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# **Establishing the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF) Network**

## **Inception Document**

**With Activity Plan for the Pilot Project supported by ACQF-II  
(Jan-Sept 2025) – validated by ACQF-II coordinator**

**19 December 2024**

## **Table of contents**

|            |  |           |
|------------|--|-----------|
| <b>1</b>   | <b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>   | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>2</b>   | <b>RATIONALE.....</b>  | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>3</b>   | <b>MISSION AND OBJECTIVES OF THE ACQF NETWORK.....</b>                                   | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>3.1</b> | <b>MISSION .....</b>   | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>3.2</b> | <b>CORE VALUES .....</b>   | <b>6</b>  |
| <b>3.3</b> | <b>MAIN OBJECTIVES OF THE ACQF NETWORK.....</b>  | <b>6</b>  |
| <b>3.4</b> | <b>ACTIVITIES OF THE ACQF NETWORK.....</b>   | <b>7</b>  |
| <b>4</b>   | <b>GOVERNANCE OF THE ACQF NETWORK .....</b>  | <b>7</b>  |
| <b>5</b>   | <b>SHAPING THE IMPLEMENTATION PLAN OF THE ACQF NETWORK: DRAFT PRIORITY ACTIONS .....</b> | <b>10</b> |
| <b>6</b>   | <b>ACTIVITY PLAN FOR THE PILOT PROJECT 2025 SUPPORTED FROM ACQF-II PROJECT .....</b>     | <b>11</b> |
| <b>7</b>   | <b>CONTACTS OF MEMBERS .....</b>   | <b>11</b> |

This Inception Document of the ACQF Network is elaborated in the context of the project “Supporting Implementation of the ACQF”, in accordance with the activities planned under Output 3.1 of the project.

This version of the Inception Document reflects all comments and recommendations from members of the ACQF Network who participated in the 1<sup>st</sup> online meeting (5 December 2024).

**Member countries participating in the meeting of 5 December 2024:** Angola, Botswana, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, DR Congo, Eswatini, Guiné-Bissau, Kenya, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tunisia.

Member countries include also: Ghana, Lesotho, Senegal, Somalia, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

**Drafter of the Inception document:** Eduarda Castel-Branco. **Reviewers and contributors:** all representatives of the countries participating in the meeting of 5 December 2024 listed above.

*Version 1: 28 November 2024*

*Version 2: 06 December 2024 (integrates the comments and recommendations from ACQF stakeholders discussed at the online meeting of 05 December 2024) – validated.*

*Version 3: 19 December 2024 (integrates the Activity Plan 2025 for the pilot project supported by ACQF-II project)*

## 1 Introduction

The national qualifications authorities and departments, the regional economic communities and specialised organisations of the African continent signatories of this document pledge to create, maintain, respect and constantly improve the **African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF) Network (ACQF Network)**.

The main objective of the ACQF Network is to implement, sustain and strengthen the ACQF and its Qualifications and Credentials Platform (QCP), as policy instrument supporting transparency and comparability of qualifications and credentials of all types and levels, mobility of learners and workers, recognition of skills, qualifications and credentials, complementarities with national institutions in development of national qualifications frameworks and systems, referencing with qualifications frameworks in Africa and global cooperation. The **ACQF policy document**<sup>1</sup>, validated at the Conference in Addis Ababa, on 11-13 July **2023, defined the objectives, principles, the seven areas of activity, the essential principles of governance and the technical characteristics and tools of the ACQF.**

The conceptual and policy underpinnings of the ACQF Network were laid down at the ACQF Conference in Addis Ababa (11-13 July 2023)<sup>2</sup> and were further discussed and agreed at the 1st Forum of National Qualifications Institutions, in Kinshasa (18-20 June 2024)<sup>3</sup>. Output 3.1 of ACQF-II project includes activities in support of the establishment and strengthening of the ACQF Network for sustainability.

This Inception Document defining the goals, organisation and governance of the ACQF Network was discussed and validated by the countries actively cooperating in the context of the ACQF, in collaboration and partnership with ACQF-II project.

