, stakeholders' buy-in and resources deployed by the relevant national partners/institutions.

The ACQF action plan includes a mix of measures tackling different angles, and priority will be given to:

- supporting a network of African NQF agencies (authorities, commissions and units) to advance and strengthen the common agenda of transparency, comparability, mutual trust and recognition-portability of qualifications;
- supporting national and regional focal points of the ACQF;
- disseminating the ACQF guidelines and training ACQF focal points on their use;

- implementation of digital tools to ease comparison and referencing processes; and
- capacity development activities: sharing concrete experience and solutions with peers; coaching.

**4. There are no bodies that can act as champions for ACQF implementation in all countries**

The role of champions for a common agenda is relevant if informed and sensitive to regional and country specifics and interests, and represented by acknowledged organisations and personalities.

Among the possible platforms able to act as champions of the ACQF:

- The ACQF works with its Advisory Group, representing 39 institutions and organisations of national and regional relevance. The members of the Advisory Group can be invited to speak for the ACQF, disseminate information, generate interest and trust among the respective constituencies.
- The network of African NQF agencies (authorities, commissions) proposed in ACQF work plan can play a complementary role to Advisory Group, notably by making use of the specific technical competence and experience of its member organisations.

**Table 8:** SWOT analysis of the three scenarios for the ACQF

| | Scenario 1: 'ACQF connects' Timeframe: 2023 | Scenario 2: 'ACQF creates mutual trust' Timeframe: 2025 | Scenario 3: 'ACQF opens new horizons' Timeframe: 2027 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Strengths | • AU policies and strategies supporting ACQF: CESA 16–25, TVET, AfCFTA, AU Free Movement Protocol<br>• ACQF key elements and tools available by end 2022: ACQF policy and technical document, ACQF guidelines, ACQF website with e-learning platform and inventory of NQFs/RQFs; network of trained national and REC experts<br>• Inclusive scope of ACQF: all subsectors and levels of qualifications<br>• Existence of the ACQF Advisory Group<br>• AUC ESTI Education Division – dedicate staff<br>• Addis Recognition Convention<br>• Operationalisation of the AfCFTA<br>• Team of experts working on the ACQF | • ACQF linkage with CESA (successor – new phase)<br>• ACQF policy and technical document approved<br>• ACQF guidelines disseminated<br>• ACQF website updated/upgraded and used<br>• ACQF digital referencing approach and instruments<br>• Accessible updated inventory of NQFs and RQFs<br>• Level descriptors of the ACQF disseminated | • Several NQF/RQFs have referenced to ACQF<br>• Continental qualifications standards are used and facilitate recognition<br>• More efficient recognition (skills and qualifications)<br>• ACQF linkage with CESA and TVET strategy (revised)<br>• AUC policy process: planning, assessment, consultation, Specialised Technical Committee-Education Science Technology (STC-EST) |
| Weaknesses or limitations | • Relatively limited direct and immediate impact on recognition and mobility<br>• Low capacity of AUC to fully support/fund ACQF operations<br>• Qualifications framework initiatives in Africa are usually supported by external | • Africa has different education systems, quality assurance systems and education backgrounds – this diversity is a fact and the ACQF and other AU initiatives contribute to mutual understanding and some convergence/harmonisation | • No clear and sustainable funding source identified<br>• Low funding for NQFs within countries<br>• Low funding and functionality of RQFs<br>• Issues with availability of capacity (technical, human, |

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| | cooperation partners and their sustainability is not ascertained<br>• Insufficient advocacy – limited buy-in (countries, RECs)<br>• Significant issues with availability of capacity (technical, human, institutional) relevant for the domains of ACQF/qualifications framework | • Framework for RPL and lifelong learning are poorly developed and understood<br>• Continental policy/framework for quality assurance of all learning types/levels remains uncertain<br>• Issues with availability of capacity (technical, human, institutional) relevant for the domains of ACQF/qualifications framework | institutional) especially in new policy and thematic areas and technologies pertinent for ACQF |
| Opportun-ities | • Diversity of systems – richness, cross-fertilisation, mutual learning<br>• Buy-in through communication, champions and AUC advocacy and policy dialogue<br>• Regional communities – critical mass<br>• NQFs and RQFs in Africa<br>• PAQAF<br>• Emergence of national and regional expertise – for sustainability and good quality policymaking and implementation | • ACQF building on good practice and experiences of existing RQF<br>• Several NQFs that countries can learn from<br>• Existence of NQFs with capable governance bodies as important interlocutors of ACQF<br>• Champions: heads of states and government meetings<br>• RECs with active engagement in ACQF process<br>• Engage all countries in NQF development and implementation (wide continental partnership)<br>• Option to engage early with AfCFTA to explore gaps and demand for skills and qualifications contributing to common profiles<br>• Post Covid-19 recovery programmes and investment, including in (new) skills and lifelong learning. | • ACQF linkage to AfCFTA<br>• AU policies for continental integration |
| Threats/ challenges | • Lack of effective leadership – can affect advancement of implementation to next stage<br>• Effective involvement of labour market players will require specific approach<br>• Covid-19 waves – adversely affects schooling, learning outcomes, socialisation and equity<br>• Instability and insecurity in parts of the continent<br>• Language – Africa has numerous languages, which makes | • Future work/skills Africa: do we know enough?<br>• Enforcement of AU Free Movement Protocol remains uncertain<br>• Restrictions to free movement of AU citizens<br>• Operationalisation of AfCFTA in larger number of countries will require buy-in and leadership at country and continental levels<br>• Failure to contextualise and integrate the implementation of the ACQF in member countries' own policies | • Enforcement of AU Free Movement Protocol remains uncertain<br>• Full operationalisation of AfCFTA with a tangible skills/qualifications dimension<br>• Failure to anticipate/forecast trends and the future of work and skills<br>• Low political support and buy-in (national, regional, continental)<br>• Issues with continuity and follow-up of policy priorities |

| | connection and communication a challenge<br>• Protectionism and restrictions to free movements of people<br><br>Note: As a direct consequence of Covid-19 crisis, at the end 2020 African economies face economic recession, higher poverty, losses of education outcomes | Note: Recovery after Covid-19 might take time. Countries and AU resources will be stretched to face major competing priorities. | related to qualifications frameworks/ACQF – at national and continental levels |
|---|---|---|---|

Given that the ACQF is a new policy instrument, its development and future implementation must take account of these challenges. Key areas, such as consistent political support, human and technical capacities to support the ACQF and NQFs, adequate funding, and communication and awareness about the ACQF and its operational modalities and potential benefits should be embedded within the development and further planning for implementation.

Skills needed to support the ACQF

As a new concept for all countries on the African continent, the ACQF will require a rigorous training and capacity development programme to equip various stakeholders with the skills to comprehend and implement the ACQF – at national, regional and continental levels. The team of experts developing the ACQF will deliver a comprehensive training and capacity-building plan, contributing to the future sustainability of the ACQF.

## 5.8 Some initial conclusions on feasibility and effectiveness of the three scenarios

**Table 9**: Synthesis on feasibility and effectiveness of the three scenarios

| | Scenario 1: 'ACQF connects' Timeframe: 2023 | Scenario 2: 'ACQF creates mutual trust' Timeframe: 2025 | Scenario 3: 'ACQF opens new horizons' Timeframe: 2027 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Overview on feasibility | Feasible, with additional support post-2022 to support dissemination, buy-in, implementation, maintenance and further development of tools, networks and capacity-development actions | Feasible but requires more support for substantive, consistent and well-resourced support to NQF development<br><br>AUC: Assumes the leading role in steering the relations with countries and RECs<br>Continental-level governance of ACQF: Essential success factor | Future-oriented ACQF: new skills and new types of qualifications for new sectors. Requires more advanced tools and capacities to identify and analyse new skills needs and new jobs, and skills and qualifications essential for African growth and integration |
| Overview on effectiveness:<br><br>Relative contribution to achieve | This scenario contributes mostly to achieve the following objectives of the ACQF:<br>Objective 1: Transparency and comparability of qualifications/qualification | This scenario contributes substantially to:<br>Objective 1: transparency and especially comparability of qualifications and qualification frameworks and lifelong learning | This scenario contributes to meet the whole range of objectives in a comprehensive and innovative approach: |

| ACQF objectives | frameworks, but the contribution to comparability is relatively limited<br><u>Objective 3</u>: Work in complementarity with countries<br><u>Objective 4</u>: ACQF – for cooperation between NQFs / RQFs in Africa | <u>Objective 2</u>: recognition and mobility – supported by ACQF referencing<br><u>Objective 3</u>: Work in complementarity with countries, promote NQF development – supported by ACQF referencing process and tools<br><u>Objective 4</u>: visible contribution to ACQF operating as a referencing framework and to African education and qualifications area | <u>Objective 1</u>: higher contribution to transparency and comparability<br><u>Objective 2</u>: very significant contribution to advanced, seamless and trusted forms of recognition<br><u>Objective 3</u>: ACQF (continental) qualifications (standards) complement national; African education and qualifications area<br><u>Objective 4</u>: ACQF as referencing framework for global transparency – for African and other regions and continents |
|---|---|---|---|

## 5.9 ACQF: conceptual and technical design

The conceptual and technical design of the ACQF will consider and be inspired by the objectives and principles defined in the vision of the ACQF.

## 5.9.1 A mix of success factors

Effectiveness, relevance and sustainability of the ACQF will be determined by a combination of factors, including:

- fit-for-purpose architecture of key components, spanning from policy rationale to structural and conceptual design, technical tools, resources and governance;
- buy-in of users and stakeholders;
- monitoring and fine-tuning; and
- complementarity with quality assurance and recognition policies and institutions at national, regional and continental levels.

The ACQF conceptual and technical design will include and consider a number of key dimensions:

- **Purpose** – a continental meta-framework, working in synergy with relevant policies and aiming to enhance transparency, quality and comparability of qualifications and qualifications frameworks; contribute to facilitating recognition of qualifications and eventually the mobility of learners and workers; to work in cooperation and complementarity with national and regional qualifications frameworks; and to promote trust and referencing with qualifications frameworks in Africa and other regions of the world.
- **Scope** – comprehensive and inclusive of all sectors and levels of qualifications
- **Principles** - based on principles of readiness to innovation, openness to good practice and to stakeholders' needs
- **Levels and level descriptors** – structure of the ACQF as a meta-framework for comparison/referencing with NQFs and RQF.
- **Support and cooperation with countries** attuned to the stage of development of NQFs and RQFs on the continent.

