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### Formalising the informal: Ghana's National Apprenticeship Programme

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## **Formalising the informal: Ghana's National Apprenticeship Programme**

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Since 2001 there has been a renewed government focus on skills development and its relationship with combating unemployment in Ghana. Technical and vocational education and training (hereinafter; TVET), delivered through public and private schools, vocational training institutes and informal apprenticeship training, continues to be seen as an important link to work.

Rising concern over the large number of junior high school graduates that are unable to access further formal education and training has led politicians and policy makers to demand a National Apprenticeship Programme and ambitious plans are being put in place to move towards a more regulated, or formalised, informal apprenticeship system. This article examines these plans and argues that the government needs both to consider fully the ramifications of their proposed activities under the National Apprenticeship Programme, as well as learn from previous programmes in Ghana (and elsewhere) that have attempted to upgrade informal apprenticeships.

**Keywords:** Ghana; apprenticeship; skills development; informal economy; National Apprenticeship Programme

### **Introduction**

In developing countries, policy makers and development agencies are keen for informal economic activities to move into the economic and social mainstream. Similarly, in the area of vocational training there is increasing attention paid to formalising informal learning. This paper examines this latter issue, taking recent efforts to formalise informal apprenticeship training in Ghana as a case study.

Located on the west coast of Africa, Ghana is a low-income country with an average per capita income of approximately US\$700. It has a population of almost 23 million – about 40% of whom are under 15 years old (United Nations Development Programme; hereinafter UNDP, 2007). In the 2000s, multi-party elections were held at the end of 2000, 2004 and 2008 and Ghana is often regarded as a model of political reform in Africa. Since the mid-1980s Ghana has experienced sustained gross domestic product (GDP) growth in the 4–5% range and this has been accompanied by impressive overall reductions in poverty. However, this positive macro-economic performance and the overall reduction in poverty levels have not brought about balanced economic development; occupational and regional inequalities have

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increased and employment is still predominantly informal in nature. About nine-tenths of the population work in informal economic activities (farm and non-farm).

For political and socio-economic reasons, the government is getting increasingly concerned by the growing size of primary and lower-secondary school cohorts; there are simply neither sufficient formal employment opportunities, nor sufficient further formal education and training opportunities.

Since 2001 there has been a renewed government focus on skills development and its relationship with combating unemployment, and especially unemployed school leavers, in Ghana (Government of Ghana (GoG) 2002, 2003, 2004a, 2004b, 2005, 2006a, 2007). Technical and vocational education and training, delivered through public and private schools, vocational training institutes (VTIs) and informal apprenticeship training, continues to be seen as an important link to work, as a means of providing the unemployed (school leavers) with 'employable skills'.

Most of those who successfully complete primary and lower-secondary education and cannot find further formal education or training opportunities, as well as those who leave school early (or never had schooling) enter into the informal micro-enterprise sector, with many taking up informal apprenticeship training. In Ghana informal apprenticeship training originated as a means to reproduce skills within families or communities, but over the years has been modified to involve more formalised contracts, payments for training and fewer restrictions regarding access to this training (Palmer 2007a). Informal apprenticeship training is responsible for some 80–90% of all basic skills training in Ghana, compared with 5–10% from public training institutions and 10–15% from non-government organisations, for-profit and non-profit providers (Atchoarena and Delluc 2001). The general features of informal apprenticeship training in Ghana are well known and similar to those described in other countries in west Africa (e.g. see Ahadzie 2003; Breyer 2007; Haan 2006; Johanson and Adams 2004; Palmer 2007a; Valenchik 1995).

The rising concern, noted previously, over the large number of junior-high school (JHS) graduates that are unable to access further formal education and training has led politicians and policy makers to demand a National Apprenticeship Programme (NAP). In 2008 ambitious plans were put in place to move towards a more regulated, or formalised, informal apprenticeship system. This paper examines these plans and argues that the government needs both to consider fully the ramifications of their proposed activities under the NAP, as well as learn from previous programmes in Ghana that have attempted to upgrade informal apprenticeships. First, the paper examines the extent to which the informal apprenticeship system has been regulated or formalised to date (December 2008). Second, it outlines the latest government proposals related to the NAP. Third, it highlights some of the concerns arising from these proposals, and outlines what lessons have been learned from earlier interventions into informal apprenticeship training that have taken place in Ghana.

### **The extent to which informal apprenticeship training is currently regulated or formalised**

Up to December 2008 nationwide regulation of the informal apprenticeship system took different forms: coordination by the National Vocational Training Institute (NVTI) (since the 1970s) and by the National Coordinating Committee on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (NACVET) (since the early 1990s); legislative regulation from the NVTI Act (1970), the 1978 Apprentice Training Regulations

(Legislative Instrument No. 1154) and the Children's Act (1998); regulation of training programmes and certification by informal sector associations (especially since the 1990s) and the NVTI.

