



Special Meeting of the Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation (TCCA)

On the implementation of SADCQF

Agenda

Concept Note

11-12 May 2023

Johannesburg



1 Context of the special meeting of TCCA

In line with the directive of the Ministers of Education and Training and Science, Technology and Innovation in June 2022, Secretariat, with the technical support of the European Training Foundation is convening a Special meeting of the Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation on 11-12 May 2023, in Johannesburg, to discuss the recommendations emanating from the study which reviewed SADCQF Implementation (SADCQF Implementation review study, 2022).

Implementation of the SADC Qualifications Framework 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. A Special TCCA meeting (8-9 May 2023) discusses the priorities and develops the Roadmap for SADCQF (2023-2026).

The focus areas to be discussed during the TCCA Meeting will include:

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

This study was conducted in the context of the Project “Developing the African Continental Qualifications Framework”, in cooperation between the European Training Foundation ([ETF](#)) and SADC, and its findings were discussed at two TCCA meetings (November 2021 and April 2022).

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Objective

It is expected that the meeting will allow for the development of a Roadmap for the Implementation of the recommendations contained in the SADC Implementation Review Study for the next 4 years (2023-2026). The draft Roadmap will be presented to the Joint Meeting of Ministers of Education and Training and Science, Technology, and Innovation in June 2023.

The meeting is co-organised by SADC and the Project “Supporting Implementation of ACQF” (ACQF-II), implemented by ETF.

The agenda includes one item non-related to SADCQF: *presentation of the SADC ICT competency framework for teachers.*

Participants, chair, expert support

Delegates represent the national institutions tasked with implementation / coordination of national qualifications frameworks or systems, and experts.

The meeting will be chaired by the Democratic Republic of Congo.

ETF provides technical and expertise support to the event.

2 Agenda

Agenda of the TCCA meeting

Chair: representative of the Democratic Republic of Congo

Day 1: 11th May 2023

Time	Activity, theme	Facilitation, speaker
09.00-09.15	Opening. Welcome Introduction of delegates	Chairperson
09.15-09.30	Attendance and apologies. Objectives and working methods of the workshop. Adoption of the agenda	Chairperson
09.30-11.00 <i>Session 1</i>	National Qualifications Frameworks in the SADC. Overview of main developments, new initiatives.	Brief introductory presentation: ETF expert Peer-sharing: all SADC member states
11.00-11.15	Coffee break	
11.15-12.00 <i>Session 2</i>	SADC Review report. Presentation	Expert
12.00-13.00 <i>Session 3</i>	Governance of SADCQF. Examples of good practice in other regional frameworks (ex.: EQF). Proposals, interactive discussion	Expert All delegates
13.00-14.00	Lunch break. <i>Family photo</i>	

14.00-15.00 <i>Session 4</i>	Cooperation of NQFs with SADCQF. Linking, comparing, aligning, referencing. Rethinking the approach. Proposals, interactive discussion.	Expert All delegates
15.00-16.00 <i>Session 5</i>	Comparability of qualifications: common profiles of qualifications. Presentation. Discussion	ETF expert All delegates
16.00-17.00 <i>Session 6</i>	SADC ICT competency framework for teachers	SADC
17.00	Coffee, tea, and networking	

