



Summary report of the Special TCCA meeting **SADCQF – new impetus and roadmap**

Objective of the meeting: a new impetus to TCCA and SADCQF; focus on the priority areas of the new Roadmap for implementation of the SADC Qualifications Framework (SADCQF)

Date and place: 11-12 May 2023, in Johannesburg (Radisson Blu Hotel, Sandton)

Table of contents

1. Summary	2
2. Rationale of the Special TCCA meeting.....	2
3. Participants.....	3
4. Themes of the Special TCCA Meeting	3
5. Status of National Qualifications Frameworks in SADC: updates	3
6. Theme 1: Governance of the SADCQF	5
7. Theme 2: Cooperation with the NQFs of SADC Member States	6
8. Theme 3: Comparability of qualifications - common profiles of qualifications	7
9. Theme 4: Digitisation – implications for qualifications frameworks	8
10. Level descriptors: comparisons	9
11. Micro-credentials: a general overview, reflections.....	10
12. Inputs for the Roadmap of SADCQC Implementation (2023-2026).....	11
13. Conclusions and next steps.....	13

Main sources: all presentations and notes can be viewed and uploaded from ACQF event webpage at <https://acqf.africa/capacity-development-programme/webinars/sadc-qualifications-framework-review-and-way-forward-special-tcca-meeting>



1. Summary

The Special TCCA Meeting (11-12 May 2023) was well attended by 29 representatives of 14 Member States and met its objectives. Members of the TCCA provided valuable contributions to rethinking the governance model and the alignment approach, and actively participated in the debates on new themes for the SADCQF such as digitisation of NQFs and qualifications, on the place of micro-credentials in the qualifications systems, and on the rationale and areas for development of common profiles of qualifications. Most importantly, TCCA members elaborated pertinent proposals on the eight themes recommended for the new SADCQF roadmap (2023-2026). The draft roadmap will be presented to the Joint Meeting of SADC ESTI Ministers (June 2023, in the Democratic Republic of Congo). The meeting allowed positive interactions on the cooperation lines with the project ACQF-II (at regional and country levels).

The full set of meeting documents, agenda, report of the study and the PPTs are accessible to view and download from the event website: <https://acqf.africa/capacity-development-programme/webinars/sadc-qualifications-framework-review-and-way-forward-special-tcca-meeting>



2. Rationale of the Special TCCA meeting

In line with the directive of the Ministers of Education and Training and Science, Technology and Innovation of June 2022, Secretariat, with the technical and financial support of the European Training Foundation (ETF) successfully conducted the Special meeting of the Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation (TCCA) on 11-12 May 2023, in Johannesburg, to discuss the recommendations emanating from the study which reviewed SADCQF Implementation (SADCQF Implementation review study, 2022). The study report is complemented by an Inventory of National Qualifications Frameworks in the SADC region¹.

Implementation of the SADC Qualifications Framework (SADCQF) started in 2016, and in 2021 SADC Secretariat and with expertise of the European Training Foundation (ETF), conducted a study to review the status of implementation and identify areas for further improvement of the SADCQF. This study was part of the research activities of the Project “Developing the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF-I)”. The findings of the study were discussed at two TCCA meetings (November 2021 and April 2022) and presented to the annual Joint Ministerial meeting (Education and Training, Science Technology and Innovation) held in Malawi in June 2022. The recommendations of the study were noted and endorsed by the Ministers.

In the five years of its existence, the SADCQF implementation model showed resilience in the face of challenges and severe resource limitations and was able to deliver tangible contributions towards some of the defined purposes. The countries’ commitment to accepting responsibility for the five implementation programs was a unique strategy to progress with technical activities, create mutual trust between countries

¹ SADCQF implementation review study (2022) and Inventory of NQFs in SADC (2022).

<https://acqf.africa/capacity-development-programme/support-to-countries/southern-african-development-community-sadc>

and generate a first tangible home-grown experience and knowledge on SADCQF, which will always be a reference point for the future of SADCQF and other RQFs in Africa.

Despite the joint efforts, the objectives set in the SADCQF Roadmap (2019-2023) were only partially achieved. The main gaps are visible in terms of the governance setting, which remains under-resourced and without an implementation unit; delayed methodological support to improve articulation in education and training / qualifications pathways; slow pace of alignment initiatives between NQFs and SADCQF; no follow-up actions related with use of SADCQF levels on newly issued qualifications in countries aligned to SADCQF. Reflection and development of common / regional standards of qualifications was not initiated, but the region could be better prepared in the phase ahead to embark in this important new line of work. The importance of capacity development and experience-sharing shows no signs of abating, all countries express readiness to engage and participate.

3. Participants

Mr. Nicolas M. Bilengalenga (Democratic Republic of Congo, Ministry of TVET and Occupations) chaired the meeting. The Special TCCA meeting was well attended: 29 representatives (onsite) and approx. 15 online from 14 SADC member states have actively participated in the 12 main thematic sessions of the programme. Other participants: SADC Secretariat (3 representatives), the coordinator of ACQF-II project (Euarda Castel-Branco, ETF) and the expert of ACQF team (Coleen Jaftha).

