

COMMERCIAL MOTORCYCLING (*OKADA*) BUSINESS DISTRACTION FOR VOCATIONAL PRACTICE IN NIGERIA: THE CONSEQUENTIALITY OF INTENTIONALITY

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Abstract

Vocation, which has become a loaded concept in today's education language, has its pedigree and indispensability in the creative energies of the then traditional craftsmen. Increased attention to functional education will make the learners be self-reliant, and be able to cater for the life expectancies. However, massive boycott of original vocations by the Nigerian young men who now engage in commercial motorcycling business otherwise known as *okada* is repeatedly recognized and criticized as a negation of value. Interest in vocational training and practice is gradually going into extinction. The study looks into the proliferating rate of commercial motorcycling business vis-à-vis vocational and technical training with a view to evaluating the effect of distraction that neglect has caused the individuals and the nation's economy at large. It was argued that there are damaging effects on the society and there is urgent need for reconsideration of economic steps on the part of the government and the individuals. Research of the survey type was designed for the study. Questionnaire was used as instrument to elicit response from 240 *okada riders* who randomly form the sample size taken from the study area. Three research questions were set to guide the study and findings reveal that though there are many vocations in the land, commercial motorcycling is never one of them. Most of these motorcycle riders are young men who have some level of education but dropped out of school or with one vocation or the other for reasons that range from passion for quick money-yielding activities, to peer group influence and respite seeking. Furthermore, the findings show that societal crimes are on the increase and the commercial motorcycle riders are susceptible to suspicion. The paper concludes that the technical and vocational education initiative of the Nigerian government, if adequately handled will positively engage the hands of people and abate vocational neglects.

Keywords: Vocation; *okada*; dropout; interest; devotional attachment; empowerment.

The Prelude: a bit of retrospective and contemporary history

The concept of Vocational and Technical Education emanated through the United Nations Organisation (UNO) via its Agency – The United Nations Educational and Scientific Organisation (UNESCO). The objectives, according to UNESCO (2001) [1] is to provide security among nations of the world in order to forestall the repetition of the kind of devastating effects of the 2nd world war on the nations of the world. UNESCO therefore defines vocational and technical education as

comprehensive a term that encompasses those facts of the educational process involving in addition to general education, the study of technologies, related science, and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge associated with occupations. Vocational education is that education that pertains to the act of calling or summon by God for special service in a special position and for specific work. Technical Education and the other hand relates to knowledge or skill pertaining to the art or science applied i.e. mechanical or artistic (Encyclopaedia 2003) [2]. Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) or Technical and Vocational Education (TVE) have been used by many professionals to address the same issue. Dike (2009) [3] refers to the duo as the education which give individuals the skills to “live, learn and work as a productive citizen in a global society”. This kind of education must form an integral part of national development policies and strategies for any society who wants to build on solid foundation.

Generally, Africa before the colonial system of education had traditional education whose objective was to induct African into his society, family style, transmit, values and morals. The system of education according to Fafunwa (1974) [4] was designed to train the youth for social responsibility, job orientation, political participation and spiritual and moral values. Though the education curriculum of the pre-colonial was not structured, it included the development of vocational and technical skills through apprenticeship training system in addition to learning the moral values that will enable the young ones to live meaningfully and contribute profitably as members of the society. Trades such as weaving, carving, blacksmithing and iron works were taught and learnt in addition to traditional farming. Odemuyiwa (2007) [5] argues that the objectives of learning these trades were not to make learners employable but for them to be self-employed, self-reliant and providers of food, shelter etc. for selves and families. This was a glorious past when outdoor touts now referred to as *area boys*, and robbery cases were minimal. In the past there were countable hardened criminals and very few hands could only be seen idle. This according to Odemuyiwa was because a person who was not on the farm would be found in the workshop or in a specific place of toiling.

The arrival of the colonialist truncated these African traditional education which should have served as foundation for a more structured and formal education (Ekwere, 2004). Unfortunately, the Portuguese slave masters, European traders, Missionaries and later colonial administrators introduced formal education. This is to solve personal problems and barriers in communication between buyers and sellers, clergy and laities as such trained natives served as interpreters, bible readers, Sunday school teachers and clerical officers for mission or government. These led to the parochial syllabi which were based on 3RS – ‘*reading, riting and rithmetic*. The resultant effect was that individual creative abilities were repressed through educational policies put in place. parents regarded “art” as an occupation meant for dullards. Consequently, the various stages of creative artistic development of the individual learner was directly or indirectly hindered by the discouraging societal and governmental attitude (Ogunduyile, Kayode and Ojo, 2008) [6].

