The
Southern African Development Community Qualifications Framework (SADCQF)[1]

Background and Context

The main goal of SADC's integration agenda in human resource development is to increase the availability of educated and highly skilled personnel through comparable standards in education and training systems of Members. The achievement of this goal is hampered by a number of challenges which, *inter-alia*, includes limited access to secondary and higher/tertiary education and training thus creating a mismatch between supply and demand for skilled labour. Further, a lack of comparable standards and qualifications across training institutions and countries limits the mobility of students, teachers and lecturers. These challenges have been acknowledged at both national and regional level.

At regional level, the SADC Policy and Strategic frameworks are the Regional Indicative Strategic Plan (RISDP) 2005-2010 and the Protocol on Education and Training (signed in 1997 and entered into force in 2000). These documents identified development and harmonisation of qualification and accreditation systems and frameworks as a key strategy for addressing the lack of comparable standards and qualifications across the region. This was also informed by the accelerating trend towards development of qualifications frameworks as instruments to develop, classify and recognise formal learning across the African continent, as is also the case across Europe, the Caribbean and the Asia-Pacific region. As more and more countries and regions across the world develop qualifications frameworks to improve harmonisation of education and training systems and comparability of qualifications, it is becoming increasingly evident that Africa has not remained unaffected. At present more than twenty African countries are actively engaged in qualifications framework development, including all SADC member states, not to mention exploratory discussions in other regions and talk of a continent-wide 'African Qualifications Framework'**.**

The SADC region has not remained mute on the possibility of a Regional Qualifications Framework (RQF). Firstly, as early as 1997, when the SADC Protocol on Education and Training was signed, the idea of a SADC RQF became embedded in a host of regional policy directives and strategies. In 2000 a SADC Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation (TCCA) was established, comprising nominated qualifications and quality assurance experts from Member States and with support from the SADC Secretariat. The purpose of the TCCA is "to develop and recommend policy guidelines, instruments, structures and procedures that would facilitate equating, harmonising and eventual standardisation of accreditation and certification of qualifications in SADC".

In 2001 SADC Ministers of Education endorsed a Strategic Plan put forward by the TCCA to facilitate the development, implementation and harmonisation of national qualifications frameworks, to review and strengthen national assessment and accreditation systems, and to facilitate agreement on entry requirements to higher education in the region.

The TCCA is functional, meeting at least once annually, despite various constraints such as resources (human and financial).   Between 1997 and 2011 the TCCA undertook a number of

activities to support the SADC RQF process. This included the review of existing qualifications (2001 and 2010) which recommended the need for development of:

- Level descriptors for the SADC RQF,
- A framework for the improvement of quality assurance systems in the region, and
- A SADC Qualifications Portal.

A regional Quality Assurance (QA) guideline was developed in 2008 informed by a review of the status of QA systems in Member States. The development of a SADC Qualifications Portal was started in 2009 and was initially populated with qualifications until 2011. The Region adopted a piece-by-piece approach to developing the SADC RQF by first focusing on QA.

The SADC Regional Qualifications Framework(RQF)

Introduction

The key components of the SADC RQF is a regional vision that it should be an overarching framework for regional integration, QA and global competitiveness of education and training systems in SADC Member States. The potential beneficiaries of the SADC RQF include:

- SADC Member States and the region as a whole,
- National education and training systems and institutions in SADC Member States and policy makers, managers and programme implementers,
- Students and society at large especially with regard to quality and relevance of the sector and harmonisation and the sharing of resources and ideas and the joint implementation of programmes and promotion and determination of equivalences,
- Employers, as the establishment and operationalisation of the SADC RQF is likely to enhance and increase the quality and pool of qualified skills; in addition there will be agreed recognition processes once the structures for the determination of the qualification comparability is in place,
- A variety of stakeholders and partners in education and training, and
- The global community and partnerships as the region will be sharing good practices with other countries and similar regional organisations.

