

DEVELOPING THE AFRICAN CONTINENTAL  
QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (ACQF)



**GUIDELINE** **08**

**Communication and outreach in the context  
of qualifications frameworks and ACQF**

This technical guideline on communication and outreach in the context of African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF) is elaborated in 2021-2022 within the project AU-EU Skills for Youth Employability/Skills Initiative for Africa, Technical Cooperation – Developing the African Continental Qualifications Framework.

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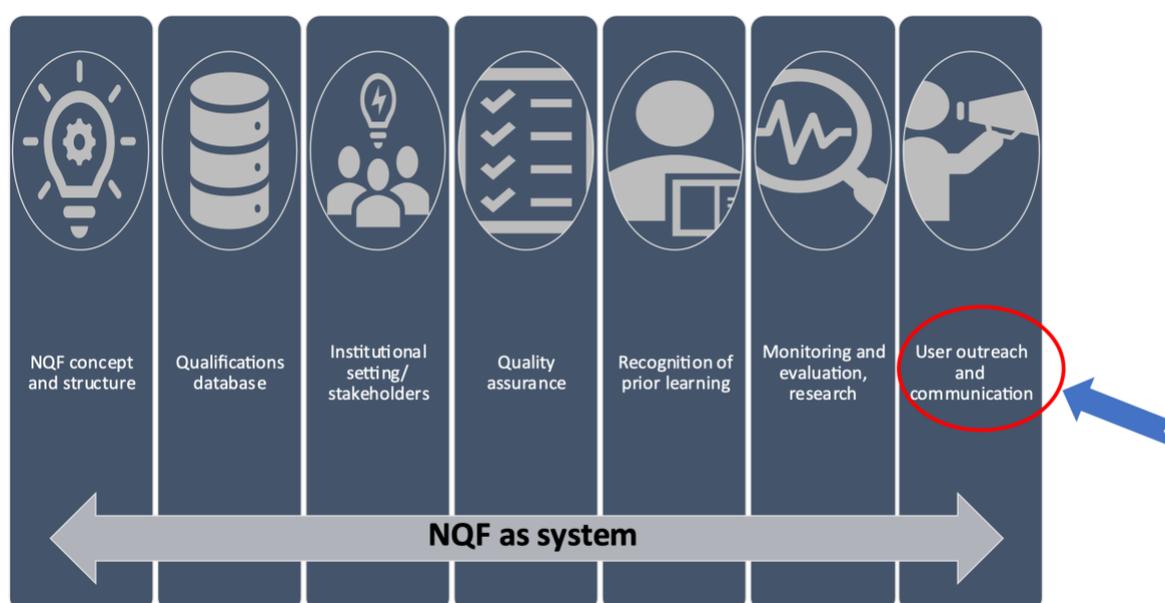
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## 1 Introduction to the Guideline 8: communication

Regular and consistent communication and outreach activities are essential to the implementation of National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) as well as the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF). This relates to ways to manage knowledge, share information and drive outreach and advocacy. Communication not only raises visibility and creates awareness, but also ensures that useful information is available to drive policy, decision-making and training. It is a way to harness the available and the most suitable instruments to engage stakeholders, including policy makers and the general public. Positive and consistent information, involvement of stakeholders/ networking, and consideration of feedback are some of the ways that encourage continuous improvement of NQFs and the ACQF.

A key message of this guideline is that communication and outreach is part of the NQF as a system. Figure 1 shows the NQF as a system comprising the following:

- The NQF concept
- Qualifications database
- Institutional setting/ Stakeholders
- Quality assurance
- Recognition of prior learning
- Monitoring, evaluation, research
- User outreach and communication



**Figure 1: Place of communication and outreach in the NQF as a system**

Communication and outreach to stakeholders, end-users at regional and national levels has been embedded in the ACQF project from the start and is relevant to ACQF as well as NQF development. From the start of the Covid-19 constraints and confinement in March 2020, the ACQF project activities were swiftly shifted to online and digital modalities, permitting a much wider outreach in terms of countries, institutions and persons. The peer learning activities around the themes of national and regional qualifications frameworks, quality assurance, recognition of prior learning, micro-credentials and qualifications management systems gathered approximately a thousand participants in 15 peer learning webinars. The mechanism of peer learning webinars blended the goal of communication and outreach,

with the goal of capacity development and dissemination of African and international developments in the indicated major thematic areas.

A substantial amount of ACQF communication items (learning materials, presentations, video learning materials, and other forms of sharing) are organised in the relevant dedicated [webpage](#) on the [ACQF website](#). Communication efforts have also identified and highlighted project results, outcomes, successes, challenges and sharing of experiences from countries within Africa and beyond. The ACQF communication items are available for use by all countries in all stages of NQF development.

A communication plan is essential to facilitate visibility, engagement, outreach, advocacy and publicity for the ACQF and its community of NQFs. This guideline explores the purposes, benefits and uses of communication in the context of the ACQF and NQFs. It proposes the elements of an ACQF/ NQF communication plan, with main objectives, instruments, outreach modalities with some target-group differentiation and interactions.

## 1.1 Purpose of the communication guideline

This guideline on communication and outreach in the context of NQFs / ACQF emphasises the need for qualifications frameworks and systems (national, regional) to engage with stakeholders and end-users to fulfil their promise towards individuals, economic actors and society. The guideline provides an overview on principles, means and arrangements for effective communication and outreach fit for the purposes of NQFs / ACQF, and their evolution; and details on the objectives, target audiences, key messages and the communication approach. Information, communication and outreach need to be seen as integral parts of NQF / ACQF governance.

The benefits of the NQF (and ACQF) will only truly materialise when all stakeholders, end-users, institutions have access to open and reliable information on the existing and new qualifications, credentials, learning pathways, recognition of learning, and on their value for employment, active life, further personal and professional development, for labour mobility, investment and economic and social development. But the limited visibility and understanding of NQFs' benefits and services among stakeholders and end-users is a problem that needs to be recognised and addressed in a systematic manner in many countries.

Mutual trust between qualifications frameworks and systems of countries and regions depends on reliable, accessible and free information on the different aspects that contribute to comparability of qualifications of all levels and types, and to validation of learning of individuals across the lifelong learning continuum.

One of the important messages from the last decade is that NQFs are changing, evolving and gradually trying to adapt and respond to new demands and calls for action. Changing socio-economic and technological contexts and other mega-drivers of change such as the impact of Covid-19 and the climate and environmental emergency have created new demands, opportunities and paradigms impacting on work, skills, modalities of lifelong and lifewide learning and types of qualifications and credentials. The vast and fast transformation of work and skills, the urgency of the digital and green transition drive the need for NQFs (and the ACQF) to evolve.

The policies, instruments and governance arrangements of NQF / ACQF ought to adapt to different stages of development, and the modalities and means of information and communication should respond and fit with the evolving nature and priorities of the NQF / ACQF.

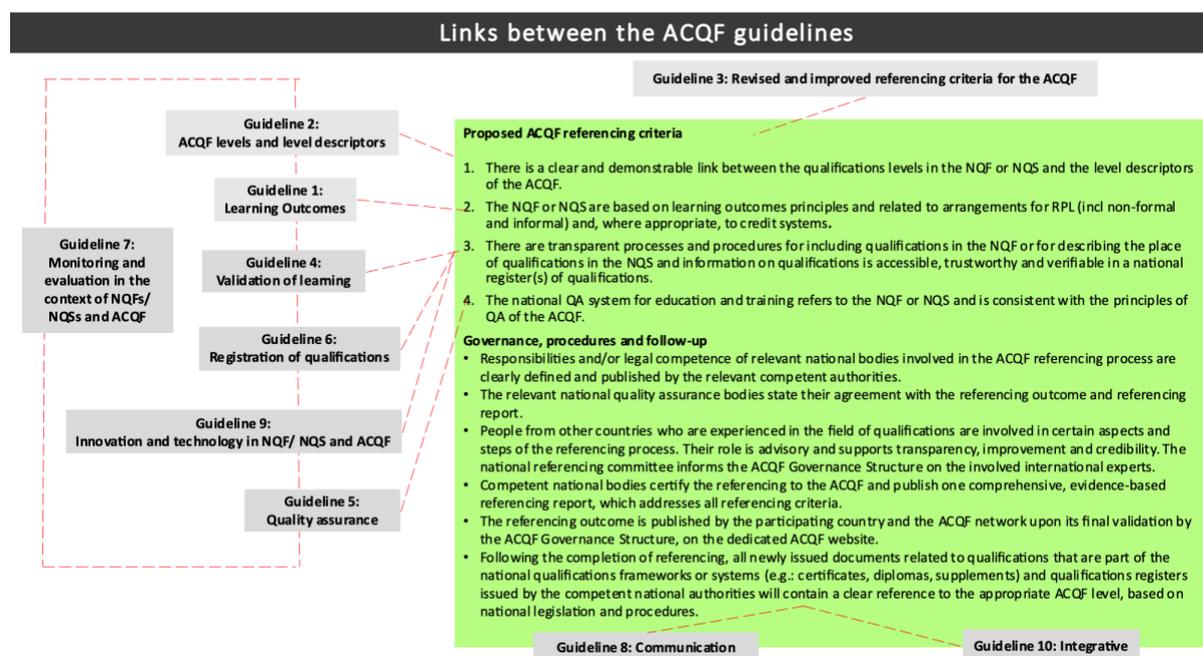
## 1.2 Users of the communication guideline

The main target users of the communication guideline are:

- Members or stakeholders of steering groups/ implementation groups for the ACQF

- National Referencing Committees/ National Coordination Points and policy advisers involved in education and training
- NQF/ NQS authorities, implementers and practitioners of NQFs and NQSS
- Education and training institutions and individuals interested in the ACQF and its benefits- learners, teachers, trainers, career counsellors, persons involved in supporting mobility for lifelong learning.