However, the missionaries later became sensitive to the defect of a system of education which deprived learners the use of their hands to fend for themselves.

Fajana (1978) [7] notes that this made the Church Missionary Society (CMS) introduce a kind of industrial education and established a brick field where students were trained the act of brick making while Catholic Mission established Agricultural school for the production of “garri” without going through the traditional processes. Regrettably graduates from these vocational and technical training could not be employed either by the missionaries nor the government. This successfully helped to kill the enthusiasm for vocational and technical education. Fafunwa in Odemuyiwa (2007) [5] reports that in spite of the non-supportive stand of the colonial government for VTE the missionaries continued and fashioned out the society’s educational policy which separated

vocational education from academic which was run until 1920's when government showed interest and set up Phelps-Stokes Commission which recommended the establishment and development of corporate training schools owned by government.

In 1932 the colonial government attempted to reinforce her policy statement on VTE by the establishment of the Yaba College as an institution of higher learning for Vocational and Technical Education and was upgraded to Yaba Technical Institute and later to Yaba College of Technology. The journey of repositioning of VTE continued gradually after the independence and today the importance given to VTE curriculum led to the establishment of more Polytechnics, Colleges of Education (Technical) and several Universities of Technologies by the Federal and State governments. On the other hand, traditional art and craft although affected by policies and implementations, yet kept surviving the hordes against it. Many thanks to the efforts of Rev. Father Kevin Carroll of Oye Ekiti Catholic Church (Nigeria), who encouraged and assisted the craftsmen after the independence (Ojo, 1990) [8]. Interest in vocational practice is dwindling to the point of extinction.

This study sets to investigate what factors are there that are responsible for the usurpation of vocational, technical and artisan services by commercial motorcycling business (popularly referred to as *okada*).

Background of the study

The intentionality and consequentiality of neglect of vocational training and practice in Nigeria goes on to reflect deep-rooted worry from the public domain. There is relatively little or absolute lack of interest in salvaging the specialism and symbolism of vocations for which young men in Nigeria were trained. Potential technical and vocational trainees have vividly developed apathy against vocational work. Those who have already acquired full training and experience in various vocational craft trades have gradually presented untrue scenarios that commercial motorcycling business (*okada*) brings quicker money. Swindells, Atkinson and Sibley (2001) [9] poignantly remark that the issue of professionalism and technical artisanship is germane to community, societal and national development. It is perhaps impossible to conceive a modern nation without relying upon the characteristics of handcraftsmanship as indispensable to society. The finesse of the right reasoning toward professional practice seems not understood. It is not absolutely understood also, what deserved sacramental and devotional attachment to be accorded vocational trade practice of the land. Young men and women have gone so far to go back while the innocent generation of Nigerians unborn is awaiting victims. Such skills as of the art of making and organizing materials and methods for a purpose accompanied man since antiquity. Vocations like basketry, gold smiting, blacksmithing, casting, carpentry, carving, pottery making and house building mentioned in Fowowe (2004) [10] were traditional industries devotionally embraced and the practitioners were highly spirited about them (Ekwere, 2004) [11].

Before the advent of the colonial masters the economy of sub-Saharan Africa was agrarian and was only supplemented with a few vocations (Akinbogun, 2004) [12]. The needs of people were met through this way. Nigerian took prominent position in almost all the various crafts practiced in the region [12]. The different tribes in Nigeria were notable for their diverse vocational services; they did not only exist as self-employed citizens they also provided vocational training to people through apprenticeship system. There were creative energies that sparked productive forces for the economy (Akintayo and Tijani, 2002, [13]. Defending and enriching, Nigerians survived though the practical effects of their vocation and yet there was no oil boom. Julier (2001) [14] reported successive governments' attempts to make vocational education more in line with the needs of society but wrong priorities and youthful impulsiveness conspire to usurp the idea.

