

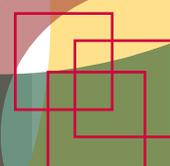


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Case studies on skills assessments in the informal economy conducted by small industry and community organizations

Annex to assessing skills in
the informal economy:
A resource guide for small
industry and community
organizations



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A resource guide for small industry and community
organizations

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List of acronyms

AMICHOCO	Amigos del Chocó Foundation
ANMACO	Navigators' Association, DRC
APSKI	Association of plumbers of South Kivu, DRC
ARM	Alliance for Responsible Mining
ASSALAK	Ship owners Association, DRC
BEP-STAR	BRAC Education Programme-Skills Training for Advancing Resources
BMET	Ministry of Employment and Training
BNFE	Bureau of Non-Formal Education
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
BTEB	Bangladesh Technical Education Board
B-WISE	Enterprise improvement and occupational safety and health training
CAPA	Plumbers training centre in DRC
CBT	Competency-based training
COV	Green Gold Corporation
CQM	Certificate of Qualification for Trades
CRP	Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralysed
CSLB	Competency skills log book
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
EFAT	End-of-apprenticeship testing
EU	European Union
FLO	Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International
FUNDAMOJARRAS	Las Mojarras Foundation
GHABA	Ghana Hairdressers and Beauticians Association
GIPA	Intersectoral Craftworkers Association
GIZ	German development cooperation
IIAP	Institute of Pacific Environmental Research
ILO	International Labour Organization
MC	Master craftsperson
NABH	National Association of Beauticians and Hairdressers
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NSQF	National Skills Qualification Framework in India
NVTI	National Vocational Training Institute
NVTQF	National Training and Vocational Qualifications Framework
QMS	Quality Management System
RMGs	Ready-made garments
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SDI	Skill Development Initiative Scheme
SICO	Small Industry and Community Organization
TVET	Technical Vocational Education and Training
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

Case 1: Local federations of craftspeople (“collectifs”) – Benin



Background and overview of skills assessment practices

Administration in Benin is decentralized. Hand in hand with the decentralization, local federations (collectifs) had to be founded from 1996 onwards in each municipality, where possible. Today, there are 77 local federations in Benin. When these were founded, the National Federation (FENAB) became a Confédération (CENAB). This case study focuses on three local federations (the “collectifs” of Kandi, Djougou and Bohicon):

- The “collectif of Kandi” comprises 14 associations (2000 members in 2007). Kandi was the first “collectif” that started with a system of testing apprentices, the first exam taking place in 2002. In 2007/2008 the collaboration with the municipality started, launched by Swiss cooperation.
- The “collectif of Djougou” comprises 50 associations. Djougou started with the testing in 2004. Collaboration with the municipality started in June 2012.
- The “collectif of Bohicon” comprises 40 associations (4600 members in 2009); most of the members are female. Bohicon started collaboration with the municipality in 2012.

In Benin, apprenticeship testing has gone through different stages: In the early 2000s, EFAT (end-of-apprenticeship testing) was carried out by the craftspeople in an autonomous way. From 2007 onwards, with the influence of Swiss cooperation, the testing was linked up with the municipality. In addition, national plans were developed that focused on replacing the EFAT by the Certificate de Qualification aux Métiers (CQM), a more formalized system for apprentices with low levels of education. In parallel with the CQM, the Certificate de Qualification Professionnelle (CQP), a dual-system approach, was introduced in 2005 for apprentices who have an adequate level of schooling.

Collaborating with the municipality on the testing led to procedures becoming legally regulated and structured by official decrees. The decrees of the municipalities make the testing compulsory and the traditional system of “liberation” (setting free the apprentice) is no longer possible if an apprentice has not undergone formal testing.

The collaboration with the municipality has not had any influence on decision-making processes with respect to the content of the testing. Each federation decides on the contents of testing on their own with the craftsmen being intensively involved in the process. However, the jury for the testing, which had been composed only of craftspeople before, has been expanded by three members: a representative of the municipality, a representative of a training centre and an honourable member of the community.

Currently, EFAT is being carried out by local federations in five departments. It is expected, however, that all 12 departments in Benin will carry out the testing in the future.



Motivation for introducing skills testing

The reasons given by the representatives of the federations for considering the testing a “good model” are that it reduces the cost of the extremely expensive traditional “liberation” for the apprentices and that the quality of the work of the future craftspeople is being improved. They also said that it would contribute to local development as a whole.

In addition, some of the motivation can be seen in relation to the longstanding influence of international cooperation. For instance, two of the three Small Industry and Community Organizations (SICOs) stated that the intention of Swiss cooperation has been to “facilitate” the introduction of “the end-of-apprenticeship testing” in the whole country since 1993/94.



Initiation and organization of skills testing

The whole testing process is embedded in a nationwide process, influenced by international cooperation. All federations, associations and craftspersons are involved. In practice, some federations accepted the testing scheme faster than others and also developed more ownership.

Trying to convince their member-associations and the master craftsmen and -women of the advantages of the testing has been a challenge for the federations. After many years of carrying out the “softest” form of testing (without authorities), sensitization is still necessary to overcome resistance, as the testing of apprentices means more advantages for the apprentices than for the masters.

Items for skills testing are proposed by master craftspersons to a committee established for each trade. The proposals explain all steps that have to be considered professionally. The committee then discusses and screens the proposals according to the content, the cost of material, and the time necessary for testing. They then decide on which item to choose.

The jury is composed of craftsmen only (in the first stage) and of craftsmen and three other representatives (in the second stage with municipality). The craftsmen elected in the jury are required to have at least 5 years of working experience and they must be “honourable” persons. The number of members of the jury depends on the number of apprentices admitted to the test.

Testing takes place twice a year, either in the local centre of the federation, a training centre owned by the federation or in the workshops of selected craftspersons, depending on the trade.

Up to now, the process of identifying test items appears to be quite an autonomous process that relies with great confidence on the masters’ knowledge and competencies. Communities are also involved in the process of testing, based on the regulation in the decree of the municipality, whereby representatives of the municipality, parents’ associations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and training centres monitor the whole process. Test items consist of theory content and practical testing, with emphasis on the latter. Theory testing is done in writing and/or orally, depending on the federation.



Stakeholder collaboration

The process of crafts promotion in Benin has been intensively supported by German, French and particularly Swiss Cooperation for more than 20 years. Since 2001, the dual technical vocational education and training (TVET) system has been gradually introduced.

The influence of public stakeholders will increase with a growing involvement of the municipalities in the EFAT. With the gradual replacement of the EFAT by the CQM, the influence of national stakeholders (Ministries) will also keep on growing. EFAT will be compulsory for all craftspeople and a national law foresees that it will then be replaced by the CQM.