4. Themes of the Special TCCA Meeting

The Special TCCA meeting (11-12 May 2023) discussed the priorities recommended by the SADCQF Review report and provided valuable contributions to the Roadmap for implementation of the SADCQF (2023-2026). The priority themes recommended by the SADCQF review study for the new Roadmap (2023-2026) were discussed at the Special TCCA meeting, through sessions combining conceptual presentations, targeted questionnaires (polls) and complemented by discussion of the recommendations for the new roadmap for SADCQF (2023-2026).

Themes of the main sessions on the agenda of the TCCA meeting:

1. Governance of SADCQF
2. Cooperation with the NQFs of SADC Member States
3. Comparability of qualifications: common profiles of qualifications
4. Digitisation – implications for qualifications frameworks
5. Level descriptors: comparisons
6. Micro-credentials: a general overview, reflections
7. Cooperation with ACQF-II project
8. Inputs for the Roadmap of SADCQC Implementation (2023-2026)

5. Status of National Qualifications Frameworks in SADC: updates

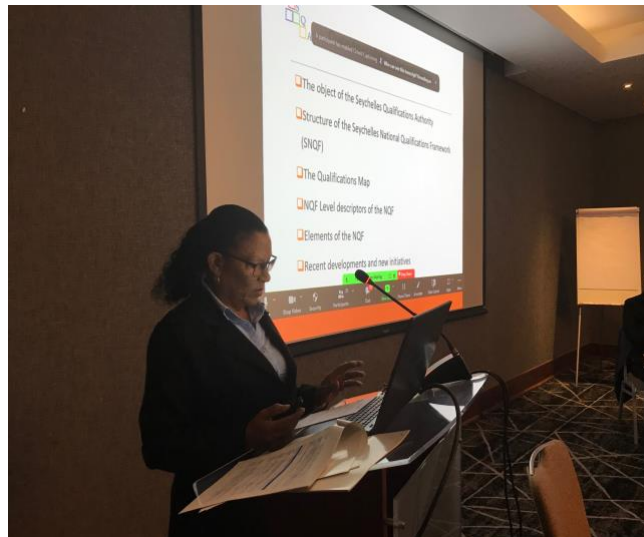
The first session of the workshop was fully dedicated to sharing of updates on the status of development and implementation of NQFs in SADC. Nine countries presented the achievements, challenges and plans related to technical aspects and governance of their NQFs, and all presentations are available on the dedicated website². These countries are Angola, Botswana, DR Congo, Eswatini, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, Tanzania, and Zambia.

Currently almost 70% (11 countries) of SADC member states are implementing comprehensive National Qualification Frameworks (NQFs), encompassing all levels and subsectors of education and training, and acknowledging learning in different contexts (formal, non-formal, informal). All SADC NQFs have adopted a 10 levels structure, which reflects certain similarities in education and training traditions, and more recently also the influence of SADCQF. These developments have started over twenty years ago – Namibia, South Africa, Mauritius – and have seen some acceleration in the last five years, with NQF development actions

² At: <https://acqf.africa/capacity-development-programme/webinars/sadc-qualifications-framework-review-and-way-forward-special-tcca-meeting>

in *new* countries. The NQFs in the SADC are at different stages of development and implementation, as summarised below. Despite progress, all NQFs in the region will require consistent implementation leadership, resources, and mutual learning with peers in the region and beyond. The experiences and struggles of the more advanced NQFs are invaluable references for the new countries just starting implementation. NQF are more than a matrix of levels and types of qualifications, and do not deliver automatically on their objectives.

The nine countries shared updates on the status of their registers of qualifications, notably on progress with development and inclusion of new qualifications aligned with NQF principles. Angola reported on the new TVET qualifications recently developed in line with NQF principles. Botswana provided an overview of the new aligned qualifications, and on the advocacy and engagement in the process. This process required that all legacy qualifications in Botswana have been



Eswatini reported on the new governance arrangement of the NQF, based on the recently established Eswatini Qualifications Authority. Mozambique and Angola clarified the objectives, level structure and implementation plans of their recently approved comprehensive NQFs, providing concrete examples of diverse governance solutions fitting the context. The Angolan NQF is managed by the National Qualifications Institute, while in Mozambique the NQF is coordinated by the Technical NQF Commission, which gathers all sub-sectors of education and training and employment policy institutions.

Seychelles referred to new developments and initiatives to strengthen and improve the NQF, notably the adoption of the new SQA Act, review of the NQF Regulations, of Standards and Criteria for Programme Accreditation, and policies and manuals. Most importantly SQA is starting a wider review of the NQF in June 2023. Zambia reported on the review of several elements of the NQF, notably of the qualifications matrix and clarification of the place of “A level” to facilitate understanding the Zambian qualifications and ease recognition abroad (e.g.: UK-NARIC).

