

SAQA Bulletin: Volume 10 Number 1: February 2007

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Acronyms and abbreviations

General

| | |
|--------|---|
| ABET | Adult Basic Education and Training |
| AsgiSA | Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa |
| CAT | Credit Accumulation and Transfer |
| CHE | Council on Higher Education |
| DBSA | Development Bank of Southern Africa |
| DED | Department of Economic Development |
| DoE | Department of Education |
| DoL | Department of Labour |
| FET | Further Education and Training |
| G8 | Group of Eight |

| | |
|----------|---|
| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| GEAR | Growth, Employment and Redistribution |
| HEI | Higher Education Institution |
| HIV/AIDS | Human Immunodeficiency Virus / Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome |
| HRDS | Human Resource Development Strategy |
| HSRC | Human Sciences Research Council |
| ICM | Integrated Committee of Ministers |
| ICT | Information and Communications Technology |
| IU | Implementation Unit |
| LCF | Learning Cape Festival |
| MDG | Millennium Development Goal |
| MOU | Memorandum of Understanding |
| NEPAD | New Partnership for Africa's Development |
| NSDS | National Skills Development Strategy |
| OBE | Outcomes-Based Education |
| OBET | Outcomes-Based Education and Training |
| RISDP | Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan |
| RPL | Recognition of Prior Learning |
| RQF | Regional Qualifications Framework |
| SADC | Southern African Development Community |
| SADCQA | SADC Qualifications Agency |

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|--------|--|
| SADCQF | SADC Qualifications Framework |
| SETA | Sector Education and Training Authority |
| SMME | Small, Medium and Micro-Enterprise |
| TCCA | Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation |
| UK | United Kingdom |

SAQA

| | |
|------|---|
| CCFO | Critical Cross-Field Outcome |
| ETQA | Education and Training Quality Assurance Body |
| NLRD | National Learners' Records Database |
| NQF | National Qualifications Framework |
| NSB | National Standards Body |
| SAQA | South African Qualifications Authority |
| SGB | Standards Generating Body |

Editorial Comment

Three of the five papers included in this issue of the SAQA Bulletin have been drawn from the proceedings of the sixth Q-Africa conference, which was held at Gallagher Estate from 16–17 November 2005. The conference theme was Building communities of trust, which attracted a variety of presentations and papers from South Africa, the Southern African Development Community (SADC), Africa and further afield. Another paper is from a recent Kenton conference, while the last is a commissioned paper in response to the SAQA Chairperson's Lecture held in March 2006.

The first paper is based on a presentation by Shirley Walters (current SAQA Chairperson). In her paper, Walters asks how it is possible to build communities of trust, with particular reference to the communities of trust needed to create the possibility of lifelong learning. Looking at this issue through the lens of the Western Cape's vision of building a learning region in the province, which they call the Learning Cape, Walters argues that such communities do not only need to include those individuals already advantaged, but more importantly, that any attempt to build communities of trust 'needs to take very seriously the legacies of distrust with which we live'.

In the second paper, Graeme Bloch, keeping to the same central theme of communities of trust, suggests that South Africa is still experiencing 'waves of optimism that have taken us through our first decade of democracy'. He makes

the point that that many aspects of the South African education and training system have now become well established, but are not necessarily working well. Using examples from the banking sector, Bloch challenges those involved with qualifications developments in SADC to improve the effectiveness of their systems.

The third paper from the Q-Africa Conference is by Tracy Mudzi. Mudzi gives a detailed account of the developments leading up to the current proposal for a regional qualifications framework (RQF) and makes the very important point that such developments should be 'home-grown' and not slavishly copy the trends in Europe and elsewhere. This paper gives the reader insight into the intricacies associated with the development of the SADC Qualifications Framework (SADCQF), and the proposed agency that will oversee its development.

The next paper is by Ronel Blom and James Keevy. It was presented at the Kenton Conference in 2005 and provides a detailed summary of the results of the NQF Impact Study. In the paper they use the findings of the NQF Impact Study to reflect on the extent to which the NQF has impacted on equality, democracy, and quality in South Africa. This paper should be read with the two original reports (in the reference list), as well as more recent critiques that followed thereafter (available from the authors).

The last paper is a response by Edward French and Melissa King to Tom Schuller from the Chairperson's Lecture in March 2006, when questions such as What do we see as learning? and How do we value learning? were raised. French and King base their response within Schuller's focus on how different forms of capital should come together in specific qualifications and qualifications systems and try to respond from within the context of the broader NQF discourse. In their paper they come to the conclusion that Europe still faces significant challenges in recognising informal and non-formal learning, and that South Africa is no different. They also make the important point that the South African context with its 'less burdensome traditions' may very well create the opportunity to 'lead the way in the equitable development of the recognition of learning'.

Feedback

Readers are invited to contribute to the NQF discourse by completing the feedback form at the end of the SAQA Bulletin. Comments and papers that contribute to the development of the NQF discourse will be considered for inclusion in future publications.

Chairperson's Foreword

The sixth Q-Africa Conference that was held in November 2005 focused on building communities of trust. As stated in the conference invitation, communities of trust within the context of the NQF discourse are understood to include:

...those who share expertise in qualification development and improvement through relationships based on common commitment to the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and quality qualifications, integrity and clarity of responsibilities and functions.

As SAQA publishes this Bulletin containing a selection of the papers presented at the QAfrica Conference, as well as the two related papers on the NQF Impact Study and the response to the 2006 Chairperson's Lecture, the notion of building trust between NQF stakeholders is becoming increasingly important. Even more, there is a need to further develop the trust that has already been built over the last ten years of NQF development and implementation. Taking our cue from more recent, but directly related debates on this matter, the time is most opportune to investigate some of these communities in greater depth. We need to look at why some communities have developed and matured, while others are still facing significant challenges. In this regard, I think we should revisit the definition mentioned above, and do the following:

- Identify communities that are well developed, as well as those that are struggling.

- Emphasise and reaffirm our commitment to the objectives of the NQF, even though we agree that much still needs to be done.
- Agree on what constitutes a 'quality qualification' and what integrity means in the context of the NQF, and actively promote and communicate this understanding.
- Continue to work towards clarifying the responsibilities and functions of the various bodies involved with the NQF.

The papers included in this edition of the SAQA Bulletin constitute an important step towards investigating communities of trust in the context of the South African NQF.

Ken Hall
Acting Chairperson
South African Qualifications Authority
October 2006

'Optimism of the will, Pessimism of the intellect'¹: Building communities of trust in South Africa

Shirley Walters Chairperson: SAQA

Introduction

Apartheid was a political and economic system actively promoting distrust and, not surprisingly, has therefore left a legacy of a culture of distrust.

The questions I wish to pose today are, with this kind of legacy, is it possible to build communities of trust, particularly with reference to the communities of trust needed to create the possibility of lifelong learning? And if so, what will it take? What happens if this is not the case? Can a 'learning region' only operate in relatively homogeneous, developed economies? Is lifelong learning only for the rich?

I am going to pose this question concretely by looking at it through the lens of an illustrative case study. This is the Western Cape's vision of building a learning region in the province, which they call the Learning Cape.

However, before attending to this case study, it is necessary to examine firstly, the theoretical framework surrounding the concept of learning regions, and secondly, the nature of social capital in South Africa, focusing on communities of trust at local level.

A learning region and its characteristics

There is no single understanding of a 'learning region', as the notion is imbedded within different understandings of economic and social development. These in turn refer to various theories of democracy and citizenship. At the one end, a neo-liberal view could encourage an extreme form of competitive individualism within a limited state; at the other end, there could be emphasis on social solidarity with an interventionist and developmental state.

Through its being imbedded in these various notions of democracy and citizenship, the concept of a 'learning region' focuses attention on the interconnectedness and interdependence of the local and the global arenas. While a learning region may appear to be a local phenomenon, it encourages us to think of the world as a single space – not one necessarily mapped territorially according to national borders.

There do seem to be certain essential characteristics of a learning region identified in the literature and which are shown briefly here. These include: a world-class education and training system at all levels, with high participation

rates; high levels of collaboration, networking, and clustering within and across economic and knowledge sectors, especially around areas of innovation; world-class systems for the collection, analysis, management, and dissemination of information; a constant challenging of traditional knowledge categories to suit rapidly changing social and economic realities; the provision of frequently updated, easily accessible information and counselling services to enable citizens to maximise their learning opportunities; a high value being placed on formal, non-formal, and informal learning throughout life, expressed in tangible improvements in learners' employment and community situations; and learning support for high levels of social cohesion (across social class, ethnicity, gender, ability, geography, and age) within a society of limited social polarities. There is an assumption that countries will not be able to move to competitive knowledge economies if there is not sufficient social cohesion. I will further examine this assumption in the case study of the Learning Cape.

Key concept: social capital

From the global to the local, from the World Bank to community-based organisations, social capital has emerged as a new language of value. In simple terms, social capital can be defined as social networks, informed by trust, that enable people to participate in reciprocal exchanges, mutual support, and collective action to achieve shared goals. As an increasingly popular indicator of social cohesion, social capital has featured in a burgeoning social science literature as the key to democracy and development.

All definitions of a learning region emphasise the importance of social capital but may mean different things by it. For example, some may highlight the importance of social capital within a neo-liberal framework. In a scenario such as this, people are urged to volunteer, and to take on more and more community work while the government reduces its public spending in the social sector. In other words, this represents one aspect of a new type of social contract in the 'risk society', where individuals are being told to invest in education throughout their lives. If they fall by the wayside, it is their own fault.

Others, who support a participatory democratic view of development, would urge the strengthening of social capital in communities, families, and workplaces, to build capacity amongst the citizenry broadly, and to engage in governance at all levels in the society. This view of social capital, as will be shown in the case study, is perhaps of particular relevance for new, middle-income democracies.

Most of the countries developing the concept of learning regions are high-income countries. However, in middle-income countries, like Brazil, India, and South Africa, the challenge is to interpret and develop the notion in contexts of widespread poverty and social polarisation. Some regions may emphasise high-end research for economic development only. Others may also highlight the importance of social justice and equity as integral to economic success.

Key words that constantly recur in the literature of social capital are 'trust', 'community', 'partnerships', and 'networks'. A small example of a social system based on trust that facilitates effective economic transactions is the revolving credit savings clubs in poor communities. Social capital is a particularly important concept for the development of the learning region, as the argument is that trusting relationships are good for social cohesion and for economic success. So a learning society is dependent on partnerships and collaborations of multiple kinds, both for economic development and greater social cohesion.

Key concept: trust

In general terms, we need to recognise that support for new democracies is more volatile than support for established ones. Most citizens of a new regime have been socialised into a different order. A new political order will build trust on high hopes, but increasingly the people may also start assessing government on actual performance. The question of how to assess social capital and trust becomes more pressing once the initial novelty of the new democratic order begins to wane.

A burgeoning body of literature on trust has pointed to a lack of social capital and limited associational life as key determinants in the growth and depth of democracy. Looking at the extent of civic engagement in the polity of local

government (conventionally portrayed as the foundation stone of democracy and as the first line of service to local communities) becomes therefore very important. The advancement of local government is seen as a counterweight to the hegemony of a rigid and autocratic central state. Good local government has increasingly been associated with principles of liberal democracy. In addition, adherence to liberal democratic principles has increasingly been included in the conditionality of international aid to developing states.

A culture of trust possesses a number of attributes that promote the well-being of a nation. In a trusting society, the development of trust, sociability, and associational life are encouraged and supported. The presence of this culture of trust, moreover, lowers transactional costs, as the need to monitor the behaviour of others decreases and the enforcement of claims and obligations is reduced, thus increasing spontaneity and openness. The absence of a culture of trust, in contrast, hampers the functioning of society. It does so in the first instance by constricting human agency and by inducing routines and conformist conduct, which can degenerate into passivism. A culture of distrust erodes social capital, leading to social atomisation and isolation and the decay of interpersonal networks. At the same time, it gives rise to a social climate of hostility, defensiveness, prejudice, and even xenophobia. In the next section I will turn to the South African case, and focus particularly on the crucial dimension of trust within local government with reference to the concept of social capital.