## 2 Rationale

This document lays the foundation for a harmonised and collaborative approach towards skills, qualifications and credentials in Africa, aiming for a brighter, skilled, and interconnected future.

**Considering** the imperative of lifelong learning, mobility of skills and qualifications and enhanced youth employability in Africa.

**Recalling** the dynamic development of National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF) in Africa and globally, oriented to foster integrated and holistic systems of lifelong learning which value learning outcomes from all modalities of learning, are inclusive of different types and levels of qualifications and credentials, work in synergy with related policies and instruments oriented to learner's progression,

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<sup>1</sup> ACQF Policy document (2023). <https://acqf.africa/resources/policy-guidelines/acqf-policy-document-upon-validation-by-au-member-states-en-fr-pt/acqf-policy-document-en>

<sup>2</sup> ACQF News. <https://acqf.africa/news/african-continental-qualifications-framework-acqf-is-validated-and-implementation-started>

<sup>3</sup> Report of the 1<sup>st</sup> Forum, Kinshasa, 18-20/June 2024. [https://acqf.africa/capacity-development-programme/webinars/forum-of-national-qualifications-frameworks-forum-des-cadres-nationaux-des-certifications-continentales/en\\_acqf-nqf-forum-kinshasa-18-20-june\\_report-synthesis\\_en\\_web.pdf/@@display-file/file/en\\_acqf-nqf-forum-kinshasa-18-20-june\\_report-synthesis\\_en\\_web.pdf.pdf](https://acqf.africa/capacity-development-programme/webinars/forum-of-national-qualifications-frameworks-forum-des-cadres-nationaux-des-certifications-continentales/en_acqf-nqf-forum-kinshasa-18-20-june_report-synthesis_en_web.pdf/@@display-file/file/en_acqf-nqf-forum-kinshasa-18-20-june_report-synthesis_en_web.pdf.pdf)

upskilling and reskilling, mobility and employability, and share vision and principles with frameworks regionally and globally.

**Emphasising** the significance of skills for the green and digital transformation for sustainable growth and for a leading role in the global community's efforts to leverage the benefits of technology, and responsible practices of Artificial Intelligence in the contexts of labour market, education and training, and qualifications and credentials.

**Noting** the innovation needs in the eco-system of skills, qualifications and credentials to strengthen their response to new demands from labour market and society, to contribute to social inclusion and equitable growth and embrace novel approaches to skills development and recognition such as of micro-credentials and validation of non-formal and informal learning.

**Guided** by the inspirational context of African integration strategies, especially, Agenda 2063 and its First Ten Years Implementation Plan 2023, CESA-25, African Continental Free Trade Area (AFCFTA) and other relevant initiatives.

**Committed** to the implementation of the Policy document of the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF), backed by evidence, research, monitoring and evaluation.

**Impelled and buoyed up** by the unwavering commitment and cooperation demonstrated by countries, regions and stakeholders from 2020 to date.

The new **ACQF Network** builds on the community of NQF authorities, institutes and departments and other relevant stakeholder organisations started and united by common goals in the context of the implementation of the project ACQF-II since May 2023.

The **ACQF Network** is open to involvement of more countries, regions and relevant organisations sharing the objectives and values of the ACQF and driven by the established mindset of solidarity and mutual understanding between all qualifications frameworks institutions and stakeholders.

**The current list of countries and organisations** interested to participate in the ACQF Network comprises (in alphabetic order): Angola, Botswana, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, D.R Congo, Eswatini, Ghana, Guiné-Bissau, Kenya, Mauritius, Mozambique, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, Tunisia, Zambia, Zimbabwe. All-Africa Students Union. The regional organisations involved in ACQF activities are: ECCAS, EAC, SADC, UEMOA.

Other countries that can have an interest in joining the Network: Gabon, Namibia, Morocco, Egypt.