Lessons learned

The testing has had positive effects on the relationship between master and apprentice: it has increased the respect for the master. Apprentices are also much more active in asking questions during their apprenticeship and masters are motivated to be better informed in order to enable their apprentices to pass the testing. Furthermore, the apprentices are more competent now and there are fewer complaints by clients.

However, there are also several challenges on different levels: The problems between the SICO and its members stem from the idea that craftspeople will “lose” something with the introduction of the testing — losing money by having to do without the “traditional fees” for the “liberation” ceremony, losing credibility in the community if the apprentices fail the testing, and losing authority once a certificate will no longer be signed by them and instead is signed by the municipality or a ministry.

These challenges require the federations to develop specific strategies addressing the concerns of the craftspeople.

The craftspeople themselves try to tackle the problem by conducting informal pre-testing with their apprentices. As requirements for testing increase, craftspeople have to consult fellow-master craftspeople in order to be able to prepare their apprentices for testing.

The challenges with respect to the actual testing procedure are mostly about how to avoid “cheating”. As a response, the three federations have invented systems to prevent apprentices gaining information on the content of the test from their masters.

The collaboration with municipalities, on the one hand, is a challenge as it adds complexity to procedures, and may be seen as a burden by the associations or federations if the process is not managed efficiently. Interviews also highlighted that there is, at times, a lack of motivation on the part of the municipality agents to be involved. Furthermore, when municipalities become involved, the ownership of master craftsmen may be reduced if they no longer sign certificates. On the other hand, the positive effects of testing in collaboration with municipality are that the credibility of the certificate increases, the organization of the testing improves, the testing is documented (statistics, archives) and the publicity for the craftspeople through media is enhanced.



Further developments

On a national level, procedures and requirements of testing are in a process of shifting towards a formalized system of accreditation and testing in Benin. While the shift from autonomous testing to collaboration with the municipality is more or less accepted by craftspeople (as they “weigh” the disadvantages against the advantages), there seems to be more resistance to the intended shift from the EFAT to the CQM system (that will involve ministries) according to the interviews.

Case 2: Trade Union COTRAF – Rwanda



Background and overview of skills assessment practices

COTRAF is a Rwandan trade union that exists since 2003 covering several professions. In Rwanda, trade unions have been allowed since 1985, but at that time it was a “one-party-trade-union” association with a strong political touch. Since 1991, trade unions are separate from the government. COTRAF is a trade union that is strongly engaged in improving workers’ rights and promoting decent work. COTRAF has 6,519 workers and employees as members.

This case concerns “COTRAF construction”. More or less half of the members of COTRAF belong to “COTRAF construction”. The majority of them are self-employed in the informal sector. There are also semi-employed workers due to the reality of construction work.

According to the Rwandan system, the members of COTRAF are organized in cooperatives at district level. COTRAF has the long-term objective that these cooperatives will one day be transformed into “construction enterprises”.

At present, COTRAF is starting with a process of standardization of the members’ professional profiles. COTRAF has introduced “member cards” (professional badges) that show the category, that is the degree of professional skill, of each member. As this process is in the first stage of development, the categorization of professional skills is based on informal assessments of the union’s members or construction enterprises that employ them.

Further qualification leading to certificates has started recently.



Motivation for introducing skills testing

The main driving force for the idea of member cards based on assessment and certification was the market itself: Rwandan construction enterprises and clients ask more and more frequently for qualified workers. Thus many qualified workers from other countries (particularly Uganda) come in to “replace” the Rwandan craftspeople who cannot prove their competences. According to their engagement as a trade union, COTRAF says that if they don’t have any qualification criteria, they can neither claim decent work conditions nor minimum wage. As a consequence, they introduced the professional badge in order to show the level of qualification of each member and therewith support him to claim an adequate wage. The members are conscious of the fact that they lose contracts if they cannot prove their qualification.



Initiation and organization of skills testing

When COTRAF became aware of the problems their members are facing in the market, they tried to get advice from a Belgian trade union and from this contact derived the idea of introducing “professional categories”. The idea was presented to and discussed with the members. Following that, the General Council of the trade unions in Rwanda decided to introduce badges for their members. The members themselves tried to “categorize” each other as: mason, qualified mason helper, carpenter, mason-carpenter, simple helper, technician and so on. Later, COTRAF intends to organize skills

assessment. A long-term objective of the trade union is to establish their own training centre with a qualifying programme at three levels.

So far, no skills assessment *procedure* exists. The professional categorization of the members of COTRAF appearing on the badges, are presently based on informal appreciation. COTRAF also cooperates with the German development cooperation GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit) that only recently delivered training to the members of COTRAF, giving a “certificate of participation”, signed by GIZ and the cooperative the worker belongs to. GIZ will carry out research with local craftsmen to find out which are the criteria used by craftspeople to classify somebody to be a “master” craftsman. The results will be the basis of the training programme and the respective certificates.



Stakeholder collaboration

COTRAF is a strong trade union that sometimes even risks being in conflict with the Government. The initiative of introducing the member cards was an autonomous initiative. COTRAF benefits from a close relationship with a Belgian trade union that they can approach for advice. In addition, the relationship with the German development cooperation GIZ has only recently been established. Together with the association of private training centres TEVSA (Technical and Vocational Private Schools), GIZ supports COTRAF to set up a training programme.



Lessons learned

The main lesson learnt is that craftspeople and workers want the certificate in order to have better chances in the market. And certainly, a certificate can help them withstand market pressure to a certain degree.

Having introduced skills assessment ideas recently, COTRAF is still in a learning process and they face similar challenges than other SICOs wanting to introduce craftspersons’ testing, such as the resistance of some craftsmen towards being “assessed”. There are different reasons for this resistance, such as a sort of “professional pride” or being afraid of the possibility of failing such exams, for instance.



Further developments

COTRAF can be considered a strong trade union and has the means to bring forward its ideas. However, future developments are difficult to foresee as there is a tendency of the Rwandan government to strongly influence the private sector.

Case 3: Plumbers' Association, APSKI – Democratic Republic of the Congo (East)



Background and overview of skills assessment practices

APSKI (Association of plumbers of South Kivu) is a plumbers' association, founded in 2008 through the initiative of a committed plumber who is the president of the association today. The association has 67 members. APSKI represents about half of the plumbers of the city of Bukavu in South Kivu. The plumbers' association decided to introduce skills assessment for their members about three years ago. Going through this assessment is compulsory for the members of the association. Plumbers who are not yet members of the association can also attend the training and exam. However, they cannot receive the badge.

Before creating the new system of skills assessment, the plumbers had an informal system of releasing their apprentices: the master would follow his apprentice to a work-place and check his abilities. When he was convinced that the apprentice was ready, he gave him a “plumber's key” and declared him a plumber.

