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# TRANSITIONING VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN AFRICA

A Social Skills Ecosystem Perspective

VET Africa 4.0 Collective



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# Contents

Series Editor's Preface	vi	
List of Figures, Tables and Boxes	viii	
List of Abbreviations	ix	
Acknowledgements and Authorship	xi	
1	Introducing VET Africa 4.0	1
	<i>Heila Lotz-Sisitka and Simon McGrath</i>	
2	VET and Skills in Africa: A Historical Sociology	22
	<i>Simon McGrath</i>	
3	Water, Transport, Oil and Food: A Political–Economy– Ecology Lens on Changing Conceptions of Work, Learning and Skills Development in Africa	37
	<i>Heila Lotz-Sisitka</i>	
4	Towards an Expanded Notion of Skills Ecosystems	55
	<i>Presha Ramsarup and Jo-Anna Russon</i>	
5	Social Ecosystem for Skills Research: Inclusivity, Relationality and Informality	75
	<i>Luke Metelerkamp and David Monk</i>	
6	Vocational Teachers as Mediators in Complex Ecosystems	97
	<i>Jo-Anna Russon and Völker Wedekind</i>	
7	Challenges in Transitioning Processes	118
	<i>Presha Ramsarup and Jo-Anna Russon</i>	
8	The Role of the University as Mediator in a Skills Ecosystem Approach to VET	139
	<i>Heila Lotz-Sisitka, George Openjuru and Jacques Zeelen</i>	
9	Implications for VET Research, Policy and Practice	158
	<i>Simon McGrath</i>	
	Afterword: Towards a More Just and Sustainable Research Practice	182
	<i>VET Africa 4.0 Collective</i>	
	References	188
	Index	211

## Series Editor's Preface

This is the first volume for the Bristol Studies in Comparative and International Education (building upon the former Bristol Papers series) and one that clearly demonstrates our commitment to 'critically engage with education and international development from a comparative and interdisciplinary perspective'. In content, the book is ground-breaking for the ways in which it challenges traditional, and often northern, conceptualizations of vocational education and training (VET); insists upon analysing both VET and work in broad, relational and inclusive ways; develops and applies original theoretical contributions drawn from political ecology; and moves beyond 'extractive' modalities of research in this important arena. In terms of 'process', the book has further distinction and originality due to the innovative ways in which the 20 core authors/researchers have combined to form the VET Africa 4.0 Collective and wrestled with the decolonial challenges and dynamics of coproduction and joint authorship within the context of an externally funded international Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) partnership. For those interested in learning from, and advancing, more equitable international research partnerships, this book has much to offer readers across multiple fields and disciplines.

The book is structured around three sections, the first of which establishes the historical and theoretical context (Chapters 1–4) while introducing the 'social ecosystems for skills' model that underpins the overall framework for the analysis. Section 2 (Chapters 5–8) develops and expands this model through a detailed and critically reflexive examination of the empirical data embedded within four contextually grounded South African and Ugandan VET case studies. Section 3 (Chapter 9) reflects upon the implications of the overall study for future research, policy and practice; and an important and insightful 'Afterword' reflects on the collaborative, multilevel research and writing process in ways that deserve close attention.

This is a complex and sophisticated analysis with theoretical and empirical depth that provides an invaluable resource for all concerned with the future of VET policy, practice and research worldwide. It is a collective book that reimagines more democratic and relational futures for VET, challenges dominant orthodoxies, engages with the implications of both decolonization

and climate resilience for the future of skills development, and interrogates the multiple power dynamics involved in advancing innovative international research partnerships within, and beyond, the VET arena. To cite the authors own words: 'As university researchers, we must find ways of balancing the immediacy of the funded project and the need for stronger and longer-lasting bonds in the locations in which we research, while also forming new, oftentimes nontraditional, relations across our institutions and our related partner networks' (afterword).

For these reasons, it is hard to imagine a more appropriate volume for the launch of our renewed book series with Bristol University Press. I am, therefore, more than pleased to recommend this work to readers interested in the contemporary challenges faced by VET in Africa and worldwide; and, most importantly, to *all* engaged with the theoretical and epistemological implications of decolonization for interdisciplinary research, comparative studies and international development.

