

Harmonisation, Quality Assurance
and Accreditation in Africa



Southern Africa Regional Consultation on PAQAA

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1. Introduction and context

The Southern Africa consultation on the establishment of the Pan African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency (PAQAA) took place on 6 August 2024 in Mauritius. This event was organized in conjunction with the SADC EMIS Technical Committee meeting, bringing together quality assurance stakeholders from across the SADC region. It formed part of the broader HAQAA3 consultation process designed to inform the design of the PAQAA's governance, functions, and operational roadmap. The event was co-hosted by the Higher Education Council of Mauritius, in collaboration with SARUA and the SADC Secretariat. It is the third of four regional consultations organized under HAQAA3 in 2024.

Participants included representatives from national quality assurance agencies, ministries, regional networks, and higher education institutions from across the SADC region. Countries represented included: Mauritius, Mozambique, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Tanzania, Botswana, Eswatini, Zambia, and Malawi. Also in attendance were members of the PAQAA Interim Technical Unit, HAQAA3 implementing partners, and observers from the AAU, DAAD, ENQA, and OBREAL.

2. Objectives of the consultation

The Southern Africa consultation had the following objectives:

- Review progress on the PAQAA initiative and present the HAQAA3-supported work plan.
- Discuss and validate the proposed governance structure for PAQAA.
- Address questions and expectations regarding PAQAA's legal foundation, mandate, and financial model.
- Collect regional perspectives and recommendations for the phased implementation of PAQAA.
- Foster consensus on roles and engagement of SADC member states in the process.

3. Key discussions and outcomes

3.1 FUNCTIONS OF PAQAA

There was wide agreement that PAQAA's primary added value lies in facilitating external reviews of QA agencies, building capacity, and maintaining a public register of agencies aligned with the ASG-QA. These were seen as urgent and useful functions that should be prioritized in Phases 1 and 2. Participants emphasized that PAQAA must not duplicate national roles or impose top-down accreditation, which could undermine existing systems.

Participants appreciated the consultative approach of HAQAA3 and called for sustained technical support, with emphasis on tailoring services to the needs of less mature systems in the region. It was recommended that reviews remain voluntary, based on self-assessment and peer evaluation, and accompanied by training and feedback mechanisms.

3.2 GOVERNANCE

The governance discussion focused on the composition and mandate of the General Assembly, the role of the Executive Board, and the interim structures. Most delegates supported the idea of a lean, regionally representative governance model, with the General Assembly composed of national QA bodies. Countries without an agency could designate a representative from the Ministry of Education. There was consensus that PAQAA should operate independently but with endorsement from the AUC and strong links to regional organizations.

3.3 FINANCING

Financial sustainability was recognized as a key concern. Participants supported the idea of launching PAQAA with HAQAA3 support, then gradually transitioning to a cost-recovery model based on service fees. Suggestions included:

- Charging for agency reviews and training.
- Encouraging member contributions through secondments or hosting.
- Exploring external funding from regional development banks and donors.
- Avoiding mandatory membership fees at this stage.

3.4 COMMUNICATION AND COORDINATION

The meeting underscored the need for more accessible communication. Participants welcomed the PAQAA website but stressed the importance of multilingual resources and targeted outreach. SARUA and the SADC Secretariat were identified as key platforms for disseminating PAQAA information and convening future political dialogue. The participants also called for clearer messaging around the separation of functions between PAQAA and existing QA networks or institutions.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

The Southern Africa consultation confirmed the region's strong interest in a pragmatic and inclusive approach to the establishment of PAQAA. The participants supported moving forward with an interim governance structure under HAQAA3 and called for continued involvement in shaping PAQAA's statutes and funding model. There was broad agreement on the phased implementation of its functions, with a focus on technical support and peer learning.

Key recommendations include:

- Advance with a clear and inclusive interim governance structure.
- Ensure that PAQAA does not duplicate national accreditation mandates.
- Prioritize voluntary reviews, capacity building, and registry functions.
- Mobilize SADC regional bodies for advocacy and dissemination.
- Avoid membership fees; use service-based financing for sustainability.
- Launch sensitization campaigns targeting ministers and national agencies.