The South African case

South Africa is an especially stark example of deep social and economic divisions, where sophistication and simplicity, wealth and poverty live side by side. The first democratic government of South Africa in 1994 enacted a Constitution that has embraced the ideal of social cohesion. It has enacted a constitutional framework with its constitutional patriotism and its imagining of a unitary citizenry – it starts with the invocation, ‘We the people of South Africa’. Implicit in the Constitution is the presumption of a homogeneous citizenry, sharing common understandings of the form and function of democracy in the country and the necessary obligations of citizenship. Based on a political ideal, the constitution not only prescribes a common South African citizenship and asserts that all citizens are equally entitled to the rights, privileges, and benefits of citizenship, but also maintains that they are equally subject to the duties and responsibilities of citizenship.

This constitutional framework was developed for a country that has just emerged from over three hundred years of colonialism and nearly fifty years of legalised racism and discrimination in terms of gender, race, class, and religion against 80% of its population. This apartheid system was a political and economic system that actively promoted distrust.

South Africa re-entered the global economy in 1994 after a sustained period of exclusion. At the same time, the new government expressed its inevitable commitment (given South Africa’s history) to equity and redress in a Reconstruction and Development Programme. Since then, the central debate has been around the nature of South Africa’s insertion into the global economy, with some advocating a high-end Information and Communications Technology (ICT) focus, and others seeking more directly to channel the forces of globalisation for the elimination of poverty. These are the differences, which run through from the neo-liberal, to the social democratic, to the socialist views of development. These different views inevitably also play out in the different understandings of a learning region.

Social capital and trust in the South African case²

The ending of apartheid rule in South Africa in 1994 brought with it the hope that, not only would civil rights be restored to the majority of the population, but that significant gains would be brought to the welfare of those people hitherto disadvantaged by apartheid. This hope was underscored by the fact that the new Constitution adopted in 1996 had all the hallmarks of a modern liberal democratic state, which promised a free and open society.

Not only did it set in place the formal institutions of democracy, but it entrenched in the Bill of Rights a set of welfare entitlements to housing, health, education, and so forth.

In the years succeeding the transition to democracy, the state has been restructured to reflect a more developmental orientation, and a plethora of policies have been formulated to promote greater social equity, including the SAQA Act (Act No. 58 of 1995). Parliament demarcated nine new provinces, with the provincial governments having certain powers over the distribution of resources in health, welfare, education, transport, and economic development. The third tier of government, at the local level, was seen as key to taking governance to the people.

Despite the fact that South Africa has a laudable democratic infrastructure, it is widely recognised that a culture of democratic governance has yet to take root in the country.

Equally problematic is the fact that the new democracy, in some instances, does not appear to be providing an adequate voice to the poor, nor is it adequately meeting their need for improved welfare. During the passage of the past eleven years, despite some important gains in the delivery of basic services to the poor, the predicament of the poorer segment of society has not improved significantly and the gap between rich and poor has remained constant, although the racial composition of the 'rich' has shifted somewhat.

This state of affairs highlights the distinction between democratic institutions and democratic politics. A culture of democracy, it is held, can be achieved provided an appropriate balance develops between the state and civil society. In the context of South Africa, the impact of the apartheid state, mass dislocation, migrant labour, unemployment of between 30 and 40%, and rapid urbanisation, have seriously undermined traditional norms, values, and practices.

Social capital and trust at local level³

Unlike many other countries in sub-Saharan Africa, post-apartheid SA has moved beyond political rhetoric in its efforts to decentralise administrative responsibilities to local level. In a marked departure from post-colonial norms, local government's status has been elevated significantly. It is a distinct sphere of government, the foundation stone of democracy, and the first line of service to local communities.

The social milieu into which local government was introduced was a major challenge. For 40–50% of the population, who had lived in ethnic homelands, life under a system of local government was entirely new. There was no social or institutional memory to draw on. In many small rural towns, newly elected councillors had to compete with the residue of previous power systems, namely the civic associations and the traditional leadership structures, both of which asserted their right to represent the interests of the people. For the bulk of black urban population, who had lived under the discredited Black Local Authorities, the advent of legitimate local government, with a degree of real autonomy and with the promise of resources, was an equally novel experience.

To communities with low levels of trust and who have been conditioned to resist municipal rule and support rent and service boycotts, the transition has not been easy. This is even more so because the liberal democratic system prescribed by the Constitution assumes that a particular social framework is in place:

1. that there is a sizeable rent-paying community in existence, and that these citizens contribute to the financial autonomy of the municipality;
2. that the citizenry participate in the electoral process; and that individuals elected to public office have a popular mandate; and
3. perhaps most importantly, that there is a well established tradition of associational life that supports a vibrant civil society.

The lack of social capital and trust at the local level manifests itself in low municipal polls. (With local government elections coming up and with the extensive encouragement to get everyone to register, the authorities clearly want to change this.) Under these circumstances, many of the councillors assuming office do so without broad popular mandate; they are free from constant scrutiny and hence not accountable for their actions; there is the development of corruption and clientelism; politicians interfere in the administrative processes, which perpetuates the problems; and there is little faith in the system, which further constrains development of social capital.

At the same time as local government structures are being established, civil society structures are undergoing change. During resistance to apartheid, there were dense networks of community organisations that formed part of the social movements of the day. Since 1994, these have changed significantly with many becoming dormant or closing. However, in the last number of years, new organisations and social movements have been forming in response to the contemporary issues relating to poverty, housing, violence, or Human Immunodeficiency Virus / Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS).

In a local community, social capital is accumulated in and through social networks, informed by trust, sympathy, and mutual obligation, all of which enable people to act together in advancing common interests. Several local community organisations have recognised that their interests are not only 'local', but are impacted by global forces. They have intentionally connected with other organisations globally, for example, the Homeless People's Federation, or the anti-globalisation lobby, or the HIV/AIDS movement. Therefore, some South African communities are building social capital at the intersection of local interests, national policies, and global forces.

It is in this paradoxical context of hope and optimism, on the one hand, and mistrust on the other, that the seeds of a learning province were sown. I turn now to describe briefly the Learning Cape.

The Learning Cape⁴

The Western Cape is the second wealthiest province in South Africa. It has a population of about 4.5 million. On the one hand, certain parts of the economy are fairly buoyant, like tourism, services for film, media, and IT, and the fruit and wine industry. On the other hand, 67% of people live below the poverty line, there is 24% unemployment, 30% of adults are 'illiterate', 78% of pre-schoolers do not have access to early childhood development opportunities, and the number of tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS-infected people is increasing rapidly. The disparities between rich and poor are among the most extreme in the world.

In 2001 the Provincial Government, after lengthy consultative processes, adopted an economic development White Paper (PAWC 2001) that argued for an intimate relationship between economic development and learning within a learning region framework, coining the term Learning Cape, as one of four key pillars for economic and social development.

The White Paper set out to address the 'twin challenges of increasing competitiveness and alleviating poverty in the global knowledge economy of the 21st century'. Whilst the use of the Learning Cape framework is not yet fully entrenched as a foundation of government policy, the Learning Cape concept and the preliminary moves being made to develop it in a systematic way represent the most explicit and determined example of serious engagement with the notion of a learning society in South Africa. I will give one illustrative example of a strategy that is engaging civil society, government, labour, and business in promoting the Learning Cape concept – the month long Learning Cape Festival that has been running for the last four years.

The Learning Cape Festival

In October 2001, a proposal was made to the provincial Department of Economic Development (DED) that an annual Learning Cape Festival (LCF) could contribute to the development of the concept and strategy of the Learning Cape. DED canvassed the proposal amongst higher education, civil society, trade unions, business, local government, libraries, and the Department of Education (DoE). A Steering Committee made up of a range of social partners was set up to run it. By starting the month-long festival on National Women's Day, 9 August, and ending it on International Literacy Day, 8 September, it was hoped to entrench issues relating to the most marginalised citizens as part of the festival. Since then there have been four, month-long, festivals. I will not attempt to do justice here to the depth, breadth, and texture of the month's 500 or more activities, but will rather discuss some pockets of intense engagement that illustrate how the Festivals have promoted various forms of learning, advocacy, networking, and partnership-building within and across sectors.

For example, two community workers in a poor, working-class, gang-dominated township used the Festival as a way of promoting its sustainable community projects. The Festival provided a rare, conflict-free space, because, as they

said, ‘everyone could agree on the importance of building a lifelong learning culture’. It linked programmes related to adult literacy, early childhood development, health, science (in partnership with higher education), small business skills development, sports and recreation, and second chance learning, with personal (individual) and community (collective) development, as well as promoting local citizen actions to the broader Cape Town community. Presently in the same community there is a campaign with the slogan: ‘Proudly Mannenberg – a place of learning not of crime’.

Another example is the pioneering collaborative events amongst the four Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), which don’t have a history of working together, which has led to a standing committee being set up to promote the relationships between higher education and the province.

The LCF was also influential in the establishment by the provincial Departments of Economic Affairs and Education of a process that produced a Human Resource Development Strategy (HRDS) for the province. This has stressed the significance of linkages and partnerships within a learning province framework.

Lessons from the LCF

In summary, the LCF has helped to move ideas of lifelong learning beyond rhetoric to implementation. It has profiled lifelong learning that is concerned with economic development and social equity and redress. This has been possible because of the particular socio-economic imperatives in the area, and also because of the composition of the Steering Committee, which has had fairly strong civil society and government representation. A new stage has now been reached, with the establishment of an independent non-profit company that brings together the four social partners, business, government, labour and civil society, plus higher education, the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), and the LCF, and which will promote and advocate the Learning Cape.

The LCF has highlighted, in important ways, that to work out of silos takes practice. It requires people who can facilitate the processes that key into important issues for the different sectors. It takes long-term vision and sustained commitment to working together. It requires ongoing advocacy to motivate and to mobilise resources to support the activities. These have captured the imagination of many people and have given hope that creating a learning region may be possible. It is seen to have enormous potential to be a vehicle for institutions and individuals to learn to behave differently. Trust has been built amongst a diverse set of practitioners and institutions. It is, however, very fragile, and requires constant vigilance in order to ensure that one sector, institution, or individual does not dominate and so render others passive.

‘Optimism of the will, pessimism of the intellect’

In a context where the levels of historical and structural distrust nationally are so deep, what point is there to aspiring to build a learning region, which has high levels of social capital and trust as prerequisites? What purpose is there in a world in which there are contradictory impulses and pressures, which on the one hand promote ideas of social cohesion as integral to economic development; and on the other, a kind of ‘casino capitalism’ often dominates, which encourages extreme forms of competition and individualisation, with distrust amongst people, institutions and regions as the result?

The answers to these questions cannot be given at a local level alone but have to take into account the interconnectedness and interdependence of all of us. At the various levels of governance, it is important to recognise that a democratic constitution and democratic institutional structures do not guarantee democratic practices. Institution building takes time and members of new organisations have to learn to trust one another and gradually establish common rules and routines. Processes of trust-building are critical to building democracy and they take place over extended periods. Truth-telling, justice, solidarity, and equality have to become embedded in the ways of life of people, most of whom have only known injustice and inequality, in order to secure the development of institutional trustworthiness. While there are many examples that highlight the limited levels of social capital and trust in South Africa, there are signs that indicate that focused, sustained, and honest interventions can turn distrust to trust. The LCF is one amongst several examples where this is happening. The idea of the ‘learning region’ can therefore be used developmentally to build democratic practices within and amongst institutions.

One of the values of thinking about development within a geographical entity such as a learning province is that it is spatially contained. It enables politicians and citizens to grapple with socio-economic issues at a local level. While the local environment can only be fully understood within an analysis of the bigger national and global pictures, focusing on the local is easier to manage conceptually for most people. It is also physically possible to interact with people and institutions to build new relationships of trust.

