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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION

African Continental Qualifications Framework project
Advisory Group – 2nd meeting
Date: Thursday 8 April, 12.30–16.30 (GMT+3)

Meeting report

1.   Summary

The 2nd meeting of the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF) Advisory Group (AG) took place on 8 April 2021 (12.30–16.30 GMT+3), via Zoom, chaired by the African Union Commission (AUC) – Department of Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation (ESTI) (acting head of Education division, Mr Hambani Macheleni). Opening remarks were made by the director of ESTI department, Dr Mahama Ouedraogo. Steering of the flow of sessions and the main presentation was by Mr Emmanuel Chigozie Okonkwo, Education division.

Simultaneous interpretation (English, French, Portuguese) was available.

1.   Objectives of the meeting
   - Update the AG on the outputs achieved in 2020 and on the activities planned and started for the period 2021–2022
   - Discuss and gather views and recommendations from the AG on the subjects of the agenda.

2.   Documents shared with all participants before the meeting for information and discussion
   - ACQF Mapping Study – collection of reports
   - ACQF Scenarios – draft proposal for consultation with ACQF AG, January 2021
   - ACQF Capacity Development Programme 2021–2022 – concept and plan, February 2021
   - ACQF – Activity report 2020, December 2020

3.   Main themes on the agenda (Annex 2 of this report)
   - Report of project activities
   - Outputs and activities 2021–2022
   - Discussion and consultation on main propositions of ongoing activities: Scenarios for the ACQF; report of feasibility analysis; capacity development programme.

4.   Participants
   - Participation in the ACQF AG No. 2: The AUC invited all members of the AG and, as observers, additional countries that had been particularly active and cooperative in phase 1 of the ACQF project (2019–2020). A number of ACQF AG members have not participated in the meetings, and AUC ESTI, with support of the ACQF project, will continue communication with all members to ensure outreach and information-sharing.

5.   Main conclusions

- Chaired by the acting head of Education division, this meeting was indispensable at this stage of the ACQF process, to re-activate the consultation and discussion with the ACQF AG, which is the most important platform for regular engagement and exchange with key stakeholders. In 2020 there was no AG meeting, at which to discuss the findings and conclusions of the mapping study and the results of the first peer-learning programme.

- Director of AUC ESTI, Dr Mahama Ouedraogo, emphasised the importance of the ACQF as a policy and an instrument contributing to the wider objective of continental integration, mobility of people with portable skills and recognised qualifications, transparency and quality of qualifications of all levels and sub-sectors of education and training supporting lifelong learning. The ACQF is fully in line with objectives defined by the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16–25), notably objectives 4c) and d) – establishment of the continental qualifications framework, cooperating with national and regional qualifications frameworks. The ACQF shall work in synergy with the Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Framework and in complementarity with the Addis Recognition Convention.

- AUC ESTI commended the tangible progress reached by the ACQF project and praised the fact that project activities had not been adversely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic crisis in 2020. This meeting of the ACQF AG is an important milestone for the project progress in phase 2, leading up to the main output of the project – the ACQF policy and technical document with action plan and technical guidelines. The AUC encouraged participants to contribute to the discussion and to actively share their views on the documents sent for consultation before the meeting. AG members were invited to send AUC ESTI and the ACQF project coordinator their complementary comments on the proposed scenarios for the ACQF during the week after the meeting.

- Upon proposal of the chair, the AG members voted for the continuation of the function of the two co-chairs elected at the first meeting (4 September 2019). The co-chairs are: President of the National Council on Quality Assurance in Higher Education (CNAQ – Mozambique) and representative of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS).

- In two sessions, the ACQF project team presented in detail: a report of 2020 activities and outputs; plans and first achievements of phase 2, especially the scenarios of the ACQF; outline of the report of feasibility and concept and plan of the capacity development programme; the first version of the ACQF website, in construction (launch online: 1 May 2021).

- In the discussion AG members made proposals on the following points: (i) to improve recognition and mobility across the continent and to consider the possibility of establishing systematic exchanges and networking of the three pillars: qualifications frameworks, recognition of qualifications and quality assurance; (ii) build on the specific expertise and role of regional bodies and councils, such as Le conseil africain et malgache pour l'enseignement supérieur (CAMES), for effective interaction of the ACQF with countries; (iii) synergy between the ACQF and other AU frameworks, such as: Teachers Qualifications Framework (coordination: the Africa Federation of Teaching Regulatory Authorities (AFTRA) and the International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa (IICBA)) and actions towards human resources for Early Childhood Education and Development (ECED) Framework (coordination: the Africa Early Childhood Network (AfECN)); (iv) The ACQF project is to conduct regular updates on the status and developments of national qualifications frameworks (NQFs), using smart/digital instruments; AG members recommended: a user-friendly template to be proposed to collect updates on NQFs; (v) the ACQF website – a focal point/hub connecting all African NQFs and regional qualifications frameworks (RQFs).

6. Action points proposed at completion of the meeting

   a. Widen participation: involve the AU countries, regional economic communities (RECs) and relevant institutions not yet participating in the process

Countries not yet involved in ACQF activities include Algeria, the Central African Republic, Djibouti, Eritrea, Liberia, Libya, Madagascar, Mauritania, Niger, South Sudan and Sudan.

b. Specialised Technical Committee on Education, Science and Technology (STC-EST): information and strategic reflection on the ACQF policy and technical document with action plan and ways to prepare for future implementation (at continental, regional and national levels)

c. Update the ACQF inventory/website: sharing of information on new developments and initiatives in the countries and RECs, related to NQFs. Propose an efficient/digitalised tool for information flow.

