

Case Study: Update on improving apprenticeship in the informal economy in Niger

Context of apprenticeship in the crafts sector

The education system in Niger has poor internal efficiency, with one of the lowest enrolment rates in Africa. The majority of young people outside the education system learn trades in enterprises in the craft sector, which in Niger has at least 900,000 workers¹ in 206 trades.²

Craftspersons in Niger are represented by the National Federation of Artisans in Niger (FNAN), which is organized into regional federations of artisans. The National Federation is in charge of selecting enterprises and registering apprentices eligible for training. Training matters themselves are managed by the Chamber of Craft Trades of Niger (CMANI), which contributes to developing curricula, training apprentices in enterprises and at training centres, and organizing advanced training for craftspersons.

These craftspersons take on apprentices seeking skills to join the labour force. Assuming that all of them have one apprentice, there would be 900,000 apprentices, while the formal vocational and technical training system has fewer than 30,000 students.³ This would suggest that there are around 30 times as many apprentices in the craft sector as there are students in the formal vocational and technical training system.

In contrast to Benin or Togo, where apprenticeship in the informal economy is an institution that is recognized and valued by the parents of apprentices as a way to prepare for entry into the labour force, apprenticeships in Niger have a stronger connotation of moral upbringing and are considered to be less structured. Agreements only very loosely set out their terms and conditions, including their duration which is at the discretion of the MC. There are no



graduation ceremonies or apprenticeship leaving certificates (ILO, 2020). Apprenticeships rarely come to an end following the recognized release of the apprentice by the employer, but often (i) when the workshop closes (*workshops for trades such as mechanics, joinery or plumbing are often run by workers from Benin, Togo or Burkina Faso, who sometimes return to their own country after several years*) or (ii) when the young person finds another, more lucrative opportunity (*getting an apprenticeship in another trade, setting up in their own business once they decide that they have learned enough to get by, starting another trade, or emigrating within the country or abroad, and so on*). In general, no certificate is issued at the end of the apprenticeship (*whether the end of the apprenticeship was agreed or not*). This means that apprentices who have completed their apprenticeship cannot show evidence of their knowledge.

¹ Ministry of the Economy, statistical report, May 2017.

² Niger craft trades register.

³ Ministry of Vocational and Technical Training (MFPT), statistical yearbook, 2017.

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This less defined end to apprenticeships often leads to the following outcomes for young people:

- Sometimes, they prefer to change profession and seek opportunities in a workshop in another business sector.
- They are unable to set up their own workshop due to a lack of know-how and capital.
- Some of them (*those who are educated to primary level*), who have the necessary information and financial means, try to join training centres to obtain a diploma or certificate.

National policy on vocational training and regulation of apprenticeship

The sectoral policy document on technical and vocational education and training (PS-EFTP) adopted in 2006⁴ recognizes the important role of traditional apprenticeship as a way for young people in Niger to gain skills, and proposes modernizing the system. This document states that “human resources are trained on the job through traditional apprenticeship. Techniques, methods and equipment are passed down traditionally and technical advances are not easily incorporated, meaning that the quality of services and products suffers as a result. Improving the skills level of all those active in this sector, especially young people, must be a priority. This is why apprenticeship reform is a priority for the future system”. This reform involves:

- ✓ establishing an organized, appropriate, attractive and incentivized apprenticeship system:
 - creating or strengthening mechanisms appropriate for apprenticeship: firstly by using the training units set up for specific programmes or used and strengthened by those programmes (such as the Nigetech vocational training programme), or those from private initiatives, following the evaluation proposed above, as well as the training units created by the technical ministries and local authorities;
 - updating the legal framework for apprenticeship and adapting it to national requirements and conditions;
- creating apprenticeship management tools: as a priority, collecting accurate data on existing apprenticeships;
- capitalizing on experience and formalizing the use of national languages;
- setting up a qualification system suited to requirements and potential;
- training trainers specifically for apprenticeship;
- introducing incentives to encourage employers to accept apprentices;
- ✓ organizing and offering effective support to the professional bodies involved in apprenticeship:
 - supporting – in technical, educational and financial terms – initiatives by these professional bodies to create training materials;
 - supporting these bodies in their actions to publicize and promote their trades to young people;
- ✓ introducing an apprenticeship fund:
 - building up the National Fund for Apprenticeships, Technical Education, Training and Skills Development through the income from the training levy, in addition to the subsidy granted, to finance, among other things, the training of apprentices and apprenticeship instructors.

