

# Labour markets and the impact of skills recognition

GERARD NYELE, NAIROBI

**T**he Noah's Ark is the biblical tale of the vessel in the Genesis flood narrative through which God spares Noah, his family, and examples of all the world's animals from a world-engulfing flood. The story in Genesis is repeated, with variations, in the Quran, where the Ark appears as Safinat Nūḥ and al-fulk. While it is a fulfilling tale in human religious faith, in the world of Skills development, It reflects how ancient the art and craft of skills perfection has existed among humanity.

As it is in many valuable assets, Inheritance systems and practices have a key role in people's ability to exit poverty, or, conversely, plunging them further into it. In the seeing and doing, individuals are able to learn crafts and trades that pass from generation to another. While this worked well for ancient communities who made sure every age group perfected the skills they need to advance in society, modern education systems require formal training and certification as prove to mastery of any trade.

Formal education and training systems are not, however, the only way in which people develop skills; and in some cases, they acquire skills outside the locality where anyone knows about their skill.

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is the process of identifying, assessing and certifying knowledge, skills and attitudes regardless of how, when or where learning occurred. The knowledge, skills and attitudes under consideration in RPL are those that are acquired/learned either non-formally or informally in the formal and informal sectors. Assessment and certification is done against learning outcomes or prescribed standards (occupational/qualification standards) for part or full qualification.

The RPL process enables persons



**DR JUMA MUKHWANA**  
Director General and CEO of the  
Kenya National Qualifications  
Authority

to acquire formal qualifications that matches their knowledge and skills and thereby, contributing to improving their employability, mobility, lifelong learning, social inclusion and self-esteem.

An employed person working in any job where qualification requirements have changed over the years or where qualification requirements differ across countries or where technology has changed requiring fresh certification and the employee has already acquired the competencies on the job and wants to remain competitive on the labour market.

An unemployed person who possess requisite skills in each trade area and realizes that formal certification is required for them to find a job.

## Status of Recognition of Prior in Kenya

In Kenya, the mandate to implement RPL is under the Kenya National Qualifications Authority (KNQA). The Authority was established in 2015 through the Kenya National Qualifications Framework (KNQF) Act No. 22 of 2014 and KNQF Regulations, 2018). The Authority was set up to coordinate and harmonize; education, training, assessment and quality assurance to all qualifications awarded in the country, with the view to improving quality and international comparability.

"We supported 62 employees get certification and graduated at the Base Titanium in Kwale county, this was in collaboration with other stakeholders. There are lessons learnt but we are on the right track as country," said Dr Juma Mukhwana, Director General, KNQA.

The Director Generals says more can be achieved if employers with uncertified skilled workers champion awareness and



National Industrial Training Authority (NITA) automobile engineering trainees at work.

extent their support to them.

"SGR trained so many employees, however, they were left uncertified on the skills they learned once the project wound up. It is important companies train and help employees get papers," He added.

## Statement by NITA on the state of implementation of RPL

Section 3A of the Industry Training Act provides for the Powers and Functions of the Authority which include; Assessing industrial training, testing occupational skills and awarding certificates including Government trade test certificates.

In furtherance of this function, the Authority has been conducting the National Trade Test since 1959. Trade Testing which is a component of RPL in many countries including South Africa, Tanzania, India and Australia aims at providing evidence that a certified worker possesses the requisite employable skills and competencies to execute tasks in his/her trade area.

Since its inception, Trade Test is recognized by employers as a reliable way of establishing the competence of workers thus allowing for appropriate placement at the workplace. It is an important tool which, as per the Kenya Labour Laws, has been used as a key component for the Collective Bargaining Agreements (CBAs).

The national launch of RPL has provided the Authority with an opportunity to solidify her place in steering RPL in the country. Consequently, RPL will open up an opportunity for NITA to expand on assessment and certification and overall further industrial training for national relevance and economic development.

