

Formal and Informal VET in Sub-Saharan Africa



Overview, Perspectives and the
Role of Dual VET

Dr. Anthony Gewer



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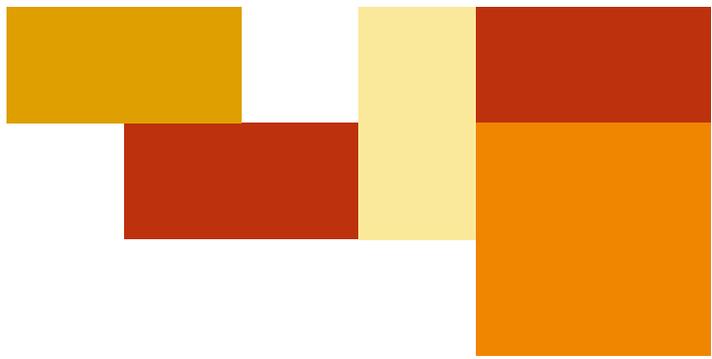
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Author: Dr. Anthony Gewer, National Business Initiative (NBI)

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The statements in this study are the responsibility of the author and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Donor Committee and its members.

Gender-specific terms and formulations apply in principle to both genders.



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1. INTRODUCTION

Over the years, the dual vocational education and training (VET) system has attracted international interest and there have been many attempts to replicate it, with varying success. The concept of dual VET emanates from a well-established tradition of cooperation and coordination among public and private actors in countries such as Austria, Germany, Liechtenstein and Switzerland (for details on key characteristics of dual VET see DC dVET 2016). In many Sub-Saharan countries, however, VET has an inferior status and there are high levels of contestation between social partners, making the conditions sub-optimal for introducing dual approaches (von Maltitz, 2018). While there are good reasons for referring to the benefits of dual VET also for the further development of VET systems in Sub-Sahara Africa, experience has shown that this requires extensive and context specific discussions and concepts.

This paper seeks to provide an input for the further discussion on the implementation of dual VET practices in Sub-Saharan Africa with a particular focus on upgrading of informal apprenticeships and the role of micro- and small- and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs)¹. In doing so, the paper takes cognisance of the dangers of wholesale policy borrowing, and the importance of ensuring that models and approaches are adaptable to both the common and differing challenges of countries across the continent.

2. VET in Sub-Saharan Africa: Background

While Sub-Saharan Africa has massively expanded access to education over the past couple of decades, the region is still someway from realising its demographic advantage. Through significant increases in public expenditure, participation in primary and secondary schooling is unprecedented and access to tertiary education has begun to expand across various countries (Arias, Evans, and Santos, 2019). Therefore, Sub-Saharan Africa is on the right track in terms of access to education. However, these advances have not been rapid enough to keep up with other low- and middle-income countries (Arias, Evans and Santos, 2019). Only a fraction of the population currently reaches tertiary education (university or tertiary VET) and the region risks falling further behind over the next few decades.

In the region, VET generally refers to formal systems of provision of mid-level skills, usually including programmes at the level of upper secondary education and as well as some tertiary education below bachelor level (Allais, 2020). Access to these formal VET systems remains small in terms of enrolment and expenditure. Only 12.2% of students in upper-secondary education, on average, are enrolled in VET programmes as of 2014, although there are high variations across the region (Santos, Soto and Sosale, 2019). These formal VET systems are generally weak, fragmented and disconnected from the labour market. There is little focus of practical training in VET systems, and this is viewed by employers as a main weakness of VET in the region.

¹ According to the World Bank, micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) are defined as follows: micro enterprises: 1–9 employees; small: 10–49 employees; and medium: 50–249 employees. However, the local definition of MSMEs vary from country to country, and is based not only on number of employees, but also by inclusion of other variables such as turnover and assets. There are about 365-445 million MSMEs in emerging markets: 25-30 million are formal SMEs, 55-70 million are formal micro, and 285-345 million are informal enterprises. Sobir, R (2020) *Micro-, Small-, and Medium-Enterprises (MSMEs) and their role in realizing the Sustainable Development Goals*. New York, United Nations.

The diagram below illustrates the low uptake of VET across many Sub-Saharan countries, although there is significant variation among them.

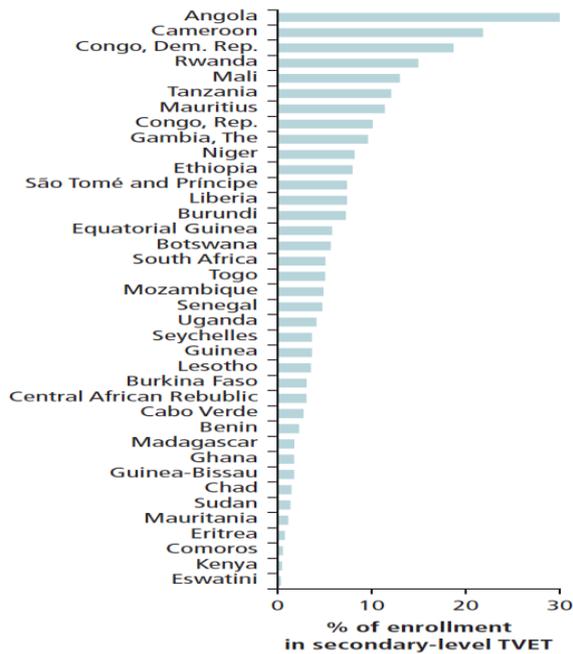


Figure 1: Enrolment in percent of all secondary-level students in TVET programmes (Source: Arias, Evans, and Santos, 2019).

