

African Academic Credit System (ACTS)

Report of the Policy Country Visit to RWANDA

(Kigali, 4th September 2024)

Date: Wednesday 4th September 2024 – 09.30 – 12.00

Location: Higher Education Council (HEC) Ministry of Education (First floor MINEDUC Building)

ACTS Experts who participated of the visit:

- Ana Maria Nhampule (Higher Education Expert of Mozambique)
- Pablo Beneitone (Higher Education Expert of OBREAL)
- Apiyo Okwiri (Project manager OBREAL)
- Frederick Ato Armah (AAU)

List of participants from National authorities:

- Rose Mukankomeje, Director General, Higher Education Council
- Theoneste Ndikubwimana, Head of Department, General Higher Education Quality Standards, Higher Education Council
- Christine Mutesi, Division Manager, Academic Quality, Accreditation, Standards and Qualifications Framework, Higher Education Council

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 Rwanda.

2. Objectives of the meeting:

- Presentation of ACTS initiative and its importance for international mobility and academic recognition.
- Discussion with HEC authorities 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

The higher education system in Rwanda is structured into university education and other higher education institutions and is regulated by the Higher Education Council (HEC). HEC is an agency under the Ministry of Education in Rwanda. The Presidential Order No 081/01 of 28/08/2020 which also provides for the establishment of HEC provides a number of laws that govern Higher Education Institutions in Rwanda. There are 35 higher learning institutions in Rwanda of which public institutions are 3 and the private institutions are 32.

The Higher Education Council referred to the ACTS Expert Team to several policy documents on higher education in Rwanda that could provide useful and timely information. These are the Statistical year book, which provides information on student enrolment; the General academic regulations; Note of guidance, Article 19 of the HE law in 2021.

The Higher Education Council indicated that there was flexibility in terms of curriculum design and implementation as institutions developed their own curricula; students are able to choose

elective courses and core courses based on their interests and career trajectory. Benchmarking is encouraged among the higher learning institutions to consolidate their uniqueness and preserve their value proposition. The possibility of using joint degrees as a vehicle for hastening the pace of integration was also discussed.

4. Description of the visit

The meeting was convened to discuss the implementation of the African Credit Transfer System (ACTS) in Rwanda and East Africa. The primary aims were to validate the ACTS country survey of Rwanda and review the challenges, prospects, and gains associated with ACTS, and to outline a clear way forward for successful implementation. After brief introductions led by Frederick Ato Armah, there were presentations by Pablo Beneitone and Anna Maria Nhampule on the state of the art on the ACTS, which emanated jointly from the collaboration between the AU and the EU. Pablo Beneitone gave a historical account of the phases of HAQAA starting from its inception in 2015. He mentioned 5 phases of the ACTS going forward namely updated State of the Art in Africa on academic credits; lobbying for ACTS at regional and national level: Workshops and national visits to public authorities, piloting the ACTS: 100 universities from 10 African countries to revise study programs; piloting the ACTS: Assigning credits to the degree programs, and developing the ACTS User's Guide. Pablo Beneitone alluded to the workload range of 1350-1850 and 60 credits per academic year, which hinges on number of credits instead of contact hours.

Anna Maria Nhampule presented preliminary findings on the state of the ACTS survey report in terms of the current situation regarding academic credits in higher education in African countries, and narrowed it down to Eastern Africa and Rwanda, with a view to gathering contributions for its validation and enrichment. She began with the conceptual and methodological framework of the State of the Art study. It emerged that several countries in Africa had implemented national credit systems and qualifications framework under the aegis of the AU member states. Countries were at various stages of the implementation and had experienced varied successes. The Pan-African Quality Assurance Framework (PAQAF) was highlighted in terms of the instruments needed to operationalize it such as the Addis Convention, continental education strategy for Africa (CESA), African Standards and Guidance for Quality Assurance (ASG-QA), African Quality Rating Mechanism (AQRM) and the register of relevant stakeholders.

Anna Maria Nhampule also mentioned the methodology of the ACTS and the 47 countries that responded to the country specific survey. She indicated that in 2018, IUCEA developed an East African Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (EACATS) through a participatory and consultative process involving representative experts drawn from national commissions and councils for higher education, national qualifications authorities and higher learning institutions. It emerged that different countries were at different stages of implementation of the credit system; Kenya is at the initial stage whereas Rwanda is at full implementation. Countries such as Djibouti and South Sudan however, do not have national credit systems or qualifications framework in place. It emerged that the national qualifications framework in Rwanda in force since 2013 had been amended.

5. Commitment of the policy authorities with ACTS implementation phase

The Higher Education Council requested training workshops for higher learning institutions on the ACTS, HAQAA3, harmonization, accreditation and quality assurance so that higher learning institutions obtain a nuanced understanding of the key issues within the higher education landscape. The Higher Education Council also requested to be part of the process so that they internationalize higher education in Rwanda. There is opportunity for Vice-Chancellors and quality assurance staff of higher learning institutions in Rwanda to be engaged in the process in order to deepen ownership and bottom-up validation.

6. Systematisation and analysis of topic exchange during the visit

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

- Infrastructure and resources: many institutions lack the technological infrastructure necessary for effective credit transfer management in Rwanda. This limitation affects the efficiency of implementing and tracking credits across institutions.
- Training and Capacity Building: academic and administrative staff require extensive training to understand and implement ACTS procedures. Existing training programs are insufficient to cover the depth of knowledge needed for effective application. There is the need for the team to pursue this to ensure a bottom-up approach.
- Standardization issues: harmonizing curricula and assessment methods across diverse institutions poses a significant challenge.
- Quality assurance: Ensuring that transferred credits meet quality standards and reflect equivalent learning outcomes is complex. For instance, a totally online medical degree or engineering degree is likely to be problematic given the fact that these programs require considerable practical sessions. Online PhDs from countries such as Haiti and others present formidable challenges in terms of determining equivalencies.
- Awareness and buy-in: there is a lack of comprehensive awareness among stakeholders about the benefits and operational aspects of ACTS.
- Resistance to change: some institutions may resist adopting ACTS due to perceived complexities or lack of immediate benefits.

In relation to prospects, the following appeared during the discussion:

- Increased mobility: ACTS can greatly enhance student mobility, allowing them to study across different African countries and institutions without losing academic progress. The Higher Education Council was of the view other countries in Africa ought to open their borders the way Rwanda has done to enable mobility.
- Diverse learning opportunities: students can access a broader range of courses and specialized programs that may not be available in their home institutions.
- Enhanced collaboration and institutional partnerships: ACTS encourages greater collaboration between universities, fostering partnerships that can lead to joint programs and shared resources.
- Regional integration: improved coordination between institutions can strengthen regional educational networks. The quality assurance network in universities in Rwanda are committed to this.
- Broader recognition: with standardized credit systems, degrees and qualifications will gain wider recognition across participating countries.
- Global competitiveness: standardization can enhance the global competitiveness of African higher education institutions.

7. Opinion of the ACTS Technical Team on Rwanda's participation in the implementation phase

The meeting concluded with a consensus on the importance of a coordinated effort to overcome the challenges associated with ACTS implementation. In the opinion of the ACTS Expert Team, Rwanda offers wide possibilities for participation in the implementation phase of ACTS.

The commitment of HEC 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. They expressed their willingness to be part of the implementation phase of ACTS, but on the condition of receiving a series of training workshops for universities on what ACTS is, and the importance for mobility and recognition. This should be done prior to the start of the implementation phase in order to have the support and accompaniment of the HEC.