Policy Framework – Towards a Harmonised African Continental Higher Education Area

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IQA-4-Africa

From Pan-African Policy to Practice

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Preliminaries

This is an introductory text to the following screencasts in the cinema of the topic the Policy Context:

- The PAQAF
- The ASG-QA
- The AQRM
- Experiences with AQRM (Case Study L'Université de Kisangani (Democratic Republic of Congo) and Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (Ghana))

The text is not a complete summary of the information given in the screencasts. It can introduce you to the respective topic and help you to remember the key facts later. You can make use of the full potential of the learning material and have the most fruitful learning experience, if you watch the respective screencasts in the cinema and work on the reflective questions, which you find at the end of this document.

Further reading to deepen your knowledge can be found in the bookshelf of the topic Policy Context. Material for the transfer from theory into practice, like worksheets, templates etc. can be found in the toolbox.

All material is part of a compendium that was developed to be used in the framework of the HAQAA2 Training Course IQA-4-Africa – from Pan African Policy to Practice.

Keywords

PAQAF, ASG-QA, AQRM, Harmonisation in Higher Education, African Union, CESA, African Higher Education Area

Expected Learning Outcomes:

On successful completion of the material Policy Context you should be able to:

- explain the background, development process and goal of the Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Framework and its strategic relevance for Higher Education in Africa.
- summarise the goal and content of the African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ASG-QA) and be able to transfer these standards and guidelines into practice in your own activities as Quality Assurance Officer.
- describe the aim and content of the African Quality Rating Mechanism (AQRM) and decide, whether it would be helpful to be used at your institution, to structure quality assurance practices.

1. The PAQAF

What is it all about?

The PAQAF – the Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Framework – is an overarching framework for several action lines and instruments related to the convergence of the African Higher Education sector, and more specifically quality assurance and accreditation. It was adopted by the Specialized Technical Committee (STC) on Education, Science and Technology of the African Union Assembly in 2016. The implementation of some of the PAQAF's action lines and the development of some of its instruments has been supported by the HAQAA initiative from 2015 to 2018 and is currently continued in the context of HAAQA2 (see below).

The African Union and the impulse for revitalised Tertiary Education

Since about the year 2000, the African Higher Education system has recorded the largest increase in higher education student numbers worldwide (cf. UIS 2013). This is a positive development seen against the background that many African economies urgently need skilled workers, and that enrolment in basic education has shown drastic improvements, hence trickling up to the HE sector. However, a number of studies show that the tertiary education sector in Africa has not been prepared for the massive growth in student numbers. In their study on quality and quality assurance in African universities, which preceded the development of the PAQAF (see below), Peter Okebukola and Bart Fonteyne (2015, p. 18) summarise "funding, human capacity deficit, poor policy implementation environment, weakness in institutional governance and enrolment pressure" as main challenges of African Higher Education Institutions in the 21st century.

A recent response to these challenges has been the African Union Commission's comprehensive ten-year Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16-25), driven by the desire to set up a "qualitative system of education and training to provide the African continent with efficient human resources adapted to African core values and therefore capable of achieving the vision and ambitions of the African Union". "Revitalized" tertiary education is highlighted in this strategy, as well as the principle that "Harmonized education and training systems are essential for the realization of intra-Africa mobility and academic integration through regional cooperation." CESA also states that "Quality and relevant education, training and research are core for scientific and technological innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship" (CESA 2015).

These principles are based on the AU's Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, which calls for "A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development".

The African Union is comparable to the European Union in that it does not have the competency to legislate on higher education. Legally binding measures are established through Treaties, however no higher education related areas are governed by treaties with the exception of the Pan-African University[1]. The CESA is a strategy, to which Member States of the African Union voluntarily adhere. It has a number of indicators, which should be taken forward in a soft manner by States and stakeholders organised into 'Clusters' around thematic priorities.

CESA has been adopted by the Specialised Technical Committee for Education Science and Technology. STC's are are thematic Committees that are answerable to the AU Executive

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[1] https://au.int/en/treaties/revised-statute-pan-african-university-pau

Council. Each STC is composed of Member States' ministers and senior officials responsible for sectors falling within their respective areas of competence.

