Workshop on Mobility, Academic Recognition and the African Credit Transfer System (ACTS)

Senegal, 28th October 2024

Senegal Regional Hybrid Event on an African Credit Transfer System had a Workshop structured in 4 sessions (see Programme of the Senegal Regional Hybrid Event on ACTS in Annex 1) with 23 participants from 12 countries (See Annex 2 List of participants)

An introductory session was dedicated to a country-by-country presentation by participants, each of whom shared a brief overview of the status of academic mobility, recognition practices, and credit transfer systems in their respective national contexts. The exercise revealed both a strong commitment across the continent to harmonize and improve quality assurance mechanisms, as well as significant disparities in the implementation and coordination of credit systems.

A recurring theme was the varying levels of development and institutionalization of credit transfer mechanisms. Countries such as Tunisia and Cape Verde reported relatively structured frameworks aligned with international standards, including the Bologna Process and the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). Tunisia, for instance, integrates credit accumulation with a well-established national qualifications framework and a systematic process for transfer and recognition based on detailed academic records. Cape Verde noted the ongoing development of equivalency and digital diploma authentication procedures, while also referencing its participation in mobility initiatives and regional harmonization efforts.

Countries like Senegal, Niger, and Chad highlighted efforts to expand credit recognition and student mobility, supported by commissions of equivalence and participation in regional policy dialogues. However, differences in how the LMD (Licence–Master–Doctorate) system has been adopted across and within institutions were noted, underscoring the need for greater harmonization. Challenges include lack of updated legal frameworks, inadequate data systems, insufficient communication between agencies, and inconsistent understanding of learning outcomes and workload-based credits.

In Guinea, Mali, and Gabon, recognition of foreign diplomas and internal academic equivalence is managed through multi-ministerial commissions or central education authorities. However, several speakers noted the complexity and fragmentation of procedures, and the need to reinforce digital tracking systems and better coordinate inter-ministerial responsibilities.

In countries such as Sao Tome and Principe, The Gambia, and the Central African Republic, participants acknowledged important structural limitations such as the absence of centralized agencies for equivalence, low staffing capacity at universities, and limited digital infrastructure. Nonetheless, they emphasized their engagement in reforming policy frameworks, including the establishment of national quality assurance agencies (as in Sao Tome with support from Cape Verde) and participation in Erasmus+ programs and inter-regional student exchanges.

The session revealed common aspirations across African countries: to improve student mobility, ensure reliable diploma authentication, and adopt credit systems that reflect student workload and competencies. At the same time, participants called for regional support in adapting ACTS to the realities of different national education systems. The development of reliable, transparent, and coordinated frameworks was seen as essential to advance harmonization and facilitate academic mobility across the continent.

Overall, this session provided a valuable opportunity for peer exchange, highlighting both the diversity and convergence of credit and recognition practices in Africa. It offered a diagnostic baseline to support the ongoing refinement of ACTS and reinforced the value of inclusive, multi-country dialogue in shaping continental higher education policies.

Session 1, held in the format of a roundtable, set the tone for the discussions to follow by outlining the overall context, objectives, and strategic relevance of the HAQAA3 initiative. The session featured two key speakers who provided both a global and national perspective on quality assurance, recognition, and academic mobility.

The first contribution came from Marina Larrea, representing OBREAL and the HAQAA3 management team. She presented an overview of the HAQAA3 initiative, emphasizing its role in fostering structured and sustainable cooperation between Africa and Europe in the field of higher education. Her intervention highlighted the strategic objectives of the project, which include strengthening quality assurance systems, advancing recognition mechanisms, and promoting academic mobility across the continent. She also underscored the importance of HAQAA3 as a tool for bi-regional policy dialogue and harmonization.

The second intervention focused specifically on the development of quality assurance systems, recognition procedures, and mobility strategies in the context of Senegal. The presentation offered a national lens on how the goals of HAQAA3 align with ongoing reforms and policy priorities within the Senegalese higher education system. This provided valuable insight into the local relevance and implementation potential of continental initiatives like the African Credit Transfer System (ACTS).

Overall, the session established a common understanding of the HAQAA3 project, its added value in promoting coherence across regional higher education frameworks, and its relevance as a platform for mutual learning and capacity building among African and European stakeholders.

Session 2 focused on the comparative analysis of academic credit and recognition systems in Africa and around the world. It brought together two expert speakers from the HAQAA3–ACTS initiative to share global and regional perspectives, followed by a guided discussion involving participants.

The first presentation, delivered by Pablo Beneitone, representative of the HAQAA3 ACTS Expert Team, explored the global landscape of credit recognition and mobility. It provided a comparative overview of key features of regional and national credit systems in Europe, Latin America, and Asia, highlighting both the diversity and convergence of approaches toward credit portability, qualification frameworks, and learning outcomes. Emphasis was placed on the role of credits as mechanisms that facilitate academic transparency, student mobility, and regional integration in higher education.

The second contribution, presented by Senghane Mbodji, also representing the HAQAA3–ACTS Expert Team, focused on the current state of credit systems in Africa, with a particular emphasis on West Africa and Senegal. The presentation drew on the findings of a comprehensive study conducted by the ACTS expert group on the state of the art of credit systems across the continent. It addressed the varying degrees of development, harmonization efforts, and the institutional challenges associated with implementing credit-based systems in African higher education.

