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ABSTRACT

Apprenticeship is the main avenue to self-employment in micro-enterprises and thus a cornerstone of informal sector development in West Africa. Survey results for Ibadan, Lome, Dakar, Niamey, and other cities demonstrate that apprenticeship as practiced by informal sector artisans is often very similar from one country to the next. Dropout rates are estimated at 20-25%. Micro-enterprises involved in apprenticeable trades produce, on average, one "graduate" per year. Apprenticeship is not only for young men. Females apprentice in female-dominated trades. Survey data confirm that apprentices tend to be better educated than their masters. A majority select their trade because it was something they had always wanted to do. Masters are often selected because they are relatives or family acquaintances. Costs of apprenticeship vary considerably among and within trades and from one country to another depending on demand and whether the master is a relative. Apprenticeship usually takes 3 or 4 years, and working hours are long. Apprentices learn primarily by watching their master and being "corrected" when they err. Usually, masters follow a training plan. Apprentices learn technical skills as well as management and organization skills. Three of four apprentices state they want to create their own establishment; many seek wage employment at first. Intervention options should include measures aimed at apprentices or at masters. (Appendixes include 10 statistical tables.) (YLB)

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Discussion papers are preliminary material intended to stimulate critical discussion and comment

February 1992

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PREFACE

This paper is one of several outcomes of a joint research effort of the International Labour Office, the Development Centre of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the World Bank. The joint project studied, in several West African countries, how informal sector artisans had acquired their skills and how they contributed to skill acquisition by training apprentices. Surveys of apprentices were also undertaken, notably in Ibadan (Nigeria) and Lomé (Togo). A synthesis of the work is to be published later under the title "Skill Acquisition and Work in Micro-enterprises: Recent Evidence from West Africa".

Introduction

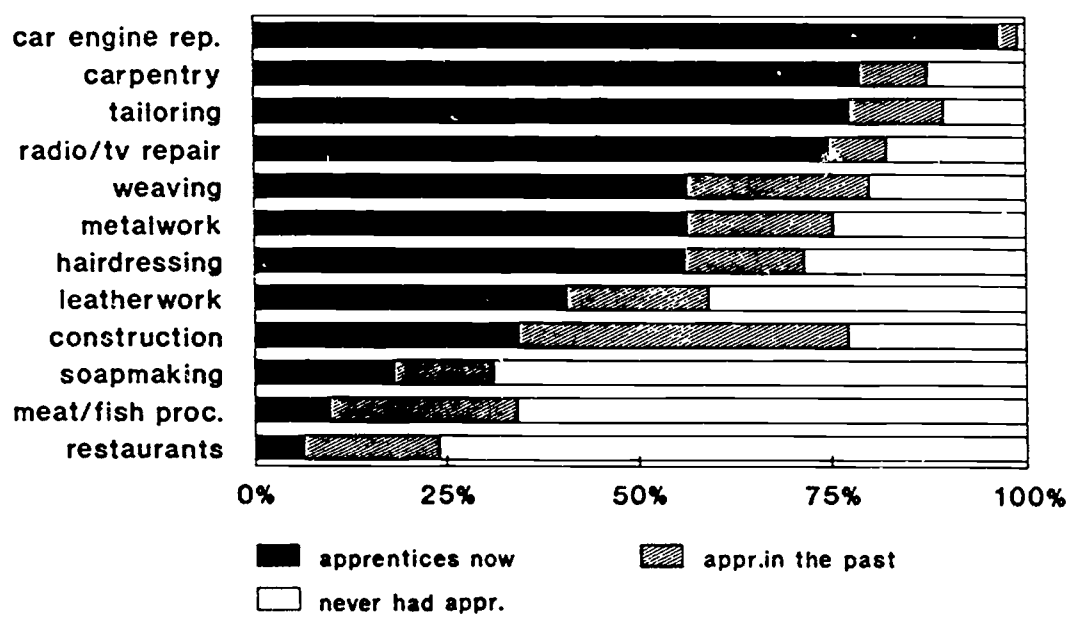
Hundreds of thousands of young people in West Africa are being trained at this moment, without any involvement of government and at no cost but to themselves or their parents. Traditional apprenticeship, a remarkable blend of work, practical training and moral upbringing, is the main avenue to self-employment in micro-enterprises and thus a cornerstone of informal sector development.