Notions of development within the learning region that argue for ‘joined up’ approaches by government, civil society, labour, and business make it possible to recognise that development is not a linear process but must be enacted in more holistic ways. What may be seen on one hand as disparate development initiatives can be conceptualised on the other as related pieces in the development jigsaw puzzle. A key example of how a learning region enables new conversations and approaches to development is in relation to lifelong learning. This is an abstract notion barely understood by many politicians and development practitioners, but through the learning region discourse, lifelong learning gains some meaning within the socio-economic development debates.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have suggested that the notion of a learning region, within a context where social capital and trust is often in short supply, can have a developmental purpose. It can provide a framework for a capable agency to strengthen democratic citizenship and so contribute to the enhancement of social capital and trust. There does seem to be evidence that development does not just depend on the stocks of social capital, but also on the agency of community leaders in drawing upon those resources to realise development goals.

In answer to the questions that I posed at the beginning of this paper, it seems that lifelong learning is not necessarily only for the rich. The conclusion that can be drawn from the example of the Learning Cape is that setting up a framework for a learning region can enhance and develop precisely that social capital and institutional trust required. Research into social capital and trust within a developmental framework are only just beginning in South Africa, but they clearly challenge us to think deeply on what holds us together as a collective and what pushes us apart. While we’re not in a position to answer these questions, just the process of asking them promotes serious reflections on democracy, citizenship, and development, which connect individuals and communities both locally and globally.

My argument therefore is that building communities of trust at whatever level in South Africa needs to take very seriously the legacies of distrust with which we live. The processes need also to be located as part of the bigger development jigsaw puzzle that connects us locally, regionally and globally.

Partnerships for Quality Education

Graeme Bloch

Education Policy Analyst, Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA)

This conference offers the opportunity to talk about education, to keep education issues on the agenda, and to mainstream our critiques and concerns and plans, as we design better education systems for quality education.

Because education – as the World Bank made clear just this week in its latest World Development Report – is one of the most important things one can do for development. Education, begun early and with clear developmental principles, can be one of the greatest contributors to equity. It enhances the ability of all people to take advantage of their basic human rights, and to make the claims that are necessary to allow full growth of talents and abilities in a productive and sustainable social environment.

To talk about education in a Southern African and African context is even more important. As we stand poised on the real possibilities of economic growth underpinned by the expansive plans of the New Partnership for Africa’s

Development (NEPAD), education is recognised as a key component of realising and sustaining Africa's potentialities. As the G8 and the Blair commission have underlined, investment in human resources is one of the highest priorities in all of the plans for infrastructure and investment rollout. Do we have the capabilities to ensure that the direction, maintenance, and forward planning of all these initiatives will be decided according to African priorities and remain in African hands?

How we handle our own education decisions and programmes, how we prioritise and focus, will provide some of the answers.

I think that, in South Africa, we still find ourselves on the waves of optimism that have taken us through our first decade of democracy. We have seen institutions of democracy form and solidify, and remain stable under some very trying and testing situations. Democracy, good governance, and the rule of law have become well-established principles in how we conduct our lives.

The economy has grown; our broad policies have changed from a period of macroeconomic stabilisation and even tightening under Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) to our present more optimistic outlook, with vast government plans for infrastructure-led investment, growth of 6%, and – hopefully – job-creation. A significant programme of welfare benefits, including a pension and child-grants system unparalleled in the developing world, makes a serious impact on poverty, especially in rural areas. The provision of basic services such as electricity and water has transformed the lives of millions.

In relation to education, the tasks related to changing years of colonial and apartheid education were never going to be easy. As educationist Luis Crouch has noted, what has been achieved in so short a time is amazing. Even just the creation of a single national department absorbed enormous energies and effort. Deracialisation, new norms and standards, new structures and curricula, and a raft of legislation, show the level of activity and policy growth.

Matriculation pass rates have improved. More and more black students are finding their way into higher education. Daily we see the fruits and products of new generations coming up, bright, spunky, confident, searching for opportunity to get ahead.

But there have been serious mistakes and gaps. Many of these, I think, were a result of our very optimism, our perhaps naïve belief in the power of systems-level change, and an underestimation of the social and educational complexity of dealing both with new challenges and deep-rooted backlogs.

In this context, there are some harsh criticisms that can be made. It seems to me that we must acknowledge the problem and name it. In South Africa, many have referred to an education crisis.

Those in the classroom frontline – the teachers – struggle to manage the content changes and policy overload. Poor levels of support and hostile conditions have led to alienation, insecurity about Outcomes-Based Education (OBE), and often a desire to leave. There is a systematic flight from township schools by learners.

Few want to be teachers anymore. Training in the universities is expensive and hard to access for rural students. In the Western Cape, I am told, there is only one Foundation-Phase African in teacher training. Sixty per cent of trainees are white women, who probably have little intention of township teaching.

It is a miracle that so much is achieved, that teachers remain and do what teachers should, encouraging, teaching, and building, showing their charges a way.

For most children, the gaps are vast. Only the top quintile (mostly white in formerly-white Model C schools) performs appropriately. The majority can barely read or write. A recent study showed that, in Model C schools, 65% of sixth graders could read and count at appropriate levels, which in itself is unimpressive, and that less than 1% of Africans could! Maths and science scores rival the world's worst. There are only a few more passes at matriculation level than there were 10 years ago. Huge disparities exist between former (white) Model C schools and township

and rural schools, which are often no more than warehouses or sinkholes where almost half drop out. Even those who finish, fail to find work.

It is not surprising that the pressure on higher education is so strong, as it is the one avenue out. Universities cannot handle the knowledge backlogs, the transformation pressures, the lack of funds to guarantee access and structures to ensure throughput and success. The road to a renewed and strong vocational/technical Further Education and Training (FET) college system is still a way off. Model C and university teachers remain largely white.

Throughout the system, there is disjuncture and bureaucracy that holds up rather than encourages delivery. It is the poor and rural who pay. From a high of over 7% of gross domestic product (GDP), provincial expenditure has dropped to below 5%. Structures, from district to province, at school level and in the community, fail to play their part.

Researchers report an overwhelming sense of 'sadness' in young township dropouts, the products of the second stream of a dual education system. Even where learners can squeeze their way into tertiary education, dropping out and unemployment are rife. For 60% to 80% of learners, education condemns them to a life of poverty and exclusion on the margins of the second economy. They are overwhelmingly poor and black.

Just when their lives should be full of opportunity, our young people's futures evaporate in front of their eyes.

Even though I say these things about South Africa with its many achievements, a country that has largely met its Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), just a cursory glance at the country reports on the MDGs for education in the rest of SADC would show that the outlook is hardly rosy there either.

It seems to me that we have made many mistakes. We are at a point where we need to make assessments and revisions appropriate to the second decade of our freedom.

More specifically, in the context of this conference, what have the achievements of SAQA itself been, and what is the place of a national qualifications framework going forward? What contribution can it make to rescuing our education and setting it on a sound footing?

I am not an expert on qualifications issues. I do hear organisations on the ground complain about lack of clarity and information, bureaucracy, and complicated procedure. Both SAQA and the SETA system have come in for much public criticism around their delivery scale and impact. What should be a gateway to improved, easier, and more flexible training opportunities is often seen as a roadblock. At conferences, such as the recent Kenton education conference, I have heard sharp words expressed about whether claimed achievements are illusory or real.

I cannot speak to the truth of these critiques, but we need to address them and be fearless about the conclusions that we reach.

Perhaps more worrying are the warnings of Michael Young, himself very influential in formulating and driving the set-up of SAQA. He writes (in *Education in Retrospect*, HSRC, 2001): The South African experience of reform dramatises the limitations as well as the potential of social scientists as both shapers and predictors of change. In doing so, it reminds us that social scientists are not so different from political activists and politicians; they tend to believe what they want to believe and choose the theories that seem most congruent with their beliefs.

On the other hand, the more pragmatic view of change as a process of policy maturation is also useful. It reminds us of the inherent fallibility of even the best of policy intentions. Perhaps it is not just a question of lost idealism, of policy makers giving way to practical exigencies, or governments not willing to grasp the nettle. It may be more a matter of grappling with the complexities of educational reform, and of continuing to examine assumptions about knowledge and learning in different policies, as well as the multiple uses that can be made of qualifications by governments and individual learners.

‘Getting it wrong’ and admitting mistakes in a thoughtful and responsible way – whether as a policy theorist and researcher or as someone involved in policy implementation – has its advantages; it is likely to offer more hope for the future than the superficial advocacy of ‘either/or’ solutions.

The experience of the United Kingdom (UK) in the period from 1987 to the mid 1990s was of developing a bureaucracy and registering large numbers of vocational qualifications, few of which were used.

The new basis of trust was not there; users either continued with old qualifications because, in a pragmatic sense, they ‘worked’, or did not use qualifications at all. My conclusion is that we need to look again at (a) the origins of educational divisions in different countries, (b) the unintended consequences of making qualifications the driver of educational reform, (c) the purpose of integration and the extent to which it is the major or only strategy for reducing inequalities, and (d) the lessons that may be learned from other countries where integration has not been a major issue or strategy (Lasonen & Young, 1998).

Establishing a single, comprehensive National Qualifications Framework is a massively ambitious project. Various kinds of qualifications frameworks are under discussion in many countries; however, there are no examples of one that has been fully implemented. I have recently called for an indaba of stakeholders to work on our solutions. There are multiple pockets of excellence in our education system that must be the basis for renewal.

How do we build them and others like them?

It is quite clear that teacher support is needed above all. Everything possible must be done to help teachers to teach, to improve their knowledge, their time on the job, their focus and sense of worth. Effort, clear materials and infrastructure are there to enhance the magic and graft of teachers and learners in the classroom.

The Development Bank of Southern Africa has moved to expand its involvement in education, to consider a high-level think tank to contribute to ideas and to explore practical (investment) projects from early childhood development to student loans. We are planning a conference with the University of the Witwatersrand School of Education, the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) and DBSA, under the NEPAD banner, to examine investment choices in Africa with a SADC-wide focus.

This is a challenge to the public to do the same – to commit, to renew involvement, to mobilise, and to strengthen structures and systems so that they really work. We need to get together and discuss our solutions. There is an obvious truth in the title of this conference – we need communities of trust: to hear each other, to test and criticise fearlessly, to develop our solutions, and to find focused priorities that are realistic, implementable, and have impact.

It is not for me to say what that means for qualifications-based structures and approaches, both in South Africa and in SADC. I am sure that is precisely the point of this conference. I hope I have not been unduly critical. The spirit of my talk is one of renewal and optimism, of finding the appropriate place and niche for our work so that it can be effective, so that it occupies a space and makes claims that are meaningful.

The only criterion is the impact on the education, the skills and creativity, the emotional development and cognitive skills of our future generations.

We owe it to them to ‘get it right’.

The Development of a Southern African Development Community Qualifications Framework

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Why do we need the SADCQF?

While we see the development of qualifications frameworks as an education process and in line with the international trends, for SADC it is also a political and socio-economic process. The education system in SADC and the development of the SADC Qualifications Framework (SADCQF) need to be put in a context:

1. The region was once disintegrated as a result of the partition and the famous scramble for Africa during the colonial era.
2. SADC is a region still backward and in a hurry to catch up and compete with the rest of the world as part of the awakening African giant.
3. There is a need for regional integration, unity and peace, and the reversal of the negative effects of the past on both the African continent as a whole and the SADC region in particular.
4. There is a need to consolidate the gains of independence as required by the SADC Treaty.
5. There is also the need to revitalise education, localise and integrate the sector, and make it relevant and make sense to the people of SADC and the region as a whole.
6. Education must enhance both labour and students' mobility in the region.

It is in this context that SADC needs a regional qualifications framework and, above all, one that is agreed on, homemade and developmental. There is also a need to compete globally and be in line with the rest of the world.

The vision of SADC and the goals of the Protocol on Education and Training and the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan

In developing SADCQF, the region is guided by the ideals of SADC and what the region seeks to achieve. These are:

1. The vision of SADC as outlined by the Treaty is that of a common future, and a future within a regional community, one that will ensure economic well being, and an improved standard of living and quality of life of the people of SADC (SADC, 1992).
2. The goal of the Protocol on Education and Training (SADC, 1997) is 'to progressively achieve the equivalence, harmonisation and standardisation of education and training systems in the (r)egion'. The approach, however, is for a negotiated and agreed process and not an imposed SADCQF, and this approach is adopted by all the protocols of SADC.
3. The priorities of the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP), which is a programme of action adopted by SADC for the next 15 years (SADC, 2004), are outlined as being: trade liberalisation and the development of a common market, possibly by 2008; infrastructure support for greater regional integration and development; human and social development on cross-cutting issues like HIV/AIDS, gender equity; and the enhancement of science and technology and ICT. For human development, the key focus is on improving the availability of educated, well-informed and skilled, healthy, productive, etc. personnel for poverty alleviation, socio-economic development and transformation of the region. The RISDP is also broadly guided by the SADC vision and overall framework of regional integration and co-operation of the SADC member states.