The NVTI was set up in 1970 by an Act (351) of Parliament and was mandated to be responsible for the nationwide coordination of all aspects of vocational training including apprenticeship in both the formal and informal sectors (GoG 1970; NVTI 2002). Under Legislative Instrument (L.I.) No. 1154 (GoG 1978), the NVTI Department of Apprenticeship was meant to regulate and control all forms of apprenticeship training. For example, the L.I. made provision for the NVTI to regulate the conditions under which employers who are registered with the NVTI could offer apprenticeship training. However, the NVTI has signally failed to engage with informal apprenticeship training; according to the Ministry of Manpower, Youth and Employment (MoMYE), the NVTI 'has not lived up to this particular mandate' (GoG 2006b, 3). Ahadzie's (2003) doctoral study on informal apprenticeship in Ghana notes that:

Engaging and maintaining [informal] apprentices are now done in complete disregard of the provisions of the legislative instrument [1978]. Most employers do not prepare formal contracts for apprentices as required by the law... The legislative instrument seems not to have any explicit provision for the informal sector. (138)

NVTI's main programmes under its Department of Apprenticeship have been targeted at training formal apprentices. Formal apprenticeship training combines institutional classroom theoretical instruction in NVTI centres (10–15% of course) with on-the-job training (85–90% of course).

In 1990 the National Coordinating Committee on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (NACVET) was set up to coordinate a national skills development system, formal and informal (NVTI having failed to achieve this). NACVET was largely an advisory body within the Ministry of Education and did not have separate legal status. Its key functions were: (1) formulation of TVET policies; (2) determining the middle level skills needs of the economy that will form the basis of planning and coordination of training resources; (3) determining the financial needs of training institutions; and (4) coordination of the provision of technical education and vocational training. By the mid-1990s NACVET was in an appalling state, 'an empty shell' (World Bank 2001, 19), with 'almost no capacity', lacking legal status, 'almost no staff, no management systems and no work systems, no office space... no office equipment... [and] no technical and managerial experience in the area of vocational training' (World Bank 2001, 6). By the early 2000s NACVET was still considered 'an extremely weak organisation' (World Bank 2001, 3), one which failed to develop a national policy for skills development and continued to suffer from capacity problems and on-going tensions between the Ministries of education and manpower (King and McGrath 2002). The 2002 report of the President's Committee on Review of Educational Reforms concluded that NACVET has been 'ineffective because of diverse inter-ministerial objectives' (GoG 2002, 86). With the creation of a new coordinating body in 2007/08, the Council for TVET (COTVET) (see later), NACVET is being phased out.

It has been noted previously that legislative regulation related to informal apprenticeship training has largely been ineffective; this includes both the NVTI Act (1970) and the 1978 Apprentice Training Regulations (L.I. No. 1151). In 1998 the Children's Act (560) was passed. This too contains a section related to informal apprenticeship training (Part V, sub-part II). It specifies the minimum age of informal apprenticeship (section 98), masters' responsibilities towards their apprentices regarding training

(section 99), the apprenticeship agreement (section 100) duties (section 101) and the release (section 102) of the apprentice (GoG 1998). While the legislation is in place there is a problem with enforcing the Children's Act (Laird 2002). According to one long-established and experienced master-craftswoman based in Kumasi and a senior officer of the International Labour Organization – International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (hereinafter: ILO-IPEC) Accra office, the Children's Act, and specifically the sections related to informal apprenticeship training, are very little known about (personal communication, 13 December 2007). It is quite likely that for the majority of all master-craftspeople legislative regulation related to informal apprenticeship training is more-or-less meaningless at present.

Informal sector associations (ISAs) of dressmakers, carpenters, and others represent the strongest element of the current institutional framework for informal apprenticeship training and are actively involved in the supervision of skills training. However, that is not to say that ISAs are necessarily either strong, effective or always representative of their members. ISAs in Ghana were set up to act as intermediaries between member enterprises and the government/other agencies, while the establishment of many had social origins (e.g. starting off as mutual insurance schemes) for some the establishment had more to do with politics than self-help. For example, many of the well-known ISAs (e.g. dressmakers and tailors association, Ghana National Association of Garages (GNAG)) did not originally emerge from within the informal economy; rather the Rawlings military government sponsored the formation and registration of over 30 ISAs supposedly to serve the interest of their members but in fact with definite political functions in mind (i.e. creating groups that would help legitimise PNDC actions) (Ninsin 2000). Despite their large number, ISAs are generally regarded as being weak and unable to provide useful services to their members (International Fund for Agricultural Development, hereinafter: IFAD, 2002). An evaluation team for the World Bank funded Vocational Skills and Informal Sector Support Project (1995–2001) arrived at the conclusion that 'most of the associations identified by the study team only exist in name and are not functioning as mobilisers of the local artisan corps' (Korboe 2001a, 24) (see also later).

Currently youth trained through informal apprenticeship training have three options with regard to certification; these are not mutually exclusive and some apprentices may obtain all three.

The most common form of certification comes in the form of a signed testimonial from an apprentice's master-craftsperson. This certificate is generally not recognised beyond the immediate community where the apprentice learned.