## 5.9.2  Purpose of the ACQF as a meta-framework

As a meta-framework, the ACQF aims to contribute to a 'meta-transparency' of qualifications on the continent, and consequently to the aspired objective of fair mobility, and recognition of people´s qualifications and skills in a lifelong learning perspective. The key working modalities of the ACQF are approximation, working together, mutual trust, common concepts, referencing/alignment and systematic articulation with recognition and quality assurance policies and institutions.

The ACQF aims to support approximation and common understanding between countries´ qualifications frameworks. As a meta-framework for the African continent, the ACQF will work towards comparison, alignment/referencing and common reference milestones between NQFs (and RQFs) on the continent. The ACQF will support countries and RECs to meet the key criteria and requirements for working together in the context of the ACQF. As a meta-framework the ACQF will also act as a platform for mutual learning between African countries, and support developments at national (and REC) level, enabling the establishment and implementation of qualifications frameworks, which are fit for national objectives and open to cooperation with other NQFs.

As a meta-framework, the ACQF will support countries' NQFs, but not replace them, nor will it work to standardise NQFs and qualifications on the continent. As a meta-framework, the ACQF will contribute to change, but change happens effectively at national level, through the reform-driven action of (functioning) NQFs. In other parts of the world, referencing to RQFs has been associated with change processes (review or development) at NQF level, which can be explained by a win-win combination of top-down (RQF-NQF) and bottom-up (NQF-RQF) change processes. The interaction of the two frameworks (RQF and NQF) generates self-managed processes of national dialogue, renewed reflection, screening of the national panorama of qualifications, identification of gaps and inconsistencies, and determination of adequate action (for the short and medium term).

This definition of the purpose of the ACQF as a meta-framework influences the orientation and scope of its level descriptors.

A question for further debate and decision: how should the ACQF be structured – eight levels, ten levels, other options? Should both types of level structures be considered and compared when developing ACQF level descriptors?

## 5.9.3  Towards ACQF level descriptors

**Level descriptors of the ACQF: A balancing act?**

ACQF level descriptors will play a key role in alignment/referencing between NQFs and RQFs, in a process that comprises other complementary and fundamental components of transparency, namely: learning outcomes approach, recognition of learning from non-formal and informal contexts, placement of qualifications in NQF levels and registers, quality assurance of qualifications and NQFs, and stakeholders' participation and endorsement.

To promote participation and inclusion of all NQFs in ACQF dialogue and referencing/alignment, the formulations of ACQF level descriptors ought to be general in scope but explicit in defining learning domains. Level descriptors ought to be generic and equally applicable to academic, vocational and work-based qualifications.

As the transformation of learning and of skills on demand occurs, the ACQF must be able to support adaptation in accordance with its principle of innovation-readiness. To a certain extent, the ACQF must be future-proof. Can ACQF level descriptors include domains or subdomains supporting adaptation, innovation, transformation in terms of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes? Can certain dimensions of

the global transformation of learning and the society be translated in ACQF level descriptors, such as digitalisation, greening, inclusion, and also citizenship and cultural aspects?

Overly detailed and specific formulations might prevent many NQFs from finding compatibility of their level descriptors with the ACQF's and this could lead to exclusion rather than to inclusion of all countries in the ACQF process. The ACQF is about inclusion of all countries' qualifications frameworks.

## 5.9.4  Understanding level descriptors

**Level descriptors: The 'glue' in qualifications frameworks?**

In NQFs and RQFs, each of the levels is described by a set of *descriptors*, which indicate the learner acquisitions (not the years of study). *Level descriptors* are formulated on the basis of horizontal logic (through the domains of learning) and vertical logic (progression from lower to higher levels). Level descriptors of NQFs and RQFs translate the nature and scope of the qualifications framework.

In the document 'Level descriptors for the South African National Qualifications Framework' (SAQA 2012), the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) states that the purpose of level descriptors (levels one to ten) is to ensure coherence in learning achievement in the allocation of qualifications and part qualifications to particular levels, and to facilitate the assessment of the national and international comparability of qualifications and part qualifications.

SAQA (2012) defines *level descriptors* as follows:

> 'Level descriptor' means that statement describing learning achievement at a particular level of the NQF that provides a broad indication of the types of learning outcomes and assessment criteria that are appropriate to a qualification at that level' (SAQA 2012: 4)

In addition, SAQA (2012) notes:

- There is one common set of level descriptors for the NQF to be used in different contexts
- The NQF level descriptors are designed to meet the needs of academic as well as occupational qualifications
- Level descriptors are descriptive and not prescriptive
- Level descriptors do not describe years of study.

The ASEAN QRF notes that learning outcomes are:

> A general statement that summarises the learning outcomes appropriate to a specific level in a qualifications framework. They are usually grouped in domains of learning (2018: 31)

Level descriptors are formulated as learning outcomes, which are statements of what the learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to do at completion of a process and period of learning.

## 5.9.5  Uses and formulation of level descriptors

Level descriptors are fundamental elements of the technical-conceptual design of qualifications frameworks.

Level descriptors are designed to act as a guide and a starting point for, inter alia:

- pegging a qualification at an appropriate level on the NQF, used together with purpose statements, outcomes and assessment criteria;
- writing learning outcomes and associated assessment criteria for qualifications and part qualifications;

- validation of acquired skills, knowledge and competence against a particular level for an award; and
- assisting learners to gain admission through RPL at an appropriate level on the NQF (SAQA 2012: 4–5).

Bahrain published a guidance note, 'Using the NQF Level Descriptors', clarifying how the role of level descriptors can be optimised in the real work of qualifications developers and assessors, noting their possibilities and limitations. A few suggestions from Bahrain's guidance note:

NQF level descriptors are used along with other sources of information to place qualifications on the NQF. Other sources, which will become more widely available as qualifications, are placed on the NQF, include subject benchmarks, qualifications at the same level, and comparable qualifications on other frameworks.

NQF level descriptors are not qualification specifications. On the contrary, while level descriptors confirm learning outcomes for a series of predefined characteristics, qualification specifications (descriptors) set out:

o What the learner is expected to do on successful completion of the qualification on the qualification structure i.e. level and number of units

o The minimum number and level of credits required at each level.

The NQF level descriptors are generic and equally applicable to academic, vocational and work-based qualifications. There will be qualifications with units that comprise learning outcomes at different levels, and it may also be that one or more of the sub-strands does not appear in particular units. A best-fit approach is used to determine the level of the units of a qualification on the NQF.

Professional judgement can be assisted by reading and becoming familiar with the level descriptors in order to make an informed determination as to where a qualification sits and to provide supporting rationales that can be understood by others who may not be expert in the subject/discipline area.

Although level descriptors can act as a useful guide when designing qualifications, it is not recommended that the design of a qualification be based solely on these descriptors. It is important that qualifications are designed to meet the needs of learners and other stakeholders such as employers, universities and training institutions.

To help with interpretation of the level descriptors, the Bahrain Qualifications Authority developed a glossary of words and terms in which the meaning is provided specifically in relation to the NQF. To become familiar with the progressive nature of the language being used, it can be useful to consider and compare key words used within the level descriptors.

The Bahrain Qualifications Authority provides guidance on the formulation of progression between levels. An example:

At Level 4, learners would not cover all the theories of the subject/discipline, only some of them, with a decision on the eventual number being covered left to those designing the qualification. At Level 5, learners would cover more of the main theories. Theories are not directly referenced in Level 6, being already covered in Levels 4 and 5, but this does not prevent the continuance of activity relating to core theories at Level 6. At Level 7, learners would study more in-depth theories that are central to the subject/discipline.

## 5.9.6  Level descriptors: An overview from African qualifications frameworks

This section provides a synthetic mapping on level descriptors of 22 NQFs and two RQFs in Africa, based on the ACQF mapping study collection, and original country and regional sources (refer to Sources).

<u>Domains of level descriptors</u>

Many qualifications frameworks specify the meaning of their domains of learning:

- South African National Qualifications Framework (SANQF)
- France NQF
- Lesotho NQF
- EQF
- ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF).

**<u>Table 10</u>: Definitions of domains of level descriptors – examples**

**NQFs**

|  | Domain |
|---|---|
| SANQF | The philosophical underpinning of the NQF and the level descriptors is 'applied competence', which is in line with the outcomes-based theoretical framework. Ten categories are used in the level descriptors to define 'applied competencies' across the ten levels of the NQF: <br><br> 1) Scope of knowledge; 2) Knowledge literacy; 3) Method and procedure; 4) Problem solving; 5) Ethics and professional practice; 6) Accessing, processing and managing information; 7) Producing and communicating of information; 8) Context and systems; 9) Management of learning; and 10) Accountability. <br><br> 'Applied competence' has three constituent elements: a) foundational competence (intellectual/academic skills of knowledge together with analysis, synthesis and evaluation; b) practical competence (operational context); c) reflexive competence (learner autonomy). |

| | Knowledge | Expertise | Responsibility and autonomy |
|---|---|---|---|
| France NQF | The descriptor refers to the progression of knowledge to carry out the professional activities of the level (processes, materials, terminology relating to one or more fields as well as theoretical knowledge) | The descriptor is about progression on: <br> - The complexity and technicality of a task, an activity in a process <br> - The level of mastery of professional activity <br> - Mobilising a range of cognitive and practical skills <br> - Expertise in the field of communication and interpersonal relations, in the professional context <br> - The ability to pass on know-how | The descriptor relates to progress in the following areas: <br> - The organisation of work <br> - Reaction to contingency <br> - Understanding the complexity of the environment <br> - Understanding interactions in activities in other professional fields, allowing you to organise your own work, correct it or give directions to supervised staff <br> - Participation in collective work <br> - The level of supervision |
| Lesotho NQF | Knowledge <br><br> Areas: Depth, breadth and complexity <br><br> LQF applied notions of depth that operate on a continuum from general to specialised; breadth (single topic to multidisciplinary areas of knowledge); kinds of knowledge (concrete –abstract and segmented to accumulative); and lastly, complexity (combinations of kinds of depth | Skills <br> Nature: covering competencies of graduates | Agency and context <br> Personal and professional attributes expected to be displayed by graduates |

| | and breadth of knowledge), as the criteria and lens of inquiry | | |
|---|---|---|---|

**RQFs**

| EQF | Knowledge Knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual. | Skills Skills are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments). | Responsibility and autonomy Responsibility and autonomy are described as the ability of the learner to apply knowledge and skills autonomously and with responsibility |
|---|---|---|---|

| AQRF | Knowledge and skills | Application and responsibility |
|---|---|---|

In the AQRF the level descriptors include the notion of competence as the ability to extend beyond the possession of knowledge and skills. It includes:

- cognitive competence: involving the use of theory and concepts, as well as informal tacit knowledge gained experientially;
- functional competence (skills or know-how); those things that a person should be able to do when they work in a given area;
- personal competence: involving knowing how to conduct oneself in a specific situation; and
- ethical competence: involving the possession of certain personal and professional values.

