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Youth Skills Development, Informal Employment and the Enabling Environment in Kenya: Trends and Tensions

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Abstract

Youth skills development, poverty and unemployment are prominent global concerns. Pressure to expand post-basic education in countries with low to moderate enrollment and concerns of high youth unemployment have encouraged the development of a "skills for jobs" education reform discourse. The discourse argues that post-basic education focus on skills development with the hypothesis that such a focus will help reduce youth unemployment. Following post-election violence in 2007, promoting youth employment has become an increasingly important policy issue in Kenya. In 2011 nearly 40% of Kenyan youth were neither in school or working, and the informal sector accounts for nearly 80% of jobs. Despite the complex and unclear relationship between education and employment, post-basic education in youth polytechnics and skills development programs have been identified as potential solutions to employability challenges facing Kenya's youth. This paper identifies some of the possibilities and limitations of these reforms and of the broader "skills for jobs" discourse. The paper presents critiques and perceptions influencing recent post-basic education reforms, outlines factors in the economy and the non-economic environment which mediate the relationship between education and employment in Kenya, identifies tensions involved in efforts designed to prepare youth for informal sector employment and discusses two recent reforms designed to provide "skills for jobs."

Introduction

Governments in sub-Saharan Africa are under great pressure to expand access to post-basic education. Increased popular demand for post-basic education is fed by progress toward universal primary completion, growing youth populations and increased levels of household wealth in sub-Saharan Africa (UIS 2006; World Bank 2005). A doubling of the number of primary completers over the next decade is expected to further increase demand for post-basic education (Lewin 2008)[1]. Pressure to expand post-basic education also comes from the desire of governments to address broader economic and social issues.

[1] In 2009, GER for lower and upper secondary in sub-Saharan Africa was 43% and 27% respectively (UIS 2011).

Many countries face high levels of youth unemployment, lackluster economic growth, persistently high levels of poverty and inequality and perceived threats to country stability and social cohesion from youth who are in neither education nor employment. From this perspective, pressure to expand access to (and reform) post-basic education is part of a multi-sectoral policy response to the economic and social challenges represented by a growing number of youth.

These pressures co-exist with and influence a third concern, the perceived inadequacies of existing education systems. Historically, education has been recognized as the main channel through which individuals secure access to wage employment and join the middle and elite classes in most countries in sub-Saharan Africa. However, in the past decade, enrollment growth in post-basic education has far surpassed enrollment growth at tertiary institutions and job growth in the formal sector. Limited and increasingly competitive access to tertiary education and formal sector jobs and increasing joblessness among secondary and tertiary educated youth have led to some disillusion with the promise that education will lead to a better life (EDC 2009; Sivi-Njonjo and Mwangola 2011).

In the face of these multiple pressures, policymakers in countries with low to moderate access to post-basic education, face many choices, dilemmas and trade-offs. In considering policy options, countries are likely to revisit some basic assumptions which shape the goals of post-basic education. Some of these questions may include: What are the purposes of post-basic education? Which areas of learning or skills development should be prioritized? Who does (or should) make and influence education policy? What are the equity dimensions of different policy directions and education models?

The confluence of pressures described above has supported the emergence (some would say the re-emergence) of a "skills for jobs" construct in global and national education discourses. The "skills for jobs" idea draws on the assumptions of human capitol theory to answer normative questions on the purpose and content of education. The notion is that education should prioritize workforce development and economic growth objectives, and as such, should focus on the development of particular skills. The "skills for jobs" construct hypothesizes that increased skills will help address youth employment challenges and promote economic growth. Given low formal sector job growth over the past decade, the skills development discourse in sub-Saharan Africa often highlights post-basic education and skills development for employment and self-employment in the informal sector.

The "skills for jobs" argument is echoed in several recent reports and policies. The 2013 World Development Report and 2012 EFA Global Monitoring Report identify expanding and improving youth skills development as a critical priority for reducing youth unemployment and strengthening the economies of lower-middle income and lower income countries (World Bank 2012a; UNESCO 2012). In sub-Saharan Africa, several recent presidential campaigns (e.g. in Uganda, Kenya, Ghana) and conferences (e.g. ADEA 2008 and ADEA 2012) evidence the pressure on governments and the policy

community to expand access to and to improve the quality and relevance of post-basic education and training. In Kenya, pressure to expand and reform post-basic education and government interests in using skills development programs to help address issues of youth poverty, unemployment and inequality has led to several recent reform efforts intended to provide "skills for jobs."

Despite the complex and unclear relationship between education and informal employment, post-basic education in youth polytechnics and skills development programs have been identified as potential solutions to employability challenges facing Kenya's youth. This paper identifies some of the possibilities and limitations of these reforms and of the broader "skills for jobs" discourse. The paper presents critiques and perceptions influencing recent post-basic education reforms, outlines factors in the economy and the non-economic environment which mediate the relationship between education and employment in Kenya, identifies tensions involved in efforts designed to prepare youth for informal sector employment and discusses two recent reforms designed to provide "skills for jobs." While several authors (e.g. McGrath et al. 1994; Lauglo and McLean 2005) have written on the topic of education, skills development and the informal sector in Kenya, this paper identifies recent changes and reforms in the post-basic education and the labor market and offers preliminary discussion on non-economic factors which may also mediate skills utilization.