## 3 Mission and objectives of the ACQF Network

### 3.1 Mission

- To ensure the sustainable impact and brighter perspectives of the ACQF and its Qualifications and Credentials Platform (QCP) in the interest of all African countries.
- To promote the development, recognition, transparency, articulation, innovation and harmonisation of skills, qualifications and credentials in a perspective of lifelong learning and employability for all population groups in Africa, fostering a qualified and agile workforce adaptable for the challenges of the 21st century and contributing to meet the goals and targets of relevant strategies and policies of the African Union, and of regional economic communities as adequate.

Main target groups of the ACQF Network:

Learners in all forms of education and training (formal, non-formal, informal, remote), workers in all sectors and forms of employment, youth and adults in vulnerable conditions, professionals, employers, innovators, the wider community of education and training stakeholders and policy makers, civil society organisations and other relevant groups.

### **3.2 Core values**

In accordance with the ACQF Policy Document, and the aspirations of the member states and organisations supporting this initiative, the ACQF Network will respect and promote the core values:

1. *Focus*: on the key objectives of the ACQF and the QCP. Focus on the common interest.
2. *African knowledge*: continuously nurture development of African knowledge and good practices; share and promote methods, policies, tools, and publications of the ACQF Network and its partners in Africa and globally.
3. *Inclusiveness*: encompass all levels and types of qualifications and credentials, all forms and stages of learning and modalities of certification.
4. *Innovation*: support new developments related to green, digital, and other emerging skills; new roles and occupations; new technologies and societal demands; digital and micro-credentials for learning; new methods and tools to enhance the activities of the ACQF Network.
5. *Supported by evidence*: reliance and promotion of sound, substantiated and well-informed actions and outputs, based on data and analysis.
6. *Collaborative approaches and participative governance*: solidarity and mutual support between members states on the core matters of the network; participation of all stakeholders and member states who respect these core values; learn from experiences and good practice from Africa and other regions and continents.
7. *Transparency and integrity*: good governance, clarity and credibility for mutual trust.

### **3.3 Main objectives of the ACQF Network**

1. To support and sustain the implementation of the ACQF and its Qualifications and Credentials Platform (QCP).
2. To foster further development of clear, meaningful, comparable and operational 'green' NQFs in African countries and support their cooperation, referencing, peer support and mutual trust.
3. To promote the use of ACQF levels on qualifications and credentials and databases of qualifications upon referencing to ACQF, facilitating mutual recognition of qualifications.
4. To contribute to change and reforms, supporting impact-oriented education and training, improved access and completion rates, accessible recognition of prior learning, functioning credit accumulation and transfer systems and quality assurance.
5. To support efficient management of qualifications and credentials and real-time information-sharing, through data analysis, anticipation of skills needs, and interoperable databases of qualifications connected to QCP, across all African countries and regions.
6. To cooperate and work in synergy with the Addis Recognition Convention, promoting linkages and synergies between ACQF-NQFs and facilitating the recognition of qualifications and credentials.
7. To contribute to improve global recognition and transparency of education, and qualifications and credentials from African countries.
8. To foster joint research projects for the advancement of the ACQF Network.
9. To collaborate with existing regional structures, especially with the regional economic communities, and relevant global networks and frameworks.

### 3.4 Activities of the ACQF Network

The implementation plan covering the main activities and comprising milestones and performance indicators will be defined by the governance structure of the ACQF Network.

The cooperation between the ACQF Network and the ACQF-II project will rise and qualitatively benefit from the enhanced ownership and self-management acquired by the ACQF Network.

In accordance with the Output 3.1 of the ACQF-II project implementation plan, cooperation with the new ACQF Network will intensify, based on the fundamental common goal of sustainability of the ACQF. This cooperation will entail joint actions and dialogue on planning and monitoring of progress, joint implementation of key activities, and provision of technical and financial support to the ACQF Network, commensurate with the project's available budget and human resources and in the operational period until end 2026. The modalities and goals of this support will be defined and agreed taking into consideration the objectives of the ACQF Network and of the implementation plan the ACQF-II, seeking bridges and synergies enabling wider impact, outreach and meaningful development of the ACQF Network.