Definition and conceptual frame for the SADCQF

Generally, it is within the context of the definition or the origin of qualifications frameworks that the SADCQF will be developed.

Quale, qualia (plural), and qualis, from which the term qualifications is derived, is a Latin word that means 'quality' or a thing with 'certain qualities.' It is the quality and improved performance and impact of the sector that SADC is after, as well as making it part of the regional process for integration and community building, as required by both the SADC Protocol and the SADC Treaty, that the region aspires for. The aim is thus to make education make sense for the individual, the SADC member states, and the region at large, and the development of the SADCQF being a crowning process for it all. When one also looks at international efforts and trends in the development of qualifications frameworks, the greatest or most deep-rooted intention is the concern to improve the quality of the sector, based on the assumption that transparent and credible assessment and accreditation systems are among the most powerful aspects of improving education quality and the impact of the sector. For this reason, the development of the SADCQF will also be through a negotiated and agreed process in search of the best output or outcomes-based qualifications. Also, what is relevant and of quality today may not be the same tomorrow. This also applies to the SADCQF, which will have to be developed with open minds, and in search of the best or quality education acceptable to all SADC member states.

Implementation of the SADCQF and the areas of focus

Home-grown SADCQF and NQFs

Although the region will be broad-minded and ready to share ideas with the rest of the world, SADC is committed to a home-grown qualifications framework, one based on the history and the need for decolonisation and emancipation of the region, including the education sector. This has been one of the main objectives of the NQF in South Africa, and the same applies to all member states and the region at large. Browsing through the Internet on the vast literature on qualifications frameworks in Europe (www.esib.org/policies/statementqf.htm), the following principle was noted for the European qualifications framework: A European framework must be the result of a European process of discussions and deliberations which is inclusive in terms of countries and stakeholders. The same philosophy and aspiration applies to the SADCQF and the NQFs in member states.

Research, data management, and documentation

This is a fundamental process for the development of the SADCQF, and nothing is as disastrous as trying to build a regional qualifications framework, or indeed a national one, without adequate information on the sector for which or from which the qualifications framework is being built. Research and data management are key components for the development and operationalisation of the SADCQF. Enhanced, systematic, and open information sharing and flow is the foundation of an effective, well-established and operational qualifications framework.

Stakeholder participation and advocacy

Unless there is strong involvement and agreement by all parties on every process, there will be the danger of an unacceptable, poorly functioning and under-utilised qualifications framework for SADC. One needs to remember that the SADCQF is to be developed, not just as an additional education structure, but one to be used and to benefit society (SADC, 2001). This includes students, employers, academic institutions, workers, society at large, and the SADC region as a whole. All of these must be involved and there is a need for their input and buy-in to the process. They do not want to wake up one day to find a completely different system in terms of assessment and the determination of their qualifications in place, and the same applies to industry, academic institutions, etc., whose input and involvement in the process must be strongly encouraged.

On advocacy, it is important that the establishment of the SADCQF and the structures put in place are widely accepted and appreciated by all in SADC or the beneficiaries of the SADCQF. The region must not create a framework that is foreign, unappreciated, and not widely utilised by the people and educational institutions of SADC.

Resource mobilisation and development of institutional framework/management structures

This is an area where we are severely constrained and faltering, both as a region and for the majority of member states. Currently, there is no budget or financial allocation, including at the Secretariat level, for the establishment of the SADCQF, and the same applies for the NQFs in many of the member states. Also, in many cases for the member states, such frameworks are seen as part of an examinations or accreditation process, and in some countries the NQF is only considered important for technical and vocational education and training, and not the entire education sector.

On institutional structures and management, only the Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation (TCCA) currently exists, with no other structure to support the establishment and operationalisation of the SADCQF. This includes for research or data management purposes, as well as the determination of equivalences. The same applies to full-time or part-time staff for such purposes or the tasks in the establishment and operationalisation of the SADCQF. The idea of a qualification agency and implementation unity, as proposed by the Concept Paper on the SADCQF developed by the TCCA, is still being discussed and needs to be considered seriously. Although it may be an expensive process, the structures are needed if the SADCQF is to be established and to have the impact required on the quality and performance of the education sector and the achievement of the objectives of the SADC Treaty, the Protocol on Education and Training, and the RISDP.

Regional and international networking and competitiveness

Africa has been behind and passive for too long. It needs to transform from a sleeping giant to an aggressive and competing one – one also to be feared! The SADC region must take a lead in the development of a regional qualifications framework, and to situate the process in the context of national, regional and international competitiveness. It is for this reason that the SADCQF cannot develop in isolation, although it must have a home-grown base and be rooted in the needs of the education sector in the region.

The role of the SADCQF

Promoting the ideals of SADC

This has already been reflected on, and the SADCQF must be considered an important tool for regional integration and enhancing the role and impact of education in SADC.

Making education make sense and revitalising the sector

This is a key expectation from the SADCQF, given the diversity and in some cases irrelevance of education systems inherited from the past. Officially opening the TCCA Meeting in Maseru in March 2005 that developed the Concept Paper to guide the development of the SADCQF, the Honourable Minister of Education and Training, Mr Hohlabi Tsekoa (2005), outlined how the SADCQF, among other things, ‘can assist in the recognition of competencies of people who have skills but no paper qualifications and thus offer flexibility, diversity and recovery from the dead-end situation’ imposed by the former education systems. He further underlined how the regional integration of SADC is highly dependent on the quality and relevance of the education sector and how, with comparability and recognition of qualifications in the region, there will be true regional integration for a better future. To this effect, the successful implementation of the SADCQF will assist in streamlining the multiple and diverse education systems existing in SADC today, without necessarily creating a uniform education system. The SADCQF will also revitalise and enhance the impact of the sector, as well as promoting greater labour and student mobility (SADC, 1999).

Productivity and the socio-economic transformation of SADC

Since we do not eat qualifications or qualifications frameworks, it would be a pity if SADC establishes structures, namely NQFs and the SADCQF, that have no bearing on productivity, competitiveness, and an improved life for the people of SADC. Today, when we see a gadget with ‘Made in China’ or any other country on it, this is an indicator of the level of skills and the quality of qualifications offered by that country. We want qualifications that are outcomes-based and impact oriented. The SADCQF will only be relevant inasmuch as it improves productivity and the quality of life of the people of SADC. We must move from the focus on theoretical degrees and diplomas, which can be a source of frustration and also poverty when individuals cannot be employed. Let the quality of the

qualifications be in the service provided, just as we say the proof of the pudding is in the eating. It is further important to be creative in the development of the SADCQF and not establish and adopt a static framework. Reading through the Internet, one comes across initiatives by some countries to come up with an even higher qualification than a PhD, and to continue progressing. It is through such progressiveness and flexibility that the SADCQF can be an effective tool for transforming society and the region and not be a tool for paralysis.

Human resource development and capacity-building for the region

The Protocol on Education and Training (SADC,1997), for example, has the following principles on which co-operation in education and training is based:

- That human centred development is one of the most essential means by which to achieve the objectives of the SADC Treaty.
- That the development of human resources to its fullest potential is the sine qua non for tackling socio-economic problems facing the region.
- That high literacy and numeracy are major contributory factors to the achievement of sustainable development.
- That socio-economic and technological research is crucial for sustainable development.
- That no SADC member state can alone offer the full range of world-quality education and training programmes at affordable costs and on a sustainable basis.
- That programmes of human resource development, utilisation and increased productivity must have both national and regional dimensions.
- That a concerted effort in education and training by member states is necessary to equip the region adequately for the 21st century and beyond.
- That a concerted effort can only be effected through the implementation of well-coordinated, comprehensive and integrated programmes of education and training that address regional needs.

With these objectives, the SADCQF is widely expected to be a tool for enhancement of the performance of the sector and of individuals in society. It is neither the development of the SADCQF for its own sake, nor the improvement of education also for its own sake that is sought, but the advancement of society, the community and the people of SADC.

Facilitation of student and labour mobility

With an effective and well-functioning SADCQF and the facilitation of credits transfer, the mobility of students and labour within and between SADC member states will also be enhanced. The SADC community cannot really be created and the economic transformation of the region achieved if labour mobility is not facilitated and students are not allowed free movement between the institutions existing in SADC to ensure enhanced and advanced skills development (SAQA, 2003). The development of the SADCQF is also part of the processes of building a strong cadre for regional development and enhancing the competitiveness among institutions of higher learning, as students will be free to choose to attend the best institutions in SADC.

Regional unity, integration and global competitiveness

With a well-functioning SADCQF, a major step towards regional integration and unity will have been achieved. Above all, education is an important unifying factor, and this holds true for the SADCQF: united we stand, and divided we fall.

With the regional unity and integration likely to be brought by the SADCQF, it is further hoped that the global competitiveness of the region will be enhanced and the mobility and competitiveness of the people of SADC both

within and outside the region also enhanced. These are only a few of the advantages of or roles to be played by the SADCQF that SADC is likely to benefit from. As outlined earlier, this is a developmental and incremental process that cannot be seen to end and of which the impact cannot be envisaged. The more that the SADCQF is improved and positively transformed, the greater the impact that it is likely to bring.

Executing the task and the efforts to date

With our aspiration for a home-grown SADCQF, no one will do the job for us but ourselves! Although the TCCA has made commendable efforts to spearhead the development of the SADCQF, more should be done, and there are no full-time members to execute the task and operationalise the SADCQF. This includes the establishment of an effective and up-to-date data management system; the determination and assessment of qualification equivalences or their comparability; and dissemination of the information for use by member states, academic institutions, and employers, etc. The focus has also mainly been on theoretical aspects of the SADCQF, for example, the Report on Existing Education Qualifications in the SADC Region (SADC, 2001b), which is becoming outdated, or the Concept Paper on the Development of the SADCQF (SADC, 2005). Decisions on the establishment of a SADC Qualifications Agency (SADCQA) and Implementation Unit (IU) for the SADCQF have also been delayed, and this is affecting progress on the development of the SADCQF. While the argument that it may be expensive to establish SADCQA might be true, such a structure is critical if the SADCQF is to be established and operational.

Although some member states have made significant progress in establishing their NQFs, which is an advantage for the acceleration of the SADCQF, and must be congratulated, it would be ideal if all SADC countries had the same commitment for their NQFs and, finally, the SADCQF. Currently, there is still a lot of work to be done before the SADCQF can be established and its envisaged impact realised.

Time frame

The directive or requirement by the Integrated Committee of Ministers (ICM) and the SADC Council of Ministers is for the SADCQF to be established within five years (2005–2010). This is a short space of time, and five years have already elapsed since the Protocol entered into force in 2000, and the TCCA was established in and has been operational since 1997. Although SADC restructuring has contributed to the delay and disruption in the development of the SADCQF, more has to be done to accelerate the process and to take advantage of the political will and support of both the Council of Ministers and ICM. The Australian Qualifications Framework, for example, was also established within a five-year period (1995–2000). The same could be achieved for the SADCQF with commitment and effort on the part of all the member states and the region as a whole. The process would also continue to be ongoing, particularly for a high-quality SADCQF.

Advantages and disadvantages of a regional qualifications framework

Advantages

These are many, and the majority have already been highlighted. There is also, however, the issue of pride that would arise from a home-grown SADCQF, which would be a symbol of unity, stability, and regional integration. The process of closely working together, started by the TCCA, has been a good beginning for a long process of regional integration, and this must be maintained and sustained until the SADCQF is established and operational.

Disadvantages

While the advantages of the SADCQF are many, disadvantages also exist and the region must be aware of these.