Secondly, some of the larger ISAs (e.g., GNAG, Ghana National Association of Tailors and Dressmakers, and the Ghana Hairdressers and Beauticians Association) operate their own informal skills testing resulting in certificates issued by the association which are widely recognised by their members nationwide (Haan and Serrière 2002).

Thirdly, informal apprentices are also able to take the NVTI proficiency examination. The proficiency exam is a non-written competency-based skill test involving a practical and oral examination. This allows illiterate trainees, including informal apprentices, to get nationally recognised certification. The proficiency tests differ from regular full NVTI trade examinations which include written components. The knowledge of tools and equipment is assessed during an interview. In 2007 there were approximately 30,000 NVTI trade and proficiency tests taken nationwide, with proficiency tests accounting for 45%. About 30% of all tests in 2007 were taken by informal apprentices (almost all were proficiency tests) (NVTI Director, personal

communication 20 February 2008). Most informal apprentices, therefore, do not register for this NVTI examination. Possible reasons for this include: a lack of awareness of such an examination; high examination fees (US\$14–17 in 2006); or that the apprentices don't consider such certificates useful.

### **The NAP**

In 2002 Ghana's President commissioned a panel of academics and other educationists to examine the country's education system. Some of the main recommendations of the President's Committee on Review of Educational Reforms (GoG 2002) were adopted by government in its 2004 Education Reform *White Paper* (GoG 2004a). One such recommendation was the creation of an apprenticeship stream as one of the post-basic education alternative tracks.

The 2004 *White Paper* pledged that government would 'assume full responsibility for the first year of all approved apprenticeship programmes' (GoG 2004a, 13). In fact, this pledge came as somewhat of a surprise to many policy makers and policy observers in Ghana; it had not been one of the recommendations of the 2002 report of the Presidential Committee and it is widely understood to have originated from within Cabinet. In other words it was seen as a political decision, rather than one informed by expert advice, experience of earlier initiatives or research evidence.

As a result, and by late 2007, policy makers were tasked to operationalise this pledge, and to do so quickly; policy makers, but especially politicians, were aware of the forthcoming election year of 2008 and initially hoped to have the NAP operational before the elections. However, the bodies that were originally intended to design and oversee the formalisation of apprenticeship in the country, the National Apprenticeship Training Board (NATB) and the Informal Sector Affairs Division of the COTVET secretariat, had not been created at that time. Indeed the new COTVET Board, under which the NATB and the COTVET secretariat were to fall, had only just been inaugurated in November 2007. It was not until November 2008 that the executive director of the COTVET secretariat took up office, with the rest of the secretariat to be appointed on a rolling basis during 2009. The NATB was still not in place in March 2009.

As a result, an NVTI working group was tasked in the interim to design and operationalise the first phase of the NAP (NVTI 2007), initially planned to start in early 2008. The original proposal put forward by the NVTI suggested that about 64,000 students out of the 162,000 JHS leavers who were not placed in the computer selection and placement of 2007 should be sponsored to undertake structured apprenticeship. In other words the NAP was not originally designed to engage directly with the large numbers of youth already in informal apprenticeships (estimated at about over 210,000 individuals (Ghana Statistical Service 2005)). Rather, the intention is for the NAP to take JHS graduates and place them in 1-year apprenticeships. One-year placements were planned to be both in informal enterprises with master-craftspeople (similar to 'regular' informal apprentices) and in formal vocational training institutes (institution-based 'apprenticeship'). Approximately one-third of these graduates were to be placed with master-craftspeople and two-thirds trained through formal vocational training institutes, in one of 25 trade areas. The proposal covered all 165 districts. Under the original NAP proposal the government was meant to cover the training fees (for the first year), training materials, provide toolkits and stipends to apprentices and provide a limited amount of supplementary training for apprentices (the design envisaged once a week training in English, Entrepreneurship Skills and

Mathematics for those JHS graduates placed with master-craftspeople) as well as a limited amount of training of trainers (master-craftspeople were meant to get 3 days' pedagogical/curriculum training, while VTI managers were meant to get curriculum training). Apprentices were to be assessed at the NVTI proficiency grade 2 level after the 1-year's training. The expected unit cost for the first 'batch' of NAP apprentices was originally about US\$700 per apprentice per year, with the stipend alone expected to account for over US\$300 per apprentice per year. The projected cost for the first year was originally about US\$46 million. Meanwhile, all training for the selected JHS graduates was meant to be free (with only a US\$1 commitment fee for registration).

During April 2008 several things took place which altered the direction the NAP would ultimately take. Firstly, it was acknowledged that it would not be possible to find US\$46 million to fund such a scheme, but that US\$5 million could be allocated from the Ghana Education Trust Fund (GETFund); so the NAP had to be scaled down. Secondly, while there had been whispered concern over the programme *content* before this time, by April voices of concern were emerging from multiple areas and reinforcing each other. Concerns were raised by the COTVET Board, senior officials in the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports (MoESS) and development partners. Their concerns centred around several main issues. Perhaps one of the largest related to the impact such a scheme might have on the sustainability of the existing informal apprenticeship system, which is currently almost entirely privately financed. There exists a very extensive informal apprenticeship system that serves many more individuals than the proposed formal NAP would. There, the average total costs are about US\$150–200 for 3 years of training. This amount includes the training fee, which is paid by the apprentice or his/her parents, and equipment. In the proposed NAP 'NAP apprentices' would not pay this; rather, they would receive about twice as much as this only as a stipend. It is quite clear that there would be repercussions from the formal NAP on the existing financing arrangements of the informal apprenticeship system. This could become extremely disruptive. It would have been quite likely that such a scheme would not add additional funds to the overall resource envelope for TVET but, more likely, would simply replace private with public financing.

