BUILDING TRUST FOR BETTER MOVEMENT
Southern African Development Community Qualifications Framework (SADCQF)
Introduction and Background

The main objectives of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) are to enhance development, peace and security, economic growth, poverty alleviation, improved quality of life and regional integration, built on democratic principles and equitable, sustainable development. In this context, SADC countries adopted, in 1997, a Protocol on Education and Training which aims to promote regional integration especially with regard to quality of education interventions. In 2015, SADC countries adopted the SADC Industrialisation Strategy 2015 – 2026 which focuses on greater industrialisation of economies to raise total productivity in the region.

The SADC Qualifications Framework (SADCQF) is an important mechanism to implement the SADC Protocol and Industrialisation Strategy and contribute to the harmonisation of the education and training systems, and enhance the movement of learners, professionals and workers in the region. The SADCQF, a comprehensive Regional Qualifications Framework (RQF) for schooling, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and higher education, was established in 2011 by the SADC Ministers of Education. Its purpose is to enable easier movement of learners and workers across the SADC region and internationally.
The SADC Qualifications Framework (SADCQF) is a 10-level RQF underpinned by learning outcomes and quality assurance (QA) principles that will provide a regional reference for qualifications and QA mechanisms in SADC. Member States agreed to align their qualifications and QA mechanisms to the SADCQF. The vision is that, in the SADC region, all new qualification certificates, diplomas and other qualification credentials issued by competent authorities will contain the relevant level on the SADCQF. Alignment will enable this recognition of achievement at a regional level. The resulting transparency and information about the qualifications and QA of aligned Member States will further assist in embedding mutual trust in and between SADC countries. Regional alignment would also enable institutions and individuals to compare their learning and competence levels, and would reduce unnecessary duplication of learning and effort when moving through SADC for study or work purposes.

To give effect to this decision by the Ministers, a Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation (TCCA) was given the task of overseeing implementation of the SADCQF. The TCCA is a group of experts from the SADC Member States and is supported by the SADC Secretariat. The TCCA decided on an implementation model which comprises the following programmes namely (1) development and alignment; (2) quality assurance (3) verification (4) Communication and advocacy (5) Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) and articulation, and (6) Governance. In order to provide support and centrally drive co-ordination of implementation, a TCCA Executive Committee (EXCO) was established, based on the SADC Troika principles. To ensure the sustainability of the SADCQF, funding mechanisms for a SADCQF implementation unit have been developed. In the meantime, Member States volunteer to support the SADC Secretariat with the implementation efforts.
The main purpose of the SADCQF is to promote mobility, and as such, it plays a key role in being the regional reference point for comparing qualifications obtained in SADC. Some SADC countries volunteered to pilot the alignment of their qualifications frameworks or education and training systems to the SADCQF. An alignment plan and roadmap, as well as alignment timelines were developed to assist the pilot countries. Support was provided via alignment capacity building workshops.

Essential to the alignment process is the establishment of a National Alignment Committee (NAC) to spearhead and approve the process. The NAC typically comprises the following: Councils on Higher Education or Tertiary Councils; Departments of Education (including basic, TVET and higher); Occupational and Trades Sectors; and Qualifications Authorities. Each country establishes a NAC that suits their particular needs and context. The plan is to roll out alignment to all SADC countries.
The SADCQF encourages SADC countries to have good QA mechanisms in place and links up with key regional QA bodies. In this regard, both the Southern African Quality Assurance Network (SAQAN) and the Southern Africa Association for Educational Assessment (SAAEA) nominated experts to assist the TCCA with the implementation of QA in SADC. The plan is to strengthen SADC countries’ QA mechanisms in terms of accreditation and certification, and support their alignment with the SADC QA guidelines. Already progress has been made with creating a list of credible SADC institutions and their qualifications, and making the information publicly available. Looking ahead, it is important to strengthen QA capacity in SADC. Opportunities for QA capacity building are consistently being sought, in particular opportunities to engage with the Revised Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and Other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in African States (Addis Convention).
While the preceding programmes promote trust by ensuring that qualifications and quality assurance meet the regional standards, it is important that countries have mechanisms that can verify information about individual qualifications obtained in Member States. To ensure that credible, trustworthy information is shared across SADC, a regional Qualifications Verification Network (SADCQVN) was established. The SADCQVN was initiated to strengthen verification in SADC and is a member of the African Qualifications Verification Network (AQVN), which shares the common goal of ensuring that African qualifications can be trusted. The SADCQVN contact details are consistently updated and shared across the region. The annual collation of statistical information on learner and worker mobility in SADC, as well as on misrepresented qualifications, is a key feature of the work of the SADCQVN. The plans are to develop a SADC recognition manual, develop regional policies on verification and establish verification agreements between SADC countries. To ensure that the SADCQVN employs modern and innovative technologies, there are plans to pilot real-time verification at a regional level. There are also plans to assist Member States to develop their qualifications infrastructure so that information on their qualifications can be provided quickly and efficiently.
Communication and advocacy

The TCCA has identified platforms to advocate for, and communicate about, the SADCQF. Already information about the SADCQF has been distributed at national, regional and international levels. A communication strategy, which includes promotional material on the SADCQF, and social media sites were set up to disseminate information about the SADCQF. To ensure that the SADCQF is visible, a formal launch by the SADC Ministers of Education, and popularisation of the SADCQF by the TCCA, took place in the first half of 2017.

RPL, CAT and articulation

The SADC region has RPL guidelines that were approved by SADC Ministers in June 2016. The International Labour Organization (ILO) has been closely involved with SADC in the production of these guidelines and has indicated a readiness to assist with implementation across the region. This programme also focuses on CAT, articulation pathways and progression opportunities within and between schooling, TVET and higher education.
Governance

Implementation of the SADCQF entails implementing all its programmes and the TCCA consolidates, reviews and plans the work, with assistance from the SADC Secretariat. To assist with implementation, Member States play an active role in driving the strategic processes and supporting the Secretariat. Since September 2016 the TCCA has accelerated implementation of the SADCQF by:

- Developing an implementation action plan, implementation road map and implementation model and mobilising Member States to drive the programmes of the SADCQF;
- Ensuring regular meetings to co-ordinate the work of the TCCA and SADCQVN, as well as mobilising Member States to provide secretarial support to the SADC Secretariat;
- Developing and facilitating capacity building workshops; and
- Harmonising energies to synergise QA initiatives across Southern Africa and strengthening countries’ capacity to ratify the Addis Convention.

A SADCQF that builds trust for better movement

The programmes of the SADCQF have the common purpose of building trust in SADC qualifications. A fully functional SADCQF will provide the region with the following benefits:

- Easier comparability and recognition, including the verification of qualifications in the region;
- Reduction of misrepresented and fraudulent qualifications being used in the region; and
- Improved articulation of qualifications within the education systems in the region; improved awareness of how qualifications compare in the region; improved quality assurance systems in the region and improved mobility in the region.

It is envisaged that a fully operational SADCQF will promote lifelong learning by enabling easier movement of learners, workers and professionals regionally, continentally and internationally.

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