

African Academic Credit System (ACTS)

Report of the Policy Country Visit to BOTSWANA

(Gaborone, 8th August 2024)

Date: Thursday 8th August 2024 – 09.00 – 14.00

Location: The Grand Palm Hotel Casino Convention Resort (Cnr Bonnington Farm and Molepolole Road, Gaborone, Botswana)

ACTS Experts who participated of the visit:

- Pablo Beneitone (Higher Education Expert of OBREAL)
- Nodumo Dhlamini (AAU)

List of participants from National authorities: see Annex 1

1. Purpose of the site visit

- Validation and enrichment of the data provided by the countries through the responses to the Mapping Study Questionnaire, with a particular focus on data on Botswana and SADC.

2. Objectives of the meeting:

- Presentation of ACTS initiative and its importance for international mobility and academic recognition.
- Discussion with participants for the identification of the main challenges for the implementation of ACTS at national level.

3. Brief Description of the main Higher Education Policy Development at National Level in different fields

Botswana Qualifications Authority (BQA) is responsible for registration of qualifications and the evaluation of qualifications. BQA also handles the quality assurance of Education Training Providers, Learning Programmes, Assessors and Moderators. BQA is also responsible for the associated education records. The Botswana Government is still to approve the Credits Policy that was drafted about 4 years ago. Four main national documents are still at draft stage and not yet approved:

- a. National Policy for the Implementation of Credit Accumulation & Transfer (CAT)
- b. Draft guidelines enable accredited ETPs to implement Credit Accumulation & Transfer (CAT)
- c. National Policy on Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)
- d. Draft Guidelines to enable ETPs to implement Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) In Botswana

4. Description of the visit

The visit focused presentation of the report from the survey on Credit System being implemented in Botswana and also getting an understanding of how credit system is being implemented and the related challenges. This document records the main aspects to be retained from the interactions that took place at the meeting and, at the end, presents the opinion of the members of the ACTS Technical Team on the possibilities and challenges of Botswana's participation in the implementation phase of ACTS.

Various institutions were invited to the meeting including business and private sector representatives, public universities and private universities (in total 31 persons, see Annex 1).

The official opening was done by Professor Botsalano Mosimakoko (Chief Executive Officer of BQA) and Ms Boitumelo Watlhaga (Acting Deputy Chief Executive Officer of BQA). Both concurred that more work needed to be done to increase the awareness on Quality Assurance and Accreditation issues in Botswana. The CEO said that data was key, and its cleanliness and reliability were the foundation of a robust quality assurance and accreditation system. After that introduction, two main presentations were done by Nodumo Dhlamini and Pablo Beneitone in relation to ACTS.

5. Commitment of the policy authorities with ACTS implementation phase

BQA authorities expressed their's interest in participating in regional, African and global initiatives for the harmonization of higher education, as a way to strengthen internal processes with a view to improving the quality of national higher education.

At the end of the meeting, it was said that Botswana is interested in participating in the implementation of ACTS and thanked the initiative for including the country in the visit. BQA requested ACTS Expert Team technical assistance to enhance the quality of the four Policy Documents mentioned above (a., b. c. & d.) before they are approved for implementation. It was agreed that the four the documents will be sent to ACTS Expert Team to be revised and send a feedback for improvements.

6. Systematisation and analysis of topic exchange during the visit

The discussions focused on issues surrounding Credit System. The following were discussed:

- What are the benefits of ACTS? It was explained that a Credit is a tool to translate what is happening from one programme/ institution to another programme/ institution. It provides some orientations on what time does a student need to achieve certain goals/outcomes. It brings common references to global / continental levels. It was stressed that ACTS proposal is not going to change any national regulation, it is trying to install a credit translator.
- What is the implication of the survey on students work loads and credits and SADC results? It was clarified that the data was collected in 2017/2018 from various degree programmes. In these surveys, several perceptions were collected from academic staff and students perspectives, but data was not linked to any regulations or policies. In 2024, the picture is completely different. There is now a regional initiative and we are talking about the same language.
- What is the implication of ACTS on the draft Botswana CAT Policy?. For that particular issue, Mr. Ofentse Disang from BQA responded that Botswana adopted one credit to 10 hours, and it is not a isolated decision, other countries go in the same direction. CAT Policy is still in draft since 4 years ago. This can be considered an advantage because Botswana can use HAQAA3 to review its CAT Policy (as it was mentioned in the section below)
- How aligned is Botswana on the recognition of studies and certificates, not only at continental level, also at global level?. It was stressed that Botswana is aligned with the Addis Convention for recognition, and as UNESCO is part of the HAQAA3 Steering Committee brings in the alignment to global conventions and discussions. It was expressed that different global chapters are using the same language, credits, but these credits must be focussed on student centred learning, including student workload.
- Has BQA plans to standardize what is on the ground leading to same credit hours (with reference to internships and research projects? The answers were focussed on the flexibility as one of the main aspects of the credits, so the idea of standarization would not be an option. The only thing that should be fixed is the total amount of student workload per academic year, not how much credits each course/module should have. Another aspect relevant link to this point was that recognition is not automatic and credits provide on element to be considered for this purpose: the number of learning hours behind a learning process.

- A request was made in relation to the next steps to be followed. It was explained that between September and November 2024, HAQAA will be organizing three additional regional workshops with strategic partners in Africa, to share the findings of the state of the art study and compile recommendations for the next steps of ACTS endorsement and implementation in Africa. These regional workshops (In Nairobi, Egypt and Senegal, respectively), will be complemented by national policy visits, similar to the one that BQA is receiving, to explore in more depth the interests, concerns and priorities of national authorities. From this, the State of the Art report will be finalized and translated into four official African languages (French, English, Portuguese and Arabic). ACTS Expert Team will make a preliminary assessment/recommendation for 10 pilot countries for ACTS implementation. The authorities of those countries will be asked to submit a proposal for participation in the pilot phase, accompanied by a national work plan that aligns to specific policy interests. Once approved, a cohort of universities will be selected to for the pilot phase, to accompany the national authority. The pilot phase will entail work at the level of study programmes and learning outcome design, as well as intra-African mobility and recognition and a broader training on the credit systems and their usage with respect to regional integration, recognition, mobility, lifelong learning, etc. The timeline informed was:
 - September – November 2024: Remaining Regional workshops ACTS and national policy visits
 - December – March 2025: Finalization and publication of State of the Art Study
 - April – May 2025: Selection of pilot countries and national work plan development
 - June 2025: Pilot phase launched

8. Opinion of the ACTS Technical Team on Botswana's participation in the implementation phase

In the opinion of the ACTS Expert Team, Botswana offers wide possibilities for participation in the implementation phase of ACTS. There is a political commitment of the country to the operationalization of the African initiative, declared and demonstrated at the highest level, by the authorities of BQA who supervises higher education.

The possibilities of materializing political commitment are supported by:

- Enthusiasm shown by the national authorities, BQA in relation to the support that ACTS initiative can give to the development and implementation of the National Policy for the Implementation of Credit Accumulation & Transfer (CAT). It is clear that ACTS implementation phase might be an opportunity for the instalment of the national credit system. The initiative is absolutely timely.
- The commitment of BQA can play a relevant role in the coordination and management of activities at the national level, with the engagement of the selected HEIs and with wide possibilities of extending the implementation of ACTS to other HEIs, as one of the impact results of the pilot implementation.
- The enthusiasm and interest shown by the HEIs represented at the meeting, recognizing that the implementation of ACTS can add value to internal processes.
- The clarity with which the participants pointed to the factors that determine the implementation of ACTS, suggesting actions and products that should be developed.