All members of the ACQF Network are invited to remain actively involved in the activities and communities supported by the project ACQF-II, enhancing the benefits at national, regional and continental levels.

#### Scope of work of the ACQF Network

- All ACQF's main areas of activity: referencing and facilitation of recognition of qualifications, RPL campaign, credit accumulation and transfer systems, common qualifications profiles, QCP, training and peer learning to boost development and implementation of NQFs and related policies, communication and advocacy, monitoring and evaluation and research.
- Inclusiveness, participation – all countries, institutions of the regional economic communities, other national, regional and specialised organisations.
- Other areas relevant to the ACQF to be explored in view of the advancement of the ACQF.

## 4 Governance of the ACQF Network

The governance set-up of the ACQF Network builds on the governance principles defined in the ACQF Policy Document (2023), notably:

- No country is left behind: All AU member countries are invited to participate in the activities on equal footing. Such ACQF activities notably include referencing to the ACQF, peer reviews, deliberations in the context of the governing structure, capacity-development programmes, dissemination and outreach, and collaboration on the ACQF QCP.
- The AUC provides political support and steering and participates in the ACQF governing setting.
- Networking and collaboration between African national qualifications entities, social partners, professional associations, recognition centres, students' unions, and other relevant stakeholders.
- Governance based on accountability and integrity.
- The ACQF process is supported by monitoring and evaluation.

Stakeholders dialogue and exchanges on the options for governance of the ACQF Network came up with additional recommendations concerning efficiency of the set-up, in particular:

- Focus on impact-oriented activities and initiatives related with the seven areas of activity defined in the ACQF Policy document.
- Establish lean, non-bureaucratic, agile and participative governance set-up, working with the technically competent implementation structures of National Qualifications Frameworks.
- Use streamlined deliberations and consultation procedures and methods, enabling efficiency and evidence-based decision-making and independence.

The proposed governance setting is based on the following elements:

- Presidency (chairs) of the Network: composed of several countries, rotational.
- General Assembly of all members (countries, regions, stakeholder organisations).
- Secretariat

### Presidency

The Presidency of the ACQF Network is based on a troika leadership consisting of three countries having developed NQF authorities with significant experience. The composition of the troika leadership is renewed every two / three years.

The Presidency works closely with all Members of the Network / General Assembly to plan activities, report on progress, explore innovative initiatives, shape and take decisions and communicate and advocate for the ACQF within the continent and globally.

Political support and participation of African Union Commission in certain aspects of strategic governance of ACQF is considered, to be defined in a Memorandum of Cooperation or other adequate form.

### General Assembly

All members of the ACQF Network are part of the collective General Assembly, which gathers twice a year to share developments, build capacity, advise, deliberate, and propose initiatives and recommendations to the Presidency.

The General Assembly is informed on progress on a quarterly basis by the Presidency and Secretariat.

### Secretariat

The ACQF network will be supported by a Secretariat, tasked with the organisation and conduction of the activities, and reporting to the Presidency team. On a quarterly basis the Secretariat issues brief Progress reports to inform the General Assembly.

The Secretariat is composed by a small team of technically competent staff. The Secretariat can function on the basis of remote work and be supported by the NQF authorities involved in the Presidency.

The Secretariat interacts with the ACQF-II project coordination for joint-planning and joint-organisation of activities, reporting, and proposal of new initiatives.

The current ACQF Website will include new webpages and resources specifically dedicated to the activities of the ACQF Network. The Secretariat will gradually participate in content management of the ACQF website.

### Technical Clusters

The technical clusters contribute to the implementation plan of the ACQF Network, and sustainability of the ACQF. They are composed of experts, members of the ACQF Network.