Overview of levels and level descriptors in a selection of African NQFs

The roots of the ACQF are the African NQFs – national and regional, with their diversity and multiple points of intersection. NQFs in Africa are at different stages of development and implementation. Table 1 (in Chapter 2) summarises the state-of-play of NQFs by stages, as identified by the ACQF mapping study and complementary sources (until end 2020).

**Figure 4: Overview: Distribution of qualifications frameworks by stages of development and implementation**
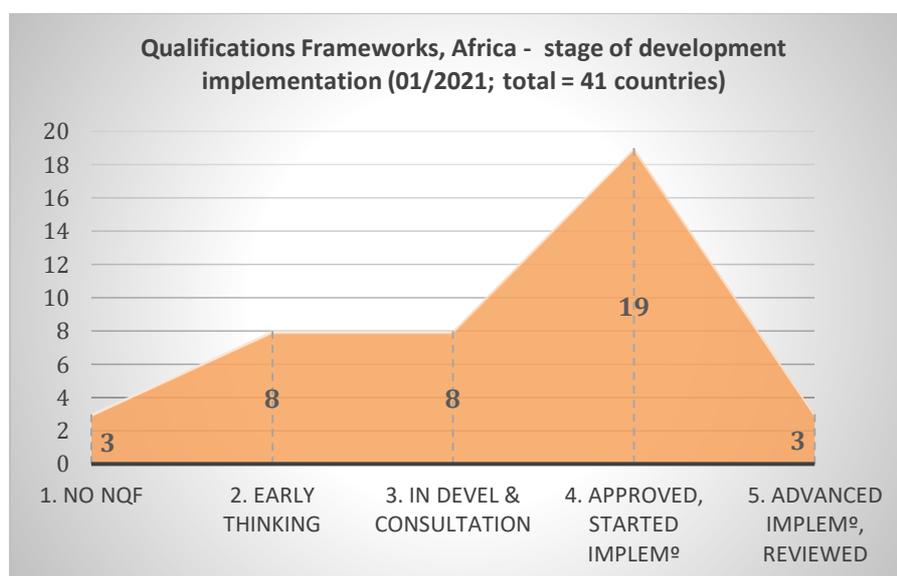


*Source: Dataset of ACQF Mapping Study (ACQF 2021b)*

A summarised comparison of levels and level descriptors in African NQFs and RQFs (Table 11) provides a general panorama on important commonalities, as well as differences, which matter for the development of ACQF levels and descriptors.

It is worth noting the predominance of NQFs of ten levels, and that of the domains Knowledge-skills-competence and Knowledge-skills-autonomy and responsibility.

**Table 11: Overview of levels and domains of level descriptors in a selection of 24 African qualifications frameworks (national comprehensive; sectoral – TVET and higher education; regional)**

**Key:** K (Knowledge); S (Skills); AR or RA (Autonomy, responsibility); C (Competence); A (Attitude)

| Country<br>Qualifications Framework lead body | Type of qualifications framework | Number of Levels of the qualification framework | Domains of level descriptors |
|---|---|---|---|
| Angola<br>UTG-PNFQ | National, comprehensive. In approval process | 10 | K-S-AR |
| Botswana<br>Botswana Qualifications Authority | Botswana National Credit and Qualifications Framework. Comprehensive. | 10 | K-S-C |
| Cape Verde<br>Unidade de Coordenação-Sistema Nacional de Qualificações (UC-SNQ) | National, comprehensive. In 2018 was reviewed legislation on the NQS and in 2020 on the NQF and National Catalogue of Qualifications. | 8 | K-S-Attitudes (Responsibility and Autonomy) |
| Egypt<br>National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation (NAQAAE) | National, comprehensive. In approval process | 8 | K and Understanding-S-C |
| eSwatini<br>Higher Education Council | National, comprehensive | 10 | K-S-Personal attitudes |
| Ethiopia | a) TVET QF<br>b) National, comprehensive NQF | 5<br><br>8 | a) Problem solving capability/information processing; level of accountability, responsibility and autonomy; level of knowledge and skills; level of tasks/operational environment<br>b) K-S-A |
| Ghana<br>COTVET-Council for TVET | National TVET Qualifications Framework | 8 | Knowledge; requirements (skills and attitudes) |
| Kenya<br>Kenya National Qualifications Authority (KNQA) | National, comprehensive | 10 | K-S-C |
| Lesotho<br>Lesotho Qualifications and Quality Council | National, comprehensive | 10 | Areas of knowledge (depth, breadth, complexity); nature of skills (covering competencies of graduates); agency and context |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Malawi | a) TVET QF - TQF (since 2004)<br>b) Higher education QF (draft)<br>c) Comprehensive NQF (in development) | 8<br>5<br>10 | Level descriptors HE QF and comprehensive NQF – in development |
| Mauritius<br><br>Mauritius Qualifications Authority (MQA) | National, comprehensive | 10 | Learning demand – processes |
| Morocco<br><br>NQF Instance - Ministry National Education Vocational Training Higher Educations and Scientific Research | National, comprehensive. In development process | 8 | Knowledge, skills, complexity, autonomy-responsibility, adaptability, communication |
| Mozambique<br><br>Conselho Nacional da Avaliação de Qualidade do Ensino Superior (CNAQ) - (Ensino Superior)<br><br>Autoridade Nacional da Educação Profissional (ANEP) - TVET | a) Comprehensive NQF (in consultation)<br>b) HE: QUANCES<br>c) TVET: QNQP | 10<br>3<br>5 | a) Integrated NQF: K-S-AR;<br>b) HE QF: K-S-C;<br>c) TVET QF: K-S-AR |
| Nigeria<br><br>National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) | TVET: National Skills Framework | 6 | Competence, skills, autonomy |
| Rwanda | a) Rwanda NQF - comprehensive<br><br>b) Rwanda Education Qualifications Framework (REQF) – in review, development | 8<br><br>10 | Knowledge and understanding; practice; applied knowledge and understanding; generic cognitive skills; communication , ICT and numeracy skills; autonomy, responsibility and working with others. |
| Seychelles<br><br>Seychelles Qualifications Authority (SQA) | National, comprehensive | 10 | Degree of complexity; reasoning & problem solving; knowledge; AR |
| South Africa<br><br>SAQA | National, comprehensive | 10 | Applied competencies: scope of knowledge; knowledge literacy; method and procedure; problem solving; ethics and professional practice; accessing, processing and managing information; producing and communicating information; context and systems; management of learning; accountability. |
| Tanzania<br><br>Tanzania Commission for Universities | Higher education | 5 (6 to 10) | Complexity, autonomy, responsibility, adaptability, knowledge, and behaviour. |
| Tunisia<br><br>Ministry of Vocational Training and Labour | National, comprehensive | 7 | Complexity, autonomy, responsibility, adaptability, knowledge, and behaviour. |

| Uganda BTVET | TVET: Uganda Vocational Qualifications Framework (UVQF) | 5 + 1 entry level | Domains not segregated, and include: knowledge, skills, autonomy, control |
|---|---|---|---|
| Zambia Zambia Qualifications Authority (ZQA) | National, comprehensive | 10 | Foundational competence; practical competence; Reflexive competence |
| Zimbabwe National Alignment Committee | National, comprehensive | 10 | Domains not segregated, and include: knowledge, skills, autonomy, control |
| SADCQF SADC Secretariat, TCCA | Regional, comprehensive | 10 | K-S-AR |
| East Africa Community EAQFHE | Regional, comprehensive – higher education part in implementation. | 8 | Development of knowledge and understanding; cognitive and intellectual skills; key transferable skills; practical skills |

Consultation of the original legal and policy texts defining the qualifications frameworks of the indicated African countries is useful to stimulate reflection on differences and similarities in addressing the role and place of level descriptors, and their linkage with the objectives and components of the qualifications frameworks (see Chapters 4 and 6 - Sources, Part I).

A number of issues need to be considered in further development and design of ACQF level descriptors. Firstly, the underlying theories in writing learning outcomes should be clearly identified, namely the result-oriented behaviouristic approach and the process-oriented constructivist one, and their assumptions regarding learner acquisitions. Their interplay in describing levels of learning outcomes is key as learning acquisitions increase and cumulate. The supposed tension between the two theories occurs in the case of an approach that opposes one to the other, instead of complementing one another, in engineering the hierarchy in levels' progression.

## 5.9.7  Comparison of level descriptors

The section is entirely based on the ACQF Mapping Study (ACQF 2021b) - chapters 2 and 3. This analysis of level descriptors is applied to a selection of NQFs, and also the SADCQA and EAQFHE. The methodology is premised on the application of three taxonomies (Revised Bloom, Structure of the Observed Learning Outcome [SOLO] and the Dreyfus Model of Skills Acquisition) to three commonly used domains (knowledge, including a cognitive dimension, skills and competence). In the initial application in 2017, as part of the SADC RQF study (Keevy et al., 2017), a grid was developed for each domain and a smooth line was fitted to each of the grids. In this way the SADC level descriptors were compared with both other regional descriptors (the EQF and AQRF) and a selection of national descriptors (from South Africa, Botswana and Lesotho).

On the following pages we present an initial analysis of a selection of national and regional level descriptors using the same methodology, but slightly adapted to allow for more consistency and also better comparison across the case studies. The cognitive dimension of the Revised Bloom Taxonomy was also excluded because its application proved more difficult and inconsistent. Further development of the methodology should consider greater automation of the data capturing, and perhaps also the inclusion of statistical methods to check for validity and reliability.

Figure 4, which presents an analysis of level descriptors from a selection of NQFs in Africa (Cape Verde, Egypt, Botswana, Mozambique, Senegal and Kenya), points towards some interesting observations.

**Knowledge domain (blue graphs)**

- Most NQFs focus strongly on factual knowledge in their first levels, but some introduce conceptual knowledge earlier, such as in Senegal.
- On the other extreme, the introduction of descriptors at the metacognitive level in the highest NQF levels is not consistent – for example, Kenya focuses exclusively on this area, while Cape Verde and Mozambique retain a distribution of knowledge dimension in their highest NQF levels.
- Across the levels, the charts demonstrate a gradual shift towards higher knowledge levels.

**Skills domain (brown graphs)**
- Similar to the knowledge domain, the level descriptors show significant variance across the SOLO levels.
- Senegal stands out, with many SOLO levels captured within each NQF level.