The ACQF website will serve as key tool to gather and systematise information on NQFs and RQFs. Countries will receive guidance.

d. ACQF AG: further consultation to support the ACQF process – two meetings in 2021 (July, December), two in 2022 (March, July)

There were no objections to this proposal from AG members.

e. ACQF capacity development programme: invite countries to contribute to peer learning and participate in training

Countries *will* be invited to participate and contribute (presentations, debate) in the upcoming peer-learning webinars in 2021–2022. Invitations to nominate participants to ACQF training workshops will be sent to AG members and other countries and stakeholders.

f. Scenario 1: 'ACQF connects' is within our reach. Let us make it happen!

The AG and participants are invited to use the possibilities of the ongoing project to move towards Scenario 1 – 'ACQF connects'. Scenarios 2 and 3 will build on the instruments, networking and dynamics established under Scenario 1, notably the function of information and knowledge hubs on qualifications frameworks on the continent.

2. Report of the discussions and deliberations

Session 1: Objectives, opening remarks

Speakers: Dr Mahama Ouedraogo, director of AUC ESTI; Mr Hambani Macheleni, acting head of Education division

Main topics: Objectives of the meeting; the ACQF in the context of AU policies

The second meeting of the ACQF AG is part of the cycle of consultation and information on the activities, technical outputs and draft proposals of the ACQF project. This meeting plays an important role in the ongoing ACQF process and will be followed by regular meetings in 2021 and 2022, as indicated in the action points. In 2020 there was no AG meeting, but the ACQF project maintained regular communication with all AG members via the activities of the mapping study and the programme of peer-learning webinars.

The opening remarks emphasised the importance of the ACQF as an AU policy initiative, anchored on the key AU policies and strategies: Agenda 2063, the AU Free Movement Protocol and CESA 16–25. The ACQF aims to contribute to portable skills and qualifications, a major success factor in the context of the operationalisation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

It was noted that the AU fully supports the ACQF as a policy initiative and the ACQF project activities and AUC will continue providing guidance to ascertain ownership and complementarity with other education policies and frameworks, and evolving objectives and priorities in this policy area. Synergy of the ACQF with the Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Framework (PAQAF) and the Addis Recognition Convention will be nurtured, while acknowledging that the scope of the ACQF is much wider, as it encompasses all levels and types of qualifications, education and training.

Dr Ouedraogo highlighted the vision of the ACQF, as formulated through its objectives and principles: a meta-framework for the African continent, supporting national, regional and continental transparency and acknowledged globally, promoting African skills and qualifications. The objectives of the ACQF are:

- Contribute to comparability, quality and transparency of qualifications of all levels and sub-sectors, and support people´s lifelong learning;

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

- work in cooperation and complementarity with NQFs and RQFs and support the creation of a common African education and qualifications area; and

- promote cooperation, referencing between qualifications frameworks (national and regional) in Africa and worldwide.

Key principles of the ACQF are:

- Inclusiveness of all types of learning and levels of qualifications;

- openness to learners' and stakeholders' needs; and

- innovation-readiness to embrace new forms of learning, new skills and types of qualifications, ongoing and future transformations.

Participants of the meeting were encouraged to share their views and proposals on the ACQF technical documents shared for this consultation exercise.

Main debates, questions

- The ACQF project is action-oriented and its outputs will support future implementation of the ACQF, contributing to transparency about African qualifications and their alignment within and beyond the continent;

- the group discussed how the ACQF would support and promote NQFs and RQFs on the continent;

- it also discussed the importance of capacity development for national, regional and continental actors to solve the long-standing problem of the scarce availability of African expertise in the domain of NQFs and consequently the low sustainability of many NQF projects supported by international partners;

- the ACQF should be transparent, easy to understand and practical, to meet the needs of countries and regions on the continent; and

- the ACQF is a strategic initiative supporting transformation of education and training in Africa.

Session 2: Report of activities in 2020; plan of outputs and activities for 2021–2022

Speaker: Eduarda Castel-Branco, ACQF project – thematic coordinator

Main topics
- The ACQF project: its processes and outputs so far (2019–2021)
- Planned and ongoing and ongoing activities 2021–2022

The speaker thanked AUC ESTI for the support and guidance and for the leadership in organising the 2nd ACQF AG meeting. She acknowledged and thanked the AG members and other country and regional institutions for their active participation in the activities of the ACQF project in 2020, notably the Mapping Study and the peer-learning programme. Despite the limitations imposed by Covid-19, thanks to the rapid shift to digital and remote mode of many activities of the ACQF project, in 2020 the exchanges with countries and regional institutions continued. Most importantly, there is much to share and learn about qualifications frameworks and systems, of old and new generation, in Africa and other continents. This vast field of

knowledge and practical action is what unites all the participants of the meeting. NQFs in general create bridges, and the ACQF connects.

The ACQF is a policy initiative of the AU. 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'.

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. The future of work arrived ahead of schedule. At least four mega-drivers of change are boosting the dynamics of this transformation: (i) digitalisation, automation and artificial intelligence; (ii) Covid-19; (iii) the greening of the economy and society; and (iv) societal movements towards rights, democracy, information and innovation. The combination of these forces has resulted in:

- Two years of digital innovation in two months;
- remote work and hybrid forms became the norm in many occupations;
- a changing mix of occupations within economies and changing skills mix within existing occupations;
- an immense need for reskilling and upskilling of growing numbers of workers, and the transition to new jobs with new skills is accelerated – half of us will need reskilling;
- learning anytime, anywhere; new types of qualifications: micro-credentials, digital certificates; and
- new horizons are an opportunity and also a challenge for qualifications frameworks and the future ACQF, as new skills, new modalities of learning and new types of qualifications are emerging.