### 1.3 Links between the communication guideline and other ACQF guidelines



**Figure 2: Link between the guidelines**

There are ten ACQF guidelines with a key intention to contribute technical and methodological support to countries participating in the ACQF process:

- Guideline 1: learning Outcomes
- Guideline 2: ACQF levels and level descriptors
- Guideline 3: Referencing
- Guideline 4: Validation of Learning
- Guideline 5: Quality Assurance
- Guideline 6: Registration of qualifications
- Guideline 7: Monitoring and evaluation and
- Guideline 8: Communication
- Guideline 9: Innovation and technology in NQF/NQS and ACQF
- Guideline 10: Qualifications and qualifications frameworks – a systemic view

Communication is integral and embedded in all parts of the ACQF and NQF process and the communication guideline is therefore relevant to all the other guidelines.

The ten guidelines form part of the analysis and technical activities that support the engineering of the ACQF (2020 -2022). Other analytical elements include the ACQF mapping study, ACQF scenarios, feasibility study, ACQF governance and the policy document and action plan.

## 2 Communicating about the value added by NQFs- visibility for users

Communication and outreach is not only about marketing, but more importantly about information for stakeholders and end-users as part of the NQF strategy and system for results and impact, that is effectiveness over the short, medium and longer term.

### 2.1 NQF as system

A key message of this guideline is that user outreach and communication is one of the pillars of the NQF as a system (Figure 3), and need to be addressed in a systematic manner. All the pillars are of equal importance and interrelate within a continuous improvement cycle of:

- Informing, clarifying and providing a service
- Building capacity and buy-in
- Collecting information and feedback for monitoring
- Improving the system

There are many resources that can be used by NQFs e.g. presentations, support materials and key learnings from Africa and beyond about [real NQF cases](#) and [ACQF training materials](#) available on the [ACQF website](#).

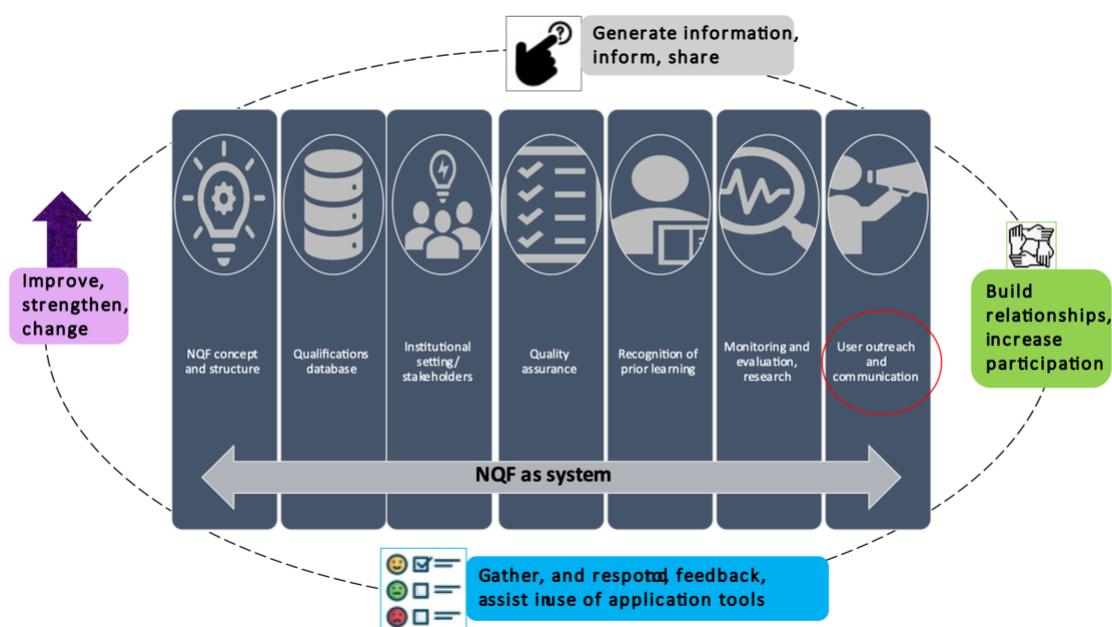


Figure 3: NQF as a system of continuous improvement

### 2.2 NQF concept and structure

#### 2.2.1 NQF scope

The decisions around the scope of the NQF is shaped by the purpose, objectives, principles and functions of the NQF, as well as the applicability to, and the responsibilities of, relevant stakeholders. These will also determine the main mechanisms and instruments for operationalisation.

NQFs can be comprehensive- inclusive of all sectors (higher education, TVET and general qualifications) or sectoral- inclusive of a certain sector only. Comprehensive NQFs address all types of qualifications at all levels which means that they must be relevant to a wide array of institutions. They enhance the consistency of the use of learning outcomes across the various sub-sectors and sub-frameworks. Learners should be able to move between institutions (academic and TVET) and combine learning from diverse institutions and qualifications to advance their careers (lifelong learning). Outcomes based perspectives can strengthen links between education and training sub-systems and institutions, improve articulation and reduce barriers to progression.

### **Referencing**

The ACQF is a comprehensive and inclusive continental qualifications framework, designed to support a holistic and systemic vision of learning, qualifications and credentials. Country NQFs, whether comprehensive or sectoral, will reference to it. The ACQF is open to co-operate and undertake referencing activities with all countries and qualifications frameworks and systems in Africa, and to compare with other regional qualifications frameworks, following transparent criteria and processes.

### **2.2.2 Learning outcomes approach**

[Learning outcomes](#) approaches improve transparency across NQF sectors and sub-sectors. The learning outcomes based approach introduces a common learning outcomes based language for describing qualifications. NQFs encourage a common conceptual basis of qualifications and strengthens and further encourages the concept and use of learning outcomes principles. Implementation means more explicit learning outcomes based levels which help to make NQFs and qualifications more readable and easier to understand within and across countries.

### **2.2.3 Map of qualifications**

The NQF provides a comprehensive map of national qualifications and how these qualifications relate to each other (see examples of [real NQF cases](#)). The increased transparency supports systemic improvements and changes to qualifications and strengthens qualification reforms. The learning outcomes focus also allows countries to identify where learning outcomes use needs to be improved (where it is being applied or where it is not being used consistently) and can influence policy development.

### **2.2.4 Level descriptors**

[Level descriptors](#) indicate the organisation of the levels of learning achievement appropriate to a specific qualification, and how they will be arranged. They are increasingly used as reference points for describing, writing and levelling (classifying qualifications on NQF levels), qualifications and assessment standards and curricula.

This is a very important use to NQFs and strengthens the consistency of qualifications to be delivered according to similar requirements. At national level, the level descriptors are used to classify qualifications onto NQF levels and can be used as a source of information to support recognition decisions.

NQFs provide important information about the level of the qualification, its link to other national qualifications, and what the qualification holder is expected to know understand and be able to do. They affect mobility of learners and workers by supporting recognition of national qualifications as well as contributing to supporting recognition of qualifications across borders.

There are many learning materials including a [thematic brief on level descriptors](#) available on the ACQF website. Additionally, the [learning outcomes based ACQF Level descriptors](#) can be used to support the review and/or renewal of NQF qualifications.

## 2.3 Qualifications database

One of the ways in which to maintain records of education and training is to keep a database of the NQF qualifications. Databases contain relevant qualifications information and structure qualifications in line with the national framework. In this way the value is visible and clear to stakeholders outside education and training like employers and companies. Databases may include registers of national qualifications and part-qualifications, learner achievements and associated information.

An NQF encourages greater visibility by including NQF levels on qualification documents which can be used by employers and companies. Increased transparency assists with visibility in the labour market and has potential in use in recruitment, appointments, access to regulated occupations, developing and guiding career pathways, planning work-based learning, certifying and recognising skills acquired in the workplace.

The ACQF will establish a continental platform (database) for publication and dissemination of information on national qualifications of NQFs referenced to the ACQF; and other qualifications and standards, according to guidelines and procedures decided by the ACQF governing structure.

## 2.4 Stakeholders

Crucial to NQF development is the involvement and co-operation of stakeholders on matters of mutual interest that takes into account the purpose and objectives of the NQF and will improve system transparency and relevance. For NQFs to be successfully implemented and operations to be effective, the relevant stakeholders need to meet regularly and participate in dialogues which address the development and strengthening of policies, qualifications and skills issues.