Tracking into VET commences in most African countries at lower-secondary level, with the curriculum combining general and technical education but with a stronger emphasis on technical education (Arias, Evans and Santos, 2019). The authors raise concerns about early tracking into VET at the expense of sound foundation skills which may limit both learning and employment options later, thus reinforcing the low value of VET.

Allais (2020) highlights the following key considerations that are significant for any analysis of VET in Africa:

- The rapidly increasing pressure on secondary education systems to prepare large numbers of young people for the labour market. Current secondary education systems are struggling to accommodate this demand. Furthermore, conditions in the labour market are not evolving fast enough to create opportunities for better educated young people.
- Increasing numbers of highly educated young people entering a labour market context which has seen little structural change and continues to be dominated by agriculture and service sectors, thus making it uncondusive for skilled occupations or professionals.
- There are limited opportunities for formal wage employment and having low levels of education is in fact more likely to lead to employment, with many low skilled youths working in subsistence agriculture. Although secondary education is increasingly becoming a requirement for finding wage employment, less than 20% of employment in low-income African countries is in a wage-paying job.

Against this background, the paper will analyse the interaction between VET and the economy in Sub-Saharan African and highlight emerging approaches that can foster and strengthen the engagement of the economy, and in particular MSMEs, in order to expand and improve VET offerings.

3. The Relation between VET and the Economy

3.1. Conceptual Framework

The table below (figure 2) represents the lens through which VET is viewed and analysed in this document. It emphasises the interconnection between VET and the economy and provides a typology of how this relationship currently manifests, depending on the context of the country concerned. The typology distinguishes between the role of VET in the formal and informal economy. While the table provides a broad categorisation of formal and informal apprenticeships it must also be emphasised that:

“...there is not a single formal system on the one hand and a single informal system on the other, but rather a continuum from the very formal, exemplified by the German dual system for example, to the very informal, as is typical in Africa. Similarly, the system of informal apprenticeship can vary greatly from one country to another depending on the cultural context.” (Werquin, 2021: 12)

In addition, it is common for there to be parallel systems of formal and non- & informal VET within a particular country, and the intersection between the different (sub-)systems will also vary from country to country. Despite this, however, Franz (2017) distinguishes between countries where there is a distinct apprenticeship system that is regulated parallel to other formal school-based VET schemes (Botswana, Kenya, Mauritius, South Africa, Ghana, Zambia and Zimbabwe) and countries where the apprenticeship scheme is the default VET delivery mode (Ethiopia and Malawi).

The following table outlines possible interconnections between VET and the economy and the resulting types of training. Further information on the different categories can be found in the chapters indicated below.

Economy \ VET	Formal Economy	Informal Economy
Formal VET	Formal apprenticeships ² (chapter 3.2)	Upskilling of young people and adults through shorter trainings (chapter 3.4)
Non- & Informal VET ³	Work-based ⁴ and company - specific training (chapter 3.3)	Informal (“traditional”) apprenticeships (chapter 3.5)

Figure 2: Table outlining possible interconnections between VET and the economy and resulting types of training (own illustration)

3.2. Formal Apprenticeships

Formal apprenticeships are a small fraction of the formal VET systems, found mostly in Southern and Eastern Africa, and even there, their stake is small compared to school-based initial VET, which does not have a workplace learning component (Franz, 2017). South Africa has the most extensive formal apprenticeship system and produces less than 30,000 apprentices per year while Malawi, where apprenticeships are a dominant part of the VET system, there were less than 1,300 apprenticeships

² The term “formal apprenticeship” refers to apprenticeship schemes that are embedded in the formal education system leading to a formal certificate. Dual apprenticeships or dual track VET are a specific form of formal apprenticeships.

³ According to the EU (2011: p. 32-34)

- “Non-formal learning is not provided by an education or training institution and typically it does not lead to certification. However, it is structured, in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support. Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner’s point of view.”
- “Informal learning results from daily life activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time and/or learning support). Typically, it does not lead to certification. Informal learning may be intentional but in most cases it is non-intentional (or incidental/random).”