The Origin of PAQAF: Growing consensus on the importance of 'harmonisation'

The concepts of 'harmonisation'[2] and also regional integration in Africa higher education well-preceded the PAQAF and the CESA and have been an objective of organisations like the Association of African Universities (AAU), as well as regional higher education actors and economic communities like the IUCEA in East Africa. The European Union, which has been funding regional cooperation initiatives in African higher education since 2008, has also been a catalyst. Examples include the Intra-African mobility programme, which built upon the African Union's Nyerere Programme and subsequently the Tuning Africa[3] initiative, which began as a pilot in 2011, and expanded to 120 universities which established new degree programmes, teaching, learning and assessment methods, aimed at curricular alignment.

On the specific topic of quality assurance and accreditation harmonisation, numerous regional initiatives also pre-date the PAQAF. With the Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA) and the East African Quality Assurance Network (EAQAN), the East African Community has built over 15 years if experience in collaborating in quality assurance on a regional level. Inspiring outcomes of their work include the book series "A roadmap to Quality" (see references below) that comprises five handbooks for internal and external QA in Higher Education and the East African Qualifications Framework that came into being in 2015. It should be noted that there is a strong legal framework for higher education cooperation in the East African region, with the integration of the higher education tied to the political goals of customs union and eventually establishing a common monetary space. The IUCEA is the recognised implementation body the Common Higher Education Area for East Africa, which was declared by Heads of State in 2017, aimed at facilitating the recognition of academic certificates and the transfer of credits from higher education institutions across the region. It should be noted that as with the EHEA in Europe, the regional integration process in EAC remains a voluntary one, as do the application of the standards and guidelines for quality assurance developed by IUCEA.

As with the case with IUCEA, the African and Malagasy Council for Higher Education (CAMES) has developed quality standards for its 19 member countries in francophone West and Central Africa, provides capacity building and fosters the harmonisation of the region. As also Okebukola and Fonteyne (2015, p. 19) have pointed out, the implementation of the PAQAF elements can benefit from the East African and West African regional experiences. Also, you as quality assurance manager or officer, will find a lot of inspiring resource material and information on regional harmonisation processes on the websites of CAMES and IUCEA (see references below).

Instruments and action lines of the PAQAF

Being a comprehensive framework, the PAQAF consists of several commitments, action lines and instruments, some of which have been already established and formally recognised by the African Union (such as the AQRM), some of which have been developed and are being utilised,

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[2] Term ‚Harmonisation' is consistenly used if African Union strategic documents. This term does not implay a standardisation of higher education in Africa, but rather, transparency, readability and convergence around common standards.
[3] http://tuningafrica.org/en/what-is-tuning-africa

yet still pending adoption at the AU level (ASG-QA) and some of what are under development (ACQF). In the following chapters I will give a more detailed insight into the two elements of the PAQAF that are of the most immediate relevance for persons dealing with quality assurance at Higher Education Institutions. But first I will give a rough overview of the lines of all action and instruments.

- **African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ASG-QA)**: The ASG-QA are a set of standards and guidelines that form the basis for internal and external quality assurance for both Higher Education Institutions and Quality Assurance Agencies (see below).
- **African Quality Rating Mechanism (AQRM)**: The AQRM is a self-assessment and rating tool that can be used by African Higher Education institutions to assess their degree of fulfilment of part A of the ASG-QA.
- **African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF)**: The ACQF is part of the AU-EU Skills for Youth Employability Programme and is currently being developed by the European Training Foundation (ETF) in collaboration with AUC and the German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ). It will identify a hierarchy of qualification levels in ascending order and state the generic requirements for qualifications to be awarded at each of these levels in the African educational system. Its main purpose will be to enhance quality, comparability and transparency of qualifications from all educational levels in African education and thus facilitate the recognition of diplomas and certificates.
- **Revised Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and Other Academic Qualifications on Higher Education in African States (Addis Convention):** The Addis convention is based on the Arusha convention of 1981 and was adopted in 2014 in Addis Ababa (hence the name) and provides a legal framework for the fair and transparent recognition of higher education qualifications in Africa. Its aim is to facilitate inter-university cooperation through mobility of students and staff. Today, the Addis Convention has been ratified by 13 African states and is thus pending legal approval by many African countries.
- **African Credit Accumulation and Transfer System:** In the African Higher Education system there is not yet a common definition of a credit system that would allow for easy recognition of qualifications acquired elsewhere and thus for student mobility, A proposal for a streamlined African credit system has been developed by the TUNING Africa initiative in 2019. It is currently pending endorsement of the African Union.
- **Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency**: Eventually, the action lines and instruments of the PAQAF should be maintained be an African Continental Accreditation Agency, the general mandate of which shall be "To coordinate, promote, and facilitate the harmonization of higher education, QA and accreditation systems within, across, to and from Africa as well as being the lead Agency of the continent in QA, quality enhancement and accreditation." This agency has not yet been established (PAQAF, 2015, p. 2).

