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Strengthening apprenticeship systems in the informal economy in Africa to promote quality, innovation and transitions to formality

Regional workshop

Concept note

Date: 3 days, 22-24 February 2023

Place: Cotonou

Countries: Algeria, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, DRC, Gabon, Ghana, Guinée, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda.

Partners: ILO, AFD, World Bank, SDC, ADET

Background

Apprenticeship in the informal economy – also referred to as traditional or informal apprenticeship – continues to train millions of young people in Africa. While in some countries it trains ten times the number of learners in formal skills development or TVET systems, and over 30 percent of 18-24 year-olds have been apprentices (Brooks et al. 2014), government funding very rarely reaches the actors of this self-governing system.

Informal apprenticeship has been the subject of national and international research for many years (Carton, 1980; Fluitman 1986; Fluitman 1992; Walther and Filipiak 2008; Haan 2006; Ahadzie 2009; ILO 2008; Nübler et al. 2009; ILO 2011; Akoojee et al. 2013; Adams et al. 2013; Hofmann and Okolo 2014, ADEA 2015; Nordman and Pasquier-Doumer 2012; OECD/ILO 2019; Arias Diaz et al. 2019; ILO 2020a; Werquin 2021; Palmer 2020, Avenyo 2021, Hofmann et al. 2022) yet empirical studies remain scarce and statistical information with a few notable exceptions insufficient. While there is an increasing body of literature on the informal economy, informal apprenticeship – despite its high and lasting prevalence – remains understudied.

Research has confirmed that apprenticeship is much more than an individual contract between a learner and a workplace trainer. It is a training system, embedded in local norms and traditions, utilizing enforcement mechanisms that involve kinship and the wider community. It ensures that skills for a trade or a profession are passed on from one generation to the next. In some contexts, like for the Igbo in Nigeria, the apprenticeship system is considered a “business incubator model” and at the core of the entrepreneurial spirit of its people (Ugabaya 2019, Ekekwe 2021).



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Policymakers are increasingly reassessing the value and opportunities of apprenticeship systems in the informal economy and are including them in national skills development policies and strategies. The [African Union's Continental Education Strategy for Africa](#) (African Union 2016), the [Continental Strategy for TVET to Foster Youth Employment](#) (African Union 2018), or national strategies such as the [National Five Year Development Plan in Tanzania](#) (2016–2021) all recognize apprenticeship in the informal economy as a pathway for skills development and highlight the need to improve it. The [Abidjan Declaration](#) calls for “making decent work a reality for Africa’s youth, developing skills, technological pathways and productivity for a brighter future in Africa, transforming Africa’s informal and rural economy for decent work”.

Skills reforms in a number of African countries during the past decade have aimed to introduce dual training approaches, end of apprenticeship assessments, recognition of prior learning, incentives for master craftspersons to upskill, financial incentives and other measures to upgrade informal apprenticeships and strengthen their contribution to national skills development systems. International development partners like AFD, DANIDA, GIZ and KfW, LuxDev, SDC, or the World Bank have invested in different approaches to improve informal apprenticeships.

Benin has often been referred to as a country where reforms to the country’s autochthonous training system have successfully combined bottom-up and top-down approaches with strong engagement of associations of craftspersons, leading to two types of qualifications for apprentices graduating from apprenticeships in the informal economy: the CQM and the CQP to address the diverse needs and realities of apprenticeship and the economy in the country. The country is registering increasing numbers of apprentices under both systems, therefore providing a clear pathway for young people to learn the skills for an occupation under shared quality standards, leading to nationally recognized qualifications.

ADET as the country’s national agency for the development of technical education is coordinating the TVET sector in the country and acting as a role model for the region to demonstrate how apprenticeships in micro and small businesses can be fully integrated into national skills development systems. ADET coordinates this work in partnership with public and private structures, a network of training centers throughout the country, the Chamber of occupations in the crafts sector in Benin, and local professional crafts associations whose members offer apprenticeships. These reforms are undertaken to ensure that the crafts sector reaches its full potential to contribute to national economic development, fostering local skills ecosystems through strengthened apprenticeships.

