

State of Play: Regional Quality Assurance in Southern Africa (SADC)

Overview of findings

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Introduction

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 - ▶ The German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) for oversight and initial feedback
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 - ▶ All participants in the research study, from both Quality Assurance Agencies (QAAs) and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)
- ▶ The report includes separate country reports in the Appendices which is not included in this presentation.

Introduction

- ▶ Southern African countries are working on strengthening national QA systems and harmonizing standards and structures regionally through SADC Qualifications Framework (SADCQF) and the African Union's (AU) Pan-African QA and Accreditation Framework.
- ▶ DAAD and the Dialogue on Innovative Higher Education Strategies (DIES) is considering working on supporting these QA efforts through regional capacity building
- ▶ This requires sound information about the state of quality assurance in the region, i.e. both EQA and IQA
- ▶ The research sought to cover QA systems in all SADC countries

Key Research Questions

- ▶ What type of external QA system already exists in all SADC member states?
- ▶ How do Higher Education Institutions in SADC organize their Internal Quality Assurance?
- ▶ What are the defined purposes of the systems?
- ▶ What are the roles of individual stakeholders in the existing QA systems?
- ▶ What are the needs, demands and priorities of the individual stakeholders?
- ▶ What are the strengths and weaknesses of existing systems in the SADC region?
- ▶ What are the potential areas for future capacity building on EQA and IQA?
- ▶ Are there commonalities among the systems which might allow for intra-regional harmonization?

Methodology

- ▶ Brief desktop review
- ▶ Questionnaires disseminated to
 - ▶ QA agencies,
 - ▶ HEIs(public and private)
 - ▶ Experts/Consultants who have worked on QA in Africa
- ▶ Convenience sampling was used
- ▶ Questionnaire respondents identified from desktop research and contacts received from the CHE in South Africa, SARUA, and DAAD

Summary of Responses

Country	QAA	HEI
Angola	<i>Instituto Nacional de Avaliação, Acreditação e Reconhecimento de Estudos do Ensino Superior</i> (Institute for Evaluation, Accreditation and Recognition of Studies in Higher Education/INAAREES)	<i>Universidade José Eduardo dos Santos</i>
Botswana	Botswana Qualification Authority	Botswana International University of Science and Technology Botho University
Democratic Republic of Congo	<i>Coordination Nationale Assurance Qualite</i> (CONAQ)	<i>Université de Goma</i>
Lesotho	Council on Higher Education	
Madagascar		
Malawi	National Council for Higher Education (NCHE)	Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources
Mauritius	Tertiary Education Commission	University of Mauritius
Mozambique	National Council for Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education (CNAQ)	<i>Universidade Pedagógica de Moçambique</i> Wutivi University
Namibia	Namibia Qualification Authority	Namibia University of Science and Technology University of Namibia
Seychelles	Seychelles Qualifications Authority	University of Seychelles
South Africa	Council on Higher Education (CHE)	University of Cape Town Milpark Education
Swaziland	Swaziland Qualification Authority	University of Swaziland
Tanzania	Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU)	St Augustine University of Tanzania
Zambia	Higher Education Authority	
Zimbabwe	Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education	Catholic University of Zimbabwe Lupane State University

- ▶ Responses received from QA Agencies in 14 of the 15 SADC member states, HEIs in 12 of the SADC member states, and 2 HE consultants

Overview: Existence of QA Agency or similar body

Country	QA agency or similar body (with link to the website where existing)
Angola	<i>Instituto Nacional de Avaliação, Acreditação e Reconhecimento de Estudos do Ensino Superior (INAAREES)</i> Institute for Evaluation, Accreditation and Recognition of Studies in Higher Education
Botswana	Botswana Qualifications Authority (BQA)
DRC	<i>Coordination Nationale d'Assurance Qualité (CONAQ)</i> National Quality Assurance Agency
Lesotho	Council on Higher Education (CHE)
Madagascar	<i>Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche Scientifique (MESUPRES)</i> Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research
Malawi	National Council for Higher Education
Mauritius	Tertiary Education Commission Mauritius Qualifications Authority (MQA)
Mozambique	<i>Conselho Nacional de Avaliação da Qualidade do Ensino Superior (CNAQ)</i> National Council for Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education
Namibia	National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) Namibia Qualification Authority (NQA)
Seychelles	Seychelles Qualifications Authority (SQA)
South Africa	Council on Higher Education (CHE)
Swaziland	Swaziland Higher Education Council (SHEC)
Tanzania	Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU)
Zambia	Higher Education Authority (HEA)
Zimbabwe	Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education (ZIMCHE)

All SADC countries have a body/unit responsible for ensuring the quality of higher education. This provides some evidence that all countries have established some EQA mechanisms at the national level.