Day 2: 12th May 2023

Time	Activity, theme	Facilitator, speaker
09.00-09.15	Opening, agenda of the day	Chairperson
09.15-09.30 <i>Session 7</i>	Recapitulation of key topics and issues debated on day 1	Representative of Eswatini
09.30-10.45 <i>Session 8</i>	Digitalisation and implications for NQFs. Digital registers of qualifications. Digital credentials for learning. Presentation. Interactive debate	ETF expert. All delegates
10.45-11.00	Coffee break	
11.00-12.00 <i>Session 9</i>	Level descriptors: SADCQF-ACQF Presentation. Interactive debate	Expert All delegates
12.00-13.00 <i>Session 10</i>	Micro-credentials: a global overview, trends. Presentation. Interactive debate	Expert All delegates
13.00-14.00	Lunch break	
14.00-15.45 <i>Session 11</i>	Inputs for the Roadmap of SADCQF. Introduction. Definition of main priorities. Discussion in working groups	ETF expert All delegates
15.45-16.15 <i>Session 12</i>	Presentation of proposals and inputs for the SADCQF Roadmap.	All working groups
16.15-16.40	ACQF-II project - overview of objectives and activities	Expert
16.40-17.00 <i>Session 13</i>	Conclusions, sum-up. Next steps. Next meeting. Closure	SADC Secretariat. ETF expert. Chairperson
17.00	Coffee, tea, and networking	All delegates

3 Background Note

At their Meeting in 2011, Ministers of Education and Training approved the Regional Qualification Framework (RQF) as a reference framework of ten level, a qualifications portal and quality assurance guidelines to serve as a regional mechanism for comparability and recognition of full qualifications, credit transfer, creation of regional standards and facilitation of quality assurance.

In 2021 TCCA / SADC Secretariat took the initiative to review progress in implementation of SADCQF and identify perspectives and areas for improvement and further development. The review was conducted by ETF in the context of the project developing the ACQF, and the analytical report was discussed at two meetings of TCCA (Nov 2021 and April 2022), before final presentation to the Joint Meeting of Ministers ESTI in Lilongwe, Malawi, on 14 June 2022. This concept note is based on the findings and propositions of this review.

3.1 Implementation started: results

The first half decade has passed since the September 2016 meeting of the Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation (TCCA), which formally adopted the new designation 'Southern African Development Community Qualifications Framework (SADCQF)'. The same meeting endorsed the two-year milestone plan and the first implementation model of three programmes. To that end, it was deemed crucial to undertake an assessment of progress achieved since 2016 and as such, Secretariat, with the financial and technical support of the European Training Foundation (ETF) undertook a review of the implementation of the SADCQF over the last five years.

Overarchingly, the findings show that the this first phase of implementation of SADCQF has reached several achievements, and the resource constraints have been partially addressed thanks to solidarity between the SADC countries, regional ownership, and cooperation with the key international partners.

In addition, the SADCQF has acquired a stronger centrality in the region's development plans for the decade (2020–30). This new impetus to strengthen implementation of the SADCQF capitalises on the outcomes of the first phase of implementation (2017–21) and aims to incentivise development of NQFs aligned with SADCQF, and work in complementarity with other tools supporting recognition of qualifications across the region, including the SADC Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (CATS), the SADC Qualifications Recognition Manual, Guidelines for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and SADCQF Quality Assurance Guidelines. Furthermore, in 2020, the SADC reaffirmed its intent to give a new impetus to promote and implement the SADCQF, by including relevant measures in two key strategic plans for the decade: RISDP 2020–30 and the SADC Labour Migration Action Plan (2020–25).

To date three Member States have completed the alignment process – South Africa (SAQA 2019) and Seychelles (SQF 2018) and Mauritius (MQA 2022).

Furthermore, the principles, level structure, level descriptors and Quality Assurance guidelines are generally considered relevant and supportive to both national and regional objectives.

Most importantly, as regards the number of NQFs in place, the SADC region has a clear comparative advantage over any other regional economic community in Africa. The dynamic trend continues, with the approval in 2022 of the NQF legislation of two countries (Angola and Mozambique).

- Six countries have NQFs at advanced implementation stage and reviewed (Botswana, Mauritius, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, and Zambia).

- Five SADC countries have their NQFs approved, and implementation started (Angola, Eswatini, Lesotho, Mozambique, Zimbabwe).
- Several countries are in the process of development and consultation of their NQFs (Madagascar, Malawi, Tanzania), and a group is at early thinking stage (Union of Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo).

However updated information on the status of NQF development and implementation is not readily available and regularly shared between countries. In its revised roadmap SADCQF could include a regular annual NQF survey to member states.