Following the presidential directive to implement the policy on RPL during the 58<sup>th</sup> Madaraka day celebrations, the following has so far been achieved.

- Immediate national roll-out of RPL in 8 counties in the Month of July/August 2022 in 4 trade areas; Welding & Fabrication; Motor Vehicle Mechanics & Electricians; Tailoring & Dressmaking and Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy.



**ENG. STEPHEN OGENGA**  
Director General, NITA

- Full implementation of RPL in all counties and in all trade areas and levels as registered in the Kenya National Qualifications Framework (KNQF)
- Automation of the RPL assessment processes to enhance access

NITA has taken a lead role in steering the process for the industry sector. The Authority's strategic place in the industry has caused considerable engagements with employers and consequently a number of employers have expressed significant interest for the RPL process

This July in collaboration with Base Titanium, Kenya National Qualifications Authority, Kenya National Jua Kali Federation the Authority oversaw the very first Recognition of Prior Learning Graduation where 62 trainees were certified

## What is the potential impact of skills recognition systems on labour markets?

- Labor mobility locally, regionally and internationally
- Fair job placement and remuneration (guide to CBA)
- Enhancement of worker esteem
- Career progression
- Access to formal training

opportunities

- Access to trade/business opportunities
- Inform training needs leading to demand driven training and assessment
- Expansion of opportunities for job specific skills training and assessment at the workplace (through apprenticeship, industrial attachment, skills upgrading and internship)
- Utilization of private sector workplaces as training and assessment venues
- Utilization of private sector skilled workers as skills development experts (curriculum developers, trainers and assessors)
- Enhanced funding for skills development initiatives (Levy Fund, Grants, CSR)

## What are some of the occupations that NITA has identified;

- Welding & Fabrication;
- Motor Vehicle Mechanics & Electricians;
- Tailoring & Dressmaking and
- Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy.

## Emerging challenges towards implementation of the policy.

- Lack of sufficient national awareness on RPL, its processes and methodologies, particularly among those with low formal education.
- Inadequate number of competent RPL professionals to aide in successful RPL roll-out.
- Lack of acceptability by employers for employment and by higher educational institutions for admission to further education and training programmes.
- Ineffective participation of stakeholders, especially employers' and workers' organizations, in education and training systems.
- Institutions lacking the additional resources and incentives to promote as well as the capacity to implement RPL.
- The RPL methodology for assessing the knowledge and skills of persons is fairly complex, and the candidates

Continues on next page>>



Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is the process of identifying, assessing and certifying knowledge, skills and attitudes regardless of how, when or where learning occurred.



## Why RPL is good for both formal and informal economy

<< Continued from previous page

applying for RPL require significant support and counselling during the various processes.

- National policies concerning employment, poverty reduction, development, migration, education and training may not necessarily place the required emphasis on the implementation of RPL.

- Confusing language and differing definitions of RPL can act as a hindrance in effective discussions and act as a barrier to its effective implementation.

### Why more needs to be done to effectively achieve RPL goals

People are always learning, everywhere and throughout the course of their lives. However, learning that takes place outside the formal education and training system is often not well understood or valued. On-the-job training, informal apprenticeships, managing a household, caring for the sick and for elderly relatives are all activities that result in learning outcomes, but which often do not come with a certificate of competencies recognizing the knowledge, skills and experience acquired. Recognition of all types of learning can result in benefits in the labour market, formal education and training, financially and in terms of self-esteem.

"RPL is crucial in facilitating transitions from the informal to the formal economy as well as the growth in the career ladder" says Geoffrey Ochola, The national programme coordinator of skills and employment services at the International labour organization (ILO).

"There is less loss of money through brokerage where formal enterprises get contracts and subcontract uncertified skilled workers to do the job since all certification opens avenues for informal enterprises to transition to formal," explained Ochola.