The ACQF is not an isolated policy of the AU, but is part of the ecosystem of AU policies and strategies. From CESA 16–25 strategic objective 4, we highlight two major orientations:

- c. Set up NQFs and RQFs to facilitate the creation of multiple pathways to skills acquisition and competencies as well as mobility across the sub-sector;

- d. develop continental qualifications framework, linked to RQFs and NQFs to facilitate regional integration and mobility of graduates.

As a policy instrument, the ACQF is anticipated as an enabler: a meta-framework supporting cooperation and referencing/alignment with NQFs and RQFs; a platform providing benefits to countries and RECs in the form of dialogue, experience-sharing, capacity development, tools for transparency, databases and website with updated information on qualifications frameworks and systems; networking between NQF authorities and councils and institutions in charge of recognition and quality assurance.

The ACQF project is a component of the Africa-EU Partnership's programme 'Skills for Youth Employability', a contribution of the European Union (EU) to the AU's Skills Initiative for African (SIFA), co-funded by the EU and Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, Germany (BMZ), implemented in partnership with the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH (GIZ) and the European Training Foundation (ETF). The approach of the ACQF project is holistic, based on evidence, and is also participative. The ACQF project is working and delivering on the following planned outputs:

1. Continental mapping study: analysis of the state of play and perspective developments of NQFs and RQFs on the continent. The comprehensive mapping report was pre-published in English on 20 November 2020. Thirteen country reports and three regional reports complete the collection of the ACQF mapping study.[1] This phase has been completed.

2. Report of feasibility analysis (options and scenarios of ACQF)

   Completion milestone: June 2021

3. Guidelines on key themes supporting implementation of ACQF and buy-in of countries and stakeholders. Training modules will accompany the guidelines.

   Completion milestone: May 2022

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[1] The ACQF mapping study collection is available at:https://www.nepad.org/skillsportalforyouth/publication/african-continental-qualifications-framework-acqf-mapping-study

4. ACQF policy and technical document, supported by an action plan.

   Completion milestone: September 2022.

5. Capacity development programme and networking, to boost mutual trust, experience-sharing, expertise and awareness. Supported by ACQF website and an e-learning platform.

   - Started in 2020: completed a first round of seven peer-learning webinars.
   - Capacity development programme 2021–2022: combination of modalities of learning, including peer-learning webinars, blended training, conferences and workshops, support to countries (NQFs).

6. ACQF website: with functionalities and tools supporting the above-mentioned functions and objectives. At project completion, in 2022, the ACQF website will be more than an information front-end, to include instruments, such as databases, tools for comparison of qualifications and for monitoring of progress.

Other analyses supporting the evidence-base of the ACQF process and contributing to synergy with CESA clusters:

1. School curriculum mapping/survey, jointly with CESA Cluster Curriculum and African Curriculum Association.
   Completion milestone: October 2021.
2. ACQF-AfCFTA: links and synergies.
   Concept note drafted and discussed in 2020 with AfCFTA Unit AUC; further steps to initiate the study: in preparation.
3. Interplay between technical-vocational education and training (TVET) reforms and implementation of qualifications frameworks (NQF, sectoral QF): pilot case study, Mozambique.
   Completion milestone: September 2021.

Main planning documents, conceptual notes and analytical reports drafted by the ACQF project

Phase 1 (Sept. 2019–Oct. 2020)	Phase 2 (Nov. 2020–2022) – as per April 2021
1. Developing the ACQF: scope of work and roadmap 2019–2022. Infographic 2. Report and communiqué of the inaugural workshop of ACQF project (2–3 Sept. 2019) in Addis 3. Minutes of 1st meeting of ACQF AG (4 Sept. 2019) 4. ACQF Work Plan 2020–2022 5. ACQF in the AU policy context – technical note 6. ACQF Mapping report collection (thirteen national reports; three regional reports; comprehensive report (in three formats: long, synthesis, snapshot) 7. Concept note on the links and synergy between ACQF and AfCFTA 8. Terms of reference of ACQF Mapping Study 9. Terms of reference phase 2: three outputs 10. Terms of reference of ACQF website 11. Peer-Learning Programme 2020: report and webpage with all materials (PPTs, reports,	12. Scenarios of ACQF: shared and discussed at 2nd ACQF AG meeting 13. Output 1: draft 1 report (draft 2 – underway) 14. Output 3: Concept of capacity development programme. Plan of ACQF capacity development activities 2021 – all components 15. Technical and guidance note on level descriptors 16. Concept note on ACQF guidelines and training modules 17. Technical note on PAQAA – ACQF: first draft. 18. Comparison of RQFs (EQF, ASEAN QRF, SADCQF), emphasis on governance setting and implementation modes 19. Implementation roadmap for the approved ACQF: first proposal 20. ACQF guideline QA: annotated outline 21. Terms of reference: ACQF guidelines and training modules; African school curriculum survey; study on interplay of TVET reforms and NQF implementation

policy documents) of the seven webinars (July–October 2020).	ACQF experts' team held seventeen technical meetings (November 2020–April 2021). One capacity development webinar on level descriptors.

ACQF Guidelines: aim to support implementation at continental, regional and national levels. To be integrated and systematised in a digital ACQF Handbook, user-friendly, flexible and scalable.

- Themes: Learning outcomes; level descriptors; alignment/referencing criteria and processes; validation of learning; quality assurance; registration of qualifications; monitoring and evaluation, review of QFs/ACQF; communication; innovation and technology; qualifications and NQFs – a systemic view.