Today, the plumbers organize a qualifying training for their members as well as for their apprentices. This training concludes with a final examination and the handing over of an officially recognized certificate. Specific to the context of the DRC is that a professional certificate cannot be issued by an SICO alone. It is compulsory that the testing is preceded by a skills upgrading course that has to be conducted by an accredited training centre. As a response to that, the association, in collaboration with a training centre, designed an upgrading course that was linked to testing.



Motivation for introducing skills testing

The founder of APSKI was of the opinion that “too many self-declared plumbers” without adequate skills were having negative effects on the market. There were frequent complaints of clients about the “bad” work of plumbers in the city. At the time, many of these plumbers were former apprentices who had dropped out of apprenticeship and immediately entered the market.

Another development that led to reflections about testing was the emerging practice of many public clients and international organizations to ask for professional badges before placing an order. Thus, the plumbers without badges would often miss out on important orders. Consequently, the plumbers wanted to raise their status (through qualification and certification) and, with a professional badge, they wanted to be able to identify themselves as “true” plumbers to their clients.



Initiation and organization of skills testing

The example of the plumbers' association shows that it is possible for a SICO to initiate skills assessment even in the absence of a national policy framework or support by international cooperation.

In the case of APSKI, the tests are organized together with prior training: craftsmen undergo three months of training and there are six months for apprentices. The trainers are identified by the plumbers themselves, whereby two trainers are selected out of the association and combined with two technicians known as competent in that area. The skills assessment is carried out in three stages: at the beginning of the training as an “entrance requirement” to determine the entry level of each

person, secondly after each module of the training and at the end of the training for the certificate. The contents of the first testing are elaborated by the trainers of the association together with the trainers of the centre. The items of the final test are selected by a committee, which is composed of representatives of the plumbers' association, the training centre and the government.

The testing combines a theoretical questionnaire and practical exercises, whereby the candidate chooses his test questions randomly from a codified list. Theory testing takes place in the training centre while practical tests are conducted on building sites. There is also the option of testing conducted orally for illiterate persons. The jury is composed of two representatives of the plumbers' association, 2-3 persons from the training centre and 1-2 government representatives (technicians or engineers sent by the Ministry of Education).



Stakeholder collaboration

The initiative was an autonomous bottom-up initiative. The plumbers are not members of the local Confederation of artisans (CMA) and there was no stakeholder involvement at the beginning. At a later stage, the plumbers had to seek the cooperation of a training centre accredited by local government in order to get the certificate. However, the training centre, called CAPA, was neither involved in creating the idea of skills assessment of the plumbers nor did it have a training section of plumbing at that time.

The local government appreciates the initiative as it brings “order” to the sector, and the Ministry of Youth (in charge of vocational training) officially recognizes the certificate. The mere involvement of government (representatives of Ministries) in the skills assessment makes the certificate “official”, even if the accrediting authority does not provide any test items itself.



Lessons learned

The fact that the testing and certification is recognized by the Government has raised the status of the plumbers. They reported that they now feel more respected by society and wearing their professional badge instils a sense of pride. In addition, the plumbers are now in a position to receive contracts from registered companies/organizations or participate in public tenders. Another effect of linking this certificate with the training has been that more young people feel attracted to this trade that they formerly considered ‘simple, dirty and for old people’.

One of the main challenges at the beginning was to convince the old members of the association. Some of them were of the opinion that their knowledge was sufficient and that they didn't need to learn more in order to get certified. However, as the association considers the exam compulsory for their members, the old members could not refuse to be tested. In the end, they recognized that there were many new things they didn't know and even 80-year-old plumbers passed the exam.

Many of the old plumbers still rely on their old working methods learnt during the colonial period, but they say that they have now started to improve their traditional way of “informal testing” of apprentices.



Further developments

Some other trades have started to think about “imitating” this initiative: e.g. the electricians and the floor tilers.

Case 4: Hairdresser's Trade Associations – Ghana



Background and overview of skills assessment practices

In Ghana trade associations in the sectors of hairdressing and beauty care have been on the forefront of introducing skills testing for apprentices and, at a later stage, to master craftswomen. The three trade associations who regularly conduct skills testing are organized as national organizations with branches in all provinces:

- The Ghana Hairdressers and Beauticians Association (GHABA)
- The National Association of Beauticians and Hairdressers (NABH)
- The Professional Cosmetologist and Beauty Therapist Association of Ghana (P-CABAG)

GHABA introduced skills testing for apprentices in one of its branches in 2001, nationwide testing was established in 2007 with assistance of the National Vocational Training Institute (NVTI). NABH introduced skills testing in 1999. In 2011, two organizations (GHABA and NABH) graduated close to 3000 apprentices in self-administered proficiency tests and prepared another 1500 apprentices and master craftswomen for NVTI trade tests through bridging courses and pre-tests.



Motivation for introducing skills testing

A primary motivation was to improve the quality of service. In one case the leadership of the association, trained in the UK and in regular contacts with other trade association abroad, was concerned about poor hygienic standards in the industry. With increasing awareness for HIV/AIDS and growing demand for new fashion and quality service among customers, skills testing was chosen as the most viable approach to set and improve new service standards in the industry and thus to maintain and strengthen the market position of members. Participation in international trade competitions and exchange with trade associations abroad further contributed to sensitize leadership and members on skills testing. Since hairdressing is very popular, skills testing (and institutional training) have become an income generating activity for the associations.



Initiation and organization of skills testing

Proficiency tests were first established with the assistance of NVTI in some pilot regions. Gradually the trade associations extended skills testing to all regions and branches. By now the three associations each have independent systems for proficiency testing and certification. Items for skills testing and assessment criteria are discussed and proposed by local committees and submitted to the national education and testing committee. The national committee screens the proposals and finally decides on the testing standards (assessment criteria) and testing items. Test items are selected annually. They are supposed to reflect new market developments. Tests include both trade theory and practice. For instance, there are test items on the properties and usage of cosmetic products so as to ensure proper application of chemicals according to product specifications and health standards. One association uses a test bank for the documentation of test items.

Tests are organized by each of the local branches on the same day across the country. Testing is voluntary. Only members can register their apprentices for the exams. Assessors (master craftswomen) are selected by the local assessment committees. One association is offering additional mid-term “pre-tests” so as to better prepare apprentices for the final test and for influencing quality of apprenticeship.

In addition to the proficiency tests, two associations offer four months bridging courses for NVTI administered trade test exams. The courses are organized in rented facilities; one association is operating a training centre. The curriculum is provided by NVTI.



Stakeholder collaboration

There is a close collaboration between the associations and NVTI. NVTI has assisted in setting up the testing mechanisms and has provided certified assessors in the beginning. The associations participate in the national dialogue on TVET reform and contribute to the development of new competency based curricula in their trades. The bridging courses conducted by the associations create a link between SICO administered testing and national skills accreditation. As part of the reform of National Qualification Frameworks there is a perspective that the SICO administered proficiency tests will receive national recognition. A new development is the cooperation with ITEC, an international examination board situated in the UK, for introduction of internationally recognized diploma certification.