The roundtable discussion was structured around several guiding questions, designed to foster dialogue on regional similarities and differences, as well as practical and policy implications. Participants engaged in reflections on:
- The relationship between the African context and other regions regarding credit recognition— identifying both commonalities and distinctive challenges.

- The perceived value and critical role of credit systems in their respective higher education systems.
- The extent to which regional credit systems have been implemented at the government and institutional levels, and the barriers faced.
- The potential of credit systems to support curriculum harmonization, quality enhancement, pedagogical innovation, and flexible learning pathways.
- The use of credit systems to facilitate national and international student mobility.
- The current prioritization of credit system reform in participants' institutions and the importance attributed to this topic in institutional agendas.
- This session provided a platform for comparative learning and exchange, reinforcing the importance of shared standards, regional cooperation, and the strategic role of credit systems in advancing the goals of harmonization, quality assurance, and student-centered learning across Africa.

Session 3 was dedicated to an in-depth group discussion, lasting approximately one and a half hours, aimed at engaging participants in active reflection on the African Credit Transfer System (ACTS) from both national and institutional perspectives. The session began with a brief introduction outlining the objectives and structure of the group work. Participants were then divided into five or six smaller groups, each tasked with addressing a set of guiding questions related to two key thematic areas.

Theme 1 – National Level: the first theme focused on the relevance and feasibility of ACTS at the national level. Participants were asked to identify additional key components they believe should be incorporated into the ACTS proposal. The discussion also explored the major obstacles that countries may face in adopting the ACTS framework. Groups were encouraged to reflect critically on the political, institutional, financial, and technical barriers that could hinder implementation. Lastly, participants were invited to suggest concrete strategies and solutions to overcome these challenges, drawing from their national contexts and experiences.

Theme 2 – Institutional Level: the second theme shifted the focus to the institutional level, exploring how ACTS could be introduced and supported within individual universities and higher education institutions. Groups were asked to propose five key steps or strategies that could be implemented to initiate ACTS-related discussions in their institutions. Particular attention was given to the internal dynamics, leadership structures, and operational mechanisms that would facilitate institutional engagement.

Additionally, participants discussed communication strategies and awareness-raising measures that could be employed to inform the broader academic community—faculty, students, and administrative staff—about the objectives, importance, and potential benefits of ACTS. The goal was to identify effective procedures for building institutional ownership and fostering a shared understanding of ACTS across all stakeholders.

This session served as a practical, participatory space to connect policy-level intentions with institutional realities, allowing for a nuanced and context-sensitive exploration of ACTS implementation pathways.

In session 4, the main findings of the discussion of the two themes were shared in plenary. In relation to Theme 1 (national level), the groups expressed broad consensus on the need to advance normative and academic harmonization as a fundamental condition for the effective implementation of ACTS. Common challenges included the lack of alignment within the LMD system, curricular inconsistencies, statutory teaching loads, and divergent pedagogical methods, all of which weaken the coherence of credit systems across countries.

Participants emphasized the importance of including additional dimensions in ACTS such as the recognition of prior learning (VAE) and the integration of micro-credentials (e.g., certificates, attestations, internships). These measures would increase flexibility and accommodate diverse

educational pathways. Key obstacles identified included the difficulty in applying existing regulations, the absence of robust monitoring systems, and the limited ratification of regional frameworks such as the Addis Ababa Convention.

Another challenge raised was the varying levels of development of qualification frameworks across countries and even within institutions, which underscores the need for a phased and adaptive approach to ACTS. Institutional fragility in terms of human resources and technical capacity was also highlighted.

Proposed solutions include progressive harmonization of legal and academic frameworks while allowing room for national adaptation, the creation of new regulations recognizing micro-credentials and prior learning, the digitalization of accreditation systems, capacity building for staff, and multi-level advocacy strategies. Political support and financial commitment were also deemed critical for a successful transition to a continental credit system.

In relation to Theme 2 (institutional level), all groups agreed on the need for a comprehensive, participatory, and gradual strategy for the implementation of ACTS in universities and higher education institutions. One of the key recommendations was to conduct extensive awareness-raising and information dissemination efforts within academic communities to build commitment and ownership.

The establishment of internal quality assurance units at both institutional and sectoral levels was also emphasized, supported by targeted technical training programs to ensure their operationalization. These units would play a central role in managing evaluation and accreditation processes and implementing follow-up recommendations.

Further strategies included ensuring explicit political support to facilitate funding and implementation, launching pilot initiatives with phased rollouts, providing continuous training for academic and administrative staff, developing monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, and promoting institutional benchmarking and networking to enable the exchange of best practices.

Active stakeholder engagement—including leadership, faculty, students, and quality assurance bodies—and clear institutional communication were considered essential conditions for institutional ownership of ACTS. Together, these strategies aim to build a solid foundation for aligning governance, pedagogy, and regional frameworks in support of a harmonized academic credit system.

At the end of the event, the future steps in relation to ACTS were presented. It was explained that HAQAA3 will be organizing the last regional workshop with strategic partners in Egypt, 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. From this, the state of the art report will be finalized and translated into four official African languages (French, English, Portuguese and Arabic). The HAQAA3 Implementing Team will make a preliminary assessment/recommendation for 10 pilot countries for ACTS. 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.