ACQF Mapping study (completed, published) - very brief overview

Aim of the mapping study: stocktaking of state of play, main features, current dynamics, perspectives of qualifications frameworks on the continent. Commonalities, differences, challenges, opportunities. Interfaces with the future ACQF. Collection: Thirteen national reports, three regional reports and a comprehensive report.

Sources: combination of several sources: online survey; country and REC technical visits; virtual meeting; documents: inventory, analysis; updates and exchanges: via peer-learning webinars.

Online survey (33 countries responded): Angola, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Union Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, D R Congo, Egypt, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Guinea, The Gambia, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Mauritius, Morocco, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, São Tomé e Príncipe, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia; 2nd round of the survey: Chad, Republic of Congo, Ghana, Zimbabwe.

Guiding themes: common throughout the ACQF project: Legal, policy and conceptual base of African QFs; governance: institutional setting, participation of social partners and other constituencies; monitoring and review; vision, objectives, scope, structure (levels and descriptors) of QFs; place of validation/recognition of prior learning/non-formal, informal learning; quality assurance; learning outcomes; credit systems, progression, permeability; alignment/referencing to RQFs; registration of qualifications: tools, instruments; costs and financing of QFs; communication, dissemination, outreach various users' groups; role and place of QFs in supporting national developments and skills and employment policies; innovation in qualifications.

Some findings: distribution by stages development and implementation of their NQFs (total: 41 countries)

1. No NQF	2. Early thinking	3. In development & consultation	4. Legal act approved, implementation started	5. Advanced implementation, reviewed	Total
3	8	13	14	3	41

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 (eleven out of seventeen NQFs at implementation stage). 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. Two of the newest NQFs are located in SADC: Eswatini (approved in August 2020) and Lesotho (approved in June 2019).

NQFs in implementation in other regions: Cape Verde (10 years of experience); Kenya (progress since 2014); Morocco (political validation NQF, new governance structure NQF, QA); Rwanda (advancing completion of integrated NQF, based on existing sector frameworks); Tunisia (legal act approved, ongoing reforms of TVET qualifications); The Gambia (TVET QF); Ghana (TVET QF); Nigeria (National Skills QF) and Senegal (TVET QF).
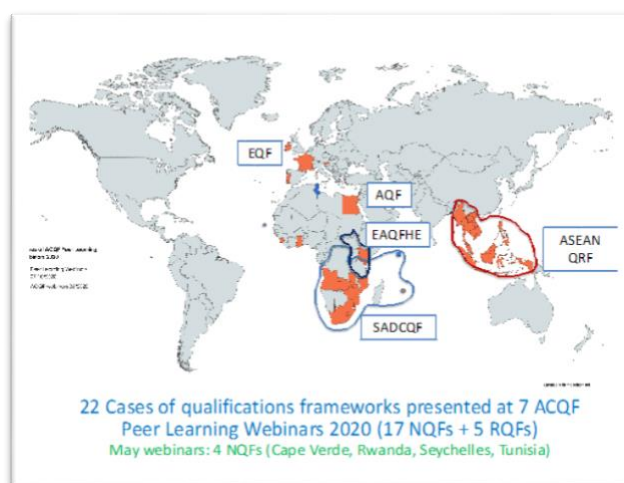
Peer-Learning Programme 2020

From the start of the Covid-19 pandemic the ACQF process turned digital, took the road of active networking, peer-learning activities and mutual understanding between national NQF stakeholders. This process combines learning and knowledge-building with networking – creating bridges. The peer-learning webinars in 2020 brought together a wealth of information, views and evidence on 22 real cases. In seven webinars,

the participants learned from seventeen NQFs and five RQFs, through live presentations and discussion with high-ranking officials and representatives from national and regional authorities/agencies. The full content of the seven peer-learning webinars, including presentations, policy documents and videos is available at: https://openspace.etf.europa.eu/pages/acqf-peer-learning-webinars. These resources will also be available in the ACQF Website (launch planned on 1 May 2021).

The presented cases are listed below, in alphabetical order:

	National qualifications frameworks	Regional qualifications frameworks
Africa (14 cases)	Angola, Cape Verde, Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Mauritius, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe	Southern African Development Community Qualifications Framework (SADCQF); East Africa Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (EAQFHE)
Other regions, continents (8 cases)	Bahrain, France, Ireland, Portugal and Slovenia	Arab Qualifications Framework (AQF); European Qualifications Framework (EQF); ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework

22 Cases of qualifications frameworks presented at 7 ACQF Peer Learning Webinars 2020 (17 NQFs + 5 RQFs)
May webinars: 4 NQFs (Cape Verde, Rwanda, Seychelles, Tunisia)

Session 3: Phase 2 – report on progress and planned activities 2021–2022

Speakers: members of ACQF experts' team – Jeffy Mukora, Eusebius Juma Mukhwana, Jean Adotevi, Kaylash Allgoo, Deodonne Kunwufine

Main topics
- Scenario-building for the ACQF: overview of the approach and questions
- The ACQF scenarios
- SWOT analysis of the scenarios for ACQF
- ACQF feasibility study (output 1)
- ACQF capacity development programme: concept and plan
- ACQF website: first version – presentation

Scenarios of the ACQF

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.

The analysis of the scenarios and options for the ACQF as a sustainable policy instrument paves the way to the elaboration of the main project output – the ACQF policy and technical document and action plan.

The scenario-building discussions examined several issues of strategic importance, such as: (i) harmonisation: scope and format relevant and adequate within a context of diversity of education and

training systems on the continent; (ii) collaborative working of ACQF, quality assurance and recognition of qualifications are essential for improved portability and mobility of skills and qualifications; (iii) interplay and efficient cooperation between the three levels: national, regional and continental; (iv) sustainability of the ACQF: a function of the future governance set-up, technical and human capacity, buy-in and support at national and regional levels, resources (financial, technical), involvement of the relevant stakeholders (from the world of work, education and training, youth, professional sectors); (v) capacity development – a major factor for success and sustainability; (vi) links with AU flagship policies and initiatives supporting free trade, free movement, recognition and quality assurance; (vii) links with skills intelligence and with progress monitoring, to be established from the start of ACQF to ensure evidence-based steering and review.