Survey results for Ibadan and Lomé, partially supplemented by data for Dakar and Niamey, and earlier data for other cities, demonstrate that apprenticeship as practiced by informal sector artisans is often very similar from one country to the next. Basic characteristics have been handed down through successive generations of masters; relatively minor variations among and within countries reflect how different needs and circumstances have given rise to adaptation. The system, however traditional, has been capable of considerable growth and diversification; it now covers more trainees in more trades than ever before.

Frequency

Apprenticeship is not equally common in all informal sector trades. Frequencies by trade for each of the cities surveyed show a remarkable similarity however, so that they can be combined as follows:

Chart 1: Apprenticeship in 1,751 Micro-enterprises in Dakar, Ibadan, Lomé and Niamey, Selected Activities, Percentages of all Enterprises with Apprentices Now or At Some Stage in the Past



Three categories can be distinguished:

(i) Activities in which apprenticeship is very common and almost, it seems, a pre-condition for being self-employed. They include car engine repair, carpentry, tailoring and radio/TV repair. Entrepreneurs in this group who do not have apprentices are typically recent starters.

(ii) Activities in which entrepreneurs usually have been apprentices; they may or may not have their own apprentices now. They include weaving, metalwork, hairdressing, leatherwork and construction. A fair number of entrepreneurs in this group have had apprentices at some stage in the past but don't need them any longer or are unable to attract them now. Most of those who never had any apprentices are recent starters.

(iii) Activities in which apprenticeship has never been common and where entrepreneurs, mostly female, rely if necessary on family helpers. Included are soapmaking, meat/fish processing and restaurants, together with most retail and wholesale activities.

Almost all of the sample entrepreneurs involved in trades of group (i) and (ii) above, had been apprentices and 60 per cent of those who had been apprentices believed that it represented their most useful learning experience.

Entrepreneurs who accept apprentices usually have two, three or four at a time but popular masters in "attractive" trades may have more. However, very few enterprises anywhere have more than ten apprentices even if a fair number of Ibadan carpenters, dressmakers and some master car mechanics might suggest otherwise. Only in exceptional cases is income from training likely to exceed revenue from the master's "real" business.

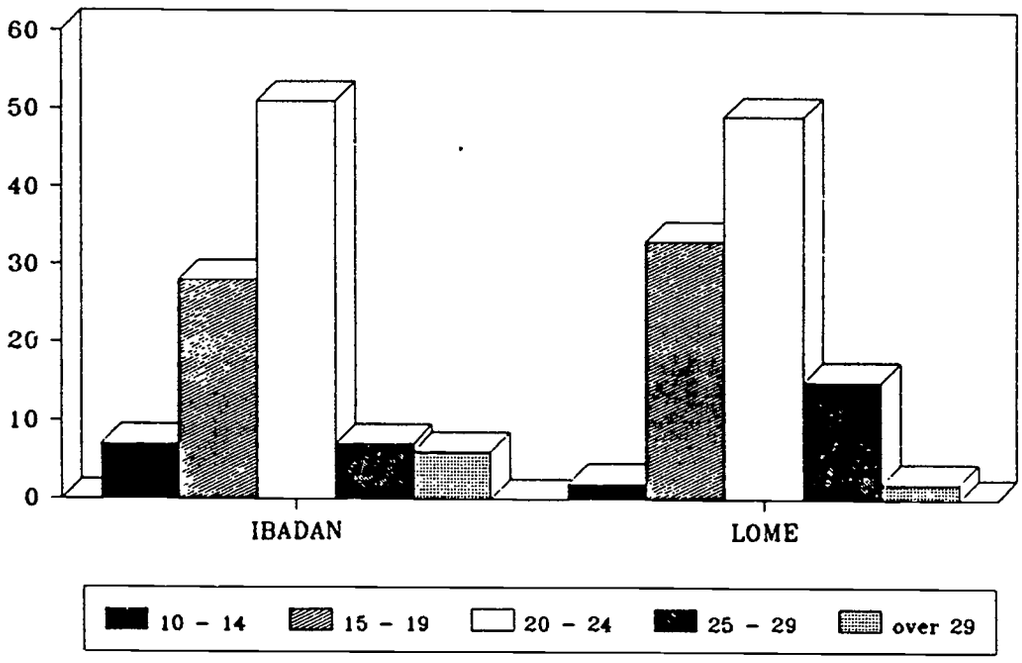
Not all apprentices complete their apprenticeship. In addition to a few cases of business failure, there is drop-out as in other training systems; some trainees cannot cope or find that they waste their time; others get in trouble with their master; the women may become pregnant. Drop-out rates are estimated at 20-25 per cent of the intake with variation by trade. In general, these rates are lower in the more traditional trades which attract relatively less educated males; drop-out was found exceptionally high in the case of Lomé hairdressers (48 per cent).