⁴ Work-based training or workplace-based learning refers here to internships or non-formal in-company training that is not linked to a formal qualification or certificate.

available in 2015 (Allais, 2020)⁵. Access to formal apprenticeships is restrictive for young people who have poor educational background, particularly where youth have incomplete primary or lower secondary education (Palmer, 2020). In addition, formal apprenticeships differ significantly between countries in the region “in terms of organizational patterns, financing mechanisms, recognition, formalization and employer involvement.” (Franz 2017, 12)

Franz (2017) further concludes the following:

- Formal apprenticeships remain small and accessible only for a privileged few as government focuses on expanding full-time training in formal VET institutions.
- SMEs tend to be less involved in formalized and structured apprenticeship training. Most will offer young recruits some company-specific training, but this is not transferable and not geared towards a comprehensive trade or occupational competence.
- Formal apprenticeships in Sub-Saharan Africa adopt a cooperative approach, combining school-based and workplace-based training. The ratio and structuring of time that apprentices spend in the institution vis-a-vis the workplace differs across countries.
- Employers play a limited role in standard setting and quality assurance, serving more as sites of training delivery. As such, employers have little influence over the quality of the system itself.
- Apprentices are typically paid an allowance by the company, which is regulated through collective agreements or set by government. Allowance may fully or partially be funded through training funds or levy systems. In South Africa, the government also offers companies tax incentives to increase the supply of apprenticeships. Countries with small formal sectors tend to avoid prescribing the apprenticeship allowance.
- Dual apprentices are gaining increased attention across the continent and there are plans underway across many countries to introduce dual training systems.
- There is widespread implementation of employer-based training within the formal sector, ranging from induction training for new recruits to highly structured in-company training linked to company career schemes. These training programmes are often provided to graduates from formal VET institutions to better prepare them for the job, with the belief that such VET training has not been fit for purpose.

3.3. Work-Based Training in the Formal Economy

The provision of workplace-based training across the Sub-Saharan region appears to be very low, although there is limited data available in this regard. According to a World Bank Enterprise Survey, 30% of formal firms in Africa offer on-the-job training although there is considerable variation between countries (Filmer & Fox, 2014). Another survey found firms that were providing on-the-job training varied from 9 percent in Sudan to as high as 55 percent in Rwanda (Arias, Evans and Santos, 2019).

Workplace-based learning in the formal economy is most likely to happen in larger firms and particularly in companies that export products as these are the firms with higher labour productivity that will more likely see skills as a primary obstacle and provide training in their business (Ngatia and Rigolini, 2019; Perotti, 2019). Governments have also sought to use workplace-based learning (also termed “internships”) as an active labour market programme, targeting unemployed youth (including both school leavers and VET or higher education graduates). These programmes may offer financial incentives to employers (both formal and informal) and allowances for the beneficiaries.

While workplace-based learning is perceived to be a key to successful employment outcomes through influencing hiring practices, addressing mismatches between skills supply and demand (i.e., ensure demand-driven training) and supporting the transition from VET to work, the literature suggests modest outcomes from workplace-based learning because such interventions do not address the low demand for labour in the formal economy, particularly in developing contexts. Therefore, workplace-

⁵ In South Africa formal apprentices make up 1% of the total number of young people enrolled in post-school education and training (Marock et al. 2020). On the other side, the World Bank (2010) found the enrolment into formal TEVET institutions in Malawi at 35 per 100,000 inhabitants, substantially lower than other countries in Southern Africa.

based learning is unlikely to lead to an increase in employment where the structural conditions are not favourable for the growth of the private sector.

3.4. The Role of Formal VET in the Informal Economy

Informal employment, excluding agriculture, makes up 72 % of total employment in Africa, rising to 86% of total employment if agriculture is included (Palmer, 2020). The informal economy is wide-ranging and diverse in make-up with a broad spectrum of activities from survivalist and low productivity on the one end and higher productivity on the other end. In general, informal economic activity is undertaken where no other choice of livelihood is available.

In this context, the emphasis on wage employment in a small formal sector context is a critical shortcoming of VET policies and systems in Sub-Saharan Africa, given the dominance of the informal economy as a major employer of youth (Arias, Evans and Santos, 2019; Allais, 2020). The delivery approaches adopted by formal VET providers (VET institutions, VET schools, training providers etc.) are not conducive for training for the informal economy, because the curricula generally focus on formal qualifications and are not able to adapt to specific skills needs of informal businesses. In addition, the pedagogical approach adopted in formal VET is geared to deliver the formal curriculum and preparing young people for the formal workplace context and is not aligned to the specific context of the informal workplace. In addition, formal VET providers are not geared to recognising non-formal or informal learning.

As such, the link between formal VET and the informal economy is tenuous, thus undermining the potential contribution of formal VET to upskilling young people that have no access to apprenticeships or qualifications. Given the large number of young people operating in the informal economy, the formal VET system could (and should) provide some formal knowledge and recognition to these young people to enable them to further their learning and career prospects, but also contribute to enhancing the aggregate skills base of the country.

3.5. Informal Apprenticeships

Even though the formal economy offers more opportunities for skills development, many informal workers will gain their skills from the informal economy itself through “learning by doing”, particularly those in agriculture, retail and other service industries which make up a large majority of informal workers.

“Informal apprenticeships are the primary source of technical and vocational skills development in manufacturing, construction and (some) service occupations in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and even Latin America, and is emerging in importance in countries in Central Asia.” (Palmer, 2020, 11)

Informal apprenticeships and informal training in general are dominant across the region, but informal or “traditional” apprenticeships are particularly evident in West African countries. In Ghana, for example, more than one-third of youth aged 25–34 report having held an informal apprenticeship (or internship) (Santos, Soto and Sosale, 2019). Informal apprenticeships account for almost 90 per cent of all trades training in Benin, Senegal and Cameroon (ILO, 2012).