Once established and implemented, the SADC RQF could be extended to the rest of the continent in accordance with the continental coverage of the Addis Convention (*Revised Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and Other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in African States*). This would further enhance regional and international co-operation. The SADC RQF also holds numerous benefits to the beneficiaries listed above and these include:

- Promoting dialogue and mutual understanding,
- Creating a wider pool of knowledge, skills, values and experience in the region as countries can begin to fill their training gaps and collaborate in highly specialised training,
- Increasing access to skilled and knowledgeable personnel through a more efficient, rational and standardised system,

- Allowing learners and workers greater flexibility and mobility within the region and increasing the pool of learning opportunities,
- Facilitating determination of qualification comparability and credit transfer in the SADC region,
- Regulating cross-border provisioning,
- Streamlining and rationalising training resources leading to greater economies of scale in developing highly technical and rare skills and knowledge,
- Promoting greater co-operation and unity of purpose between SADC Member States and education and training stakeholders,
- Enhancing partnerships between governments and private education and training providers to improve QA practices and relevance of qualifications, and
- Ensuring more justice in access and equity of disadvantaged groups.

Definition

The SADC RQF was formally named the SADCQF at a September 2016 meeting of the TCCA.

The SADCQF is a regional mechanism for comparability and recognition of full qualifications, credit transfer, creation of regional standards and facilitation of QA. It consists of a set of agreed principles, practices, procedures and standardised terminology intended to: ensure effective comparability of qualifications and credits across SADC, facilitate mutual recognition of qualifications among Member States, harmonise qualifications, and create acceptable regional standards.

Purpose

The main purpose of the SADCQF then includes:
- 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 will promote co-operation and partnerships within SADC. It will also promote peace and prosperity through quality human resource development and increased mobility in the Region. It is expected that the SADCQF will enhance co-operation and development in the SADC region by contributing to the fulfilment of the SADC Protocol on Education and Training and the overall objective of the SADC Treaty for a common future.

The SADCQF will also contribute to the:
- development and implementation of National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) in Member States,

- harmonisation between NQFs in Member States,
- review and strengthening of national assessment and accreditation systems, and
- facilitation of agreement on entrance requirements to higher education and training.

Scope

The scope of the SADCQF includes all forms, levels and categories of education and training that exist in the Region including in Member States. This includes provision by public and private sectors and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). The main principle will be one of inclusiveness to encompass all areas of general education, technical and vocational education and training (TVET), higher education, lifelong and out-of-school or non-formal education, including but not limited to various modes of learning such as face-to-face, distance and online learning. Apprenticeships and industry-based training will also be taken on board. Cross-border education and training as outlined under the General Agreement on Trades and Services (GATS) will not be excluded.

Design features

The existing and emerging NQFs in Member States already exhibit a variety of design features best suited to the individual countries and in most cases agreed on by the stakeholders and role players in the country. The design features range from level descriptors, quality assurance and standards setting arrangements, databases, etc. It is recommended that the design features of the SADCQF be determined in a similar conciliatory manner. Furthermore, the design features of the SADCQF should be influenced by the structures of the NQFs in Member States and vice-versa. The SADCQF and the NQFs should be well linked and co-ordinated as a critical component of the harmonisation process.

The SADCQF will include standardised terminology for better understanding and improved implementation. The SADCQF will recognise the variety of credits awarded by Member States and develop a mechanism that will allow for comparability and transfer. This may ultimately evolve into a Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) system and should facilitate Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) processes.

The SADCQF will be a reference framework. It consists of:
- Ten levels described by SADC level descriptors as contained in Annexure 1,
- A SADC qualifications portal that includes part-qualifications and full qualifications, described through outcome statements and including credits where applicable, that are formally recognised in SADC Member States, and
- SADC QA guidelines as contained in Annexure 2.

Underlying principles

The principles on which the SADCQF should be based as proposed by the TCCA are summarised in the Table below.