Imagining scenarios of the ACQF

The proposed ACQF scenarios were developed on the basis of the principles and assumptions below. The analytical report (output 1) is due in June 2021.

<u>Starting definition</u>: Scenarios are not crystal balls to guess the future, but tools to explore different ways how 'futures' might unfold. 'More than one future is possible' (scenarios).

<u>Sources, references</u>: AU policies; ACQF Mapping Study; international literature on scenario-building; NQFs; RQFs; qualifications; future of work and skills: Labour market, jobs, skills, qualification types.[2]

<u>Process of scenario-building</u>: Initial proposal of three scenarios – ACQF team's comments and debate systematically organised in four meetings (November and December 2020) for gradual development, clarification and general consensus. The SWOT analysis was discussed in a dedicated meeting in January 2021. On 6 January 2021 the ACQF team met with AUC ESTI Education division to present the planned activities, the proposed Scenarios and discuss linkages with AU Education policies. The working document 'Scenarios of the ACQF' shared for the ACQF AG meeting was finalised in January 2021, upon an internal review process verifying coherence and clarity of the argument.

<u>Features of the three scenarios</u>: All three scenarios are conceptualised on the basis of a set of key 'features', which act as common references to compare the scenarios. The key features at this stage are as follows:
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 and networks;
8. interplay with other frameworks, conventions; and
9. benefits, contribution, acceptability.

Each scenario can be translated into plans, actions and conditions for implementation, as a target construct and can also be viewed as a stage in the path of gradual development (evolution) and consolidation of the ACQF.

Three scenarios of ACQF: 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 three 'futures'.

The proposed titles of each scenario underline the distinctive added value of each scenario:
   a. Scenario 1: 'ACQF connects' – underscores support for effective networking, experience and knowledge-sharing, capacity development, support to NQFs' development, communication and benchmarking on NQFs and RQFs. The ACQF website is fundamental and the ACQF is a platform for all countries and RECs on the continent. This scenario is conceived as relatively easy to reach, as it

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[2] The main source on scenario-building considered in the team discussion is available at:
https://www.oecd.org/site/schoolingfortomorrowknowledgebase/futuresthinking/scenarios/whatarescenarios.htm

focuses on supporting dynamics that enable the establishment of NQFs, as it contributes to building the capacities, motivation and tools that countries need to engage with NQF development.

b. Scenario 2: 'ACQF creates mutual trust' – beyond experience-sharing and communication, this scenario focuses on referencing of NQFs/RQFs to the ACQF, and eventually the use of ACQF levels and labels on qualifications of the linked NQFs/RQFs. This implementation of the features proposed for this scenario contributes to meet the full set of objectives of the ACQF, including more efficient recognition and portability of skills and qualifications across the continent.

c. 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.

AG members received the working paper 'Scenarios of the ACQF', shared by AUC ESTI with the invitation and other meeting documents. The working paper presents the three scenarios, briefly described in terms of nine key features. A partial overview of the three scenarios is presented below, through the lens of two key features: a) objectives and functions and b) instruments, policies and networks.

Features	Scenario 1: 'ACQF connects' Timeframe: 2023 *Note: The current ACQF project funds/supports the set-up of certain elements of these features (2022)*	Scenario 2: 'ACQF creates mutual trust' Timeframe: 2026	Scenario 3: 'ACQF opens new horizons' Timeframe: approx. 2028–2030
1.Main objectives and functions of the ACQF	• Transparency on NQFs/NQS/ RQFs: accessible online information • Platform for dialogue, peer learning, capacity development, benchmarking, good practice • Monitoring NQFs/RQFs in Africa • Contributes to achieving strategic objectives of CESA 16–25 (especially 4c and 4d)	• Referencing meta-qualifications framework – working with NQFs and RQFs • Translation device for comparison/ referencing • Quality and comparability of qualifications of NQFs/NQS referenced to ACQF • ACQF levels applied on qualifications of NQFs/NQS referenced to ACQF • ACQF common guidelines disseminated and domesticated • ACQF levels, descriptors can be used as reference by qualification frameworks at national and regional level • Common African education and qualifications area • Analysis: trends in skills and qualifications	• Qualifications framework with continental qualifications (standards, profiles, units) with ACQF levels • ACQF contributes to the AfCFTA • Supports automatic mutual recognition of qualifications • Issuance of digital certificates • Common African education and qualifications space • Analysis: trends in skills and qualifications
2.Instruments, guidelines, policies and networks	• ACQF policy and technical document • ACQF guidelines: full set • Website – with database, inventory NQFs and regular updates • Recognition of prior learning (RPL) models: inventory of	• ACQF policy and technical document (upgraded) • ACQF Handbook: referencing, ACQF guidelines, tools • ACQF digital referencing (alignment) – to ease referencing NQFs/RQFs to ACQF, with evidence and milestones Database of all referencing processes and reports	• ACQF policy and technical document (upgraded) • Continental qualifications (common minimum standards, profiles, units), especially for

tools, methodologies, good practice • Capacity-development activities • Platform ACQF focal points – national, regional • Network of ACQF coaches/ experts • Network with national recognition bodies • Network with NQF/RQF institutions/agencies	• Database of qualifications of NQFs referenced to ACQF • Tool comparison referenced NQFs • Recognition of prior learning: common policy, tools	new fields, new tasks/jobs, and new skills[3] • Continental agreement on automatic mutual recognition (linked with transparency factors such as: existence of operational NQF, quality assurance, referencing to ACQF) • Digital certificates infrastructure: for issuers and users • Data analytics

SWOT analysis of the ACQF scenarios

The overview of perceived strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the three scenarios is the result of several rounds of discussion in the team of ACQF experts. The SWOT analysis was elaborated to each individual scenario, focuses on key features of the scenarios, considers risks and assumptions. Major common elements considered in the SWOT across the three scenarios are outlined in the table below.

