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Unesco's work to improve lifelong learning through NQFs

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September 2012

Conference on Policy Transfer in Vocational Skills Development

Revisited

Institute of Education

University of Zurich

1. The presentation will rely on three projects/reports at UIL

- a) *Linking recognition practices to national qualifications frameworks – international exchange of experiences and strategies;*
- b) 24 draft country reports (so far) in the context of a joint ETF-Cedefop-Unesco *Inventory on NQFs*;
- c) UNESCO has recently produced the *UNESCO Guidelines on the Recognition, Validation and Accreditation of the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning*

2. Questions: Global trends

- a) How has lifelong learning inspired NQFs?
- b) What are the different ways in which NQFs could support lifelong learning?

2. Questions: Country context

- a) What are the benefits claimed for NQFs by policy makers and stakeholders for improving lifelong learning?
- b) Reasons why developing countries are adopting NQFs?
- c) What are the different North and South country approaches to developing NQFs as reference points for recognition, validation and accreditation?
- d) What are the challenges and opportunities and critical success factors in applying NQF and related mechanisms for improving lifelong learning?

3. Global trends: Lifelong Learning (LLL)

- a) A major **policy**, and a **basis for reforms** at national and regional levels;
- a) Encompasses formal, non-formal and informal learning, which have become core concepts in lifelong learning;
- b) The notion of lifelong learning is not unproblematic;
- c) Despite some concerns, LLL implies a broader concept of education, emphasising, **horizontal integration** and **vertical linkages**.



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3. Cont'd.: Lifelong learning

- e) It is a **standard** that promotes education on a holistic basis, tackling the problems of inequality of educational opportunity, exclusion and raising the quality of education.
- f) It embraces a **systemic strategy** as well as a holistic focus on the individual.
- g. A **core value** of lifelong learning is ensuring equity and inclusiveness in access to learning opportunities. Lifelong learning is first and foremost about making diverse forms of learning opportunities accessible to all.



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4. What are the ways in which NQFs could support lifelong learning

- a) **Transparency and accessibility:** modular structure ; provision of statement of attainment, and credit transfer; Allows easy entry to and exit from, and learning over an extended period of time;
- b) **Clear pathways,** clear routes and expected standards, clear reference for individuals to move to different learning and career paths;
- c) NQFs are **systems of equivalency**;
- d) Recognition of non-formal and informal learning should be seen as **complementary to NQFs**;
- e) NQFs could accommodate outcomes of learning in non-formal and informal learning; If incorporated into qualifications, frameworks can **broaden the base of qualifications** from all domains;
- f) **Transparent quality assurance for certification process** must be developed.

5. The move towards NQF and mechanisms for recognising non-formal learning by South countries to address :

a) Education and training reforms;

- **Limited pathways** between different education and training subsectors
- Difficult **transitions**;
- Ever growing number of **early school leavers**;
- **Certificates** contain little information on competencies
- **Fragmentation** of training of the variety of providers;
- Limited qualifications **and career routes**;
- No **comparability** with other certificates;
- Lack ladders and bridges to avert dead-ends;

5. The move towards NQF and mechanisms for recognising non-formal learning by South countries to address :

a) Education and training reforms;

) There is growing interest in sector strategies

- Renewed interest in all education and training sub sectors;
- Realisation that universal coverage of **primary education will not do;**
- Need for alternative **post-primary education** access programmes linked to overarching frameworks;
- **NQFs** could help with building ladders and bridges that avert dead-end.

6. What are the different North and South country approaches to developing NQFs as reference points for recognition, validation and accreditation?

- a) Countries with a **unified NQF**; (Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong SAR, Mauritius);
- b) Countries in the process of developing a NQF, and with a **developed curricular standards** that can directly be linked to an already “nationally established” qualification (developed Europe);
- c) Countries with **labour competence frameworks** specific to industry benchmarks (occupational standards) (Mexico and other Latin American countries);
- d) Countries with a **subsectoral framework** in the technical and vocational education and training (**TVET**) sector (Ghana, India) or higher education system (Malaysia, Republic of South Korea, Hong Kong SAR),
- e) Systems with an **ad hoc approach** to reference points for recognition

7. Convergent versus parallel systems

- a) While some countries have comprehensively replaced existing systems and contributed to education reform – *convergent systems*,
- b) Other countries have developed a *parallel framework in addition to the* educational system.