Qualifications frameworks, in particular comprehensive qualifications frameworks support coherent implementation and have a greater influence on bringing together NQF stakeholders across all sectors and institutions. These frameworks support the bringing together of stakeholders to allocate and quality assure the classification of qualifications to levels, according to level descriptors, to ensure consistency of the overall structure of the framework and to strengthen cooperation on progression routes across sub-sectors and sub-frameworks.

## 2.5 Quality assurance

NQFs are essentially about quality –assured qualifications and opens up to include other types of quality-assured credentials. An NQF brings together all the relevant quality assurance bodies responsible for developing and maintaining qualifications and related policies in the relevant NQF sub-sectors. Quality assurance responsibilities extend to developing and maintaining qualifications databases in the various sub-sectors.

## 2.6 NQFs linked with RPL and opening up to qualifications awarded outside the formal system

Most NQFs are open to qualifications within formal sectors (general, TVET and higher education) that are regulated by national authorities.

The learning outcomes approach is key to linking NQFs and the further implementation of recognition of prior learning (RPL) arrangements. Learning outcomes of NQFs and the ACQF act as a reference point for identifying, documenting, assessing and recognising learning from non-formal and informal settings. Having an NQF is beneficial and can allow countries to move towards a more national and coordinated approach to RPL with the same standards as in formal qualifications.

In order to support lifelong learning and remain relevant, NQFs need to open up to different types of qualifications awarded outside the formal system for example non-formal and private sector qualifications and qualifications awarded by international companies. More importantly, NQFs need to find ways to link the non-formal sector to the NQF by developing procedures for how they can be included, and an action plan noting when this will be addressed.

This opening up supports lifelong learning by allowing learners to combine formal qualifications with professional training and specialisation.

The ACQF encourages orientations to lifelong learning, and to parity of esteem of learning outcomes acquired in formal, non-formal and informal contexts, and all levels and sub-sectors of education and training .

## 2.7 Monitoring & evaluation and research

NQF stakeholders have a responsibility to conduct or commission research into issues of importance to the development and implementation of the NQF including various monitoring and evaluation activities which includes financial statements and audit reports.

Monitoring also determines the degree to which the communication objectives have been met and identifies where more effort needs to be made and includes elements of research and academic studies. The resulting analysis will assist in understanding what are the facilitators and barriers to successful communication and assist in refining the communication activities.

## 2.8 User outreach and communication

An NQF also has a responsibility to inform the public and other relevant role players about the NQF, its purposes, objectives, intentions, challenges and successes.

User outreach and communication takes place in a continuous improvement cycle, where the feedback from stakeholders is used to inform and strengthen the information and stakeholder relationships.

# 3 Communicating about NQFs in different stages of development

## 3.1 Communicating about NQFs in different stages of development

The [ACQF feasibility study](#) showed that across Africa there are 41 National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) that can be categorised into five stages of NQF development:

- Stage 1: NQF development to be started
- Stage 2: NQF in early thinking
- Stage 3: NQF in development and consultation
- Stage 4: NQF legal act approved, implementation started
- Stage 5: NQF in advanced implementation and reviewed

Countries within each of the five stages (See Table 1) will require different [support](#) and have different communication needs. However, all the stages will implement the NQF as a system and harness each of the pillars in the development and continuous improvement of their NQFs.

**Table 1: 41 African countries in five stages of NQF development**

No	Stage of NQF development	Countries
1	<b>NQF development to be started</b>	Chad, Republic of Congo
2	<b>NQF in early thinking</b>	Burkina Faso, Union of Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, São Tomé e Príncipe, Togo
3	<b>NQF in development and consultation</b>	Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Madagascar, Malawi, Morocco, Sierra Leone, Somalia
4	<b>NQF legal act approved, implementation started</b> <sup>1</sup>	Angola, Burundi, Egypt, Eswatini, Ethiopia, The Gambia, <b>Ghana</b> , Kenya, Lesotho, Mozambique, <b>Nigeria</b> , Rwanda, <b>Senegal</b> , <b>Tanzania</b> , Tunisia, <b>Uganda</b> , Zimbabwe
5	<b>NQF in advanced implementation and reviewed</b>	Botswana, Cape Verde, Mauritius, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Zambia,

Source: ACQF, 2021c, p.13

The next section elaborates, for each of the five stages:

- Main goals of communication
- Main tools and approaches
- Stakeholders involved
- Challenges

### 3.1.1 Stage 1: NQF development to be started

**Table 2: Stage 1 communication approach**

Stage 1: NQF development to be started			
Main goals of communication	Main tools and approaches	Stakeholders involved	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To explore the possibility of an NQF</li> <li>- To explore the purposes and scope of the NQF</li> <li>- To bring together key stakeholders to discuss the possibility of an NQF and consider proposals</li> <li>- To inform the public and stakeholders about the benefits of having an NQF</li> <li>- To provide peer learning/ sharing on NQFs and examples from other regions and countries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Stakeholder meetings</li> <li>- Websites of different NQF actors</li> <li>- Workshops exploring NQFs</li> <li>- Webinars to share experiences from countries and regions that have implemented NQFs and RQFs</li> <li>- Development and dissemination of Frequently asked questions (FAQs) on the what, why and who of NQFs and where to find information</li> <li>- Short news items on websites and social media of stakeholders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Stakeholders in charge of qualifications and databases relating to higher education, TVET and general education</li> <li>- Quality assurance agencies/ authorities</li> <li>- End-users including the public,</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- There may not yet be a lead agency identified to drive the process</li> <li>- Stakeholders may not be willing to participate or collaborate</li> <li>- End-users may be difficult to reach given that NQF communication can be very technical</li> <li>- Communication support needs may not yet be identified</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> In Stage 3 and 4, the highlighted six countries have sectoral NQFs, either higher education or technical and vocational education and training (TVET) with most sectoral NQFs focused on TVET

	- Sharing news on NQFs and RQFs	learners and workers	
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### 3.1.2 Stage 2: NQF in early thinking

Table 3: Stage 2 communication approach

Stage 2: NQF in early thinking			
Main goals of communication	Main tools and approaches	Stakeholders involved	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To gain clarity around the purpose and benefits of the NQF</li> <li>- To discuss and draft proposals for the NQF concept and structure (objectives, principles, actions, learning outcomes approach, level descriptors, etc)</li> <li>- To bring together stakeholders from the various NQF elements including to discuss the co-ordination and responsibilities of the NQF sub-sectors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Broadcasts and short news items to inform the public about the NQF system in early thinking, what it means and who is involved</li> <li>- Peer exchanges</li> <li>- Stakeholder meetings and webinars to consolidate NQF concepts</li> <li>- Websites and social media of different NQF actors</li> <li>- Research to support NQF concept proposals</li> <li>- Frequently asked questions (FAQs) on the country's NQF concept and what it will mean</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Relevant Ministries</li> <li>- Sector councils/ authorities</li> <li>- Stakeholders in charge of qualifications and databases relating to higher education, TVET and general education</li> <li>- Quality assurance and RPL agencies/ authorities</li> <li>- End-users including the public, learners and workers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teams may require technical support and training</li> <li>- Communication support needs may not yet be identified</li> <li>- Resources may not be available to conduct research and develop FAQs</li> <li>- End-users may be difficult to reach given that NQF communication can be very technical</li> </ul>

### 3.1.3 Stage 3: NQF in development and consultation

Table 4: Stage 3 communication approach

Stage 3: NQF in development and consultation			
Main goals of communication	Main tools and approaches	Stakeholders involved	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To consolidate the NQF concept and structure and various elements (purpose, objectives, principles, actions, learning outcomes approach, level descriptors, quality assurance, databases, RPL, monitoring and evaluation and user outreach)</li> <li>- To obtain buy-in and support of stakeholders from the various NQF</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Research-based concept proposals</li> <li>- Peer exchanges and PLWs</li> <li>- Records of declarations of intentions to collaborate on NQF related issues</li> <li>- Webinars</li> <li>- Radio broadcasts</li> <li>- Short videos on NQF concepts and benefits</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Relevant Ministries</li> <li>- Sector councils/ authorities</li> <li>- Stakeholders in charge of qualifications and databases relating to higher education, TVET and general education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- There may be delays in getting feedback from stakeholders which may delay the consolidation of the NQF concept and structure</li> <li>- End-users may be difficult to</li> </ul>

<p>elements including to discuss the co-ordination and responsibilities of the various ministries and NQF sub-sector authorities/ agencies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To draft concepts on monitoring and evaluation and user outreach</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Frequently asked questions (FAQs) on the country's NQF concept, progress and updates on milestones</li> <li>- Websites and social media of different NQF actors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Quality assurance and RPL agencies/ authorities</li> <li>- The public including learners and workers</li> </ul>	<p>reach given that NQF communication can be very technical</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Communication support needs may not yet be identified</li> </ul>
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### 3.1.4 Stage 4: NQF legal Act approved, implementation started