The **Network's Technical Clusters** are:

- **Cluster 1: Referencing to ACQF and facilitation of recognition of qualifications**
  - Steer, support referencing to ACQF and related follow-up steps (Guideline 3).
  - Communicate achievements related to referencing to ACQF and advocate for better processes and outcomes of recognition of qualifications – with African and global networks and institutions interested in transparency and recognition of qualifications.
  - Cooperate with Addis Recognition Convention Committee, and other relevant regional and continental networks on matters related with recognition of qualifications and credentials. The focus of ACQF is not to overlap but to cooperate and share proposals and knowledge with these committees and networks.
  - Follow-up steps: online publication of reports; use of ACQF levels on newly issued qualifications, credentials and registers of qualifications; communication and dissemination.
- **Cluster 2: Qualifications and Credentials Platform (QCP) and digitalisation**
  - Steer, support, contribute to implementation of the QCP at national and continental levels.
  - Nurture and promote the ACQF website and tools.
- **Cluster 3: Research, development and implementation of NQF, RPL, CATS, Quality Assurance**
  - Promote and support research on all relevant topics related with the ACQF scope of work. Data collection and analysis, reporting, dissemination of findings from research to different target users. Publication on ACQF website of all new publications (articles, reports, notes, policies, infographics) produced under the umbrella of the ACQF Network. Maintain the databases of research projects according to rules of data protection legislation.
  - Promote the results of research and analyses of the ACQF Network in African and global Forums, conferences and platforms.
  - Use and analyse existing data from ACQF surveys and research.
  - Technical advice, information-sharing, peer learning activities for **common** goals and interests.
  - Develop and disseminate policies and tools related to Micro-credentials, green skills, digital skills.
- **Cluster 4: Collaboration, communication and sharing**
  - With African RQFs, regional organisations, UNESCO Recognition conventions, European Qualifications Network, ENIC-NARIC, Bologna Process, ETF, CEDEFOP and other networks globally.
  - Communication and advocacy actions, events, social media, ACQF website.
  - Campaigns and calls for good practice related with ACQF activities and themes.
  - Sharing: of qualifications standards and learning programmes between countries and organisations of the Network.
- **Cluster 5: Financing and fund raising to support sustainability and impact-oriented actions**

#### Financing

- From ACQF-II project: technical expertise, QCP, workshops and conferences, training, pilot projects with the ACQF Network
- Countries and regions: in-kind, financial, technical.
- The Members of the ACQF Network will define possibilities to establish options for regular contributions, in form of a modest annual fee.

- Organise income generation activities linked to the scope of work of the ACQF Network, ensure efficient and transparent management of such revenues and report to the General Assembly.

## 5 Shaping the implementation plan of the ACQF Network: draft priority actions

The establishment and strengthening of the ACQF Network is a substantial action requiring preparation, internal agreement on key processes, and definition of clear and relevant goals and activities for the short and the medium-term. The members of the ACQF Network have the relevant organisational and management systems and experience and can efficiently plan, organise and implement the work plan.

ACQF-II will support the organisation and strengthening of the ACQF Network through “Pilot Projects” managed by the project contractor and concluded with the members of the ACQF Network in accordance with the rules of transparent and efficient project management.

To ensure a rapid start of the activities early in 2025, a successful implementation process with tangible achievements, the members agree on a relevant and comprehensive work plan aimed at stabilising the organisation and functioning of ACQF Network by the end of the first pilot project (January-September 2025).

The list of actions is exhaustive and can be structured in phases, as proposed below:

**Phase 1: January-September 2025. Focused on the organisation of the ACQF Network, fund raising and implementation of high-visibility activities for the members and international partners.**

