Development and Alignment of NQFs to Enhance Quality and Cooperation in Asia Pacific

Presentation at NQFs Expert Meeting on Developing Regional Guidelines for National Qualifications Frameworks in Asia and Pacific organized by UNESCO, Bangkok 26-29 July 2015

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Outline

- Context of APQN
- NQF: A brief background
- Asia Pacific scenario
- Regional alignment of NQF: Some issues and challenges
- Guidelines for development and alignment of NQFs
- Need for cooperation among UNESCO, APQN and other stakeholders
The Asia Pacific Quality Network (APQN)

- Founded in Hong Kong in January 2003.
- Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA): 2003 – March 2009
- Funding Partners-The World Bank, UNESCO, Aus Aid, GIQAC and many more
APQN Membership:
150+ members from 50 countries and Territories
5 observers from European countries
Key APQN Activities

- More than 50 workshops and seminars hosted in Australia, India, Vietnam, Laos, Fiji and China and other countries in the region with about 2000 participants including 177 sponsored.
- 6 moderated online forums on various QA issues with more than 450 participants from 50 of its member agencies.
- APQN Exchange Programme, Asia Europe exchange programme.
- APQN Quality Awards to recognize good practices of QA bodies and experts, the first of its kind initiative.
- Student participation in quality initiative.
- UNESCO- APQN Toolkit for QA of CBHE.
- APQN Quality Information toolkit with support of UNESCO.
- Quality Hubs across Asia Pacific -
- Launch of Asia Pacific Quality Register in 2015.
- APQN Quality label.
NQF Background

NQF Definition 1

“A qualifications framework is an instrument for the development and classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for levels of learning achieved. This set of criteria may be implicit in the qualifications descriptors themselves, or made explicit in the form of a set of level descriptors. The scope of frameworks may take in all learning achievement and pathways or may be confined to a particular sector, for example initial education, adult education and training or an occupational area. Some frameworks have a tighter structure than others; some may have a legal basis whereas others represent a consensus of social partners. All qualifications frameworks, however, establish a basis for improving the quality, accessibility, linkages and public or labour market recognition of qualifications within a country or internationally”. (OECD, 2007, p. 7)
NQF Background

NQF Definition 2

“A Qualifications Framework is an instrument for the development, classification and recognition of skills, knowledge and competencies along a continuum of agreed levels. It is a way of structuring existing and new qualifications, which are defined by learning outcomes, i.e. clear statements of what the learner must know or be able to do whether learned in a classroom, on-the-job, or less formally. The Qualifications Framework indicates the comparability of different qualifications and how one can progress from one level to another, within and across occupations or industrial sectors (and even across vocational and academic fields if the NQF is designed to include both vocational and academic qualifications in a single framework)”. (Tuck, 2007, p. v)
NQF Definition 3

A qualifications framework is an instrument for classifying qualifications according to a set of criteria for levels of learning outcomes. Considerable benefits are expected of national qualification frameworks (NQFs). If backed by a good system of quality assurance, they can support the development of workers’ skills, facilitate educational and labour market mobility, and help improve the access of individuals to higher and different levels of education and training over their lives. Education and training providers and authorities are able to design more consistent and linked qualifications when descriptors of qualifications are developed within NQFs. (APEC, 2009)
Benefits of NQF

Tuck (2007) has outlined a set of ‘problems and needs’ which an NQF can help to address. They are:

• consistency in standards;
• quality assurance;
• the relevance of qualifications for users;
• international recognition;
• access of learners to qualifications; and
• progression routes.
Mobility issue

- Number of international migrants rising:
  - 150 million in 2000;
  - 214 million in 2010;
  - there could be 405 million in 2050 (IOC).
- Currently, there is absence of global system [on a single platform] of qualifications recognition allowing a learner or worker to take his/her qualifications to other countries and have them recognised.
- However there is Growing momentum of cooperation in the use of Qualifications Framework (QF) for cross-border recognition
- Qualifications are a form of currency that signal both national and international value

[Ref – ASEM presentation 2013]
NQF Impact study by ILO

- Qualifications frameworks seem to capture and represent many hopes and dreams. 2010 Research by Allais for ILO does not have straightforward, simple recommendations or definitive conclusions about what they can or cannot achieve.

- Two central messages which must be emphasized is that there is no single right model of NQFs, and that NQFs do not provide quick-fix or simple solutions to the complex problems facing countries in relation to education, skills development, and employment.

- This research found little evidence that NQFs are achieving their goals. In many instances this was because NQFs are a recent intervention, and it may be simply too early to tell.