Stakeholders want concerted efforts to fill the gaps manifesting. According



Base Titanium workers hold certificates as they pose with RPL implementation partners after graduating in Kwale county.

to the some of the partners involved in the implementation, "We are still in the process of developing tools and guides for accessing more occupations as what we have currently are tools for four occupations under pilot"

There is also lack of adequate awareness, integration of all parties and effective selection criteria, not to mention the lack of a monitoring criteria on the effectiveness of the policy for the Kenyan case

"Going forward, we need to adopt a sectorial approach to RPL assessments as every sector has its unique needs," said Ochola.

We also need a central portal for registration of applicants to help in administration and information

management to be able to account and monitor emerging needs in transforming this important sector living informally to the formal economy.

The ILO is also keen to strengthen inclusion in the policy and coming up with strategies that will enhance participation of vulnerable groups such as female, persons with disabilities and refugees. The ILO had developed Guide on making TVET and skills development inclusive for all.

### Lessons from Kenya's first recognition of prior learning conferment of certificates

Nothing defines anyone's career than the confidence of knowing they can do a job well and their ability recognised and certified. I'm a plumber and here's my certificate. I'm an electrician and here's my certificate.

### Question: What are some of the lessons learned from the pioneer class that just graduated

The programme requires a lot of awareness creation for both trainees and employers since its a process that one must create interest and understand.

Secondly, the process is tedious as it involves a lot of paper work needed to create portfolios for the trainees

The process also requires a top management approach for established organizations, if the management does not understand on the return of investment pumped in the programme including time that must be allowed for the trainees to attend class, they can easily frustrate it.

Further, we need to celebrate those who face the above challenges and give them hope if they have to complete the training.

### What are some of challenges encountered in during the training



**RICHARD MUTETI, HSC,**  
Chief Executive Officer,  
Kenya National Federation of  
Jua Kali Associations &  
Confederation of Micro and Small  
Enterprises Organization East  
Africa (CMSEO-EA)

There is a serious tools mismatch. While trainees come from different backgrounds, we observed diversity in the tools used where some have interacted with modern technology powered tools, yet testing is by old technology tools. Assessment Centres should have modern technology powered machines and tools, a scenario if effected could cut training time to one day from three.

The costs associated with RPL is also high, given the background of most of these trainees. Trainees from informal sector have a challenge since they don't pay levies charge buy NITA that can facilitate their training, making its expensive for them.

### Recognition of skills in the Jua Kali Sector in Kenya

According to the Kenya National Federation of Jua Kali Associations,

Millions of skilled Kenyans with no papers get terribly underpaid for their skills due to lack of recognized certification.

The federation CEO Mr. Richard Muteti says "The skills in this sector are not recognized by our formal system. millions of Jua Kali sector artisans have refined skills but no papers.

Muteti says the sector has been disadvantaged for long though it has many qualified and skilled personnel who lack certification.

The Jua Kali Sector artisans in Kenya are part of the informal economic sector that boasts of an estimated population of **18 million** Kenyans contributing over **34% to the GDP** and offering more than **86% of all the total new jobs in the Kenya per year.**

RPL will give millions of our talented citizens especially the youth who would not wish to pursue higher formal education to have an opportunity to pursue an equally dignified career pathway that is clear and comparable to the alternative academic and formal education

"During the 58<sup>th</sup> Madaraka Day celebrations speech by His Excellency President Uhuru Kenyatta, he directed the Ministry of Education through the Kenya National Qualifications Authority (KNQA) to develop a comprehensive policy framework for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) that would be responsive to support Jua Kali artisans and craftsmen to access economic opportunities that have denied to them due to lack of certification. We really need a progress report on this matter urgently to help the Juakali sector," said Muteti.

"Those with papers and no skills get the jobs, but those jobs are done by those with skills but no papers, that's a tragedy RPL must address."

[gnyele@standardmedia.co.ke](mailto:gnyele@standardmedia.co.ke)



RPL assessment of a fitter general candidate during the pilot phase at NITA Mombasa, May 2021.