1. **Start organisation of the ACQF Network:** Establish a multi-country Ad Hoc Team to start off the ACQF Network, define the roadmap and implementation plan and set-up the lean governance set-up.
2. **Fund raising:** identify adequate donors organisations, and initiate contacts and promotion of the ACQF Network
3. **Network Registration:** Prepare the options for registration of the ACQF Network in a foreseeable future.
4. **Internal Regulation:** Develop working modalities to ensure good governance and the efficiency of the Network.
5. **Create the Technical Clusters:** organise the Clusters, plan and agree activities, work together with the project ACQF-II for technical expertise.
6. **ACQF Implementation:** Ensure that all countries and regions are informed and actively participating in the ACQF and in the activities supported by ACQF-II project (until end 2026).
7. **Digital Presence:** Update the ACQF website, introduce new web pages and resources for the ACQF Network.
8. **Series of webinars:** a) For promotion and branding: with members and partner organisations, AUC, EU institutions and global networks; b) Technical: capacity development on important topics related with NQF-RPL-CATS and ACQF referencing; c) Fund raising; d) Other purposes to advance the ACQF Network.
9. **Final Conference:** reporting, peer-learning, dissemination, trust building.

**Phase 2: September 2025-2026**

10. **Promote Skills Development, Qualifications and Credentials:** Launch campaigns and communication to emphasise the importance of skills, and qualifications and credentials for development, social inclusion, growth and innovation.
11. **Prior Learning Recognition:** Advocate for and support the recognition of prior learning across member nations.
12. **Employer Engagement:** Foster trust and ensure continuous feedback from the private sector about labour market trends and demand for skills, and qualifications and credentials.
13. **Labour Market Intelligence System:** work towards development of a system for labour market monitoring, analysis and a users' visualisation platform.

#### Transversal activities

14. **Communication and Outreach:** Plan and execute outreach activities and define national focal points for smooth communication.
15. **Funding:** Secure funding from credible donors, companies, and involved governments to ensure the sustainability of the ACQF Network.
16. **Annual Conferences:** Organise yearly conferences to review progress, share good practices and resources, discuss challenges, and plan future initiatives.

## 6 Activity plan for the Pilot Project 2025 supported from ACQF-II project

| Phase 1: January-September 2025. Focused on the organisation of the ACQF Network, fund raising and implementation of high-visibility activities for the members and international partners. |   |  |                               |
|---|---|--|-------------------------------|
| Phase 1: Jan 2025 - Dec 2026  | Start organisation of the ACQF Network:                     | Establish a multi-country Ad Hoc Team to start off the ACQF Network, define the roadmap and implementation plan and set-up a lean governance set-up.   | Troika / SAQA                 |
|   | Fund raising  | Identify adequate donors organisations, and initiate contacts and continuous promotion of the ACQF Network   | Fundraising technical cluster |
|   | ACQF Implementation   | Engage all the countries and regions and ensure participation in the ACQF Network activities including <b>Referencing of NQFs to ACQF, RPL, CATs, and mapping of micro and digital credentials to the National Qualification Frameworks</b> . Actively participating in the ACQF and in the activities supported by ACQF-II project (until end 2026).                              | Troika                        |
|   | Governance  | Hold a webinar to discuss and agree matters Network Registration & Internal Regulation (virtual); Create Technical Clusters  | Troika /KNQA                  |
|   | Promotion and awareness creation                            | Hold webinars with members and partner organisations, AUC, EU institutions and global networks   | Troika / Angola               |
|   | Enhance Digital Presence                                    | Update the ACQF website, introduce new web pages and resources for the ACQF Network  | Troika                        |
|   | Research  | Undertake common research and review of the impact, challenges and successes of implementation of National, Regional and Continental qualifications Framework; alignment and comparability of qualifications.  | Troika/SAQA                   |
|   | Annual Conference I (physical)                              | Organise an annual conference on Qualification Frameworks to review progress, share good practices and resources, discuss challenges, and plan for future initiatives; for purposes of reporting, peer-learning, dissemination of best practices and trust building; Prior Learning Recognition: Advocate for and support the recognition of prior learning across member nations. | Troika                        |
|   | Promote Skills Development, Qualifications and Credentials: | Promote Skills Development, Qualifications and Credentials: Launch campaigns and communication to emphasise the importance of skills, and qualifications and credentials for development, social inclusion, growth and innovation.   | Troika / Angola               |

## 7 Contacts of members

To be added by the secretariat of the ACQF Network.