Following the adoption of the PS-EFTP, the ministry issued an order regulating work-based apprenticeship,⁵ which made it possible to pilot dual-type training schemes in the following ten professions from 2007 to 2010:

⁴ Decree No. 2006-072/PRN/MFP/EJ of 16 March 2006 adopting the sectoral policy on technical and vocational education and training.

⁵ Order No. 000029 MFPT/DEFPT of 12 September 2007 regulating work-based apprenticeship.

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► Occupations selected for pilot dual-type apprenticeship (2007-10)

Modern jewellery, two-stroke mechanics, audio-visual maintenance, bricklaying, sanitary plumbing, electrics for construction, truck mechanics, leather work, electrical installation and forging/foundry work.

These pilot training schemes took place with the support of the International Labour Office as part of a project to support vocational training financed by the European Development Fund (EDF). The project involved 144 apprentices and 105 master craftsmen.

Several regulatory acts have been adopted to extend these pilot schemes:

- Interministerial Order No. 0080 of 22 July 2013 establishes the National Steering Committee for Vocational Training through Apprenticeship. This is a mechanism for consultation, guidance and coordination regarding all actions taken in relation to vocational training through apprenticeship in Niger. The public authorities, representatives of professional bodies and representatives of regional trade union organizations are represented on this Committee. Technical and financial partners are also involved in apprenticeship development and promotion.
- Order No. 0092 of 5 September 2013 establishing the regional committees for vocational training through apprenticeship, which are attached to each regional governor. The main role of the regional committees is to provide local representation on the National Committee. Their proximity to the beneficiaries of apprenticeship training guarantees a responsive approach to

monitoring training actions by generating synergies between all stakeholders in vocational training through apprenticeship.

Yet despite the adoption of the texts listed above, it has not been possible to roll out the pilot schemes at national level, due to:

- poor engagement by professional bodies regarding training, as they wanted enterprises' contribution to training apprentices to be remunerated;
- a lack of resources in the training fund;
- the constitutional and political crisis that led to a coup d'état in 2010.

However, some projects by international development agencies (Switzerland and Luxembourg) were implemented in the cities where cooperation programmes were active following the return to constitutional order in 2012.

Qualifications within the apprenticeship system

Based on the act setting out the fundamental principles of technical and vocational education and training in Niger,⁶ and taking into account the demands of professional bodies, in November 2018, the Government introduced a qualification system to recognize the skills acquired through informal apprenticeship.⁷ The assessment to obtain these qualifications takes place

through the recognition of prior learning system for craftsmen and master craftsmen. No qualifications are yet operational, and none have been awarded. The implementing orders specifying the procedures for awarding the qualifications have not yet been passed (status end of 2019).

⁶ Act No. 2015-22 of 23 April 2015 establishing the fundamental principles of technical and vocational education and training in Niger.

⁷ Decree No. 2018-770/PRN/MEP/T of 2 November 2018 establishing vocational qualifications and procedures for the assessment and approval of training.

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The qualifications are:

1. the basic training certificate or AQB, which represents accreditation of one or more qualifying training modules of the trade qualification certificate (CQM), so several AQB's make it possible to obtain the CQM;
2. the trade qualification certificate or CQM;
3. the vocational training certificate or CQP;
4. the vocational skills certificate or BQP;
5. the technician certificate or BPT.

All these qualifications are accessible via informal apprenticeship through recognition of prior learning. However, these qualifications are not yet being awarded.

In addition to these qualifications, the Government has also passed a decree setting out the terms and conditions of apprenticeship in Niger.⁸ The decree states that:

- Craftspersons who take on apprentices shall receive payment in return, funded through the training levy in Niger.
- Apprentices shall receive an allowance, also funded through the training levy in Niger.



⁸ Decree No. 2018-772/PRN/MEP/T of 2 November 2018 concerning the organizational arrangements for apprenticeship in Niger.