3.2 Implementation started: Problems and challenges

However, despite the progress achieved to date, there are undeniable impediments which are restricting the smooth implementation of the SADCQF.

Firstly, dissemination of the SADCQF tools, such as the approved Guidelines and Handbooks, has been insufficient, resulting in limited application of these instruments by national institutions. This information bottleneck is exacerbated by cases of irregular participation in organised TCCA meetings and discontinuity in representation in the TCCA. Awareness and information about SADCQF Implementation Plan are low, causing uncertainty about what each SADC Member State is expected to do. Monitoring of SADCQF activities and outputs in relation to the implementation plan is not systematised and is not constantly supported by the relevant reporting documentation.

Secondly, the fundamental function of SADCQF (alignment) has not acquired yet the necessary vibrant dynamism, despite good progress in approval and implementation of NQFs in several Member States in 2021-2022. There is no multi-year plan supporting implementation of alignment to SADCQF, with follow-up information and progress reporting, which results in ambiguity and uncertainty for the Member States, TCCA and SADC Secretariat. Without a planned approach to alignment, fragmentation, and inefficiencies in submission of alignment reports and their adoption will not be solved. Alignment to SADCQF implies follow-up by the Member States with support of TCCA / Secretariat. One of such key follow-up steps is the use of SADCQF levels on newly issued qualifications documents and on qualifications databases of the countries having successfully aligned. However, currently none of the countries which finalised the alignment process is using or preparing the ground to use SADCQF levels on qualifications documents newly issued by the competent authorities and bodies.

Thirdly, Quality Assurance. This is a fundamental pillar of any regional qualifications framework and SADCQF is no exception. Quality Assurance is a widely acknowledged key factor of trust in qualifications and consequently for recognition and portability of qualifications between countries across the region and beyond. The SADCQF Quality Assurance Guidelines, composed of 16 recommendations, played a positive orientation role in the first period of SADCQF, but the review survey found that Member States consider it is time to review these Guidelines, improving their applicability; and to consider ways to learn from other communities and regions, while contextualising to the relevant SADC strategic objectives and policies. Dissemination, advocacy, and support for application of the SADCQF Quality Assurance Guidelines has been insufficient, contributing to poor implementation and slow adoption of a Quality Assurance culture in relation to qualifications.

Many of these difficulties in implementation of SADCQF are caused by the systemic budget limitations. Available human, financial and technical capacity to drive the SADCQF development and implementation on the ground has been lacking, thus limiting progress in its implementation. To make

matters worse, the absence of the Implementation Unit or dedicated personnel for the SADCQF continues to be a hindering factor.

Summing-up, the review survey identified several weaknesses, which contribute to slow implementation coupled with poor reporting and response by Member States. SADCQF-related documents and tools, such as the mentioned Guidelines and Handbooks, are difficult to find, access and to use at national level.

3.3 Enablers for improved in implementation

Nonetheless, the findings have also pointed to several important enabling factors, which may be used as a basis for improving the implementation of the SADCQF going forward. Among those enablers the following can be highlighted: a) the existence of national and regional (SADC) expertise and practical experience on the relevant themes, notably among national qualifications agencies / authorities, and regional thematic associations; b) mutual trust and cooperation between SADC countries on SADCQF / NQF matters created and nurtured through the regular TCCA activities; c) synergies with other SADC strategies and working groups related to skills development, recognition of skills and qualifications, portability of skills; d) most importantly: the ministers' support and mandate given to SADC Secretariat in June 2022 to move forward with the recommendations of the review report on SADCQF implementation. Enabling factors of external character include a) supportive international partners and projects (e.g.: ILO, UNESCO, ETF); b) the emerging African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF) with resources and expertise to support NQFs.

There has been continuous work by the Secretariat to mobilise, expand and harness cooperation with existing institutions at national level, regional networks, associations, and external expertise, such as SAQA, SAQAN, SARUA, ILO, UNESCO, and European Training Foundation (ETF). These linkages contributed to the achievements so far in implementation of the SADCQF activities, promoting synergies, avoiding duplication, and maximising utilisation of limited financial resources.