As a result COTVET tasked NVTI to re-examine the proposals during April 2008. By the end of that month the NVTI working committee came out with a revised proposal for the NAP. The revised proposal intends to cover 15,000 students (still JHS graduates, but now from both 2007 and 2008) from 80 selected districts who would be trained through 2000 master-craftspeople (taking 10,000 students) and 171 Public and Private VTIs (taking 5000 students). Master-craftspeople and VTI managers are still meant to get only 3 days' pedagogical/curriculum training. Training materials, training fees and tool-kits are still part of the proposal, but the initial suggestion to pay stipends to apprentices has been dropped (the amount allocated for tool-kits has also reduced from US\$150 to US\$120 per person). As a result the unit cost has dropped from US\$700 to US\$400. The estimated cost is still some US\$6 million.

Since the latest drafting of the NAP document (April 2008), there has been an emerging consensus – noted in the Ministry of Education Science and Sports 2008 Preliminary Education Sector Performance Report (July 2008) (GoG 2008, 28):

...that the redesign of the government-sponsored... Apprenticeship programme should... include a much stronger focus on upskilling master-craftspeople (this might include further technical and pedagogical training, improving access to technology);

[and]... should focus on training delivered by master-craftspeople and not include vocational training institutes in the delivery of apprenticeship training.

However, there has not been a redrafting of the actual NAP document to reflect this consensus; the latest official document outlining the operational plans is the April 2008 version.

On 7 December 2008 Ghana held Presidential elections, which resulted in the two main political parties being 'neck and neck'; neither the ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP) nor the main opposition party, the National Democratic Congress (NDC), managed to obtain the required 50% plus 1 votes needed for an outright win. As a result, a run-off election was held on 28 December 2008 which the NDC subsequently won. While the NAP, discussed in this paper, was designed during an NPP government – and was part of the 2004 White Paper on Education Reforms which emerged from the (NPP) Presidential committee on education reforms – the NDC have highlighted technical and vocational education and training as a priority area. It could be anticipated, therefore, that the NDC government in 2009 would still take up the National Apprenticeship Programme, though perhaps changing one or two elements of its current design.

As a result of the global financial crisis, and its likely impact on economic growth and job creation in Ghana, the political pressures associated with increasing numbers of unemployed school leavers may be great for the NDC administration during 2009. The impact such pressure will have on policy formation may result in populist policies rather than those based on evidence of what might work best, when, and how.

### **The NAP: reflecting lessons learned from earlier initiatives in Ghana?**

Ghana's plan to improve the informal apprenticeship system as part of the TVET reform is sensible; informal apprenticeship is responsible for the majority of all skills training and has a much closer relationship to the world of work than institution, pre-employment training schemes. However, care is needed to ensure that attempts at formalisation do not undermine the strengths and sustainability of this informal system. The 2004 World Bank study, 'Skills Development in Sub-Saharan Africa' (Johanson and Adams 2004) provides a warning about formalising training in the informal economy:

...apprenticeship training... is fragile and can be easily distorted. Any attempt to intervene directly in the practice of training apprentices could easily do more harm than good and create another supply-driven, dependency-induced training program...

Many of the advantages of traditional apprenticeship stem from its informal and flexible nature. Attempts to formalise it through bureaucratic regulations on type, duration, and conditions of training may decrease its appeal. (Johanson and Adams 2004, 132–135)

In fact, warnings about formalising the informal economy (in this case the informal apprenticeship training element of it) are not new. For example, the ILO/Jobs and Skills Programme in Africa (hereinafter: JASPA) studies back in the mid-1980s noted that 'the [informal] sector is efficient because it is informal, but because of its informality it cannot be integrated into development plans' (ILO/JASPA 1985, 35). In the early 1970s this basic dilemma of informal sector policy was noted by Steele (1972), who asked whether 'the imposition of an institutional framework [would] do more harm than good?' (226).



This concern has been acknowledged by the authors of the chapter on modernising Ghana's informal apprenticeship system in the 2007 NVTI/Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (hereinafter: GIMPA) document, *Restructuring of the NVTI*. The authors state that the '**NVTI must respect the strengths that the traditional apprenticeship system has and not attempt to destroy those strengths while attempting to modernise apprenticeship training**' (NVTI/GIMPA 2007, 96; emphasis in original).