Informal apprenticeships vary in quality and generally lack any formal VET or classroom instruction. They mainly attract young people with low educational achievement, often targeting young people that have not completed their primary education (Filmer and Fox, 2014).

Informal apprenticeships have a number of characteristics (Franz, 2017):

- Recruitment is often done through cultural, ethnic or religious ties. Master craftspersons are increasingly placing emphasis on educational background as a criterion in the selection process.
- Contracts may be in writing or orally, varying in content but generally describing working hours and apprenticeship periods at minimum.
- They vary in length from a few months to more than 5 years, depending on the complexity of the trade.

- Financial arrangements also vary but are generally designed to benefit both the master craftsman and the apprentice/family. It is common for apprentices to pay a training fee to the master craftsman and receive a training allowance once they become more productive. This allowance of the apprentice is usually significantly below the wage of a skilled worker. Apprentices are often required to bring their own tools for training.
- Informal apprenticeship training is enterprise-based, learning is achieved through observation, imitation, and practice with guidance from the master craftsman. As such the quality of training depends on the skills of the master craftsman and the production processes in the enterprise.
- There are instances of informal quality assurance conducted by informal trade associations mainly in West Africa, but more structured approaches to quality assurance have only been introduced in countries that have begun to upgrade their informal apprenticeship training.
- Completion rules and recognition procedures vary, with the master craftsman often determining the point of completion, depending on his assessment of competencies acquired by the apprentice. Formal certification of completion is not usually provided but the master craftsman may issue a letter to the former apprentice to confirm the apprentice's competence.

Informal apprenticeships have a long history in Africa, and the master craftsman plays an important social and economic function, passing on his/her skills to the next generation (Lange, Baier-D'Orazio and Hermanns, 2015). The graduation of an apprentice in West and Central Africa is often a community affair. Systematic assessments are not a common feature, with the master craftsman using his or her individual criteria and judgement.

They play an important source of skills for young people due to the limited scope and cost of the formal training system (ILO, 2012). Informal apprenticeships are cost-effective as they do not require expensive training centres, and the competence developed by the young person is in line with the business needs. Young people are also inducted into business culture, enhancing their employability more than those who come out of the formal training system (ILO, 2012).

Aggarwal (2013) highlights the shortcomings of informal apprentices identified through studies in the Southern and Eastern African countries:

- The quality of training provided by master craftsmen varies due to lack of uniform standards and the particular conditions of the workplace, and the skills and knowledge of the master craftsman.
- Training is unstructured and determined largely by the master craftsman.
- Underpinning knowledge is not adequately provided due to the lack of access to classroom training.
- The apprenticeship agreement is mostly verbal and not enforceable. This raises the risk of exploitation of apprentices, including a protracted training period depending on the determination of the master craftsman, the risk of the master craftsman not allowing apprentices to perform a certain task which limits the scope of training and the risk of using apprentices as cheap labour with no or limited access to social protection.
- Unlike West Africa, trade associations in Southern and Eastern Africa have little role in informal apprenticeships, hence limiting the availability of an effective mechanism for quality assurance.
- There is little formal recognition of skills acquired by informal apprentices.

3.6. Informal vs. Formal Apprenticeships

Informal apprenticeships occupy an important space for young people with limited educational background and limited access to funding. As such, informal apprenticeships have with few barriers to entry and high levels of flexibility. However, informal apprenticeships face a number of shortcomings which undermine their quality and outcomes. A comparison with formal apprenticeships by the ILO (2017) indicates that the only similarity between a formal and informal apprenticeship is in the area of workplace-based learning. In addition, ILO (2012) highlights the major distinctions between formal and informal apprenticeships with respect to the key elements that make up an apprenticeship.

Elements of the apprenticeship	Formal apprenticeship	Informal apprenticeship
Training contract between employer and apprentice	Written contract between employer, apprentice and sometimes training centres/schools	Oral or written contract between master craftsperson, apprentice and sometimes apprentice's parents
Apprentice achieves occupational competence for a trade	Broad skills that enable mastery of a trade	Broad skills that enable mastery of a trade
Training is workplace-based and integrated into the production process	Training is workplace-based and usually complemented by courses in training centres/schools; formal curricula or training plans	Training is entirely workplace-based, often following an informal training plan
Apprentice is a young person	Usually the case, some regulations include age limits, others do not	Usually the case, risk of child labour
Costs of apprenticeship are shared between employer and apprentice	Employer invests time and resources (including apprentice's wage), apprentices provide labour service, government provides financial support	Master craftsperson invests time and resources (pocket money, in-kind), apprentice provides labour service and sometimes fees

Source: ILO (2012)

The analysis in earlier sections above highlights a number of challenges associated with formal VET and formal apprenticeships in a Sub-Saharan context, including:

- Structural conditions making it difficult for the growth of the formal sector which limits the demand for formal VET.
- There are limited options for formal workplace-based learning.
- The formal VET systems being unable to adapt programmes to respond to skills demand and workplace contexts in the informal economy.

Against this background, the next section highlights some of the trends and options for improving VET systems through upgrading informal apprenticeships, bringing formal and informal VET closer together and creating conditions for more effective VET systems to operate.

