

Informal Workers and Skills and Training for Sustainable Development

Evidence from the Asia-Pacific, Sub-Saharan Africa, Central and Eastern Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean

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Chapter 1. Introduction

The Informal Economy and Informal Workers

The informal economy, the informal workers that comprise the labour force for the informal economy, the relationships between these informal sectors and workers and more formal sectors and workers, are complex and difficult to develop shared agreement and understandings in relation to. As are their connections to broader concerns in relation to social, economic and political development - as captured at a global level in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Given this complexity, this review is informed by a number of the following definitions, descriptions and identifiable characteristics and indicators - even if many of these must remain as contestable.

Box 1.1 The Informal Economy: Definitions (Source. ILO 2021a)

The “informal economy” refers to all economic activities by workers that are – in law or in practice – not covered (or insufficiently covered) by formal employment arrangements. Although it is hard to generalize about the quality and nature of informal employment, the characteristics include a lack of protection for non-payment of wages, retrenchment without notice or compensation, unsatisfactory occupational health and safety conditions and an absence of social benefits such as pensions, sick pay and health insurance.

The ILO’s (2018a) *Women and men in the informal economy: A statistical picture* provides a description of various key characteristics of the informal economy and informal workers on a global and regional scale that are important for what follows in this review (See Box 1.2).

Box 1.2 Characteristics of the Informal Economy (Source. ILO 2018a: 13-21)

The Size of the Informal Economy

Two billion of the world’s employed population aged 15 and over work informally, representing 61.2 per cent of global employment.

Among the five main regions, the vast majority of employment in Africa (85.8 per cent) is informal. Asia and the Pacific (68.2 per cent) and the Arab States (68.6 per cent) have almost the same level of informality. In the Americas and Europe and Central Asia, less than half of employment is informal.

Socio-Economic Development and Informality

Emerging and developing countries represent 82 per cent of world employment...More than two thirds of the employed population in emerging and developing countries are in informal employment (69.6 per cent).

Economic Sector and Informality

Informal employment can be in the informal sector, in the formal sector or in the household sector. The 61.2 per cent of global employment that is informal is comprised of 51.9 per cent in the informal sector, 6.7 per cent in the formal sector and 2.5 per cent in households.

Employment Status and Informality

The employment status category with the highest percentage of informality is own-account workers, both globally and regionally. Globally, 86.1 per cent of own-account workers are informal.

Age of Workers and Informality

The level of informality is higher among young people and older persons. Worldwide three out of four young (77.1 per cent) and older persons (77.9 per cent) are in informal employment.

Education and Informality

Globally, when the level of education increases, the level of informality decreases. Those who have completed secondary and tertiary education are less likely to be in informal employment compared to workers who have either no education or completed primary education.

Gender and Informality

Globally, the share of women in informal employment is lower than the share of men...but...women are indeed more exposed to informal employment in more than 90 per cent of sub-Saharan African countries, 89 per cent of countries from Southern Asia and almost 75 per cent of Latin American countries.

As Joyceline Alla-Mensah and Simon McGrath (2021) observe, various agencies, including the ILO, acknowledge that these gross figures do not, however, tell the whole story of informality. Some research cautions against making 'judgements' based on these sorts of statistical overviews. Ravi Kanbur (2021: 3) suggests, in his Introduction to the *International Labour Review's* Centenary Collection on 'The Long Discourse of Informality', that any discourse on informality should avoid:

the common notion that there is something inherently "bad" or "problematic" about informality. As we shall see, this is a historical legacy from colonial times that still governs the administrative mindset. "Reducing informality" per se is not an appropriate objective. Rather, the framework calls for the design of regulation and interventions with appropriate social objectives, taking into account economic and social agents' varied responses.

The COVID-19 Pandemic and Informality

This review seeks to highlight historical and contemporary characteristics of informality in different regions, including the ways in which the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and the public health, social, and economic policy responses to the pandemic, have impacted informal workers in different regions in different ways.

A report from the ILO (2021b: 19) points to the fact 70 percent of the global working-age population (4 billion people) have little or no safety net, leaving only 30 percent 'legally covered by comprehensive social security systems...with women's coverage lagging behind men's' (ILO 2021b: 19). There are significant challenges across and within regions 'with coverage rates in Europe and Central Asia (83.9 per cent) and the Americas (64.3 per cent) above the global average, while Asia and the Pacific (44.1 per cent), the Arab States (40.0 per cent) and Africa (17.4 per cent) have far more marked coverage gaps'.

Structure of the report

Chapter 2 outlines the methodology employed in developing this review of the literature.

Chapters 3 to 7 present region based - the Asia Pacific, Sub Saharan Africa (SSA), Central and eastern Europe, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) - reviews (illustrated where appropriate by country and city examples) of such things as:

Digitalisation - including debates about the intersections and relationships between the Fourth Industrial Revolution/Industry 4.0, the formal and informal economies, skills and training opportunities and challenges for informal sector workers, the limits and possibilities of ICT based projects, skills training, access to technologies/bandwidth (see GIZ 2019: 53-55);

Financing Skills Development - including debates about equity, access, and cost for informal workers, and organisations of undertaking skills training and the relative merits of 'Demand-side funding approaches...for example, voucher programmes and study loans...[and]...Supply-side funding approaches include training-cum-production and vocational education and training funds' (GIZ 2019: 119).

Skills development enablers and barriers for informal workers - where the importance of developing the skills of informal workers as a pathway to more secure employment, must acknowledge and account for the barriers to achieving this, including: 'lower levels of foundational skills to formal educational entry requirements, costs of training and opportunity costs such as foregone income, and location - and gender specific-factors which impede access to learning opportunities especially for girls and people in rural communities' (Hoffman 2021).

Chapter 8 canvasses the possibilities of Life Long Learning for informal economy workers, and presents a model for skills and training that can contribute to progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

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Chapter 2. Methodology

This draft review draws on a variety of academic, policy, research and web based materials. Resources for the review were accessed from the following sources.

RMIT University Library

Online catalogue and electronic journal database holdings: search terms - informal economy, informal workers, skills training, sustainable development, Asia-Pacific, SIDC, Sub Saharan Africa, Middle East and North Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean.

Web based search engines

Google and Google Scholar: search terms - informal economy, informal workers, skills training, sustainable development, Asia-Pacific, SIDC, Sub Saharan Africa, Middle East and North Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean.

Organisational and institutional libraries and data repositories

The International Labour Office (ILO)

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

United Nations agencies - including UNESCO

Deutsche Gesellschaft für International Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)

The World Bank

The European Commission

Review and analysis

The review and analysis of the literature generated through these search strategies was conducted with the details outlined in the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the review for information on “skills and learning needs of informal economy workers”, including:

- Recent trends on the status of training for informal economy workers worldwide (in Asia-Pacific, sub-Saharan Africa, Central and Eastern Europe, Middle East and North Africa, and LAC regions; with some country cases);
- Impact or influence of informal economy workers on skills development systems (e.g. on its governance, digitalization, financing, etc.); and
- Analysis of the identified key policy measures to:
 - Increase productivity of informal workers and to support them to transfer from informal to formal jobs; and
 - Make the whole skills development system relevant to informal workers and to ensure lifelong learning for all individuals in view of the social protection system, social safety net, coverage of health services, changing the global value chain, etc.

Chapter 3. Asia-Pacific

Introduction

The informal sector accounts for 68.2 percent of the workforce in the Asia-Pacific region with 1.3 billion people working informally. The region has the largest informal sector in the world, accounting for 65 percent of the global informal workforce (ILO 2018a). The region covers a large geographical area with variable climates and topographies, and is politically and culturally diverse with a mix of languages and religions. The complexity and diversity of the Asia-Pacific region - captured by the ILO (2018a) - makes any generalisations difficult (See Box 3.1).

Box 3.1 A Statistical Picture of the Informal Economy in the Asian-Pacific Region (Source ILO 2018a: 35-38)

The differences in the size of the informal economy in the region varies considerably with 74.4 per cent of the informal economy in developing Asian countries compared with 21.7 per cent in developed Asian countries.

Some parts of the region such as Southern Asia (87.8 per cent in 2016) and South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific (75.2 per cent in 2016) have greater shares of the informal economy than Eastern Asia (50.7 per cent in 2016).

In rural areas, the informal economy contributes to 85.2 per cent of informal employment and is 47.4 per cent in urban areas.

The scale of the informal economy at a country level varies from 94.3 per cent in Nepal, 93.6 per cent in Lao and 93.1 per cent in Cambodia (highest levels) to below 20 per cent in Japan (lowest level).