EQA in the SADC

- ▶ Different approaches are used by QAAs - In most instances, there is a combination of accreditation and audits, and these are usually conducted on a cyclical basis.
- ▶ Accreditation and audits may be focussed at different levels. For example, accreditation may be at the institutional and programmatic level, while audits may be at the institutional level, or different QA processes may apply to public and private and HEIs (for example, there may be programme accreditation for private providers and quality audits for public universities).
- ▶ Other QA measures used are: programme validation, compliance visits, registration of institutions, and support visits to institutions. Additionally, programmes may be accredited by professional bodies.

EQA in the SADC...ctd

- ▶ Whilst some countries are implementing various EQA processes, others have plans that are yet to be implemented.
- ▶ Most EQA agencies appear to be focused on ensuring compliance, although there is evidence of some countries adopting a more 'developmental' approach or may be more supportive in nature.
- ▶ There were mixed responses regarding whether QA focuses on the institutional or programmatic level, or both.
- ▶ There are often different QA approaches to institutional and programmatic QA. For example, in Mauritius, registration of private education providers is done at the institutional level, and accreditation for private providers and quality audits for public universities is done at the programme level. However, in Lesotho, audits are conducted at the institutional level and accreditation is at the programme level. Similarly, in Zambia, registration and audits is done at institutional level, while accreditation is at the programme level.

IQA in the SADC

- ▶ The presence of institutional level QA is less clear, as this research was based on a small sample of universities in the SADC region. The research therefore does not reflect all IQA practices.
- ▶ There is evidence that some HEIs may have a dedicated office or unit to monitor the quality of teaching and learning.
- ▶ HEIs are at different phases in developing their QA policies and practices.
- ▶ Some are still in the planning phase, while others have a detailed QA 'map' that stipulates QA procedures at every level.
- ▶ Most survey respondents noted that they have institutional plans, policies, and/or other documents that describe their QA approach.
- ▶ Some have committees at faculty level, others have introduced QA to several institutional policies, and others tie in their IQA processes to meet the requirements of the EQA (though some have tried to shift towards a quality enhancement or quality improvement model as opposed to just meeting EQA reporting requirements).

Roles of Stakeholders

There are many stakeholders including parents, students, government lecturers, employers, professional bodies, the private sector, and the public. Each of these stakeholders may have different perceptions about quality. Key stakeholders include:

- ▶ The state/government (primary role of providing funding);
- ▶ Quality assurance agencies (developing and implementing QA and performing a regulatory function);
- ▶ Students (active agents and/or participants in their educational or learning experience, participants in QA process, providing feedback and input into programmes);
- ▶ Parents (provide feedback and financial support);
- ▶ Higher education institutions (developing and implementing IQA policies and structures);

Roles of Stakeholders...ctd

- ▶ Staff (improving the quality of education, providing feedback on the quality of their experiences and suggestions for improvement, providing feedback on university services, developing curricula, delivering programmes, and managing finances and administration at HEIs);
- ▶ HEI leadership (establishing and maintaining good relationship with regulators, overseeing policy. and quality implementation);
- ▶ International bodies (inter-university collaboration, financing pf projects);
- ▶ International institutions (conducting external examination, collaborating on activities, verifying qualifications, and establishing qualification pathways and credit transfer mechanisms);
- ▶ Professional bodies/councils (participate in programme development, accreditation of programmes, registration of qualified personnel, verification of programme quality, and regulating the practice of professions); and
- ▶ Employers and industry (input into programme/curriculum development and review, providing feedback on quality and suggesting improvements, providing information to HEIs on their needs to allow programme alignment to needs, and employing graduates).

QA Needs, Priorities, and Demands

Given the diverse positions of countries in implementing QA in HE, the corresponding needs, demands, and priorities of countries in SADC are also diverse. The following list summarizes the priorities, needs and demands of QAAs and HEIs in the SADC region:

- ▶ Develop QA bodies and policies - for countries in early stages of developing QA bodies, policies, and frameworks.
- ▶ Develop a culture of quality - through awareness raising and capacity development of all stakeholders.
- ▶ Manage QA processes - in contexts where there are multiple agencies responsible for QA in a country.
- ▶ Achieve institutional accreditation - to accredit all institutions and programmes and to improve the performance of HEIs.

