



## Policy Brief

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### How to reform apprenticeship in Benin? Integrating modern and traditional systems

Traditional apprenticeship has been an important source of employment for most school dropouts and youth with no prior education in Benin. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the government introduced reforms that prohibited traditional practices, such as a popular graduation ceremony, and formalised the apprenticeship system as part of Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET). The recommendations put forward in this policy brief support further evolution of Benin’s strategy to allow the graduation ceremony to remain an option for celebrating the training completion, to the discretion of each graduate.

Picture: A master craftswoman presents a certificate to her apprentice in hairdressing.

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#### KEY MESSAGES

Actions to support integration of modern and traditional training:

- Keep the graduation ceremony optional, to the discretion of each graduate.
  - Adapt inclusive apprenticeship regulations or directives to specify the rights and responsibilities of apprentices and master craftspeople.
  - Allocate sufficient funding to support the implementation of apprenticeship programmes, especially dual training.
  - Revise the participation of master craftsmen and craftswomen in adapting apprenticeship regulations.
  - Assign each class of craft occupations a role in monitoring how apprenticeship regulations and directives are applied.
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Graduates and their relatives celebrate graduation, showing the community's support for graduating apprentices.

apprentices receive the official professional certificate *Certificat de Qualification Professionnelle* (CQP – Certificate of Professional Qualification). Apprentices who do not participate in this programme have the option of taking a national exam – after completing a three-year apprenticeship scheme with a master craftsman in a workshop – to receive the *Certificat de Qualification aux Métiers* (CQM – Certificate of Occupational Qualification).

### Reforms, rejected: a tradition misunderstood

The government of Benin is aware of how traditional apprenticeship benefits school dropouts and young people with no prior education. Traditional apprenticeship consists of occupational skills transfer from a master craftsman to apprentices in a workshop or workplace. It makes a significant contribution to the provision of occupational skills for youth with disadvantaged backgrounds. An estimated 800,000 youths were enrolled in Benin apprenticeships in 2014.

A graduation ceremony – typically organised to celebrate completion of the training – is one of the few formal features of this type of traditional apprenticeship, which has no written curriculum, learning objectives or learning support: the master trains apprentices based on their skill gaps. During the graduation ceremony, apprentices pay their master a dowry, in-kind and in-cash, to receive an informal diploma. Those who are unable to finance this ceremony are expected to work for their master for an agreed-upon period, which varies depending on the case. Apprentices who do not receive the informal diploma cannot go on to establish their own workshop.

This financial challenge for apprentices who wish to graduate was the basis on which the government banned traditional graduation ceremonies. It attempted to pass regulation (craft code No. 116/1991) that would cap the dowry amount to XOF 20,000 (approximately USD\$36). But master craftsmen and craftswomen rejected this regulation.

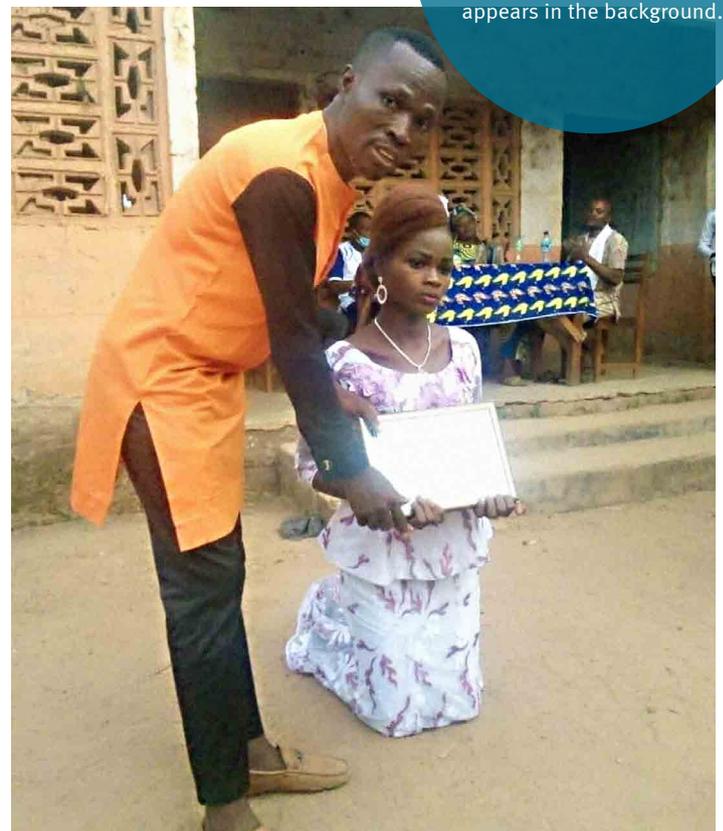
At the root of the problem is a misunderstanding of what the practice of a graduation ceremony means to those who are completing the training, as well as for master craftspeople.

In 2005, alongside this attempt to reform traditional apprenticeship, the government began to improve skills learning with a competence based-approach called Developing A Curriculum (DACUM). Two apprenticeship programmes were created with the support of donor agencies such as Swisscontact, Swiss Development Cooperation and the Danish Development Agency. The first is a national programme that oversees and certifies dual apprenticeship, through which

However, through extensive research to analyse the implementation of this dual training system, we found that graduation ceremonies are still organised in private.