Not too long ago, as explained in Ihendinihu and Onwuchekwa (2012) [15], Nigeria has initiated and pursued many development-driven policies. Notable among these were the Structural Adjustment programme (SAP), Vision 2020, Millennium Development Goal (MDGS), Accelerated Poverty Alleviation Programme (APAP) and National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS). Other economic measure put in place were State Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (SEEDS) and Local Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (LEEDS). All these initiatives of governments at various levels have gone down the drain. The intentionality (implementation) and the consequentiality (outcomes) of these economic revamping goals seem to have been thwarted by not just brain drain but drain of devotional interest.

Statement of the problem

The problem of this study is about those who were initially trained in vocational and technical craftsmanship but put aside their knowledge and competencies for other things that engage them. These contemporary dropouts who, instead of enrolling for a vocation decided to join the wagon of commercial motorcycle drivers are multiplying daily. The situation where skills are acquired and not practised fully or abandoned completely for unskilled pastime is worrisome. The habit of keeping late nights and the perpetuation of crimes with the fast-moving motorcycle has been reported and criticized by the society. The youthful exuberance and propensity to get quick money is an act of desperado. The act of jettisoning parentally approved vocation for peer group-influenced motorcycle business that has no dignifying future is wrong priority. High level of public crimes abounds in cities which are most times traceable to the ubiquitous *okada riders*. This is the reason laws banning *okada business* in some big cities and most times, on university campuses are enforced correctly. Government, on frequent occasions has set boundaries for *okada* operators as prohibited areas as well as time limit for business running. This study sets as its aim, to investigate what remote factors are there that are responsible for the abandonment of vocational, technical and artisan services for commercial motorcycling business with a view to assessing the intention and consequence. To do this effectively, the following research questions are set to guide the study.

1. What is the literacy level of *okada riders* in Nigeria?
2. Do *okada riders* possess specific vocational skills?
3. What factors propel commercial motorcycle riders to abandon their vocational calling for *okada business*?

Tangibility of vocational training and practice

Artisanship and technical skills are critical not to craft designers alone but to the development of a nation. Engagement in adaptive skills develops both the personality and manipulative skill responsibilities of an individual. These itself help to rescue street youths, ghetto youths and the destitute from ‘gangsterism’, drug abuse and vicious involvements that mar the social, cultural and economic development of a country (Akosile, 2007; Unoarumi, 2009, Umar, 2008, and Smartbrief, 2007 in Onyenekenwe, (2013) [16]. Skill acquisition has been described as an antidote for idleness and over-dependency on others (Ogbodo, 2009) [17] , but display of such skills is consequential and much advocated. Friedman in [3] opined that the neglect of technical education is socially and economically injurious to the nation, because it is robbing the nation of the contributions the graduates would have made towards national development. While Alwasilah in Dike (2009) [3] listed the gains as: provision of students with “life skills” to become entrepreneurs, genders creative and innovative ideas, enlargement of economic pie and increased personal freedom. It is noted that most of the so-called “expatriate engineers” who are paid millions of dollars to build Nigeria’s roads and bridges are graduates of technical and vocational colleges.

Nigerian leaders need to take technical institutions seriously. This neglect is an obstacle to national development. The artisans of medium and small scale enterprise are also neglected, The neglect is however relative, government at all tiers make several frantic efforts on policy statements on VTE in 1932, 1959, 1977 (which was revised in 1981), 1985, 1988 and 2004 among others. Successive administrations through the Ministry of Education had made several reviews and revisions on policy on education; the latest review was in 2012 which is yet to be implemented. It is worthy of note that policy formulations in Nigeria is excellently and wholesomely conceived, and formulated. However, it is politically, corruptly and selfishly implemented. Such is the policy on VTE that has not yielded much success. The Vocational and Technical entrepreneurship suffers consistent decline, the VTE graduates who ought to be self-reliant and employ labour, do not want to weather through the storms to nurture a business. While vocational and technical apprenticeship is fading off, continuous skill commercialization, technical artisanship and creativity are gradually disappearing from cities.

Commercial motorcycling (*okada*) in Nigeria

Commercial motorcycling (termed *okada* in Nigeria) is a means of transportation on a two-wheeled cycle powered on land by a motor. Motorcycles are adopted for commercial transportation purposes for its fuel economy, easy maintenance and ability to penetrate interior and remote places. The fast-moving public would rather prefer to patronize *okada* for its ability to manoeuvre intra-routes during metropolitan traffic jams and the power to convey passengers to desired destinations at rates cheaper and faster than taxi-cabs or motor vehicles. Commercial motorcycling has different nomenclatures which are operational from one community to another.