Strengths	Weaknesses
- AU policies and strategies support ACQF - NQF developments across the continent: growing number of countries developing and starting implementation - AUC support to ACQF project - Planned outputs of ongoing ACQF project: substantive foundation for future implementation	- Scarce and unstable funding - Governance and implementation set-up and mechanisms – needs to be operational and adequate for scope and objectives ACQF - Capacities, experience, knowledge, paradigm shift among relevant stakeholders
Opportunities	Threats
- Diversity of education systems: richness, cross-fertilisation, mutual learning - AU countries very interested in rapidly operational ACQF - ACQF–AfCFTA linkages and synergy - New developments on AU education policies, notably PAQAF, CESA - Post-Covid19 recovery investments and programmes - New skills, new learning, new qualifications - Emerging and growing experiences and expertise on qualifications and frameworks in Africa	- Failure to integrate ACQF implementation activities and objectives in national and regional policies and programmes - Inconsistent policies and priorities related with qualifications and NQFs at continental, regional and national levels - Fall-out of Covid-19 crisis on learning outcomes, economic development, employment, society - Instability: political, military

Report of feasibility analysis (Output 1)

The outline of the report was presented as follows:

1. Executive summary

2. Introduction to the study

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[3] 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.

3. African Continental Qualifications Framework in the African and global context

4. ACQF vision and development

5. Scenarios for the ACQF

6. Sources

An annotated outline of the report provides a concise overview of the themes and issues addressed by chapter:

1. Executive summary

- Presents the main findings, assessment and perspectives of the study

2. Introduction to the study

- This chapter covers the orientation: presents the justification/rationale of this study. The main objective: identify and assess key scenarios for the ACQF as a sustainable policy and instrument – informing the design of the ACQF policy and technical document with action plan, guidelines and supporting instruments.

3. African Continental Qualifications Framework in the African and global context

- Places and views the ACQF in the context of African developments
  - Economy, employment, education and skills development, digitalisation
  - Presents the RECs – with focus on their education, qualifications, skills policies
- AU policy context
- ACQF in the context of global developments

4. ACQF vision and development

- Vision, aspirations and objectives of the ACQF
- Development process: phases, outputs, consultation
- Main findings and strategic considerations from the ACQF Mapping Study concerning NQFs and the interplay with RQFs
- ACQF as an enabler

5. Scenarios for the ACQF

- Drivers of change of learning, skills, qualifications and QFs
- Explores scenario-building in the context of education
- Defines key dimensions and features for ACQF scenarios
- Presents three scenarios – in a perspective of comparison and evolution
- Discusses the conceptual-technical design of ACQF: scope, levels and descriptors. Options (8–10 levels)
- Options for governance and sustainable implementation of ACQF
- Draft roadmap – towards ACQF

6. Sources: research, literature, inventories, policies, ACQF mapping study collection

ACQF Capacity development programme (Output 3)

The development of the ACQF is underway, but sustainability and continuity will depend on leaders' commitment and understanding, on practitioners' competences and the eventually on the availability of a network of trained experts able to support countries in developing and improving their NQF initiatives. This programme will empower individuals, leaders, countries and the continent.

Main objectives of the ACQF capacity development programme

- create and share knowledge: contribute to creating common understanding and concepts of qualifications frameworks and systems;
- share experiences: disseminate information on the state of play, good practice and experiences of QFs on the continent and across the globe;
- create technical capacity: contribute to creating a growing pool of African expertise and consequently to sustainability of projects and initiatives across countries and regions;
- create trust among countries and QFs: generate mutual understanding and networking between countries, qualifications frameworks (systems); and
- provide information on the ACQF and create buy-in: enhance communication from and on the ACQF project's activities and outputs, contribute to quick wins and build buy-in of African stakeholders towards the ACQF.

Components of the ACQF capacity development programme

To reach the above objectives, the ACQF capacity development programme combines a set of components, working in synergy:
- peer learning (experience-sharing): (i) on NQFs and RQFs in Africa and across the globe; (ii) thematic sessions;
- blended training (for groups): training workshops and online learning;
- e-learning: individuals, groups;
- support and work together with countries (on demand): through coaching, facilitation, advice. These activities are means for practical application for ACQF capacity development programme trainees and trained experts;
- conferences, seminars, workshops, calls for papers and publications; and
- if necessary and feasible, other components can be included, such as cooperation with education institutions (lectures, workshops, or even a module – on a pilot basis).

Main themes of the ACQF capacity development programme

Qualifications and NQFs – a systemic view, including global dynamics. Learning outcomes; level descriptors; alignment/referencing criteria and processes; validation of learning; quality assurance; registration of qualifications; monitoring and evaluation, review of QFs/ACQF; communication; innovation and technology in qualifications frameworks and systems. Governance of NQFs. African opportunities for skills and qualifications.

Overview of planned CDP actions:

A) Peer learning activities: five webinars (May to October)
B) ACQF Conference: two days (indicatively: 02-03/December 2021). Theme: "Validation of learning: the future is here- opportunities and demands for qualifications frameworks and systems".
C) ACQF Training Programme: 5,5 days – 06-11/December 2021. Qualifications and qualifications frameworks – a 360° view of issues, components and tools and their interactions.