- **Continental Register for QA agencies and quality assured higher education institutions:** Going along with the implementation of standards, guidelines and instruments for quality assurance in Africa for both internal and external QA activities, a register should be developed for accreditation agencies and higher education institutions that underwent respective QA assessments. The development of this register is pending.

HAQAA and HAQAA 2

We cannot speak about the PAQAF without briefly mentioning the HAQAA initiatives. HAQAA1 stood for Harmonisation of African Higher Education Quality Assurance and Accreditation and is an initiative funded by the European Union in partnership with the African Union. The main goal of the initiative was to support the "development of a harmonised quality assurance and accreditation system at institutional level, national, regional and Pan-African continental level." The first implementation phase took place from 2015 to 2018. It was implemented by a consortium comprising the University of Barcelona (Coordinator), AAU, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), the European University Association (EUA) and the European Network for Quality Assurance (ENQA). In this first project phase the main focus of the initiative lay on the development and promotion of the ASG-QA, the revision and promotion of the AQRM and the capacity building of quality assurance agencies.

In 2019, the second phase of the initiative – now HAQAA2 – has started and will terminate in 2022. Its title has now been framed as 'Harmonisation, Accreditation and Quality Assurance in African Higher Education, giving emphasis to the general framework of higher education harmonisation under which quality assurance falls. Under the coordination of the coordinator OBREAL Global Observatory, the implementing team (AAU, DAAD, EUA, ENQA) will build upon the results of the first HAQAA project phase. In addition to further develop and promote the PAQAF instruments, one of the key goals is to further implement the ASG-QA in African Higher Education Institutions and to transfer the standards and guidelines into practice by building capacity in Higher Education Institutions. In the second phase of HAQAA, the following regional strategic partners support the implementing team:

- Southern African Regional Universities Association (SARUA), South Africa
- Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA), East Africa
- African and Malagasy Council for Higher Education (CAMES), francophone West/Central Africa
- Conselho de Avaliacao de Qalidade do Ensigne Superior (CNAQ), Mozambique/lusophone Africa
- National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Education (NAQAAE), Egypt/North Africa
- Anaq Sup (Senegal)

Part of the activities for transferring Pan-African policy to the practice of African Higher Education Institutions is this learning material as part of the HAQAA2 training course for QA professionals.

2. The ASG-QA

What is it all about?

The African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance are a set of overarching standards and guidelines for quality assurance in Higher Education in Africa and consist of three parts:

- Part A standards for internal quality assurance in higher education institutions,
- Part B standards for external quality assurance,
- Part C standards for internal quality assurance of accreditation agencies (QAA).

In the official document, the standards are formulated as minimum standards, that HEIs or QAA must achieve. Each standard is accompanied by several guidelines that reflect good practice examples on how the respective standard could be put into practice. For a detailed overview of the standards kindly refer to the original document in the toolbox of this module.

The ASG-QA have been developed in the framework of the HAQAA initiative (phase one) in 2017/2018 based on existing local or regional standards and drawing from the experiences of development and implementation of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ESG). They have been subjected to wide stakeholder consultation in the African Higher Education Area. They have not yet been formally adopted by the African Union, yet this is intended for the Science and Technology Committee (STC) in the end of 2020. This said, many higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies are already applying them.

"The ASG-QA aim to support higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies in Africa by:

- promoting good quality assurance practices and developing adequate internal and external quality assurance mechanisms and processes that fit international best practices;
- better defining and promoting the relationship between internal and external quality assurance;
- developing mutual trust between higher education agencies, regulatory bodies and institutions, thus facilitating recognition and mobility of students and human resources within and across national borders of the continent
- promoting transparency and accountability by providing appropriate information on quality assurance to the public." (HAQAA 2017)

As an underlying principle, the ASG-QA respect the autonomy of the institutions that use them, which means that both HEIs and Quality Assurance Agencies can adapt the standards and contextualise them based on their organisational culture. Higher Education Institutions and Quality Assurance Agencies are encouraged to reflect on the standards, guidelines and good practice examples given in the ASG-QA and look for evidence that can show the level of standard conformity. There is no prescription on how to measure the degree of standard conformity. The AQRM, that will be presented in the next chapter, can be used to measure the achievement of the ASG-QA standards.