Some specific concerns related to the proposed NAP are analysed in the following section. Where relevant, lessons from earlier apprenticeship projects in Ghana are highlighted. Since the mid-1990s there have been a number of projects and programmes in Ghana that have attempted in various ways, and to varying degrees of success, to upgrade informal apprenticeship training. These include; the Vocational Skills and Informal Sector Support Project (VSP) (1995–2001) (Amankrah 2001a, 2001b; Korboe 2001a, 2001b; World Bank 1995, 2001), the Rural Enterprise Project (REP) (1995–ongoing) (see Haan 2006, 200–203; GoG/IFAD 2000); the Skills Training and Entrepreneurship Programme (STEP) (2003–2005) (see Palmer 2007a, 2007b; Debrah 2007; Preddey 2005); the Opportunities Industrialisation Centre (OIC)–Ghana improved apprenticeship training project (2001–ongoing) (Baier-D'Orazio 2007); and, the ILO-IPEC informal apprenticeship training project (see Asare-Nelson 2007; FIT Ghana (National Network Ghana) 2007; Partners in Development 2007; Pealore 2007).

### ***Full responsibility?***

As noted above, the stated aim is that government 'will assume full responsibility for the first year of all approved apprenticeship programmes' (GoG 2004a, 13). This stated objective of the government is perhaps the most concerning element of the NAP.

It is clear that 'full responsibility' means different things to different people. The government has stated that their assuming full responsibility means that they will pay for 1 year's training costs, provide a tool kit, insurance and some supplementary training to both masters and apprentices. But it should be recalled that the financing arrangements of informal apprenticeships are complex and entail more than simply training fees alone, as two surveys in 2005 and 2006 (Breyer 2007; Palmer 2007a) highlight. For example, in many cases training fees themselves are made up of two types of fees, commitment and graduation fees, paid at the start and end of training respectively. In addition, some master-craftspeople ask for in-kind contributions, commonly a crate of minerals (soft drinks) or malt (malt beer), a bottle of spirits, cigarettes or a goat (Breyer 2007). Will the government also assume responsibility for these in-kind payments?

### ***A 1-year NAP?***

Since most informal apprenticeships take about 3 years, the issue of what will happen to NAP-apprentices after the 1-year programme is also of concern. According to a senior official of the TVET sub-committee of the NERIC, the government expectation is that parents will see the benefit of apprenticeship training and take over after the first year (personal communication, 26 October 2007). This view is unrealistic. It seems that government will withdraw completely from financing any further training (at least two more years in most cases). This will undoubtedly result in problems.

Some apprentices will simply end their training after the one year and enter the labour market (especially those from poorer backgrounds); experience from earlier schemes in Ghana suggests that one year is not sufficiently long enough for apprenticeship training. For example, experience from both the STEP and ILO-IPEC activities in Ghana provides a warning about apprentices not getting sufficient practical training.

The draft synthesis evaluation report of the ILO-IPEC project in Ghana, Kenya and Tanzania notes that the:

Effectiveness of the project has not been fully achieved because of the one year duration which is too short for mastery of skills acquisition. Effective competency requires 2 to 4 years of apprenticeship. (Pealore 2007, 26–27)

In the Ghana component trainees reported that the training time of one year gave them only the basic skills ‘but not enough to help them go into self employment. They will require longer time or post training attachment programmes to enable them to enhance their skills’ (Pealore 2007, 26).

The apprenticeship component of the STEP found that a short training duration (of up to 1 year) was not suitable for all trade areas (e.g., welding and carpentry) and led to the creation of ‘half-baked’ apprentices (GoG 2004c, 3), especially where new apprentices do not have prior trade knowledge.

Those apprentices that decide to continue their training to the average 3-year duration might run into problems with their master-craftspeople. Clearly there will be an issue of how the apprentice pays for the remainder of the training. Should the government decide to pay stipends to trainees, master-craftspeople might be reluctant to provide trainees with ‘chop money’ in the second and third year of their training.

During a ‘normal’ informal apprenticeship master-craftspeople often provide apprentices with a small amount of money on a daily basis to cover feeding costs (known as ‘chop money’) (Breyer 2007; Palmer 2007a). With the government coming in to finance the first year of training, it will be important that it is clearly explained who has responsibility for providing apprentices with food during training. It is likely that the master-craftspeople will see NAP-apprentices as government funded and hence be less willing to provide ‘chop-money’ to apprentices. In the STEP programme the money paid by government to both Ghana Regional Appropriate Technology Industrial Service (hereinafter: GRATIS) and the master-craftspeople for training apprentices was indeed meant to also cover feeding costs. But both GRATIS and the master-craftspeople complained that much of this was spent by them feeding the apprentice throughout the training period. If the government does decide to provide ‘chop-money’ to apprentices during the first year of their informal apprenticeship, master-craftspeople may be unwilling to take over this responsibility in subsequent years of training (GoG 2004c). In this instance there will undoubtedly be apprentices dropping out in the second (and third) years of their training as they cannot afford to sustain themselves (and hence they will leave training to pursue some form of small-scale, largely subsistence-based, income-generating activity).