Lessons learned

In the beginning, members (master craftswomen) resisted introduction of tests as they feared that the new practice may undermine their authority towards apprentices. Fees charged for intermediary tests and final examinations are a burden for poor apprentices who, as a consequence, are less willing to pay their master craftswomen for the training received.

Positive changes as a result of the skills testing have been reported by several stakeholders. According to them hygienic standards and service quality have improved in those businesses sending apprentices for tests. The testing practice has directly impacted the quality of apprenticeship training as master craftspeople do not like to see their apprentices failing in a test. More craftspeople have enrolled in bridging courses and register for trade tests. The practice of municipalities to provide licenses only to those saloons who have obtained a trade test certification has contributed to the popularity of skills testing. However, the reported recent increase of examination fees (for NVTI trade testing) and the high costs for the City and Guilds certification may affect demand for both bridging courses and skills testing. There is the tendency to increase entry barriers for registration to proficiency tests as some SICO leaders are convinced that only secondary school graduates are able to master the trade. Such a practice could marginalize apprentices from poor social backgrounds.



Further developments

As part of the TVET reform there are discussions about introducing a minimum period of apprenticeship training. GHABA and NABH representatives cooperate closely with the national body for coordination of TVET COTVET (Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training) in the formulation of new standards for Competency based Training (CBT). The two trade associations also became involved in the Ghana Skills Development Initiative, a project that is piloting cooperative approaches of apprenticeship training in Ghana.

Case 5: The Intersectoral Craftworkers Association (GIPA) – Cameroon



Background and overview of skills assessment practices

GIPA (Groupement Interprofessionnel des Artisans) is a local craftworkers' association that was created in 1999 in Yaoundé. It entails about 100 crafts enterprises from Yaoundé in ten different occupations. GIPA has about 300 members, of which 80 are active members. The goals that GIPA pursues are the strengthening of the technical and managerial skills of master craftspersons and the structuring and establishing apprenticeship training standards.

GIPA has been carrying out skills tests for apprentices for about 12 years. Up to now, 492 apprentices have been tested. There are only few apprentices who fail at the test (in 2011: 4 out of 25). The skills assessment focuses on a practical test in the respective craft. There is no testing of theory as to technology; although some testing on theory is done orally on management issues in which apprentices were trained before by GIPA. There is one test at the end of the year at a single location. The certificate is signed by GIPA and the Ministry of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises and Crafts. Responding to the fact that many craftsmen were sending their apprentices to the final test before they were ready, GIPA introduced pre-testing, an informal testing by the master craftsperson, before the actual test.



Motivation for introducing skills testing

GIPA seems to have quite a strong motivation for introducing standards into the practice of their trades. In their opinion, there is a lack of control of the work of craftsmen with respect to standards and criteria for quality. This, they want to foster through the testing of apprentices, and thereby “make a difference”: clients should no longer have to complain about work that is done by members of GIPA.



Initiation and organization of skills testing

In a general assembly, GIPA initiated the discussion on the issue that any craftsman can theoretically set free his apprentice at any time (and under any condition) that he considers sufficient. In order to change this situation, GIPA started thinking about skills assessment. Although having been supported by French cooperation, GIPA sustains that it was its own idea to introduce skills assessment.

The organization of testing is handled by the Executive Office of GIPA, supported by the persons in charge of training in each member trade association. This person collects items in their trade and suggests these items for practical testing. The suggestions are written or designed on paper. The Executive Office of GIPA then chooses the items for the test. There is a system of 20 points and the apprentice must achieve at least 12 points in order to pass the test. If he fails, he must repeat the test. The item for carpenters can either be to make a commode, a bureau or an arm chair. The item that the apprentices produce is assessed by a committee. This committee is composed of craftsmen and representatives of partners of GIPA. GIPA always invites at least three representatives of partners. The Ministry does not always participate in the committee; however, as it is the Minister who hands over the certificates, the Ministry also signs the certificates. At the end, the items are exposed at an official ceremony at the Chamber of Commerce, where the handing over of the certificates takes place as well.



Stakeholder collaboration

GIPA always has had many partners, particularly the French cooperation, but also the former German Development Service (DED, now GIZ), SNV, Don Bosco and BIT. GIPA considers the Government, represented by the Ministry of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises and Crafts, as their “partner”. The relationship with the Ministry is good according to GIPA, but GIPA would like the government to pay more attention and consideration to their issues. The concern about quality has probably been influenced by the French Cooperation that has always been active in promoting private sector development in Cameroon. There is no linkage between GIPA skills assessments and formal systems of skills recognition. Craftspeople suggest that it remains their responsibility of choosing and testing their own assessment items.



Lessons learned

The main positive effect cited by GIPA is a personal one. The pride of the apprentices was highlighted: to know that he was officially tested by impartial persons.

Challenges emerged with respect to the official ceremony at the Chamber of Commerce: as reported by GIPA, some members and many other people question the ceremony, saying that it is too “ambitious” and that it should not be such an elaborate ceremony with the Ministry. At the same time it may be assumed that many young people join GIPA primarily because of the testing and because of the certificate being handed over during the official ceremony.

A question to be addressed in the future is related to the testing: some members of GIPA would like to replace the “one-item-test”, saying that the apprentice should at least have the choice between two items to present.



Further developments

GIPA is thinking about tests for craftsmen. The reason is also that they want to make a difference: they would like to get their members more committed to standards in their trade. However, they are still thinking about who could be the *neutral* institution testing them.

Case 6: Navigators' Association, ANMACO – Democratic Republic of the Congo (East)



Background and overview of skills assessment practices

In the Eastern Congo Region of South Kivu, navigation on Lakes Kivu and Tanganyika is an important economic sector. There are approximately 178 ship owners, 79 of them operating on Lake Kivu. Here, the ship owners have their own association (ASSALAK). It is estimated that about 65 ship owners have navigating personnel. These navigating workers had not been organized until it was recognized that quality navigation translates into job security and improved safety for passengers. This idea was quickly adopted and led to the establishment of the navigators' association ANMACO (Association des Navigants Marins du Congo).

The navigators wanted to become certified navigation workers. However, due to national legislation on navigation, official certificates cannot be handed out in DRC without involving a training centre. Thus, a collaborative initiative between the port authority, a training centre, the ship-owners association ASSALAK and the workers/employees was launched. Specific upgrading/ training courses for all categories of navigation (four grades) were designed. In addition, there are plans of the state authority to make the testing obligatory for those professions which are relevant for ship safety.



Motivation for introducing skills testing

In the past, unqualified navigation staff and poor management, have been made responsible for most of the accidents that happened on Lake Kivu causing heavy losses of people and goods.