Regional solidarity and co-operation	The SADCQF will at all times work within its core mandates of promoting regional solidarity and co-operation, peace and prosperity among Member States and ensure unity and better understanding both in SADC and the broader initiatives of the African Continent. This includes commitment to the broader social and economic goals of combating poverty and promoting equity and global competitiveness. It also allows policy-makers and educational institutions in SADC Member States to compare their systems and qualifications and enhance transparency and mutual trust between and among the systems.
Interaction with global and local frames of reference	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.
Strengthening of national education and training systems	The SADCQF is a resource for each Member State, offering essential support for reviewing education and training provision, goal setting and planning in relation to skills needs and the securing of investment in learning to the greatest benefit of society and the learner.
Quality enhancement and strengthening of education and training in the region	The SADCQF is aimed fundamentally at using the qualifications dynamic to enhance the quality, relevance and impact of education and training throughout SADC and to serve the interests of all the citizens of the region. It will also assist Member States to ensure investments in qualifications (whether through public sector or corporate and international provision) are properly designed, nurtured and used to the benefit of society and the people of SADC.
Respect for regional and multilateral decisions	The SADCQF will have respect for national sovereignty as advocated by the Treaty and the Protocol on Education and Training. National governments will be responsible for agreeing on actions to fulfil the intentions and principles of the SADCQF. Collaborative programmes and external interventions are undertaken only with mutual understanding and respect and at the invitation of the national governments or delegated authority.
Autonomy and inter-relatedness of the sectors of learning	The sectors of learning (general, academic, technical and vocational) have different needs and different ways of designing and using qualifications. They also have common interests and a need for articulation of different kinds. The proposed SADCQF will actively promote work towards harmonisation undertaken within and across these sectors.
Pragmatism in development	It is a fundamental principle of the SADCQF (in the spirit of the SADC Protocol) that its development should occur in a pragmatic, phase-by-phase manner, which gradually becomes more delineated and comprehensive. Feasible, practical steps to attain the vision should be taken so that positive and concrete achievements can be measured as the vision is fulfilled.

Prioritisation of projects	The creation of a comprehensive and fully harmonised system of qualifications across borders is an important but also challenging task. The question of feasibility demands that projects undertaken to develop the SADCQF be prioritised on an informed basis according to a pre-determined set of principles.
Position in terms of globalisation and internationalisation	In the context of the opportunities and threats of globalisation where an aggressive trade in knowledge and skills is expressed actively and commercially there are potential benefits for Africa if taken up and well managed, but they also present a great and obvious challenge.
Transparency, flexibility and validity	The understanding of the term framework should be very broad and based on a set of agreed principles, practices, procedures and standardised terminology. The SADCQF should be continually revisited and adjusted if necessary if it is to remain valid, relevant and competitive.
Mobility	The SADCQF should allow learners and workers greater flexibility and mobility within the region. Accreditation systems would allow transfer of credits across the SADC countries. It will help citizens to navigate within and between complex national systems of education and training and therefore support their lifelong learning.
Relation to national education systems	The SADCQF recognises the principle that development should occur in a pragmatic phase-by-phase manner. Feasible practical steps should be taken to reach the outlined vision. The development of the SADCQF will take place alongside the simultaneous development of NQFs.
Equity within and among Member States	Equity within SADC will be attained once a variety of courses are recognised and approved for the attainment of equivalent levels of qualification.
Responsiveness and relevance	It is important and fundamental that the development of the SADCQF is "home-grown" and guided by the demands of education and training in the region and driven by the local experts. Improved co-operation and sharing of ideas and promising standards will go a long way to facilitate a relevant and effective SADCQF.

Legislative context

In most, if not all countries, NQFs are established through the promulgation of national Acts. Depending on their particular purposes, such legislation also leads to the establishment of national agencies/authorities responsible for the NQF.

In the case of the SADCQF no legislation at regional level is envisaged. The focus will rather be on respect for the legislation already in place in Member States. The intention of the SADCQF is to allow for more flexible arrangements, based on agreements, protocols, conventions or specific guidelines. The Protocol on Education and Training is already based on the principle of Member States agreeing on specific areas of co-operation. Institutions in SADC are urged to comply and honour the spirit of the Protocol without any enforcement and while maintaining the necessary autonomy.

This is also in line with the Addis Convention (*Revised Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and Other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in African States*) most recently revised in December 2014 calling for respect of the national character and the cultures of the education and training systems in the member countries in Africa.

Governance structure

Implementation Unit

It is proposed that a dedicated Implementation Unit be established at the SADC Secretariat and staffed through the appointment of a SADC Officer with a technical background on a fixed-term contract, and possibly also supported by seconded staff from Member States. In this regard there is a particular need for ICT and Marketing specialists. The existing budget allocated to the SADC Secretariat should be utilised to cover the initial expenses. Additional funding should be sourced by the TCCA to ensure the sustainability of the unit[2].