Table 5: Stage 4 communication approach

Stage 4: NQF legal act approved, implementation started			
Main goals of communication	Main tools and approaches	Stakeholders involved	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To publish information on the NQF legislation</li> <li>- To develop NQF policies to operationalise the NQF</li> <li>- To develop manuals and guidelines to assist NQF use</li> <li>- To ensure that elements such as quality assurance and RPL are operationalised</li> <li>- To ensure that qualifications databases are ready to records qualification profiles</li> <li>- To put in place communication and monitoring mechanisms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Seminars/ workshops/ conferences on the NQF legislation and what it means for employers, companies, students, etc</li> <li>- Relevant training and support materials to assist implementation</li> <li>- Webinars</li> <li>- Radio broadcasts</li> <li>- Short videos on the NQF</li> <li>- Frequently asked questions (FAQs) on the country's NQF concept and necessary actions</li> <li>- An NQF helpline to assist users to navigate the NQF system</li> <li>- Peer exchanges and PLWs</li> <li>- Websites and social media of different NQF actors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Relevant Ministries</li> <li>- Sector councils/ authorities</li> <li>- Stakeholders in charge of qualifications and databases relating to higher education, TVET and general education</li> <li>- Quality assurance and RPL agencies/ authorities</li> <li>- The public including learners and workers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Implementation may be delayed due to lack of resources and support</li> <li>- Communication and outreach may not yet be adequate</li> </ul>

### 3.1.5 Stage 5: NQF in advanced implementation and reviewed

Table 6: Stage 5 communication approach

Stage 5: NQF in advanced implementation and reviewed			
Main goals of communication	Main tools and approaches	Stakeholders involved	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To monitor NQF implementation</li> <li>- To assess the impact of the NQF</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Seminars/ workshops/ conferences to gather feedback on NQF implementation tools and activities by ministries,</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Relevant Ministries</li> <li>- Sector councils/ authorities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Assessment of impact may require many resources,</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To develop manuals and guidelines to assist NQF use</li> <li>- To monitor quality assurance and RPL</li> <li>- To monitor qualification databases and qualification profiles</li> <li>- To review and strengthen the NQF</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>authorities, employers, companies, students, etc</li> <li>- Peer exchanges and PLWs</li> <li>- Research on the impact and assessment of the NQF</li> <li>- Webinars, radio broadcasts, news items and short videos on the successes and challenges of the NQF</li> <li>- Information on the numbers and types of queries received on the NQF helpline and FAQs</li> <li>- Websites and social media of different NQF actors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Stakeholders in charge of qualifications and databases relating to higher education, TVET and general education</li> <li>- Quality assurance and RPL agencies/ authorities</li> <li>- The public including learners and workers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>including financial resources which may hamper progress</li> </ul>
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## 4 ACQF/ NQF project communication elements

Like all project communication, the ACQF and NQF communication activities involve a two-way process of sending information to, and receiving information from, relevant stakeholders at appropriate items, via appropriate channels.

A communication plan contributes to continuous improvement, design, creation, and sharing of information and relevant materials over a short-term, medium term and long-term. The communication plan upholds and shares the relevant ACQF/ NQF objectives, principles and activities. The goal of the communication plan is to bring the ACQF/ NQF message to the people, to ensure that all stakeholders are receiving and understanding the information they require, and that the information is clear, consistent and accurate.

### 4.1 Purpose

Communication activities are founded on the overall ACQF/ NQF activities and the related communication messages and tools address specific audiences in a mix of targeted ways to maximise the effects of the communication efforts.

The purpose of an ACQF/ NQF communication strategy and plan is to define the communication requirements and how information will be distributed. It sets out the following aspects: what will be communicated, how will it be communicated including how confidential/ sensitive information will be communicated, when it will be communicated, and who is responsible. A plan sets out the objectives/ goals, key messages, target audiences, tools and schedule, challenges and evaluation.

### 4.2 ACQF/ NQF communication objectives

ACQF/ NQF communication objectives include ensuring continuous improvement of communication (See Figure 4) with a purpose to:

- **Generate communication, share and inform:** The purpose is to connect with and engage stakeholders involved in the ACQF/ NQF and ensure that all network partners have adequate information about the ACQF/ NQFs' value, benefits, services and its various initiatives on an ongoing basis. It involves the exchange of ACQF/ NQF-specific information with the explicit aim of creating awareness and enhancing transparency, understanding and two-way communication with ACQF/ NQF stakeholders. NQFs need

to reach and engage with stakeholders and end-users at all levels, be understood and used widely across the qualifications system, supporting learners, employers, workers in all sectors and regions.

- **Build relationships and increase participation:** The purpose is to achieve the ACQF/NQF objectives in collaboration with all project partners. It is therefore important to the success of the ACQF/ NQF project that this information is consistent, timely and accurate for the specific audiences. A communication plan assists team members to prepare information that meets the needs of various project stakeholders, which includes general communication between team members as well as other stakeholders. This is also a good way to find and use better ways of engaging stakeholders and identify success stories.
- **Gather, and respond to, feedback:** The purpose is to receive feedback from stakeholders, respond to the feedback and support partners in the use of the ACQF/ NQF tools where necessary. The feedback is also used to improve communication and stakeholder relationships.
- **Improve, strengthen and change:** The purpose is to assist to improve elements of the ACQF/ NQF and improve the generation and maintenance of information to ensure continuous improvement of ACQF/ NQF communication and outreach.

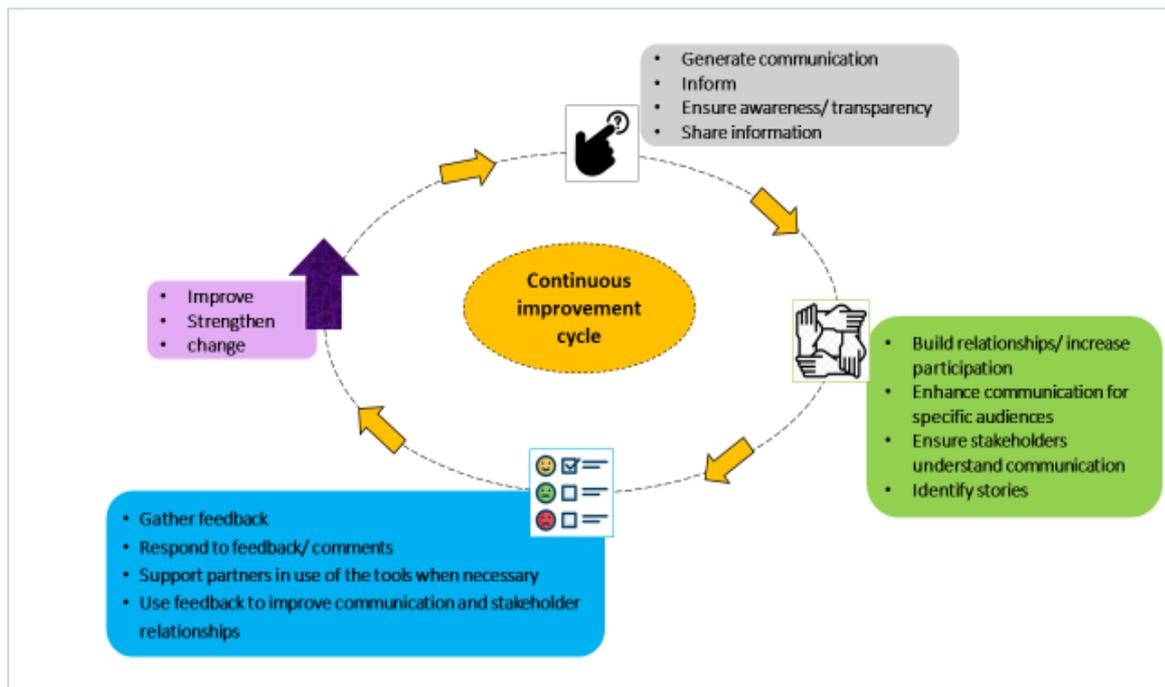


Figure 4: Continuous improvement of ACQF/ NQF project communication

### 4.3 ACQF/ NQF communication guidelines and principles

All the interactions within the ACQF/ NQF will contribute towards how it is perceived by stakeholders. It is therefore critical that communication is effective and seeks to improve contact between all ACQF/ NQF stakeholders. Regular communication will help reduce uncertainty and engage stakeholders at appropriate times.

Whether the communication is internal or with the general public, it is important that the messages are consistent. Each communication fits the technical level of the intended audience, avoiding acronyms and definitions that may not be clear.

ACQF/ NQF communication points should be clear and easily recognisable in terms of its purpose, audience, frequency, most direct way to state it, and action required from the recipient.

All ACQF/ NQF communication focuses on conveying a positive message and provides an opportunity for follow up or questions.

Messages should be succinct and aim to clarify a few points rather than cover an unlimited range of issues. Messages should be people-centred. Where appropriate, a story-telling approach is used: one that emphasises the impact of the action on individual lives.

ACQF/ NQF communication is sensitive to donor requirements concerning communication and other contractual obligations and considers the local context first while being closely co-ordinated with the key partners' fundamental principles. Any standard templates, especially regarding writing styles and graphic identity must be made available to relevant users.