Rates of informal employment in Eastern Asia are higher for men than women, but in Southern Asia, South-East Asia and the Pacific the rates are higher for women than men.

Young people aged 15-24 account for 86.3 per cent of the informal economy compared to 67.1 per cent of adults aged 25+.

Most of the workforce (89.7 per cent) in the region with a primary education are in informal employment compared to only 30.7 per cent of the workforce with a tertiary education.

Respect for these differences is important when discussing the challenges and opportunities for workers in the informal economy in the region.

The Pacific Island countries, for example, are characterised by a large informal economy with a formal sector that is limited by capacities for creating employment opportunities, underemployment, gender disparities in employment outcomes, and a growing share of young people disengaged from or not in education, training or employment (Khatiwada, 2017).

In Asian countries the informal economy is growing with an expanding workforce relocating to urban areas that are experiencing a boom in the service-sector (ILO 2021a). The informal workforce has grown from '50 per cent in the 2000s to 60 per cent during 2010-2016' (Palmer 2020: 3).

Tremendous population growth in urban areas in Asia has outpaced the rate of economic development producing significant social challenges (ILO 2021a). In East Asia and the

Pacific, these urban areas, particularly for low income workers, are characterised by low levels of: economic inclusion (reliant on cash incomes and vulnerable to job losses and wage reductions); social inclusion (social protections, citizen participation, and marginalisation for groups such as children, women, the elderly and rural migrants), and spatial inclusion (accessibility to housing and basic services and affordability, quality and safety of housing) (Baker and Gadgil 2017: vii-xxi).

The Informal Sector and Skills Training in the Asia-Pacific Region

As stated earlier, the informal economy accounts for nearly 70 percent of the workforce in the region, making it difficult for education and training institutions to find the capacity and capability to provide skills training for the informal sector. A World Bank (2008: 50) study raises concerns about the viability of restructuring education and training institutions to support skills training in both formal and informal sectors in terms of infrastructure, facilities, curricula, trained staff, and resources. TVET in the informal economy should be promoted, including through quality traditional apprenticeships in small, micro and household enterprises by engaging stakeholders in rural and urban areas (UNESCO 2016: 6 para 32).

Most of the informal sector workers acquire skills from the informal economy through family or community relationships, or their workplace, or informal apprenticeships, or through learning by doing (OECD and ILO 2019, Walther 2013: 20, Bonnet, Vanek and Chen 2019: 18, ILO 2008, 2018a).

An informal apprenticeship is the main source of technical and vocational skills training in South and West Asia, but informal apprenticeships represent a small portion of informal skill development and training (Palmer 2020: 8). In China, Thailand and India, workers acquire skills informally on the job with as much as 80 percent of Indian workers obtaining skills informally (Mehrotra 2014, Gengaiyah et al 2018).

Palmer (2020: 18) argues that informal apprenticeships should be upgraded to strengthen informal skills development for young people and adults in informal employment, alongside improving the capability of the formal education and training sector, and its accessibility to informal sector workers. A number of innovative projects in South Asia target traditional, informal apprentices to formally recognise and accredit out-of-school learning and upgrade skills in school based training.

In Afghanistan from 2010 to 2020 a German funded project, *Support to TVET in Afghanistan*, piloted a dual apprenticeships program as a means to upgrade informal apprenticeship training. Traditional apprentices who have completed grade nine in formal schooling undertake a 3 year course combining classroom training for three mornings per week at a local vocational school. This program offers a formally recognised pathway to further training and work (Palmer 2020: 25).

In Bangladesh the ILO, UNICEF, and the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) piloted the *TVET Reform Project* (2008–15), a six-month dual apprenticeship

training project as an approach to upgrade the standard informal apprenticeship. This consisted of two components:

- On-the-job training that includes practical training delivered by a master craftsman, and based on a structured format and training content using a competency skills log book.
- Off-the-job classroom training that includes theoretical skills related to the participant's trade areas, in addition to life skills, financial literacy and basic English. (Palmer 2020: 25)

The financing of skills training is a feature of debates about how best to move informal workers to more secure, more highly skilled employment in the informal sector. These debates are often about equity, access, the cost for informal workers and organisations of undertaking/providing skills training, and the relative merits of demand and/or supply side funding approaches (GIZ 2019: 119).

The ILO (2020a: 56) Centenary Declaration provides a roadmap for COVID-19 recovery focusing on three areas of action to assist young people struggling to transition in employment: (i) increasing investment in people's capabilities, (ii) increasing investment in the institutions of work and (iii) increasing investment in decent and sustainable work. Elements of action include investing in lifelong learning ecosystems; supporting people through their future of work transitions--involving a range of youth-targeted active labour market programmes; tackling gender equality once and for all; and protecting the health and well-being (including financial resilience) of populations through social protection floors (ILO 2020a: 57).

Citing an OECD report Palmer (2020: 36) observes that the challenges of financing Life Long Learning (LLL) for 2 billion informal economy workers are beyond the capacities of most governments in low-to- middle income countries (LMIC), and will likely require a mix of financing from governments, employers, and workers, and the support of international agencies and governments. These are significant challenges, but there are some examples from the region of projects that work with this mix.

Since 2008 the Nepalese *Employment Fund* - the country's largest youth training program, offering training opportunities to 15,000 young people annually - has conducted a competitive bidding system with various training agencies to provide skills development projects. The Fund - operated by Helvetas, a Swiss NGO, in partnership with the Government of Nepal, and financed by the United Kingdom's DFID, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and the World Bank - conducts a tendering process that calls for proposals, assesses proposals for viability and employment outcomes, and evaluates proposals against criteria such as provider capacity and experience, labour market demand for the proposed trades, and cost (Palmer 2020: 41-42).

There are also a number of TVET reforms that address policy issues concerning the informal economy in Small Island Developing Countries (SIDCs) in the Pacific. A DFAT (2019) report considers a number of key policy issues concerning TVET reform in SIDCs including: understanding the vision and scope of the government's role in TVET; developing relationships between TVET and other education sectors; developing a national skills strategy; establishing a system of oversight bodies; ensuring that reform strategies are well

resourced; and ensuring equitable access and inclusion (see Box 3.2 for a case study of Samoa).

Box 3.2 Samoa's Post-School Education and Training Strategic Plan 2016-2020 (Source DFAT 2019: 8).

Samoa developed its second Post School Education and Training (PSET) Strategic Plan 2016-2020 - aligned with the SDGs, Strategy for the Development of Samoa 2016-2020, and the Education Sector Plan 2013-2018 - to maximise PSET's contribution to achieving national development goals.

PSET had three domains (each with three goals and policy areas) developed against the World Bank identified essential characteristics of an effective national workforce development system:

- Strategic Framework domain (setting the strategic direction, prioritising a demand-led approach, and strengthening critical coordination),
- System Oversight domain (ensuring efficiency and equity in funding, assuring relevant and reliable standards for quality, diversifying the pathways for skills acquisitions), and
- Service Delivery domain (enabling diversity and excellence, fostering relevance, and enhancing evidence-based accountability for results).

Provocation: Economic Growth, the Informal Sector and the Limits and Possibilities of Digitalisation in the Asia-Pacific Region

A significant feature of the literature on the informal economy, skills and training, and the possibilities of sustainable development are debates about the intersections between the Fourth Industrial Revolution, the formal and informal economies, training opportunities and challenges for informal sector workers, the limits and possibilities of ICT based projects, and access to technologies and bandwidth (see GIZ 2019: 53-55).

A number of features of those debates are important in understanding the relationship between technological progress and the informal sector, where technological progress does not necessarily result in a reduction in the size of the informal economy (see the Indian paradox in Box 3.3). For example, many workers remain in low-productivity jobs in a number of low income economies because firms in the informal sector often have poor access to technology. Despite improvements in the business regulatory environment, little has changed to reduce the size of the informal sector (World Bank 2019: 7).

Box 3.3 India and the Paradox of Technological and Economic Growth and Continued Poverty in a Large Informal Economy (Source. Palmer 2020: 5)

Technological progress does not appear to result in a reduction in informality; "informality persists on a vast scale in emerging economies ... notwithstanding technological progress".

India's case is a good illustration.

The informal sector is slow to change and since 1999, India has seen its information technology sector boom. It has become a nuclear power; it has broken the world record for the number of satellites launched into outer space using a single rocket; and it has achieved an annual growth rate of 5.6 per cent.

Yet the size of its informal sector has remained at about 90 per cent.

