Report on the Study visit in Germany and France

12th November-20th November 2014

1. Aims

Initially planned at the outset of the project to build a common vision of a qualification framework for India, the study visit could only take place half way through it with different objectives:

- the implementation of the NSQF
- the functioning of a qualification agency
- the added value of a NQF for a VET system
- the referencing to the EQF.

The choice of the 2 countries was based on the fact that (a) Germany and France have the widest economies in Europe, and size matters in term of design and implementation of a NQF, and (b) since the German framework is relatively new and the French one is fully operational, the SV would show two generations of frameworks, before and after the EQF recommendation. But both frameworks have been referenced against the EQF and the referencing reports, which has been shared with the participants, provided a detailed introduction to the visit.

The visit was organised in Germany with GIZ and in France by the Commission Nationale de la Certification Professionnelle (CNCP), the French Qualification Agency. The German visit included an evening reception to the Embassy of India in Berlin, the participation of the delegation to the 3rd Indo-German Investment Summit where the Director of the NSDA made a presentation. Institutions visited included the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, Siemens professional education, the Berlin Chamber of Commerce, the Federation of German Wholesale, Foreign Trade and Services, the Federal Association of Employers.

In France the visit included the CNCP, the Paris Chamber of Commerce, the Ministry of Education, the Ecole Informatique et les Techniques Avancees, AFT-IFTIM a major training provider in Logistics and Transportation, the Confederation Generale for Small and Medium Companies (CG-PME), and the High Institute for Perfume and Cosmetics.

The main aim of the visit was to illustrate practices in implementation of national qualification frameworks, but there was several purposes attached to this global technical aim.

a) **Embeddedness**: The SV was also intended to illustrate an important feature of frameworks which is often overlooked: they must be embedded in the existing systems and do not represent the will to depart from them (the so-called transforming NQF)ⁱ. Both the German and the French counterparts insisted that their frameworks were not about a complete reform of the system, but an improvement of the system especially in terms of coordination and communication between the key stakeholders. In both countries, the framework is part of a policy but it is not a policy in itself.

b) The purpose of the study visit was also to illustrate the necessary **coordination and consensus building** which is implied in the design and implementation of the frameworks. The two countries illustrate a principle which has been verified in every other country where a NQF is being envisaged, designed or implemented: coordination as consensus building among the concerned stakeholders (which means more than consultation of stakeholders) is a necessary step. The logic of the framework is by-passed if it is not the outcome of mutual agreement. Stakeholders have to understand and factor in the implications of such an important device. Consensus building was repeatedly mentioned, especially in France, as an on-going process.

c) Another purpose was to **put into perspective the concept of occupational standards**. The German Stakeholders did not mention them because they are embedded in the system and the French ones presented a notion of OS which is limited to 5 or 6 functions of the targeted occupations. The over-reliance on such a sophisticated tool as occupational standards as separate tool is, at an early stage of development of a framework, very time and energy consuming and illustrates a tool kit approach of the framework as building blocks.

2. Two countries

Germany is a country whose framework is new, it was even said explicitly in the first session that it was designed in reaction to the birth of the European Qualification Framework, even if the initiative was said to have started in 2006. So the German framework has eight levels like the EQF because the EQF has eight levels and as the German system was created primarily because of transparency and permeability between sub-sectors.

Much remains to be done on the German framework, and mainly on the communication and common understanding. Each stakeholder met did not have much knowledge of the framework, because the communication about the DQR is only starting. It is interesting to see how little difference the DQR makes to the system, so Germany is a good illustration of one of the purpose of the SV quoted above. The robust quality assurance system in existence in the public and private system make the DQR a cosmetic change at least for the time being. The collective agreement culture that is the role of social partners is a strong feature of the German system.