- There is a danger of closing in and rejecting what lies outside, with some qualifications and those who hold them being seen as superior and held with esteem.
- The SADCQF could be a source of frustration and paralysis, especially if there is no transparency and an inadequate information flow.

- It is possible that what is not understood or is considered unimportant, such as some training activities considered traditional and not important, could be ignored.
- There is a possibility of increasing bureaucracy, although this could also be true if the SADCQF is not implemented.
- There may be a lack of honesty and trustworthiness in the process, with square pegs being forced to fit into round holes.
- There may be a preference for a certain level of education or a sub-sector at the expense of others through stakeholders not having a complete picture of the SADCQF.
- There is also the danger of being dictated to by foreign standards, especially if there is a vacuum.

Constraints

There are many constraints, and among them are the following, with some already being experienced:

- We are not yet working together as a region, with low commitment by some countries, including commitment to their own NQFs.
- The majority of people are not informed and thus there is a need for advocacy. For some, it appears to be a fashionable thing to do, and others feel constrained to do so because of SADC pressure, and the SADCQF and NQFs are therefore not taken seriously by all.
- We have not yet come to the stage of supporting each other as a family and proudly highlighting achievements and what can be achieved as a region.
- There are financial limitations and the absence of well-established and effective institutional mechanisms. This includes an Implementation Unit for the establishment and operationalisation of the SADCQF on a full-time basis.
- Key players are not well identified and empowered for the task.
- The action/strategic plans, including the Concept Paper developed by the TCCA, are not seriously adhered to or implemented.
- An agreement on the form or structure of the SADCQF is not yet in place or firmly binding. Currently, no agreement or convention on the SADCQF has been signed or adopted by the region.
- International and regional linkages, including with the African Union, are not well established. This is critical if the SADCQF is not to develop and operate in isolation. Way forward

What we have begun is a long process, which can only be achieved through commitment and adherence to the principles of establishing an appropriate SADCQF. The five-year period within which we aspire to establish the RQF is a short time, especially with the slow pace at which the region is moving and the aspiration for a home-grown SADCQF. We must gird our loins and make a leap to avoid a borrowed or foreign SADCQF obtained through the displacement of a vacuum. SADC must also ensure the sustainability and application of the SADCQF once it is in place.

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The impact of the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework on education and training in South Africa

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Introduction

The South African National Qualifications Framework (NQF) was conceptualised over a period of more than 14 years starting in the early 1980s. The old Commonwealth, most notably Australia and England, significantly influenced thinking in South Africa, as well as other dominant discourses of the day, particularly Freirean thinking on oppression and liberation. Evidence of these influences includes the virtually unquestioned acceptance of outcomes-based education and training (OBET), lifelong learning, and even the commodification of education.

The NQF was formally established in 1995 with the promulgation of the SAQA Act (South Africa, 1995). The objectives of the NQF were clearly stipulated in the Act, namely to:

1. create an integrated national framework for learning achievements;
2. facilitate access to and mobility and progression within education, training and career paths;
3. enhance the quality of education and training;
4. accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities; and thereby
5. contribute to the full personal development of each learner and the social and economic development of the nation at large.

In March 1997, the SAQA Executive Officer assumed duties and the implementation of the NQF started in earnest. After only five years, in 2002, a Ministerial Study Team was appointed to 'recommend ways in which the implementation of the South African NQF...could be streamlined and accelerated' (South Africa, 2002:i). The appointment of the Study Team set in motion an extended review process of the NQF that has been characterised by internecine power struggles and contestations – a review process that to the present day remains to be concluded. Importantly, it was found that NQF-related research activity and output had been appropriately confined to the preparation and publication of policy documents, but that these should be broadened to include longitudinal and baseline studies, as well as strategic partnership projects with universities and research institutes (South Africa, 2003). In recognition of this recommendation, SAQA embarked on a longitudinal comparative study, the NQF Impact Study, in March 2003 to measure the impact of the NQF on the transformation of education and training in South Africa.

Supported by two international experts, Gary Granville from Ireland and Ron Tuck from Scotland (who also served on the Ministerial Study Team), and together with Seamus Needham from the SAQA regional office, the authors of this paper spent much of the last three years doing interviews, conducting focus groups, and analysing results – this

also included spending a considerable amount of time in developing the research design (discussed in the next section). As a result, two reports were published:

- National Qualifications Framework Impact Study. Report 1. Establishing the criteria against which to measure progress of the NQF (SAQA, 2004)
- National Qualifications Framework Impact Study. Report 2. Establishing a baseline against which to measure progress of the NQF (SAQA, 2005).

In the first two sections of this paper, we briefly discuss the research design of the NQF Impact Study and then present the key findings as contained in the two reports. In the final section, we stand back and consider how, in the light of the findings of the NQF Impact Study, the NQF has impacted on how we think and practice equality, democracy, and quality in South Africa.

Research design of the NQF Impact Study

Based on three important considerations that underpinned the research design, namely replicability, cost-effectiveness, and credibility (also see Tuck et al., 2004), the research design of the NQF Impact Study (adapted from SAQA, 2005):

- Was premised on the five NQF Objectives
- Was longitudinal and comparative
- Comprised three common components: contextualisation, data gathering, and findings and recommendations
- Used an indicator-based methodology
- Used purposive quota sampling
- Used data collection through interviews, analysis of qualifications, and a national survey.

Each of the above design aspects is briefly discussed below.

The five NQF Objectives formed a fixed point of reference that allowed the research design to evolve and yet remain relatively stable. This decision also meant that the research design was underpinned by the assumption that the NQF Objectives were still valid and well supported. The research design is longitudinal and comparative in nature, to be repeated in consecutive cycles. The first cycle was completed in 2003 (SAQA, 2004) and although it included a pilot study, it focused mainly on the development of the research design. The second cycle established a baseline against which subsequent measurements would be compared and was completed late in 2004 (SAQA, 2005). The third cycle is planned for 2007, the fourth in 2009, and so forth. It is only when the third cycle is completed in 2007 that a definitive statement on the impact of the NQF can be made. In the interim, the Cycle 2 results are informative in that they already show particular trends and changes in the education and training system.

Three common components are included in each application of the research design:

- *Contextualisation* - to outline the origins of the NQF and to describe current issues of NQF implementation both in South Africa and internationally, thereby defining a context for interpreting and using findings from the NQF Impact Study
- *Data gathering* – using structured sampling methods
- *Development of findings and recommendations* – based on the analysis of the data gathered, and related to the context and the period in which the study takes place

An indicator methodology was used to facilitate the gathering of appropriate data, the analysis of such data, and the findings and recommendations that would emanate from each cycle. In the context of the NQF Impact Study, an indicator is defined as:

... a policy-relevant, quantitative and/or qualitative statistic designed to provide a profile of the current condition, the stability or change, the functioning, and/or the effect of the NQF on the transformation of education and training in South Africa (SAQA, 2004:16).

After extensive piloting in Cycle 1, seventeen impact indicators were employed in Cycle 2 (see Table 2).

The sampling approach for the NQF Impact Study was based on pragmatic considerations (see Table 1):

The need to develop a research design that would be repeatable was deemed more important than representing all sectors and groupings on a proportional basis. It was therefore decided to use purposive quota sampling (SAQA, 2005:17).

A questionnaire was developed, piloted and adjusted before being sent to potential respondents. Data collection comprised three components (SAQA, 2005):

- *Stakeholder interviews and focus groups* – 111 interviews and 12 focus groups were held across all nine South African provinces in the period June to November 2004. The interviews and focus groups were transcribed and thereafter analysed. A quantitative analysis was completed on MS Access and Excel. A qualitative analysis was performed with ATLAS.ti using 91 codes premised on the 17 Impact Indicators.
- *Analysis of qualifications on the National Learners' Records Database (NLRD)* – a quantitative summary of qualifications (including unit standards) and learner data on the NLRD as available on 31 January 2005 was used. This quantitative summary was supported by a qualitative analysis, performed by an independent expert, of a sample of qualifications on the NLRD. The analysis aimed, in particular, to investigate the extent to which the current qualifications registered on the NQF addressed the education and training needs of learners and South African society. The qualitative analysis was limited to regular⁶ qualifications in three particular sectors: Physical Planning and Construction; Mining and Minerals; and Hospitality, Travel, Tourism and Gaming.
- *National survey* – an independent research company was contracted to administer a national survey.

Data was collected according to the NQF stakeholder categories as reflected in Table 1:

| Category | Strata | Quota |
|------------|---|-------|
| Providers | General Education and Training (GET) band, including Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) and secondary schools ⁷ | 143 |
| | Further Education and Training (FET) band | 79 |
| | Higher Education and Training (HET) band | 49 |
| Businesses | Large | 71 |
| | Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) | 39 |

| | | |
|--------------------------|---|-----|
| Organised Labour | Education | 10 |
| | Other | 32 |
| Quality Assurance Bodies | Education and Training Quality Assurance Bodies (ETQAs) | 54 |
| | Professional Bodies | 32 |
| Standards Setting Bodies | National Standards Bodies (NSBs) | 32 |
| | Standards Generating Bodies (SGBs) | 38 |
| Government Departments | Department of Education (DoE) | 26 |
| | Department of Labour (DoL) | 18 |
| Total | | 623 |

Table 1: Sampling and stratification for the NQF Impact Study (SAQA, 2005)

Key findings from the NQF Impact Study

As discussed above, the research design included a set of 17 impact indicators that were used to gather empirical data, but also to facilitate the analysis and findings of the research.

Table 2 is a summary of the findings of the study ordered according to the 17 impact indicators. In each case the impact indicator was rated based on the gathered evidence.

The following ratings are used:

- *High Positive Impact (HP)*: The research evidence shows a marked positive change across most of the education and training system as it pertains to the NQF.
- *Moderate Impact (M)*: The research evidence shows moderate positive change across the education and training system.
- *Minimal/mixed Impact (MM)*: The research evidence shows minimal positive and/or a mix of positive and negative change across the education and training system.
- *Negative Impact (N)*: The research evidence shows a marked negative change across most of the education and training system as it pertains to the NQF.

| Impact indicator | Level of impact | | | |
|--|-----------------|---|----|---|
| | HP | M | MM | N |
| Set 1: The extent to which qualifications address the education and training needs of learners and South | | | | |

| | | | | |
|---|--|----|---|----|
| African society | | | | |
| #1 | Number of qualifications | | M | |
| #2 | Effectiveness of qualifications design | | | MM |
| #3 | Portability of qualifications | | | MM |
| #4 | Relevance of qualifications | | M | |
| #5 | Qualifications uptake and achievement | | | MM |
| #6 | Integrative approach | | | MM |
| Set 2: The extent to which the delivery of learning programmes addresses the education and training needs of learners and South African society | | | | |
| #7 | Equity of access | | M | |
| #8 | Redress practices | | | MM |
| #9 | Nature of learning programmes | HP | | |
| #10 | Quality of learning and teaching | | M | |
| #11 | Assessment practices | | M | |
| #12 | Career and learning pathing | | M | |
| Set 3: The extent to which quality assurance arrangements enhance the effectiveness of education and training | | | | |
| #13 | Number of registered assessors and moderators | | | MM |
| #14 | Number of accredited providers | | | MM |
| #15 | Quality assurance practices | | | MM |
| Set 4: The extent to which the NQF has had a wider social, economic and political impact in building a lifelong learning culture | | | | |
| #16 | Organisational, economic and societal benefits | HP | | |

| | | | | | |
|-----|---|----|--|--|--|
| #17 | Contribution to other national strategies | HP | | | |
|-----|---|----|--|--|--|

Table 2: Impact indicators and levels of impact (SAQA, 2005)

In summary, three indicators were rated as High Positive, six as Moderate, eight as Minimal/Mixed, and none as Negative. The findings are discussed in more detail below.