Summing-up, SADC Member States are at different stages of development and implementation of their NQFs:

- Six countries have NQFs that have been operational for some time, and some have been reviewed: Botswana, Mauritius, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, and Zambia.
- Five countries have NQFs in place (legal act approved, implementation started): Angola, Eswatini, Lesotho, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe.
- Three other countries are at the stage of development and consultation for their comprehensive and integrated NQFs, and some of them have showed some progress in the 2020-2022 period: Madagascar, Malawi, and Tanzania.

- Two countries are at a very early stage of NQF development: Union of Comoros and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Comoros started steps to develop its NQF, in a process linked with the programme supporting enhancement of the TVET system. The Democratic Republic of Congo is starting development of a comprehensive NQF, in a process coordinated by the Ministry of TVET and Occupations.

Registers / Catalogues of national qualifications accessible online for end users

The Study reviewing implementation of SADCQF identified four countries with registers/catalogues of national qualifications accessible online for all users. These countries are Botswana, Mauritius, Mozambique, and South Africa. These digital qualifications registers / catalogues have the merit to place in the public domain open and complete information on the registered qualifications and their learning outcomes, although only two embrace the full scope of the 10-levels framework (Botswana and South Africa). Mauritius Qualifications Authority's register includes national TVET qualifications (levels 1 to 6), and Mozambique's Catalogue of Professional Qualifications is likewise focused on TVET (levels 2 to 5). Digital and accessible registers of qualifications are instruments of strategic importance for the implementation of NQF, for quality and comparability of qualifications, for visibility and outreach to end users and for delivery of the public service and promise of NQF: transparency and comparability of qualifications. Other countries can learn from the existing practice and SADC could support development of qualifications databases able to interoperate and deliver much-needed information for portability, mobility, and recognition.

6. Theme 1: Governance of the SADCQF

In the case of the SADCQF no legislation at regional level is envisaged. The focus is 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.

The SADCQF Booklet 2017 defines the governance structure of SADCQF based on:

- Implementation Unit (at Secretariat)
- Advisory role of TCCA: meetings twice a year
- Co-ordination points
- Thematic working groups
- Tools: Qualifications Portal

The actual governance arrangements and tools have diverged from the planned view and are based on a fluid combination of elements:

- SADC Secretariat: lead in coordination (governance)
- Advisory role of TCCA: formulated in the revised ToRs of TCCA (09/2016)
- Established TCCA EXCO (12/2016)
- Focal points
- Roadmap 2019-2023 (outcomes, indicators, funding proposal)

The problematic issues of governance are related to scarcity of financial / HR resources; instability, discontinuity of TCCA membership (and of dissemination, follow-up, response); agenda of TCCA meetings – wide range of themes, and limited attention to topics of NQFs / SADCQF; scarce: information updates on NQFs and related policies; no common accessible information and documentation point / bank.

TCCA members made proposals towards and solutions to these issues, e.g.: implementation capacity; create a structure similar to NARICs for information-sharing; national legislation should refer to SADCQF; designation of national focal points aligned with the national NQF structures, ensuring continuity and dissemination; guidelines and rules on participation; mutual learning, peer sharing, dialogue; follow-up and updates on NQFs; national commitment.

7. Theme 2: Cooperation with the NQFs of SADC Member States

Ongoing scope and modalities of cooperation	Rethinking the scope and modalities of cooperation – next phase (2023-2026)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guidelines and Handbooks TCCA Alignment process Data-sharing (mobility) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guidelines and Handbooks: review, disseminate, upload. Alignment process: streamline process; enhance the self-improvement / self-assessment nature; add peer learning and review; dissemination NQF, involve all key stakeholders. Post-alignment: report publication; use of SADCQF levels on qualifications documents. Dissemination on findings and plans. Regular updates on NQF developments Capacity development <p>Referencing vs alignment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore a "referencing" / "comparison" approach The majority of SADC countries have approved NQFs and started / advanced implementation – build on momentum Referencing has wider international currency. Based on mutual trust, peer review, cooperation

Advantages of referencing (instead of alignment):

- Balance: between compliance – comparison – peer learning – self-improvement. The focus moves away from simple compliance to peer learning, comparison and mutual understanding.
- Mutual trust, participation, celebration
- Online dissemination of the report
- Comparison tool NQF-SADC levels
- Use of SADCQF levels on national qualifications documents and databases
- Information and dissemination: regional, Addis Recognition Committee, ACQF, other networks
- Comparison / referencing with other frameworks internationally.

Views of TCCA Members expressed through the online questionnaire (poll)

TCCA members expressed their recommendations on the main priorities for cooperation NQF-SADCQF in the next 4 years, and largely voted for the following: support to develop and implement NQFs in all SADC countries; continue alignment/referencing to SADCQF; digital transformation of NQFs; engage with micro-credentials; strengthen routes and practices for progression, articulation and RPL; comparison to other RQFs; revision of alignment process and criteria and consideration of simultaneous referencing to both SADCQF and to ACQF.