**Competence domain (green graphs)**
- Again, the analysis allows for a side-by-side view of the Dreyfus levels within the level descriptors of each NQF.
- Most NQFs show a very strong alignment between NQF level and the Dreyfus taxonomy, and again Senegal stands out as an exception.

This exercise points towards the potential wider application of the methodology. A more automated approach using algorithms could be explored and, once in place, this could enable more consistent analysis of descriptors during referencing processes. At the very least, the exercise should be done in a more reliable manner, using several experts.

Cape Verde's set of level descriptors looks straightforward to analyse, given that its structure aligns with the two generally admitted learning domains – knowledge and skills – while the third domain – responsibility and autonomy – has elements of competency. The analysis below draws on the application of different taxonomy templates to the level descriptors. Learning outcomes pertaining to the knowledge domain, including its cognitive dimension, through the lens of Bloom's Taxonomy, cover all the range of the taxonomy components. Knowledge acquisition hierarchy is transparent, starting from basic and factual knowledge to metacognitive knowledge in generic terms and aligns horizontally with levels of learning. The SOLO taxonomy, applied to the skills domain, emphasises skills demonstration, but importantly, brings out the cognitive layer that underpins every learning process. Both culminate in competence hierarchy, as autonomy and responsibility increase. Finally, the Dreyfus Model of Skills Acquisition, applied to Cape Verde's level descriptors, depicts most clearly their competence levels and focuses on skills demonstration and the expected degrees of responsibility and autonomy attached to progression in competence at each level of learning.

Ghana exhibits a typical set of TVET reference NQF level descriptors. Strangely, the knowledge domain makes no provisions for Level 1, while learning outcomes are expected as far as skills acquisitions are concerned. This is revealing of the assumption that basic skills of trade and craft in non-formal and informal sectors are deprived of knowledge, which may impede lifelong learning processes and opportunities. Skills and competence domains are combined, highlighting expected learning outcomes at each of the eight levels, with degrees of responsibility and autonomy attached to progression in competence at each level of learning. SOLO taxonomy and Dreyfus Model templates capture perfectly the competence progression at each level of learning from novice to expert and how the skills structure builds up and plays out. At the expert level, there seems to be a balance between the four knowledge components – the factual, the procedural, the conceptual and the metacognitive (cf. Ghana knowledge chart), which remains to be explained.

Senegal's NQF shows five level descriptors. The three generally admitted learning domains – knowledge, skills and competence – have not been treated distinctively. Learning outcomes at each level are competence-based, referring more to levels of qualification as a result of training. As the nomenclature

does not delineate learning domains, comparative analysis falls into assumptions that learning domains are embedded in each level descriptor. Nevertheless, these multi-layer and condensed level descriptors are easy to analyse through the SOLO taxonomy and Dreyfus Model lenses. The expected degrees of responsibility and autonomy attached to progression in competence at each level of learning come out clearly enough. However, Senegal's NVQF level descriptors may need refining.

**Figure 4**: Analysis of level descriptors from a selection of NQFs in Africa (Cape Verde, Egypt, Botswana, Mozambique, Senegal and Kenya)
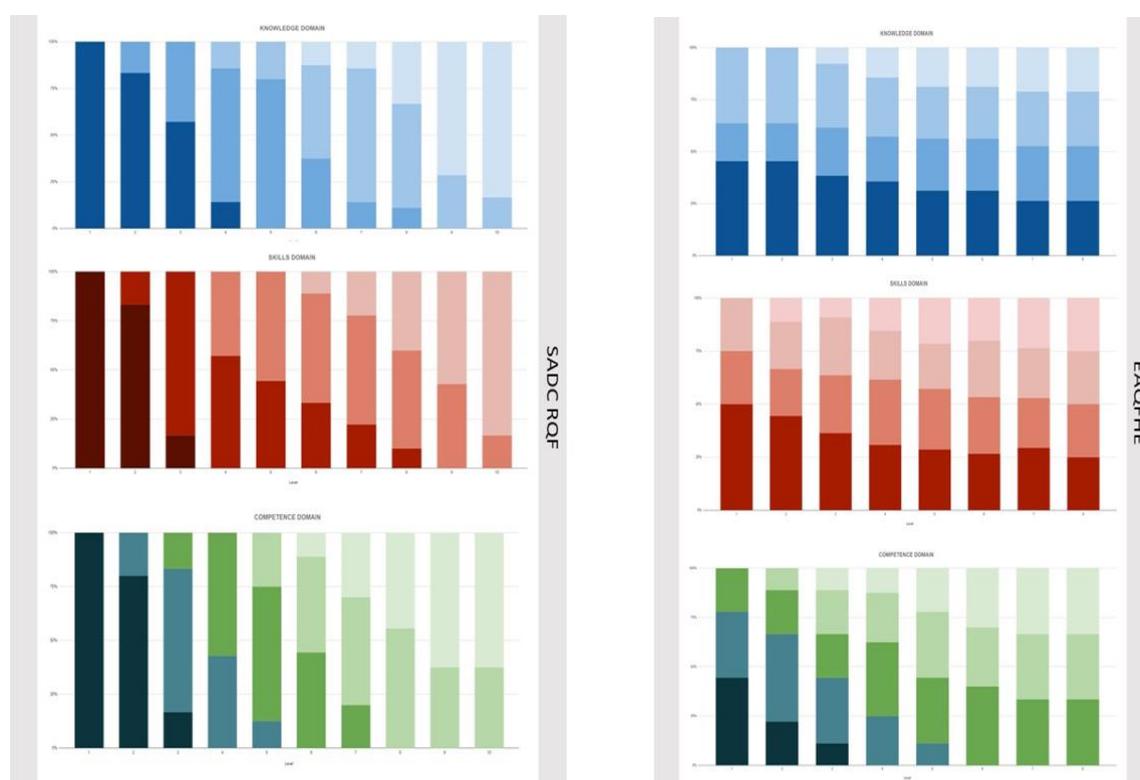


**Key:**
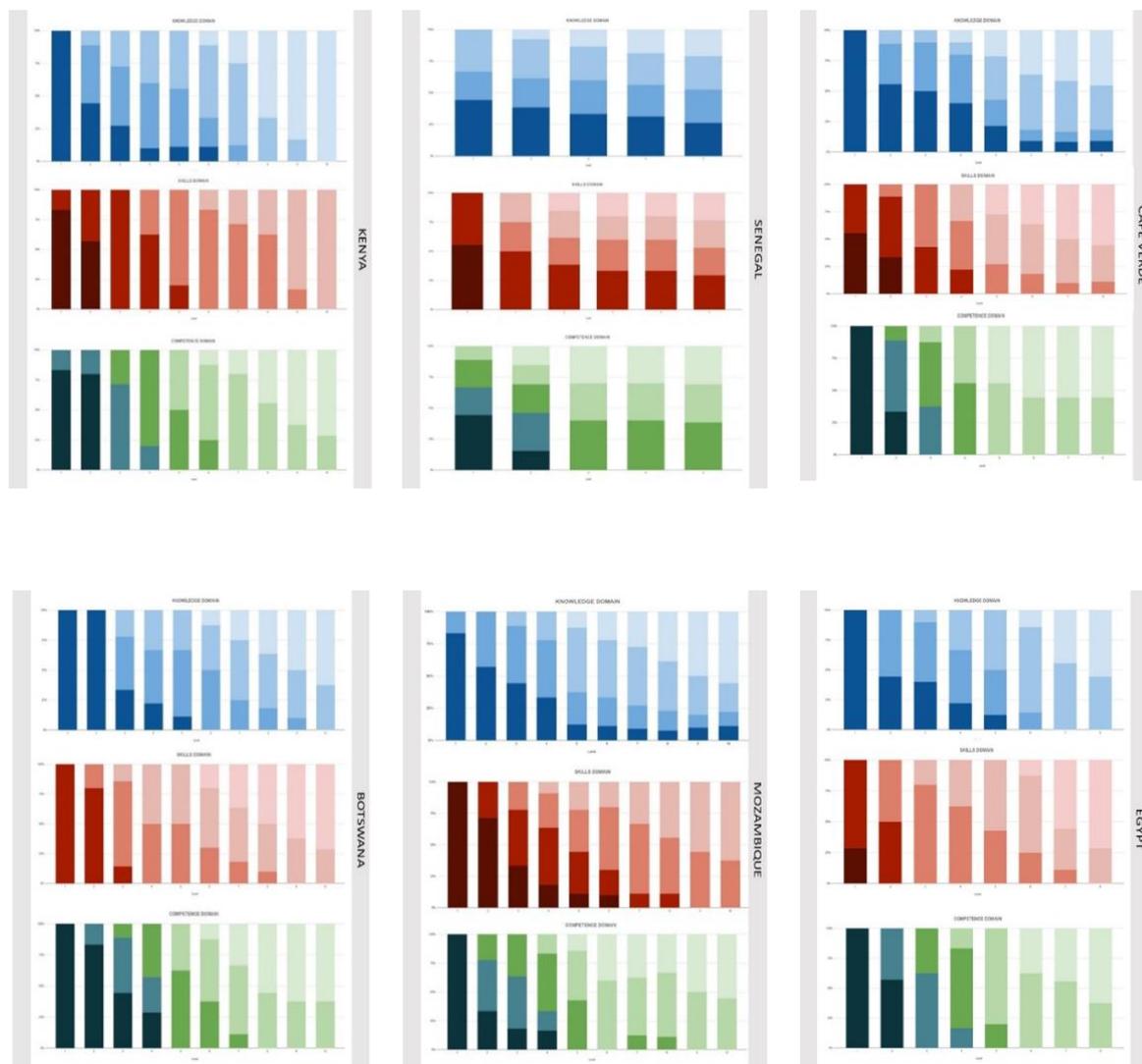
| Knowledge | Factual | Conceptual | Procedural | Metacognitive | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Skills | Prestructural | Unistructural | Multistructural | Relational | Extended abstract |
| Competence | Novice | Advanced beginner | Competent | Proficient | Expert |

The knowledge, skills and competency dimensions in the Botswana and Kenya level descriptors were best analysed through Bloom's Taxonomy, SOLO and the Dreyfus Model, respectively. The pre-structural level in the SOLO taxonomy could not be applied to any of the level descriptors because it did not seem appropriate to review even the lowest level (Level 1) as incompetent/fail.

