



# BOOK CHAPTER CALL

## LEARNING FOR LIVELIHOODS: SKILLS AND THE INFORMAL SECTOR



We would like to invite chapter contributions for an edited book, *Learning for Livelihoods: Skills and the Informal Sector*. The volume will be edited by Lesley Powell (Nelson Mandela University), Adam Cooper (Human Sciences Research Council), Simon McGrath (University of Glasgow) and Trent Brown (University of

Melbourne). The book aims to collate into one volume a range of theoretical, conceptual, and methodological lenses that bring together the concepts of skills and livelihoods, to explore how they enable people in various parts of the global south to better realise the lives that they value.

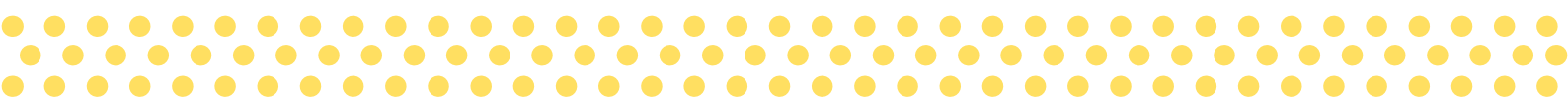
The volume critiques the dominant education-work narrative, a paradigm underpinned by the 'pathways' metaphor, that stubbornly, and despite all evidence to the contrary, insists on understanding work singularly and over simplistically as transitions into the formal labour market. Only small bodies of work located in various disciplinary patches have targeted the education and training needs of those working outside of this imagined trajectory, those people who make a living beyond the wage. This is despite over 2 billion (61%) of the globe working in the informal sector (ILO, 2018) and 93% of these workers living in emerging economies (ILO, 2018). Across the world, most people make a living primarily in the informal sector, or they mix and match forms of income through combinations of formal and informal sources (Thieme, 2018; Cooper, Swartz and Ramphalile, 2021)



Notwithstanding these staggering figures, education and training has largely failed to respond to the needs of those who generate livelihoods outside of formal wage employment. Public spend is framed within the neoliberal logic of employability, production, and profit. It orientates tertiary education and vocational education and training (VET) almost exclusively to supporting the skills needs of the formal labour market. There is now an urgent need to build the capacity and knowledge to engage with the informal sector (Skinner, 2018). As Carswell & De Neve (2018, p.62) note, "labour agency has been almost solely researched and conceptualised in terms of collective forms of organised worker resistance [in the formal sector]". The multiple ways that people exercise agency in relation to work in the informal sector has scarcely been researched and neither has the role of education and training in developing such forms of agency.

Taking the call of people like Carswell, De Neve and Skinner seriously, this volume will try to illuminate these blind spots related to education and skills for livelihoods with the focus being on the theoretical, conceptual, and methodological tools brought to better understand skills and livelihoods. Scholarly neglect of this important area exists at the same time as people in the global south are pioneering livelihoods characterised by extracting resources and opportunities at the intersections of formal, informal and social economies and beyond the boundaries of the state, the market, and formal institutions. Understanding skills and work, and the intersection between the two, as socially relational, serves as a challenge to what we understand to be the purposes, orientations, and pedagogies of Vocational Education Training (VET) and skills development. It potentially opens new vistas for reimagining the purposes of VET (Powell and McGrath, 2019) informed by how people in the global south are actually living, working and learning (Brown, 2020).

This book is not a defence of precarious work which is not glamorous and is often survivalist with many forced into it due to a lack of available and dignified formal sector jobs. Given that these circumstances are the reality for the majority of the global South, the heart of this book is an insistence that the way in which learning, working and living happens in these contexts matter. Equally important are the conceptual, theoretical and methodological lenses that shape what we see, how we understand what we are seeing, and the decisions and actions, or non-decisions and non-actions that we take. This book is therefore concerned with understanding how we might better theorise what skills and work mean for young people with diverse livelihoods, people who rely substantially on the informal and social economy. Rather than envisioning education and skills as orientated towards profit making or increased productivity, we are looking for fresh perspectives that move beyond the dominant neoliberal and human capital orthodoxies. The focus is on contributions that illuminate how skills and livelihoods, and the intersection between the two, may be used to empower people in ways that improve lives and that contribute to a more just, sustainable, and equitable world.