4. Improving VET Systems: Approaches & Considerations

4.1. Upgrading Informal Apprenticeships

Approaches to Upgrading Informal Apprenticeships

The upgrading of informal apprenticeships has gained momentum in Sub-Saharan Africa, with increased recognition of the importance of informal apprenticeships in the culture and traditions of many Sub-Saharan African countries. Many of these countries have started to integrate informal apprenticeships into national training policies, and an increasing number of these have set as a policy objective the upgrading of informal apprenticeships and integration thereof into education and training policies. These countries include Ghana, Cameroon, Lesotho, Burkina Faso, Benin, Gambia, Mali, Tanzania, Malawi and Rwanda (Franz, 2017). Despite this trend, Franz (2017) suggests that

attempts to give structure to informal apprenticeships and bring them closer to formal apprenticeships have failed to reach scale. As such, the author argues that the policy objective should not be to make informal apprenticeships look like formal apprenticeships but rather to improve the learning process of apprentices in informal apprenticeships. Aggarwal (2013) highlights the importance of governments recognising the value of informal apprenticeships and creating a conducive policy environment in which informal apprenticeships can operate, including allocations from national budget and skills levies.

Approaches to upgrading informal apprenticeships across Sub-Saharan Africa can be broadly categorised as follows (for details and country examples see Annex 1):

- Providing formal recognition for trades;
- Integrating informal apprenticeships into national VET system;
- Introducing more structured and organised approaches, oriented towards dual apprenticeships;
- Voucher programmes to support upgrading of craftspersons and apprentices;
- Skills levy systems to fund apprenticeships.

Some of the key lessons from efforts to upgrade informal apprenticeships over the past 20 years include (Palmer, 2020; Aggarwal, 2013):

- Strengthening existing systems through greater collaboration amongst small business organisations to guide the upgrading of informal training. This includes strengthening the capacity of small business associations to function as regulators of apprenticeships, register agreements, assess skills, and award certificates.
- Strengthening the apprenticeship contract and ensure there is a written contract.
- Upgrading pedagogical, technical, and business skills of master craftspersons, as well as ensuring access to business development services and microfinance, and improving occupational safety and health at work.
- Enhancing the skills of apprentices by providing theoretical instruction as well as business skills to complement practical skills, as well rotating the apprentices in various businesses to broaden their skills and experience.
- Providing formal recognition for informal apprenticeships, through certification as a signal of achievement of specified standards.
- Revising national competency standards and recognition of prior learning (RPL) methods to meet the needs of informal economy.
- Ensuring equitable access to informal apprenticeships, particularly for females.

Benefits of Upgrading Informal Apprenticeships

The ILO (2012) highlights some of the key advantages of upgrading informal apprenticeships, including ensuring decent work conditions, providing formal qualifications and recognition for apprentices who achieve competence in their respective trade(s), and providing apprentices with the theoretical knowledge needed to adapt to changing technologies, and business skills to prepare for possible self-employment.

Successful apprentices should have the formal recognition of competence through which they can continue working as a skilled worker with the same master craftsperson, in another enterprise, or start to work independently (Franz, 2017). Evaluations of Benin's dual system found that apprentices with only primary education were able to receive a formal certificate, and employers were more likely to hire graduates with these formal occupational certificates than other candidates (Franz, 2017).

Formal certification for craftspersons also eases access to contracts from formal sector and public clients, and generally improves the standing within the community and with clients. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, formal recognition of plumbers has increased access to contracts from registered companies and government. Informal trade association institutions can play an important role in regulating market access of newly skilled craftspersons. An example for that is Togo where informal

trade associations enable craftspersons who have completed apprenticeship training with a local master craftsperson to open a business.

In addition, master craftspersons will update their technical and business skills, benefit from cooperation with other enterprises, and have access to business development support and finance.

The upgrading of informal apprenticeship can also have benefits for the role of social partners and foster greater social dialogue. Some Sub-Saharan African countries have developed strong craft associations and in West Africa in particular some of these associations play a role in the quality assurance of workplace-based training and in the assessment and certification (Franz, 2017). The ILO (2012) emphasises the need to strengthen and expand the role of business associations in promoting and improving informal apprenticeships.

Upgrading vs. Formalisation of Informal Apprenticeship

The economic conditions in Sub-Saharan Africa make it impossible for the formal sector to have the capacity to absorb labour on the scale needed for the countries concerned. The comparative size of the informal sector makes it an important site for achieving scalable opportunities for skills development and employment. With the limitations on access to formal VET, informal apprenticeships are in many cases the only option for young people to get access to relevant occupational training. Informal apprenticeships are therefore perceived as necessary for greater economic inclusion (Werquin, 2021).

Given the central role informal apprenticeships play, it makes sense to enhance the quality and effectiveness of the informal apprenticeship rather than restricting its role through forced formalization. This could include:

- having shared intelligence on local labour market demand,
- proper selection and matching of candidates to the workplace role,
- providing more structure to the apprenticeship and setting clear objectives for learning and outcomes,
- a coherent and well-planned curriculum, including good quality assessments,
- formal recognition and certification of competencies,
- effective governance and quality assurance through key social partners,
- sound statistical data on performance and labour market outcomes.