TCCA members suggested strengthening the modalities of cooperation, especially online interactions, and other types of experience and information-sharing between countries on NQF implementation; close involvement of the relevant government entities; speed up alignment / referencing process; peer support to complete post-alignment activities; technical visits to countries for in-depth NQF updates; build capacity of NQF responsible officers.

TCCA members made proposals towards enhanced dialogue and dissemination across all sub-sectors of education and training, notably: ensure participation of TVET and Higher education representatives in meetings; advocacy and awareness at all levels especially policy makers and employers; national advocacy and communication so that NQFs go to every village; each member state to report to TCCA on communication to ensure consistency; access to digital platform for information-sharing; wider use of the websites of NQFs, SADC and other institutions to disseminate and enhance advocacy; SADCQF – own webpage and its link available on relevant national websites.

Cooperation with other regional qualifications frameworks and networks is important and needs reinforcement. TCCA members expressed their views: diverse forms of interaction and themes for exploration with ACQF, including referencing to ACQF; benchmarking meetings and alignment the SADCQF

with other frameworks; linkages with other pan-African networks; openness to learn from other regional frameworks; develop and share publications and presentations of good practices on key themes.

8. Theme 3: Comparability of qualifications - common profiles of qualifications

One of the explicit purposes of SADCQF is to ‘create SADC regional standards where appropriate’. Progress has been very limited regarding this purpose.

The rapid pace of transformation of work, technologies, and global challenges requires agile lifelong learning policies and offerings adaptable to different needs. Development and adoption of common standards for occupations and profiles of qualifications hold promise, as the region engages with large common initiatives like the University of Transformation, as well as challenging issues such as the green transformation and its skills requirements.

- Common profiles of occupations and common elements in qualifications profiles do not impinge on / replace national standards and qualifications approved and managed by the national institutions.
- Common profiles are common elements/components, conceived and designed in a participative manner, multi-country teams, following a common methodological / technical approach.
- The identification of needs should take account of already agreed priority sectors and fields and an updated mapping of needs in high priority sectors, to achieve technological and employment development, and ultimately economic growth.
- Common profiles can be managed and disseminated with the aid of a common database of standards and qualifications of SADCQF.

Common profiles are a way of making visible the commonalities of learning outcomes across borders that prepare learners for similar work tasks and processes. They can be developed based on the combination of comparing learning outcomes of national qualifications and the identification of emerging skills. This working definition and the key elements included offer flexibility for practical implementation. Common profiles are voluntary tools to provide inspiration at national level without aiming at standardisation. Common profiles can be used as a reference tool fully respecting the governance and delivery of national education and training systems. They are devised as a complementary instrument that does not replace national qualifications nor interfere with national responsibilities.

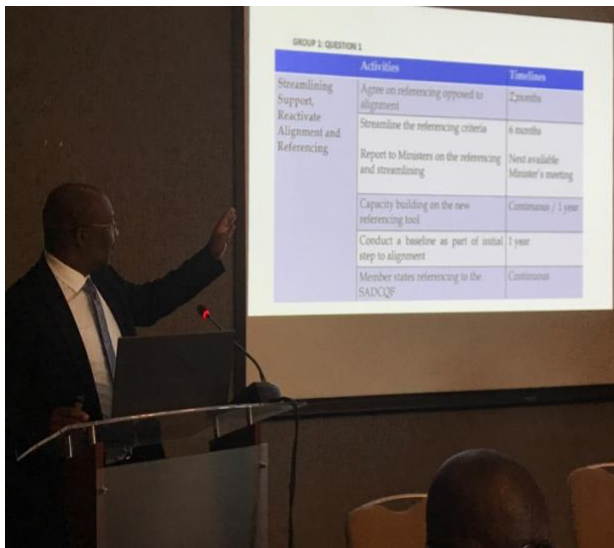
On commonalities: Commonalities of work tasks / job roles or functions of the corresponding occupations across borders, mainly due to technological standards and the organisation of business processes. The typical (existing and emerging) skills and competences to carry out these tasks are consequently also similar. The learning outcomes to be acquired by learners for these common work tasks are also similar. Identify those common – ‘core’ – learning outcomes relevant for national VET programmes across countries in specific occupational/vocational fields; these intended learning outcomes form the educational profile. The learning outcomes do not necessarily need to relate exclusively to occupational skills and competences but should also relate to transversal skills relevant to work and society in general.

Development of common profiles of qualifications requires reference points, listed hereafter. But what is currently their state of play, and what are the alternative reference points? A regional qualifications framework (such as SADCQF); a common SADC taxonomy / classification of occupations and skills with updated profiles occupations-skills; a common Skills Intelligence system / data? common database of qualifications; common quality assurance framework? common qualifications development principles (learning outcomes)?