In Cape Verde, Mozambique and SADC the knowledge and skills dimensions were best analysed using Bloom's Taxonomy and SOLO. The pre-structural level in the SOLO taxonomy could not be applied to any of the descriptors because it did not seem appropriate to review even the lowest level (Level 1) as incompetent/fail. The Dreyfus Model was used to analyse the dimension of responsibility and autonomy, as this was the model used to analyse the competency dimension and responsibility and autonomy were viewed as competences.

Level descriptors of Egypt were analysed using Bloom's taxonomy for the knowledge dimension, and SOLO for the cognitive and professional skills dimension. The pre-structural level in the SOLO taxonomy could not be applied to any of the level descriptors because it did not seem appropriate to review even the lowest level (Level 1) as incompetent/fail. The autonomy, responsibility and interaction competencies were best reviewed through the use of the Dreyfus Model.

**Figure 11**: Analysis of level descriptors from the SADCQF and EAQFHE



**Key:**

| Knowledge | Factual | Conceptual | Procedural | Metacognitive | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Skills | Prestructural | Unistructural | Multistructural | Relational | Extended abstract |
| Competence | Novice | Advanced beginner | Competent | Proficient | Expert |

The analysis in Figure 12, which follows the earlier example of the analysis of the level descriptors of NQFs, shows similar variances between the SADCQF and EAQFHE level descriptors across the knowledge, skills, and competency domains. It will also be possible to compare level descriptors from an NQF, with those of an RQF, something that could be useful during a referencing/alignment process. As pointed out earlier, the validity and reliability of such analysis could be improved using a more automated approach. Such an approach could be further developed in the ACQF process. While the value of digital tools to compare NQFs and level descriptors is undisputed, it is equally important that practitioners and stakeholders lead the processes of analysis and comparison; are able to interpret results of semi-automated processes of comparison to take decisions on the review and improvement of qualifications frameworks, and can shape

the implications of level descriptors for qualifications design and reforms. Capacity development, experience-sharing and analytical capacity of practitioners and stakeholders for practical use is a central element of current and future developments of qualifications frameworks on the continent.

The EAQFHE's set of level descriptors is characterised by a pressing demand on cognitive/analytical and practical skills as knowledge acquisitions increase. Its structure does not quite match the three generally admitted learning domains of knowledge, skills and competence, although they underpin the engineering of the four domains of learning outcomes that are fleshed out: Development of Knowledge and Understanding; Cognitive and Intellectual Skills; Key/Transferable Skills and Practical Skills. The analysis through the application of different taxonomy templates to the level descriptors reveals that learning outcomes pertaining to the knowledge domain, including its cognitive dimension, through the lens of Bloom's Taxonomy, cover all the range of the taxonomy components. Due to the nomenclature of Development of Knowledge and Understanding AND Cognitive and Intellectual Skills, the knowledge acquisition hierarchy does not come out clearly. Furthermore, the novelty consisting in connecting ethical issues to knowledge remains to be discussed. The SOLO taxonomy and the Dreyfus Model of Skills Acquisition templates applied respectively to the Key/Transferable Skills and Practical Skills domains reveal some limitations in the engineering of the level descriptors. The line between 'Intellectual Skills' and 'Transferable Skills' is blurred, as is that between 'Transferable Skills' and 'Practical Skills'. This splitting of the skills domain results in lengthy and repetitive expected outcomes of learning and eclipses competence hierarchy, as autonomy and responsibility increase at each next level of learning. The EAQFHE level descriptors reveal a comprehensive and reference RQF that may need reviewing for more concision.

While each level of the level descriptors from Botswana, Cape Verde, Egypt, Kenya, Mozambique and SADC could not all be associated to a specific level on different taxonomies used to analyse the level descriptors, an attempt was made to rate each level descriptor using a rating scale of 0 to 5, where 0 represented no alignment and 5 good alignment. This enabled researchers to judge how well aligned each level of the specific taxonomy (Bloom, SOLO or Dreyfus) was to each level descriptor.

**Observations**

This analysis of a sample of level descriptors from NQFs and RQFs in Africa is important for the future ACQF. While the methodology has not been applied widely internationally, there is a growing interest for a more scientific approach to the development of level descriptions and, as a result, also for the comparison of level descriptors across countries and regions. As mentioned, this more refined approach could enable improved comparison between qualifications frameworks and therefore also be used in the referencing/alignment process. An understanding of this process could also assist countries to develop their NQFs more in line with the meta-frameworks they intend to reference.

The first attempts to analyse level descriptors reveal a number of issues that need to be considered in further development of ACQF level descriptors design. Firstly, the underlying theories in writing learning outcomes should clearly be identified, namely the result-oriented behaviouristic approach and the process-oriented constructivist one and their assumptions regarding learner acquisitions. Their interplay in describing levels of learning outcomes is key as learning acquisitions increase and cumulate. The supposed tension between the two theories occurs in the case of an approach that opposes one to the other, instead of complementing one and another, in engineering the hierarchy in levels' progression.

Besides, the use of teaching and learning planning and assessment taxonomies like the Bloom's taxonomy for knowledge dimension, the SOLO taxonomy for Skills Analysis and the Dreyfus Model of Skills Acquisition regarding competence will need fine tuning in setting LDs learning outcomes, especially as far as lower-level descriptors are concerned. Some learning goals/objectives in these taxonomies' templates do not fit

Levels 1 and 2 learning outcomes in most African countries whereby lower certificates are granted by trades and crafts corporations of non-formal and informal settings.

## 5.10 ACQF: Governance and financing

This section proposes key principles and components for the governance set-up of the ACQF. This proposition is based on (i) the logic of the three ACQF scenarios and takes into account (ii) governance and implementation practices of other RQFs with recognised experience, notably the SADFQF, the AQRF and the EQF.

The proposition on governance of the ACQF entails:

-   background reference to the AU institutional framework;

-   principles of governance of the ACQF;

-   implementation set-up: governance, management, resources; and

-   monitoring, evaluation and analysis.

In line with the ACQF principle of openness to knowledge built by other relevant experiences in the wide domain of qualifications frameworks, this chapter starts with an overview of governance models developed in the context of other RQFs.

Although only a few countries in Africa have well-established and functioning NQFs, there is sufficient interest in the topic to support the work of the ACQF. The ACQF will hopefully motivate into action those that have been slow to embrace the idea of NQFs to create a viable and functioning African network of NQFs to support and implement the ACQF.

### 5.10.1  Background reference to African Union institutional framework

The AUC is implementing the large institutional restructuring programme adopted in 2020. The ACQF development is placed under the coordination and political lead of the (renamed) Department of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (ESTI), notably the Education Division.

The AU policy underpinnings of the ACQF provide substantial ground for the development and deployment of the ACQF as a policy instrument: CESA 16–25, AfCFTA and the AU Free Movement Protocol are the major justifications for establishment of the ACQF.

The ACQF interacts closely with PAQAF, but goes beyond the sector of higher education, as it embraces all types and levels of qualifications from different subsectors. The ACQF's scope is comprehensive, justifying revised institutions that may play a role in its implementation, their mandate and how to harmonise this with the expectations of the ACQF.

### 5.10.2 Overview on governance of regional qualifications frameworks

**What do RQFs do?**

RQFs are meta-frameworks, which support approximation and trust building between NQFs, contributing to the wider and strategic objectives of regional cooperation – notably, good quality qualifications, mobility of learners and workers and integration.

RQFs do not supersede the NQFs/NQSs. Instead, RQFs work on the basis of common principles geared towards enhanced transparency and portability of qualifications. RQFs build on shared concepts, emphasise quality assurance, support sharing of information and data among countries and the application

of common instruments (such as qualifications databases and common guidelines on key processes of recognition and transparency). RQFs also act as catalysts for the development of NQFs.

Referencing/alignment of NQFs/NQSs to a RQF is a major milestone in the implementation of RQFs. Referencing is based on agreed criteria and procedures, which are essential for transparency, credibility and quality of the process and outcomes. The use of RQF levels on qualifications documents and databases of the referenced NQFs/NQSs is a major step towards portability and mobility of learners and workers.

RQF implementation requires governance based on participation of the relevant stakeholders, technical expertise and analytical capacity, a set of instruments supporting transparency and quality of RQF processes, communication and an efficient information system within a rapidly changing policy environment. Besides their essential regional mandate and goals, RQFs also play a fundamental role of communication and cooperation with other RQFs and with NQFs/NQSs in other regions/continents. Cooperation and comparison between RQFs contribute to paving the way to global transparency of qualifications and qualifications frameworks, and ultimately to facilitate recognition of qualifications. This process, when fully implemented, will play a critical role in harmonising qualifications in Africa and internationalising African qualifications.

**State of play of implementation of RQFs**

The history of RQFs has been made in the last fifteen to twenty years, with the starting reflections and steps taken on different continents: in Africa (SADCQF) and Europe (EQF). Table 12 summarises key features of three operational and influential RQFs (meta-frameworks).

**Table 12:** Summary of main features of the RQFs included in this comparison

| Feature | SADCQF | ASEAN QRF (AQRF) | EQF |
|---|---|---|---|
| Region/ community | Southern African Development Community<br><br>16 countries | Association of Southeast Asian Nations<br><br>10 countries | European Union and other countries with specific status of cooperation<br><br>38 countries |
| Establishment | Established: 2011<br><br>Operations: from 2017 | Endorsed 2014 by ministers of economy, education and labour | Council Communication: 2008<br><br>Revised in 2017 |
| Referencing criteria and procedures | 10 criteria | 11 criteria | 10 criteria |
| Countries that referenced/ aligned NQFs to RQF | 2 (South Africa, Seychelles); 1 submitted report for adjudication (Mauritius) | AQRF Referencing Reports of ASEAN Member States:<br>Malaysia<br>Philippines<br>Thailand<br>Indonesia | 36 countries referenced and these reports are published. |
| RQF scope and levels | ● Comprehensive; inclusive of all subsectors<br>● 10 levels<br>● Descriptors: knowledge, skills, autonomy and responsibility | ● Comprehensive; inclusive of all subsectors<br>● 8 levels<br>● Descriptors: knowledge and skills; application and responsibility | ● Comprehensive; inclusive of all subsectors<br>● 8 levels<br>● Descriptors: knowledge, skills, responsibility and autonomy |

These RQFs share a number of common features and maintain a degree of cooperation with each other. However, currently this cooperation is ad hoc and is not supported by formalised agreements.

Governance/implementation of these RQFs is based on shared responsibilities and a participatory approach (Table 13). Governmental bodies have a dominant role and place in the governance set-up, which is a corollary of the fact that NQFs are part of public policy and most national qualifications are awarded in the name of the state/authorised public bodies. In some cases (for example, the EQF) the membership of the EQF Advisory Group includes systematic representation of regional students' organisations, civil society organisations, business associations, trade unions and organisations from the higher education and TVET sectors.