ACQF/ NQF communication is undertaken, where appropriate, through partnerships with individuals and organisations that can have a potential multiplier effect, uses the local context and language(s) and is consistent with actions in terms of human and financial resources and responsibilities.

- ACQF: The [ACQF website](#) is the standard ACQF platform and houses all the relevant news, documents, events, video clips, presentations, updates, etc. All the data on the website can be downloaded and is available for sharing. All communications should include the link to the [ACQF website](#).
- NQFs: Similarly NQF communication is best housed within a website that can be easily accessed by the public. NQF communications should include a link to the NQF website. The ACQF website can be used as a resource for information for NQFs

#### 4.4 Assumptions

Success is dependent on all relevant team members participating in processes using the channels and guidelines in the ACQF/ NQF communication plan, and committing to open, honest communication. The assumption is that ACQF/ NQF partners will be involved in all areas of the communication:

- Implementing the ACQF/ NQF objectives and principles
- Participating in ACQF/ NQF events, meetings and relevant research
- Promoting the ACQF/ NQF, its website and all materials on the relevant networks (respective websites and social media accounts (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc)).

#### 4.5 Resources

ACQF/ NQF communication must serve the relevant objectives of the system and is not an objective in itself. The need for communication resources should not be underestimated and often requires a separate budget though this should be as cost-effective as possible. Communication budgets need to make provision for costs related to design, translation, printing (where relevant), human resources (e.g. communications officer, administrators of events and meetings (including monitoring of the chat functions) website manager, social media manager, videography, photography, etc).

#### 4.6 Graphic elements conveying messages about ACQF/ NQF visual identity

The ACQF/ NQF logo is the most visible part of its visual identity, and based on a range of graphic elements (colours, typography, layout) and the way these are arranged in documents, publications, event information, etc.

All the graphic elements and rules for application convey a message about the ACQF/ NQF and is designed to reinforce the ACQF/ NQF brand and increase visibility.

All ACQF/ NQF publications follow certain formats such as the details of the ACQF/ NQF project partners and funders, disclaimers about the views and opinions expressed in the publication and intellectual property rights including how permission needs to be accessed and granted for translation, reproduction, transmission and recording.

#### 4.6.1 ACQF visual identity

An example of the ACQF visual identity is shown here.

For the ACQF, the various visual elements are used on appropriate documents:

- Figure 5 shows the ACQF logo in green with the picture of Africa in the Q of ACQF.
- The elements make provision for inclusion of the relevant Africa- EU partnership with the logos of the African Union and European Union (see Figure 6).
- Figure 7 shows the logos of the funders/ project partners namely the European Union, Federal Ministry of Economic Development and Cooperation, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, European Training Foundation.
- All ACQF publications follow certain formats regarding contributions and disclaimers and encourage include an email channel feedback (See Figure 8).



Figure 5: ACQF logo



Figure 6: Logo showing Africa-EU partnership



**Figure 7: Logo showing the co-funders and technical developers of the ACQF project**

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

Views and opinions expressed in this publication are the responsibility of the authors and should in no way be attributed to the institutions to which they are affiliated or to the African Union Commission or the project partners (European Union, Federal Ministry of Economic Development and Cooperation, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, European Training Foundation).

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Comments and additional information to be sent to: [ecb@etf.europa.eu](mailto:ecb@etf.europa.eu)

**Figure 8: Example of ACQF format for Technical Guideline**

## 4.7 ACQF/ NQF Network

Effective communication can be time-consuming. The ACQF/ NQF network has the potential to be “message multipliers” and are key to improving visibility but must be convinced that the ACQF/ NQF activities relates to their interests. It is therefore essential that the target audiences are identified and analysed for the best way to communicate with them and ensure a participatory approach.

There are a number of stakeholders in the ACQF/ NQF network including:

- African stakeholders, especially the national and regional entities responsible for qualifications frameworks or systems
- organisations delivering international qualifications
- recognition bodies and committees
- education and training providers
- social partners
- professional and sector associations
- employment sector institutions, job centres and online job vacancies websites, labour market and skills observatories
- students' unions
- International networking and cooperation with regional and national qualifications frameworks on other continents, international organisations active in certification, recognition, and research in the domain.

### 4.7.1 Engaging ACQF/ NQF target audiences

A key part of the communication is to identify target audiences, what are their preferred communication channels and when they prefer to receive the communication. The target audience means all groups of people that may have an interest in the activities and results of the ACQF/ NQF although the reasons for their interests may vary.

All the interactions within the ACQF/ NQF must contribute towards building a positive image and increasing positive perceptions of the ACQF/ NQF. It is critical that effective communication seeks to improve contact between all ACQF/ NQF stakeholders.

Activities and actions must be determined based on the perceptions and expectations of various target groups and messages tailored accordingly. For example, it is critical to identify who must make decisions and provide validations for various parts, who must be physically involved, who must be kept informed of updates and who needs to be further developed in terms of capacity.

**ACQF target audiences:**

For communication purposes the key target audiences for the ACQF can be categorised into three levels of target audiences: continental stakeholders, regional stakeholders and national stakeholders. Interactions with stakeholders will ensure access to these audiences:

***Continental stakeholders***

All member states, regional stakeholders/ organisations and international partners that are working with the African Union (AU) to build, develop and improve the ACQF are part of this target audience. Some examples include: AU Commission (AUC) European Union (EU), GIZ, European Training Foundation (ETF), ACQF Advisory Group (AG), ACQF steering/ implementation groups, project experts, policy makers and advisors. As project partners and facilitators, this group has the strongest influence in promoting communication and awareness about the ACQF.

***Regional stakeholders***

Regional Economic Communities (RECs), funders of REC activities, implementation committees, regional policy makers and advisors form part of the regional audience. This audience has a key role as influencers and multipliers of messages about the ACQF at regional and national level.

***National stakeholders***

This group includes members or stakeholders of national steering groups/ implementation groups for the ACQF, including ACQF committees, national coordination points and other implementation institutions, national policy makers and policy advisors involved in education and training, NQF/ NQS authorities, education and training institutions and individual end-users such as learners and workers. This audience has a key role as influencers and multipliers of messages about the ACQF at national level and also has an influence on individual end-users.

## 4.7.2 ACQF/ NQF stakeholder directories and distribution lists

It is important to establish an ACQF/ NQF Directory that contains the contact information of all the stakeholders in the community, with the necessary protocols on privacy policies and protection of personal information in place. There should also be a visible channel for stakeholders and interested parties to subscribe to mailing lists.

Figure 9 shows an example of a screenshot from the [ACQF website](#) where all visitors are invited to subscribe to the ACQF mailing list. In the screenshot, the terms and conditions and privacy policy are available and accessible for all visitors to the website.

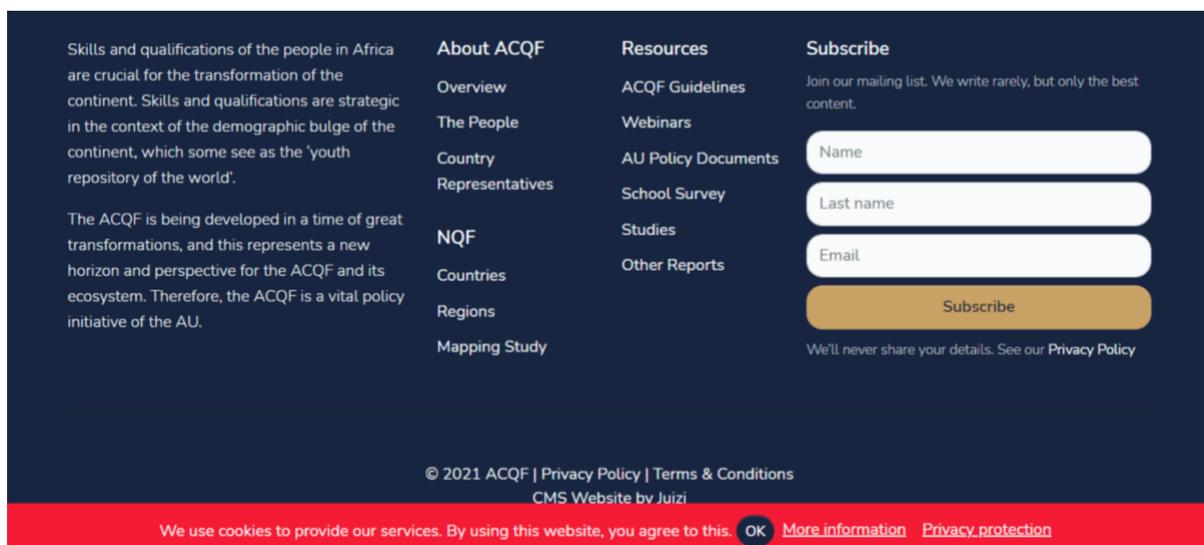


Figure 9: Example of an invitation to subscribe to a mailing list (screenshot from ACQF website)

## 4.8 Key messages

The purpose of any message is to convey ACQF/ NQF content but also to increase awareness of the support and services that are available to member states. Effective messages are jargon-free, clear and simple so that it can be easily remembered. The messages convey the typical themes that will be used to achieve the ACQF/ NQF goals. Examples of key messages may be about:

- **ACQF/ NQF Information:** The purpose is to convey news about the ACQF/ NQF: accomplishments, progress updates, announcements, events, etc.
- **ACQF/ NQF support:** The purpose is to increase the use of the information, which emphasises its benefits and how the information can be used
- **ACQF/ NQF feedback:** the purpose is to encourage comments and feedback that will enhance continuous improvement of the ACQF/ NQF.