Taking account of drop-out and other variables such as the duration of apprenticeship and the proportion of entrepreneurs without apprentices, it may be suggested, merely as a rule of thumb, that micro-enterprises involved in apprenticeable trades produce, on average, almost one "graduate" per year. How many of the graduates will eventually start their own enterprise is unclear but it is certain that without them the remarkable growth of the informal sector could not have come about.

The Apprentices

Presumably as a result of increased access to education, the average age of apprentices has increased over the years and is now around 20; a large majority is between 18 and 25 years old (see Annex 1, Table 1). At least in the case of West Africa, it is incorrect to associate apprenticeship with child labour as has been done in places to justify restrictive legislation.

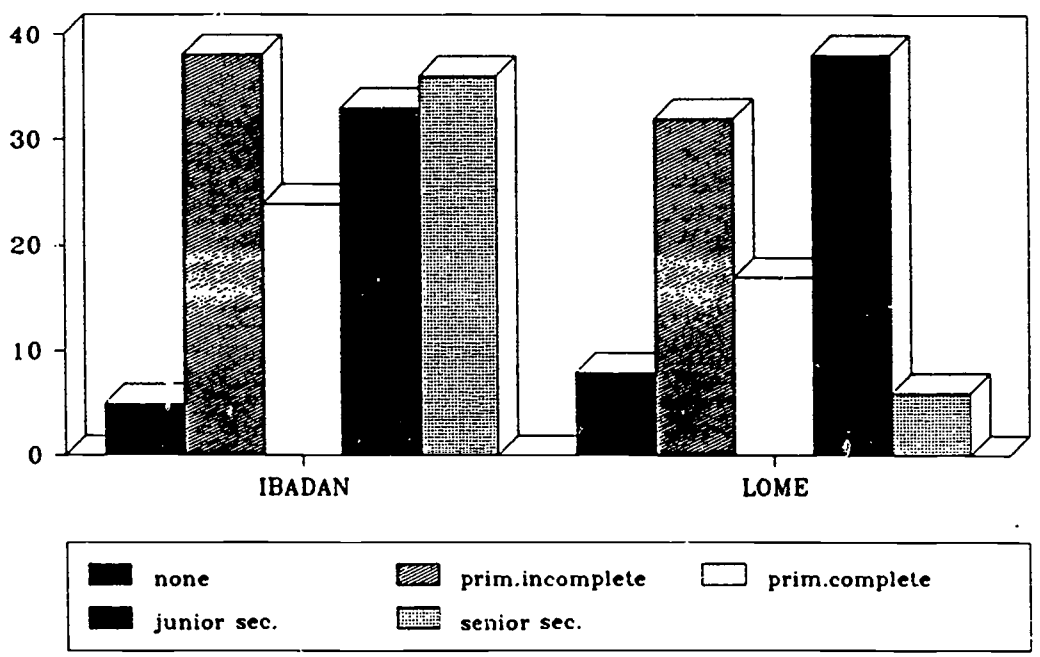
Chart 2: The Age of Apprentices in Ibadan and Lomé; Percentage in Age Group



Apprenticeship is not only for young men. In a number of trades practiced by women, such as dressmaking and hairdressing, female apprentices are the rule rather than the exception. In other "female" trades, notably various food processing activities, entrepreneurs prefer family helpers who may learn something in the process but who are not considered trainees. As a result of the sexual division of labour, fewer training opportunities exist for young women; it is virtually excluded that they would be apprenticed to male entrepreneurs and there are fewer apprenticeable trades in the female domain.