Specific areas that you might want to consider locating your submission are provided below as four themes. The **four themes are meant as a supportive framework and not as a constraint** to submissions that may cut across these themes or rest outside of them.

1

## THEME 1: PROBLEMATISING CONCEPTS AND METHODS.

We acknowledge the **limitations of the concepts** that we have at our disposal in having this discussion and welcome contributions that trouble them. Contributions that trouble notions of **labour market, supply and demand, skills, green skills,**

**informal and formal, and Vocational Education and Training** are particularly welcome. We also realise that survey data can only capture slices of people's lives and welcome contributions that engage with the **methodological challenges** involved in collecting information about skills, work, and livelihoods.

## THEME 2: SKILLS FOR LIVELIHOODS: INFORMALITY AND BEYOND.

We recognise that the dominance of economic thinking has produced limited understandings of the heterogeneity that exists in the informal economy and of the complex ways in which young people are living, learning, and sharing skills. We understand that many people in the global south generate livelihoods through a mixture of wage labour and informal sector work and are interested in better understanding how learning empowers and improves the lives of informal sector workers. In theme 2 we therefore

support Caroline Skinner's (2018) and Carswell & De Neve's (2018) powerful call for scholars to better understand skills, work and labour agency as lived in the informal and social economies and beyond formal wage labour. In this section we welcome chapters that engage with these diverse income streams perspective and labour agency as lived in the informal sector.

3

## THEME 3: EDUCATION FOR INFORMAL SECTOR DOMINATED LIVELIHOODS.

An outcome of the econometric lens is that skills are understood in narrow and instrumental ways and that learning that happens in communities, in families, in faith-based organisations and in social movements have simply been ignored (Mcgrath and Deneulin, 2021). Education that supports livelihoods is provided by a range of individuals, groups, and institutions, including formal education systems, NGOs, and formal and informal workplaces as informal apprenticeships. Chapters are encouraged that engage with

the range of education providers that support young people with skills for livelihoods and with the range of purposes and contexts within which learning happens. We would particularly like contributions that challenge VET to move beyond their focus on large, formal sector enterprises, to engage with people in the global south who predominantly work in the informal sector. The focus is on how VET can better engage with learning as it happens in informal processes and spaces, but also the philosophical, pedagogic and curriculum implications for VET, which we hope will push our imaginings in new ways.

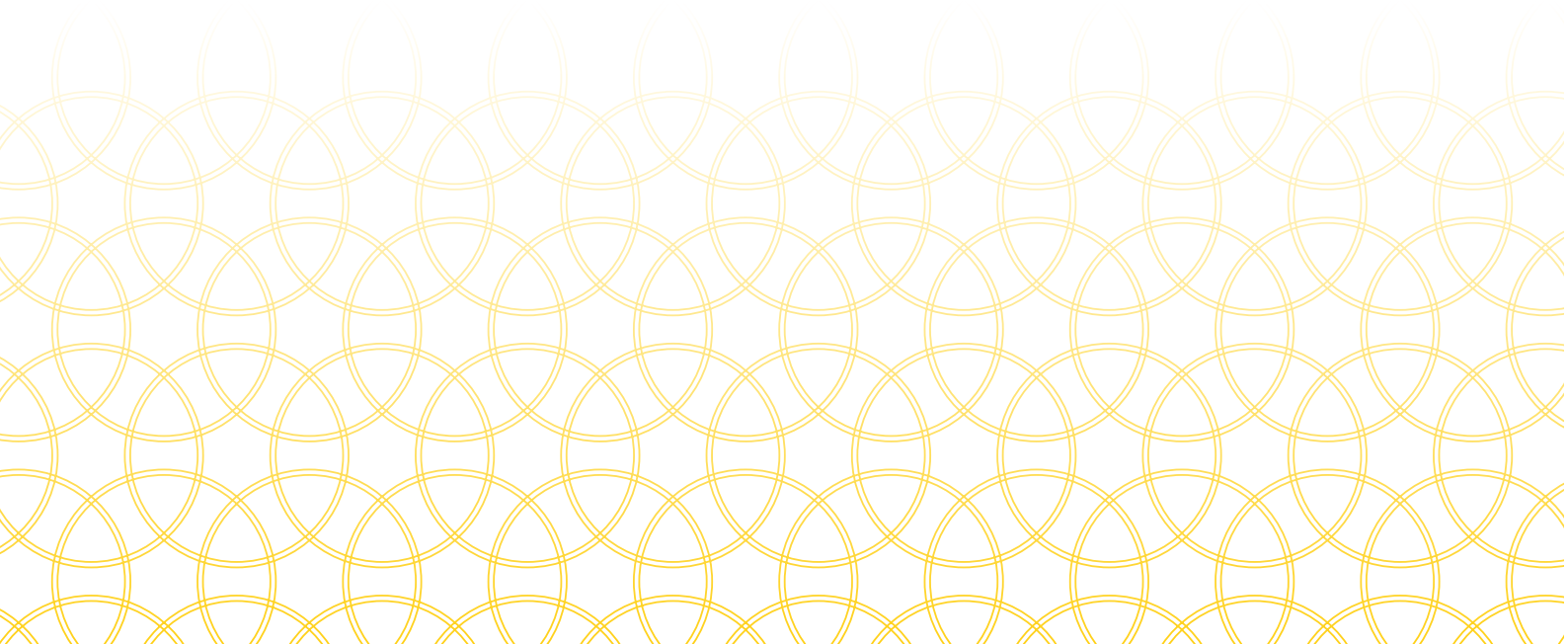
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## THEME 4: INTERVENTIONS, SOCIAL AND POLICY CHANGE.

