

## TRADITIONAL APPRENTICESHIP IN THE INFORMAL ECONOMY IN AFRICA



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### INTRODUCTION

In Africa, youths represent a rising part of the population and economies are facing difficulties to absorb their influx into the labour market because of the low level of qualifications that they offer. Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) systems, which are one of the main elements of the potential response to this demand, are limited both in terms of matching labour market needs with the supply of trained persons with good capacities.

The way companies consider young graduates is generally clear and irrefutable: “they know the theory but have no idea about practice!” In reality, the post-primary education essentially consists of learning a job within Small and Micro Enterprises (SMEs) according to training methods termed as “traditional”. The most requested sectors are the craft industry, consumer goods and personal services and agriculture. Indeed, traditional learning represents an alternative to the NEET phenomenon (Not in Employment, Education or Training). However, this type of learning may jeopardize the commitments of states regarding child labour and education for all, even if learning mainly concerns children of post-primary school age.

### TRADITIONAL LEARNING’S MODALITIES

Generally, the young learner is supervised by a master-craftsman who trains him or her in one or two years. In exchange, the young learner or his or her parents pay him financial returns. In many Sub-Saharan countries, the master-craftsman is paid – or at least receives compensation, generally in kind, from the family – for hosting the apprentice. In other countries, the young learner may be (poorly) paid<sup>1</sup>. Generally, craftspeople complain about the lack of a qualified workforce, which can also be a pretext to hire more underpaid apprentices. Small enterprises have a strong turnover of apprentices because, often, they are not ready to hire more expensive workers. Thus, the development of apprenticeship has been at the expense of wage labour because it has become its hidden form. Medium-sized firms tend to specialise their apprentices on fragmented tasks in order to use a cheap workforce in a productive way. The rotation of apprentices becomes systematic and this way of training results in specialisation. Small enterprises are, however, more likely to deliver a more complete training which will tend to increase the apprentices’ capacity to create their own business later. This is, at least in part, thanks to the knowledge acquired on the entirety of business issues.<sup>2</sup>

In the traditional apprenticeship model, the young learner does not frequent an institution of vocational training. Obviously, the apprentice learns a profession “on the job” and his or her apprenticeship facilitates his/her employability and his/her professional integration. However, the apprentice is often, sooner or later, confronted with the limits of the apprenticeship in learning the chosen profession: the insufficient

<sup>1</sup> The master craftsman is seeking productivity and workforce stability, and may, as a strategy, make clear to the apprentice that the low income he or she receives is the price to pay for the acquisition of the trade.

<sup>2</sup> Technical knowledge of the business but also of non-directly productive activities (choice of materials, maintenance of tools and machinery, relationships with customers, workshop management, supply management, accounting / procurement, contacts with subcontractors, etc.), which give to the apprentice the opportunity to learn about all operations of the enterprise.

knowledge of the theoretical principles of the job prevents him/her from adopting a professional lifelong learning approach.

Finally, a recrimination or an almost constant claim of master craftspeople is that they should be compensated for their training function, which is both time and money consuming (waste of raw materials, defective work). Such claims may be used to try to convince – or impose – some time off for their apprentices so that they may attend both theoretical and practical training within official training centres. In parallel, and to avoid the masters to feel looked down upon by their apprentices who are acquiring knowledge and skills that the masters themselves may not have, other steps should be taken. Accordingly, training centres should plan to support the masters with activities of continuous vocational training and a financial contribution to the training costs within micro-enterprises. This means that vocational training centres, and more generally the TVET system, should think out of the box, be open to civil society and the needs it expresses, and strive to implement actions to better match vocational training and jobs.

### **BEST PRACTICES IN THE FIELD OF TRADITIONAL APPRENTICESHIP**

The Support Program to the Development of Apprenticeship Training (Pafpa), in Mauritania and Benin, seeks to develop an offer in apprenticeship and work/study programs accessible to youths. It also aims to provide sustainable skilled workers in line with those which SMEs need. It further intends to provide apprenticeships that are formally recognized as part of a concerted effort of public institutions, companies and vocational training centres. In the framework of the ILO's International Program on the Elimination of Child labour (IPEC), the pedagogy and learning methods have been adapted to formal education standards. Specific instruments have been created, as well as a possible official recognition of the professional qualifications acquired by the apprentices within the non-formal education system.

With respect to unqualified youths who are not yet in apprenticeship, companies require apprentices who have received good professional preparation and a good training regarding the use of equipment and tools and the norms. This is particularly important with respect to Hygiene, Safety and Environment (HSE) (in particular to avoid damage to equipment and tools, waste of raw materials and defective work), before they start their internship or work/study contract. In this regard, the Ministry of Technical Learning and Vocational Training of the Republic of Congo (Brazzaville) has experimented with a vocational training model called « RCA » - Reinsertion through Communitarian Apprenticeship. This program included youth from both urban and rural environments. Partnership agreements have been signed with enterprises and master-craftsmen. Involved sectors were included construction, hairdressing/beauty care, cooking/bakery, sewing, ironwork, and plumbing. RAC's modus operandi is as follows: (i) 10 to 15 days of training/professional preparation within a training institution; (ii) 3 months of immersion in a company; (iii) companies hiring the trained apprentices. In addition to being effective, this model is efficient and offers an excellent quality/cost ratio (estimated cost between 300 and 400 euros per apprentice, depending on the chosen job). The only downside of this model comes from its difficult application to some jobs, which requires longer training (9, 12, 18 months and even more).

### **CONCLUSIONS**

There is no one-size-fits-all solution for the implementation of TVET programmes. Experimenting new training and learning models requires an in-depth analysis of the expectations of all stakeholders (learners, companies and training centres). Even if one sees that models such as the work/study system in Europe are effective, it is not correct to simply transpose them to Africa: significant modifications should be made in relation to the socio-economic and cultural local context. Traditional apprenticeship in Africa remains quite conservative and paternalistic. Masters teach their apprentices what they have learnt with their own masters, one generation before. Yet, techniques evolve and the apprenticeship system is not ready to

absorb such change so support to change and improve the quality of apprenticeships for the benefit of both masters and learners is important.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- The integration of work/study learning to traditional apprenticeship in the TVET system is highly recommended. It could improve traditional apprenticeship and support its evolution toward a work/study or school/enterprise system. By opening their door to apprentices of informal micro-enterprises, vocational training institutes could strengthen their capacities to promote and develop work/study education.
- In order to extend the work/study system to the informal sector, a voluntary policy is required from the vocational training centres which should regularly visit micro-enterprises, share qualifications and carrying out an open-door policy providing materials and equipment to partner enterprises. Thus, work/study programs could be developed, both for apprentices and masters: theoretical complements to the practices acquired within the workshops, technology updating, enterprise management, corporate tutoring, etc.
- New curricula of vocational training should be recognized by a certification.
- For the most vulnerable target groups, functional literacy programs (mathematics and French courses applied to the profession) should be implemented.

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## IESF TEAM SUGGESTED RESOURCES

- [www.agropolis.fr/formation/pdf/2007-Walter-Filipiak.pdf](http://www.agropolis.fr/formation/pdf/2007-Walter-Filipiak.pdf)
- [http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/IMG/pdf/Les\\_apprentissages\\_en\\_milieu\\_urbain.pdf](http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/IMG/pdf/Les_apprentissages_en_milieu_urbain.pdf)

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