The state authorities therefore considered the testing a means to fulfil their responsibility according to legislation on navigation, that is to guarantee safety standards in the shipping industry and thus ensure the safety of the population. The ship owners were interested in safeguarding goods and preventing losses. The workers' motivation was also based on security concerns, as well as professional pride and the interest to gain better wages. Finally, the navigation staff - captains, marines and workers – had a strong interest in getting qualified and being certified in order to secure their work, and, being qualified workers, be in a position to claim better wages.



Initiation and organization of skills testing

Although the certification requires training or upgrading at an officially recognized centre, the technical ownership is completely on the side of the navigating personnel and the Commissioner for Navigation ("Commissaire Lacustre de la Province du SUD KIVU") as the representative of the Government. The training centre only provides the frame conditions for the training and assessment as well as some pedagogical support. Training contents and assessment are jointly set up and carried out by navigation staff and the Commissioner for Navigation. The most qualified navigators have become the technical trainers; the Commissioner for Navigation is the trainer for all aspects related to legislation in navigation. Due to national legal requirements on navigation, the testing is composed by the government authority (represented by the Commander) and comprises the whole trade.

As the workers are employed staff, they cannot freely decide to participate in the training during working hours. Therefore, the ship owners had to be involved. They agreed to set aside time for their workers to be trained and accepted practical training and internships on their ships.



Stakeholder collaboration

The whole process is a “tripartite engagement” between the navigation employees, the ship owners and the government. The training centre CAPA facilitates the process. By introducing an upgrading through certification, the influence of government as a stakeholder increased. While the navigation personnel consider this growing influence an advantage (as it guarantees better regulation of their activities and therefore improved protection of their rights), the ship owners are more hesitant towards it in their sector, as this leads to increased governmental oversight and influence on their business practices, hence might reduce their freedom to operate.



Lessons learned

The case of the navigators on Lake Kivu in the DRC (East) shows a range of effects that skills testing can produce: qualification and assessment have been reported to positively affect the shipping activities which are now better managed and carried out in a more responsible and safe way. The population feels more confident about the security on Lake Kivu transportation, as ships are no longer excessively loaded, and are better maintained and professionally equipped.

The navigators, as well as the state authority, have plans to make the testing compulsory, the motivation being in each case different. The navigators understood that being trained/upgraded and certified protects them against non-qualified competing workers and allows them to claim better wages and better working conditions from the ship owners. The Commissioner for Navigation, on the other hand, is highly interested in making the testing compulsory so as to assure the safety of the population.

One of the challenges is that the ship owners, as employers, appreciate better qualified navigation personnel, but are now confronted with expectations on higher wages.



Further developments

This process of introducing skills testing has been a very fast one which started only in 2004 and has now grown into a comprehensive skills assessment procedure in the navigation industry on Lake Kivu. There are strong indicators that the whole sector will become standardized across borders (Lake Tanganyika) as the experience on Lake Kivu spreads.

Case 7: Corporación Oro Verde – Colombia



Background and overview of skills assessment practices

The Corporación Oro Verde (Green Gold Corporation (COV)) was created in 1999 by and for the traditional mining families of the Chocó Bioregion in Colombia. The main parties involved are the NGO Amigos del Chocó Foundation (AMICHOCÓ), the Community Councils of Condoto (ASOCASÁN) and Tadó (COCOMACCOIRO) and Las Mojarras Foundation (FUNDAMOJARRAS).

COV is a cooperative organization, its organizational structure is non-hierarchical and the Community Councils and FUNDAMOJARRAS represent the mining communities. Their task is to supervise, guide and coordinate activities on the ground, provide technical assistance and arrange the internal monitoring of certified miners. AMICHOCO links local communities to national and international stakeholders, for instance by facilitating market linkages and disseminating information. Since 2000, 116 artisanal mining families from the municipalities of Tadó (24) and Condoto (94) have joined the Oro Verde programme.

COV's main goals are, firstly, to support artisanal and small-scale alluvial mining activities by Afro-Colombian communities living in the Chocó bioregion. Secondly, to protect their livelihood and land rights, and thirdly, to stop the environmental and social devastation caused by the use of cyanide and mercury, two highly toxic substances commonly used in the extraction process of precious metals. In contrast to the practices of large scale mining enterprises or informal miners from outside, the miners affiliated with COV only apply traditional mining techniques that are environmentally friendly.

To encourage these practices, COV introduced the world's first local certification scheme for precious metals. The Oro Verde label ensures a toxic-free production process that is socially and environmentally sustainable. COV also inspired the foundation of the Alliance for Responsible Mining (ARM) in 2004 and the creation of the Fairtrade and Fairmined standard. Since then, the producer groups can also certify their gold as Fairtrade and Fairmined Ecological Gold, while using Oro Verde as the brand and registered trademark.

In August 2002, the first 60 miners were certified. Today, there are about 45 certified mining family units (consisting of about 5-10 people each).



Motivation for introducing skills testing

A central motivation to establish the certification scheme was to support artisanal and small-scale alluvial mining activities by Afro-Colombian communities, and, more generally speaking, to improve the livelihoods of the communities and mining families of the Chocó Bioregion in Colombia.

Specific motivational aspects are to raise the income level of the mining families, improve the miners' access to the global market and to stop unfair supply chains through enhanced transparency.

In addition, stopping environmental degradation as well as protecting biodiversity by maintaining traditional mining techniques plays an integral role.



Initiation and organization of skills testing

An economic incentive is provided for certified miners, that is, they are offered favourable market access and a 15 per cent premium on top of a guaranteed price (a direct premium of 2 per cent and 1 per cent on top of the official prices for gold and platinum respectively, as well as 13 per cent that go to a rotating fund for local development projects which is managed through a democratic and transparent process by the Chocó Bioregion families). Miners are provided with technical assistance and they are encouraged by the certification scheme to claim ownership in the development of their communities.

There are ten certification criteria that were developed by COV in participation with the mining communities and under the guidance of experts. The criteria have a primarily environmental focus, such as, for instance, not using toxic chemicals in the extraction process or replacing the topsoil removed from the site during the extraction.

Those mining family units that are members of COV must comply with the criteria to receive certification. To oversee the compliance with the certification criteria and to ensure that the purchase of metals comes exclusively from certified miners, COV established the Quality Management System (QMS) in 2005. QMS serves as an internal control mechanism that documents every step in the productive chain, thus guaranteeing complete traceability of the metals. The QMS coordinator is also in charge of verifying the compliance with the certification criteria, using a system of bio-indicators to assess environmental improvement or recovery achieved in the mining areas. In addition, compliance with the criteria is also verified and locally certified by the research institute IIAP (Instituto de Investigaciones Ambientales del Pacífico), taking the role of an independent third-party certifier. A percentage of certified miners are audited by IIAP annually. If a mining family unit does not comply with the criteria, they lose the certificate.