Plate 1: *Okada* riders scouting for passengers
Source: channelstv.com



Plate 2: *Okada* riders at take-off point
Source: bellanaija.com

The name *okada* was derived after the order of the Okada Airline - a Nigerian local airline services now defunct in Edo State of Nigeria. Names like *achaba*, *going* and *inaga* among others are as well adopted for *okada* in the northern and eastern part of the country.



Plate 3: Okada transportation in Lagos metropolis

Source: bellanaija.com



Plate 4: Civil and Humam Rights Society protest against ban on okada business on Lagos major roads

Source: omobaswagz.blogspot.com

Until the 1980s, motorcycles were few in the country and many of them were privately owned by civil servants. Brands like Vespa, Honda and Suzuki were notable in cities. The villagers soon adopted motorcycles to ply various rural paths, especially to ease journey to the farm more than the then famous bicycles. Though could convey people and goods, it was not designed to usurp the vocation of the users. It was only meant to aid mobility (Tribune 2012) [18]. Motorcycles became a means of commercial transportation in the early 1990s, owing to the rise in the rate of unemployment occasioned by austere economic downturn in the country. Before then motorcycling was associated with “dispatch riders” whose major operations were limited to official errands along certain routes and business places (Akeem, 2010) [19]. He also observed that the influx of various brands of motorcycles into the country from Asian countries and their seeming affordability has been a sort of incentive to many unemployed Nigerians thus making the business attractive.

The consequentiality of intentionality

The mix of the young men who learnt vocations but resorted to doing other things for living exists heterogeneously but the number of those who specifically take to *okada* riding is outrageously high (Plates 1-4). These vocational dropouts are incredibly ubiquitous, to name a few reasons, basically because of massive unemployment in the country and the need to seek respite. The unemployment situation in the country is a menace that is no more a strange phenomenon (Akintade, Ibidapo and Ale 2013 [20], Badaru 2013 [21], Filani 2013 [22] and Olusanya, 2013) [23]. Worry over massive unemployment rate stems from an increased acknowledgement of the importance of being self-employed. Presently victims have become hard-hit as a result of rationalization and retrenchment of workers in workplaces. According to the government, the introduction of austere measures (including downsizing) would usher the nation into national economic recovery and encourage self-employment. Nevertheless, it is pertinent to mention that the Nigerian government needs a major shift in its educational curriculum development to stave off an imminent extinction of vocational skill acquisition and practice. The observation in Kuta (2011) [24] is that the able-bodied men and more sadly, university graduates who are sweating it out on motor and tri cycles are facing the consequences of misplaced priority of career pursuit while they were at school. Public opinion about *okada* riders has not been gratifying in any material consideration. Roadside handwork industries and vocational artisanship have been abandoned and almost discontinued. Reckless riding and overloading of passengers on *okada* have always led to

serious road accidents resulting in orthopedic casualties at the best and death casualties at the worst. The recent ban on motor cycle business in major cities of Lagos, Kaduna, Kano and Abuja to mention a few places as well as on high-ways seems to be a right step in the right direction but this decisive action of government further ignites consequential hardship for these set of people. It seems to have spelt doom for the country. Hence, several dimensions of crime have been reported ranging from assassination to snatching of personal effects from pedestrians.

On a closer scrutiny, the propensity to make ends meet is a hugely popular reason why citizens of little means would go into other things. It is a truism that the *okada* riders are able-bodied men; they are low income earners and under-employed citizens who have gone into the business to seek respite. The pressing socio-economic challenges confronting the country and by extension the individuals cause poverty to flash at victims like a slide show. Poverty is fierce and getting fiercer in the land. The urge to make a pile of money daily to augment the meager monthly salary is therefore powerful in those who pick up their motorcycles after closing from government work. Besides, the artisans, technical and vocational entrepreneurs who cannot endure difficulties encountered in trade and resolve to full or part-time *okada* riding are part of the respite seekers. These ones would rather do odd jobs to save money to buy a motorcycle for commercial riding than spend time engaging in a vocational trade. Thus while there is large deficit of well-trained and competent mechanics, welders, electricians, plumbers, furniture makers among others, the cities are flooded with *okada* riders [18]. The Lagos State Commissioner for Works and Infrastructure according to [18] observed that most skilled artisans and would-be artisans had take to "Okada" riding business to hamper their entrepreneurship prospects in trade acquired. It is rather unfortunate that government in the past had encouraged youths indirectly by donating motorcycles as empowerment programmes. The politicians during political campaigns till date still give various items including motorcycles to win the support of hungry-jobless youths.