Survey data confirm a trend found in earlier surveys, namely that apprentices tend to be better educated than their masters. In Ibadan 92 per cent of apprentices had completed primary school compared to 82 per cent of their masters. In Lomé the figures were 60 and 54 per cent respectively. A relatively new phenomenon consists of large numbers of apprentices who have been to secondary school. In Ibadan 33 per cent had been to junior secondary and 36 per cent to senior secondary; in Lomé they were 38 and 6 per cent respectively (see Annex 1, Table 2). It is important to recognise two elements in the explanation; there have indeed been further improvements in access to education but, also, fewer employment opportunities for educated youth in the modern sector so that masters can be more selective. In any case there exists an accrued interest among the better educated to sign up as apprentices. Although entry requirements for apprenticeship remain flexible, masters increasingly cite aptitude among selection criteria using education level as a yardstick.

Chart 3: Education Level of Apprentices in Ibadan and Lomé; Percentage by Highest Level Reached



The stigma associating apprentices with school failures, if it ever existed, does not apply any longer. Traditional apprenticeship usually complements basic education; it does not substitute for it. It substitutes for formal vocational training which, if it is available, is often irrelevant to informal sector circumstances. Almost all entrepreneurs who had been involved in formal training had thereafter nonetheless gone through a period of apprenticeship.

Selection Criteria

A majority of apprentices who were asked said that they had selected their trade because it was something they had always wanted to do. Good prospects or the fact that they had relatives or friends in the trade were also mentioned by some. Their considerations must have been based on what was given, namely their sex and level of education which, survey data show, are the main determinants of activity choice among entrepreneurs (see Annex 1, Table 3).

Reasons to select one master rather than another often included that he or she was a relative or acquaintance of the family; in Ibadan it was mentioned in 42 per cent and in Lomé in 40 per cent of all cases. It shows that kinship remains a key factor in traditional apprenticeship; but it is not - any longer - the variable which explains all. Other common reasons for choosing a master included enterprise performance and his or her professional reputation (see Annex 1, Table 4).

Most entrepreneurs are keen to have apprentices but they only select them, they say, after a serious round of talks with a parent or guardian. They are, inter alia, concerned about trainability and behaviour and may insist on a probation period. The most important selection criterion, it appears, is aptitude which is, according to some masters, mainly a matter of the candidate's education level. Honesty is another most important factor, one which in the view of some masters may be vouched for by family links (see Annex 1, Table 5).

Conditions

Most apprentices these days are old enough to have decided themselves that they should learn a trade this way. However, most of the written contracts which cover more than 80 per cent of apprenticeships in Ibadan and Lomé, are signed with parents who negotiate fees and other conditions on their behalf. In Niamey the situation is different in that contracts and payments are rare.

The costs of apprenticeship vary considerably among and within trades and from one country to another depending, inter alia, on how much demand there is for such training and whether or not the master is a relative. It appears that paying fees has become the norm in Ibadan and Lomé. In Niamey, however, apprenticeship is still mainly a matter of kinship and fees remain an exception. The issue of costs is complex and should be considered not only in terms of fees but also in terms of payments in kind

such as entry and exit presents and the duration of the apprenticeship. Moreover, on the benefit side, pocket money and perks which apprentices may or may not receive, should be taken into account; their value may well exceed apprenticeship fees. Be that as it may, apprentices typically invest in their future and two thirds of them rely to a lesser extent on family support. Relatively few apprentices depend exclusively on whatever they receive from their master (see Annex 1, Table 6).

Apprenticeship usually takes three or four years, depending on the trade and, to some extent, on the age, the aptitude and the education level of the apprentice. In the case of Lomé, duration, like the level of fees, is subject to recent legislation. Hairdressing apprentices tend to stay two years and occasional apprenticeships by soapmakers may last only six months (see Annex 1, Table 7).