Examples of initiatives and references related to common profiles: in the European Union – development of European Vocational Core Profiles is underway. The ESCO taxonomy developed ESCO profiles, using the data connections of the taxonomy (relations occupations - knowledge and skills)

Views of TCCA members: through an online questionnaire (poll) members shared their recommendations and comments. TCCA members consider development of common profiles of qualifications relevant and

necessary for both the national and regional levels, especially for comparability of qualifications, to guide and support development of national qualifications, for regulated professions, to address common skills gaps across the region, and to ease recognition of qualifications and mobility of learners / graduates. Some members noted that common profiles are a *must for SADCQF*. TCCA members mentioned the need for a consistent methodology, experience-sharing and understanding of the labour market needs (common occupations across countries). Several TCCA members expressed commitment to contribute to develop the approach and methodology. Finally, a wide range of areas / sectors / occupations were proposed to pilot test the development of common profiles in SADC: Artificial intelligence-based jobs / functions; construction sector, agri-food, mining, oil and gas; ICT jobs and agriculture; education; nursing, engineering; STEM in general; research; medicine.



Recap session: Mr. Mboni Dlamini (Eswatini) provided a brief but comprehensive overview of the main topics and conclusions discussed during the first day of the TCCA meeting. Highlighted the achieved results and challenges of NQFs in SADC, e.g., as regards articulation within and across frameworks, understanding and using learning outcomes, inertia in the adoption of learning outcomes approach and quality assurance in some institutions, coordination and integration between 3 sub-frameworks, embracing micro-credentials, renewing legacy qualifications in respect to the principles and of the NQF. Highlighted the results of the presented case (European Qualifications Framework). Noted the pertinence of common profiles of qualifications for the SADC.

9. Theme 4: Digitisation – implications for qualifications frameworks

Digitisation in the context of qualifications and NQFs concerns and influences a) processes (digital documentation, decision making on registration of qualifications, digital platforms of quality assurance agencies, automation of levelling and evaluation of qualifications); b) management (of data, maintenance; credentialing, certification, databases, data exchange); and c) information-sharing (open, public platforms for end-users).

The theme was presented from three main angles: digital registers / databases of qualifications; AI in education; and digital credentials. Major emphasis was given to registers of qualifications, given the fundamental role they play as instruments for management and communication of the NQF, and provision of credible information on qualifications to end-users. Registers of qualifications, open, digitalised and accessible to the public play an important strategic role in human resource development, skills matching, and transparency and comparability qualifications. The quality, completeness and accessibility to this information is an important service for the end-users (learners, training providers, employers, and workers) and policy makers and institutions. Databases / registers of qualifications also offer a view on the actual status of implementation of NQFs. The population has the right to know what courses and qualifications are available and quality-assured for easier study and career choices. The functions and services associated with different types of qualifications registers and their digital features vary between countries. Currently all countries in the context of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) have operational digital qualifications registers, and 21 EQF countries have connected the national databases to the Qualifications Database Register linked to the Europass Platform, and the data is accessible online for all interested users. In the United States the platform “Credential Engine” contains and shares data on over a million credentials and almost 60,000 providers. New Zealand Qualifications Framework (NZQF) Register was designed to be the single, authoritative register of data for qualifications (including awards), programmes and components of programmes, and also contains a register of micro-credentials. Development of the NZQF register is a

key component of the Education Sector Digital Strategy programme of work, and of NZQA's Future State Portfolio, and it provides benefits such as a unified data system, interaction and streamlining process, and real-time publication of information on qualifications.

Reported on the qualifications registers of Botswana, Mauritius, Mozambique and South Africa, with a brief comparative high-level analysis of included qualifications and other key features. Noted the importance of these registers, and the fact they are not interconnected or interoperable. In the future, such interoperability will be necessary to support transparency and information-sharing for the region and the continent.

The presentation to the role of AI in the context of education, and qualifications noted that AI is built from data, algorithms, hardware, and connectivity – to enable machines to imitate human intelligence, like perception, problem solving, language interaction and creativity. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a ubiquitous concept and tool already found across society and an integral part of everyday life, enabling many valuable services and functions. Therefore, basic understanding and knowledge of AI should be a critical component of student education to foster successful global citizens. Uses of AI in education concern a range of areas, e.g.: AI literacy (AI across curriculum); AI and coding schools for youth; linking learning outcomes of qualifications with classifications of occupations and skills (ESCO); Comparison: courses / qualifications with labour market needs (Big Data analysis); Evaluating qualifications – for NQF levelling (Poland); AI and education policy (UNESCO, European Union policies and guidelines supporting policy makers and safeguarding ethics and human-centered approach).

Digital credentials are increasingly gaining ground in different communities of countries and at national and institutional levels. The examples shared in the session included three national uses in African countries (Zambia – ZAQA E-Certificate, South Africa and Cabo Verde), complemented by a case of a regional approach and service (European Digital Credentials for Learning).