Methodology

The study was carried out in Odeda Local Government of Ogun State, Nigeria. Three communities in the local government area were purposively selected. Research of the survey type which involved descriptive statistics was used for this study. Questionnaire was used as data-gathering instrument to elicit response from two hundred and forty (240) *okada riders* who randomly form the sample size taken from the study area. A pilot study was conducted to test and ascertain the reliability and validity of the instrument. The method of data analysis was carried out by subjecting the data collected to frequency table distribution and simple percentage. Three (3) research questions were set to guide the study while results were presented based on the reaction of the respondents in tabulated format.

Results

The findings are summarized in the tables below and were also discussed in the light of relevant social-demographic data of the respondents.

Table 1 shows job skills distribution among the commercial motorcycle riders, Table 2 shows educational training, the various professional skills are presented in Table 3 while Table 4 shows constraints to practicing of the trade.

Table 1: Varieties of job skills among 240 respondents.

Trade	A ¹	A ²	B	C	D	E ¹	E ²	F ¹	F ²	G	H	I	J	K
	12	24	36	12	36	12	12	24	12	12	12	12	12	12

*Bricklaying – A¹, Aluminum fabrication – A², Barbing – B, Tailoring – C, Generating set repairs – D, Motor mechanic – E¹, Motorcycle mechanic – E², Panel beating – F¹, Printing – F², Carpentry – G, Teaching – H, Vulcanizing – I, Welding – J, No Trade – K.

Table 2 shows the professional attainment of the respondents

No	Items	Option	Frequency	Percentage
7	I have trained profession	Yes	228	95%
		No	12	5%
8	I have just finished apprenticeship but looking for money to buy instruments	Yes	132	55%
		No	108	45%

Table 2 reveals 95% of the respondents as having possessed trained profession, while only 5% of the respondent is not trained in any skilled job. 55% of the riders have been practicing their profession after graduating while 45% have finished their apprenticeship period but are yet to do graduation ceremony and set up their own business.

Table 3: Academic attainment of respondents

No	Items	Option	Frequency	Percentage
1	I finished primary school	Yes	228	95%
		No	12	5%
2	I have primary school leaving certificate	Yes	204	85%
		No	36	15%
3	I have finished secondary school education	Yes	108	45%
		No	132	55%
5	I have secondary school result	Yes	72	30%
		No	168	70%
6	I have other certificates apart from primary and secondary	Yes	96	40%
		No	144	60%

The responses above show that 95% finished basic elementary school. 45% finished secondary education while 55% did not go or drop out of secondary school. 30% possessed school certificate result for basic employment while 70% did not. Also 40% have other certificates aside from primary school leaving certificate while 60% did not have.

Table 4a: Probable impediments and constraints in practicing vocational skills.

No	Items	Option	Frequency	Percentage
13	I choose Okada because customers are not patronizing	Yes	84	35%
		No	146	65%
15	My business is seasonal that is why I added <i>okada</i> business so as not to be idle	Yes	60	25%
		No	180	75%
17	My trade depends on electricity or other social amenities provided by government which I can not afford	Yes	84	35%
		No	146	65%
18	The material and equipment for my work is scarce and costly	Yes	84	35%
		No	146	65%
19	My job is affected by high tax demand	Yes	12	95%
		No	228	5%
20	High rent without corresponding sales made me to quilt my shop	Yes	24	10%
		No	216	90%

Table 4a reveals that 35% of the riders quit because customers are not patronizing, 65% disagreed. 25% choose *okada* business because the work is seasonal, 75% disagreed. 35% depend on electricity supply, 65% disagreed. 35% agreed that equipments for a start up of their outfit are costly as such they could not afford them, 65% disagreed. 95% disagreed that tax demand affected their work while 90% disagreed that high rent cost made them to quit.