Alongside this paradox there is a growing digital divide among Asian countries with Singapore, South Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Japan making notable progress compared with other Asian countries, and between Asia and non-Asian countries (Nipo et al 2014, Maji and Laha 2020, 2021).

In 2018 over half the population of the Asia and Pacific region had no mobile internet access with expectations that access will reduce to about 40 percent by 2025 (GSM, 2019). This is particularly troubling with a rising population of seniors (those over 65) who did not grow up with technology and who are not in position to receive training for new technical skills (Telenor Group 2015). Users of Smartphones are low for those over 50 with only 5% in Pakistan, 7% in India, 2% in Bangladesh, 14% in Thailand, 17% in Malaysia, and 25% in China (Telenor Group 2015). The cost of data is falling, but the price of internet-enabled devices has not reduced significantly and remains a barrier to mobile uptake in LMICs (an entry-level internet-enabled device costs more than 20 percent of an average monthly income) (ITU and UNESCO 2019: 9).

Given these existing and looming challenges, much of the intergovernmental policy literature continues to invest heavily in the promise of digitalisation in addressing, disruptively, the skills training challenges for workers in the informal economy (see Box 3.4).

Box 3.4 GIZ Toolkit: Three Areas of Digital Transformation (Source. GIZ 2019: 53-55)

First, informal enterprises use apps to gather information on the availability and prices of goods, and use mobile phones and smart phones to communicate with customers, suppliers and other market actors. E-learning and mobile learning enable informal workers to access general and vocational education. But poor digital literacy, lack of access to technology and connectivity, and the purchase price of smartphones mean that many informal workers and micro entrepreneurs cannot reap these benefits of digitalisation.

Second, digital technology is crucial to the operation of the platform economy (or 'gig economy'), providing many opportunities to informal workers. But while the platform economy opens up access to labour markets from which informal workers were previously excluded, it can result in more informal employment worldwide, thereby transferring insurance and occupational obligations to freelance workers.

Third, informal workers and informal firms have usually faced difficulty in accessing finance through formal banking systems. Digital innovations such as mobile payment apps are fostering the financial inclusion of actors in the informal economy, as it offers significant potential for marginalised sections of the population, particularly women and the rural population to make and receive payments for the goods and services they produce.

Research suggests that the range of limitations to introducing ICT in the informal economy in places such as Ahmedabad (India), Durban (South Africa) and Lima (Peru) include: informal workers not owning smartphones or computers; many are not literate; and many live in remote areas with little internet access (Chen 2016: 421).

City level policies and practices also have a significant impact on informal workers. For example, a hostile policy and regulatory environment serves to inhibit the livelihood strategies of informal workers, including their choice and use of technologies, particularly when items are seized by police (Chen 2016: 421).

In this context we ask, as Palmer (2020: 5) does, and as the Indian paradox suggests: 'Will digital technologies actually change the informal economy? With such low use of basic technologies among the 2 billion in the informal economy, the answer seems to be: not yet'. Indeed, 'the hope that new technologies will soon change the face of the informal economy appears to be a little premature'.

Chapter 4. Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA)

Introduction

In Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), particularly in urban contexts, the informal economy is 'the main source of employment and the backbone of economic activity' (Guyen and Karlen 2020; ILO 2020b). Indeed, 'Eight out of ten workers in Africa are in informal employment, the highest share among all regions' (Kiaga and Leung, 2020: 3). As Guyen and Karlen (2020) observe, in ways that caution against seeing informality as 'inherently bad or problematic' (Kanbur 2021):

The vibrancy of the informal sector is difficult to miss in African cities: street vendors are key in ensuring food security. Those who work in transport keep the city and the economy moving. And those operating in services are critical to the overall incomes and functioning of African cities...and is an important contributor to poverty alleviation.

High levels of population growth and growing youth population over the next decade will mean that the 'pivotal role of the urban informal sector is expected to continue in the foreseeable future' (Guyen and Karlen 2020). By some estimates the 'working age population in the region will increase by 224.0 million by 2030 and 730.4 million by 2050' (Guyen and Karlen 2020). The 'youth population in Africa is projected to increase by 105 million people by 2030, 94 million of whom will live in the sub-Saharan subcontinent' (Kiaga and Leung, 2020: 3). Guyen and Karlen (2020) observe that with this population and economic growth 'the (urban) formal wage sector is not creating sufficient jobs to absorb all new entrants and those migrating from rural to urban areas'.

In SSA, as Kiaga and Leung (2020: 11) observe, there are significant differences between regions and countries in terms of the percentage of workers who are 'informal'. In Southern Africa (40.2 per cent) the share of informal employment is less than half that in Central Africa (91.0 per cent), Eastern Africa (91.6 per cent) and Western Africa (92.4 per cent).

The share of informal employment reaches its highest rate in Burkina Faso (94.6 per cent) and Benin (94.5 per cent), while South Africa (34 per cent) and Cabo Verde (46.5 per cent) have the lowest rates.

In both rural (88.3 per cent) and urban areas (76.3 per cent) informality is the dominant feature of labour markets. Further, almost all of the agricultural sector in Africa is informal (97.9 per cent) (Kiaga and Leung 2020: 11).

Box 4.1 Postcolonial Development in Sub Saharan Africa.

Any attempts to understand the contemporary complexities of economic, social, cultural and political development in SSA - including the significance of the informal economy - must be situated, as Kiaga and Leung (2020: 7) suggest, in a framework that accounts for the ways in which the 'socio-economic political contexts: pre-colonial, colonial, postcolonial and independent Africa shape the conceptualization of formality/informality and its relation to employment'. In addition, it is important to not fall into the trap of a primary focus on comparisons between African states - with their differing historical and contemporary challenges and opportunities - and/or to assume that there is a single, unitary 'African' story of postcolonial development (Mkandawire 2001).

A detailed examination of these *postcolonial development challenges* is beyond the scope of this review, but there is an extensive literature on postcolonial theories of development that could inform future work here (see, Kapoor 2008).

The Informal Sector and Skills Training in SSA

In an extensive review of the literature on the informal economy and informal employment in pan Africa (including countries in the MENA region) Galdino et al (2018: 232) observe that: 'informal activities are viewed as a genuine way to make a living and establishing a business, especially in countries lacking governmental and institutional support', and that excessive 'bureaucracy and corruption and inadequate legislation are all factors...driving people and businesses to informality'. Galdino et al (2018: 235-240) identify a number of themes that speak to some of the challenges and opportunities shaping relationships between informal work and skills and training initiatives in SSA:

- *Institutional Environment*: Examine how institutional aspects such as public policies affect the development and growth (or decrease) of the informal economy.
- *Social Networks*: Networks of personal relationships that, through mechanisms such as trust, affect how firms and individuals engage in business activities.
- *Transition and the Informal-Formal Continuum*: Highlights the relationship between informal and formal economies and how they are part of a continuum.
- *Bottom of the Pyramid (BoP)*: Most of the economic activity in the BoP happens in the informal economy, which is often the only option for individuals escaping poverty.
- *Gender Issues*: Gender discrimination and inequalities are important issues...The informal economy may bring women opportunities of personal and professional development.

The literature reports on diverse efforts in SSA to develop initiatives that seek to 'formalise' the ways in which skills are developed and recognised in the informal sector, including recognising the testimonies of employers or master craftspeople (Alla-Mensah and McGrath (2021).

In Benin a collaboration between the government, the Swiss Cooperation, Danida, Swisscontact, AFD, and the ILO has aspirations to 'institutionalise' the 'informal/traditional technical and vocational training sector' to 'recognize skills gained in apprenticeships, which

remains one of the most common and effective mechanisms for vocational training'. This partnership has resulted in the development of a system with two levels of qualifications:

1. a Professional Qualification Certificate (Certificat de Qualification Professionnelle (CQP)) for young people who have at least completed primary school. The CQP is a 3 year "dual-type" apprenticeship combining work experience with classroom training;
2. an Occupational Qualification Certificate (Certificat de Qualification aux Métiers (CQM)) for young people who have not finished primary school, have followed a traditional apprenticeship with a master craftsman, and have had skills assessed (Palmer 2020: 20)

In Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Togo dual apprenticeship models - based in centres/schools and traditional workplaces in which master craftspeople also have skills training - are being developed that link informal apprenticeships with formal training, and incorporate elements of theory, reflection and modern technology. In this project financing is 'provided by national funds paid by large enterprises, or by international donors' (Palmer 2020: 20).

In Côte d'Ivoire, an initiative titled the Youth Employment and Skills Development Project (Projet Emploi Jeune et Développement des Compétences), seeks to recognise 'informal apprenticeships via classroom training, formal certification, and a training wage for Apprentices' (Palmer 2020: 21).