Stakeholder collaboration

The Corporación Oro Verde collaborates with a number of different stakeholders comprising national bodies for trade testing and certification, training institutions and unions/civil society /communities. As described above, the research institute IIAP plays an integral part in the certification process. In addition, COV works in partnership with ARM and Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International (FLO). The programme has received support from various donor organizations such as the SEED (Sustainable Employment and Economic Development) Initiative; Artemisia; Solidaridad; Oxfam Novib and USAID through the Programa de Atención a Desplazados y Grupos Vulnerables (Support programme for displaced persons and vulnerable groups) implemented by Fundación Panamericana para el Desarrollo - FUPAD (Pan-American Foundation for Development).



Lessons learned

COVs certification process has a number of positive social and environmental effects. The most important ones are improved market access for mining families that also receive the premium on top of a guaranteed price, as explained earlier. Generally speaking, economic conditions are being improved by securing a minimum price for gold and by directly linking the mining communities with international markets.

By encouraging traditional and socially and environmentally responsible practices, environmental damages are mitigated. The Oro Verde certification supports the Afro-Columbian communities in various ways: by protecting their livelihood, strengthening organizational processes, and building up ownership and a shared identity. The latter is achieved by fostering a culture of joint responsibility in protecting the environment and the biodiversity of El Chocó.

However, there are also a number of constraints that the programme is facing.

The Community Councils have to handle considerable procedural and financial implications to obtain the required mining titles. Furthermore, a major challenge is the competition with informal mining activities and large-scale industrial mining companies. As profit margins are extremely low, the programme struggles with sustainability issues. In 2010, for instance, about 5 kg of pure metals (93 per cent gold, 7 per cent platinum) were produced. However, production would have to double to make the programme financially sustainable. So far, the lack of production and certification costs can only be compensated by international support.



Further developments

There are plans to continue collaboration with ARM and FLO.

Case 8: Formalizing skills and informal apprenticeships through assessments and recognition of prior learning in Bangladesh



Background and overview of skills assessment practices

The Bangladesh TVET Reform Project (2008-2013) is a joint initiative between the Government of Bangladesh and the ILO with EU funding to modernize and upgrade the TVET system and to make it more inclusive and accessible to disadvantaged groups and informal sector workers who were not formally trained and certified. As a part of the project, a National Skills Development Policy was approved which amongst other things highlighted the need for new legislation to improve governance of the apprenticeship system covering both informal and formal apprenticeships. Today, Bangladesh has a comprehensive and flexible national framework for all qualifications, ranging from the National Training and Vocational Qualifications Framework (NTVQF) Pre-Vocational Level 1 to Level 6, which reflects the policy focus to recognize any form of skills acquired formally or informally on the job under the new NTVQF. The TVET Reform project to date has facilitated the development of over 50 competency standards and qualifications and supported strengthened assessment and certification capacity within the Bangladesh Technical Education Board (BTEB), the responsible body for standard development, assessment and certification. Of these 50 competency standards, 15 were drafted for trades where skills are usually acquired informally or during training that is not certified by a nationally accredited testing agency. While expanding the certification process of assessors and setting up assessment centres across the country, BTEB has started to accredit assessment centres and pilot tested assessments/certification of sewing machine operators and motorcycle servicing mechanics through Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for Pre-Vocational Level 2 and NTVQF Level 1 qualifications. Another pilot is planned to assess and certify master crafts persons (MC) who oversee informal apprenticeships. Most of these workers acquired their workplace experience informally or during training that does not have nationally valid certification.

A pilot project, BEP-STAR (BRAC Education Program-Skills Training for Advancing Resources), jointly developed and implemented by BRAC¹, UNICEF and the ILO, has focused on how informal apprenticeships can better utilize existing skills of MCs to effectively train, assess and enhance the employability of school drop-out adolescents. The project also includes enterprise improvement and occupational safety and health training (B-WISE)² to upgrade and modernize skills and working techniques of selected MCs across 11 trades³ so that productivity at workplaces improves and hazardous working conditions are reduced. While the ILO and UNICEF train MCs, BRAC implements the project, monitors the entire training and facilitates enrolment of apprentices through programme organizers who were trained by ILO and UNICEF in B-WISE. BRAC also provides support so that these micro enterprises, and later apprentices, can access micro finance and other business development services to expand or start their business.

¹ BRAC (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee) is one of the largest micro finance providers and educational support organizations of the country. Acknowledging the need for skills development and vocational training and apprenticeships for sustainable livelihood development, BRAC is planning to increasingly venture into this field to promote informal apprenticeships and enterprise development as a part of their educational programme. BRAC intends to acquire the status of a registered training organization and also explore the option in the long run, to become an assessment centre.

² B-Wise includes aspect of the ILO WISE (Work Improvement in Small Enterprises) and SCORE projects (Sustaining Competitive and Responsible Enterprises) to address occupational safety and health, worker participation and productivity improvement aspects in small and medium-sized enterprises.

³ These include: tailoring and dress making, motorcycle servicing, refrigeration and air conditioning, electrical house wiring, electronics, beauty care, block-batik and screen print, embroidery and jori chumki, mobile phone servicing, wood furniture making, aluminum fabrication.

This competency based apprenticeship initiative started in 2012 with 500 MCs from informal but growing businesses imparting apprenticeship training to two apprentices in each enterprise over a period of six months. The training was delivered for five days in the workplace and one day in the nearby technical institute or learning centre, where instructors from technical education centres/ accredited training institutions reviewed the apprentices' learning in the workplace during that week and provided theoretical training and training in English, social and life skills. In 2012, over 1,000 apprentices (58 per cent female) were trained and certified, and since then, another 1,000 apprentices have been enrolled and are expected to finish their training before the end of 2013.



Motivation for introducing skills testing

The introduction of skills testing arose from a mix of government and market-driven initiatives. As a part of the national TVET reform agenda, work on assessment has intensified as part of efforts to consolidate existing training and certification initiatives in the public and private sector under one umbrella, and to increase access to training and certification of the majority of Bangladesh's workers who informally acquired skills in the workplace and during informal apprenticeships. There have also been requests from employers in the ready-made garments (RMGs) and construction sectors to intensify certification of workers and promote and pilot test RPL to be able to upgrade the overall skills levels and productivity within the industry. The RMG sector's interest in skills testing is a result of the massive skills shortages and high attrition rates within the industry and has further led to plans for a centre of excellence for training and certification to be established that will address these needs. Interest in certification has also arisen as a result of increasing skilled migration and the need to recognize the skills of migrant workers (mostly construction) before they go abroad. In the case of micro entrepreneurs, BRAC had found that increasingly, MCs wished to be assessed and certified, as this provided them with an identity of a skilled entrepreneur and gave a branding opportunity that distinguished them from other enterprises.