Contribution of national vocational training fund to financing apprenticeships

In Niger, there is a training fund known as the Vocational Training and Apprenticeship Support Fund (FAFPA). This fund is subsidized by the State. Various negotiations and discussions have resulted in an agreement through which the Government has committed to gradually increase the subsidy up to the limit of the income from the apprenticeship taxes collected. The FAFPA will be used to

pay the craftspersons who take on apprentices, as well as the apprentice allowances.

The FAFPA finances training for apprentices and master craftspersons. The tables below show the number of master craftspersons (2016 to 2018) and apprentices (2014 to 2017) whose training has been financed by the FAFPA.

► **Table 1. Number of master craftspersons whose training was financed by the fund (2016–2018)**

Year	Number of master craftspersons undertaking training financed by FAFPA
2016	780
2017	123
2018	46
TOTAL	949

Source: Niger FAFPA, 2019

► **Table 2. Number of apprentices trained with financing from FAFPA (2014–2017)**

Year	Apprentices trained			
	Men	Women	% women	Total
2014	1 236	1 385	52%	2 661
2015	2 672	1 133	30%	3 805
2016	3 056	3 039	50%	6 095
2017	1 079	747	40%	1 826
Total	8 043	6 304	44%	14 387

Source: Niger FAFPA, 2019.

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The table shows that the FAFPA only reaches a very small number of craftspersons and apprentices.

A study conducted in 2017⁹ showed that training (enhanced and advanced learning) for apprentices and craftsperson employers over the previous three years (2014, 2015 and 2016) had the following major effects:

► Effects of upgraded apprenticeship on craftspeople and apprentices (2014-16)

- Employers improved the organization of their work.
- Employers diversified their services.
- Customers expressed greater appreciation of the quality of services in the workshops where employers and apprentices had taken part in training.
- Some employers became trainers of other craftspersons.
- Once they had completed an enhanced apprenticeship cycle, the majority of apprentices stayed with their employer or switched to another employer, as they were unable to set up a business on their own due to a lack of financial resources for purchasing the necessary equipment.
- Apprentices received support with their share of the training costs from their employers or a technical and financial partner.
- Including a literacy programme within the apprenticeship system meant that learners were able to read, write and calculate in French when they left.

Challenges for upgrading apprenticeships in Niger

The Ministry of Vocational and Technical Training has a Department of Rural Vocational Training and Apprenticeships (DAFPR), which is responsible for managing and implementing the strategy to modernize traditional/informal apprenticeship in collaboration with the professional bodies representing craftspersons. Within the DAFPR, there is the Apprenticeship Development Service.

Given the poor facilities and equipment in workshops/enterprises, which does not favour the transfer of skills, the Government has set up trade training centres (CFM) where young people can learn craft trades and master craftspersons can receive advanced training.

In this way, the Government is seeking to develop a new generation of craftspersons who have achieved a minimum educational standard and learned their trade in more structured conditions than through the traditional enterprise-based system.

Where they exist, the trade training centres can call upon craftspersons to deliver training. The following main challenges are faced by the vocational training system in the craft sector in Niger:

- improving the structure of professional bodies representing craftspersons to promote their involvement in the implementation of the new regulations (the decrees of November 2018);
- implementing the decrees of November 2018, notably those concerning:
 - the payments given to craftspersons taking on apprentices, and the allowances given to apprentices;
 - operationalization of the five qualifications (AQB, CQM, CQP, BQP and BPT);
 - operationalization of the formalization of the apprenticeship system in the informal sector by standardizing the apprenticeship contract;
- topping up the training fund (FAFPA) through the apprenticeship tax paid by enterprises in the formal sector;
- ensuring that enterprises in the informal sector contribute to topping up the FAFPA in order to benefit from it;
- training a sufficient number of craftsperson trainers, distributed across the whole country and in all 206 trades on the national craft trades register.

⁹ *Evaluation des effets des formations des apprentis et des patrons dans les régions de Dosso et de Maradi dans le cadre du Projet Formation professionnelle Rurale (FOPROR)* [Evaluation of the effects of training apprentices and employers in the Dosso and Maradi regions as part of the Rural Skills Development support programme (FOPROR)] (Swisscontact Niger, 2014).

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As Niger experiences food crises almost every year, the Government and international development partners are more committed to apprenticeships in agricultural trades than those in craft trades, as the issues of self-sufficiency,

sovereignty and food security constitute major challenges for the country.

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