A number of continental initiatives are also increasingly placing emphasis on the upgrading of informal apprenticeship: The [Association for the Development of Education in Africa \(ADEA\)](#) had broadened its definition of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) to technical and vocational skills development (TVSD) in 2012, to explicitly include the reality of informal apprenticeships. Its Triennale in October 2022 also touched upon the upgrading of informal



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apprenticeship systems as part of its conference track on TVSD. The [Skills for Africa Initiative](#) by AUDA-NEPAD co-funded by Germany and the EU is developing guidance on formal and informal apprenticeships in Africa.

The ILO's [Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy Recommendation, 2015](#) (No. 204) takes account of informal apprenticeships and recognizes their potential to support transitions to formality – provided countries improve them. In addition to being a leverage for transitions to formality for young people and enterprises, apprenticeships can be a source of innovation and entrepreneurship and support local economic and sector development. What is more, they can strengthen a country's TVET system by extending its outreach, labour market relevance, and improving its cost-effectiveness, given the important contribution micro- and small enterprises already play in training delivery.

The ILO has long been supporting knowledge generation and research at country level to understand how [informal apprenticeship](#) functions, and how its prevailing decent work deficits, such as poor working conditions and child labour, can be addressed. Knowledge exchange between countries has been supported through [technical workshops in 2007](#) in Geneva (ILO 2008) and [2013 in South Africa](#) (Akoojee et al. 2013), drawing on experiences from over twenty countries. A recent [working paper](#) compares findings of country level research. In 2022 and 2023, the International Labour Conference discusses and elaborates a new international labour standard on apprenticeship. The draft text incorporates recommendations to improve apprenticeship in the informal economy, recognizing its potential to support the skilling of millions of young people in developing countries.

Workshop objectives

This workshop is expected to support policy dialogue and contribute technical reflections on how to preserve and upgrade existing apprenticeship systems in the informal economy to promote quality, innovation, economic development, social justice, and transitions to formality. More effective apprenticeship systems, capacity and innovation at local level will trigger a process of structural transformation leading to more inclusive development.

The workshop will take place in Benin, in collaboration with ADET, the Agency for the Development of Technical Education, to showcase the advances made in Benin, foster collaboration with other countries, establish Benin as a knowledge hub on the inclusion of apprenticeship within national training systems in Africa, and stimulate dialogue in other countries through knowledge sharing and exchange of experience.

More specifically, the workshop aims at



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- Sharing knowledge and experience of policies and practices from Benin and beyond to strengthen apprenticeship systems in the informal economy in the African region, identify decent work deficits and avenues to address them
- Reflecting on recent research and studies on understanding apprenticeship systems and assessing the impact of interventions and policies
- Comparing innovative approaches and lessons learnt of partnerships between crafts and business associations, parents and workers' associations, governments and non-governmental actors aiming to promote quality and dynamism in informal apprenticeship systems and transitions to formality
- Informing about a new global Recommendation on Apprenticeships discussed at the International Labour Conference in June 2023
- Identifying areas and topics for further research at national and sector level to analyse trends, assess policy impacts, and explore potential for system strengthening, enterprise and sector development and the role of apprenticeships in structural transformations
- Making Benin a hub in the sub-region for planning a multi-country program to strengthen apprenticeship systems in the informal economy for a better future of work

The expected outcomes of the workshop are

- A selection of good practices from the region on the modernisation of informal apprenticeship and its integration into national training and skills development systems.
- Evidence-based recommendations in line with the AU Agenda 2063.
- Thematic research questions and topics of interest to several countries to inform a regional agenda.

Participants

The workshop will bring together experts, representatives of governments, employers and workers' organizations, crafts associations and their federations from selected countries in Africa, other international skills development experts and interested development partners.

Languages

The workshop will be held in both English and French

Preparatory work

In order to build a basis for the event's content, the organizers will develop, in collaboration with key technical experts from Africa,

- a series of 5-7 short videos with voices of actors (apprentices, master craftspersons, crafts associations, governments, AUC, program implementers),
- a bibliography on informal/traditional apprenticeship systems, and
- three short fact sheets in two languages (maximum 2-3 pages) to serve as technical background and reflection material for the workshop. The topics covered will be as follows:



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- Conceptual clarifications and terminology (formal/non-formal/informal, apprenticeship/ Informal apprenticeship/training, traditional/informal, formal/informal economy), including the meaning of 'formality';
- Recognition of prior learning - different country approaches; and
- Sectors of informal apprenticeships: Traditionally in crafts, however potential for new sectors for vocational learning such as ICT, renewable energy, and in rural areas agriculture (farmer apprenticeship) including green skills.