

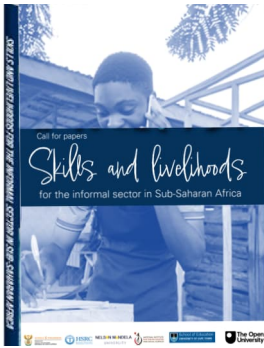


Call for papers

# Skills and livelihoods

for the informal sector in Sub-Saharan Africa





We would like to invite chapter contributions for an edited book, *Learning for Livelihoods: Skills and the Informal Sector*. Lesley Powell (University of Cape Town), Adam Cooper (Human Sciences Research Council), Joyceline Alla-Mensah (Open University), and Azra Rajah (Nelson Mandela University) will edit the volume. 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.

Authors are invited to submit an abstract of 100-300 words to Azra Rajah at [Azra.Rajah@mandela.ac.za](mailto:Azra.Rajah@mandela.ac.za) preferably by 30 October 2023. Please also cc [lesleyjpowell@gmail.com](mailto:lesleyjpowell@gmail.com) into this email. Abstracts should provide a brief overview of the focus of the proposed chapter as well as feature the working title of the proposed chapter, the author, or authors responsible for it, together with the details of the corresponding authors, and if you are submitting an abstract for section 1 or 2 of the book.

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). In sub-Saharan Africa for example, about 80-90% of employment is located in the informal economy (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.

The volume aims to highlight southern epistemologies and knowledge systems (including indigenous knowledge systems) that empowers marginalised communities and creates more holistic and inclusive approaches to livelihoods that draw upon a wider range of perspectives and expertise. Furthermore, it aims to decolonise existing canons of research and literature that are strongly influenced by research in the global north that has a tendency of erasing the lived experiences of the global south.

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, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, 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 in Sub-Saharan Africa, 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.

<b>THEME 1: PROBLEMATISING CONCEPTS AND METHODS.</b>	<b>THEME 3: EDUCATION FOR INFORMAL SECTOR DOMINATED LIVELIHOODS.</b>
<b>THEME 2: SKILLS FOR LIVELIHOODS: INFORMALITY AND BEYOND.</b>	<b>THEME 4: INTERVENTIONS, SOCIAL AND POLICY CHANGE.</b>

### **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 Sub-Saharan Africa 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.

### **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 Sub-Saharan Africa 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.

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

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 and transitions from informality to formality, especially in apprenticeship (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).

The book’s consideration of the theoretical, conceptual, methodological and practice, sees the volume divided into two sections as follows:

- Section 1: Embedding skills and the informal sector into the conceptual and theoretical tools of disciplinary or sub-disciplinary spaces.
- Section 2: Narratives from the field. In this section invite NGO’s and those in the field to submit their experiences of working with skills and the informal sector.

If you are interested in this venture, as we hope you are, please take note of the following: The book will most likely be published by HSRC Press. The HSRC style sheet for references and bibliography will be forwarded to all authors whose abstract has been selected for the volume.

An abstract of 100-300 words should be submitted to Azra Rajah at [Azra.Rajah@mandela.ac.za](mailto:Azra.Rajah@mandela.ac.za) preferably by 30 October 2023. Please also cc [lesleyjpowell@gmail.com](mailto:lesleyjpowell@gmail.com) into this email. Abstracts should provide a brief overview of the focus of the proposed chapter as well as feature the working title of the proposed chapter, the author, or authors responsible for it, together with the details of the corresponding authors, and if you are submitting an abstract for section 1 or 2 of the book. Prospective authors will be informed of our editorial decision by 10 December 2024.

The following time frame will apply:

- The first draft of the chapter is to be submitted on 30 April 2024. 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 31 July 2024.
- Revised and finalised chapters are to be submitted by the 31 October 2024.

Final chapters for section 1 will need to be around 6,000 words in length and final chapters for section 2 will need to be around 3,000 words in length. All chapters will need to be written in English and 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, Sub-Saharan 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. 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 (University of Cape Town)  
Adam Cooper (Human Science Research Council)  
Joyceline Alla-Mensah (Open University)  
Azra Rajah (Nelson Mandela University)

## References

Brown, T. (2020) 'Pathways to Agricultural Skill Development in the Indian Himalayas', *Journal of South Asian Development*, 15(2), pp. 270–292.

Brown, T. (2022) 'Skill ecosystems in the global South: Informality, inequality, and community setting', *Geoforum*, 132, pp. 10–19.

Carswell, G. and De Neve, G. (2018) 'Towards a political economy of skill and garment work: The case of the Tiruppur industrial cluster in south India', in Hann, C. and Parry, J. (eds) *Industrial labour on the margins of capitalism: Precarity, class and the neoliberal subject*. New York, NY and London, UK, pp. 309–335.

Cooper, A., Swartz, S. and Ramphalile, M. (2021) 'Who are global South youth and why are they worth studying?', in Swartz, S. et al. (eds) *Oxford Handbook of Global South Youth Studies*. New York, USA: Oxford University Press.

International Labour Organisation (2018) *World Employment Social Outlook*. Geneva, Switzerland: International Labour Organisation.

Langthaler, M., McGrath, S. and Ramsarup, P. (2021) *Skills for green and just transitions: Reflecting on the role of vocational education and training for sustainable development* PDF Logo. Available at: <https://www.econstor.eu/handle/10419/231419>.

McGrath, S. and Deneulin, S. (2021) 'Education for just transitions: Lifelong learning and the 30th anniversary Human Development report', *International Review of Education*, 67, pp. 637–658.

Powell, L. (2021). *Planning for freedom: From human capital to human capabilities*. *Journal of Education (University of KwaZulu-Natal)*, (84), 85-105.

Powell, L. J., & McGrath, S. (2019). *Skills for human development: Transforming vocational education and training*. Routledge.

Skinner, C. (2018). *Informal-sector policy and legislation in South Africa: Repression, omission, and ambiguity*. *The South Africa's Informal Sector: Creating Jobs, Reducing Poverty*. South Africa: HSRC Press.

Thieme, T. A. (2018). *The hustle economy: Informality, uncertainty, and the geographies of getting by*. *Progress in Human Geography*, 42(4), 529-548.

Wedekind, V., Russon, J. A., Ramsarup, P., Monk, D., Metelerkamp, L., & McGrath, S. (2021). *Conceptualising regional skills ecosystems: Reflections on four African cases*. *International Journal of Training and Development*, 25(4), 347-362.