The role of implementation management, coordination and the secretariat is fundamental, given the number of countries and institutions involved, the range of key activities and the gradual development approach required for progress.

In the case of SADCQF, TCCA gathers the member states and since the Implementation Unit is not yet established, the SADC Secretariat supports and organises activities, with the support of a group of member states.

The EQF implementation is coordinated and steered by the European Commission, working in close cooperation with the EQF Advisory Group. Funding to support EQF Advisory Group activities, research and peer learning is provided by the European Union budget, within the relevant programme.

**Table 13:** Overview of governance settings of the RQFs

| | SADCQF | AQRF | EQF |
|---|---|---|---|
| Governance | <ul><li>16 countries</li><li>SADC Council of Ministers</li><li>SADC ministers of education</li><li>TCCA – Executive Committee;<ul><li>With thematic working groups</li></ul></li><li>SADC Secretariat (supported by Implementation Unit)</li><li>Funding:<ul><li>SADC for regional coordination, some capacity development activities</li><li>Countries: all costs of participation in SADCQF meetings; NQF</li></ul></li></ul> | <ul><li>10 countries</li><li>ASEAN ministerial meetings: economic, education and labour</li><li>AQRF Committee – supported by the AQRF Secretariat</li><li>National AQRF committees</li><li>Funding: external sources in first phase; ASEAN for regional coordination and AQRF Committee; countries: all costs of participation in AQRF meetings.</li></ul> | <ul><li>38 countries</li><li>EU level:<ul><li>EQF Advisory Group: all countries; European associations: business, youth, students, volunteering</li><li>Chair: European Commission director general</li><li>Employment; provides also: secretariat and coordination function</li><li>Sub-groups thematic (ad hoc, temporary)</li></ul></li><li>National level: National Coordination Points (NCPs)</li><li>Technical/research support: Cedefop, ETF</li><li>Funding: EU budget</li></ul> |
| Main instruments | <ul><li>Cooperation African Qualifications Verification Network (AQVN)</li><li>Guidelines</li></ul> | <ul><li>AQRF website</li><li>Guidelines and handbooks</li><li>Cooperation with other ASEAN platforms</li></ul> | <ul><li>Europass: the EU-wide platform supporting skills and qualifications, EQF, skills intelligence, digital credentials, careers.</li><li>EQF technical notes, EQF annexes, guidelines, validation of non-formal and informal learning</li><li>Peer-learning activities</li></ul> |

| | | | ● Cooperation ENIC-NARIC[15] network (recognition of qualifications) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Monitoring and evaluation, review | ● In the context of regular TCCA meetings, countries leading the SADCQF implementation programmes report on progress, challenges and plans. <br> ● In TCCA meetings member countries report on their national initiatives and progress. <br> ● Systematic way of evaluating progress has not yet evolved | | ● Obligation to evaluate the implementation and outcomes of EQF is defined the EQF Recommendation. <br> ● Two major evaluations of the EQF Recommendation 2008 conducted. <br> ● Evaluation of the EQF Recommendation 2017 is in preparation - to be started in 2021. |

### 5.10.3  Principles of governance of the ACQF

The objectives and principles of the ACQF determine the principles of its proposed governance, as proposed below:

- **Participation: involves**

    o continental, REC and national levels;

    o adequate representation of the major subsectors of education and training, providing qualifications of all levels and types;

    o specialised thematic or sectoral organisations (continental, regional), for example, curriculum, quality assurance, teachers, others; and

    o stakeholders: students, social partners, business, employers, workers, civil society

- **Implementation led by a technically competent structure**, with recognised experience in the domain of qualifications and qualifications frameworks, and representative of a wide range of countries.

- **Technical robustness**: based on evidence, digital instruments

- **Accountability:** based on research, monitoring and evaluation

- **Communication and dissemination**: transparency, sharing, networks – using a combination of modes of communication: website, webinars, conventional modalities

- **Readiness and commitment to support and cooperate with AU member countries, RECs and relevant institutions**: to grow and nurture NQFs and cooperate with the ACQF.

- **Openness to the world**: participate and engage in various networks and platforms; open doors to cooperation on win-win-win-win basis with other RQFs and NQFs (four wins: continental-regional-national and the other RQF).

### 5.10.4  Implementation set-up: Governance, management and resources

The institutional and policy context of the ACQF is characterised by:

- scale: a continent with 55 member countries, 8 RECs, 5 regions;
- multi-level stakes and participation: national, RECs, specialised organisations of a regional and a continental nature;
- the role of the AUC: political lead; guarantor of the compatibility with AU policies and strategies;

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[15] ENIC: European Network of Information Centres in the European Region; NARIC: National Academic Recognition Information Centres of the European Union

- the role of other AU instances: the Specialised Technical Committee-on Education, Science and Technology (STC-EST) for technical and political consultation and future endorsement of the ACQF policy and technical document;
- technical implementation and delivery: starting phase (2019–22) – project supported by external funding; technical experts' team; and
- stakeholders' consultation setting: Advisory Group ACQF. Chaired by the AUC.

Considering the plans and needs of the period 2022–25, in which implementation should be initiated, the governance setting of the ACQF (Scenario 2) can be envisaged as indicated in the Table 14. This period should be further supported by the technical assistance programme and technical partners.

**Table 14:** ACQF governance - summary overview

| Political steering | Implementation management | Stakeholders engagement |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Lead: AUC ESTI<br>2. Board of ACQF implementation body | **1. Professionally competent and credible structure –** 2 options:<br>a) Association of NQF agencies (to be established);<br>b) Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency (PAQAA), if encompassing all levels and subsectors of education and training<br>**2. Supported by a technical assistance project** | 1. Advisory Group (renewed)<br>2. Networks, unions and associations: students, sectoral and professional organisations, social partners, education and training organisations – through ACQF events, website, peer sharing, joint activities, consultation. |

<u>Implementation and operations</u>

**Option 1: A network of NQF institutions**

To ensure that implementation and management of ACQF operations are based on tangible technical competence and understanding of NQF policy, it is recommended to involve the existing and interested African NQF agencies (of different legal statutes) – into a network (association) of African NQF agencies. This network could become the focal point supporting implementation of the ACQF, working with the AUC (political lead), with the countries and regions (stakeholders and users of the ACQF) and other agencies (quality assurance, RPL, labour market information, social partners and students). The association should have a legal status, membership, a board tasked with planning and accountability functions, and an efficient management and technical team to carry out operations. The ACQF website could be co-owned and managed by this association. A memorandum of cooperation with AUC should lay the foundations and institutional basis for planning and carrying out ACQF operations, based on accountability towards the AU.

This option has the advantage to involve existing African NQF expertise embodied in the national institutions leading and coordinating NQFs and the associated areas of competence. Moreover, this approach fosters bonds and a common agenda between NQF agencies across the continent. Finally, this option empowers the countries and the NQFs in co-creating the ACQF, and acts through a bottom-up dynamic that holds promise. The risk of fragmentation and distancing from the wider AU Agenda 2063 is averted by the institutional setting (association), the political lead role of the AUC and the memorandum of cooperation laying down the scope of work, commitments and resources.

Different funding and financing for sustainability mechanisms are possible, spanning from membership contributions to technical assistance projects, international donors and African sponsors. In the medium-term, the African NQF association, as the ACQF implementation body, can engage in private-public partnerships with African and international medium and large enterprises, in projects addressing

development of new types of commonly designed qualifications for the continent, digitalisation of qualifications systems and frameworks, and recognition of skills of workers and migrants, amongst others.

The current ACQF project is able to support preparatory steps towards such an African NQF association, notably the elaboration of a concise feasibility and legal analysis, exploratory membership meetings, drafting of statutory and planning documents, and communication actions.

**Option 2: PAQAA**

Steps have been initiated towards a feasibility study on the PAQAA, under the supervision of a technical working group supported by the Harmonisation of African Higher Education Quality Assurance and Accreditation (HAQAA) project. Although this option has potential, it does not share the same strengths and opportunities embodied by Option 1, notably the thematic and technical competence in the domain of qualifications and qualifications frameworks, the generation of synergy between NQF agencies, and the bottom-up approach. One the key issues of this option concerns the scope of work of PAQAA, which is narrower than the scope of the ACQF, since it is focused on higher education, rather than on the inclusive lifelong learning perspective of qualifications which is at the core of the vision of the ACQF.

## 5.10.5  Monitoring, evaluation and analysis

Monitoring and evaluation will be important tools for assessing the progress being made in the implementation of the ACQF and its various elements. The main objective of the evaluation and monitoring processes will be to assess the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, impact and sustainability of the ACQF. Reports from these processes will be useful in enabling the AUC to monitor the implementation of the ACQF and especially in achieving the various milestones that will be set for the process, including the progress of countries in developing NQFs, establishing in-country ACQF focal points, referencing NQFs with the ACQF and meeting timelines of quality assurance, recognition and other aspects of the ACQF.

This process will ensure that participating countries in the ACQF will keep implementing and putting in place qualifications systems that are more transparent and clearer; and that their commitments to the ACQF objectives always remain strong for the continent to benefit from implementation of the ACQF. The AQCF Advisory Group will be a key actor in the implementation of the ACQF, as it is expected to provide some sort of 'soft control/guidance' on the establishment of ACQF focal points, alignment of NQFs to the ACQF and adherence to ACQF guidelines. While carrying out monitoring and evaluation, it will be important to ensure that sufficient financial resources are made available at the country, regional and continental level. It will also be important to monitor availability of financial and human resources at all levels to support roll-out and implementation of the ACQF.

Considering that various countries and regions are at different levels of implementation of their NQFs and RQFs, the monitoring and evaluation process will seek to develop and implement appropriate and relevant targets for different countries and regions, in line with the status reports conducted before the commencement of implementation of the ACQF.

The monitoring and evaluation process and implementation should consider:

- the effort each country and region is making towards reaching the targets set by the ACQF;

- support to the ACQF implementation – through the ACQF Advisory Group, and other systems and processes set up to support ACQF implementation;

- ensure that implementation of the ACQF contributes to the overall objectives of the AU for improved mobility of learners and workers and facilitates trade and investments;

- ensure that the ACQF becomes a credible reference tool in Africa and beyond – and that the main features of the ACQF remain stable so that this influence continues and expands, thereby giving the ACQF greater visibility; and

- data about implementation of the ACQF should be continuously collected and analysed, and outcomes and impacts of the ACQF Recommendations regularly evaluated to facilitate further implementation and articulation of the ACQF.