HP High Positive findings

It was found that the NQF has led to a major redesign of courses (Indicator #9). All South African qualifications are included on the NQF, both those that were developed prior to the NQF (historical qualifications), and those developed through the standards setting structures (new qualifications). Education and training providers submitted their historical qualifications for registration on the NQF between 1998 and 2003 and had to align with NQF requirements, which included an outcomes-based format. All qualifications were therefore 'reformatted' into an outcomes-based format – in some cases simply to comply; in others, careful thought was given to the redesign of the qualifications. The findings suggest that at present:

- There is a high demand for learning programmes based on NQF qualifications (79% of respondents agreed).
- There is a wide range of NQF qualifications available to facilitate curriculum development (66%).
- The quality of learning programmes has improved as a result of using an outcomesbased approach (71%).
- The implementation of the NQF has resulted in improvement to the design of learning programmes (72.6%).

There was strong evidence of the organisational and societal benefits of the NQF (Indicator #16). Many examples of organisational adjustments to facilitate quality assurance processes, such as quality assurance units in universities and human resources sections, were noted.

Although respondents often expressed concerns that these adjustments were unnecessarily bureaucratic, it was apparent that in most cases the organisations benefited from them. The findings in relation to organisational changes and perceived societal benefits suggest that at present:

- The NQF has made an impact on reducing illiteracy and unemployment, the upskilling of the labour force, and building the capacity of SMMEs (67% to 79%).
- Respondents had difficulty in relating the NQF with SADC and African developments – this was mainly because they did not know about such developments.
- Importantly, the economic benefits directly related to the NQF were not yet evident – most respondents indicated that it was too soon to say.

There was also sufficient evidence to be able to say that there is significant alignment between the NQF, the National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS), Tirisano, and the Human Resource Development Strategy (HRDS) (Indicator #17).

M Moderate findings

By March 2005, 8 553 qualifications and 8 208 unit standards had been registered on the NQF. Of the 8 553 qualifications, 8% (696) were unit standard-based, and approximately 10% (829) were new qualifications developed since 1997. Other related findings included:

- There has been a shift in qualification development to NQF Levels 3, 4 and 5.
- Since the establishment of the NQF, a significant number of unit standards have been developed.
- Historical qualifications still form the majority of qualifications registered on the NQF (92%).

Workplace qualifications, learnerships and skills programmes were seen as relevant to the needs of employers (Indicator #4). University qualifications were, however, criticised as not being responsive to the needs of the market and society. School and teacher qualifications were also seen as outdated and not preparing graduates adequately for work. Other findings included:

- Public higher education institutions are frustrated by DoE requirements related to qualification registration processes and lack of involvement in learnerships.
- Private education and training providers are frustrated by the DoE requirements for registration.
- Increased numbers of non-traditional qualifications are becoming available (66% agreed).
- Learnerships were seen as too few, too narrow-focused, too low and not always matching the requirements of the workplace.

There was strong consensus that the equity of access (Indicator #7) had improved – this included people with disabilities, women, learners of all ages and all population groups. Recognition of prior learning (RPL) was, however, noted as an area that requires more attention. It was generally found that although there is strong support for RPL, systemic implementation was lacking (more about this in the next section).

It was agreed that the quality of learning and teaching (indicator #10) had improved.

Findings included:

- More attention is given to the professional development of educators (72%).
- Learning and teaching practices have become more responsive to the need of learners (74%).

There was common agreement that assessment practices (indicator #11) had improved, but had also become more labour-intensive and expensive. Findings included:

- Assessment practices in some higher education institutions have changed significantly.
- Benefits are being reaped from provincial standardisation of school exams.
- Assessment is associated with increased workloads.
- The cost of assessment is seen by many as a barrier to effective practice.

Career and learning pathing (indicator #12) had improved. It was noted that:

- Learners are more aware of career opportunities associated with specific NQF qualifications (67%).

Combined with the three indicators rated as high positive (#9, #16, and #17, discussed in the previous section), the six moderate indicators discussed above suggest that the overall impact of the NQF also lies within this category. As was previously mentioned, this observation is only indicative, and will only be confirmed once the Cycle 3 results are available in 2006/2007.

Although the scope of this paper does not allow for a more detailed discussion on the effectiveness of the research design of the NQF Impact Study, it is important to mention at least one of the methodological findings. It was found

that the methodology employed to determine the levels of impact should be refined, as two distinct variables were being conflated (SAQA, 2005):

1. The extent of the impact of the NQF on the education and training system – mostly concerned with numbers and systemic changes, and
2. Whether the NQF has had a beneficial impact on the education and training system – more concerned with issues of quality, access, redress, etc.

This conflation is most apparent in the following set of minimal/mixed findings.

MM Minimal/Mixed findings

The area with the most significant issues to redress is undoubtedly quality assurance practices (Indicator #15). Findings included:

- Quality assurance practices have improved since the implementation of the NQF (61%).
- Quality assurance practices are regarded as overly bureaucratic and resource intensive (35%).
- SMMEs have been supported.
- One hundred and nineteen Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) have been signed to date, although they appear not to be working well, especially between the Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA) ETQAs and the two band ETQAs (the Council on Higher Education [CHE] and Umalusi).
- Tensions exist between ETQAs due to overlapping responsibilities and differing levels of development.

There has been little progress on portability (indicator #3) and redress (indicator #8). It was found that the development of communities of trust requires more attention. An integrative approach (indicator #6) was also found to be minimal/mixed, mainly due to the identification of both positive and negative changes across the education and training system. Specific findings included:

- Lack of parity of esteem between vocational and academic qualifications.
- NQF qualifications are more portable than non-NQF qualifications (49%).
- Distinct perceptions of the quality of institutions and sectors exist.
- The matriculation certificate is still a major barrier to RPL and redress.
- A limited number of practical examples of integration were found.
- An integrative approach is seen as comprising partnerships and collaboration.

N Negative findings

No indicators were rated as negative.

Here, we are most acutely aware that the lack of negative findings will lead to an interrogation of the research design. We are, however, of the opinion that the lack of negatively rated impact indicators can be substantiated by the research findings, and have therefore opted to stand our ground. Importantly, the fact that none of the impact indicators were rated as negative does not imply that no negative findings were made (see for example some of the findings in the previously discussed minimal/mixed category). What it does mean is that the research evidence did not show a marked negative change across most of the education and training system as it pertains to the NQF.

Equality, democracy, and quality: the impact of the NQF

As indicated at the outset of this paper, we consider it important to also reflect on the findings of the NQF Impact Study from a different point of view; namely as the findings relate to:

- Equality (as opposed to inequality)
- Democracy (as opposed to a surrendering of the democratic project), and
- Quality (as opposed to poor quality) in South Africa.

Although the NQF Impact Study did not explicitly deliberate on these issues, we are of the opinion that the study offers valuable insights that can contribute to the opening of a broader debate, but more importantly, that it identifies key areas for future research. In our discussion, we take as our frame of reference the work of Paulo Freire (see Freire, 1985), which, in our opinion, has significantly influenced the nature of the South African NQF⁸. In this regard, we need to note two important points: we recognise that the NQF has also been influenced by many other philosophies/ideologies; and we do not attempt to give a detailed account of the Freirean influences on NQF development in South Africa, but temporarily postpone such a task to a future endeavour, keeping in mind that Freire's work is not meant to offer 'radical recipes for instant forms of critical pedagogy' (Giroux, 1985 in Freire, 1985:xvii).

Equality

The Collins Concise Dictionary (1985) describes 'equality' as 'the state of being equal'. In terms of our understanding, 'the state of being equal' relates to 'having identical privileges, rights, status' (p. 374). Mehl (2004: 22) makes this understanding explicit by saying:

The way in which society recognises, rewards and measures learning achievement is through qualifications. It is society that provides the ultimate validation of qualifications and accords respect to the bearer. Society awards status and also opportunity and privilege (emphasis added).

In South Africa, with its history of a hugely disparate education and training system, it was considered very important to enable the development of parities of esteem, in other words, to ensure that qualifications are equal in value and equal in significance. The NQF Impact Study therefore investigated the extent to which qualifications attained in different contexts and at different sites are equally valued.

In this section, we briefly explore two aspects of how the NQF has impacted on equality: namely, the equality of learning through the adoption of an integrated approach to education and training (see impact indicator #6) and through increased portability of qualifications (see impact indicator #3), and equity of access through the facilitation of access, mobility and progression (see impact indicator #7).

Equality of learning through an integrated approach

Samuels et al. (2005) suggest that the dominant underlying thinking that implicitly and covertly influenced the development and implementation of the NQF has shifted from the original (Freirean) influences, which led to an attempt to acknowledge and value all forms of learning, including disciplinary, occupational, vocational, and informal and/or non-formal learning (i.e. an integrated or unified NQF), to a greater awareness for the epistemologically different modes of learning and the different modes of knowledge production.

The increased awareness of different models of learning and knowledge production resulted in SAQA adopting an 'integrated approach' to education and training. This shift from the original thinking has led to numerous debates and even contestations, mostly because of a lack of a clear understanding of what is meant by an integrated approach.

In particular, it is evident that there are at least three different understandings of an integrated approach to education and training:

The macro understanding, namely that education and training should be integrated: A number of commentators, such as Mehl and Jansen (SAQA, 2004), have noted that the contestations evident between the two sponsoring departments (DoE and DoL) are the result of the decision not to have a single Ministry of Education and Labour in the post-1994 government. This resulted in what Badat (2002:20) has called the lack of ‘a shared language, understanding and agreement around areas of initiative and co-operation’.

The meso understanding, referring to epistemological differences between the nature and purposes of education and training respectively: Young (2003:10) says that ‘the power of different types of learning is a reality that any NQF has to start from. If it does not it will be a barrier to progression (and) not a way of overcoming barriers’.

The micro understanding, namely in terms of the inclusion of theory and practice in qualifications, curricula and learning programmes; and ‘learning in the ‘context of application’’ (Gibbons, in Kraak, 2000: 40): This last understanding, i.e. at the micro level, in particular, seems to have much support across the education and training spectrum.

This understanding is reflected in:

- The integration of theory and practice
- Partnerships between education and training providers and workplaces
- The application of theory in authentic situations, i.e. in simulated and/or real scenarios.

In our view, this is where the greatest promise for the development of an integrative approach to education and training lies – in what is emerging from the ‘more persuasive logic locked up in daily practice’ (Jansen, 2004: 90). In other words, if it makes educational sense to value theory and practice equally, then the system should respond in ways that will enable integration, in this sense, to take place. Equality of learning could therefore be achieved by valuing learning equally.

Equality of learning through increased portability of qualifications

The principle of portability of qualifications is an attempt to operationalise integration and consequently enhance equality of learning, but as in the case of integration, portability of qualifications has more than one dimension that needs to be considered. In our view there are at least three ways in which portability is understood:

An instrumentalist/technicist view is represented in the design and structure of qualifications and unit standards. This view speaks to the structural possibilities of the NQF – the possibility of credit accumulation and transfer (CAT), namely that agreed standards, applied in a consistent and coherent manner, will enable participants to transfer credits of qualifications or unit standards from one learning institution and/or employer to another.

The second dimension deals with trust and parity of esteem between contexts of learning, i.e. the extent to which different sites of learning will value each other’s qualifications. The third dimension of portability is that of a collaborative and co-operative approach. Essentially, portability seems to be enhanced through collaboration between different partners in education and training where the articulation of credits attained in different contexts is agreed, jointly designed, and mutually recognised.

Equity of access through the facilitation of access, mobility and progression In the responses to the Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 questions on redress, almost all respondents understood redress to be the recognition of prior learning. In our view, however, redress is also about equity of access, i.e. ‘to provide ease of entry to appropriate levels of education and training for all prospective learners in a manner which facilitates progression’ (SAQA, 2005:54). Equity of access is one of the indicators that is currently rated as having a moderate positive impact, and we believe the two should therefore be read and understood together.

If redress is then almost primarily associated with RPL, then it is not only the ‘hard thinking’ that is required, but also the political will to implement the stated ideal. The political will includes making available funding and

resources for the development and implementation of RPL (Heyns, 2004). The lack of funding and the lack of appropriate skills are the two inhibitors to the implementation of a process whereby prior learning can be recognised that consistently emerge from the responses – both in Cycle 1 and in Cycle 2 of the NQF Impact Study.

The findings indicate a moderate impact in this crucial area, particularly in relation to access to education and training for what are considered non-traditional learners: learners of all races, genders, ages and disabilities are seen to have gained access as a result of changes in institutional practice and admission requirements, but the recognition of prior learning is not yet prevalent across the system.