Working weeks of apprentices are long, even if the work is not always equally hectic. Certain periods of the year such as those preceding religious holidays, are much busier than other periods. Masters consider that their apprentices should be present when they are; that being in business means being available. Apprentices in Lomé typically work six days a week, eight hours a day; in Ibadan there are often ten hours in a working day which makes for a 60-hour week. With only few exceptions, vacation for apprentices (or anyone else in the informal sector) is unheard of. Apprentices are likely to obtain permission however to respect family obligations such as funerals and marriages even if it involves travelling far away.

The Learning Process

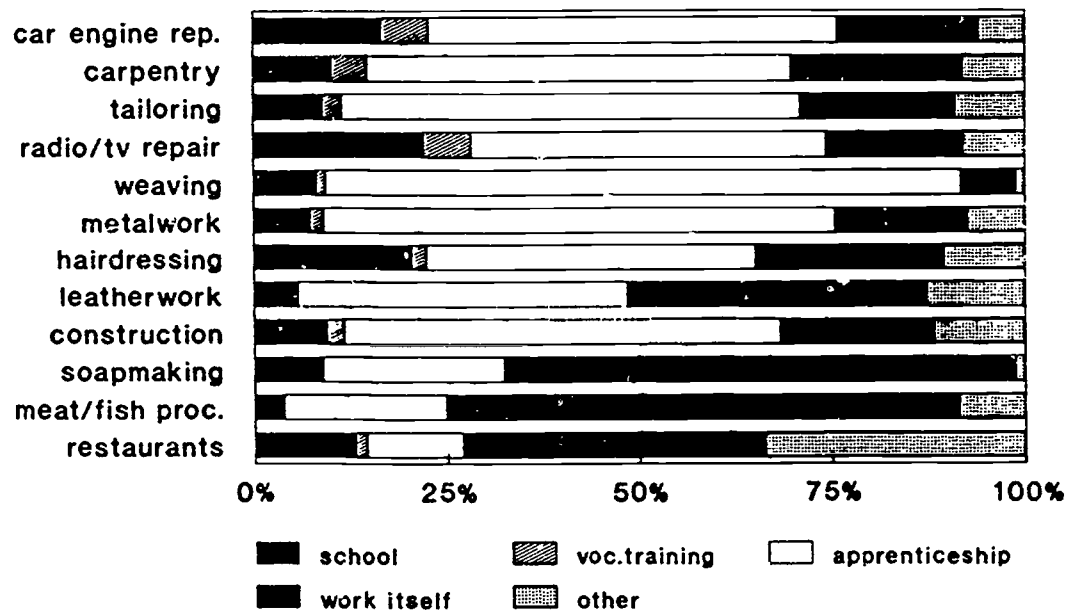
Apprentices learn primarily by watching their master and then by being "corrected" when their trials end in error. In almost all cases it is the master who tells them what to do or what not to do; asking too many questions is discouraged. In workshops with several apprentices, longer serving ones tend to "take care" of newcomers and thus take part in the training process. A majority of entrepreneurs said that they had acquired their training skills as apprentices.

It is not uncommon to find that masters follow a training plan, even if unwritten. Some follow guidelines issued by their association. There are indeed cases where learning is highly structured, modularised, that is, but "fixed-time" rather than "competency based". Theoretical aspects are largely ignored, however, and note-taking by apprentices is rare.

Most apprenticeships start with an introduction phase in which the novice is "taught to behave" and made to do menial jobs such as cleaning the workshop and running errands. The next phase consists of getting to know the tools of the trade and, as appropriate, the materials, the ingredients, the spare parts. Gradually the apprentice is introduced to more complex tasks and given increased responsibility such as finishing a piece, dealing directly with customers, supervising junior apprentices and, from time to time, looking after the enterprise in the absence of the master.

It is important to recognise that apprenticeship goes well beyond the acquisition of mere technical skills. In many instances, apprentices learn a range of management and organisation skills such as how to negotiate with suppliers or customers, how to cost a product, and how to train others (see Annex 1, Tables 8 and 9).