Key messages are presented in a consistent manner regardless of the media or channel used. Additional messages may be linked to the key messages.

Whether the communication is internal or with the general public, it is important that the ACQF messages are consistent and regular to reduce uncertainty and engage stakeholders at appropriate times.

It is also important to find the right communication mix for the various audiences, for example a specific target audience may prefer a mix of different communication channels depending on the purpose of the communication and the associated message.

## 4.9 ACQF/ NQF online communication channels

The ACQF is developed in a digital era where an online presence is preferred. At the time of the ACQF development, across Africa there are 41 National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) categorised into five stages of NQF development. An online presence is an important feature of the image and branding of the ACQF as well as the NQFs in its environment.

The online presence must be able to foster visibility, attract users, provide information and motivate participation. Information must be accessible and easily searchable at all times and audiences need to be able to access all communication digitally including on smart mobile devices.

Selecting the right online communication channel is important to channeling the online image and brand. Examples of online communication channels include:

- Websites as central information hubs
- Online channels of partners such as social media
- Online events
- Email correspondence
- Publications and reports

#### 4.9.1 ACQF/ NQF websites

The NQF website is the main information hub and central communication point of all ACQF/ NQF information. It is the main site for official ACQF/ NQF news. Access is usually free and the website can reach all stakeholders with access to electronic and internet resources. The website allows all stakeholders to have access to all project information at any time.

To ensure maximum outreach, the website should be fully functioning and kept up to date. The content is usually available in the relevant languages of the country. In an effort to encourage ACQF/ NQF dialogue, the ACQF/ NQF must be seen as a support tool for developing and improving the development of NQFs in Africa.

All stakeholders must be encouraged to make use of the information on the ACQF/ NQF website and therefore need to know how the ACQF/ NQF can support them. Optimal use of the websites must be encouraged by ensuring that it is accessible on all visibility items:

- cross-referenced on partner pages and other project pages
- included in email signatures of ACQF/ NQF partners
- promotional material
- social media sites, etc.

All ACQF/ NQF communication should contain a link to the website and direct users to the website. All other communications should lead audiences to the relevant website. The dedicated website content persons are typically responsible for preparing, managing, editing and maintaining website content. All users of the website should be invited to:

- provide relevant feedback on the clarity, user-friendliness and accuracy of website information
- direct interested parties to the website.

#### **Navigating the ACQF website**

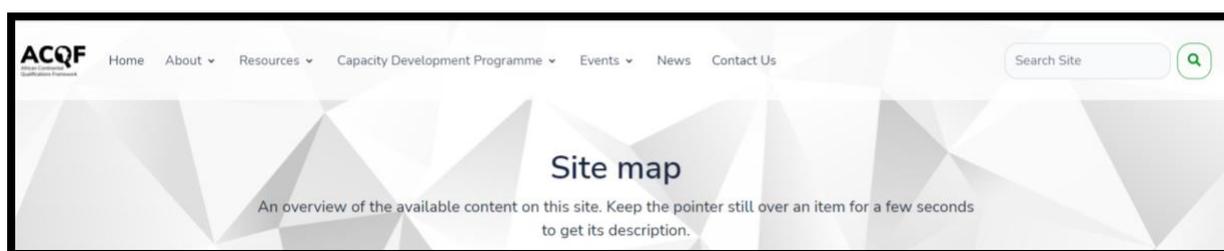
The [ACQF website](https://acqf.africa/) address is <https://acqf.africa/>. The address is short, descriptive, easy to remember and easy to access. The website is also easy to find by searching the words “ACQF website” or “acqf.africa”. Content is available in the languages of the African Union namely English, French and Portuguese.

The [ACQF website](https://acqf.africa/) is a dedicated ACQF platform with a wealth of information and communication on all the ACQF activities and project outcomes (milestones, updates on achievements and progress), as well as an archive of tools and materials that may be used by the public including news about the ACQF, [video learning materials](#), [presentations](#), handbooks, [thematic briefs](#), [policy documents](#), [ACQF Research](#), reports, [infographics](#), [photos](#), [event materials](#), etc.

Clicking on the [site map](#) (screenshot in Figure 10) will provide a broad overview of the key tabs on the ACQF website:

- Home
- About
- Resources
- Capacity development programme
- Events
- News
- Contact us

The site is fully searchable.



**Figure 10: ACQF website site map (screenshot)**

The plan of available materials/ resources on the website: [ACQF site map information](#) as at 15 February 2022 includes:

- About
  - [Overview](#)
  - [History](#)
  - [The people](#)
  - [Representatives](#)
  - [Presentation of the ACQF project 2019-2022](#)
- Resources
  - [NQF inventory](#)
  - [Mapping study](#)
  - [Policy & Guidelines](#)
    - [ACQF Guidelines](#)
    - [Feasibility study](#)
    - [Meetings and Webinars ACQF Advisory Group](#)
    - [African Union policy documents](#)
  - [ACQF Research](#)
    - [School Curriculum Mapping](#)
    - [Studies](#) (under development)
    - [Other Studies](#) (under development)
  - [Recognition of Prior Learning](#)
  - [Library](#)
    - [Publications from international sources](#)
- Capacity Development Programme
  - [Webinars](#)
  - [Conferences](#)
    - [First ACQF Conference 2022](#)
    - [Africa Creates Jobs Conference 2021 \(3-4 November 2021\): presentation of ACQF website](#)
  - [Support to Countries](#)

- [Early reflection or consolidating the NQF](#)
- [Thematic Briefs](#)
- [Networks](#)
  - [Networking with African Qualifications Verification Framework](#)
- [Video Learning Materials](#)
  - [Videos- real NQF cases](#)
  - [6 NQFs Governance Models](#)
- [Gallery: ACQF video and photos](#)
  - [\[Video\] on ACQF Peer Learning](#)
- [Events](#)
  - [Upcoming events](#)
  - [Previous events](#)
- [News](#)
- [Contact the ACQF developers](#)

#### 4.9.2 Using online channels of partners to deliver ACQF/ NQF messages

All Member States, stakeholders and partners can be regarded as ACQF/ NQF influencers and multipliers of messages- they have the potential to increase the spread and power of the ACQF/ NQF messages. Partners' online media includes websites, social media and blogs.

##### Social media

Social media such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, Instagram, Flickr are quick, real-time platforms that can be effective in that they are relatively low cost, interactive and can link effortlessly to the relevant ACQF/ NQF website and other social media instruments. All news on social media should include a link to the ACQF/ NQF website.

- **ACQF social media:** It takes time to develop a social media presence. For this reason, the [ACQF website](#) will remain the official online platform of the ACQF and will not have a separate social media platform. However, member states, partners and stakeholders of the ACQF will be encouraged to promote the ACQF on their existing online channels and social media pages as they would already have an established audience and have dedicated resource persons to post and monitor social media.

##### ACQF website a resource for information about NQFs

The [ACQF website](#) is a source of information for NQFs and has many additions and news items about NQF development (in Africa and beyond) that can be promoted on online channels of partners, for example:

- **Real time information:** Real time information on events, before events ([Upcoming events](#)), during events and post-events ([Previous events](#)) work best on social media, and is an effective way to get the NQF/ ACQF message across. All information on all past events is available on the [ACQF website](#). News on the recent [Webinars on RPL, VAE, RVCC](#) that took place in February and March 2022, are available- Recognition of prior learning (RPL) / Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience (VAE) / Reconhecimento e certificação de competências (RVCC) (Reconhecimento de competências adquiridas).
- **Infographics:** They present a much more attractive way to popularise complicated information using visual tools combined with innovative design elements. Various [ACQF infographics](#) are available for sharing.
- **Good quality short videos:** They are produced well, relevant, and are a powerful medium for spreading the message about NQFs and the ACQF. They can be used in training, self-learning and capacity development programmes. They are able to generate greater interest and are also much more likely to be used, shared and re-shared by users and accessible via the website. The website already has a

number of videos on real NQFs: [NQFs learning materials and videos of real NQF cases](#) as well as a number of videos on [Six NQFs governance models](#).

- **Photos/ pictures:** There is a photo gallery on the website that can quickly show actions, successes and the people side of the NQF/ACQF project. Photos are available on the website: [videos and photos](#)
- **E-learning portal:** The website can be used as a portal for e-learning as it has a range of information related to the NQFs: [ACQF and NQF news](#), materials, articles, documents, research, presentations, etc.