The continuous peer engagements, learning and review on key technical activities and issues through the creation of sub-committees or thematic working groups within the TCCA facilitates capacity building, but will require further support and revitalisation.

3.4 A new phase of SADCQF - addressing the technical areas (level descriptors, quality assurance, standards of qualifications, monitoring and evaluation)

Level descriptors

Primarily there is need for: definitions of the three domains; review of progressions across all three domains; rationalisation of some of the level descriptors to explicitly reflect the progression in the complexity of learning from level to level; disaggregation within certain levels to cater for different disciplines/fields that are in the same band, such as Level 8. The review of the level descriptors of SADCQF should consider the integration of new themes, such as green and digital skills, transversal skills and competences, competences for citizenship and democratic values. Possible mutual learning with ACQF level descriptors can be considered (refer to ACQF [Guideline 2](#), and [Brief ACQF Handbook](#)) Decisions regarding the review of the level descriptors should consider priorities, resources, and impact.

Quality Assurance

There is a need for unpacking and streamlining the existing Quality Assurance principles as they are found to be too generic and broad to effectively serve as a reference mechanism. In addition, the

SADCQF Quality Assurance guidelines should cater better for the quality of online learning and digital qualifications.

Standards of qualifications

One of the five objectives of SADCQF is “creation of SADC regional standards where appropriate”. To-date there is very limited progress in the conceptualisation and implementation of tangible actions contributing to this objective. Going forward TCCA needs to define and agree on the scope and strategy to relevant regional standards, given their role in supporting comparability of qualifications across countries,

Monitoring and evaluation

Finally, a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework is indispensable to help further implementation of the SADCQF, and inspiration can be taken from the M&E guidelines of the ACQF ([Guideline 7](#)) developed in 2022 by the ACQF-I project.

3.5 Minding the wider context of transformation of learning and work

The implementation of the SADCQF cannot stay immune to changing circumstances operating at the regional and global levels including the non-negligible impact of technology on education outputs. In this regard, the landscape of jobs, as well as their accompanying qualifications and skills requirements is rapidly changing. The transformation of tasks, occupations and the organisation of work is creating a demand for new sets of skills, displacing existing jobs and giving rise to wholly new ones. The twin green and digital transitions have strong skills dimensions, which every skills development and qualifications system must recognise and address. Qualifications are changing, and education and training institutions must open up to new types of learning, be learner-centred, and also recognise learning outcomes from non-formal and informal contexts. New concepts and instruments, such as micro-credentials, and digital technologies to recognise learning (digital certificates) are gradually becoming part of the mainstream reality of our education and training systems.

Furthermore, digital transformation has arrived ahead of schedule, as countries had to suddenly close schools, training centres and universities to counter the threat to life posed by the global pandemic. Education and training in all countries had to shift to remote, digital and hybrid forms of learning. This shift was accompanied by a steep learning curve for all education and training systems, teachers, and learners; but also by significant learning losses. As education and training systems shape their recovery from the pandemic crisis, questions arise on the necessary adaptation of QA policies and practices, new teachers’ roles, curriculum delivery and assessment in the new context of more digital, remote, open learning.

SADCQF activities need to take account and synergise with the policies and strategies in other domains, especially innovation, employment, environment, trade, industrial development, migration, social inclusion. As a regional framework, SADCQF can and should stimulate debate and new thinking about the mega trends and issues to be addressed by qualifications frameworks and systems in times of great transformation.