## 5.11 Towards future operationalisation of the ACQF: Output plan

This proposition of a plan of outputs with related indicators aims to shed light on the feasibility of the ACQF and to anticipate the areas of intervention of future activities, indicatively for the period 2022–25. This plan highlights components of a diverse nature, closely articulated with the features of the scenarios for the ACQF. The envisaged outputs are oriented to a middle-development scenario, such as Scenario 2 ('ACQF creates mutual trust'), although some elements of Scenario 3 ('ACQF opens new horizons´) have also been included. The latter concerns certain aspects of a data system providing insights on skills and qualifications trends and initial steps towards common qualifications profiles of high priority for continental free trade and integration.

**Table 15**: Plan of outputs – indicators: supporting ACQF Action Plan (indicatively 2022–25)

| Outputs | Activities - Indicators |
|---|---|
| 1. **ACQF governance setting established and operational** | a. Memorandum of cooperation on ACQF consolidation and implementation (2022–25) with relevant organisations – with action plan, milestones, responsibilities, resources <br><br> b. Established association (network) of African NQF agencies (authorities, commissions) <br><br> c. ACQF implementation unit/structure in place to assure sustainability <br><br> d. Established network of ACQF focal points at national and regional levels (at least 60% of the countries and all RECs <br><br> e. Networking and organised cooperation with relevant organisations working in the area of quality assurance of education and training systems, recognition of qualifications and verification of qualifications <br><br> f. Networking and organised cooperation with existing and newly established RQFs to advance common agenda, generate synergies and build and sustain capacities |
| 2. **ACQF policy instrument and ACQF Action Plan implemented and monitored** | a. ACQF Guidelines – finalised, tested and disseminated. The ten guidelines address the critical themes, concepts and components of NQFs, while linking to the scope of the ACQF.[16] Refer to Annexure 1 of this report for more information <br><br> b. Regular monitoring reports with analysed data in accordance with relevant ACQF guidelines and tool on monitoring and evaluation <br><br> c. Established comprehensive ACQF management information system, including enhanced monitoring and evaluation tool (with indicators and data collection/ analysis and reporting) and ACQF qualifications database <br><br> d. Established principles, template and digital tool for regular updates of information on NQFs and RQFs (at least 20 countries regularly send updates to ACQF) <br><br> e. Capacity development programme for ACQF implementation unit conducted for all involved staff |

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[16] Themes of the ACQF Guidelines: Learning outcomes; level descriptors; referencing/alignment to ACQF – goals, criteria and process; validation of learning; quality assurance; registration – registers of qualifications; monitoring and evaluation; communication, innovation and technology in NQFs/ACQF; NQFs – NQS: the ecosystem.

| 3. | **ACQF database of qualifications designed, and operations started with pilot countries** | a. | Established operational qualifications database, interoperable with ACQF management information system, with specific operational handbook and technical support |
| | | b. | Relevant information disseminated to all countries |
| | | c. | Trained focal points at national and continental level to maintain and update the database and ensure its integrity |
| | | d. | Harmonised qualifications description/template in application |
| | | e. | Showcase, communicate - ACQF website, events, ACQF focal points |
| **4.** | **Skills and qualifications: analysis, intelligence, development** | a. | Labour market information: employment, jobs and skills dynamics |
| | | b. | Innovative methods for analysis and anticipation of changing skills and jobs |
| | | c. | Comparison of qualifications: content, learning outcomes |
| | | d. | Qualifications development and renewal: tools and piloting |
| | | e. | Training and coaching countries |
| 5. | **NQFs aligned/ referenced to ACQF, in accordance with ACQF Guidelines** | a. | At least 60% of all African NQFs at stage 4 and 5 (approved and started implementation, NQF reviewed) are aligned/referenced to the ACQF |
| | | b. | Validated rules applicable to use of ACQF levels in qualifications documents and databases |
| | | c. | National qualifications with ACQF levels upon successful referencing to ACQF |
| 6. | **Increased number of NQFs in African countries at stage 4/5 (approved, implementation started and advanced)** | a. | At least 4 new NQFs moved from stage 2/3 (NQF in early thinking / development and consultation) to stage 4 and 5 (NQF approved, implementation started) |
| | | b. | At least 4 new countries moved to stage 2 (NQF in early thinking) |
| 7. | **Improved learning validation practices through application of RPL and credit systems and systematic cooperation with recognition agencies** | a. | ACQF guideline on validation of learning, encompassing RPL and credit accumulation and transfer systems – approved, disseminated and in application |
| | | b. | Effective recognition of qualifications and especially validation and certification of individuals' skills and competences acquired in migration experiences are essential policy instruments to be further improved across all countries and regions on the continent. A wider agenda/campaign for fair and trusted RPL will be part of the ACQF strategy, to enable easier access of beneficiaries, dissemination of good practice and adoption of commonly agreed technical and methodological guidelines and quality assured tools for RPL for the continent |
| | | c. | Validated instruments linking the guideline with ACQF referencing processes |
| | | d. | Network of NQF agencies, recognition bodies, quality assurance agencies and ACQF established, with plan of joint actions to improve and ease validation and recognition across the continent |
| | | e. | Improved recognition statistics and take-up of RPL |
| **8.** | **ACQF contributes to better mobility and quality of qualifications in the context of AfCFTA** | a. | Established joint work plan ACQF and AfCFTA Secretariat |
| | | b. | Mapping of qualifications for priority sectors of AfCFTA in a representative sample of countries |
| | | c. | Developed and piloted approach to common (continental) profiles/minimum requirements for qualifications relevant for AfCFTA |
| | | d. | Database of common profiles for qualifications – accessible for all countries |
| 9. | **ACQF capacity development and awareness raising activities expanded to all countries** | a. | Pool of NQF African coaches/experts trained by ACQF – included in ACQF database and deployed to support countries. At least 30 trained coaches/experts |
| | | b. | ACQF training programme and e-learning platform continuously improved and used (increased number of learners from all countries). At least 100 users of the e-learning platform registered and complete training with certificate |

| | | c. | At least 2 in-depth training programmes per year on ACQF themes and tools conducted – with involvement of participants from at least 45 countries and 3 RECs |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | | d. | At least 2 ACQF conferences held per year |
| | | e. | At least 10 ACQF newsletters published, including articles submitted by ACQF focal points and other contributors |
| | | f. | At least 2 modules on ACQF and NQF developed and offered in African education institutions |
| | | g. | ACQF website continuously maintained and improved to support experience-sharing, capacity development, updated information on NQFs and RQFs |
| 10. | Dialogue, comparison and comparison with other regional and national qualifications frameworks in the world | a. | Established dialogue with EQF – towards preparation for comparison of the ACQF with the EQF |
| | | b. | Established cooperation with other frameworks, using available networks and based on mutual interest |

## 5.12 ACQF: Fit-for-purpose, contributing to change

This reflection on scenarios of the ACQF acknowledges that the world of learning and qualifications is in transformation and offers multiple opportunities to be seized and challenges to be carefully assessed. The principle of innovation-readiness of the future ACQF, as stated in its vision, is in coherence with the need to acknowledge and eventually embrace new trends in the world of learning and qualifications.

The ACQF will emerge, develop and evolve in an environment marked by the post-Covid-19 recovery efforts, intertwined with the multiple transitions of our time (social, ecological, technological and digital). The emerging ACQF will face the challenges of economic slowdown and recession triggered by the pandemic and the significant learning losses as a result of widespread school closures in 2020.

For an optimistic vision of the future of jobs and the societies in Africa to become a reality, investment in human capital must aim not just to develop the skills needed today, but also to start building the skills needed to successfully leverage the technological advances of tomorrow. Future-readiness of programmes and qualifications should encourage critical thinking, creativity, cognitive flexibility and emotional intelligence (WEF 2020a).

Africa started in January 2021 with the operationalisation of trade under the AfCFTA, launched in May 2019. Most importantly, AfCFTA implementation will call for policy reforms to maximise its benefits, notably reforms in the domain of transparency and recognition of skills and qualifications across countries, seen as essential conditions for mobility and free trade.

The landscape of jobs, as well as their accompanying skills requirements and competences, is rapidly changing. The transformation of tasks, occupations and the organisation of work is creating a demand for new sets of skills, displacing existing jobs as well as giving rise to wholly new ones. Strategies for empowering job transitions from declining to emerging roles are being devised (WEF 2020a), modelling the opportunities for job transitions to new professions on the basis of skills similarity (adjacency) between a worker's current and future roles, as well as the reskilling investment. A shift to a skill-based hiring system focused on lifelong learning requires more flexible modalities of learning, of recognition of learning and certification. Countries are grappling with the need for more effective skills intelligence providing real-time insights for skills development policies and practices, and for more responsive lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Qualifications are changing, and education and training institutions must open up to new types of learning, be learner-centred, and recognise learning outcomes from non-formal and informal contexts. New concepts and instruments, such as micro-credentials, and digital technologies to recognise learning (digital certificates) are gradually becoming part of the mainstream reality of our education and training systems.

<u>Qualifications frameworks contributing to transition and transformation of learning</u>

The 'Top Skills for 2025' (WEF 2020a) are changing, with new top skills moving up the list, as highlighted earlier in this report.

The twin green and digital transitions have strong skills dimensions, which every skills development and qualifications system must recognise and address.

Debates linked with the ACQF peer-learning webinars in 2020 included a discussion of the role of NQFs in the context of the great transformations of our time. In one of the debates, John O'Connor (Quality and Qualifications Ireland) shared a useful contribution, which we want to highlight here. There are features of NFQs that may be of assistance as countries plan their recovery, particularly job-recovery strategies. RPL may well attract increased attention. So too the prospect of qualifications frameworks opening up to non-formal qualifications, including micro-credentials, which seem to be appearing everywhere. Many labour market policy responses are looking at fast, flexible skill solutions, not always suited to the slower pace of NQFs.

Inequality and the associated digital divide is a major issue – qualifications and their delivery are going to have to be more accessible for everyone if online delivery continues to play a significant part in TVET and higher education qualifications.

Quality assurance matters as the shift to more remote delivery of qualifications poses questions about academic integrity and standards. The learning outcomes approach (agnostic on location) may have been helpful in facilitating the shift to online assessment, though it is too early to tell.

The role of NQFs in the context of Covid-19 might usefully be unpacked under these three headings:

- recognition (individual learning achievements and newer forms of certification);
- accessibility (NQFs could do more to insist on access as a principle for qualifications to be included); and
- quality assurance of NQFs and constituent qualifications, so that Covid-19 does not present a threat to the quality, reputation or recognition status.