Chart 4: Most Useful Learning Experience of 1,751 Sample Entrepreneurs in Dakar, Ibadan, Lomé and Niamey; Selected Activities



There is little doubt among those involved that apprentices learn a great deal. Masters often point at their own apprenticeship as their most useful learning experience (Chart 4); apprentices proudly confirm that they are already capable of undertaking critical tasks; and parents are unabated in their willingness to pay for apprenticeships.

"When the time has come", masters are likely to administer a test and apprentices will regain their "freedom" during a ceremony in which a certificate is presented. Evidence of having completed one's apprenticeship is increasingly demanded of people who want to create their own enterprise by other entrepreneurs in the trade.

It is unusual for "graduates" to stay in the enterprise they have been trained in, except perhaps for a short period "to show their gratitude". Three out of four apprentices stated that they wanted to create their own establishment sooner or later (see Annex 1, Table 10). From tracing the careers of entrepreneurs, it appears however that only a few do so immediately following their apprenticeship. Particularly in trades such as carpentry, metalwork and car mechanics, many seek wage-employment for a few years to gain some more experience and save the necessary starting capital.

Conclusions

Traditional apprenticeship as West African artisans practice it is not outdated. It is a dynamic institution, in many instances capable of growth and adaptation and thus a cornerstone of informal sector development. The system caters to larger numbers of youth than governments can ever hope to provide with useful skills. Given the circumstances, the system is relevant, effective and efficient unlike more "up-to-date" exogenous training models.

Traditional apprenticeship is relevant because it contributes directly to solving a major employment problem of many developing countries. It does not create jobs per se but takes care of young men and women, beyond the age of children, who, educated or not, have no alternative but to turn to the informal sector for a living; it prepares them for self-employment in a range of useful trades; it makes them more productive than they would otherwise be. Without traditional apprenticeship the informal sector would not be able to absorb increasing numbers of labour market entrants at current levels of income.

Traditional apprenticeship is effective in that it achieves what it is meant to achieve at a remarkably high level of "customer satisfaction". In spite of drop-out and the fact that not all "graduates" eventually establish their own enterprise, the system produces artisans who put their skills to work. The system is efficient and self-financing; moreover it is largely self-regulating.

Finally, traditional apprenticeship is not perfect. While it is unfair to call it a closed system which perpetuates backwardness, it does transfer essentially simple skills and it does not always do so very well. There is often scope for improving training contents and methodology. Aided as appropriate, traditional apprenticeship might be instrumental in improving productivity, product quality and the safety of producer and consumer; and it might help implement diversification strategies which are essential in tapping new markets.

Options for Action

To intervene or not is a serious question. There should indeed be good reasons for trying to mend a system that works reasonably well; and the least to ask for is that measures envisaged are wanted or voluntary, affordable and likely to achieve a purpose which is clear to all concerned.

A principal reason to intervene in traditional apprenticeship should be to ensure that informal sector artisans continue to train large numbers of school-leavers for self-employment and other income opportunities. A second reason concerns raising productivity in micro-enterprises through improved training contents and methods. Enhancing through training, the safety, health and working conditions of apprentices and their masters in general, is another good reason.

Outside intervention in traditional apprenticeship is not per se unwanted. Entrepreneurs and apprentices alike confirm that they would welcome support of one kind or another; they are understandably less interested in restrictive measures. Feasibility and cost-effectiveness are largely a matter of design; successful measures tend to be based on facts and real needs and have the blessings of the target group.

It is important to begin with, to appreciate from an overall employment perspective, the relevance and dimensions of traditional apprenticeship, to recognise its strengths and weaknesses and to ascertain the extent to which alternative arrangements would yield better results.

The challenge is to intervene, if at all, in a realistic and constructive manner so that all parties benefit. The uninformed adoption and enforcement of apprenticeship legislation inspired by exogenous circumstances is likely to be counterproductive; it would almost certainly reduce the willingness of masters to take in apprentices or force them "underground". Another common case of well-intentioned but misdirected effort concerns an urge among officials to ensure higher standards via a formal testing and certification system; they may go as far as to insist that master-bakers in Ibadan know how to make plum pudding before they can have apprentices or that car mechanics apprentices in Lomé write an essay about fuel injection if they ever want a "true" certificate.