Initiation and organization of skills testing

As mentioned, the testing of skills informally acquired on the job or during an apprenticeship, has been initiated as a part of a broader objective to increase accessibility of disadvantaged groups to nationally recognized certification within NTVQF. Skills testing and assessment and certification via RPL are at an early stage in Bangladesh but are currently being field-tested. It is envisaged that all the MCs and apprentices under the BEP-STAR project will be assessed and certified in the year to come, with the delay primarily a result of the slow processes within BTEB to register assessors and assessment centres. Regardless, the BEP-STAR project on informal apprenticeships introduced the following monitoring and skills testing and assessment procedures:

Training of MCs: 500 MCs have been trained in CBT and workplace improvement and occupational safety and health during a 3-day programme. They learned how to follow a code of practice covering occupational safety and health standards and working conditions (the number of working hours, pay rates, minimum age etc.), how to use the Competency Skills Log Book (CSLB) and familiarize themselves with CBT. The project has developed CSLBs for 11 priority trades with inputs from industry and trade specialists. CSLBs help standardize the training between workplaces and training institutes and support small enterprises to follow a structured apprenticeship approach, while also providing a mechanism to record relevant evidence of learning.

Apprenticeship implementation: B-WISE and CBTA (Competency-based training and assessment) trained BRAC Programme Organizers pay weekly visits to monitor compliance in the workplace and provide mentoring support to the MC to strengthen the apprenticeship process and documentation. Compliance monitoring includes observations, attendance register, use of the CSLB, adherence to the code of practice, workplace improvements and social compliance, (ensuring non-exploitation of apprentices, working hours etc.)

Assessment and certification: Assessments include progress assessments and challenge tests conducted by the MC for each competency unit covered during workplace training. The final assessment is

organized in the workplace and conducted by BRAC's technical instructors with UNICEF technical consultants under the oversight of staff from the Bureau of Non-Formal Education (BNFE). UNICEF technical consultants developed assessment tools for the relevant trades together with the ILO. The assessment includes 80 per cent practical demonstration, and 20 per cent oral and written multiple-choice questions. Assessment criteria are based on the individual CSLB units. As an interim measure, till BTEB's testing and assessment capacities are fully built, the assessment certificate is currently provided by BNFE, while the Ministry of Employment and Training (BMET) registers all the apprentices under the apprenticeship scheme and provides them a certificate that they have completed the apprenticeship. In this way what was an informal apprenticeship becomes a formal programme.

To ensure the overall quality of the assessment process during the pilot project, UNICEF organized a sample assessment for 50 learners in a dedicated assessment space with the help of an international TVET consultant. The sample assessment results were congruent with the overall assessment results of the initiative. At the end of the training 1,000 adolescents/young people were assessed and received a certificate from BNFE.

After training support: At the end of the apprenticeship, Programme Organizers supported job placement and after training support. The programme had a 95 per cent placement rate, and significant wage improvements could be measured. To date, all the apprentices have been retained on the job. One per cent of the apprentices started their own business.



Stakeholder collaboration

During the last two years, a structured dual informal apprenticeship system has been gradually introduced and is being implemented for disadvantaged youth and women and, in the case of the ready-made garments industry, also for people with disabilities. The TVET Reform Project collaborated with multiple partners, dependent on their target groups. Key stakeholders of the BEP-STAR project and the disability inclusion project are BTEB, BMET, BNEF, the Directorate of Technical Education, the industry and large training NGOs like BRAC, the Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralyzed (CRP). UNICEF and ILO provide the funding and technical support.



Lessons learned

The BEP-STAR is a scalable and replicable model, which promotes the conversion of informal apprenticeships into structured and formal apprenticeships in Bangladesh. At the same time it reduces hazardous working conditions in micro enterprises. MCs perceived the project as a significant support to their businesses and to get access to trained and motivated staff. Many MCs were sceptical initially about the duration of the apprenticeship and the fact that learning can be accelerated through a structured and well-documented apprenticeship process. They realized that they could reduce the usual training period of three years to six months to achieve similar learning outcomes. MCs also appreciated the additional training in documentation of their business practices, like basic book keeping and accounts and noticed considerable progress in managing their business.

Most MCs showed interest in certifying their apprentices but till date they do not see an advantage of being certified themselves. The perception is that testing is time consuming, costly and not easily accessible, since there are only few assessment centres and qualified assessors available, which is currently being addressed. Another hurdle is the fear that MCs will not pass the assessments due to their low literacy/numeracy skills. However, BRAC's project staff and some MCs feel that if certification is easily accessible and promoted, RPL can contribute to branding and the overall image building of micro-enterprises. Testing might also have positive effects on the relationship between master and apprentice and lead to increased respect for the master. Despite the initial low take-up, BRAC is continuing to explore possible incentives for MCs to be certified and is in the process of developing a training package for business up gradation, training methods and loan facilities, which is linked to certification.

Current bottlenecks in the assessment and accreditation process within BTEB need to be overcome to achieve the large-scale outreach into the informal economy. BTEB needs to expand its assessment and testing capacities by training staff to accredit local assessment centres, which are easily accessible. Further, mock tests for assessors and instructors need to be introduced and MCs and apprentices need to be prepared for such tests. Since apprenticeships are currently under BMET, and assessments and certification were initially overseen by BNFE and undertaken by representatives of BRAC instructors and UNICEF technical experts, it needs to be explored how over a period of time, the apprentices and MCs will be assessed and certified by an independent assessment centre (third party), which is accredited by BTEB.



Further developments

One of the pilot project's goals is replication and eventual expansion by other public and private TVET institutes, non-government organizations and industry bodies. The systemic changes in the TVET system will enhance apprenticeships and have already led to stronger training institution-industry linkages and a sound foundation for more and better training for all. The pilots demonstrate that underprivileged persons can also become skilled and competent workers who fulfill industry demand.

Next steps include engaging with more MCs and offering training to more young people in different parts of the country. Other training organizations will also be encouraged to become involved. Similarly, trade unions could explore reaching out to their members and encourage their assessment and certification.

The BEP-STAR project is currently expanding into five additional urban districts of Bangladesh and also plans to move into semi-urban areas. Collaboration between the government and large NGOs are ongoing to target working children, school dropouts and young informal sector workers. The garment training initiative for people with disabilities, funded by ILO and implemented through CRP is expanding and certification of their acquired skills is being pilot tested by BTEB. It is envisaged that another 8,000 graduates from non-formal vocational training programmes will be assessed in the next year with UNICEF funding after the RPL pilot for sewing machine operators and motorcycle servicing mechanics is completed. Eventually, it is planned that this informal skills development process will be included in revisions to the 'Apprenticeship Rules' of the Bangladesh Labour Law 2006.⁴ Current efforts to expand the assessment and certification of informal training and apprenticeships will ensure that RPL is embedded in the national testing and certification system under NTVQF. As a result, linkages between formal and non-formal organizations can be established, and apprentices can be assessed according to NTVQF skill standards.