7. Cont'd.:As a parallel system:

NQFs are considered to serve the labour market with skilled labour;

- a) Providing a means to recognise learning that takes place outside the formal education sector;
- b) help those who have dropped out of the academic system to receive a more vocationally oriented-training.
- c) **Recognition of non-formal and informal learning thus becomes a key issue;**

8. What evidence is there of elements that are vital to the future of NQFs in an international context?

Evidence shows that NQFs together with other mechanisms such as RPL and credit transfer and guidance and counselling systems contribute to economic, social and educational development:

- a) paving pathways for further learning and raising levels of qualifications;
- a) widening participation and enhancing lifelong learning opportunities for under-represented groups of learners;
- a) meeting workforce development needs to strengthen the skills base.

Africa

- a) **Shifting to learning outcomes based NQF in the TVET sector** (Namibia, Botswana, Ghana), has meant that recognition of skills and knowledge of this type is more achievable, even where education and training systems are still in their early stages of reform;
- b) In Mauritius, RVA is used for to encourage those people who have been left out of the system to have an opportunity to have their skills and knowledge developed outside the formal system valued in qualifications. The Mauritius qualifications authority has set up Industry Training Advisory Committees (ITACS) to generate unit standards and qualifications. **Adult literacy** is one of the committees;
- c) **Non-formal Adult education** is to be incorporated in the TVET Qualifications framework (Kenya and Namibia). South Africa has made attempts to include ABET in the NQF;
- d) Namibia has piloted RPL in, the Namibian College for Open Learning (NAMCOL), to **facilitate access to its distance education certificate courses**, and alternative courses in primary and secondary education.
- e) **Mali:** No NQF but a new curriculum framework based on standards drawn from informal learning and outcome-based approach.

The Arab region

- a) **Equivalency programmes** at the basic level. Illiteracy eradication classes consist of learners from grades 1-3 (equivalent to grade 1-6 in primary school). Adult classes cover 7-12. (non-formal education sector is very narrowly defined as remedial education) ;
- b) **Morocco**: recognition of on-the-job training to improve workforce skills, and the development of socially vulnerable groups (Morocco);
- c) In **Jordan**, Questscope, an international NGO, ensures that non-formal programmes mainstream early school leavers into General Equivalency Diploma and also enables them together with students from formal educational system to progress into the government vocational training institutions.

Asia and Pacific context

- a) **Low basic education countries:** (Mongolia, Pakistan, Bangladesh)
- b) **Asian Giants:** China and India
- c) **Advanced basic education countries :** the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam
- d) **Developed Asia:** Australia, New Zealand, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong, Malaysia
- e) **Central Asian countries:** Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan



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Asia and Pacific context

In Hong Kong,

- 7-level NQF;
- It covers academic, vocational and continuing education, and training sector;
- All qualifications and associated learning have to be accredited before they are uploaded into its Qualifications register;
- Many industries have joined the Qualifications Framework through the setting up of the Industry Training Advisory Committees – and engage in specifying labour competences;
- RPL mechanisms are being set up for experienced practitioners;
- There is a Framework Secretariat.

In the Republic of Korea

Raising university level qualifications is done on the basis of a credit system; The Academic Bank System functions to allow people with various educational backgrounds – formal, non-formal informal – to have their learning accredited.

Asia and Pacific context

In New Zealand,

the qualifications outcome statements identify and include information on pathways. Each outcome statement must include information on:

- **graduate profiles** that identify the expected learning outcomes of a qualification – this is captured in notions of what a learner will know and understand and be able to do when they achieve the qualification;
- **education pathways** that identify other qualifications that a graduate could enroll onto after completing this qualification – where qualifications are standalone, and do not prepare graduates for further study, the outcome statement should make this clear;
- and **employment pathways** or contributions to the community that identify the areas in which a graduate may be qualified to work, or the contribution they may make to their community (Keller 2012).

Latin America and the Caribbean

- a) NQFs in Latin America has been through the implementation of the **labour competences approach** in vocational training institutions (VTI).
- b) **Better and quicker integration into the labour market for workers** in the private sector, self-employed, government workers, teachers and students requiring recognition and certification is the major objective.
- c) At the **secondary school level**, the labour competence approaches are **promoting new paradigms for curricular reform**.
- e) At the level of **non-formal adult education**, National Institutes for Adult Education like INEA in Mexico are **providing benchmarks (The model of Education for Life and Work (MEVyT))** for assessment of non-formal adult education (15 +) for entry and re-entry to the formal system.

Europe and North America

- a) Recognition of non-formal and informal learning are **set in the formal education system (Austria, Germany)**;
- b) Great efforts still are being made to relate learning outcomes from non-formal and informal pathways that do not yet have an equivalent in the formal system.