Policymakers working to improve Benin's TVET system should consider adapting rather than banning the ceremony, so that it's done differently to maintain the benefits for graduates.

A master craftsman presents a certificate to an apprentice in sewing occupation. The committee in charge of the celebration event appears in the background.



“We recommend adapting rather than banning the ceremony, so that it’s done in a way that maintains benefits for graduates.”

### **Actions to support integration of modern and traditional training**

The following policy recommendations target two categories of Benin’s TVET stakeholders.

#### **For the government and public institutions**

- 1. Keep the graduation ceremony optional, to the discretion of each graduate.**

Leaving the graduation ceremony event to the discretion of graduates will allow it to fulfil its social, cultural and symbolic functions for apprentices and their masters.

- 2. Adapt inclusive apprenticeship regulations or directives – in addition to those of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) craft code – to specify the rights and responsibilities of apprentices and master craftspeople.**

There is no specific apprenticeship act in Benin, to specify the duties and responsibilities between master and apprentice in the workshop throughout the duration of the training. Such an act should be developed through an inclusive initiative.

- 3. Allocate sufficient funding to support the implementation of apprenticeship programmes, especially dual training.**

Dual training is widely regarded as a modernised form of apprenticeship in Benin. As the government considers TVET a priority in education, we recommend that it allocates enough resources for its implementation.

#### **For professional associations**

- 1. Revise the participation of master craftsmen and crafts-women in adapting apprenticeship regulations, for inclusive decision-making with the public sector.**

Following the government’s apprenticeship reforms, professional associations that represent individual firms are now involved in decision-making about training. We recommend that the decision-making process be revised to allow individual firms or master craftspeople to contribute to the process directly. For example, conversations can be organised via social media to discuss with individual firms about specific issues.

- 2. Assign to each class of craft occupations a role in monitoring how apprenticeship regulations and directives are applied.**

Benin’s national standards specify eight classes of craft occupations. As apprenticeship regulations get reformed, establishing a monitoring system can support the implementation of new rules over the long-term.

### **Evidence from studies of Benin’s apprenticeship system**

These recommendations are supported by a series of studies on Benin’s TVET system, especially dual training. We mapped programmes in the TVET system, classifying them into four categories according to the formality of their accreditation and the training location. We also undertook qualitative research to study both CQP and CQM programmes as innovations introduced in the crafts sector, and to analyse their social implications.

Our empirical evidence has been collected in Cotonou and Abomey-Calavi, cities in southern Benin, and in Parakou, a city in northern Benin. These are important urban centres for young people who transition into employment. Cotonou and Abomey-Calavi host many public and private organisations, institutions and others who help implement dual apprenticeship. Parakou is one of the regions where the apprenticeship system receives development support from the Swiss Department of Cooperation. The respondents included in these

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studies represent diverse stakeholders involved in the reforms, with emphasis on apprentices as beneficiaries. Their perceptions, especially about the graduation ceremony, was of great significance in understanding the implications of the reforms.

We visited workshops and vocational training centres, which are considered “social arenas”, to assess how apprenticeship programmes are offered. We collected empirical evidence during official events such as conferences, roundtables and workshops organized by TVET public institutions. We also interviewed training providers, apprentices, and officials from public and private institutions as well as donor organisations.

Our findings help explain why graduation ceremonies persist despite a series of reforms.

Apprentices live either with their masters or with a family member throughout the duration of a traditional apprenticeship. In both cases, our research found that most apprentices still depend on their masters for their daily allowance, transportation and pocket money; they are like family to the apprentices.

Our findings also illustrate that the workshops rely on apprenticeship fees and the graduation ceremony dowry to stay viable and productive in the crafts sectors. This is a key reason why master craftspeople remain attached to the graduation celebration.

According to our results, this event is an opportunity for new graduates to earn their first clients. It is also a social event, seen as a ritual of integrating into the profession. Our respondents emphasise the “symbolic end” that this event represents for the graduates’ successful career achievement. Graduates from CQP and CQM programmes often organise the graduation ceremony – in collaboration with their masters and parents – at a church, mosque or in private spaces.

It is worth noting that even though master craftspeople still favour the traditional graduation ceremony, they also have a positive perception of the modern dual training system. Its formal accreditation provides a more valuable certificate than the one received by most master craftspeople in a traditional apprenticeship. Holding a CQP certificate enables graduates to take public or private exams for job opportunities in the formal market. But because this means that master craftspeople train their potential competitors for the labour market, they still lay claim on the system that validates work experience, which provides a certificate considered to be higher than the CQP.

### The way forward

Introducing reforms in the crafts sector is difficult, as it involves change in social and cultural patterns. Government reforms have so far failed to meet the expectations of beneficiaries: the apprentices that those reforms are meant to serve. Our research suggests that the move to ban traditional graduation ceremonies represents a misunderstanding of a set of social and cultural patterns associated with successful apprenticeship. The event plays a multidimensional role in career integration and socialisation. Therefore, we recommend adapting rather than banning the ceremony, so that it's done in a way that maintains benefits for graduates. Traditional graduation ceremonies can be better managed through inclusive decision-making or apprenticeship regulations.

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