ACQF website

The first version of the ACQF website was presented for information and a first glance at the design, functionalities and possibilities offered by this important instrument. More than a space for communication of information, documents and news, the vision for the ACQF website entails other functions, such as diverse types of tools: a) facilitating access to updated information and snapshots on NQFs on the continent; b) for comparison of NQFs and qualifications; c) inventory database of NQFs; d) learning programme ACQF; e)

networking; f) online/remote meetings. The website is in construction until 30 April and will be launched on 1 May 2021. A landing page with a sign-up facility is now online for all interested users.

Main debates, questions in sessions 2 and 3

- The ACQF Mapping Study and the peer-learning webinars of phase 1 attracted international participants, experiences and attention, which contributed to elevating the place of the ACQF process in the map of international networks and debates. The ACQF is open to learn from international experiences and to be part of the global debate and activities contributing to much-needed transparency and portability of skills and qualifications.

- The ACQF Mapping Study is a rich source of knowledge and reflections on qualifications and qualifications frameworks, with a wide global perspective and stakeholders and AG members are invited to read and use the insights of the collections of reports for capacity development in their own institutions. The Mapping Study collection sheds light on NQF developments in several AU countries never included before in the specialised research and publications.

- The ACQF project should continue engaging with countries and regions, and involve different stakeholders to promote, inform and co-create the conditions for an operational and responsive ACQF, oriented to people. The AUC will support the process of involvement of new countries.

- The scenarios of ACQF are interconnected, and the first scenario is easier to reach in the short-medium term. However, to meet all objectives of the ACQF, notably the objective of recognition and mobility, it is essential to prepare the necessary conditions and decisions to prepare for Scenario 2.

- Discussion of the conceptual-technical design of the ACQF started and participants are interested in the levels and descriptors. This debate will continue in the coming months.

- The scope of the ACQF is inclusive/comprehensive (all levels and sub-sectors of education and training), and this opens a new opportunity to support synergy between the various projects and programmes of the AU with different sub-sectors of education and training.

- To improve recognition and mobility across the continent, we need to consider the possibility of establishing systematic exchanges and networking of the three pillars: qualifications frameworks, recognition of qualifications and quality assurance. Creating links between the ACQF and the Addis Recognition Convention should be discussed, and actions prepared in this direction.

- Shaping the governance set-up of the ACQF requires consideration of different dimensions: the national-regional-continental interaction; the involvement of relevant stakeholders; sustainable operations, supported by resources, capacity, experience and analysis; good and constructive networking between NQF agencies and councils. An implementation unit (capacity) with resources should be put in place to ensure that the ACQF remains active and starts implementation as soon as the technical and policy foundations are prepared and agreed.

- Capacity development activities should be adjusted to needs of different countries.

- The ACQF has a unique characteristic, differentiating it from other meta-frameworks globally: it interacts with national and also with regional frameworks on the continent, hence the ACQF has two lines of interaction. It was noted that the ACQF will build on the specific expertise and role of regional bodies and councils, such as CAMES, for effective interaction with countries affiliated with the regions.

- Shaping the adequate links between the ACQF and AfCFTA is a fundamental decision, and the ACQF can and should help in developing the skills and qualifications that can enable and support mobility and trade in services and goods.

- The ACQF project and beyond should continue to seek good synergy with other AU frameworks and CESA Clusters, such as: Teachers Qualifications Framework (coordination: AFTRA, IICBA) and actions

towards human resources for AU Early Childhood Education Framework (AfECN). The joint initiative between the African Curriculum Association/CESA Cluster Curriculum and the ACQF project aims to study and map trends and key features of school curriculums and will provide evidence-based insights. It is also an example of cross-fertilisation between AU policy initiatives and clusters.

- The ACQF project is to conduct regular updates on the status and developments of NQFs, using smart/digital instruments. A user-friendly template will be proposed to collect updates.

- The ACQF website – a focal point/hub connecting all African NQFs and RQFs. The website is in construction and will be online at the beginning of May 2021.

ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: list of participants

1. Representatives of ACQF AG

Countries: Cameroon, Egypt, Kenya, Mauritius, Mozambique, Senegal, South Africa

Institutions: Association of African Universities (AAU), African Curriculum Association (ACA), AQVN, Arab Qualifications Framework, Association of Arab Universities, ATUPA-CAPA, CAMES, IUCEA, SARUA, African Early Childhood Network (AfECN), IICBA-Unesco, UNESCO (Headquarters Paris), UNESCO (Dakar), EU Delegation to AU

2. Other invitees

Ghana, Seychelles, Zimbabwe

3. ACQF project team: Eduarda Castel-Branco, Ernst Hustaedt, Essete Abebe, Deodonne Kunwufine, Eusebius Juma Mukhwana, Jean Adotevi, Jeffy Mukora, Kaylash Allgoo.

4. AUC ESTI: Director, Acting Head of Education division, Team Education division

ANNEX 2: Agenda of the meeting

Introduction

The African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF) is a policy initiative of the African Union (AU).

The ACQF is strongly anchored on AU policies and strategies, especially:

- *Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want*;[4]

- *African Continental Free Trade Area* (AfCFTA);[5]

- *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);[6] and

- *Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2016–2025* (CESA 16–25).[7]

To develop the ACQF the African Union Commission works in partnership with the European Union (EU), Federal Ministry of Economic Development and Cooperation (Germany), GIZ and ETF, in a process technically supported by a specific component of the AU– EU Union (EU) programme "Skills for Youth Employability: SIFA Technical Cooperation". To this end the ACQF development process (further: ACQF project) was launched on 3-4/09/2019 at headquarters of the African Union, in Addis Ababa, and will be completed in September 2022.