*Michael Crossley*  
*Professor of Comparative and International Education*  
*University of Bristol*

# List of Figures, Tables and Boxes

## Figures

4.1	Combining the Finegold and Spours models	60
4.2	Expanded social ecosystem for skills model	72
5.1	Two farmers' knowledge acquisition pathways	88
5.2	Four phases of learning network evolution	89
9.1	VET 4.0's ontological, epistemic, social and normative dynamics	180

## Table

7.1	Transition vignettes	123
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## Boxes

3.1	The need for a political–economy–ecology lens for VET: views of work, life and learning realities and skills development needs found in our cases	49
7.1	Crop farmer, Eastern Cape, South Africa	125
7.2	The creative arts, Uganda	126
7.3	AEOs and community learning transition, South Africa	128
7.4	Tailoring/fashion design, Gulu	129
7.5	Small-scale farmers, Gulu, Uganda	130
7.6	Maritime VET students, eThekweni	131
7.7	Catering sector, Hoima	133
7.8	Market vendors, Uganda	134

# List of Abbreviations

AEO	agricultural extension officer
CHAT	cultural historical activity theory
CoE	centre of excellence
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training (South Africa)
DTP	Dube Trade Port
FCAFTI	Fort Cox Agricultural and Forestry Training Institute
GCRF	Global Challenges Research Fund (UK)
IBLN	Imvothu Bubomi Learning Network
ICT	information and communications technology
ILO	International Labour Organization/Office
INGO	international nongovernmental organization
IOC	international oil company
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
LED	local economic development
MEMD	Ministry of Energy and Mineral Development (Uganda)
NGO	nongovernmental organization
NQF	national qualifications framework
PAR	participatory action research
PI	principal investigator
SDGs	sustainable development goals
SEZ	Special Economic Zone
SIP	Strategic Integrated Project
SoE	school of excellence
SOGA	Skills for Oil and Gas in Africa programme
ToT	training-of-trainers
TVET	technical and vocational education and training
VET	vocational education and training
UK	United Kingdom
UKRI	United Kingdom Research and Innovation

UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UPIK	Uganda Petroleum Institute, Kigumba
US	United States of America
US\$	United States Dollars
WRC	Water Research Commission (South Africa)

# Acknowledgements and Authorship

Much of the research on which this book is based took place in the context of pandemic and lockdowns. The conventional acknowledgements of all those who gave of their time and knowledge to share with us therefore must be even more heartfelt. We absolutely could not have done this work without the cooperation of hundreds of youth activists, vocational education and training (VET) teachers and administrators, small business owners, farmers, representatives of traditional authorities, and staff of large corporations, development agencies, NGOs and government ministries and agencies. As well as the core writing team, we benefitted hugely also from the support of university administrators, without whom the project could not have made the many adjustments to respond to radically changing circumstances over its lifespan. We benefitted also from the participation of research scholars in our various institutions who attended team meetings and shared insights from their own work, and from the comments of the many external colleagues who attended our presentations along the way, online and in several countries. In particular, we acknowledge Lwande Maqwelane and Phindile Sithole, who provided vignettes for [Chapter 7](#). We also recognize the pioneering work of the late Tich Pesanayi, who established the boundary-crossing foundations of the social skills for ecosystem approach in the Alice case in collaboration with partners from the local economic development office, especially Passmore Dongi, and the Fort Cox Agricultural and Forestry Training Institute, especially but not limited to Chamu Matambo and Louise Madikiza, whose contributions are also acknowledged.

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We have taken the conscious decision to author this book collectively. This was part of a deliberate attempt to move beyond research as extraction. While this was inevitably fallible as still located within the uneven political economy of the global knowledge production system, and our own human frailties, we committed to maximizing the ownership of the project by the wider team. We made early career researcher capacity development an explicit project goal while seeking to grow the whole team. A total of 20 team members were involved centrally in the project and form the collective authorship of this book. All 20 participated in design and case discussion workshops. Most visited both case countries, Uganda and South Africa (although COVID limited some planned travel), and about half of the African team visited England to present at conferences and attend workshops. Several of the less experienced members of the team have gone on to write journal articles based on parts of the project in which they were particularly involved, with support from more experienced colleagues.

Inevitably, contributions varied, as some had far more time to commit to the project, another hard to shift inequality. Eleven of the team were centrally involved as (co)leads of chapter writing and/or as editors. Nonetheless, we have written this as a monograph rather than an edited book as all chapters were extensively worked on by multiple members of the team and edited to cohere. Due to performativity pressures, however, we have named authors for each chapter. These are the team members who were most involved in drafting the chapters, although all have been read and edited collectively. We will return to a reflection on our process in an afterword.

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