- The framework which emerges from this study as the most successful, the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework, had relatively limited ambitions. [Ref. Allais, Stephanie] The implementation and impact of national qualifications frameworks: report of a study in 16 countries / Stephanie Allais ; International Labour Office, Skills and Employability Department. - Geneva: ILO, 2010

- Need to conduct impact study on NQF in Asia Pacific
Glimpse of NQFs across the Globe

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS 2013

Regional, Transnational & National Qualifications Frameworks involving 143 countries
Glimpse of NQFs across the Globe

EQF has triggered NQF developments

NQFs linked to EQF by 2012
Planning to link NQFs in 2013
# Evolutionary Stages of NQF

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<tr>
<td>Botswana, Mauritius, Namibia, South Africa</td>
<td>Lesotho, Seychelles</td>
<td>Angola, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda, Zambia</td>
<td>DRC, Ghana, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zimbabwe</td>
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<td>OECs</td>
<td>Barbados, Canada, Honduras, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago</td>
<td>Antigua and Barbuda, Chile, Colombia, Grenada, Guyana</td>
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<td>Brazil, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico Nicaragua, Panama</td>
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<tr>
<th>Asia (South &amp; East) &amp; Pacific</th>
<th>1. Established</th>
<th>2. Developing and implementing</th>
<th>3. Planning and/or designing</th>
<th>4. Considering</th>
<th>5. Competence framework</th>
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<tr>
<td>Australia, Hong Kong SAR, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippines, Samoa, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Vanuatu</td>
<td>China, Fiji, Maldives, Pacific Islands, Papua New Guinea, Thailand, Tonga, Viet Nam</td>
<td>Bangladesh, India, Pakistan</td>
<td>Afghanistan, Bhutan, Brunei, Cambodia, China, Japan, Laos, Macau, Mongolia, Nepal (has NVQs), Republic of Korea</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
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<td>England, France, Ireland, Malta, Northern Ireland, Romania, Scotland, Wales</td>
<td>Albania, Belgium Flanders, Bosnia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Georgia, Kosovo, Lithuania, Montenegro, Portugal, Slovenia, Turkey</td>
<td>Andorra, Armenia, Austria, Belgium, French, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Norway, Poland, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Spain</td>
<td>Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Luxembourg, Macedonia, Switzerland, Ukraine, Uzbekistan</td>
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<td>Tunisia</td>
<td>Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, United Arab Emirates</td>
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<td>Iraq</td>
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### NATIONAL REFERENCE POINTS FOR RECOGNISING NON-FORMAL LEARNING AND SKILLS

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Comprehensive frameworks</th>
<th>NQFs in TVET sector</th>
<th>Labour Competency framework</th>
<th>NQFs in Higher Education</th>
<th>No national frameworks as of yet</th>
<th>Equivalency frameworks in basic education</th>
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<tr>
<td>Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Mauritius, Seychelles; Malaysia; Philippines Rwanda Hong Kong SAR, India, Maldives, Republic of Korea (proposed), United Republic of Tanzania, Mexico.</td>
<td>Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Botswana, Ethiopia, Kenya, Namibia, Rwanda, Uganda, Ghana, and Gambia.</td>
<td>Mexico, Chile, Hong Kong SAR, India, Viet Nam, Republic of Korea, Malaysia</td>
<td>Malaysia, Rwanda, Canada Philippines</td>
<td>USA, Japan Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Malaysia, Ethiopia, Kenya, United Republic of Tanzania, Uganda, Botswana, Mauritius, Namibia, South Africa, Seychelles, Ghana, Gambia, Mexico</td>
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Asia Pacific scenario

- East Asia Summit (EAS) Education Ministers’ Meeting held in Indonesia in 2011, MOS (HRD, GOI), offered that India would *inter alia* lead the project “Regional Inter-operability of National Qualification Frameworks”.

- NAAC co-hosted “East Asia Summit–ASEAN Information Sharing Session on National and Regional Reference Qualifications Frameworks” with Australia on 8th November 2013 at Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

- APQN project of Qualification frameworks in Asia Pacific

- APEC economies NQF mapping project, 2009

Two Good practices from sub-regions of Asia Pacific

- ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework [AQRF]

- Pacific Qualifications Framework

- Strong case for Asia-Pacific Qualifications Framework (APQF) as voluntary reference point
A glimpse from APEC mapping

- Seven APEC economies—Australia, Hong Kong SAR China, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore, [mapping in 2009]

- Thailand and the Philippines have NQFs. The Republic of Korea is in the process of implementing one and five others have them under development or consideration. Of the seven with frameworks:

  - Five have NQFs covering senior secondary, vocational education and higher education qualifications, but there are differences in the framework across the sectors. In Singapore the framework applies only to vocational education and in Thailand to higher education.