Europe and North America

- a) **Adult and continuing vocational education** have become important sites for recognising non-formal and informal learning against qualifications.
- b) The **competence-based vocational qualifications in Finland** offer those in the adult population a flexible method of renewing and maintaining their skills, with a particular focus on vocational competences.
- c) **Certifying a certain period of professional experience of adult educators** is gaining in popularity in Austria.
- d) National qualifications system/Nqfs **in combination with other elements** such as Guidance and Counselling and credit transfers, bridge courses, **benchmarks for the assessment of non-formal adult education** (RVCC in Portugal) , building capacities of teaching staff are designed to improve the qualification (academic and vocational) levels of adults over 18 yrs. (Portugal).

- 10. Critical factors:** At the macro policy level, there is need for
- a) Understanding the **strategic value** of NQFs and RPL;
 - b) **Advocacy** of the benefits in the labour market and the lifelong learning system; and in widening participation of vulnerable groups.
 - c) **Close communication and co-ordination** among all stakeholders;
 - d) **Coupling NQFs with lifelong learning strategies** to broaden the base of stakeholders and to include broader groups of society;
 - e) Combining learning outcomes-based approaches in qualifications with **other instruments** such as credit transfer and career guidance and counseling and RPL, and quality management in non-formal learning.
 - f) Building capacities of key personnel.

11. Critical factors: At the meso institutional level, there is need for

- a) Better **integration of non-formal adult and continuing training** and other sectors of educational system;
- b) **Genuine links** between schools, companies and services,
- c) A combination of **general education and vocational training** to meet the needs of businesses and services with the aim of gaining in efficiency, development and competitiveness
- d) Education and training needs to be made more **relevant** to the world of work and **responsive** to the expectation of the ever-growing number of candidates, who will only have obtained a part of their qualifications and need to be chosen to take **supplementary training**.
- e) It should be **flexible** in terms of having more educational modules that are assessed on the basis of competence domains, which make sense from the point of view of getting a job.

11. cont'd.: Challenges facing the non-formal education sector

There is need to improve quality of non-formal learning in South countries

- To shift from purely education-steered approaches to **demand-steered** approaches with the involvement of all economic and social stakeholders;
- To develop regulatory frameworks for **quality of non-formal** and private educational sectors to address frequently expressed quality concerns;
- To put emphasis on **professional development of teachers** as they are crucial to build bridges between non-formal education and formal education.
- Not all non-formal activity needs to be certified; however, a certain amount of formalising can help towards quality improvement.

11. Cont'd.: The role of the informal sector is in itself a challenge for any national education system

The informal economy acts as the **biggest training centre** in many countries in the South;

- a) Making productive skills **visible** by identifying, documenting and recognising them;
- b) Ensuring that recognition has real **benefits** for those who have acquired skills outside the school system, e.g. encouraging them to start a qualification; reducing the amount of time of supplementary upgrading programmes; raising self-esteem; improving basic education.
- c) Setting up mechanisms of RPL, and **provision** of public infrastructure for recognising skills;
- d) **Communicating** to the potential candidates; administering the process.

11. Cont'd.: The role of the informal sector is in itself a challenge for any national education system

- a) Developing methods –portfolio, written/oral exams, demonstrations;
- b) Putting in place a relatively open examination system related to a NQF.
- c) Guidance and information campaigns to guide individuals through the system.
- d) Not all documentation and formative assessments lead to certification, however, by making skills visible, supplementary/complementary non-formal programmes can be designed in order to make up for the deficits in their basic skills and knowledge.
- e) It will be important to work closely with professional organisations operating in the informal economy.



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12. Challenges of sharing learning across countries

- a) Much larger non-formal education and informal sectors in the South than in the North;
- b) non-formal education sector covers basic education more in the South than in the North – in the North,
- c) Non-formal education programmes are more **workplace-oriented** than in the South;
- d) The higher importance of **levels of learning** below upper secondary schooling in most South countries while North countries tend to focus more on or above upper secondary vocational levels.
- e) Motivation of the **individual** is a key factor in North countries; Individual has to be an active player; in the South the obstacles are more systemic.



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Conclusions: Critical lessons learnt

- a) High-level commitment by policy-makers and institutional leaders, all stakeholders and practitioners at national, regional or sub-regional level;
- b) Clear curricula and qualifications as the currency of learning;
- c) Awareness-raising to highlight the benefits and opportunities of NQFs and other related instruments to learners, employees, people not in education or employment, and employers;
- d) Provision of high-quality information and support for candidates;
- e) Presence of strong links between the education sector and training sector and industry.



Thank you

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