

THE ROLE OF SAQAN IN SOUTHERN AFRICA: IMPLICATIONS FOR PAQAF

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1. The Southern African Development Community (SADC)

- **Member States:** The Southern African Development Community (SADC) is a regional political and economic grouping of 15 member states whose total population is estimated to be about 258 million. The member states are: Angola, Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Botswana.
- **International Languages:** Three international languages are used in the region: English, French and Portuguese.



2.The Higher Education and Quality Assurance Context

- a) The role of higher education in development is recognized by the member states and is articulated in the SADC Protocol on Education and Training. Article 7(A) (2) of the Protocol clearly sets out the need for harmonization: “Member States agree to work towards harmonisation, equivalence, and eventual standardisation of University entrance requirements”.
- a) However there are major problems relating to quality and harmonization
 - i. There are different education systems due to different colonial histories.

2.The Higher Education and Quality Assurance Context

- ii. There are different university entry requirements. For example in some countries, students are admitted after four years of secondary education and do a preliminary year at university; in South Africa students go to university after Matriculation, which is five years of secondary and high school education; and in Zimbabwe the requirement is six years of secondary and high school education.

- ii. This means there is a need for a common understanding of quality and quality assurance issues, and how quality should be measured, as well as a need to standardise higher education in the region.

2.The Higher Education and Quality Assurance Context

iv. Quality assurance systems are at different levels of development:

- South Africa has a highly developed QA system.
- Some countries have a fairly well developed systems. These include Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Mauritius and Namibia.
- There are countries whose QA agencies are still in the early stages of development, such as Zambia, Malawi and Swaziland.
- There is also the case of Tanzania which is part of the Inter-University Council for East Africa.

3.The Establishment of the Southern African Quality Assurance Network (SAQAN)

The information given above, together with developments at the continental level where the AAU and AfriQAN are facilitating the development of regional networks, gives the background to the formation of SAQAN. This Network is still very young, as shown by its history:



- a) In July 2014 the Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education (ZIMCHE) organised a conference for QA agencies at Victoria which was attended by participants from about 11 SADC member states. One of the resolutions was to form a network and to set up a Task Team to work towards that goal.

3.The Establishment of the Southern African Quality Assurance Network (SAQAN)

- b) In October 2015 the Second Conference was held in Botswana and the Constitution of SAQAN, which had been developed in Namibia, was adopted and SAQAN was launched.
- c) In October 2016 the Third Conference was held in Pretoria, South Africa. At this conference the following important steps were taken:
- The First General Assembly was held.
 - Substantive Executive Committee was elected.
 - It was agreed to finalize the appointment of the SAQAN Coordinator, Dr Phetolo Malau-Modiega from the Botswana Qualifications Authority (BQA).
 - It was agreed to produce an annual work plan and allocate tasks to different members of the Executive Committee.

4.SAQAN Priorities

The work plan referred to above is premised on implementing the objectives and functions of SAQAN as set out in the Constitution, which include:

- Assisting members of the Network in developing standards and best practice guidelines for quality assurance
- Facilitating international recognition of SADC qualifications to enhance mobility of staff and students
- Fostering harmonisation of quality assurance systems in SADC and with international best practices
- Networking with other regional and international bodies in order to improve quality in higher education

4.SAQAN Priorities

- Supporting the development of quality assurance through capacity building, exchange of staff and internships, seminars, workshops and conferences
- Participating and collaborating in continental and international training and research programmes within Southern Africa
- Promoting the SADC Regional Qualifications Framework; and
- Advising SADC Member States on issues of quality in higher education.

THANK YOU

SAQAN
SOUTHERN AFRICAN
QUALITY ASSURANCE
NETWORK

5.SAQAN and the Goals of PAQAF

The objectives and functions of SAQAN set out above would seem to relate well to the goals of PAQAF which, according to the AAU document sent to us, include:

- Development of a continental Qualifications Framework
- Promoting the African Quality Rating Mechanism (AQPRM) for institutional assessment
- Implementation of the Addis Ababa Convention
- Developing a system of credits (African Credit Accumulation and Transfer System)
- Creating a continental register for QA agencies
- Establishing a continental agency to govern and direct PAQAF.

5.SAQAN and the Goals of PAQAF

There are clearly synergies between the objectives and functions of SAQAN and the goals of PAQAF as set out above. For example, SAQAN is sending two representatives to the SADC Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation (in support of the SADCRQF). Zimbabwe is developing its own ZIMCATS in relation to the credit system adopted by some key SADC countries.

We also believe that cooperation between national, regional and continental bodies such as PAQAF and AfriQAN is desirable for the following reasons:

- We have uneven systems and uneven quality in higher education on the continent, and hence mechanisms that help to reduce this unevenness would be beneficial at national, regional and continental levels.

5.SAQAN and the Goals of PAQAF

- The mobility of students on the continent would be assisted by ensuring equivalence in qualifications.
- The corollary to mobility and advances in technology is the growth in qualifications fraud, which poses a serious threat to the credibility and integrity of qualifications. Collaboration and harmonisation are therefore essential to ensure that appropriate mechanisms are put in place to mitigate this.
- Higher education is increasingly seen as an enterprise, with many new providers driven by the profit motive. Cooperation at national, regional and continental levels is necessary to ensure protection of citizens and the value of qualifications.
- Networking at regional level and on a continental basis will help us to share with each other problems as they arise, so that those not affected can be alerted in advance and take preventive action timeously.

6.The Need for Clear Parameters and Rules of Engagement

- From what has been presented above, it is evident that from the perspective of SAQAN, PAQAF is desirable. What is important, however, is that there be clarity and a good understanding of the role of each body involved and an approach and process which avoids conflict and duplication of functions. In this regard, the SAQAN Executive has agreed on the following parameters in SAQAN's dealings with sister bodies and other agencies:
 1. At national level, Quality Assurance issues in higher education are properly the domain / responsibility of national quality assurance bodies. SAQAN should not be seen to be taking over the responsibilities of national QA agencies.

6.The Need for Clear Parameters and Rules of Engagement

2. At regional level (i.e. at the level of SADC) QA issues are properly the domain of SAQAN. Consequently, no sister or continental body should be seen to be taking over the responsibilities of SAQAN in regional quality assurance issues.
3. It is conceivable that there are cases when national and regional QA issues overlap. It is also conceivable that there are cases when regional and continental QA issues overlap. The way to deal with these overlaps is to have a clear understanding of roles backed by clear rules of engagement.

7.The Way Forward in Respect of SAQAN /AfriQAN / PAQAF Relationships

7.1 There is a need to clarify the roles of PAQAF and those of AfriQAN.

7.2 SAQAN wishes to have a clear understanding of PAQAF before committing to the framework.

7.3 It is proposed that a meeting involving the AAU, the AU, AfriQAN, PAQAF and regional QA bodies such as SAQAN, CAMES, IUCEA etc. be held to have roles and rules of engagement clarified.