Advisory role of the TCCA

The Implementation Unit will be advised by the TCCA which will oversee the co-ordination of the implementation of the SADCQF. It is proposed that the TCCA be expanded to include social partners, industry and other identified stakeholders. The TCCA should meet at least twice per year.

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[2] An indicative budget has been compiled and is available on request

Co-ordination points

Co-ordination points within Member States should be identified and must include direct links with representatives from Member States that form part of the TCCA. The main role of co-ordination points will be to ensure effective communication between the Member States and the Implementation Unit.

Thematic working groups

Thematic working groups should also be considered to work in specific areas. The SADC Qualifications Portal Task Team is already in place, while similar emerging groupings in the areas of credential evaluation and other sectoral initiatives should be further developed and initiated where necessary.

ANNEXURE 1: SADC level descriptors

Level	Knowledge	Skills	Autonomy and responsibility
10	Makes a substantial and original contribution to knowledge in the field of study through research and scholarship.	Conducts original research which is evaluated by independent experts against international standards. Demonstrates problem solving ability and critical evaluation of research findings for academic discussion.	Demonstrates full responsibility and accountability for all aspects of advanced research work.
9	Demonstrates mastery of theoretically sophisticated subject matter, showing critical awareness of current problems and new insights at the forefront of the discipline area.	Conducts original research deploying appropriate research methods and processes primary and secondary source information using rigorous intellectual analysis and independent thinking and applies knowledge in new situations; and demonstrates independent thinking, problem solving, critical evaluation of research findings and ability to make judgements based on knowledge and evidence.	Shows independence, initiative and originality and the ability to manage own and group outcomes in complex and unpredictable situations.
8	Demonstrates critical understanding of the principles, theories, methodologies, current research and literature of the discipline.	Demonstrates capacity to use a coherent and critical understanding of the principles, theories and methodologies of a particular discipline. Selects and applies appropriate research methods and techniques, and critical analysis and independent evaluation of information.	Operates within the context of a strategic plan with complete accountability for management of resources and supervision of others.
7	Demonstrates knowledge of a major discipline with possible areas of specialisation, including command of the ideas, principles, concepts, chief research methods and problem-solving techniques of the recognised discipline.	Demonstrates intellectual independence, critical thinking and analytical rigor, and advanced communication and collaborative skills in complex and variable contexts.	Designs and manages processes and works with broad accountability for determining, achieving and evaluating personal and group outcomes

6	Demonstrate specialist knowledge in more than one area and ability to collate, analyse and synthesise a wide range of technical information.	Demonstrate ability to apply specialist knowledge and skills in highly variable contexts and formulate responses to concrete and abstract problems.	Manages processes and works with complete accountability for personal and group outcomes.
5	Demonstrate a broad knowledge base with substantial depth in some areas, ability to analyse information and construct a coherent argument.	Applies a wide range of technical and/or scholastic skills in variable contexts using standard and non-standard procedures, often in combination.	Works independently under broad guidance and can take some responsibility for supervising the work of others and group outcomes.
4	Demonstrates a broad knowledge base, incorporating some abstract and technical concepts, and ability to analyse information and make informed judgements.	Applies a moderate range of technical and/or scholastic skills which are transferable in familiar and unfamiliar contexts, using routine and non- routine procedures.	Shows ability for self-direction, requiring little supervision, and complete responsibility for own outcomes and some responsibility for group outcomes.
3	Demonstrates basic operational and theoretical knowledge and ability to interpret information	Demonstrates a range of well-developed skills and ability to apply known solutions to familiar problems	Works under general supervision with some responsibility for quality and quantity of output
2	Demonstrates recall and a narrow range of knowledge and cognitive skills	Can carry out processes that are limited in range, repetitive and familiar	Applied in directed activity under close supervision
1	Demonstrates basic general knowledge and numeracy and literacy for everyday purposes	Can follow simple instructions and perform actions required to carry out simple concrete tasks requiring no special skills	Works under close supervision in familiar situations and structured contexts

SADC Qualifications Portal

The SADC Qualifications Portal has been established as an integrated system that is able to channel information on qualifications, learners and education and training providers from various sources in SADC member states into a seamless interface that will allow different levels of access to governments, education and training providers, and also individual learners.