QA Needs, Priorities and Demands

- ▶ Enhance existing EQA processes - examples of which are maintaining high levels and standards of programmes, conducting institutional reviews, developing standards for qualifications, developing online systems to support QA systems, aligning learning programmes to national frameworks, streamlining QA processes, and reviewing QA tools.
- ▶ Develop IQA processes and systems - creating IQA policies and structures, supporting development of institutional QA processes and systems, establishing IQA units, developing strategies for continuous enhancement of quality such as monitoring, review, and evaluation of student experiences, revising quality indicators, improving dialogue and engagement with stakeholders, and undertaking projects to support implementing recommendations after EQA audits.
- ▶ Foster Information Exchange and Collaboration - sharing information and experiences at workshops and conferences, increasing collaboration between QAAs in the region and internationally, sharing best practices, and collaborating in activities such as staff exchanges and peer audits.
- ▶ Create a HE repository and information systems for monitoring and evaluation.
- ▶ Source and mobilize funding to achieve QA goals.

Strengths and positive impacts of QA

- ▶ Increased political support and legislation to support national QA processes
- ▶ The presence of a national QA regulatory body
- ▶ The presence of a national QA framework in most countries
- ▶ Increasing visibility and awareness of QAAs and their work
- ▶ Increased knowledge and improved awareness of QA at the institutional level
- ▶ High successes with EQA processes in achieving accreditation and/or audits of institutions
- ▶ Increased institutional compliance to EQA processes
- ▶ Enhanced collaboration and networking efforts in the region, and participation in international workshops
- ▶ Increased capacity and competency and transparency in QA processes

Weaknesses in existing QA systems

- ▶ Lack of legislative and political support for QA, and the need for more autonomy of the QAA in some countries
- ▶ Absence of qualifications frameworks, and in applying frameworks/putting regulations into practise
- ▶ Insufficient information on QA at institutional level
- ▶ Resistance to change, possibly linked to the recent establishment of QA bodies (in comparison with the more established HEIs)
- ▶ Lack of relevant experience and expertise in both QAAs and HEIs
- ▶ Multiple regulatory bodies with overlapping QA requirements, which may lead to over-regulation

Weaknesses in existing QA systems...ctd

- ▶ Difficulty executing QA tasks
- ▶ QAA management and logistical challenges, including adhering to timelines, transport, and lack of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools
- ▶ QAA staff shortage and budget constraints that hamper QA implementation
- ▶ Ineffective IQA processes, aggravated by budgetary constraints, under-funding of HEIs, lack of understanding of IQA, resistance to change, lack of accountability, and the high teaching load of academic staff which means little time to carry out QA activities
- ▶ Lack of QA capacity at the institutional and national level, aggravated by 'brain drain'
- ▶ Inadequate stakeholder engagement leading to difficulties achieving buy-in from stakeholders
- ▶ Lack of adequate technology infrastructure to complete QA tasks

Potential Areas for Capacity Building

Respondents from both QAAs and HEIs called for capacity building and enhancing QA skills in their institutions and agencies. They highlighted the general lack of training in QA and the need to develop skills in QA. Respondents were asked to identify skills gaps and areas that need to be strengthened in QA in their countries. The following list indicates some potential areas identified by respondents to focus capacity building efforts:

- ▶ Increase awareness and understanding of QA, including understanding QA concepts, approaches, and processes;
- ▶ Develop and revise policies and frameworks, and create awareness and easy access to these policies and frameworks;
- ▶ Understand how QA systems work, including mechanisms and practices that can allow measurement of quality of all dimensions of HE;

Potential Areas for Capacity Building...ctd

- ▶ Develop specific skills related to conducting institutional audits and site visits, conducting programme reviews, setting standards, and conducting accreditation, monitoring and evaluation, conducting self-evaluations, and benchmarking;
- ▶ Design and development of QA tools for assessment, analysis of data and develop and implement improvement plans;
- ▶ Incorporate quality issues in curriculum development and evaluation, and develop capacity around teaching, assessment, and research skills;
- ▶ Research and writing skill to collect data and prepare assessment reports;
- ▶ Develop ICT skills and systems relevant to QA work; and
- ▶ Establish and manage QA units, developing and implementing internal QA systems, and internal quality management.

Possibilities for Intra-Regional Harmonization of QA Systems

- ▶ There are synergies between countries regarding their QA approaches, as they all focus mainly on registration, accreditation, and audits.
- ▶ There is a strong tradition of peer review in most countries that have accreditation and they have developed good mechanisms to ensure the independence of the process.
- ▶ There have been several efforts focusing on creating synergies and regional harmonization of QA systems, notably via SADC, which is currently conducting a pilot project to align QA mechanisms with the SADCQF.
- ▶ All respondents from the QAAs reported that they are aware of the SADCQF, with six countries participating in the pilot project.