⁴ The Government's Apprenticeship Authority – Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET) under the Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE) has already endorsed the process.

Case 9: LabourNet – India



Background and overview of skills assessment practices

LabourNet in Bangalore, India, is an initiative of MAYA (Movement for Alternatives and Youth Awareness), a non-governmental organization. LabourNet is not a member-based organization but operates as a social enterprise that creates services and sustainable benefits for workers in the informal sector, comparable to a small industry organization. It offers a platform to access services, provides financial inclusion, and social protection and welfare services. It seeks to build capacities of workers, and markets their services to customers.

The first step taken by LabourNet was to provide the workers with the most basic needs such as an identity card, a bank account and insurance cover for a small fee. It then developed its own training curricula and content modules through in-house and contracted teams of industry experts, subject matter experts, instructional design experts, school teachers and both on-site and off-site trainers. Its focus was primarily on training programmes and industry linkages in the construction sector. Through its training programmes 11 of the 14 courses on offer relate to the construction industry (the others being tailoring, electrician and beauty related courses). Of the 11 trades addressed in the construction industry, LabourNet chose to develop assessment tools for four trades namely: masonry, carpentry, painting and plumbing.



Motivation for introducing skills testing

India's large informal sector includes millions of people with unrecognized skills for whom skills assessments leading to formal certification could deliver enhanced employment outcomes and be a stepping stone for further education and training. This is considered to have the greatest potential amongst informal workers in India where most workers have been excluded from education and training to date.

The programme undertaken by LabourNet, was for informal workers in the construction sector, and highlighted both what can be achieved on the ground and some of the challenges faced in implementing it. Indeed some of the specific challenges that India faces regarding implementing skills assessments to recognize prior learning are:

- The lack of a unified qualifications system or coherent regulatory environment for assessment and certification;
- Low proportion of potential beneficiaries who can be accessed through formal workplaces i.e.: the large informal economy;
- Low demand for vocational education;
- Linguistic diversity;
- Class and caste distinctions; and
- Cost and resource constraints.



Initiation and organization of skills testing

LabourNet relied on a team of industry experts, vocational training experts, instructional design experts, content writers, and assessment experts to ensure assessments measured the competencies deemed relevant to a specific trade. It conducted assessments through outsourcing assessment delivery to a professional survey agency. Under this model, labour coordinators worked to raise awareness of the programme, and helped recruit participants. Assessments were then conducted on-site through questionnaires delivered by experienced survey professionals, with completed tests then evaluated centrally by industry experts. This model has allowed it to strike a balance between assessment expertise and industry expertise without exceeding resource constraints.

Completed assessment tests were then sent to the survey company's office where they were photocopied and the original sent to LabourNet's offices for evaluation. A process which took about four days after which a report card was printed and couriered (via speed post) to workers. The results were communicated to labour coordinators who then advised workers accordingly and/or invited those with low scores for further training as and when such courses were available. Report cards were delivered to workers two to three weeks after they had taken the assessment.



Key features of the model

- An iterative process to develop assessments which involved a core team working with industry experts, subject matter experts, instructional design experts and content writers who were contracted by LabourNet as and when necessary; these experts were located in Bangalore and other cities.
- The promotion of skills assessments was combined with promoting worker registration for the LabourNet programme as a whole. Assessments were delivered with the support of labour coordinators who assemble workers for assessment.
- Assessment was conducted on-site.
- Delivery of tests was outsourced to a professional survey team.
- Evaluation of the tests was conducted centrally at LabourNet's offices.
- Report cards were prepared and mailed/couriered to labour coordinators for distribution to the workers.
- Assessments and any follow up training are currently offered free of charge to workers.

It is important to note three key differences between LabourNet's RPL activity and more typical RPL programmes.

First, this activity was started because LabourNet identified a need for it. There was no expressed demand from workers and little indication of support from the industry for such a skills assessment programme. It should be noted, however, that lack of demand is not the same thing as lack of need, and that RPL programmes elsewhere have also often needed to raise awareness among key stakeholders in order to develop demand for RPL.

Secondly, LabourNet's RPL offer is currently limited to skills assessment. It does not necessarily lead to training, information advice and guidance, skills improvement and wage enhancement. Training and employment happen as and when LabourNet's corporate clients demand. Post-assessment linkages are not currently in place.

Thirdly, LabourNet has invested its own money and taken a loan on commercial terms to set up and implement the RPL activity. The cost for assessing workers is currently borne entirely by LabourNet. Similarly, follow-up training for skills enhancement is generally available free to workers.



Lessons learned

The process of recruiting workers for skills assessment involved raising awareness of the service in terms of its content, its benefits and its limitations. Local labour coordinators were found to be of particular importance to the success of LabourNet's activities. The number of workers who registered and the number who participated in assessments were highly dependent on the local labour coordinators' existing relationships with workers. Where labour coordinators were well known and perceived to be honest, reliable and dependable, workers were far more likely to register and participate.

The LabourNet skills assessment programme makes use of a range of different knowledge and skill sets provided by a team of industry and subject matter experts as well as instructional design and assessment design experts. The key criteria for selection of such 'experts' is extensive experience in their given field and prior involvement in content/ assessment design (preferably in vocational training).

Some proof of the relevance and validity of its assessment tests was provided by the fact that 1800 of the workers assessed by it also qualified for the modular employable skills test conducted by the Construction Industry Development Council - an independent assessment body representing the industry and set up under the Skill Development Initiative Scheme (SDI) of the Ministry of Labour and Employment.

Whilst the SDI scheme has been very successful in delivering short course training to workers in the informal sector, opportunities for RPL and skills testing have not been taken up, due largely to the fact that it is poorly understood and not well promoted.

The efforts of LabourNet to promote assessment for RPL indicate that latent demand exists and that the standard measured by LabourNet met an existing benchmark in the form of the SDI modules.

The broader goal of RPL through skills assessments features in the National Skills Development Policy (2009) and in various rationales surrounding the development of the National Skills Qualification Framework in India (NSQF). However, at the time of the LabourNet trial, the NSQF and associated National Occupational Standards and Qualification Packs for the construction sector had yet to be developed, leading LabourNet to develop and undertake their own assessments. Why LabourNet did not use the SDI modules to inform the assessment tools it developed is not clear although the highly fragmented nature of the Indian TVET system may have been a factor.

Despite this, ongoing work on RPL by the National Institute of Open Schooling has led to development of a set of National RPL Guidelines which are likely to be piloted more formally in the construction sector in 2014. Coupled with National Occupational Standards, Qualification Packs and nationally endorsed assessment tools becoming available through industry led Sector Skills Councils, it is expected that the as yet untapped potential for RPL in India will be realized. To that end, the efforts of LabourNet to engage with workers in the informal economy will provide valuable insights for ongoing efforts.



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