However, there are significant challenges - financial, governance - that shape the success of these sorts of schemes. An evaluation of Ghana's National Apprenticeship Programme, for example, found that:

1. The difference in completion rates between those who received the subsidised training and those who did not suggest that apprenticeship fees present a barrier for many young people.
2. Trainer skills are a 'constraint to the effectiveness of apprenticeships'. (Palmer 2020: 21-23)

Martin Magidi and Innocent Mahiya's (2021) recent ethnographic study of informal workers/entrepreneurs and government, industry and NGO stakeholders in Zimbabwe provides an interesting account of the shifting and complex relationships between informal and formal sectors and workers - relationships that are largely characterised by a valuing and recognition of the formal sector/workers/training at the expense of informal sectors/workers/training.¹ Their data - which is supported by studies elsewhere (Palmer 2020: 8-11) - provides evidence of the sorts of skills developed by informal workers in the informal economy, including vocational skills, soft skills, and entrepreneurial skills (Magidi and Mahiya 2021: 509-510). Their work also provides evidence of the variety of ways in which skills are developed in the informal sector (see Box 4.2).

¹ In another paper that draws on the data from that ethnography Magidi (2021: 1) suggests that the informal economy and informal workers can be 'harnessed to advance the sustainable urbanisation agenda'. This study highlights the ways in which activities in the informal economy are 'playing a big role in; natural environment stewardship, skills development, promotion of social cohesion, indigenous knowledge systems and Ubuntu as well as contributing towards economic development'.

Box 4.2 How skills are acquired in informal sector training in Zimbabwe (Source. Magidi and Mahiya 2021: 516-518)

Informal on-the-job-training

Involves one or more trainees working under a mentor who has expertise in the trade. Trainees acquire skills through learning by doing the actual task as the mentor directs and show them the way.

Training workshops

The growth of the informal sector has seen formation of various associations that represent the actors in the sector - for example, the Harare Chamber of SMEs, Norton SMEs Association, Norton Residents and Development Association - which aim to improve the welfare of the sector and one way of doing that is facilitating skills training among members.

Self-training and learning through hobbies

Many in the informal sector are self-trained, and have developed skills through a combination of strategies like self-reading/studying and the trial and error method. Self-training in this context is a form of experimental learning.

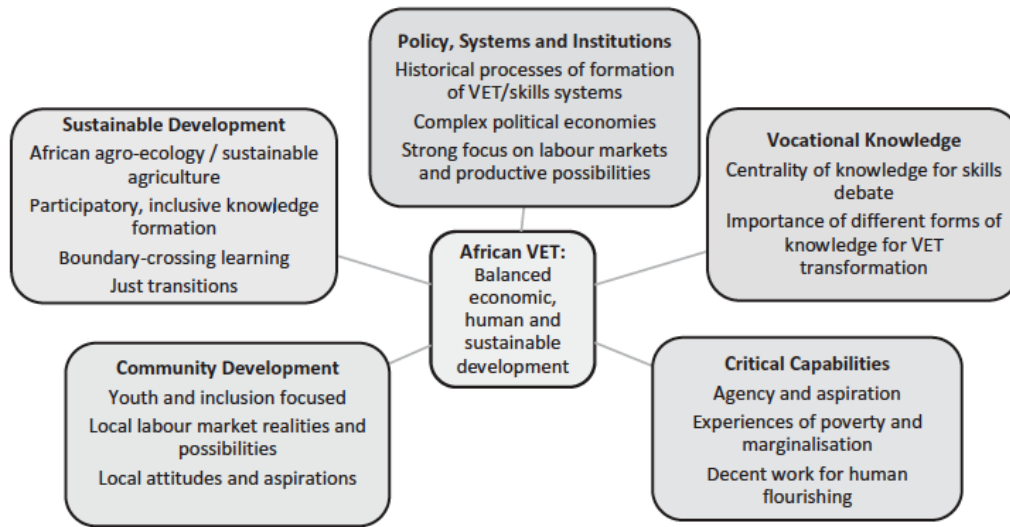
Provocation: A New Skills and VET Agenda for SSA?

Simon McGrath and colleagues (McGrath et al 2020) – drawing on an extensive research track record in relation to SSA, TVET, development, the MDGs and SDGs – present a review of the literature on TVET in Africa, and a series of provocations that emerge from that review. At a fundamental level they highlight a concern in much of the research literature that in a context where ‘formal labour market employment and real wages have been stagnant (as in much of Africa over much of the post-independence period), it is perverse to see the provision of skills as the underlying problem’ (McGrath et al 2020: 469).

In SSA, the institutional (government, development agencies, NGOs) dominance of narrow ‘human capital’ approaches to skills, individual motivations, and a broader development agenda emerges from orthodoxies that seek to ‘explain individual rationales and economic dynamics in the most advanced economies without considering the extent to which these same forces operate in different cultures, education systems and economies’. These models, they suggest, are ‘poorly suited’ for the ‘challenges of increasing productivity and economic growth in African urban informal or rural subsistence settings’ and of sustainable development (McGrath et al 2021: 471).

They present a thematic analysis of mainly African based research that can ‘support the improvement of just livelihoods in Africa’, and which points to ‘ways in which VET can be theorised in relationship with economic, human and sustainable development, thus extending and expanding VET research in Africa’ (McGrath et al (2021: 472. See Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1 VET for African Development – Emergent Approaches (Source: McGrath et al 2020: 480)



This approach/model offers much for shaping thinking about the relationships between the informal economy and workers, skills and training and ways of progressing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We will return to detail of this model, including a reference to specific cases, in Chapter 8.

Chapter 5. Central and Eastern Europe (CEE)

Introduction

The Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) region is defined here in accordance with the focus of the ILO's Decent Work Technical Support Team and Country Office for Central and Eastern Europe, which serves 18 countries in Central and Eastern Europe from the Baltic States to Albania, and from the Czech Republic to Ukraine.

The full list of countries includes Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Kosovo, Latvia, Lithuania, the Republic of North Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia and Ukraine. (ILO 2021c)

The informal economy in CEE is characterised by, among other things, seasonal migration, part-time employment, a high level of education of employees, trade union structures that are not adapted and do not have experience in how to work with the informal economy, and refugees (Glovakas 2005: 4). A number of other characteristics of the region's informal economy are noteworthy:

- Many employees in the formal sector are paid part of their salary informally, meaning no tax is payable on it;
- Informal employment is particularly high in the agricultural sector: in the Republic of Moldova, for example, agriculture accounts for more than 60 per cent of all informal employment;
- Similar numbers of women and men are working informally in most countries in the region;
- Women generally have lower-status jobs than men, despite having similar educational backgrounds. (GIZ 2019: 44)

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly affected the labour market in CEE. Women and lower-paid workers have been disproportionately affected, and this has exacerbated gender and income inequalities. Additionally, a number of CEE countries have observed decreases in informal employment, and slight increases in the number of workers who were formally employed (ILO 2021d: ix).

The Informal Sector and Skills Training in CEE

Across CEE the post-Soviet era transition to a market economy has seen a growth in the number of private companies, but these have not been supported by regulatory frameworks and official monitoring of economic activity. Consequently, corruption, crime, political instability, a lack of trust in the justice system, and rates of taxation and social security contributions have driven 'the rise and persistence of a high degree of informality in employment terms' (GIZ 2019: 44).

The needs and circumstances of informal workers in CEE indicate the requirement for a range of governmental and social partners to be involved in the design, delivery and

evaluation of relevant skills development systems. As the GIZ Toolkit (2019: 19) indicates, skills development should involve a range of vocational education and training approaches:

- **Formal vocational education and training provided by the state education system**, leading to a recognised qualification. Learning processes in formal vocational education and training are goal-oriented and systematic;
- **Non-formal vocational education and training outside the state initial education and training system**. This is delivered by education and training providers, companies, social partnership organisations and public-benefit bodies. Learning processes in non-formal vocational education and training are also goal-oriented and systematic;
- **Informal learning** i.e. non-structured, non-goal oriented learning processes that take place at work or in other areas of everyday life;
- **Traditional apprenticeships** in which an apprentice acquires knowledge and skills in the workplace under the supervision of a master craftsman, master craftswoman or an experienced employee;
- **Recognition of informally acquired skills tested and certified** by an accredited institution based on defined criteria.

Examples of these sorts of approaches are not widely reported in literature on CEE. However, In Kosovo a project that aims to institutionalise informal education provision in training centres and vocational schools uses a mobile delivery mechanism - the 'Eco Trailer'- to deliver environmental education (see Box 5.1).