The initial pilot phase of the development of the SADC Qualifications Portal has been completed and included seven SADC Member States. The second phase has also been completed and involved the upload of qualifications and the broadening of participation to other Member States. The further development of the Portal is currently being considered by the TCCA and will include a website.

ANNEXURE 2: SADC quality assurance guidelines

The Government and relevant institutions in every member state shall:

i. Participate in initiatives intended to lead to the harmonisation and quality assurance (QA) of education structures, frameworks for content selection and organisation, teacher training and quality, teaching and learning resources, course delivery systems, students' achievement and performance standards, nomenclature and framework of certification and governance and management of institutions. This harmonization should include recognition of the three tier degree structure in higher education – namely, Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral degrees, and the diploma supplement to add labour market value to credentials held,

ii. Ensure the planning for and provision of adequate financial resources for the provision of high quality education and training at all levels in the region,

iii. Ensure improved designs, scopes, quality and adequacy of programmes, courses and curricula at all levels of education and training and hold those programmes and courses accountable for the results realised by the learners,

iv. Ensure ideal standards of infrastructures, facilities, teaching and learning resources and generally conducive environments for the different forms and levels of education and training within the region,

v. Promote quality and relevance of education to the needs and expectations of individual learners, member states, the region and international community as a whole and hence facilitate staff and brain retention as well as competitiveness of qualifications earned in the SADC region,

vi. Ensure improved, safe, secure environments for the delivery of education and training through assured high quality, learner friendly infrastructure and facilities including water, sanitation facilities, arrangements for good nutrition and health support, accountable institutional leadership and management, and general cohesion of students and staff,

vii. Promote improved and effective teaching and learning across the region through better training, re-training, remuneration and retention schemes for committed teachers and university lecturers, appropriate and relevant curricula, suitable teaching and learning resources, use of learner-centred course delivery methods, appropriate class sizes, sufficient learning time, and student learning support,

viii. Ensure periodic reviews and improvement of policies, plans and programmes for training, re-training and induction of education personnel including supporting initiatives for the establishment of a regional centre for professional training of education personnel for the region,

ix. Promote and ensure the sharing and exchange of information and best practices on all issues pertaining to education and training for purposes of achieving high standards of achievement and mastery while enabling students in the region to promote interpersonal understanding, peace and conflict resolution and to cope with change, diversity, promoting intra-state and inter-state relationships and enhancing their abilities to learn throughout life,

x. Promote an understanding of quality and the establishment and enhancement of a quality culture as an ideal, and characterising standards of education and training outcomes throughout the SADC Region,

xi. Develop, induce and, where necessary, enforce adherence to defined and regionally agreed education quality and performance standards and indicators, learning outcomes and programme monitoring criteria and procedures,

xii. Promote and support education quality research and evaluation efforts that lead to improved regional mechanisms and performance,

xiii. Participate in sponsoring, hosting and or attending periodic regional meetings to facilitate reaffirmed collaboration, sharing information and experiences, solving common problems, considering and adopting new plans, criteria and procedures and removing obstacles to further collaboration, and planning for the future,

xiv. Foster strategic approaches for stronger partnerships for education development and promotion, maximum use of available facilities and resources in the region, dissemination of information on successful collaboration arrangements and provide on-site technical assistance for QA where it is needed and requested for,

xv. Solicit and encourage international organs and institutions to:
   o support regional initiatives for an integrated and harmonised education and training system for the realisation of regional human ideals, ideas and values that build sustainable futures in which individuals and communities develop in unity and in full respect of each other,
   o support cultural and linguistic diversity of the region in building a common education system based on the richness of those diverse cultures and languages while giving due recognition and focus on the development and use of African languages as a means of delivery and acquisition of education, and

xvi. Participate in the development of a database, linkages and networking systems through e-mails, websites, telephone contacts to facilitate prompt advice and information on matters of regional importance in education development and quality assurance