Views of TCCA Members: through an online questionnaire (poll) participants shared their experiences and suggestions on registers of qualifications. In large majority of TCCA members stated that they plan to enhance the performance, functions and data exchange of their registers; six members revealed that they do not have yet a register, while others indicated they plan to start a digital register. On the question about the types and features of qualifications and credentials that can be included in registers, TCCA members gave a range of responses, but the majority includes all types and levels of qualifications; 9 countries include only national qualifications; 6 countries include only qualifications based on learning outcomes; and 3 countries consider only full qualifications.

The following discussion tackled issues related with legacy qualifications in some NQFs and learners' criticism about provision of programmes and qualifications not consistent and not aligned to the NQF. The poll also allowed updates on the scale and size of the qualifications registers, and showed a wide range of situations: 2 countries have less than 100 qualifications in the register, and 9 have more than 1,000. The new Angolan Qualifications Catalogue (TVET qualifications – in construction) currently has 8 qualifications, but the plan is to develop at least 10 qualifications in each of 27 professional sectors (families) structuring the Catalogue. Mauritius Qualifications Authority informed about the co-existence of three registers: national qualifications; overseas qualifications; global qualifications.

The discussion on the place of legacy qualifications in the register highlighted different positions and practices, spanning from acceptance of all qualifications (South Africa, SAQA) to mandatory reengineering of all legacy qualifications (if relevant) for consistency with the principles and structure required by the NQF / register (case of Botswana).

10. Level descriptors: comparisons

The session focused on level descriptors, as core elements of qualifications frameworks (national and regional), and made an initial comparison of the two frameworks (ACQF-SADCQF). Level descriptors should be detailed enough to capture the complexities of an NQF/ RQF and also general enough to accommodate

different sub-sectors of the qualifications systems; they should be suitable for all contexts (not too academic, theoretical, and wordy); explain the logic of the domains, sub-domains, and levels preferably with an accompanying glossary; be consistently applied in countries; be made visible and accessible to users through training, capacity building, workshops, and information sessions; and capture the balance between being prescriptive and being descriptive.

Level descriptors of NQFs differ from level descriptors of RQFs in their detailed and extensive formulation, attention to context, and attachment to national specificity and objectives; unlike level descriptors of RQFs which are more generic and broader in accordance with the distinct purpose of RQFs, which is not to register qualifications, but to support comparison between different national qualifications and referencing.

To contextualise the comparison between the ACQF and SADCQF, information was shared on the baseline research and development methodology of ACQF level descriptors, and attention given to the descriptors of NQFs in Africa. More information on the methodology applied to develop ACQF level descriptors is accessible in the resources at ACQF website, e.g., the Thematic Brief 10³ and News Article (January 2023)⁴.

The similarities between the ACQF and SADCQF were highlighted. In particular: both are meta-frameworks (RQFs) and serve as a translation mechanism for comparison and referencing of NQFs; both are 10-level frameworks, with the same domains of level descriptors. The main areas of differentiation were presented namely the ACQF's guiding principles; explicit mention of "formal, non-formal and informal learning"; order of levels in the Matrix of level descriptors: 1-10 vs 10-1; definitions and sub-elements of domains of level descriptors.

A comparison was shown between ACQF and SADCQF on levels 1, 5 and 10. In conclusion, the level descriptors are broadly comparable. Further research may consider a more structured approach and may consider all the ten levels.

Views of TCCA members: through free discussion members shared views on the comparison exercise and on conceptual issues, e.g.: the relationship between level descriptors and learning outcomes of curriculum and qualifications standards; on the balance between generic – specific and detailed formulations of level descriptors, noting the risk of possible loss of necessary detail for orientation of providers and curriculum developers if the formulation of level descriptors is overly generic; on the concepts / terms specific and indispensable for level 10 (e.g.: "scholarly") and the credible levelling of PhD qualifications. It was agreed to organise a thematic session and discussion on these themes at the next TCCA meeting.

11. Micro-credentials: a general overview, reflections

The number and diversity of micro-credential offerings has expanded substantially in recent years, accelerated by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. A large part of all employees will need reskilling and the urgency of getting people back to work gives new momentum to "micro-credentials", which hold promises and challenges. The common understanding on the role and potentialities of micro-credentials in the era of digital learning and economy is central to the debate. Countries, regional communities, and international organisations globally are deploying initiatives to clarify the state-of-play and develop policies and measures to better contextualise micro-credentials (examples: EU - European Approach to Micro-Credentials, 2022; Australia National Micro-Credentials Framework, 2021). This global attention to micro-credentials has contributed to a strong increase of research and publications, dissemination, and experience-sharing activities on micro-credentials.