Box 5.1 Support for Competence Centres in Vocational Education and Training Reforms in Kosovo (Source. GIZ 2019: 139)

To deliver a module of vocational education and training in Kosovo, a Training Center for Green Technologies was established in Mitrovica. Its aim was to mainstream training courses in green technologies in Kosovo. The Training Center uses a mobile training facility known as the 'eco-trailer' to provide training on solar power, hydropower, wind power and mechanical energy and storage.

It can be used anywhere, and its exhibits, experiments and models are stored and assembled as required. This allows students to engage with training materials at various stations around the trailer. It is suitable for use at (vocational) schools, in teacher training and for PR work at a variety of events.

Training has been conducted with local teachers and professionals to enable them to accompany the activities of the trailer and to present the training materials accordingly.

Every time the trailer is used it helps raise awareness of the topic of energy conservation. The trailer offers examples of how renewable energy can be used and promotes options for fields in which private businesses could engage in the future.

Active labour market programs are being adjusted in CEE countries to provide for skills development to assist in dealing with the impact of COVID 19. In Montenegro, for example, informal workers have access to professional training through a universal and open internship program. Using labour market programs in this manner helps to prevent the emergence of 'a lockdown generation' by articulating responses to the needs of different groups of workers in the informal economy, including: 'atypical non-standard)/informal/seasonal workers; youth in transition from education to the labour market;

long-term unemployed who do not receive unemployment benefits; persons with disabilities; families with one parent who is unemployed' (ILO 2021d: 50).

Provocation: Pathways to Formal Employment: Balancing Structural Reforms, Investment in Skills Development Systems and Digital Infrastructure

In shaping the informal economy reform agenda for CEE, the EU's 'cooperation programmes recommend not repressive and punitive measures but active measures to promote formalisation of companies and jobs through support measures, incentives and education' (GIZ 2019: 44).

The examples cited here suggest a need for significant public investments in education and training in vocational schools and local city-based training centres as well as vocational education in workplaces and training institutions.

In parallel, it is necessary to develop more integrated and inclusive social protection arrangements that protect workers in the informal economy during crises such as COVID-19 so they can maintain incomes and enjoy the protection of their rights to decent work and lifelong learning (ILO 2021d: xi).

Where informal workers have access to digital devices they can access informal education and training via such platforms. However, because of issues related to digital literacy and access to internet connectivity for many informal workers, CEE states will need to give priority to enhancing digital infrastructure and assisting low income informal economy workers (through business grants, for example) to purchase affordable smartphones so they can utilise digital platforms for their skills development and economic activities.

In addition, ICT based education approaches will need to be balanced with continuing support for vocational education in schools, TVET institutions, and work-based skills development arrangements including: formal and informal apprenticeships; RPL processes; and active labour market programs. Estonia, for example, has implemented policies to cover parts of the training costs for people already in employment. The government, in cooperation with Estonian IT companies, has launched an adult education project titled Choose IT. As a recent OECD Survey of Estonia notes:

Cooperation and dialogue between the government and employers' and labour unions is likely part of the reason why this scheme has already had some success. The government and manufacturing industry has also recently launched a digital skills training project called DigiABC for unskilled workers, targeting the workers through their workplaces. These programmes may serve as inspiration on how to involve businesses more in adult education and training in cooperation with employers and labour unions. (OECD 2019)

Given the buffer role that the informal economy can play in keeping informal workers in paid employment, the focus need not necessarily be on enabling informal workers to transition to the formal economy. Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is one option

for enhancing the skills of informal workers with changing industry needs. UNESCO has recommended that the development of TVET be done in a way which involves cooperation between the private sector, public sector and other stakeholders. (See Box 5.2)

Box 5.2: UNESCO Recommendations on Social dialogue, private sector and other stakeholders' involvement in TVET (UNESCO 2016: 4)

Member States should, as appropriate, foster social partners' participation in TVET according to agreed labour market, education, training and other regulations.

Increased private sector participation in TVET should be guided by key principles including alignment with public policies, support for social dialogue, responsibility, accountability and efficiency. When involving the private sector, TVET policies should recognize its diversity, including large, medium, small, micro and household enterprises engaged in all sectors of the economy.

To enhance policy development and governance Member States should also, as appropriate, engage with other stakeholders, including non-governmental organizations, and representatives of learners, TVET providers, staff, parents, youth, traditional leaders, indigenous people and others. (UNESCO 2016: 4)

Focusing on the full range of social partners - governments, donor agencies, trade unions and employer groups, among others - highlights ways in which training providers outside the formal TVET system can contribute towards co-designing and implementing approaches that support people in the informal economy to upgrade their skills and improve their working conditions. For example, soft forms of skills validation, such as skills passports, can be used to 'make acquired skills visible to potential employers without requiring official recognition' (European Union 2018: 118). When designing these sorts of skills development and recognition initiatives, it will be important to recognise that government-funded formal training systems are not the only or key partners in the TVET field. As one recent review has noted, 'because they are close to the intended beneficiaries, grassroots organisations, non-state organisations and the projects they manage are the most able to identify the needs – and especially the new needs – that formal training could satisfy' (European Union 2018: 119). These organisations therefore have the potential to develop, research and evaluate community-based pathways for skills development and accreditation, which could complement the vocational training pathways provided to informal economy workers through formal TVET systems.

Chapter 6. Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

Introduction

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Region includes the Gulf States and the Arab states of North Africa, including Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

Informal employment in MENA is widespread, and accounts for 68% of total employment - up to 78% in Yemen and 81% in Morocco. Most formal workers are in the public sector, whereas formal private employment amounts to only one fifth of total employment in the region (OECD, 2020a: 1). Firms are constrained in their capacity to grow and create jobs by, among other things, difficulties in dealing with complex administrative procedures, access to quality infrastructure, credit and technologies, and high labour taxes (OECD 2021b: 1).

The main drivers of the informal economy in the MENA region include limited private sector activity, armed conflict, human capital deficits, low labour productivity and wages, and less inclusive growth (Ohnsorge and Yu 2021: 225-226). Another perspective is that 'perhaps the widening share of informal labour in Arab countries in non-agricultural sectors is mainly the result of policies of 'Openness', neo-liberal globalization, youth boom, rural migration in great numbers as a result of neglecting rural areas in general and the agriculture sector in particular, in addition to large waves of incoming migration' (Safa 2017: 1).

The COVID-19 crisis has amplified the vulnerability of informal sector workers in MENA, because social distancing policies, lock-down and confinement measures have meant that working remotely is not an option. Effectively, informal workers have been faced with choosing between complying with health distancing measures and sustaining their livelihoods. The picture is likely to worsen in the immediate term, especially given the lack of social protection afforded to workers in the informal economy. In the MENA region, 89% of informal workers are at risk of job and income loss and have no social protection (OECD 2021a: 1-2).

The Informal Sector and Skills Training in MENA

World Bank researchers have noted that 'although informality can provide helpful employment opportunities where the formal sector suffers from severe distortions and governance is poor, the structural, policy, and institutional causes of informality pose challenges for efforts to diversify economies and reduce reliance on commodity production and the public sector' (Ohnsorge and Yu 2021: 225-226).

For skills development systems to be effective in addressing the training needs of informal workers in the MENA region, training systems need to be more closely aligned with the labour markets in which they operate. Ncube, Anyanwu and Hausken (2014: 449), for example, have emphasised that up-skilling, labour market training and educational reforms 'that conform to industry needs will help address the skills mismatches existing in many

MENA countries'. Achieving that conformity between skills development and industry requirements will involve a multipronged approach, including MENA governments engaging in dialogue with large employers to link people with jobs through strategic skills planning, skills development, and skills matching (Chang and Shehadeh 2020: 7). This is not the only way that the private sector can be engaged:

Addressing the skills mismatch in the short run will require improved training programmes and closer links between tertiary and vocational educational institutions on the one hand, and the private sector on the other. Training programmes should include on-the-job initiatives targeting those already working, as well as graduates with a general education who lack specific work skills. In addition, governments need to develop innovative public-private partnerships and the opportunities for collaboration among large employers, governments and other relevant stakeholders such as higher and vocational educational institutions to transform institutional structures and strengthen the region's economy. (Ncube, Anyanwu and Hausken 2014: 449)

A recent UNESCO report has suggested that overcoming skills and labour market mismatches requires governance processes which involve workers and their employers in designing the provision of training. The lack of market involvement in skills development processes in MENA is 'evidenced by a lack of firm regulations on work-based learning, relevant internship or apprenticeship opportunities aligned to training programmes – making them either obsolete or requiring much improvement before they can serve the demands of the labour market' (Chang and Shehadeh 2020: 7).