Introducing these elements into informal apprenticeships will bring them closer to the definition of a quality apprenticeship as defined by the ILO (Werquin, 2021)⁶, which draws very strongly on the dual apprenticeship approach.

Bridging Formal VET and Informal Apprenticeships

Many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa have formal VET systems operating alongside informal apprenticeship systems. Werquin (2021) emphasises the benefits of creating links between formal VET and informal apprenticeships particularly in terms of ensuring a more seamless intersection between the two systems for students and employers, thus introducing the conditions for dual approaches where there can be an integration of institutional training in VET institutions and workplace training. For formal VET, it increases the pool of recruits and offers more direct insight into the demand for skills across the informal economy so that learning programmes can be suitably designed and structured to meet this demand. It allows for students to move between the VET institutions and the workplace in a manner which best develops their required competencies. Furthermore, it offers young people in the informal economy opportunities to formalise their knowledge and progress to further studies and higher qualifications. This would ensure more inclusive learning pathways within the formal VET system and provide broader opportunities for access to higher education.

⁶ The ILO defines a quality apprenticeship as having six key elements: meaningful social dialogue, a robust regulatory framework, clear roles and responsibilities, equitable funding arrangements, strong labour market relevance, and inclusiveness.

A key component of this bridge is the delivery of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), as it provides the basis for formally recognising workplace competence which has been acquired outside of a formal apprenticeship programme. RPL provides young people with mobility within the labour market, thus expanding opportunities for career growth. An effective RPL system should be combined with flexible and modularised VET programmes that make it easier for young people to address skills gaps identified through the RPL process and thereby move towards full qualifications. RPL should also be available and is necessary for master craftspersons, to enhance competence, quality and credibility in their work and in their role as a mentor.

4.2. Creating Conducive Conditions for Apprenticeships

Getting MSMEs on Board

Upgrading apprenticeships on a scalable and sustainable basis is not possible without the active participation of MSMEs, given their dominance in the economy of the region and their important role in providing workplaces within which workplace-based training can take place. As highlighted earlier in this paper, lessons from attempts to upgrade apprenticeships across many countries suggest some key elements that are important for ensuring the buy-in and participation from MSMEs in the process of upgrading apprenticeships, including:

- Strengthening the role of trade or business associations
- Addressing some of the barriers to growth in informal MSMEs
- Creating accessible support structures for MSMEs to provide structured and good quality workplace learning, which may include financial or non-financial incentives.

Trade or business associations should play a critical role in mobilising demand, driving curriculum and quality standards of both the curriculum and the workplace, and ensuring there is a sound match between the apprentice and the employer. The active involvement of trade associations in quality assurance and standards increases the buy-in and credibility, particularly when seeking to formalise and upgrade apprenticeship practices, and provides the basis for increasing the number of MSMEs that participate in order to achieve scale.

Employers play an important role in shaping upgraded apprenticeships, including the development of qualifications and occupational standards, curricula and assessment, as well as strategies to strengthen production knowledge. In this regard business or trade associations should in particular be directly involved in the design, promotion and implementation of apprenticeship training (Franz, 2017). This enhances the credibility of the apprenticeship system, and these associations are able to mobilise increased numbers of companies to participate.

However, MSMEs face a number of inherent barriers to market access, growth and sustainability, which in turn impact on their ability to generate demand for increased skills and productivity and act as a training provider. These include weak operational capacity, outdated equipment, and poor market linkages. In addition, the technical skills of the master craftsperson/artisan may not be formalised and/or up to date, which impacts on the quality of work. Finally, the workplace may not be conducive for structured learning in line with appropriate standards, including the lack of mentorship capacity.

In the face of these challenges, it is important to find ways to incentivise MSMEs to provide apprenticeship/workplace learning and employment opportunities by addressing these barriers and supporting them to grow. This support can include:

- Increasing access to technology, markets and finance,
- Upgrading technical, pedagogical (mentorship) and business skills of the master craftsperson / artisan.

An important ingredient is enabling the MSMEs to recognise the value of the investment in skills so that they commit to take on apprentices.

In addition to this support, the second part of the incentive for MSMEs to come onboard is ensure the conditions for workplace-based training of apprentices are as manageable for MSMEs as possible. This includes ensuring the contracting arrangements are as simple as possible, creating access to available training funds to cover some of the costs, providing sufficient structure and guidance for workplace learning in line with the curriculum requirements, and effectively training workplace mentors to mentor the apprentices.

Werquin (2021) supports the need for employer incentives for informal apprenticeships and argues that these incentives should facilitate the acquisition of theoretical knowledge, promote placements across employers who may be competitors within the same industry (through an industry association), encourage the use of training and qualification standards as well as the certification of competencies, ensure the length of training is appropriate, and promote RPL and upskilling of master craftspersons.

Werquin further argues that incentives must be linked to successful apprentice outcomes. However, while incentives are useful, it is important to ensure that employers should not be incentivised to take more apprentices than they need or have the capacity to train. Given the limited absorption capacity of MSMEs, there is an inherent danger of oversaturating the market with skilled workers who now struggle to find work, thus perpetuating the labour market challenges. (For more details on the discussion about the role of financial incentives by DC dVET see Schmid 2019).