3.6 Minding the role and place of NQFs in the context of transformation of learning and work

The above has entailed that a number of critical elements cannot be overlooked as we move into the second half of the decade of the implementation of the SADCQF. Firstly, there are features of NQFs that may be of assistance as countries plan their recovery, particularly job-recovery strategies. RPL may well

attract increased attention. So too the prospect of qualifications frameworks opening up to non-formal qualifications, including micro-credentials, which seem to be appearing everywhere. Many labour market policy responses are looking at fast, flexible skill solutions, not always suited to the slower pace of NQFs. In addition, inequality and the associated digital divide is a major issue – qualifications and their delivery are going to have to be more accessible for everyone if online delivery continues to play a significant part in TVET and higher education qualifications; and thirdly, quality assurance matters as the shift to more online/remote delivery of qualifications poses questions about academic integrity and standards. The learning outcomes approach (agnostic on location) may have been helpful in facilitating the shift to online assessment, though it is too early to tell.

It is against the above background that Ministers, during their Meeting in June 2022, directed the Secretariat to convene a Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation to develop a four-year Roadmap taking account of the findings and recommendations of the Implementation Review Report, and the new demands and opportunities of this period of turbulence and continuing transformation of the contexts of the qualifications eco-systems (national and regional) to which the SADCQF relates and report progress at the next Meeting.

3.7 Areas for renewal – towards an effective SADCQF

The recommendations emanating from the study were as follows:

- The planned SADCQF Implementation Unit is not yet in place. Without a dedicated implementation unit with technical capacity, this present governance and implementation model was the only realistic possible solution in the context. But the information and views collected by this study indicate that this model may have reached its limits, and that its weaknesses could adversely affect the efficacy of the SADCQF process going forward. As such, the SADCQF Implementation Unit should be established in a phased approach, starting with a small team. It should be ensured that the staff of the Unit is technically competent and has specific knowledge in the domain of qualifications and qualifications frameworks.
- The alignment to SADCQF needs rethinking, addressing both strategic and organisational aspects, for instance exploring the possibility to adopt a referencing / comparison rather than alignment approach, and provision of support to countries in undertaking the reviewed alignment/referencing activities on operational level (such as: information-sharing, adequate guidance, clear and efficient processes oriented to trust building). This requires a degree of technical assistance and the development of a unified information and guidance package on the policy, technical and QA aspects of the alignment/referencing process is relevant, to assist the member states with their self-guided alignment/referencing processes fitting the national contexts.
- There is need for the development of online databases/registers of national qualifications: each NQF should ensure public access to well-structured and updated information on all national qualifications and credentials in the country. Access to updated and complete information on national qualifications is a right of the population and a benefit for the countries' policies related with employability, skills matching and career guidance. Online qualifications databases can act as elements of the national labour market information system, alongside their primary role as transparency tools of the qualifications system.
- SADC in cooperation with the African Continental Qualifications Framework ([ACQF](#)) initiative, other Regional Qualifications Frameworks, Quality Assurance agencies and relevant stakeholders in Africa could seize the opportunity to engage in a process developing a common African concept and

guideline on micro-credentials. Such a process could build on experiences of other similar initiatives of regional/international scope, such as the ongoing development of a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong-learning and employability and the UNESCO-led initiative 'Towards a common definition of micro-credentials'.

- Common profiles of qualifications for the region: One of the explicit purposes of SADCQF is to 'create SADC regional standards where appropriate'. However, progress has been very limited regarding this purpose. Furthermore, the rapid pace of transformation of work, technologies, and skills requires agile lifelong learning policies and offerings adaptable to different needs. As such, the 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.

- The survey and interviews clearly showed there is an urgent need for well organised information-sharing and capacity development supporting the various strands and programmes of SADCQF. Capacity development activities can be conceived and delivered through a combination of modalities, including virtual and hybrid; guided and self-learning; cross-country and country focused. Partnerships with other RQFs, with ACQF and international organisations could be beneficial and could contribute to knowledge circulation, deduplication, and efficiency; and

- Finally, synergies and complementarities between the SADCQF and ACQF are already a reality and can be enhanced through joint activities and projects, such as facilitating a common language and guidelines on micro-credentials for Africa.

Thank you for all your valuable contributions and participation.