The objectives of the envisioned ACQF, as presented and discussed at the ACQF launch workshop are:

- *comparability, quality and transparency of qualifications of all levels and sub-sectors, and support people´s lifelong learning;*

- *facilitate recognition of diplomas and certificates, and support mobility (learners, workers and services);*

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[4] *Agenda 2063*: https://au.int/en/agenda2063/overview
[5] AfCFTA: https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/36437-treaty-consolidated_text_on_cfta_-_en.pdf; Factsheet on the AfCFTA: https://www.tralac.org/documents/resources/faqs/2377-african-continental-free-trade-area-faqs-june-2018-update/file.html
[6] AU Free Movement Protocol, Article 18: 'The States Parties shall establish a continental qualifications framework to encourage and promote the free movement of persons': https://www.tralac.org/documents/resources/african-union/1965-protocol-to-the-abuja-treaty-free-movement-of-persons-right-of-residence-and-establishment-adopted-29-january-2018/file.html
[7] CESA 16–25: https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/29958-doc-cesa_-_english-v9.pdf

- *work in cooperation and complementarity with National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF) and Regional Qualifications Frameworks (RQFs) and support creation of a common African education and qualifications area; and*

- *promote cooperation, referencing between qualifications frameworks (national and regional) in Africa and worldwide.*

Key principles of the ACQF are:

- *Inclusiveness of all types of learning and levels of qualifications;*

- *Openness to learners' and stakeholders' needs; and*

- *Innovation-readiness to embrace new forms of learning, new skills and types of qualifications, demanded by social and technological transformation – including greening and digitalisation, and "Beyond-Covid19" drivers of change.*

The ACQF project is working and delivering on the planned outputs:

Phase 1: 09/2019-11/2020

- Continental mapping study: analysis of the state-of-play and perspective developments of National and Regional Qualifications Frameworks (NQF, RQF)on the continent. The comprehensive mapping report was pre-published in English on 20 November 2020[8]. Thirteen country reports, three regional reports, a Synthesis and a Snapshot infographic complete the collection of the ACQF mapping study[9].

- Capacity development programme: In 2020 the ACQF completed a first programme of 7 multi-lingual Peer learning webinars, sharing knowledge on 22 experiences of Qualifications Frameworks (17 NQF and 5 RQF), with an average of 60-70 participants per webinar.

Phase 2: 11/2020-09/2022

- Analysis of options and scenarios for the ACQF as a policy instrument and enabler of the above-indicated objectives and principles. Milestone: end June 2021.

- ACQF policy and technical document supported by an Action Plan, and technical guidelines. Milestone: by September 2022.

- ACQF capacity development and networking: based on peer learning, blended training, technical support to qualifications frameworks, and knowledge creation through conferences and joint activities with education and training institutions. The mix of activities contributes to awareness raising, mutual trust, creation of a network of trained experts, and will be supported by the ACQF website and an e-learning platform.

- ACQF website: supporting information and experience-sharing, networking, capacity development, comparisons and benchmarking – on NQFs and RQFs in Africa, and on the ACQF as a policy instrument.

Objectives of the meeting

The meeting aims to update the Advisory Group on the outputs achieved in 2020 and on the activities planned and started for the period 2021-2022.

The first important milestone of the ACQF development process in 2021 is the analysis of options and scenarios of the future ACQF, as a sustainable policy and instrument. The project team submits the initial draft overview of ACQF scenarios for consultation with the Advisory Group, and welcomes comments and suggestions contributing to further development of the analysis.

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[8]Final publication in English, French and Portuguese: March 2021.
[9]ACQF mapping study collection at:https://www.nepad.org/skillsportalforyouth/publication/african-continental-qualifications-framework-acqf-mapping-study

The ACQF Website will be presented, with functionalities, reports and analyses, inventory of NQFs and newsletter.

The next consultation meeting with ACQF Advisory Group is envisaged in June 2021, to discuss the advanced draft report on the ACQF options and scenarios and the outline and plan of work on the ACQF Policy and Technical Document and Action Plan.

Agenda
Multilingual meeting (English-French-Portuguese)

Time (GMT+3)	Session – main topics	Responsible
12.30-13.15 Session 1	Opening and objectives of meeting Opening remarks Tour de table – Advisory Group	Mr Hambani Masheleni Acting Head of Education Division Dr Mahama Ouedraogo, Director ESTI
13.15-13.45 Session 2	ACQF project: process and outputs in 2020. Outputs and activities 2021-2022. Focus on: • Mapping Study • Capacity development – peer learning webinars • Outputs and activities 2021-2022	ACQF project experts
13.45-14.00	Questions and answers	
14.00-14.15	Lunch Break	
14.15-15.45 Session 3	Phase 2: main outputs and ongoing activities. Focus on: • Scenarios for ACQF: rationale, main features • Output 1: report of feasibility analysis – outline • Output 3 (capacity development programme): Concept and Plan • ACQF Website	ACQF project experts
15.45-16.15	Questions and answers, discussion. Comments and suggestions.	AUC, ACQF experts
16.15-16.30 Session 4	Conclusions. Wrap-up. Next steps. Closing remarks	ACQF project coordinator, AUC ESTI

- **Shared documents**

  • ACQF Mapping Study – collection of reports
  • ACQF Scenarios – draft proposal for consultation with Advisory Group ACQF, January 2021
  • ACQF Capacity Development Programme 2021-2022 – concept and plan, February 2021
  • ACQF – Activity report 2020, December 2020