Flexible Learning Pathways

The introduction of recognised competencies and qualifications is a key feature of upgraded apprenticeships, as it allows for more equitable learning opportunities for young people and adults. However, it is essential to ensure that learning pathways towards qualifications can be constructed in a manner which is conducive for the individual as well as for the workplace so that all the required competencies can be achieved. These competencies may be built over time and across different workplaces.

This is particularly a challenge where the apprentice is unable to achieve all the necessary competencies in a particular workplace due to limitations on the type of work conducted or the quality of the workplace environment and the scope and level of competence of the master craftsperson. The risk therefore is that the master craftsperson only passes on some of the competencies and does not equip the apprentice to fully realise the requirements of the trade concerned (Werquin, 2021). In addition, the apprentice may need to attend formal VET institutions at different times to address knowledge components as they progress towards the qualification. As such, the upgraded apprenticeship system should be underpinned by a framework which allows for flexible and stackable learning pathways, with dynamic movement between workplaces and VET institutions.

The upgraded apprenticeship should also allow for rotation of apprentices across different workplaces so as to cover different fields of practice, build their competencies and develop areas of specialisation, although this would be challenging in informal apprenticeships (Werquin, 2021). Such rotation should be contained in the apprentice contract. This rotation should not detract however from the critical role of the master craftsperson as the mentor in guiding the development of the apprentice and the apprentice's journey would start and end with their 'main' employer.

Funding Mechanisms

According to Lolwana (2016), increasing demand for VET has outstripped the funding capabilities of governments in Sub-Saharan Africa. This results in a cost-sharing model between government and families, often making VET unaffordable for young people from poor households and limiting both access and retention. Skills levy systems are increasingly becoming an important funding mechanism as public institutions are encouraged to generate alternative forms of income, but it is unclear whether this is leading to inclusive growth in VET. A key challenge is the small size of the formal private sector that is able to contribute to the funds, limiting its effect as a sustainable financing solution (Arias, Evans and Santos, 2019). In addition, skills levy systems do not necessarily shift employer's attitude to

training, particularly insofar as they do not necessarily contribute to greater economic inclusion for marginalised groups.

From a funding perspective, Palmer (2020) argues for the reprioritising of public funding to support both formal VET and informal apprenticeships. Such funding can take multiple forms:

- Direct grants to cover direct (training) fees and indirect costs (transport and accommodation). This could be an incentive to individuals or enterprises and can be conditional dependent on the performance of the recipients.
- Vouchers to individuals which can be used to select the training programme in which they wish to enrol and with which provider. This empowers the individual with more purchasing power but also stimulates competition between providers which can enhance quality.
- Training funds, including skills levies, which are typically financed by companies (through a dedicated tax) with support from donors and government. These skills levies can be used to fund the full apprenticeship or can be channelled to funding the workplace training costs while the institutional training costs in the VET provider is funded from public funds.

Ultimately, it is important to ensure complementarity between these funding sources so that they can be optimally and efficiently utilised to meet the broad needs of young people and employers.

5. Conclusion

This paper has provided an overview of the VET context and status in Sub-Saharan Africa. In doing so, the paper considers the intersection of VET and the economic context of the country concerned. Informal or “traditional” apprenticeships sit at the intersection of an informal VET system and the informal economy and offer large numbers of young people the opportunity to learn in the workplace, albeit in apprenticeships that lack many of the success factors of dual VET, such as providing apprentices with well-tuned theoretical knowledge and a formal recognition of their training.

Given the value and importance of the informal apprenticeships, the paper argues that VET can be improved by upgrading, rather than formalising, apprenticeships, bringing them closer to the formal VET systems and then ensuring that the conditions for delivering informal apprenticeships are conducive. This includes appropriate incentives for MSMEs to participate in upgraded apprenticeships, flexible learning pathways and sufficient funding mechanisms.

The paper ultimately raises the challenge of how to effectively conceptualise “dual” VET approaches in a Sub-Saharan Africa context. The emphasis on improving rather than formalising informal apprenticeships implies that the informal apprenticeships will never fit a narrow mould of the dual apprenticeship concept. However, by shifting informal apprenticeships towards a more structured and organised framework it is possible to create approaches which borrow the best practices of dual apprenticeships but make them fit for purpose for the African context.