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Locating knowledge and skills in context and orienting them towards meaningful livelihoods and sustainable living requires new systems, approaches, and democratic imaginings. The skills ecosystems framework (Brown, 2022; Wedekind et al., 2021) is one example of this kind of thinking, as is the thinking around just transitions (Langthaler et al., 2021). For this

section we encourage submissions that consider interventions that talk to the skills needed for living in the world in relationship to oneself, to others, and to the environment, while being sensitive to the development of inclusive and sustainable economies (Powell, 2021).



If you are interested in this venture, as we hope you are, please take note of the following:

Prospective authors will be informed of our editorial decision by **15 July 2022**. The following timeframes will apply:

- The book will most likely be published by Routledge. The Routledge style sheet for references and bibliography will be forwarded to all authors whose abstract has been selected for the volume.
  - An abstract of 300-500 words should be submitted to Azra Rajah at [Azra.Rajah@mandela.ac.za](mailto:Azra.Rajah@mandela.ac.za) preferably by **28 July**. Please also cc me at [lesleyjpowell@gmail.com](mailto:lesleyjpowell@gmail.com) into the email. Abstracts should feature the working title of the proposed chapter, the author, or authors responsible for it, together with the details of the corresponding author.
  - Chapters will need to be around **6,000 words in length** and will need to be written in English. Language editing is the responsibility of the authors.
  - The editors for this book will choose the most promising abstracts from those submitted but all attempts will be made to work with authors to include a broad range of theoretical and conceptual lenses
  - We will be aiming to have a broad representation of authors from different contexts, regions and disciplinary backgrounds, special care will be taken to support emerging authors from the global south.
  - Please feel free to share this invitation with other authors who might be interested. In particular, please share with emerging scholars that you might be working with.
- The first draft of the chapter is to be submitted on **10 October 2022**. Details of where and how to submit your chapter will be provided to all authors whose abstract has been selected for the volume.
  - Authors will receive their peer review comments by the **15 November 2022**.
  - Revised and finalised chapters are to be submitted by the **15 December 2022**.
  - The final chapters will be submitted to the editors by **mid-December 2022**.
  - By the end of **January 2023**, the edited manuscript is to be submitted to the publisher.

Recognising this as an initial attempt to bring together the theoretical and methodological approaches applied in these complex literatures, a webinar series and roundtable discussions will be held with the authors between July and October 2022 where authors can engage each other and the broader community of scholars.

We do hope you will feel able to respond positively to this invitation. We look forward to hearing from you and walking this challenging but very worthwhile road with you.

## Regards

**Lesley Powell** (Nelson Mandela University),  
**Adam Cooper** (HSRC),  
**Trent Brown** (University of Melbourne) and  
**Simon McGrath** (University of Glasgow)



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