For the ACQF/ NQF to expand its reach, it needs to be visible in the online media including social networks of partners. Partners must be encouraged to access the ACQF/ NQF website and promote the website to their partners and in their own social networks. Member States and partners can use their social networks and increase visibility of the ACQF/ NQF by inviting people to join or follow, share and respond to posts:

- Join or follow social media pages for real-time information about the ACQF/ NQF
- Share ACQF/ NQF news, videos, articles and the link to the NQF or [ACQF website](#) on their own organisational pages and “tag” other relevant social media pages or websites
- Respond: Like or comment on posts about any ACQF/ NQF news.

### 4.9.3 Online ACQF/ NQF events

The sustainability of the ACQF and NQF will be triggered by long-term interest and involvement of partners. Networks are a powerful way to ensure messages are heard. Events, whether webinars, meetings, conferences or workshops represent the best opportunity to raise the profile of the ACQF/ NQF by engaging remotely, with stakeholders and other beneficiaries. Any project documentation can be prepared beforehand and shared electronically. By creating these platforms for peer-sharing, an ACQF/ NQF community of practice is established, one that can continue to collaborate to ensure implementation.

Events are effective ways of distributing information to interlocutors and stakeholders, and receiving direct feedback. The most important part of planning for events is determining the objectives and then deciding which format will be most suitable for promoting inputs and feedback for example: meetings (bilateral, team, stakeholder), webinar, conference, etc.

The key audiences, key messages of the event as well as event communication should be well planned and adapted to the size and type of event. Meeting documentation can be partially shared or fully shared with specific stakeholder groups depending on the type of event and level of confidentiality/ sensitivity of information.

Events are excellent communication channels. They:

- Increase ACQF/ NQF visibility
- Improve stakeholder relationships by identifying and inviting speakers and other stakeholders to:
  - o participate in ACQF/ NQF processes
  - o provide opportunities to discuss and engage in dialogue
  - o share knowledge about education systems and processes and their links to the ACQF/ NQF
- Enhance ownership of the various ACQF/ NQF elements by various stakeholders
- Encourage the use of the various materials available on the ACQF/ NQF website
- Add to the rich archive of ACQF/ NQF information. The ACQF/ NQF website contains contents of all relevant ACQF/ NQF events that can be shared with the public and includes documentation, videos, presentations and reports.

#### Online events

With the various online platforms (Zoom, Teams, etc.) that are available, online events are much easier to manage.

They are much more cost-effective: no money needs to be provided for transport, accommodation, subsistence, hiring of venues, service providers and equipment. RSVPs, number of guests and online presence of guests at the event are easier to track.

Simultaneous interpretation is much easier to access and the event is automatically recorded.

A further advantage is that questions and comments can be monitored, and responded to, in the “chat”, a very effective feedback mechanism.

It is also possible to gauge the level of learning by undertaking a pre-event and post-event survey which can be implemented as people log in and log off from the event.

#### 4.9.4 Email correspondence with various ACQF/ NQF stakeholders

Email communication remains one of the most commonly used communication tools and is a good way to distribute urgent ACQF/ NQF information and receive direct feedback.

The costs of sending an email is low, the number of receivers are unlimited (one message can be sent to multiple recipients) and the message delivery is fast.

Easily identifiable message subject lines will mean that emails can be prioritised, easily categorised and stored using different ACQF/ NQF elements, and any amount of ACQF/ NQF documents can be attached.

To protect the personal information of recipients, when communicating with large groups, it is best that the recipient list is hidden.

It is also important that ACQF/ NQF email directories and distribution lists be carefully managed and kept up to date.

#### 4.9.5 ACQF/ NQF publications and reports

Publications and reports are an effective way to maintain regular contact with ACQF/ NQF audiences, and can be promoted on online channels like websites and social media accounts. All information about ACQF/ NQF documents should be available to the public via the official websites.

- An online presence is preferred. Printing of documents is not environmentally friendly and is discouraged, except in exceptional circumstances where printed copies are necessary to reach audiences with no internet access.

The type of publication and language used must be appropriate to the target audience:

- **Infographics** are a much more attractive way to popularise complicated information as the language is concise and articles are short. They use visual tools combined with attractive design elements and work very well in presenting statistical information. See example of [ACQF infographics](#)
- **Newsletters** can ensure that everyone is kept up to date with the latest developments and can contain summaries of developments over a period of time. Newsletter articles are short but able to present the key themes of the ACQF/ NQF. See example of the [ACQF newsletter](#)
- **Videos and photos:** Good quality videography and photography is generally favoured. For ACQF/ NQF publications, photos can quickly show actions, successes and the people side of the ACQF/ NQF. See example of [videos and photos](#) on the ACQF website
- **Success stories** are the best way to make an impression about the ACQF/ NQF achievements. They will contain information that can be shared in the public domain and are best for communication with beneficiaries. It also puts a human face to the ACQF/ NQF benefits. It is useful to find groups/ persons

who can talk about the good experience they have had with the ACQF/ NQF and how they have benefitted. The content for beneficiaries must be attractive and appealing and need to outline the change and impact (long-term results) that the ACQF/ NQF sets out to achieve. Short interviews can be set up to gather success stories. This works best if the people are identified beforehand and simple questions sent to them in advance. Quotes and short clips can be used in reports, on the websites, in social media and other promotional materials

- **Official reports** may contain confidential information (depending on the audience) and may use more official language (institutional and administrative vocabulary) than other types of publications and results. Reports can be compiled on official stakeholder meetings and capacity development sessions

#### **Publications available on the ACQF website**

A number of publications are already available on the [ACQF website](#) for example:

- Resources
  - o [NQF inventory](#)
  - o [Mapping study](#)
  - o [Policy & Guidelines](#)
    - [ACQF Guidelines](#)
    - [Feasibility study](#)
    - [Meetings and Webinars ACQF Advisory Group](#)
    - [African Union policy documents](#)
  - o [ACQF Research](#)
    - [School Curriculum Mapping](#)
  - o [Recognition of Prior Learning](#)
  - o [Library](#)
    - [Publications from international sources](#)
  - o [Thematic Briefs](#)
  - o [ACQF infographics](#)

#### **4.9.6 Media coverage for the ACQF/ NQF**

Media coverage assists in shaping public opinion but not all ACQF/ NQF events will require media participation as there may be costs involved.

ACQF/ NQF events that may be considered useful for media include: any launches with high-level speakers, presentations of preliminary results, any events that have a good story for example in interesting locations or involving marginalised groups (women, youth, children etc), presentations covering the closure/ final results.

Local media houses can be invited to ACQF/ NQF events and time can be allocated for interviews. Journalists usually need to be invited in advance by sending a media advisory and should receive sufficient information beforehand to increase the coverage.

#### **Internal approvals for communicating with the media**

Any ACQF/ NQF information given to the media must go through an internal approval process. It is also essential that ACQF/ NQF responsibilities be clearly pre-defined as regards to:

- Content communicated to media including any crisis communication that needs quick decisions
- Instruments (media advisories, press releases, articles, interviews, media briefings, audio or visual materials)
- People authorised to speak to the media.

Media articles should be short, concise and free of abbreviations and jargon. Opinion pieces in local newspapers are often used with much bigger projects, and usually requires official support and validation. In the ACQF/ NQF environment, it is useful to create a pool of media who will follow developments, especially when there are outcomes to promote.

All information presented to the media should be information that is allowed in the public domain and approved by the relevant officials as sensitive information could risk reputational damage to ACQF/ NQF partners.

Any persons/ speakers who are willing to be interviewed and speak to the media must be identified beforehand, and be supported in line with any pre-defined ACQF/ NQF protocols. Sound bites can be prepared in advance with approval of speakers. Sound-bites are short, quirky statements based on the key messages and are often quoted by journalists.

Journalists are typically interested in the direct impact of the project at local level. It is therefore useful to pick a theme and explain how the ACQF/ NQF is addressing it. Journalists should be asked for a list of themes or list of ACQF/ NQF questions to be covered in the interview. Interviewees should be aware that journalists may refuse to provide all questions or go “off-script” and ask additional questions during the interview. Given that certain information pose a risk to partnerships and may damage the projects, it is useful, for persons who are regularly interviewed, to receive some sort of media training in preparation. Some journalists may volunteer to send news pieces for checking before publication but this may not always be the case.

#### 4.10 Communication monitoring and feedback

The ACQF/ NQF communication plan remains a living document based on continuous improvement. The goal of communication is not only to share and engage but also to listen, collect and take into account experiences and feedback and use the feedback meaningfully.

All messages need to have some feedback mechanisms such as audience feedback, feedback forms including confidential feedback forms and timely responses to queries. The audience needs to know that their opinions and feedback matters for continuous improvement (reviews, improvements, updates, changes) of the ACQF/ NQF. Communication activities should ideally be monitored before, during and after the activity has finished.

Monitoring also determines the degree to which the communication objectives have been met and identifies where more effort needs to be made and includes elements of research and academic studies. The resulting analysis will assist in understanding what are the facilitators and challenges to successful communication and assist in refining the communication activities.