Rather than emphasise regulation and control, the "outsiders" should provide incentives and pertinent services to masters and their apprentices or, indirectly, improve their "enabling environment".

Measures aimed directly at apprentices will not be effective unless masters agree to them and assist, as appropriate, in their implementation.

A first category of measures concerns complementary training offered to apprentices, e.g. for only a few hours a week in existing institutions. Such training should, as much as possible, be "tailor-made" i.e. relate to what apprentices do in their respective trades rather than be designed to help them "escape" from the informal sector or get back into formal education. Training might cover, as appropriate, theoretical aspects of the trade, management skills, improved technologies, occupational safety and health and any other pertinent subject to be decided in the light of local circumstances, the heterogeneity among trades and the suggestions of masters. It is important to recognise that apprentices are likely to transfer what they have thus learned to others in their workshop, including the master.

A second category of such measures concerns guidance and advice before, during and after apprenticeship. Measures might include "vocational guidance" for school-leavers informing them about apprenticeable trades, the usual conditions of apprenticeship, masters willing to take on apprentices, etc. During their apprenticeship an "ombudsman" might be able to answer questions, look into complaints and even settle

disputes. Advice and assistance in establishing an enterprise upon completion of their training is given high priority by apprentices among possible avenues of support.

Measures aimed at masters are likely sooner or later to impact on their apprentices and may furthermore enhance growth and employment in the enterprise. Steps might be taken to advise masters about ways and means of improving apprenticeship and to mediate in locating candidates. Other possible measures include advice or training aimed at increasing productivity in the workplace, including management training; or to introduce improved products. It may be appropriate in certain cases to train masters in aspects of training and provide them with training guidelines and materials for their apprentices. Study tours to meet with other masters and to exchange views and experience in respect of apprenticeship and other matters, as well as financial incentives to take in apprentices or rewards for having trained apprentices up to a certain level, may also be considered. Outstanding masters may be recognised and recruited as part-time consultants. Finally, masters are likely to benefit from measures designed to assist trade associations of which they may be a member.

Beyond or as part of measures aimed at improving employment and income in the informal sector, it would seem appropriate at the macro-level to review training policies and redirect resources to reflect the relative significance of alternative training modes, including traditional apprenticeship. It may be necessary as a consequence to alter the terms of reference of institutions responsible for policy implementation, notably training centres which continue to produce graduates for jobs which do not exist. Existing training institutions could play a major role in supporting apprenticeship in micro-enterprises, that is if they are encouraged to open up and reach out to the informal sector. In addition to using resources redirected for the purpose they should consider cost-recovery by charging for services - such as business advice - which have the desired impact.

Efforts need not be confined to government institutions. Non-governmental organisations have demonstrated in many countries that they are effective training intermediaries or actors in their own right in promoting integrated "grass-roots" development. Governments may wish to recognise and encourage the useful role they play.

Associations of artisans represent a special category in this respect. In some places and for some trades, they have existed for many years; in other cases, it might be a good idea to get artisans to organise themselves in trade-based groups inter alia to act as a sounding board and conduit for assistance. Some care should be exercised perhaps to avoid such groups turning into self-serving corporations bent on keeping people out rather than absorbing job seekers and training them.

ANNEXES

SELECTED STATISTICS

Table 1: Age of Apprentices in Ibadan and Lomé; Percentage in Age Groups

Age Group	Ibadan	Lomé
10-14	7	2
15-19	28	33
20-24	51	49
25-29	7	15
over 29	6	2

Table 2: Education Level of Apprentices in Ibadan and Lomé; Percentage of Sample Apprentices

Education Level	Ibadan	Lomé
None	5	8
Primary Incomplete	3	32
Primary Complete	24	17
Junior Secondary	33	38
Senior Secondary	36	6

Table 3: Main Reason for Selecting Their Trade According To Apprentices in Ibadan and Lomé; Percentages

Main Reason	Ibadan	Lomé
Good prospects	12	34
Relative/acquaintance in trade	10	8
Always wanted to do this	67	52
Family has always done this	4	3

Table 4: Main Reason for Selecting Their Master According To Apprentices in Ibadan and Lomé; Percentages