  - Five of the economies have explicit levels of qualifications and two have them implicitly.

  - Most NQFs contain descriptors of qualifications and units, and the descriptors are based on a taxonomy of learning outcomes at least for the VET sector.

  - Competency standards are the basis for qualifications and units in the VET sector.
A glimpse from APEC mapping

- Most of the NQFs include measures of the volume of learning, and a formula for estimating the amount of learning required to achieve a qualification.
- Credit frameworks have been developed in New Zealand and Singapore and they are under development in some other economies.
- All the NQFs have an associated public register of qualifications.
- Recognition tools are being introduced in Australia and are under discussion in New Zealand.
- The NQFs in each economy are managed by a national agency.
- Compliance with the NQF is supported by systems of quality assurance though its operation tends to be shared by a number of agencies.
- The frameworks have been supported by legislation or by government regulation.

[ Ref APEC Mapping 2009 ]

Many developments have taken place since then. This emphasizes need for latest baseline study.
APQN Study

- Growing interest in QF among AP countries has been noted. While adoption of NQFs appears to take a slow pace, the trend is increasing. This can be due to external influences rather than internal initiatives.

- As NQFs are introduced, formulated and implemented, the countries will invariably face certain issues which were encountered by those who have had earlier experiences.

- The issues identified by the Team resulting from this study include the organization of seminars on QF; the prospect of establishing an Asia-Pacific QF; the quality assurance of qualifications; the quality assurance of the provision of education; and the establishment of materials and linkages in the Asia Pacific region.

- Attending to these issues poses an opportunity and a challenge to APQN

[ REF – Manuel Corpus , APQN Project on NQF ]
UNESCO Bangkok Initiative with KFIT

Development of guidelines for the Asia-Pacific

- Taking stock of best policies and practices from countries that have already developed and implemented NQF
- 2. Developing regional guidelines to be used for capacity building of participating countries, especially those that have not yet developed their own NQF
- 3. Organizing country-level training workshops to support and reflect on implementation of regional guidelines
- 4. Promoting experience sharing in the implementation of regional guidelines among the participating Member States
- 5. Designating an open access online repository of best policies and practices on NQF

A laudable initiative especially for developing countries for capacity building and other for collaborations
Some Issues and Challenges

The scope of NQF varies considerably in different countries. We need to consider following issues while deciding scope of proposed NQF guidelines:

- all education and training and qualifications, or just some sectors and qualifications; [VET, Higher, RPL ?]
- a number of levels (eg 8 in the EQF or 10 in AUQF);
- level descriptors for units of learning or descriptors of broad qualification levels;
- descriptors defined against a taxonomy of learning outcomes (e.g. complexity of knowledge, and skill, application, autonomy) or by learning inputs;
- measures of the volume of learning (e.g. 10 learning hours = 1 credit);
- formulae for the volume and level of units needed for qualifications to be obtained (e.g. 100 credits at level 3 for a Certificate 3);
- a public register and information system on qualifications, pathways and providers and (preferably) their performance;
Issues and challenges… Continued

- associated Recognition Tools to improve information on the value of qualifications;
- associated credit framework to estimate the level and volume of learning in various qualifications and in non-formal and informal learning to assist in transfers within the system, in employment selection and to support qualification design;
- regulatory quality assurance functions by the national NQF agency, or distributed to other institutions; [Role of QA agencies]
- links to other frameworks including regional frameworks; [SAARC, ASEAN, EAS, Asia Pacific ?]
- legal control, or voluntary involvement;
- development and control by a national NQF agency, or development managed by stakeholders, [Ref. APEC 2009]
- Development of reference guideline or framework could be a challenge due to diversity.
Need for cooperation

- Very strong national focus, better sub-regional linkages and weak regional harmonisation among QA agencies is a big challenge for coordinated QA policy across Asian region.
- Diversity in terms of languages, modes of delivery, legal systems and socio-political contexts
- Lack of National Information Centres and coordination among existing ones.
- Inadequate resources to protect students from dubious providers
- Wide difference in stages of NQF development
- Linkage with existing sub-regional frameworks
- Dialogue among regional initiatives by different players - ASEM, APEC, ASEAN and UNESCO
- APQN can play role as facilitator of UNESCO initiative on NQF Regional guidelines and capacity building as voice of over 50 QA bodies in the Asia Pacific region.
Thank you

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- **Acknowledgements** - Presentation is mainly compilation of various studies, projects and presentations by known as well as unknown sources. For details and citations please refer original sources such as UNESCO, APEC, ILO, APQN, etc., websites.