Table 4b: Impediments and constraints in practicing professional skills.

No	Items	Option	Frequency	Percentage
	Personal and family responsibilities are too demanding	Yes	180	75%
		No	60	25%
	Rate of turn-over was low (no much sales)	Yes	204	25%
		No	36	85%
	Economic atmosphere is not favourable	Yes	216	90%
		No	24	10%
	I do <i>okada</i> when there is no job	Yes	216	90%
		No	24	10%

In table 4b, oral discussion with the riders confirm that 70% said family responsibilities made them to add *okada* riding for additional income. 85% agreed that is abysmally low, while 90% agreed that the general economic atmosphere is not favourable and when they do not have job in the shop they take to *okada* business.

Discussion

The results revealed that almost all the respondents have dependable skilled professions that could make them self-employed and become employers of labour. This economic status was capable of fostering economic activities but reverse is the case. Although many respondents dropped out of high school, it was established that almost all of them finished the elementary school. The residual primary education enables them to communicate in English with their passengers peripherally. The study also established that high rent cost from landlords and tax demands from government were not responsible for quitting their respective vocations. Although electricity factor as a cause for vacating their shops received 35% yes, but critical analysis of the job skills distribution of the respondents in Table 1 reveals the following: The primary users are those who use electricity directly. Such skills comprise of Welding, Aluminum fabrication, Barbing, Tailoring and Printing. The epileptic and irregular supply of light could send them out of business if there is no financial muscle to purchase alternative power supply. The secondary users are those who use electricity indirectly. For instance, carpenters depend on processed woods from sawmills who primarily depended on electricity to run all machineries, so also panel beaters and motor mechanics. Bricklayers on the construction sites are indirectly affected by non-supply of lintel reinforcements, burglary proofs or steel doors from welder, non-supply of wooden doors from carpenters who depend on electricity to produce the needed materials. This confirms that no small or medium scale business can survive in a nation where electricity is a luxury and not social service. The business atmosphere where large number of entrepreneurs depend directly or indirectly on electricity which is incessantly disappointing also confirm the response of the respondent that economic atmosphere is not favorable. These cause ripple effects as the rate of turn-over is affected, culminating in their inability to meet personal and family demands. Inability to break even as an entrepreneur in the face of economic depression was therefore a major cause of abandoning their skills in search for quick money-yielding business like *okada*.

Recommendation

The government must find a wholesome approach to deal with the unemployment problem in the land and carry out a massive re-skilling programme for Okada riders. Government must provide the infrastructure required to make reliance on trade skills and other technical know-how possible so that the people who have acquired skills would not resort to Okada riding to earn a living. The government should stop paying lip service to reviving of the vocational and technical colleges. Modern and state of the earth equipments and machines should be provided to enable learners acquire and render skills to meet the needs in construction, technical and other manufacturing establishments. Just banning Okada from roads does not go far enough, there should also be awareness programmes to reorient, encourage and create economic climate for small and medium businesses to survive. Although commercial motorcycling (Okada) business has become a major source of livelihood and immediate means to cope with diverse conditions in the city for many, the government should brace up for nipping in the bud, the negative trends in vocational skills and services.

Conclusion

Vocational and technical education has been adjudged to be form of education that should be an integral part of national development policies and strategies for any society who wants to build on solid foundation. That was the kind of education in sub Sahara of Africa before the colonial system of education was designed to make youth self reliant, self employed, in addition to moral and spiritual values. These were abandoned and discouraged even when formal education

was introduced in Nigeria by the colonial rulers, though was partly sustained by the Missionaries who were sensitive to defect of such system of education which deprived learners use of hand to fend for themselves and few families who stick to such trade or vocation as family vocation that should be transmitted to younger generations.

In 1920 government showed interest and recommends the establishment of training schools and today has yielded positive results as graduates are turned out of such colleges and polytechnics. However the stigma on vocational and technical lingers as non implementation of policies cripples the institutions, those who acquire formal and non formal vocational skills are fast disengaging from the trade for lack of enabling economic environment into commercial motorcycling which brings quick proceeds. These enabling economic environment ranges from availability of constant electricity supply, encouragement from Government through its agencies to organise workshops, training and orientations.

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