Possibilities for Intra-Regional Harmonization of QA Systems...ctd

- ▶ Responses about its value in the HE sector were in almost all cases positive:
 - Enhanced student mobility; ensuring quality qualifications and trust between member states; enhanced qualification verification and referencing; and the addressing of fraudulent qualifications.
 - Will allow for recognition of diplomas awarded, as well as facilitate mobility of teachers, researchers, students and even administrative staff.
 - Prevent 'scientific isolation'.
 - Serve as motivation for institutions to seek accreditation and have all their programmes validated.
- ▶ Examples of identified challenges are: the absence of qualification frameworks in some SADC countries, and the framework not influencing country approaches to QA due to language limitations.
- ▶ Possible future areas of work can focus on addressing language barriers (for example, by facilitating the creation of frameworks in multiple languages) and working with countries that do not have a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) to support their development.

Conclusion

- ▶ All higher education systems in SADC countries have created QA systems in higher education (evidenced by the presence of structures and systems dedicated to QA).
- ▶ Countries are in different stages in implementing their QA systems, and may have different priorities.
- ▶ In most instances, EQA agencies adopt a combination of accreditation and audits in their approach to QA, and these are usually conducted on a cyclical basis.
- ▶ At the institutional level, institutions are at various stages in implementing QA procedures. Universities are engaging with IQA issues, creating institutional QA plans and implementing QA processes across the institution.
- ▶ There have been several significant impacts in the implementation of QA systems. These include increased political support and legislation to support national QA processes, the presence of a national QA regulatory body and a national QA framework in most countries, increasing visibility and awareness of QAAs and their work, increased knowledge and improved awareness of QA at the institutional level, and high successes with EQA processes in achieving accreditation and/or audits of institutions increased institutional compliance to EQA processes.

Recommendations

Respondents noted keenness to collaborate in regional initiatives, and there may thus be potential to conduct regional capacity building workshops, or specific projects fostering the sharing of ideas and plans. The following recommendations are made to further develop national systems and develop capacity in QA:

- ▶ The alignment of national QA frameworks to the SADCQF necessitates that countries have a QA framework, and thus efforts can focus on fostering the development and/or improvement in frameworks to facilitate the alignment process.
- ▶ QAAs would benefit from capacity building focusing on managing their inputs (strategic management and planning processes, aligning budgets with activities, and so on). To improve their effectiveness, it may also be useful for these agencies themselves to undergo an evaluation of their operations and management to streamline their processes.
- ▶ All countries have some sort of national QA systems, but some are more developed than others. It may thus be useful to create a mechanism that would allow countries to share information, and look at how others have addressed certain issues. There may thus be merit in creating data ‘dashboards’ that can be used to enable rapid comparison of QA practices across the region.
- ▶ Given that an area of capacity identified relates to understanding QA concepts, it may be worthwhile considering developing simple practical guides to assist those new to QA to understand processes. These could then be tailored by country QAAs to suit their needs and contexts.

Recommendations...ctd

Future research might focus on the following:

- ▶ Increasing the sample of HEIs to obtain a more representative sample of IQA practices in SADC. Extended research would enable construction of a bigger and more representative sample, while covering a full spectrum of diversity of institutional types. Widening the base of the IQA research would provide valuable guidance to SAQAN and all EQAs in the region, as well as to universities themselves.
- ▶ The survey instruments focused on a first, high-level and descriptive assessment of IQA and EQA activities in the region. Building on this initial dataset, there may be value in a second round of questions, focused on a deeper level of analysis of QA practices.
- ▶ While QAAs and HEIs may engage in various activities or interventions to improve quality, it is unclear how effective these have been in leading to improvements in quality. This is a major gap because many QA practices are being replicated across countries and institutions without a strong evidence base to justify their implementation. Equally, it is essential for both QAAs and HEIs to be able to make informed decisions regarding what QA practices are most likely to have a positive effect on the student's educational experience. It may thus be useful to conduct longitudinal studies researching the effectiveness of QA activities and interventions.
- ▶ The current study did not place much focus on regional harmonization. To probe the possibilities for intra-regional harmonization in the SADC, future research could focus on identifying criteria for harmonization and consider the economic, political, and socio-political landscape that may shape or influence implementation of harmonization initiatives.