In summary, evidence from the NQF Impact Study has highlighted one of the underlying objectives of the NQF, namely the creation of parity of esteem between qualifications achieved in whatever context and at whichever site, as reflected in the attempt to create an integrated NQF. Furthermore, based on the evidence discussed above, equality in education (interpreted as both equality of learning and equity of access) is a worthwhile and important objective that will continue to inform NQF development and implementation in the years to come.

Lastly, we need to revisit the question we raised at the outset of this paper: has the NQF impacted on equality? In our opinion, the NQF has played a major role in improving equality in education, yet there is still much work to be done. In this regard we wish to raise two points: (1) the NQF on its own will not be able to transform the education and training system – a coherent and co-ordinated effort is required; and (2) we must not be too impatient – the legacy of apartheid needs to be systematically addressed; this is a process that is going to take much longer than the decade we have behind us.

Democracy

Democracy in the broader NQF discourse is based on an understanding that that all human beings, regardless of social and economic function, can perform as intellectuals by giving meaning to the world, but also by participating in the conceptualisation of the world (Giroux cited in Freire, 1985). Premised on this understanding, NQF development and implementation in South Africa has included a strong focus on stakeholder involvement, including so-called ‘experts’, as well as the broader community – in effect, recognising that all stakeholders can constructively contribute to NQF development and implementation. Taking this recognition a step further, the South African NQF is seen as a social construct, i.e. more than a grid of levels on which qualifications can be registered, but rather as an agreement between democratic participants that can be re-negotiated as the South African context changes. In this section, we briefly discuss these two aspects of democracy in the context of the NQF, namely stakeholder participation and the NQF as a social construct (also see impact indicators #16 and #17).

Democracy through stakeholder participation

Democracy and democratic participation has been a cornerstone of NQF development and implementation in South Africa, sometimes to the extent that strong criticism has been expressed against a too-strong adherence to the stakeholder principle. Importantly though, this expression of democracy is a key underpinning principle established at the initial conceptualisation of the NQF. Jansen (2004b:87) comments:

There are few projects which have given such sincere and deep meaning to the word ‘participation’ through the active involvement of ordinary South Africans in the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework. The NQF Impact Study has also shown that the NQF remains a central pillar of the democratic project in South Africa:

... the South African NQF is still considered completely central to the reconstruction of a post-apartheid society and still enjoys widespread support in its eighth year of implementation ... (SAQA, 2005:29).

Despite the encouraging progress noted by Jansen and SAQA, the reality of the current South African context suggests that much work still needs to be done: the issue of leadership of the NQF remains contested, and there are difficulties with different sectors being governed by different sets of legislation not necessarily aligned to the SAQA Act. Concerns of an increase in centralised control, bureaucratisation and a too-‘technicist’ approach need also to be considered.

In a recent SAQA contribution to a study, which will deal with government involvement in higher education, particularly as it relates to institutional autonomy, academic freedom and accountability, the principle of 'a democratically accountable compact' (Jonathan, 2001:85) is strongly supported (Blom, 2005). A social contract between two or more parties suggests responsibilities. On the one hand, government holds itself responsible for the proper conduct and direction of (the education and training) sector, (and) it sees the diverse constituencies of civil society as having legitimate interests in how that responsibility should best be discharged, while on the other hand, the education and training sector has the responsibility of implementing societal interests. However, in a democratically accountable compact, these responsibilities should be negotiated (Blom, 2005).

Amongst these difficulties and concerns, stakeholder involvement stands out as an important key to improve democratic participation in the education and training system. In our view, this stakeholder principle is not negotiable, although we agree that much needs to be done to clarify the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders, as noted by the NQF Study Team (South Africa, 2002:iii):

The stakeholder principle should be strongly upheld but appropriately applied. The stakeholder principle is essential for legitimacy, accountability and quality. However, the identity and role of stakeholders needs to be clarified.

Democracy through understanding the NQF as a social construct

Based on the findings of the NQF Impact Study, and our own experience, we are of the opinion that the NQF as a social construct is not well understood in South Africa. Although some authors such as Isaacs (2001) and Cosser (2001) have attempted to investigate and even advocate this understanding, much still needs to be done⁹. Related to this point are questions about how stakeholders can contribute to the NQF as a social construct. Here, Isaacs (2001) provides some insight that can be used as an important point of departure, when he lists three necessary criteria for a successful social construct:

- *Democratic participation of stakeholders* – he comments that the legitimacy of the social construct is undermined if this does not occur.
- *Intellectual scrutiny* – credibility is influenced if this does not happen, and this includes 'academic scrutiny, international benchmarking, best practice, cutting-edge research and development and appropriate international comparators'. (Isaacs, 2001:125)
- *Adequate resourcing* – Isaacs makes the comment that failure to consider affordability and resourcing has led to the demise of most social constructs.

Isaacs (2001:124) also suggests that a social construct may necessarily imply that some form of resistance and contestation can be expected:

The essential nature of the NQF is that of a social construct, in that we as social actors in society not only theorise about, construct and implement it, but we also enable, actively change or work against it.

The point to be made here is that, in our view, the implementation of the NQF as a social construct will contribute to democracy, in particular to the democratic participation of NQF stakeholders, whether they be 'experts' or others, but that much work needs to be done to firstly understand the NQF as a social construct, and secondly to communicate and implement such an understanding.

Revisiting the earlier question on how the NQF has impacted on democracy, we argue that the impact has been positive, but as was the case with equality, much still needs to be done. The involvement of stakeholders in NQF structures seems to be under threat, as calls for more expert involvement are drowning out the Freirean-based recognition that all stakeholders can constructively contribute to NQF development and implementation. Our concern may be interpreted as irresponsible and insufficiently substantiated by the evidence from the NQF Impact Study, yet it is very real – in our view, a return to the notion of only being able to participate in NQF development and implementation because of an individual's social class or expert status represents a threat to the democratic project that most of us have struggled and sacrificed much for.

Quality

In the NQF context, quality is based on a synthesis of the worldviews, thinking practice and experience of stakeholders from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds: The commitment to developing representative and participatory processes and structures in a variety of views, thinking and practice and experience are brought together to bear on the development and implementation of the NQF points to an understanding of quality. Implicit is the notion that the definition and understanding of quality is arrived at through broad participation, negotiation and synthesis (SAQA, 2000:4).

Clearly encompassing much of Freire's liberation ideology, this 'participatory' understanding of quality is complemented by two other understandings: one is based on the commitment to the NQF to establish a 'coherent integrative education and training system that provides a platform for a unifying approach' (ibid. 2000:4); the other is implicit in the implementation processes of the NQF. The first understanding has largely been covered in the discussion on democracy, the second under equality. We therefore limit our discussion in this section to the third understanding that is related to implementation processes of the NQF. In this regard, two impact indicators are of particular relevance, namely Quality of learning and teaching (#10) and Quality assurance practices (#15).

Quality of learning and teaching

This impact indicator was rated as moderate. The responses dealt with the quality of the learning experience, namely the needs of learners and the responsiveness of teaching practices to such needs (SAQA, 2005). Also, the professional development of education and training practitioners was cited as being positive, and substantial evidence in support of an outcomes-based approach emerged. One respondent noted, for example:

I think the whole idea of outcomes is a wonderful asset to our model designers because you must always keep in mind that many of our academics at university do not have teacher training skills, so just having those outcomes already gives that focus (ibid.:63).

Quality through quality assurance

Paradoxically, quality assurance was seen to be both positive and negative (ibid.). Many respondents 'indicated strong support for the implementation of quality assurance mechanisms, and indicated that the quality of education and training has improved because of them' (ibid.:76), but the 'operationalisation' of quality assurance across sectors, as opposed to within a particular institution, was seen as problematic. The report notes (SAQA, 2005:76):

Most of the problems (with quality assurance) are associated with lack of capacity (mostly of [Education and Training Quality Assurance bodies], but also of providers), contestation, overlapping responsibilities, lack of meaningful memoranda of understanding, legislative anomalies and power struggles. The evidence therefore suggests that quality improvement in education and training has become quite embattled in unnecessary bureaucratic processes. An important recommendation in the report is therefore to streamline and simplify quality assurance processes (SAQA, 2005).

Once again returning to one of our earlier questions, on how the NQF has impacted on quality, we are of the opinion that the NQF has contributed significantly to an improved understanding of quality that transcends traditional notions. As we emphasised, both for the impact of the NQF on equality and the impact of the NQF on democracy, now even more in the case of the impact of the NQF on quality, we still have much to do in order actually to improve the quality of the education and training system – but as before, our steps are in the right direction.

Concluding comments

Although it is still too early to make a definitive judgement on the level of the impact of the NQF on education and training in South Africa (this will only be possible once the Cycle 2 baseline data is compared with the subsequent measurement in 2006/2007), we are of the 37 opinion that the overall impact of the NQF on education and training

is at least moderately positive: the research evidence shows moderate positive change across the education and training system. In this regard, we are fully aware that the research design of the NQF Impact Study is in need of refinement and focused engagement. We also realise that an over-emphasis on quantifying findings to discrete 'levels of impact' is not ideal and can lead to the conflation of variables such as the 'extent of impact' and 'beneficial impact'¹⁰.

In this paper, we have attempted to show that the Freirean-influenced South African NQF has not only embraced the principles of equality, democracy and quality, but has actively promoted and implemented each. In particular, the findings of the NQF Impact Study have shown that the NQF has impacted on equality through the adoption of an integrated approach, the increased portability of qualifications and the facilitation of access, mobility and progression. Furthermore, the NQF has impacted on democracy through encouraging active stakeholder participation, but also through an understanding that the NQF is a social construct. Lastly, the NQF has impacted on quality through promoting equity and democracy, but also through focusing on the quality of learning and teaching and quality assurance. In each case, it has been noted that progress has been made, but that much still needs to be done.

In conclusion, we answer the two questions that reflect the purpose of this conference:

Where do we go from here?

In our view, it is time to recognise collectively that we are making progress. This is not the time to be reforming our own reforms. Equality cannot be established through increased parity of esteem only; emphasising stakeholder involvement only cannot sustain the democratic project; quality cannot be attained through NQF development and implementation only.

What is the role of research in transforming education?

Again, in our view, evaluation of transformation should move beyond 'dipstick' tests, which provide little more than a snapshot of where we are, to longitudinal comparative studies (such as the NQF Impact Study). It is only through a more long-term approach that includes strategic partnership projects with universities and research institutes that research will be able to guide and inform policy makers in their quest for improved equality, democracy and quality.

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Reflections on the keynote paper of the SAQA Chairperson’s Lecture and discussion on recognising learning and its outcomes

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Nostalgic anticipation gave an edge to our mood as we set out to attend the 2006 fourth Annual Chairperson’s Lecture at Midrand. The theme took us back to the intense engagement of the founding of the NQF in the early 1990s. Our feelings about ‘recognising learning and its outcomes’ were mixed. We remembered the eager hope for justice in the formative debates of the NQF in the early 1990s, but also the sobering experience that followed.

Fifteen years on from the initial enthusiasm our understanding had grown through:

- The partial suppression of what we understood as ‘the recognition of learning’ by the need to accommodate multiple stakeholder interests and perspectives.
- The struggle to institutionalise approaches to assessment and certification that kept elements of the original ideal alive.
- The realisation that it was necessary to prune the ambitions of the original project quite severely in order to be effective in a limited, but worthwhile way.

- The irony that the cost of our libertarian – in some respects revolutionary – aspirations was an extraordinary complex of structures and regulations and seemingly permanent infighting among authorities and stakeholders.

Within these understandings is the recognition that an important feature of the progressive unfolding of any educational system is debate, dissension, reflection and review. The SAQA Chairperson's Lecture provides such an opportunity: its aim is to create a space for conversations on various key features of our own NQF.

SAQA's current Chairperson, Professor Shirley Walters, opened by saying that the feeling was that this year's lecture should engage with some of the 'big picture' issues around the NQF.