Main Reason	Ibadan	Lomé
Has prosperous business	2	21
Is a relative/acquaintance	40	42
Has a good reputation	33	16
Is a likeable person	10	9

Table 5: Main Criterion in Selecting Apprentices According to Entrepreneurs (Ibadan and Lomé) and Apprentices (Lomé), Percentages

Selection Criteria	Ibadan Ents.	Lomé Ents.	Lomé Apps.
Aptitude	44	38	47
Educational Level	17	12	7
Honesty	23	31	33
Family Links	14	5	2

Table 6: Apprenticeship in Ibadan and Lomé; Selected Characteristics, Percentage of Sample Apprentices

Characteristics	Ibadan	Lomé
Master is a relative	37	24
Written contract	73	81
Payment of fees	52	86
Payment in kind	5	15
Free accommodation	21	22
Regular, free meals	36	23
Regular pocket-money	37	30
Occasional pocket-money	45	56
Family support	67	66
Has no other source of revenue	27	11
Born in the city	45	38
Average working hours per week	60	49

Table 7: Duration of Apprenticeship in Ibadan and Lomé: Percentage of Sample Apprentices

Duration of Apprenticeship	Ibadan	Lomé
Less than 2 years	19	6
2 Years	19	11
3 Years	22	37
4 Years	21	32
More than 4 Years	18	14

Table 8: Percentage of Ibadan Sample Entrepreneurs Who Find Certain Skills Important (IMP) Who Say They Have Acquired These Skills (ACQ) And Who Have Acquired Them While They Were Apprentices (APP): Selected Trades

	Negotiating			Training			Product Costing			Use New Machines			Use New Materials			Repair Machines		
	IMP	ACQ	APP	IMP	ACQ	APP	IMP	ACQ	APP	IMP	ACQ	APP	IMP	ACQ	APP	IMP	ACQ	APP
Masons	100	98	84	98	100	48	98	100	80	92	96	32	100	100	36	14	2	2
Weavers	100	100	90	100	100	92	100	100	74	36	16	10	94	94	44	70	76	64
Metalwork	89	94	69	92	98	56	58	78	37	67	71	39	71	92	50	62	62	29
Carpenters	100	100	78	100	100	80	96	100	62	92	96	68	94	98	52	80	78	44
Car Repair	100	100	76	96	100	72	96	100	66	76	84	44	98	100	72	94	98	82
Radio/TV Repair	100	100	40	100	100	66	100	100	54	82	96	8	94	98	10	92	98	32
Dressmakers	100	100	77	98	98	77	87	100	38	96	98	26	94	100	21	96	94	77

Table 9: Percentage of Lomé Sample Entrepreneurs Who Find Certain Skills Important (IMP) Who Say They Have Acquired These Skills (ACQ) And Who Have Acquired Them While They Were Apprentices (APP): Selected Trades

	Negotiating			Training			Product Costing			Use New Machines			Use New Materials			Repair Machines		
	IMP	ACQ	APP	IMP	ACQ	APP	IMP	ACQ	APP	IMP	ACQ	APP	IMP	ACQ	APP	IMP	ACQ	APP
Masons	100	98	66	96	96	53	96	94	63	84	74	39	89	100	51	61	17	10
Leatherwork	83	97	63	74	83	55	94	97	50	77	72	45	77	69	38	60	26	19
Metalwork	91	83	51	87	80	47	83	96	54	72	57	31	72	69	31	59	29	17
Carpenters	86	96	59	84	92	65	91	96	46	78	60	36	76	73	36	60	30	16
Car Repair	100	98	60	80	82	57	90	98	42	90	71	47	92	87	50	94	96	70
Radio/TV Repair	96	96	58	84	88	59	80	93	56	78	65	50	61	63	40	76	67	53
Dressmakers	90	93	59	81	87	62	87	95	56	80	52	32	74	59	36	78	38	29

Table 10: What Apprentices in Ibadan and Lomé Would Like To Do Upon Completing Their Apprenticeship; Percentages

Intention	Ibadan	Lomé
Stay in the enterprise	6	3
Wage-work somewhere else	8	16
Self-employment	84	70
Further training	4	10

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