In the case of France, the purpose was to understand the role of a certification agency which has been in existence for 12 years. The fact that the CNCP focuses on certifications only (and not on curricula) and is the gate to the register of certifications gives a vision of the framework as a modernising of the national Technical Vocational and Training system rather than a separate artefact. The important distinction between certification by right for most public providers and certification on request gives a robust institutional basis to the French NQF. It does not create a system where some stakeholders are "more equal" than others since the conditions for acceding the Register are the same for all. Another important legal feature was also presented: training as an individual right guaranteed by the law.

3. Some important issues

Continuing training: this notion which is sometimes equalled to lifelong learning is legally framed in both visited countries. It covers up-skilling and reskilling of the existing workforce as well as of the unemployed. India is still missing a law framing the role and the funding of continuing education. SSC are the most prominent vehicles of continuing training in India.

RPL: The role of RPL cannot be overestimated. There are multiple initiatives, showing that the economy of India cannot do without some forms of recognition of experience and skills. In presenting a practice of validation of experience (VAE) the French system suggests a structured way to go about it. This will require a clarification of what is understood by and what is expected of RPL in India.

Understanding levels: the issue of the levels of qualification, which is probably the most difficult part of the framework, was not addressed in a frontal way, but clearly appeared as one of the thorny issues to resolve through coordination. The SV clearly showed that the allocation of levels is not always a straightforward issue and that in any case it does not result from a process of self-attribution.

European dimension: the role of the EQF as a pull factor has clearly been mentioned especially in Germany. The main discussion was about the articulation between the secondary and the tertiary (Bologna process) levels of the EQF addressed through the so-called tuning process whereby the so-called Dublin criteria which determine the higher education levels are progressively integrated to the EQF. Separate discussions have showed that the activity about the relation between the EQF and the NSQF will need to involve the Member States as well as the European commission.

4. Misses

Time has been too short to meet:

- The Centre d'Etude et de Recherche sur l'Emploi et les Qualifications (CEREQ- Research institute on employment and qualifications) in France would have completed the technical dimension to the SV and would have provided an insight on the invisible link between qualification and LMIS, since the CEREQ focusses on the structures of qualification in economic sectors and their link with employment in France. BIBB in Germany would also be of interest as a centre of research on qualification and as designer of curricula.

- What did not come out clearly are the quality assurance systems. There are implied in the framework which is like the tip of the iceberg, the QA being the submerged part. The topic was mentioned several times but it was not central in any of the sessions.

5. Follow-up

It was impossible in 6 working days to cover all the ground that needs to be covered on NQFs. A SV is fruitful when it provides or confirms directions based on a common understanding of the issues at stake and if it suggests subsequent initiatives. After the study visit several activities seem to need an increased consideration:

- a formal partnership between CNCP and NSDA, as sister agencies, would be in order. CNCP is a certification agency which has much more to offer to the NSDA than what was presented during the three available days. It is useful to think of other forms of cooperation.

- Relation of the NSQF to the EQF: considering the perspective of a new EC Recommendation on the external dimension of the EQF, it is urgent to engage in the first phase: building a case for India. The SV has suggested that the European Commission should not be the only counterpart of India in this phase, since education and training are not in its mandate. The Member States should be associated to this first phase. It is suggested that a workshop takes place in Delhi with selected MS (Britain, France, Germany, Denmark, Poland, Spain…), the European commission, relevant EU team experts and key Indian stakeholders. FICCI could host this workshop. This workshop could take place in the first half of next year.

   Many initiatives exist on RPL, including the NSDA project. The need is obvious and it is a priority. This activity should be closely associated with the implementation of the NSQF, so that the recognition of learning can become the validation of learning.

- No relation with the EQF is possible without a populated Register. This activity should be prioritised with an increased capacity building directed to the NSQC and the existing or future awarding bodies which will be advising on the allocation of levels of qualification. The capacity building programme planned is a step in this direction but it is not intensive enough to serve the urgent purpose of populating the Register.

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[i] In David Raffe's analysis, there are two kinds of frameworks: the transforming framework and the communicative framework. In the first case, the NQF aims at replacing the existing setting deemed a failure, and in the other it aims at promoting permeability and coherence between sub-systems