For this reason the focus was on NQF Principle 5: that the NQF should 'contribute to the full personal development of each learner and the social and economic development of the nation at large'. This principle also relates to the context of current governmental strategies, such as the focus on scarce skills and the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (AsgiSA). It seemed appropriate, therefore, to invite Professor Tom Schuller to share his thoughts on the relationship between qualifications and broad outcomes which impact on society as a whole, through his paper on Recognising Learning and its Outcomes¹¹.

What follows is a combination of personal reflections from the authors' viewpoints with inputs from participants. The content is shaped by the themes raised by Schuller's paper, the discussion from the floor and post-lecture conversations.

The hope that we experienced at the dawn of the NQF needs to be put into context and unpacked a little. As people involved in adult literacy and basic education, but also with experience in the world of formal schooling and in different universities, there were three aspects of the world of learning that especially concerned us. The first was the denial of status and value to human beings because of a failure to recognise the resources of knowledge and experience that they brought to their lives and our society. The second was the belief that the provision of further education for adults should build on this base of experience so that people could grow – as a catchphrase had it at the time, 'from sweeper to engineer'. We hoped for a system that would somehow give status to knowledgeability that was urgently needed yet marginalised by our formal structures. This would allow for the recognition of those who had achieved their competence outside of formal structures, but would also encourage quality provision in 'alternative' areas of learning that fell outside of the formal canon of western learning and its illegitimate offshoot, the Christian National Education curriculum of apartheid. Finally, there was an urge to bring together different kinds of knowledge and learning, in the hope that those who had been outside the system would be enabled to gain sufficient foundational skills so that they could progress within the system. The NQF, with its focus on portability, transferability and flexibility seemed to promise a way forward in particular for adult basic education learners.

How to use experiential knowledge as a context for the achievement of basic competence in key skills areas such as literacy and numeracy, and how to merge this knowledge with opportunities for recognised progress within a system, became key questions. To illustrate with an extreme example: 'Housekeeping and parenting skills' can be viewed as foundational for the future of our society. In the early 1990s, before the full impact of 'the triumph of capitalism' had been felt, with its erasure of critique, the women's movement had stressed the importance of parenting and campaigned to have expertise and hard work in parenting recognised in the same way as other occupations. Home building and parenting make an immense contribution to the economy, yet they are given no recognition either on payslips or CVs. Are there not ways to recognise and reward those who practise good housekeeping and parenting, however they developed the talent?

At the same time, running a successful household requires increasing levels of sophistication. Reliance on traditional and communal practices is no longer adequate. Serious levels of competence, as well as literacy and numeracy skills in various guises, are needed in financial management, health, catering, maintenance, developmental psychology, and cultural support. Are there not ways in which offerings of further learning for better housekeeping and parenting could be encouraged and supported through the recognition of qualifications?

Attempts to answer these two questions posed various problems, and could easily become ridiculous. We could reach a stage at which a mother was not permitted to make a pot of porridge without the appropriate certificate. We could find ourselves faced with learning outcomes and standards relating to tying our shoelaces.

Conundrums like this became even more intense in debates about the idea of RPL (recognition of prior learning). But they were also faced with tough opposition over time. For example, trade union representatives in the debates were scathing in their response to what they saw as the dreamy romanticism of formally recognising traditional and craft knowledges. They were only slightly more sympathetic to the housekeeping and parenting idea. These things, they said, neither made South Africa globally competitive nor enabled workers to progress in industry.

Later, as opposition from the academic establishment belatedly emerged, the theory of horizontal and vertical knowledges was unpacked in order to put a stop to the formal recognition of ('horizontal') learning not achieved in institutions. This has, of course, impacted not only on the 'romantic alternatives' but has squarely affected the NQF's original hope of recognising and certifying learning gained in experience and at the workplace. The vaunted principles of portability and transferability, and notions around the 'integration' of education and training, are undergoing serious revision.

The intensity of recent and ongoing local struggles about the recognition of workplacebased learning had sharpened the edge of our long-standing interest in 'recognising learning and its outcomes'. What transpired at the Annual Chairperson's lecture? What did we learn from it? And what did we think of it?

What are qualifications for?

Qualification systems, and qualifications themselves, serve many masters. In essence, qualifications, as a form of accreditation, serve to authenticate or validate the skills, knowledge and competences that have been identified as necessary for a particular purpose – educational, occupational, or professional. However, qualifications also serve different purposes for different 'end users': for the individual, they are the currency of upward mobility; for the receiver of the qualified person, which could be an employer or an institution for further learning, they are proof that the individual has the requisite knowledge and skills to suit that environment; and for the state, they are a means to monitoring the broad profile of its citizenry, and an arena in which the state needs to interest itself profoundly in order to shape the citizenry to suit economic or social imperatives. As someone commented from the floor, what is the 'return on investment' value of qualifications from these various perspectives?

Schuller's paper explores the relationship between education and the broad outcomes that are not usually measured in the actual certification process. He notes that '... education has outcomes that shape the health of our societies, both literally (i.e. the physical and mental health of our citizens) and metaphorically, in the sense of levels of civic engagement and participation.' He views these broad outcomes as those educational goals that are to do with social and personal well-being. His paper offers a framework for discussing the broader values of education, through the integration of three forms of 'capital' – identity capital, human capital and social capital, as summarised in Figure 1.

The focus of his discussion was on how these three forms of capital should come together in specific qualifications and qualifications systems, for the benefit of an effective 'knowledge society' with trustworthy forms of validation. In sum, the key questions on this theme relate to what should be the role of qualifications in fostering these broader values.

In the NQF these broad outcomes can be seen in the seven critical cross-field outcomes and the four developmental outcomes that should underpin every qualification. But we need to ask ourselves whether, within our current realities of education, training and skills development, we can afford to generalise about all qualifications. Can we differentiate between the goals and purposes of different kinds of qualifications, in different sectors and at different phases in the education and training system? One argument is that for schooling, the state is justified (and indeed, mandated) when it focuses explicitly on outcomes for citizenship and the promotion of certain values and attitudes. Schools are institutions whose main business is education, and the state has legitimate concerns about shaping the communal identities of its future adult citizens. However, does the same scope need to apply to professional and

vocational qualifications? What types of knowledge and outcomes should be prioritised in skills-focused qualifications?

Schuller notes in his paper: ‘But the rhetoric of the knowledge society sometimes disguises situations where low skills predominate, and where amongst large parts of the population there is not a lot of learning going on, either at work or outside’. This description is certainly apt for South Africa at present. In a country where delivery is in question, educational resources in terms of teaching personnel at all levels in and in different sectors are avowedly limited, and basic general education skills and competences are of very uneven quality across the board, what should our priorities be? If we load qualifications with too many expectations, we may undermine the foremost purpose of some forms of qualification, that is, the achievement of competence.

The exploration of the tension between broad goals for qualifications, specific and valid purposes for qualifications, and contextual delivery issues could be fruitful. This issue speaks in particular to planning needs. Educational planning must look both at long term, wider goals for citizenship in the future, and shorter-term goals for the achievement of defined purposes, addressing very particular needs in the present. If we only set our sights on the far horizons, we may find ourselves tripping over current realities. One output of a forum such as this could be an agenda of immediate ‘next steps’ towards improvement of the system in practical terms.

What is the role of information in educational planning and education systems?

The subject of educational planning takes us to the next theme that manifested itself in various ways throughout the evening. Schuller’s paper addresses the role of information in the knowledge society on a number of levels. One direction for debate was suggested by his discussion of qualifications as a tool to validate knowledge in a rapidly changing world.

Figure 1: A conceptualisation of the wider benefits of learning

As he notes, ‘... knowledge societies demand not only the capacity to access and handle information but the ability to evaluate it critically. For this to happen we need both networks of professional and personal contacts and trustworthy systems of assessment and qualification’.

In other words, if we use qualifications as a mechanism to validate certain kinds of knowledge, we had better be sure that the ways in which we check whether ‘graduates’ (at any level) have actually achieved the competencies represented by a qualification are reliable. A corollary to this is what we as planners should do with the information that a reliable assessment system should yield – in what ways would a profile of SA as a nation of learners be useful?

There is certainly no need to suggest debates on assessment to this audience, as our NQF has long foregrounded this topic. What we want to touch on is two thoughts that this theme provoked. First, what are the kinds of data that our evaluation and assessment systems are yielding, and is this the kind of data that we most need right now? There was certainly a sense from some participants that across sectors we lack appropriate, sufficient or reliable data, in terms of both quantitative and qualitative information. How, for example, can we reflect on the effects of qualifications, if we don’t have tracking data on learnership drop-out and completion rates, and data on what happens to those who do achieve these qualifications? What is our evidence base for evaluating our qualifications systems, and are we using this information in appropriate ways? What does a low success rate in some areas say about our qualification system, and what does it say about the state of delivery in the country? Maybe we need to think in tougher ways about how to use (reliable) evaluation and assessment data to identify more clearly what is not working.

The second issue raised concerning validating knowledge and the use of assessment takes us back to the purpose of qualifications, and the ‘broad outcomes’ discussed previously. Schuller’s paper refers to the debate on the recognition of different kinds of learning, with specific reference to non-formal and informal learning. This again is a familiar topic, noted in our retrospective glimpse at the start of this discussion. It was raised again from the floor in the form of a question as to how qualifications can or should address non-measurable¹¹ learning. To our certain knowledge, one strand of reaction to this debate was a strong (and somewhat irritated) wish that we could concentrate on getting foundational, readily assessable learning right, as needed in both our schooling and workplace training arenas, before dissipating our energies in other directions. This is not to suggest that we abandon exploration of the wider goals of education as suggested in Schuller’s paper: rather, it is to support the idea of prioritising certain actions and debates for planning purposes, in the context of what is arguably a crisis situation in education and training.

Two closing comments usefully framed some of the thoughts that the evening provoked:

Professor Schuller noted that certification is not the same as valuing; and Professor Walters said that we must not allow a qualifications system to become a cage. These comments remind us that we need to be clear about the purposes of qualifications; there are perhaps other ways of valuing different forms of knowledge without overburdening a system that still needs to address some core issues.

It was probably unrealistic to expect that the evening would provide clarity on the knotty issues involved in recognising learning and its outcomes, especially when one complicates them with the alternative perspectives set out earlier in this response to the Chairperson’s address. It would seem to be clear from Professor Schuller’s paper that Europe is not closer to solutions; the quest for solutions in South Africa, with its weaker base of provision, faces a long haul. Or perhaps because our challenges are greater while our traditions are less burdensome we may still have a chance to lead the way in the equitable and development recognition of learning?

[FEEDBACK FORM - PDF](#)

Footnotes

1. Antonio Gramsci’s famous dictum.

2. I have drawn on the useful work of Chidester, D., Dexter, P., & James, W. (eds). 2003. What holds us together: Social cohesion in South Africa, HSRC Press: Cape Town.
3. This section draws on Chris Tapscott's helpful chapter 'Democracy and trust in local government', in Askvik, S & Bakke, N. (eds). 2004. Trust in public institutions in South Africa, Ashgate: London.
- 4 For a fuller description see Shirley Walters 'South Africa's Learning Cape aspirations: The idea of a learning region and the use of indicators in a middle income country' in Duke, C., Osborne, M., & Wilson B (eds.). 2005. Rebalancing the social and economic.: Learning, partnership and place. NIACE: Leicester.
5. Paper presented at Kenton at Mpekwani, 27–30 October 2005, hosted by Rhodes University and the University of Fort Hare.
6. 'Regular' qualifications refer to qualifications generated through Standards Generating Bodies (SGBs) as opposed to qualifications submitted for registration on the NQF developed by providers of education and training.
7. The sample included the sub-levels for Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET).
8. See Tuck et al. (2004) and also Keevy (2005) for a more detailed discussion on the emerging NQF typology that is used as a conceptual tool to describe NQFs, including a particular focus on the underlying philosophies that influence NQF development.
9. The work of Ian Hacking (1999) on social construction is of particular value.
10. Recent work by Van der Westhuizen (2005) on the evaluation of transformation, although limited to higher education, is of particular value to improve the research design of the NQF Impact Study.
11. The paper itself is available in the SAQA Bulletin Vol. 9 No. 1, March 2006.