Similarly, resolving youth unemployment in MENA 'requires TVET institutions to continuously align the level of relevance of programmes to market needs, provide up-to-date job market information and expand the provision of quality career guidance and counselling services – all of which can be supported by the private sector' (Chang and Shehadeh 2020: 7).

In its TVET Strategy, UNESCO has emphasised that 'governance models for TVET should involve relevant local stakeholders and business associations in particular between TVET institutions and the world of work, hence, Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) in order to enhance the relevance of TVET systems and equip youth and adults with skills needed in the labour market and hence improve levels of employment, decent work, entrepreneurship, and lifelong learning' (Chang and Shehadeh 2020: 7).

There are relatively few examples of the use of internet-enabled technologies being used in MENA to deliver vocational learning in the informal economy along the lines described in other regions.

Palmer (2020) cites some emerging examples of how new technologies are providing early adopters in some regions, including MENA, with new learning opportunities. For example, in informal agriculture, apps are helping workers to enhance their numeracy skills and apply better farming practices.

In Tunisia an app available via the Tunisian Public Employment Service is being used to

teach soft skills and job search skills (Palmer 2020: 35).

In MENA the TVET system is currently financed through a variety of means:

- Student fees: secondary TVET education is generally free of charge;
- Budget allocations: even though TVET funding is still comparatively low, it has increased in the recent years;
- Donors and international partners, including the EU, World Bank and governments such as Canada, France, Germany and the United States (Chang and Shehadeh 2020: 21).

Chang and Shehadeh (2020: 22) call for more investment and funding to enhance institutionalised partnerships between TVET institutions and the world of work. While these represent an attractive option for co-financing skills development initiatives with informal workers, they are not without their challenges in MENA countries. As the majority of TVET providers are in the region's large public sector, with its associated large expenditures on wages, a key challenge concerns the inadequacy of resources for meeting development expenses and investments in reform initiatives, such as teaching and learning materials, equipment and infrastructure enhancement.

Without sustained medium term public funding in the region's predominantly public sector TVET providers, available budgetary resources are likely to be allocated to recurrent expenses (wages) with little funding left for developing skills programs and quality mainstream education. A vital component of future reform initiatives, therefore, will be promoting partnerships between the public and private sector to address the issue of investment and funding for skills development, especially in the informal sector.

Another challenge for promoting investment in workplace-based learning (WBL) concerns the structure of the economy in several MENA countries. In Egypt, for example, there is a large number of either very small scale or informal employers, which 'makes it very difficult to convince these employers to invest in TVET or to benefit from WBL' (Chang and Shehadeh 2020: 36) Similarly, in Jordan 98 per cent of enterprises are small scale, and the informal sector accounts for 26 per cent of the economy. These factors place structural constraints on the possibility of using public private partnerships to implement TVET programs for informal workers. (Chang and Shehadeh 2020: 52)

Despite these constraints, PPPs at regional and local levels across MENA are proving helpful in reducing the mismatch of skills with businesses and meeting the demand for candidates with appropriate qualifications. (Chang and Shehadeh 2020: 17) For example, the GIZ Toolkit (2019) describes a partnership project in Palestine that adapted the education and training system to better meet the needs of the labour market and young people (see Box 6.1).

Box 6.1: 'Potentials for Palestine' training program (Source. GIZ 2019: 145-146)

15 NGOs in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem provided non-formal adult training, in particular for disadvantaged target groups as a means of combating poverty and conducting labour market analyses. The courses were developed and implemented with the target groups, and partnerships for employment were created. It was mainly funded by the European Union for three years (2012- 2014).

The program empowered young people to generate income in the informal or formal labour market. Teaching staff used participatory learning methods to integrate widely differing groups of people into learning experiences and to help school dropouts rediscover the joy of learning. Around 1,800 people took part, and a study carried out 6 months after completion showed about 40 percent of participants found a job or started their own business with their newly acquired knowledge and skills.

The NGOs received support to help course participants gain a foothold in the labour market. This included internships and visits to potential workplaces, forwarding to job exchanges, microfinance institutions or other actors who provided advice and financial support for business start-ups. Ten of the NGOs set up local educational partnerships to help disadvantaged groups access continuing education

Another example from the MENA region is a project successfully piloted in Jordan by the ILO and the International Youth Foundation to upgrade informal apprenticeships (see Box 6.2).

Box 6.2 Upgrading informal apprenticeships in Jordan (Source. Palmer 2020: 26)

The pilot training in Jordan aimed at: developing the apprenticeship model and process; linking apprentices with employers for on-the-job training; improving occupational health and safety conditions at workplaces; improving work organization and workplace management; and organizing testing for occupational licenses for apprentices. It involved six months of basic training followed by three to five months of on-the-job training.

After completing the basic training, each participant was assigned to a garage as an apprentice. During on-the-job training, apprentices received transportation allowance, insurance against work-related injuries, and a work uniform.

75 per cent of participants completed both training phases, with 92 per cent of apprentices obtaining a job and 90 per cent obtaining more than the minimum wage. Compared to traditional informal apprenticeships, this pilot shortened the transition period from apprentice to employed skilled worker with less than one year of training as opposed to up to five years in a typical apprenticeship.

Provocation: A Continuum Approach to Governing and Financing Skills Development for Informal Economy Workers in MENA

Policy measures and options to address the challenges for informal economy workers are

being developed in light of Recommendation 204, arising from and endorsed by the ILO Conference of 2015, which was focused on Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy. While supporting this transition will help informal workers to realise their rights to decent work, some researchers on the informal economy in MENA have argued that in MENA the solution does not necessarily lie in formalising the informal sector (Safa 2017: 7).

A continuum approach could provide a productive way to advance skills development in MENA. At the public sector end of the continuum, fiscal reform is needed. This includes 'reducing excessive corporate tax burdens and enhancing revenue collection through harmonized electronic filing systems (for example, Morocco) or the introduction of a value-added tax (for example, Egypt)' (Ohnsorge and Yu 2021: 226). In addition, 'policies to promote entrepreneurial activities, such as easing of business licensing requirements, can also facilitate entry of informal workers into more productive jobs in the formal sector' (Ohnsorge and Yu 2021: 227). Furthermore, greater policy attention will have to be placed specifically on developing TVET programs aimed at assisting informal workers and businesses. However, in the MENA region 'developing policies and taking measures as required by TVET sector institutions informal sectors of the economy...currently lies outside the field of interest of mainstream government activity in the TVET sector.' (Chang and Shehadeh 2020: 72)

Midway along the continuum, governments can work with the private sector to improve the access of MENA firms to finance. This 'can promote formal private sector activity by increasing the transparency of firms to investors and facilitating investment'. Furthermore, 'adoption of financial technologies (fintech) 'the adoption of financial technologies (fintech), such as innovations that automate financial transactions, can also facilitate access to financial services by informal unbanked individuals and SMEs' (Ohnsorge and Yu 2021: 227-228).

Public-private partnerships can be used to improve investment in human capital. This would particularly benefit young people, women and communities in rural areas. Policies that expand job training can help young people in the region to gain entry into formal and more productive jobs. Similarly, training programs can help women to increase their mobility. And policies and programs that facilitate extension of training into rural areas will make skills development available to low income workers (Ohnsorge and Yu 2021:228).

Finally, at the participatory and place-based end of the continuum, there is scope for promoting community-based training and skills development initiatives similar to those described for Palestine and Jordan. These initiatives can enable people in particular places to align their skills to the needs of the local market and to develop green technologies and perspectives as being integral to their ways of working.

Chapter 7. Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)

Introduction

A recent report (Romero 2021) identified that the informal sector in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) was 'estimated to represent around half of total employment', including a range in which

- Bolivia had the highest share of employment informality, amounting to almost 85 percent of the total employed population in 2019;
- Uruguay was one of the countries with the lowest share of informal employment in the region, with around one third of the employed population being informally employed.

Various OECD studies suggest that the COVID-19 crisis has amplified the scale, scope and character of the informal economy, indicating that informal employment is the most pervasive 'structural weakness' in the LAC economies (Basto-Aguirre et al 2020; OECD 2020a, OECD 2020b). As Basto-Aguirre et al (2020) suggest:

Both cause and consequence of many of the regions' development traps...informality has been eroding tax collection, undermining productivity growth, and leaving a large share of the workforce vulnerable to shocks for lack of social protection, while feeding on low productivity levels, unsophisticated economic structures, rigid regulations, low skill levels and inefficient institutions.

