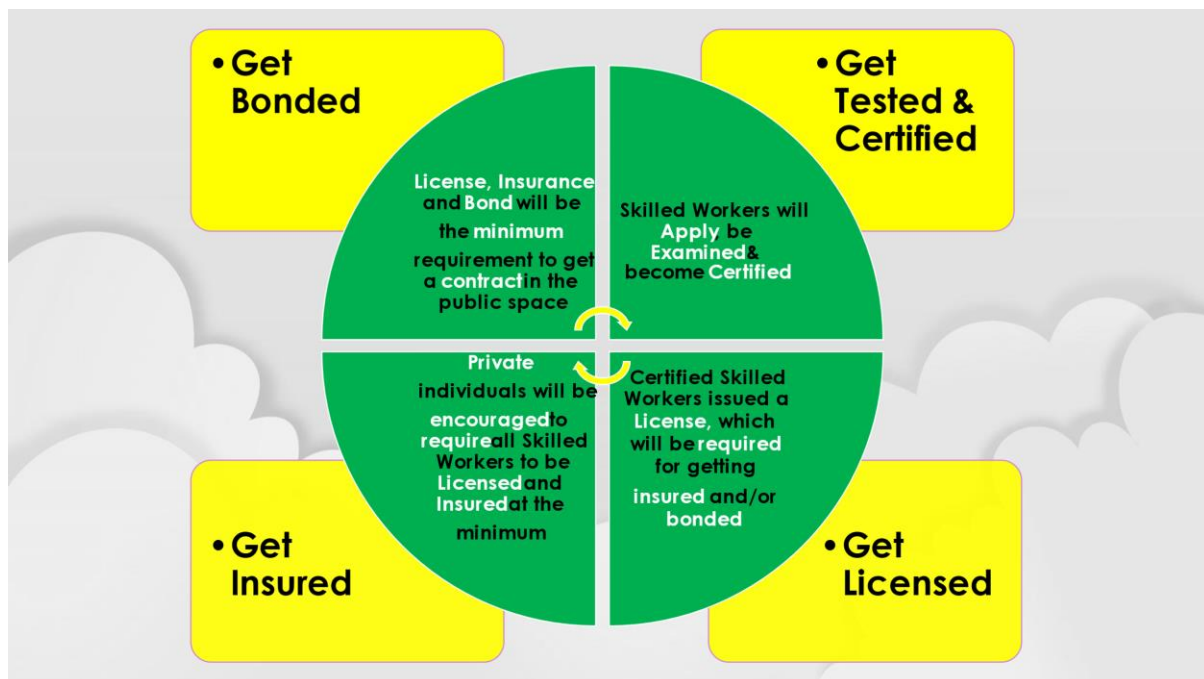


Making Nigeria a giant Construction Site - A Tradesmen Standardization Institute



The arts of Skilled workmanship or craftsmanship date back to the pre-historic days when young men who were skilled in their chosen craft (especially in relation to building construction), were hired to construct structures such as houses and the furniture inside them, as the children of master craftsmen having learnt their trade from their parents' trade so that the knowledge and skills of their craft are transferred down from the fathers to the sons, and from the mothers to daughters (Adewale *et al.*, 2014).

Sadly today, it is depressing to note that the knowledge transfer has not only not improved with the times but is actually practically no longer happening. Anyone with little or no formal training nor experience in masonry, for example, can turn him or herself into a mason by just advertising themselves as such with no certificate or license to back their skill set up. Furthermore, they can join the relevant trade association to instantly obtain the appearance of legitimacy and are then henceforth assumed to be a professional mason without further questions by the members of the public.

Currently, there are over 40,000 'jobbers' in the construction industry in the average state in Nigeria, who engage in skills such as masonry, carpentry, plumbing, painting, and iron-bending, but most of them remain loosely trained, mostly uncertified, unlicensed, and completely uninsured. The development of the local skilled workforce to easily take advantage of the wind fall in the labour market remains a big challenge that must be addressed.

Challenges in the Standardization of Skilled Workers in Nigeria

- **No Database of Skilled Workers:** Several studies revealed that a lack of a database of skilled workers is the biggest challenge to standardizing skilled workers because the skilled workers have not been identified through a system and no attempts have been made to test and issue certificates of qualification.
- **Lack of Education/Awareness among Households:** Many household members do not often know the best-skilled workers to use whenever they need one because there is no existing platform to educate household members to select the right skilled workers.
- **Lack of Policy Intervention:** Governments across the country have yet to prioritize the issue of uncertified skilled workers and the general lack of skills among today's youth that for example leads to workmanship that is poor enough to have caused the collapse of several buildings.
- **Lack of Synergism:** There is yet to be a binding force between the stakeholders like governments, professionals, private investors, craftsmen trainers, schoolteachers, skilled workers, association of artisans, and household members on how to standardize skilled workers across the various regions.

The Tradesmen Standardization Institute proposes a modern, comprehensive and wholistic approach to developing and maintaining standardization of skill amongst artisans in the various regions, while also introducing a clear and effective process by which a citizen in need can engage skill workers of any trade with trust and peace of mind.

This will be done using several types of technologies, including websites, mobile applications, and the use of the USSD telephone platform to service all strata of the society easily and quickly.

Conceptually, this will be achieved by doing the following: -

- Setting up a national/regional database for conducting tests to certify and license skilled workers.
- Issuing a certificate of apprenticeship to skill workers of any trade after the candidate has passed the relevant test.
- Enrolment of skilled workers into the institute will attract a fee of say 5,500 naira.
- Skilled workers can take the exams whenever ready at their local test centre, after which the Tradesmen Standardization Institute must be contacted for the issuance of the appropriate certificate.
- The certificates issued expire after 3 years but can be renewed by paying the appropriate enrolment fee.

Conclusions

The use of certification for the standardization of knowledge of skilled workers will have a positive impact on the regional and national economy. Testing and certificates of qualification should be made compulsory and not optional for all skilled workers in each region of the country.

The Tradesmen Standardization Institute seeks to improve the quality of service and product output among skilled workers to ensure the improvement of the skills of the general tradesmen workforce, and ferment decent economic growth.

To ensure that skilled workers get licensed, and household members who require work done across the regions receive quality service, we believe the following steps should be taken:

- I. The government must ensure policy interventions in the construction sector to enable skilled workers to get evaluated for competence and obtain certificates.
- II. All skilled workers must be licensed before getting bonded in construction works.
- III. Efforts should be made by the regional ministries of Works to enrol interested youths or construction skilled workers in certification via exams and the issuance of licenses.
- IV. The government must monitor enrolled and licensed skilled workers to ensure proper behaviour and adequate service to customers.