Principles underpinning NQFs may come to be just as important as technical features – fairness, transparency, quality, equality and relevance.

Most important is that NQFs, or rather their design, implementation and use by stakeholders, don't make things worse for citizens. NQFs as policy instruments are only one of many that policymakers will need to employ in a coherent response to these wide issues.

The ACQF, as connector of NQFs and a promoter of trust and of new horizons for African integration and international transparency of skills and qualifications, benefits from a conjunction of opportunities on which to build. The expectations of African countries and citizens are high. The ACQF must respond through its ability to embrace the twin transition (green and digital), to foster inclusion by valuing all forms of learning, to be a catalyst for better qualifications systems and frameworks across the continent and to contribute to transparency and credibility of African education and qualifications in the world.

# 6 Annexures

## 6.1 Annexure 1: ACQF Guidelines – brief overview of the concept

**1. ACQF Guidelines: Concept**

The Guidelines aim to:

- clarify how the given policy or mechanism (for example, RPL) relates to the ACQF and what are the related key requirements for countries engaging in referencing/alignment to the ACQF;

- provide conceptual and technical orientations to countries/RECs to support improvement/consolidation of their own systems (for example, credit accumulation and transfer and links with NQF and the ACQF). This corresponds to Objective 3 of the ACQF ('work in cooperation and complementarity with the NQFs');

- generate a set of applicable concepts, principles, criteria and procedures, as well as tools, contributing to common understanding and application across countries and regions to ease the implementation of ACQF at continental, national and regional levels;

- present and elaborate on specific tools; and

- seek synergy and complementarity with already existing AU policies and instruments, such as PAQAF and African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ASG-QA).

ACQF Guidelines:

- should give tangible substance to the (Output 3 of ACQF project) ACQF policy and technical document – they are instruments/mechanisms to support practical application and sustainability of the principles, objectives and milestones defined in the ACQF document;

- in most cases should have two layers of content: a) synthesis guideline (policy orientation – for policy institutions above all, and other groups); b) technical guidelines (as a short handbook: for clarification and technical support – for implementers, practitioners above all, and other groups) – see below; and

- as ACQF instruments they should work in synergy and complementarity with each other; refer to the existing (or planned) AU policies, instruments and recommendations relevant for the domain/issue; contribute to an AU area of education and qualifications, based on converging elements and recommendations that eventually contribute to continental integration and mutual understanding while respecting national and regional context and diversity.

Most Guidelines will be composed of two complementary formats:

- A) synthesis guideline: main objectives, definition(s), applications, mechanisms and tools, main requirements for alignment, referencing to the ACQF, linkage to existing relevant AU policies and tools (PAQAF, ASG-QA, CESA 16–25) – approximately 2–3 pages; and

- B ) technical guidelines: approximately 10–20 pages (additionally: annexures, sources, technical instructions, examples), depending on the subject or policy area. Complements the synthesis guideline.

  o Purpose: deepen, clarify, and provide technical orientation for national implementing bodies and stakeholders, especially the lead institutions managing the NQF and interacting with the (future) ACQF implementation structure (unit)

  o The technical guidelines combine features of a) technical document and b) short application handbook.

**2. List of ACQF Guidelines**

| Guideline | Theme and broad overview of topics, issues and contextualisation |
|---|---|
| Guideline 1 | **Learning outcomes approach**<br>1. theoretical, conceptual and technical underpinnings |

| | |
|---|---|
| | 2.  application in different contexts, such as level descriptors, qualifications standards, qualifications documents, curriculum, training documents, assessment |
| | 3.  Issues specific to different subsectors of education and training: higher education, school education, vocational education and training |
| | 4.  guiding principles to define and describe learning outcomes |
| | 5.  application in the context of the ACQF and NQFs |
| | 6.  cases, examples, sources (from African and international literature and experiences) |
| Guideline 2 | **Level descriptors** |
| | 1.  theoretical, conceptual and technical underpinnings |
| | 2.  domains and sub-domains; horizontal and vertical logic |
| | 3.  making level descriptors user-friendly: understanding the applications of level descriptors for qualifications standards, curriculum and assessment; use of level descriptions in different contexts |
| | 4.  guiding principles to define and write level descriptors. Issues, for example, understanding competence; integrative/domain-specific level descriptors |
| | 5.  ACQF level descriptors: comprehensive draft proposal of descriptors for all levels and domains (sub-domains) |
| | 6.  proposal for testing ACQF level descriptors and reviewing and fine-tuning based on feedback from test |
| | 7.  cases, examples, sources (from African and international literature and experiences) |
| Guideline 3 | **Criteria and procedures for referencing/alignment of NQFs (or RQFs) to ACQF** |
| | 1.  conceptual and technical underpinnings; rationale, purposes of referencing/alignment; benefits for the involved parties (national, regional, continental). Contribution to transparency, comparability, common concepts and trust, while respecting diversity of education and training systems across Africa. Contribution to development, implementation and consolidation of NQFs |
| | 2.  criteria, procedures, process, governance, efficiency and quality assurance of alignment and referencing to ACQF. Transparency and robustness of referencing/alignment process and outcomes. Publication of information on results of referencing/alignment on ACQF website |
| | 3.  suggestion on use of digital tools to ease and streamline referencing/alignment |
| | 4.  proposal on the use of ACQF levels on qualifications documents, qualifications databases of NQFs upon successful referencing/alignment to ACQF |
| | 5.  examples, sources (from African and international literature and experiences) |
| Guideline 4 | **Validation of learning** |
| | 1.  credit accumulation and transfer system(s) |
| | 2.  validation/RPL; non-formal and informal learning |
| | 3.  recognition of qualifications: brief chapter, with focus on the text and application of the Revised Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and Other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in African States 2014 (Addis Recognition Convention) |
| | Conceptual and technical underpinnings, main features and application mechanisms |
| | Proposal for application of credit accumulation and transfer system in the context of NQFs and ACQF |
| | Proposal for application of RPL (VAE) in the context of NQFs and ACQF |
| | Proposal on systematic exchange of information between ACQF, NQFs and qualifications recognition structures (agencies, departments) (at national level) to ease and streamline recognition processes and improve efficiency of outcomes |
| | Examples, sources (from African and international literature and experiences) |

| | |
|---|---|
| Guideline 5 | **Quality assurance** |
| | Conceptual and technical underpinnings, main features and application mechanisms of quality assurance frameworks (principles, instruments, processes, governance) |
| | Application in the context of NQFs and ACQF |
| | Reference to existing AU policies and instruments, notably PAQAF and ASG-QA |
| | Proposal for a quality assurance framework to support the ACQF. Contribution to a basic QA framework for TVET (main objectives, principles, indicators, requirements for referencing/ alignment to ACQF) |
| | Examples, sources (from African and international literature and experiences) |
| Guideline 6 | **Registration of qualifications** |
| | Conceptual and technical underpinnings, main features and application mechanisms |
| | Approaches, requirements (classifications, others) |
| | Proposal for technical design and main specifications for ACQF register/database of qualifications of various types (formal education and training, international-sectoral qualifications, new types of credentials, qualifications of the context of non-formal learning). Elements of data fields for electronic publication of qualifications. Use of ACQF levels in qualifications registers and databases (link with Guideline 3) |
| | Examples, sources (from African and international literature and experiences) |
| Guideline 7 | **Monitoring and evaluation in the context of NQFs, ACQF** |
| | Conceptual and technical underpinnings, main features and application mechanisms in the context of the ACQF |
| | Indicators, data, analysis |
| | Review of NQFs and the ACQF: approaches, methods |
| | Digital tool to support ACQF monitoring and evaluation |
| | Cases, examples, sources (from African and international literature and experiences) |
| Guideline 8 | **Communication** |
| | Purposes, benefits and uses of communication in the context of NQFs and the ACQF. Contribution to buy-in, performance and impact |
| | Target groups, end-users: policymaking, implementation institutions, education and training institutions, NQF authorities |
| | Examples, sources (from African and international literature and experiences) |
| | Draft a succinct proposal for ACQF communication plan, with main objectives, instruments, outreach modalities with some target-group differentiation, interactions continental-regional-national levels |
| Guideline 9 | **Innovation and technology in NQFs and ACQF** |
| | This guideline has distinctive features: a) it provides wider context and information on innovation and technology in qualifications and NQFs; b) provides technical information on tools and specifications. Part c) will be for limited circulation, depending on interest and relevance for wider public |
| | Digital certificates. Micro-credentials. Other novel types of qualifications and recognition of learning |
| | Developed digital tool: a) supporting comparison of qualifications; b) supporting comparison of level descriptors |
| | Proposal for model and specifications for ACQF database of qualifications (and underpinning documents, standards, units) |
| Guideline 10 Integrative Guideline | **Qualifications and NQFs: a systemic view (a larger guideline to support countries and the ACQF implementation structure)** |
| | This guideline has specific features: a) it provides a comprehensive, systemic view of NQFs as policy instrument in the context of NQSs, and relates to all ACQF Guidelines (using smart links, |

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| and training module | as adequate); b) it provides technical and methodological recommendations on development of qualifications, and their alignment to main principles and features of the NQF/RQF |
| | Conceptual and technical underpinnings, main features and application mechanisms in the context of ACQF |
| | **A) NQF** |
| | Developing fit-for-purpose NQF – linked with the NQS and national strategies (such as: education, skills, employment, lifelong learning). Pillars and components of the NQF and NQS Instruments of the NQF |
| | Links and coherence in the NQF ecosystem |
| | Governance, management and implementation of the NQF. Capacities, analysis, instruments, IT system |
| | Communication and outreach to end-users, target groups. Examples and cases (from African countries and other regions) |
| | **B) Qualifications** |
| | Qualifications policies |
| | Types of qualifications |
| | Development and renewal of qualifications: technical and methodological aspects, organisation; standards underpinning qualifications; alignment with NQF levels and principles. Participants in the process. Approval, levelling, registration |
| | Innovations in the qualifications' development (and renewal) cycle, process and tools – to ease alignment with demands related with the transformation of work, technology, occupations, tasks, skills and important societal change |
| | **C) RPL/VAE** |
| | Developing, implementing the system. Links with the NQF and NQS |

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Web resources and instruments
- EQF page in Cedefop website: https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/european-qualifications-framework-eqf
- EQF library: EQF qualifications frameworks and referencing reports; EQF series (technical notes), EQF brochure and infographic, EQF studies: https://europa.eu/europass/en/document-library#documentation_73
- NQFs in the EQF: https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/national-qualifications-framework-nqf/european-inventory
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