Picking up on these themes, and referencing various data from multiple OECD studies, Piritta Sorsa (2020) and her OECD economist colleagues, provide country based examples of the impacts of informality on particular populations in the LAC region:

- Old age poverty in Colombia is high as low-skilled workers spend much of their working lives in informal employment, without pension contributions;
- In Brazil and Argentina, informal workers retire later than others for the same reason, until they eventually reach the age to benefit from a non-contributory pension;
- In Mexico, poverty and informality are highly correlated among regions.

Sorsa et al's (2020) particular focus is on identifying those factors implicated in the emergence and maintenance of these conditions, and analysing the impacts of policy responses in various LAC countries over time. Their analysis suggests that informality 'tends to keep companies small with often low productivity, as growth would entail high costs of formalisation. Indeed, informal sector productivity in the average LAC country is only between 25% and 75% of total labour productivity, and productivity decreases as informality rises'.

The Informal Sector and Skills Training in LAC

The literature identifies a number of examples in LAC that seek to develop initiatives that identify and recognise the ways in which skills are developed and recognised in the informal sector - and to develop approaches in which formal TVET providers are better able to address the needs of the informal economy (Palmer 2020).

In Honduras, the Centros de Educación para el Trabajo works with low-income rural and urban communities to undertake local needs assessments, and to foster community participation on developing projects that can be linked to the national vocational training institution. In these community based projects the development of core skills are 'combined with gender and literacy training as well as technical and entrepreneurship training' (Palmer 2020: 17).

In LAC there is also evidence of the emergence of a number of non-formal training-related *active labour market programmes* (ALMPs) that consist of programs that operate outside the formal education system, and are of short duration (Palmer 2020).

In Mexico the National Institute for Adult Education's *Modelo Educación para la Vida y el Trabajo* (Education Model for Life and Work) - as a 'second chance basic and foundation skills training (literacy and numeracy)' project - offers young people and adults the chance to qualify for formal qualifications that can provide pathways to further education and lifelong learning. Integrating basic literacy skills with business and environmental training, the program allows young people and adults to 'obtain officially recognized and accredited 6th and 9th grade qualifications, giving out-of-school individuals a second chance to access education and lifelong learning' (Palmer 2020: 27-28).

Reviewing multiple studies Palmer (2020: 29) observes that one of the 'key aspects of the youth (jóvenes) programmes in Latin America is the combination of classroom instruction with on-the-job training'. One study of '345 training programmes confirmed the benefits of combining classroom training with direct workplace experience', and 'impact evaluations of these programmes suggests that it is a promising practice worth emulating'.

In the Dominican Republic, for example, one project - *Life skills and employability training for disadvantaged youth* - provided young people with '75 hours of basic or life skills training (mainly work habits and self-esteem), 150 hours of technical or vocational training, followed by a three-month internship in a private firm'. Evaluations suggested the project had a 'positive impact on transition to formal employment for men (increasing about 17 per cent) and also resulted in a 7 per cent increase in monthly earnings among those employed. These gains are expected to last over time' (Palmer 2020: 30).

Provocation: Pandemic Recovery and a New Skills and VET Agenda for LAC?

Nathalie Basto-Aguirre, Sebastián Nieto-Parra and Juan Vázquez-Zamora (2020), from the

OECD Development Centre, have suggested that COVID-19 pandemic, and the crises and disruptions that it has produced in LAC ‘challenges us to rethink social pacts in Latin America, with all actors involved, including civil society, private sector and academics’.

Referencing work undertaken in the developing economies in the aftermath of the Global Financial Crisis which questioned ‘*Is informal normal?*’ Basto-Aguirre et al (2020) observe that the pandemic, by ‘revealing the formidable social and economic costs of widespread informality, may be the moment where policymakers, workers and firms start to turn the tide’. At the same time, they caution that the ‘agenda is ambitious and requires a multidimensional perspective where fiscal, labour, and productive transformation aspects must be key ingredients of the rethinking of the social pact in the region’.

These significant challenges have been canvassed by Roxana Maurizio (2021a and b) in a number of recent reports for the ILO, where she has identified particular elements of the economic, labour market/employment, social and policy consequences and challenges emerging as the COVID-19 pandemic continues its deadly disruption to ‘normal’ life in LAC.

In response to these challenges Maurizio (2021b: 13) argues that the disruptions and crises triggered, even amplified, by the pandemic make the ILO *Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work* goals to achieve a sustainable future of work with decent work opportunities for all, ‘even more relevant for achieving a human-centred recovery, especially in a region so ravaged by the pandemic’. Maurizio identifies a number of ‘priority areas of action’ for a ‘sustainable and human-centred recovery’. In Box 7.1 there is a focus on policies for economic and employment growth.

Box 7.1 Increase investment in decent and sustainable work (Source. Maurizio 2021b: 13-15)

A key challenge facing Latin America and the Caribbean is to regain a stable path to growth that creates the jobs needed to meet the demand of the increased labour supply. This challenge, which is structural in the region, has become even more relevant today since it not only involves recovering the significant losses caused by the pandemic but also reversing the economic slowdown that began in the five-year period prior to the crisis.

Macroeconomic and productive policies that create the conditions and incentives to sustainably increase exports are central in this context. However, in an environment characterized by sluggish global trade, the increase in exports will likely be insufficient to generate virtuous economic development that improves the living conditions of the population. This requires policies that both promote greater diversification and the incorporation of new exported goods and services, as well as those that boost sectors that supply domestic demand and create jobs, especially for lower-skilled workers.

- To this end, strategies that promote sustained increases in productivity and digital transition play a crucial role.
- At the same time, the countries of the region should promote the creation of formal employment and the formalization of informal employment through a comprehensive set of instruments.

- These efforts must be accompanied by measures to support micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSME), which have been particularly affected by the crisis.
- Finally, the just transition agenda has become increasingly relevant and, with it, the measures to guarantee an environmentally sustainable recovery.

In Box 7.2 Maurizio focuses on education, training and skills development priorities and challenges.

Box 7.2 Increase investment in people's skills (Source. Maurizio 2021b: 15)

Investment in education and training

The countries of the region should increase investment in education and vocational training for current and future jobs. The interruption of face-to-face learning...[revealed]...an evident need to build capacities for digital transformation in the region.

Lifelong Learning

The new demands for knowledge and skills that will emerge both during the recovery and in the medium and long-term mean that they must be anticipated and accompanied by efficient, effective systems of lifelong learning that help people to better prepare for transitions in the labour market throughout their working life.

Technological replacement of routine tasks/jobs

The impetus that this crisis gave to the use of technology may be intensifying the existing downward trend in occupations with a high content of routine tasks, as well as promoting the growth of cognitive and non-automated occupations and tasks. These processes are accompanied by new knowledge demands, making access to employment even more difficult for certain groups...[indicating that]...new and better strategies are needed for labour policies in the region.

Active labour market programs

The countries of the region have active labour market policies with different designs, requirements and target populations, which are implemented from various government spheres, in some cases with the participation of the private sector and enterprises. However, their scope is insufficient to meet current demands. These programmes often have only a limited impact on the possibility of obtaining formal employment.

Social protection

The crisis revealed the significant social protection gaps in the region, especially those related to income. In response, countries must advance strategies that guarantee economic security based on universal social protection floors.

Chapter 8. Conclusions: Informal Working and Life Long Learning (LLL) for Sustainable Development

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic continues to produce uncertainties, crises and disruptions, particularly to education, training and employment pathways (OECD 2020 c and d). In addition, the massive inequalities and structural faultlines of the globalised capitalist economic model - including the production and circulation of vaccines as commodities available to those that can afford them (ICRC 2020) - that the pandemic amplifies, present significant challenges for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. An agenda that by many measures was under significant pressure prior to the pandemic (UNDESA 2019).

Many observers, agencies, researchers and commentators offer various proposals for meeting these challenges and this review has highlighted a number of them.

Rather than review and list these recommendations in this concluding chapter we return to a model for rethinking Life Long Learning and skills and training for informal economy workers that promises transformative progress towards the Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Life Long Learning (LLL) for Sustainable Development

Box 8.1 Life Long Learning (LLL) for All (Source ILO 2019: 30-32)

Lifelong learning encompasses formal and informal learning from early childhood and basic education through to adult learning, combining foundation skills, social and cognitive skills (such as learning to learn) and the skills needed for specific jobs, occupations or sectors.

Lifelong learning involves more than the skills needed to work; it is also about developing the capabilities needed to participate in a democratic society.