Existing definitions (from OECD, European Commission, UNESCO, Australian Government) point to key characteristics of micro-credentials:

³ Thematic Brief 10, 2022. <https://acqf.africa/capacity-development-programme/thematic-briefs/acqf-thematic-brief-10-acqf-level-descriptors-the-story-of-the-development-journey>

⁴ News article: <https://acqf.africa/news/comparison-of-the-acqf-and-sadcqf-initial-thoughts-by-coleen-jafta>

- Referring to learning over a limited time and/or in a specific area
- May form part of or add to formal qualifications
- Potentially 'stackable' over time, adding to individual learning careers
- Given their limited size and focus, more flexible than traditional qualifications
- Based on assessed learning
- Frequently delivered in a digital form.

In 2019-2021 UNESCO promoted a global debate towards a common definition of micro-credentials, based on extensive expert consultation, analysis of definitions from 15 countries and literature review. The proposed definition of micro-credentials is as follows: *a record of focused learning achievement verifying what the learner knows, understands or can do; includes assessment based on clearly defined standards and is awarded by a trusted provider; has stand-alone value and may also contribute to or complement other micro-credentials or macro-credentials, including through recognition of prior learning; and meets the standards required by relevant quality assurance.*

The Member States of the European Union (EU) approved a Recommendation on a European approach on Micro-Credentials (06/2022)⁵, which offers guidance on common standard elements and a set of 10 principles for the design and issuance of micro-credentials, aiming to enable the trust and quality of micro-credentials. The 10 principles are: quality, transparency, relevance, valid assessment, learning pathways, recognition, portable, learner-centred, authentic, information and guidance.

The EU Recommendation has the following definition: 'Micro-credential' means the record of the learning outcomes that a learner has acquired following a small volume of learning. These learning outcomes will have been assessed against transparent and clearly defined criteria. Learning experiences leading to micro-credentials are designed to provide the learner with specific knowledge, skills and competences that respond to societal, personal, cultural or labour market needs. Micro-credentials are owned by the learner, can be shared and are portable. They may be stand-alone or combined into larger credentials. They are underpinned by quality assurance following agreed standards in the relevant sector or area of activity.'

The session presentation contains several examples of inclusion of micro-credentials in the NQF and its qualifications register (ex.: Portugal, New Zealand) and references to the most recent research and surveys on micro-credentials, and a list of useful online resources. The Research Observatory on Micro-Credentials is an essential resource on initiatives, policies and research on micro-credentials⁶. The ACQF website has a dedicated webpage and a thematic brief⁷. Cedefop conducted in 2021-2022 in-depth analyses on micro-credentials in the context of TVET systems and the reports are accessible⁸.

Views of TCCA members: all participants acknowledged the pertinence of the debate on micro-credentials in the context of national skills development policies and qualifications frameworks. Some members noted the fact that most countries have proxies of micro-credentials in their qualifications systems, in form of part qualifications, short courses and certificates, and bridging courses enabling access and progression. Other members mentioned the possible linkages with RPL and NQFs. A few TCCA members emphasized that the current surge of micro-credentials represents a new challenge for the NQF and the qualifications authority, associated with issues of quality and credibility of provision, regulation, and monitoring of these credentials. Several members emphasized the need to engage with micro-credentials in the context of quality assurance and qualifications frameworks and reflect on a common approach for the region.

12. Inputs for the Roadmap of SADCQC Implementation (2023-2026)

The discussion was organised in 5 working groups. Tabled for discussion the 8 themes recommended in the SADCQF implementation review endorsed in June 2022 by the Joint Ministerial meeting (ESTI). Each working

⁵ Council Recommendation, 06/2022. [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32022H0627\(02\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32022H0627(02))

⁶ Observatory: <https://www.dcu.ie/nidl/micro-credential-observatory>

⁷ ACQF: <https://acqf.africa/resources/micro-credentials/>;

⁸ Cedefop: <https://acqf.africa/resources/micro-credentials/>;

group focused in 2-3 themes and elaborated high-level proposals for the new roadmap for implementation of SADCQF (2023-2026). Themes for the design of the new roadmap:

1. SADCQF Guidelines and Manuals on RPL, CAT, Recognition (& other themes) – dissemination, training, support to application / transposition at country level.
2. Streamlining and reactivating alignment/referencing to SADCQF: support and invite all SADC member states to plan and participate in the process. Revise and update the Booklet (2017).
3. Follow-up to alignment: Use of SADCQF levels on newly issued qualifications documents of NQF aligned/referenced to the SADCQF: develop the concept and guideline, submit it to approval by the ministers.
4. New developments related to digitalisation of qualifications management, micro-credentials, common profiles (occupations, qualifications and new skills): develop the concept note, constitute a dedicated working group, raise funding, partnerships, roadmap.
5. Capacity development and peer sharing: national level, SADC level, and wider international level
6. Strengthening of cooperation with the ACQF and EQF
7. Monitoring and evaluating systems and instruments to support a plan-do-monitor-review approach for SADCQF implementation.
8. On improved governance, organisation, resources of the implementation of SADCQF