3. The AQRM

What is it all about?

The African Quality Rating Mechanism (AQRM) is a self-assessment and rating tool for African Higher Education Institutions. It provides the opportunity for African Higher Education Institutions to compare their performance against a set of commonly agreed criteria that are benchmarked with international good practices but allow for taking into consideration the local context of an institution. The mechanism is aligned to Part A of the ASG-QA. The overarching goal of the AQRM is to support universities to assess their status quo in terms of quality and to develop a quality culture. This is why the AQRM is not a ranking tool to compare institutions and using it is voluntary. The AQRM is a questionnaire that can be filled in by Higher Education Institutions themselves. It is available on the website of AAU (www.aau.org/aqrm) and it consists of three parts:

1. **Background information about the institution**: contact data, institutional, staff and students' profile, governance structure etc.
2. **Self-rating at institutional level** (49 questions): governance and management, infrastructure, finance, teaching and learning, research, publications and innovation and community/societal engagement
3. **Self-rating at study programme level** (35 questions): programme planning and management, curriculum development, teaching and learning, assessment and programme results

With regard to the sections 2 and 3, a Higher Education Institution can rate itself using a scale from 0 to 4 (poor, insufficient, satisfactory, good, excellent) (cf. HAQAA 2019). For a detailed insight, you can find the AQRM questionnaire in the toolbox of this module.
Ideally, the self-assessment should be combined with a validation visit of the institution by external experts (informed peer review), but this is not obligatory.

Development of the AQRM

The AQRM has been developed by the AUC and the Association of African Universities.The AAU is the designated, 'implementing Body' of the AUC. It was adopted by the Conference of Ministers of Education of the African Union (COMDAF) in 2007. The development process included extensive consultation with the African Higher Education community. In 2010 the African Union Commission supported the piloting of self-assessments at 32 African Higher Education Institutions and the instrument was revised based on the feedback received by the pilot universities. In order to give Higher Education Institutions, the opportunity to include an external perspective in their assessment and to receive recommendations by peers, it is recommended to combine the self-assessment exercise with a validation visit. In 2014, nine pilot universities underwent such validation visits of external expert teams based on the results of their self-assessment. Under the umbrella of the HAQQA initiative, another fifteen Higher Education institutions received external reviewers from Africa and Europe to complement their self-evaluations in 2017 (cf. HAQAA 2018).

The AQRM came into being before the African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance have been developed. The alignment of these two important instruments was indispensable, thus the development process of the ASG-QA took into consideration the underlying standards of the AQRM. In 2017 a mapping between ASG-QA and AQRM was

carried out to ensure that the AQRM can serve as an instrument to self-evaluate a Higher Education Institution's degree of fulfilment of the ASG-QA Part A. (cf. HAQAA 2019).

It should be noted that while the AQRM is one tool that forms part of the PAQAF, it is not the only tool or approach to guide self-assessment that African universities are expected to or could use, nor should it be considered in isolation. Different international and regional partners and quality assurance actors have offered institutional self-assessment support with different methodologies. What is important is that African HEI find the most constructive and context-appropriate means to support their own institutional quality culture.

4. Reflective Questions

What do you think?

- Kindly reflect on the situation in your own institution. What do you think? In how far are the relevant stakeholders in your institution familiar with the African Union, continental integration objectives, and the PAQAF and its instruments, especially the ASG-QA? What should they care (in your opinion)?
- Why should Higher Education Institutions participate in an AQRM self-assessment exercise? Which advantages and disadvantages do you see? Are there other instruments you currently use? What might be the added value of something like the AQRM?
- What challenges do you see with regard to the implementation of ASG-QA in African Higher Education Institutions and Quality Assurance Agencies? How can the purpose best be promoted? How can you avoid confusion (in some countries and regions, other standards and guidelines for QA already exist, for example)?

5. References

And recommendations for further reading

CAMES = African and Malagasy Council for Higher Education: www.lecames.org.
CESA 16-25 = Continental Education Strategy for Africa (2016): https://edu-au.org/strategies/185-cesa16-25 (last access: 11.09.20).

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HAQAA (2019): Mapping Between Africa Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ASG-QA) and African Quality Rating Mechanism (AQRM) for Quality Assurance in Higher Education. Annex 4 to HAQAA final report.

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