It offers a pathway to inclusion in labour markets for youth and the unemployed.

It also has transformative potential: investment in learning at an early age facilitates learning at later stages in life and is in turn linked to intergenerational social mobility, expanding the choices of future generations.

Establishing an effective lifelong learning ecosystem is a joint responsibility, requiring the active engagement and support of governments, employers and workers, as well as educational institutions. For lifelong learning to be an entitlement, governments must broaden and reconfigure institutions such as skills development policies, employment services and training systems to provide workers with the time and financial support they need to learn.

Governments must devise appropriate financing mechanisms tailored to their country and sectoral contexts. Given the continued importance of training at the workplace, employers need to contribute to its financing.

We propose establishing a system of entitlements to training through a reconfigured “employment insurance” system or “social funds” that would allow workers to take paid time off to engage in training. Workers could be entitled to a number of hours of training rights, regardless of the type of work they do. In countries where most workers work informally, we recommend establishing national or sectoral education and training funds. Managed by tripartite boards, these institutions would provide workers access to education and training, with a special focus on vocational skills.

LLL can be understood, by extension, as learning that is ‘not only lifelong, starting in childhood and extending to adulthood, but also “life-wide”, “occurring not only formally in schools and higher education, but also nonformally and informally in the home, community and workplaces”’ (Palmer 2020: 7). The SDGs commit - particularly through a number of targets identified under SDG 4, 5 and 8 - to a ‘universal entitlement’ to LLL and decent work for all in economic, social, cultural and political processes that promise the possibility of sustainable development.

The very idea, the core logic, of these commitments emerges from the fact that billions of people around the globe do not enjoy these entitlements, or the benefits that promise to flow from the enjoyment of these entitlements. And this despite the UN member country governments, intergovernmental agencies, philanthropic and aid agencies, businesses, communities and individuals making commitments to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

These unfolding crises create an urgent need for projects that are shaped by principles of *ethical innovation*. Ethical innovation is innovation that is *responsible, inclusive, disruptive and engaged*. This is the sort of innovation that we canvas in the final section.²

Skills and Training for Sustainable Development

As we suggested in Chapter 4, McGrath et al’s (2020) ‘emergent approach/model’ to skills for SSA development offers much for shaping thinking about possible ways forward in imagining the relationships between the informal economy and workers, skills and training, and ways of progressing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In a series of Boxes below we outline the elements of this model, and provide brief examples for each of these elements.

Box 8.2 Policy, Systems and Institutions (Source. McGrath et al 2020: 472-473)

Policy, systems and institutions

This literature is vital in emphasising the ways that systems evolve historically and reflect the complexities of national political-economic configurations...the approach stresses the need to look into system dynamics for the obstacles and opportunities that will shape the likely success of innovations designed to make VET more inclusive and sustainable.

Examples here include, Volker Wedekind’s (2018, 2014) work examining the challenges and opportunities for institutionalised TVET systems in post-apartheid South Africa, and for institutionalised skills training, given South Africa’s relatively small, and ‘stagnant’ formal labour market.

² See our blog for a discussion of this concept in relation to developing micro-creds for sustainable futures: <https://unevocmit.org/2021/07/06/young-people-and-micro-creds-for-sustainable-futures/>

Box 8.3 Vocational Knowledge (Source McGrath et al 2020: 473-474)

Vocational knowledge

This literature points to the need to get beyond crude technical approaches to what skills appear to be needed at the surface level, and to consider what knowledge, as well as skills, is required for transformative VET. This research highlights the affinities to both the community development approach's Freirean roots, and to the sustainable development approach's emphasis on participatory, inclusive knowledge formation and on boundary-crossing learning.

McGrath et al reference recent research by Jeanne Gamble (2018) who suggests that competency based approaches to TVET in South Africa have derived from rudimentary labour market analyses. Gamble's research suggests, in contrast, that labour process analysis reveals how different jobs with the same title are often very different and how the nature of knowledge used at work differs dramatically within the same ostensible occupational role.

Box 8.4 Critical Capabilities Approach (Source McGrath et al 2020: 474-476)

Critical capabilities approach (CCA)

The critical capabilities approach (CCA) addresses both inequality in skills development and how we move away from a narrow focus on immediate employability and production. The approach has a strong focus both on the need to give considerable attention to young people's voices in articulating their aspirations for meaningful work and lives, and on their intersectional experience of marginalisation and disempowerment.

This approach has eight key elements related to understanding people's relationships to skills development and TVET:

- 1. Poverty** - it insists on foregrounding poverty in order to better understand many young people's challenging lived experiences.
- 2. Gender** - the approach draws on feminist literatures to stress how women experience intersectional disadvantages that shape the decisions that they make about education and work throughout their lives and the outcomes they achieve.
- 3. Political Economy** – a focus on how structural reality influences individuals' experiences of VET.
- 4. Work** - insists on a broad conception of work. It argues that work is not only about income/production but should also be about self-identity and self-worth.
- 5. Learner Aspirations** - the focus of our attention to VET should be on how it supports what individuals want to pursue in order to flourish. Evidence from South Africa suggests that VET learners are not simply concerned with immediate employability but value other outcomes from their VET participation, such as respect, active citizenship and empowerment.
- 6. Aspirations** - understands aspirations as forward-looking 'life projects' in which individuals attempt to respond to their structural obstacles and their endowments of various resources in order to imagine and achieve better lives.
- 7. Life Projects and Decision Points** - the reassessment of life projects and adjustment of aspirations occurs as a repeated process. It draws attention to the series of decision points that individuals experience regarding their learning and work trajectories.
- 8. Success** - evaluation should focus primarily on the extent and ways in which institutions, and the system, support the flourishing of learners.

Box 8.5 VET for Community Development (Source McGrath et al 2020: 476-477)

VET for Community Development

Many of the same issues are also taken up by a tradition that draws on critical adult education. There are two main African hubs for this: the Youth, Education and Work (YEW) network, centred on the UNESCO Chair in Lifelong Learning, Youth and Work at Gulu University in Uganda...and a radical adult and community education tradition in South Africa...In keeping with its adult and community education origins, much of this work is grounded in participatory action research.

In Uganda much of the focus has been on governmental and aid agency emphasis on access and enrolment in education and too little on the systematic dynamics of inequality. By stressing opportunity, the orthodox approach to education and development has prioritised access and underplayed the structural factors that cause drop out. Authors such as Openjuru (2010), Jjuuko (2012) and Zeelen (2015) argue that over-academic education, high levels of drop out and massive levels of youth unemployment force young Ugandans into indecent work.

Box 8.6 Skills for Sustainable Development (Source McGrath et al 2020: 477-479)

Skills for sustainable development

In response to these challenges, more complex theoretical perspectives on the phenomenon of green skills and VET in Africa are emerging. These draw on critical realism, political ecology theory, sociology and development studies, as well as on transformative learning and curriculum theory and praxis...The sustainable development approach particularly highlights exclusions such as the absence of sustainable agricultural curricula from much of conventional, industrial VET.

One example here references the work of Heila Lotz-Sisitka and her colleagues (Lotz-Sisitka et al. 2016: iii) on developing an 'approach that was oriented towards a systemic, innovation oriented and relational approach to knowledge dissemination so as to further the objectives of knowledge co-construction and social innovation in the area of rainwater harvesting and conservation (RWH&C) for food production at household and smallholder farmer level'. Their project was based in a 'Strategy-as-Practice' framework that foregrounds 'the interrelations between people and practice in the emergence of strategy'.

As McGrath et al suggest, such 'studies point to the need for considering vocational education in a more regionally contextualised frame, where theoretical knowledge is grounded and reflexively constituted in relation to practices. This requires giving attention to the formation of new knowledge in education, and the creation of new human activities that reflect the intersections of society-nature-economy, tradition and innovation, and that are more inclusive'.

Importantly, in terms of the ways in which many of these approaches are grounded in local, place-based, critical, emancipatory, and (socio)ecological understandings of livelihood, work, skills and training:

these accounts point to the need to look more into how individuals and communities form aspirations about how productive work supports better lives and what place vocational learning can play in this. However, they also point towards the necessity of understanding how attitudes of learners, parents and employers are shaped both by economic signals and by their perceptions about the value of different forms of

learning, knowledge and qualifications. Some of these accounts raise important questions about how both VET's current status and potential to play a transformative role are dependent on issues of knowledge and learning and how these are structured by the effects of power. (McGrath et al 2020: p.481)

The challenge and opportunity here is to *imagine* how far some of these proposals might 'travel' - both within SSA, and to other regions and countries.

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