For assessing outcomes, the “quick wins” and short term gains are useful. Outcomes can be summarised by gathering information on baselines and all the ACQF/ NQF project work, as the project progresses, for example:

- ACQF/ NQF articles/ publications including amount completed, disseminated and opened
- Surveys, including pre-event, post-event, number of surveys conducted and number of participants
  - o Online meetings/events. Examples on the ACQF website include:
    - [Meetings and Webinars ACQF Advisory Group](#)
    - [Peer learning webinars](#)
    - [Conferences — ACQF](#)
    - [Networking events of partner organisations](#)
    - [Support to countries](#)

- Websites, including launches, web news published, visits to a website, downloads of documents, feedback received from visitors to a website
- Networking (involvement of local and international institutions in ACQF/ NQF events and news on the website, news from other countries regarding new developments in qualification systems, participation in thematic events from partner organisations and other organisations, etc.

## 5 ACQF communication activities

### 5.1 Purpose of ACQF communication activities

ACQF communication activities will continue to:

- Create awareness, information, interest and engagement with the ACQF to ensure that stakeholders understand the **ACQF objectives** which are to:
  - o support comparability, quality and transparency of qualifications and lifelong learning
  - o facilitate recognition of learning from different contexts, diplomas and certificates and how the ACQF supports mobility (of learners, workers, services)
  - o work in cooperation and complementarity with national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) and systems and regional qualifications frameworks (RQFs), and supports NQF development and the creation of a common African education and qualifications space
  - o promote cooperation and mutual understanding, by means of referencing with qualifications frameworks in Africa and worldwide
- Adhere to the **ACQF principles** of inclusiveness, innovation and openness
  - o inclusiveness: across all levels and types of qualifications, all forms and stages of learning and modalities of certification
  - o innovation: support new developments related to emerging skills, roles and occupations, new technologies and societal demands
  - o openness: to participation of all stakeholders and AU member countries, to experience and good practice from Africa and other regions and continents
- Enhance dialogue with stakeholders to encourage learning about the ACQF and its tools and how it will benefit them
- Showcase the successes of the ACQF work and celebrate milestone achievements
- Ensure that the necessary endorsements and validations are obtained

The objectives, principles, and scope of the ACQF are defined in the ACQF policy document, in which the main areas of activity of the ACQF are formulated as follows:

### 5.2 ACQF main areas

**“By virtue of its objectives, principles and conceptual-technical design, the ACQF will deliver on the following main areas:<sup>2</sup>**

1. **Referencing** of national qualifications frameworks and systems to the ACQF, following agreed criteria and procedures. This includes the adequate support – for example, coordination, common instruments to facilitate the process, guidance and technical support to national referencing teams, and review and analysis on the state of play of referencing.

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<sup>2</sup> These areas are developed in the ACQF Feasibility Study (ACQF. 2021d), presented to ACQF Advisory Group meeting of 28 July 2021.

2. Support **recognition of prior learning** – for example, the development of common guidelines and approaches, updated inventory of RPL systems on the continent, and a wide information and support campaign.
3. ACQF **Qualifications Platform (database)**: a set of digital instruments to systematise and disseminate information on national qualifications frameworks and systems, on national and international qualifications and credentials, on recognition of prior learning. The ACQF Qualifications Platform will also provide other services, such as digital certification and data analysis and monitoring.
4. Qualifications: a range of activities such as research and design of common approaches and methodologies. Development of **qualifications profiles** adequate for common continental use related to new and emerging tasks, technologies, skills, and occupations linked with continental integration policies such as AfCFTA; and to continental strategies related with specific economic sectors, especially sustainable agriculture, which is poised to be a major contributor to growth and jobs.
5. **Capacity development** in the relevant thematic areas, including a range of training programmes in hybrid and digital formats, an e-learning platform, peer-learning activities and thematic communities of practice. Provision of technical support to countries in developing, implementing and reviewing their national qualifications frameworks and systems and preparing for referencing with ACQF. Cooperation and mutual learning across African regions, supporting their initiatives related to qualifications frameworks and systems and recognition of prior learning.
6. **Networking and cooperation** with African stakeholders, especially the national and regional entities responsible for qualifications frameworks or systems, organisations delivering international qualifications, recognition bodies and committees, education and training providers, social partners, professional and sector associations, employment sector institutions, job centres and online job vacancies websites, labour market and skills observatories, and students' unions. International networking and cooperation with regional and national qualifications frameworks on other continents, international organisations active in certification, recognition and research in the domain.
7. **Analysis, monitoring and evaluation** on ACQF implementation and other policy and technical themes relevant for the continuing improvement of the efficiency and effectiveness of the ACQF and its instruments.”

### 5.3 Current tools and actions of the ACQF project to reach out and communicate

#### ACQF website

- The [ACQF website](#) is the main information hub of all ACQF information. A presentation on the information on the [website](#) is available for sharing.

#### ACQF networking

The ACQF networking includes joint activities with other African organisations such as the:

- [AQVN-ACQF](#) series of experience-sharing webinars
- [ACQF-ACA](#) Mapping Study on curriculum, the joint work with regional economic communities (RECs) notably with SADC Secretariat
- Communities of Practice: Monitoring & Evaluation and Innovation & Technology)
- Participation, in ACQF events, of international experts from outside Africa (e.g. France, Ireland) and from organisations (e.g. EQF, ASEAN QRF, Cedefop, ETF)

## Activities

### Peer learning webinars

The ACQF has a systematic programme of [Peer Learning Webinars \(PLWs\)](#) with African countries, NQF authorities and QA and recognition bodies:

- **2020-2021:** Twelve PLWs were conducted in 2020-2021, with a sharing of 24 country cases and experiences (NQFs, quality assurance, recognition), and regional cases - from Africa, Asia, Europe and the Middle East. All learning materials, presentations, video learning materials are organised in the dedicated [webpage](#) of the ACQF website. A special library of [video learning materials](#) covering all real NQF cases presented at the PLWs has been created to ease access to this useful resource
- **2022:** Recognition of prior learning (RPL): The PLWs for 2022 were focused on [RPL](#). Ten cases from Africa and Europe were presented on 18 February, 3 March and 24 March 2022.

**Newsletter:** In 2022, three issues of a newsletter is scheduled: on 15 March 2022 ([ACQF newsletter](#)), 15 June 2022, and 30 July 2022

**Training programme:** The first [online training programme](#) was conducted (18-22 April 2022) and the second is scheduled for 4-8 July 2022. A full set of [ACQF training materials](#) is available for use by individuals, stakeholders, institutions, education and training providers on the continent and beyond.

### Conferences:

- The ACQF conference scheduled for September 2022 will be close to the conclusion of the ACQF project.
- ACQF participates and contributes to other conferences, events workshops, such as: the African creates Jobs (ACJ) conference 2021; and in 2022 the conference of Commission of Indian Ocean (COI), the expert's meeting of Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA), and the Unesco workshop on NQFs in West Africa.

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## 7 Annexes

### 7.1 Annex 1: Glossary/ concepts

**African Continental Qualifications Framework:** The ACQF is a policy initiative of the African Union and its development process is underway (2019-2022). The current vision for the ACQF is: to enhance comparability, quality and transparency of qualifications from all sub-sectors and levels of education and training; facilitate recognition of diplomas and certificates; work in cooperation and complementarity with national and regional qualifications frameworks; promote cooperation and alignment between qualifications frameworks (national and regional) in Africa and worldwide

**Chat (conference call)** is a way of conversing with the participant(s) of a meeting via text messages. it allows to chat only with those who are connected to each other through a conference call. Primarily used for video and audio calls and conferences, chat is still helpful to share a document, ask questions, communicate with all the conference participants, or even when you want to secretly convey a private message to any of the participants during an ongoing voice/video call

**Facebook** means a free social networking website that allows registered users to create profiles, upload photos and videos, post messages and maintain contact with persons

**Flickr** means a free photo-sharing and hosting service

**Instagram** means a free social networking app which allows users to share pictures and videos with their friends; it can be connected to other existing social networking profiles such as Facebook and Twitter, meaning users can share their pictures across platforms

**LinkedIn** means a free professional networking platform to share content: via a post, an article, or a livestream. Posts can include text, images, or video

**Multiplier** means a person that has potential to increase and intensify key messages to make more visible the project activities and outcomes; also known as an influencer

**Social media** means a way that people interact (create, share and/ or exchange information and ideas) in virtual communities and networks. Common social media are Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and YouTube

**Sound bites** means short, concise extracts from recorded interviews or speeches

**Target audience** means a particular cohort of users, identified as the receivers of a particular message. It assists in focusing the individual outreach efforts

**Twitter** means a free microblogging (140 characters or less) and social networking service on which users post and interact (post, like or retweet) messages known as "tweets"

**Web page** means a document or page of information on the internet about a particular subject, that forms part of a website; often just called "pages"

**Website** means a set of related web pages located under a single domain name, usually produced by a single person or organisation

**Whatsapp** means a free, multiplatform messaging app that permits sharing of pictures, text messages, voice calls and video calls between individuals and groups if the users have a Wi-Fi connection

**YouTube** means a video sharing service where users can watch, like, share, comment and upload video clips. YouTube can be accessed on PCs, laptops, tablets and mobile phones