### ***The NAP should be enterprise- not institution-based***

The April 2008 NAP proposal still includes formal TVET institutions as training providers, for school-based apprenticeships. This is in spite of the acknowledgement by COTVET and other key stakeholders that the providers of training under the NAP

should be master-craftspeople and not formal vocational training institutes. There is undoubtedly still pressure to include public and private VTIs as providers of training.

There is possibly space for including vocational training institutes in the NAP, but as providers of supplementary training (e.g. literacy, numeracy) to apprentices who are based with the master-craftspeople. Indeed, one of the goals of the NAP is to 'link the apprenticeship system with the formal TVET and mainstream educational systems' (NVTI/GIMPA 2007, 95).

There have been a number of attempts to reorientate formal pre-employment to better meet the needs of the informal economy but such reorientation has proved difficult (Grierson and Mackenzie 1996; Palmer 2007a). Johanson and Adams (2004) note that reorienting formal VTIs towards training for self-employment in micro-enterprises requires major changes for most training providers. Ghana itself has had some experience in formal VTIs providing supplementary training to informal apprentices. For example in the Vocational Skills and Informal Sector Support Project (VSP) apprentices undertook short practical courses (12 weeks) provided through public and private training institutions. According to Korboe (2001a) the training provided to apprentices by formal training institutions was regarded as useful by VSP trainees, and trainees confirmed that their instructors had a good appreciation of the functioning of the informal economy. Some formal training institutions felt that the duration of the course for apprentices needed lengthening (generally, to between 4 and 6 months). Nonetheless, one of the VSP objectives to redirect the focus of both public and private VTIs towards the provision of short, competency-based, demand-driven training for people already in employment proved difficult to achieve (Korboe 2001a, 2001b; World Bank 2001).

### ***The upskilling of master-craftspeople should be a higher priority***

Upskilling of master-craftspersons is perhaps one of the most appropriate interventions for informal apprenticeship training (Johanson and Adams 2004).

There is a need, therefore, to ensure that NAP trainers (master-craftspeople) are themselves adequately trained and are capable of delivering quality training. Hence there needs to be a much stronger focus on upskilling master-craftspeople (this might include further technical and pedagogical training, improving access to technology). The April 2008 NAP proposal still appears to pay insufficient attention to offering further technical and pedagogical training for master craftspeople and improving access to technology for master craftspeople. It appears that there are still only 3 days of pedagogical/curriculum training for master-craftspeople, and no technical training or means of improving technology access. This is similar to the STEP project which only provided a few days of pedagogical skills training to master-craftspeople in an attempt to make them more effective trainers. In contrast, in both the VSP and REP projects master-craftspeople received training for longer periods. In the REP part time technical skills upgrading courses lasted from 1 to 3 months (classes were every other week) and on site on-the-job training to master-craftspeople was also provided for a few hours on one to three occasions. The VSP also trained master-craftspeople in entrepreneurial, accounting and costing skills (2 weeks duration). In the case of the REP the results of the master-craftspeople training were viewed as ambivalent: the technical capability of the informal micro-enterprises was improved, but the knock-on effect *vis-à-vis* the training of apprentices in these workshops was minimal since master-craftspeople reverted to the original informal apprenticeship approach. The VSP demonstrated that job-oriented competency could be achieved more quickly

in shorter courses (6 and 12 weeks) that focus on practical skills rather than lengthy theoretical classroom instruction.

### ***The NAP will not cover all apprentices, nationally***

Given that the NAP is now supposed to cover some 15,000 youth, what are the implications for youth not selected to be part of it? Informal apprenticeship training will continue to take place in enterprises in addition to the NAP-supported enterprise-based training. Indeed, it is quite likely that there will be NAP-supported apprentices training alongside non NAP-supported apprentices *in the same* enterprise. This is what transpired in the Nigerian Open Apprenticeship System (NOAS) and the OIC's 'Improved apprenticeship training' project in Ghana; the result was friction, conflict and resentment between apprentices (on the NOAS, see King 1990, cited in McGrath et al. 1995; Evawoma-Enuku and Mgbor 2005; on the OIC see Baier-D'Orazio 2007).

The decision for the NAP to target JHS graduates also has social implications; those that did not complete JHS, those with less than JHS education and those that never went to school will be excluded from the programme. The poorest and most vulnerable, therefore, will not be included.

### ***Ensuring the NAP is demand-driven***

In accordance with the 2004 TVET Policy Framework (GoG 2004b) the NAP is meant to industry-driven. Crucially, this means that the government's role, through the NATB (and before that the NVTI), must be that of a facilitator and that ownership of the NAP must be given to industry groups. The first concern, therefore, relates to the extent to which the NATB and NVTI will acknowledge their own limitations and take up the role of facilitator rather than becoming too directly involved.

Given that industry is meant to own the NAP, the second concern relates to the capacity of the industry groups themselves – specifically the informal sector associations – and the extent to which these groups are truly representative of industry in the informal economy.