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Annex

Annex 1: Upgrading Informal Apprenticeships: Overview on Initiatives of some Countries (based on the literature)

Focus of Upgrading	Country Intervention
Formal Recognition	<p>Benin – adopted a system with two levels of qualifications: A Professional Qualification Certificate (“Certificat de Qualification Professionnelle” (CQP)) open to youths who have at least completed primary school, involving a three-year “dual-type” apprenticeship; and an Occupational Qualification Certificate (“Certificat de Qualification aux Métiers” (CQM)) targeting youth who have not finished primary school, but followed a traditional apprenticeship with a master craftsman and were assessed based on a standardized set of skills and competencies (Palmer, 2020).</p> <p>Cameroon – Skills Assessment for apprentices. The “Groupement Interprofessionnel des Artisans” (GIPA) is a local craftworkers’ association in Yaunde created in 1999 to strengthen technical and managerial skills of master craftsmen and to restructuring and establishing apprenticeship training standards. The association has conducted skills testing of apprentices for about 12 years (Franz, 2017).</p> <p>Democratic Republic of Congo - The Association of Plumbers of South Kivu (APSKI) introduced skills assessment to formally assess and certify plumbers (Franz, 2017).</p>
Integrating Apprenticeships into National VET system	<p>Senegal has embarked on reforms to modernize traditional apprenticeships, with a goal to integrate non-formal training into the national VET system. Theoretical and practical training take place in a workshop. Government defines the role of public and private training colleges as resource centres to provide additional technical and standards-based input regarding the profession, depending on the requests made by the master craftsmen. Government also regulates entry requirements and lengths of training programmes (Sonneberg, 2012).</p> <p>Benin brought the training needs for employment in the informal sector, and the informal sector’s traditional apprenticeship system into the focus of mainstream VET reform (Franz, 2017).</p>
Formal Dual Apprenticeships	<p>In Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Mali, Niger and Togo, apprentices in dual apprenticeships receive formal classroom instruction, and the master craftsman receives skills upgrading. Some may only reach higher-level segments of the informal economy due to restrictions on entry requirements or the conditions for financial contributions from businesses (Palmer, 2020).</p> <p>Côte d’Ivoire offers subsidized dual apprenticeship for low-skilled youth, including theoretical instruction from a local training institution, subsidised wages and mentorship from counsellors, ending with a skills assessment and certification. Evaluation results show increasing numbers of apprentices but also higher levels of absenteeism than traditional apprentices (Palmer, 2020).</p>
Increasing access to both informal and formal apprenticeships	<p>Ghana maintains a National Apprenticeship Programme (NAP), subsidized by the state including covering an equivalent apprentice fee to that in traditional apprenticeships. The NAP offers youth fee-free access to apprenticeship training in masonry, welding, carpentry, garment making, and cosmetology. This resulted in increased completion rates but at the same time, quality was a concern as well as insufficient focus on improving the training skills of master craftsmen (Palmer, 2020).</p>
Strengthening Apprenticeship Systems	<p>Ghana’s Skills Development Initiative comprises strengthening of training institutions through introduction of CBT curriculum and pedagogy and strengthening of trade associations to coordinate a modernized apprenticeship</p>

Focus of Upgrading	Country Intervention
	system and to foster active participation of the private sector in the design and implementation of demand-oriented VET (Palmer, 2020).
Training for Growth Sectors of the Economy	The Kenya Youth Empowerment Programme includes an apprenticeship combining life skills, core business training and sector specific technical skills, combined with 12 weeks of work experience in formal and informal sectors. Master craftspersons are provided with upgraded business and training skills in trainings that are taking place after hours. Students receive stipends and enterprises receive compensation for productivity losses. 75 per cent of participants secured employment within six months of completing the programme (Palmer, 2020).
Upgrading of Skills for Master craftspersons and apprenticeships through voucher programmes	<p>The Ghana VET Voucher Programme, implemented by Ghana’s Council for TVET (COTVET) was launched in 2017 and aims to provide competency-based training for COTVET-registered master craftspersons, and their workers and apprentices in the informal sector through certified public and private training, based on their particular needs. The project financed vouchers for approximately 15,000 master craftspersons, their employers and apprentices (out of which at least 30 per cent are women) while providing certain equipment to the selected training providers. The trade areas covered by the programme are cosmetology, consumer electronics, automotive repair, building construction (welding), and garment making (Palmer, 2020).</p> <p>The Kenya Micro- and Small Enterprise (MSE) Training and Technology Project completed in 2002 and offered vouchers to offset the cost of training and access to new technology so as to develop the market for MSE training. The vouchers covered 50 to 70 per cent of training costs for master craftspersons and apprentices while other vouchers offered access to technology, and specialized management and marketing services. The programme targeted women and was implemented by a non-governmental agency. More than 32,000 people were trained, of whom 60 per cent were women (Palmer, 2020).</p> <p>The TEVET Authority (TEVETA) in Malawi supported the formation of Informal Sector Training Providers Associations (ISTPA) in all regions and districts to organize the upgraded master trainers and to provide an institutional set-up for the further improvement and development of training in the informal sector and use of master craftspeople in rural training set-ups (Franz, 2017).</p>
Skills Development Levies	<p>Various countries in Sub-Saharan Africa have adopted skills development levy systems as a means to fund apprenticeships (both formal and informal). In many cases, these are reliant on donor grants. Where such grant funding has ended these have been difficult to sustain with government funding. In Ghana, Zambia and Uganda, the funds operate through intermediaries that provide support to SMEs to access the funds.</p> <p>In the SADC region, there are few mechanisms to support workers in the informal economy through levy funding. In South Africa, the skills levy is split – 80% goes to the private sector levy payers to fund workplace training (mostly larger companies), while 20% goes to fund broader programmes to advance economic inclusion. Generally, there is little support for informal workers (Palmer, 2020).</p>