Summarised high-level proposals for the roadmap, by themes

Theme	Main actions / áreas	Milestones and observations
1. SADCQF Guidelines and Manuals on RPL, CAT, Recognition (& other themes)	Review, update, edit, layout and disseminate. Publish through ACQF website, until the SADC website is able to accommodate these guidelines. Through the websites of SADC Member States Meetings, webinars, workshops to present the guidelines and handbooks to different stakeholders, TCCA members.	2023 to 04/2024
2. Alignment / referencing: support, reactivate	Move to a referencing approach: streamlined criteria and process; based on peer dialogue and learning between countries; oriented to self-assessment and self-improvement; visibility and communication. - Streamline and review the referencing criteria. - Cooperate with ACQF-II project, for support to all SADC countries on matters of referencing. - Contribute to regular ACQF NQF updates – in a centralised manner, managed by SADC. - Plan referencing to SADCQF as a simultaneous process with referencing to ACQF.	2023 to 04/2024 2023 to 12/2026 2023 to 2026 2023
3. Follow-up to alignment / referencing: publication of reports; use SADCQF levels on qualifications	- Develop a common approach for SADCQF on principles, key requirements and main elements of the follow-up to referencing, especially as regards use of SADCQF levels on newly issued qualifications and dissemination of referencing reports of all SADC countries. Other elements to be considered: action plans to address issues and development needs identified by the referencing reports. - Develop national roadmaps to address the follow-up steps, in coherence with the national referencing processes.	2024 2024-2025
4. New developments: digitalisation, micro-credentials, common	a) Digitisation of qualifications - Roadmap at regional level • Develop instrument / guidelines.	2023-2024

<p>profiles of qualifications</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity development of Member States - Implementation by Member States <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Member States digitisation policies developed with reference to SADC guideline. • Member States domesticate: upload qualifications • Hardware / software <p>b) Micro-credentials</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Start conversations on open platforms at regional level, involve industry and youth. - SADC: start work on regulation. - SADC position on micro-credentials (in 2 years) - Develop national plans to operationalise micro-credentials in a period up to 3 years. <p>c) Common profiles of qualifications (CPQs)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop regional guidelines for CQPs with technical and financial support; - Member States domesticate the CPQs - Member States upload CPQs to the national databases - Enforce CPQs (pilot certain qualifications) - Policy learning, sharing / Forum 	<p>2023-2024</p> <p>2025</p> <p>2024-2025</p> <p>2025</p> <p>2023-2025</p>
<p>5. Capacity development related with NQF/RQFs themes / needs</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Define needs and capacity development by country grouping / beneficiaries / target groups b) Conduct advocacy activities. c) Dissemination: tools, initiatives, good practice d) Meetings of different countries: peer-sharing, mutual support and learning e) Research: baseline study on mobility, tracer studies f) Main themes for capacity development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Articulation - Connecting NQFs-RQF (ACQF, EQF) - Referencing - Comparability of qualifications 	<p>2023-2024</p> <p>2024-2025</p>
<p>6. Interplay and cooperation with other RQFs: ACQF, EQF</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Platform for sharing and comparison between RQFs - Model NARIC (UK) for SADC: Information Centres / documents for competent authorities / higher education institutions 	
<p>7.and 8. Monitoring and evaluation; governance</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) M&E: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Peer evaluation by Member States – streamlined, focus on mobility. b) Governance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More inclusive governance setting; - Review EXCO composition and ToR 	<p>2025</p> <p>2024</p>
<p>9. Other</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Revisit and update: the SADCQF Booklet, including the level descriptors and 16 Quality assurance guidelines. 	<p>06/2023 to 04/2024</p>

13. Conclusions and next steps

The expert thanked all TCCA members for the active participation, questions and sharing of practices and solutions. Proposals from the different working groups for the revised roadmap are pertinent, complementary and based on good ownership of the TCCA members.

Proposals will be synthesised, and the roadmap will be submitted to Ministers for approval. The new roadmap will be a legitimate and well-grounded source for planning cooperation and support by ETF and ACQF-II, and other organisations and partners.

There will be activities within the different themes which can be taken forward within the format of TCCA. It was agreed to organise a thematic session and discussion on level descriptors and learning outcomes at the next TCCA meeting.

The SADC Secretariat thanked all TCCA members for their contributions. A special thanks was given to Eduarda for the thematic steering and content, and to ETF for the financial support and for funding delegates to this special TCCA meeting. The recommendations would go to the Ministers meeting on 20-23 June in DRC.

The Chairperson expressed his deep gratitude to all for participating, for the quality and openness of the knowledge-sharing, the relevant learning from all presentations and debates and to Eduarda and the ETF. He closed the meeting at 16h00 / 12 May 2023.

Drafted by: Eduarda Castel-Branco and Coleen Jaftha. 18 May 2023. Final: 22 May 2023