The third concern relates to the plans under the NAP to standardise the content of informal apprenticeship. In fact, there are two issues here. The first is that the NVTI might be tempted to impose onto informal apprenticeships the curricula that they are already using in NVTI centres, albeit in a slimmed down version to fit one-year. Indeed the authors of the 'Restructuring of the NVTI' document (NVTI/GIMPA 2007) are of the view that 'such an attempt will fail' (97). These authors are also concerned that if the NVTI curriculum is used in informal apprenticeships the business aspects of skill training – dealing with customers, competition, suppliers, pricing, negotiation – would suffer. The NVTI curriculum is more suited to formal rather than informal employment and tends to be concerned with leading up to formal examination and certification. Moreover, the evidence suggests that the non-written NVTI proficiency test is not well used by informal apprentices (see earlier). In any case, who would teach the NVTI curriculum to apprentices? Most master-craftspeople do not have the technical competencies to teach in such a structured way. The authors of the 'Restructuring of the NVTI' document suggest that:

Rather than attempt to replace the informal apprenticeship system with the curricula of formal vocational training, NVTI **should seek to assist the informal apprenticeship**

**system [to] do better what it is already doing'** (NVTI/GIMPA 2007, 96; emphasis in original).

The second issue here is that any attempt to impose a standardised content onto master-craftspeople will likely be met with resistance due to production-training tensions. Informal apprenticeship training is essentially driven by local market demand; training is on the job in an enterprise whose focus (in most cases) is production rather than training. Hence apprentices in a particular enterprise learn what is produced, which is in turn dependent on local market demand. Since local demand is likely to differ from district to district, or more broadly from rural to urban and across the main economic zones of the country, it will be difficult to standardise training content nationwide.

### *Training under the NAP will not be provided as part of an integrated approach*

The impact of apprenticeship training is greatly reduced by the inability of graduates to access start-up capital or business advice on day-to-day problems. (Johanson and Adams 2004, 141)

The latest NVTI working group document on the NAP highlights the need for start up capital, but says nothing else about post-training support:

It is envisaged that graduates, after training, would be adequately prepared to start small businesses at the level of their competence. Such graduates shall therefore need some start up capital, ranging between GH¢100.00 and GH¢470 depending on their skill area. (NVTI 2008, 3)

The current NAP proposal, like the original one, still suggests that after training graduates need start up capital, ranging from US\$100 to US\$470 depending on their skill area. However, none of these start-up costs are included in the current NAP programme budget and the concern is that funding will not be allocated to it. While the NAP-apprentices will be given a toolkit which they can keep after the training, according to the NVTI Director, the issue of post-training support for NAP-apprentices will be dealt with once the training is underway. This is a short-sighted approach by government and does not draw on the experience of earlier programmes.

Under the VSP post-training support was disjointed; the project did not optimise the potential synergies between key government and non- government institutions concerned with vocational training and employment start-up. As a result VSP graduates lacked access to start-up capital, land on which to set up their workshops and other post-training support and advice (Korboe 2001b; World Bank 2001). The VSP also gave apprentices the opportunity to purchase tools at subsidised rates, but the project demonstrated the complexity of procuring and distributing tool kits for individuals. It showed that selection of tool-kits should not be limited to ISA executives only.

In the STEP there was inadequate post-training support and huge delays in graduates accessing micro-finance; only about 10% of STEP graduates managed to access funding, rendering many of the acquired skills unable to be utilised. The failure of the micro-finance component had a lot to do with the unrealistic expectations of the government with regard to private sector micro-finance institutions (MFIs). The MFIs the government tried to work with viewed the capacity of STEP graduates to understand the conditions of lending as inadequate. They considered that providing micro-finance to STEP graduates was a social programme and not commercially

viable. STEP borrowers were seen by the MFIs as a higher risk than other borrowers, being new 'customers' with low educational attainment. Due to the failure of loan delivery as part of the STEP, many of those who participated in this training programme have become disillusioned by such government intervention. More worryingly, as the director of one of the main agencies under the MoMYE noted, 'whatever they [the trainees] learned in STEP has now become useless' (personal communication, 19 October 2007).

REP's skills development interventions have been complemented by a variety of other services (facilitating access to new technology and business advice; promoting easier access to financial services; improving the efficiency of existing small rural enterprises, supporting the creation of new enterprises, and removing communication constraints through feeder road rehabilitation); and this is seen as one of the reasons behind the success of REP so far. However, any informal apprentice graduates under the REP experienced problems post-training with regard to obtaining start-up capital, even though the REP had several rural banks participating in the REP's Rural Enterprise Development Fund. This was because most informal apprentice graduates could still not raise the 20% contribution needed to secure a bank loan and banks were unwilling to lend to youth with no track record.

The ILO/IPEC project did not link provision of training to adequate post-training follow-up advice and support. Hence, the ability of the graduate apprentices to be able to use their skills was made more difficult.

### ***Monitoring and impact evaluation will be inadequate***

Training cannot be effective unless its impact is monitored and assessed (Walther 2007). Testing the hypotheses on which an intervention is based and being prepared to adapt the intervention if it is not working is important for the success, sustainability and eventual up-scaling of strategies. It is this process which will help to build confidence in the overall skills development approach.

It is important, therefore, for Ghana's NAP to be thoroughly monitored on an ongoing basis. Several lessons regarding the monitoring and evaluation of skills programmes in Ghana should be recalled.

While many training interventions for the informal economy might evaluate their project in terms of numbers trained or numbers entering wage- or self-employment, rarely do projects undertake cost-benefit analysis or evaluate the impact of training on income (and productivity) (Palmer 2008).

The VSP implementation completion report (World Bank 2001) highlighted this exact issue, commenting that 'there is a tendency to watch for indicators of **activities**, to see if the targets are being met, while overlooking indicators of **outcome**' (18; emphasises in original). Under the VSP monitoring of outcomes and achievement of objectives was poor; while there were indicators set to measure achievement of goals these were never operationalised and no information was collected on them (World Bank 2001).

Monitoring of outcomes and achievement of objectives of the REP appears to have been more effective. The interim evaluation (GoG/IFAD 2000) not only contains data on numbers trained, but also impact on incomes and a cost-benefit analysis.

Government reporting of the STEP results largely came down to reporting of numbers trained. Although there were meant to be tracer studies conducted by training providers under phase II of STEP, it is doubtful if many of these were undertaken. There has been no comprehensive follow-up or impact assessment of STEP; instead

politicians were keen to portray the programme as meeting its objectives and creating employment. But, for the majority of STEP graduates, this is unlikely to have been the case. Although it has been claimed that young people trained under STEP have started their own businesses or secured employment, it is probably telling that STEP was renamed the Skills Training and Entrepreneurship Programme in 2005 (from 'Skills Training and Employment Placement' programme), as it had signally failed to connect with job opportunities the very large number of young people who registered. The ILO, as part of its Decent Work Pilot Programme, did a finance and performance appraisal of STEP but this relied on existing reports, training and financial statistics, and other information collated and made available by the STEP core team as well as a series of structured interviews; it did not have the resources to undertake a full impact assessment.

The ILO/IPEC project evaluated collected data on numbers trained. Indeed the final evaluation of the project took place too early – while some of the trainees were still in training. Hence, it was not possible to say anything about the employment outcomes or effectiveness of the training.

### **Concluding comments**

Increased attention to the informal apprenticeship system is warranted in Ghana; increasing numbers of school leavers are unable to access further formal education and training, and the informal apprenticeship system represents the most likely source of post-school further training. But, as has been stressed in this paper, care should be taken not to ruin what is already operating with almost no government intervention. There are certainly weaknesses inherent in the existing informal apprenticeship system as a means for youth to acquire skills, but while it represents the largest single source of skill acquisition it cannot be ignored. Addressing the weaknesses of the current informal system, while strengthening what is already working must be the way forward. This paper has noted the concerns that have been voiced with regard to the proposed NAP; notably concerns related to sustainability and those related to the use of formal VTIs as training providers (instead of working directly with master-craftspeople). It has noted that the interventions that are most likely to benefit the informal apprenticeship system include interventions to upgrade the technical and pedagogical skills of the master-craftspeople as well as those that provide literacy and numeracy training to the apprentices.

There remains a sense that the lessons from earlier policy initiatives that were designed to upgrade the informal apprenticeship system have not been fully considered in the current design (April 2008) of the National Apprenticeship Programme. Apart from providing clues about what intervention components might be more useful than others, earlier policy and project initiatives have been shown to have little impact on the informal apprenticeship system as a whole. Previous interventions have usually been of relatively small scale and not been accompanied by the national-level policy initiatives needed to bring about change in the wider informal training system. Moreover, the existing policy legislation that does currently relate to the informal apprenticeship system (such as the relevant sections of the Children's Act) remains essentially ignored and un-enforced. National level policy reform needs to accompany the so-called 'National Apprenticeship Programme' (NAP); without this there is a danger that the NAP will just be another intervention of limited scope and, most likely, of limited sustainability. The fact that the NAP specifically does not fully engage with the existing

informal apprenticeship mechanism – in its targeting of junior high school (lower-secondary) graduates, rather than those already in apprenticeships – is a further worry as well as a further indication that the NAP in its present form – like previous initiatives – will not have lasting impact on the informal apprenticeship system as a whole.

On 7 December 2008 Ghana held Presidential elections and the results show the two main political parties being ‘neck and neck’. In fact, neither the ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP) nor the main opposition party, the National Democratic Congress (NDC), managed to obtain the required 50% + 1 votes needed for an outright win. At the time of writing this paper, Ghana finds itself on the eve of a run-off election due to be held on 28 December 2008.

While the NAP, discussed in this paper, was designed during an NPP government – and was part of the 2004 White Paper on Education Reforms which emerged from the (NPP) Presidential committee on education reforms – both the NPP and NDC have highlighted technical and vocational education and training as a priority area. It could be anticipated, therefore, that if an NDC government takes power in 2009 it would still take up the National Apprenticeship Programme, though perhaps changing one or two elements of its current design.

Whoever takes power in 2009, the political pressures associated with the increasing numbers of unemployed school leavers will be the same for both an NPP and NDC administration. Similarly, the impact such pressure may have on policy formation may result in populist policies rather than those based on evidence of what might work best, when, and how.

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