The next two sections lay out in more detail some possibilities and critiques of using a "skills for jobs" framework to inform education policy and offer some background on Kenya. The fourth section provides data on recent economic trends and the informal sector and discusses implications of directing youth toward informal labor. The fifth and sixth sections discuss youth perceptions of post-basic education and youth employment interests and provides background on two recent post-basic education reforms focusing on skills development and workforce preparation. Section seven provides a brief discussion on non-economic enabling environment factors likely to mediate skills utilization. The last section provides a brief summary discussion. Information used for this analysis include data from an extensive review of available literature, including recent labor market surveys and reviews of post-basic education and youth policy in Kenya; in-country interviews with staff involved in creating and implementing post-basic education policy and youth skills development programs; and secondary data collected from nine youth focus groups in Kenya[2].

Post-Basic Education and "Skills for Jobs"

Post-basic education occupies the space in between basic and tertiary education and can be assigned any (and several) of a large number of purposes. The 2007 World Development Report expects education to prepare youth for transition to further education

[2] This data from youth focus groups is discussed further in the penultimate section.

and training, the world of work and adult roles and responsibilities (World Bank 2006). A broader framework could draw on the Delors Report and suggest the following purposes of post-basic education: To share and create new knowledge and prepare youth for tertiary education; to support economic growth and improve individual employability and livelihood prospects; to develop and nurture identity (e.g. national/citizenship, cultural, religious), community and citizenship; to empower disadvantaged groups; to support other types of learning and human development including emotional and spiritual intelligence, learning habits, and proficiency in sports and the arts (UNESCO 1996; World Bank 2005)[3].

The intended purposes of education inform the design of learning environments and experiences, content presented and the skills developed. The landscape of post-basic education includes a diverse set of learning environments within and beyond formal schooling. Post-basic learning environments include secondary schools, vocational and technical schools, short-duration skills development courses, apprenticeships and other forms of casual labor. Curriculum and pedagogical practices among and within these different categories may vary greatly, as well as their credential value. The discourse on "skills for jobs" emphasizes the role of education in developing cognitive, non-cognitive and technical (or sector specific) skills –with an emphasis on the latter two skill categories. According to Adams (2011, p. 1), "cognitive skills are the basic mental abilities we use to think, study, and learn. …Non-cognitive skills in turn refer to personality traits and behaviors." Technical skills are skills geared toward a particular occupation[4].

A "skills for jobs" approach draws on some existing critiques of secondary education and offers a point of entry for reforming post-education curriculum and delivery. The secondary curriculum, with its focus on factual and academic knowledge and exam preparation, is perceived being out of date with the needs of the labor market. The structure of the curriculum and high rates of failure on secondary leaving exams in many countries systematically produce a large annual cadre of students classified as academic failures and poorly prepared to succeed in the world of work. To address these short-comings, a "skills for jobs" approach argues for revitalization or expansion of youth technical education, skills development, job-preparation and alternative education programs, increasing the priority placed on teaching non-cognitive skills and sector-specific technical skills and improving the relevance of education to the needs of the local employers (UNESCO 2012; World Bank 2012a).

However, a "skills for jobs" approach to education reform faces several critiques. King (2011) among others, recognizes that skills are not utilized in a vacuum, but rather require an enabling environment. The enabling (or disabling) environment may

[3] Education may also promote a hidden curriculum and /or reinforce social norms and structures which perpetuate differential treatment of groups and the reproduction of inequality.

[4] The skills lexicon has metastasized in the past two decades. A brief review of concepts used to frame skills include: behavioral, soft, employability, entrepreneurial, life, transferrable, 21st century and knowledge economy. Burnett and Jayaram (2012) provide a recent iteration of this discussion.

include factors in the local and national economy, differences between informal and formal sector labor markets, cultural practices, and inequality along social, economic or political dimensions. Skills utilization is mediated by several factors in the local enabling environment. According to King (2011, p. 2), factors influencing the utilization of skills in the labor market include, "the growth in the economy and availability of more and better employment opportunities; the advancement, accessibility and adoption of technological capabilities; the development of an equitable infrastructure for formal and informal enterprises; the presence of meritocratic access to both the formal and informal labour markets; and the availability of financial capital."

A "skills for jobs" lens does little to explain patterns of unemployment and poverty and is blind to the influence of historical inequalities and unequal power on access to employment and other social goods. Skills (or skills gaps) are but one of several variables explaining the persistence of unemployment, sluggish growth and economic and social inequality in Kenya. Finally, a "skills for jobs" construct narrows the construction of education to workforce development and thus severely limits the potential contribution of education to society.

Promoting skills development to prepare youth for informal sector employment also raises questions. Specifically, "What are we promoting when we promote education for informal labor?" With weak formal sector job growth in many countries, the informal sector has absorbed the majority of new workers. Free of regulations hindering formal sector growth, the informal sector has been characterized as innovative and entrepreneurial. However, informal and casual workers generally do not benefit from the rights and social protection available to formal sector workers (World Bank 2012b; Omolo 2010; MoYAS 2012). A "Skills for jobs" approach does not acknowledge that informal labor is unattractive to youth, nor does it work to change the conditions of work. The remainder of this paper considers these issues by reviewing recent changes in education and employment in Kenya. The next section provides some general background.

Background

Kenya has a young, ethnically diverse and predominately rural population. In the past two decades, the population in Kenya has nearly doubled, from 21.4 million people in 1989 to 39.1 million people in 2009. Seventy-five (75) percent of the population is rural. Kenya's youth (aged 15-34) account for 35% of the population. Sixty-one (61) percent of Kenya's youth live in rural areas (Sivi-Njonjo 2010).

A near majority of Kenyan households fall below the poverty line and the distribution of wealth is highly unequal. In 2005, 47% of the population in Kenya was living in poverty (KIHBS 2005/06, cited in World Bank 2008). Using KIHBS 2005/06 data, the World Bank (2008, p. 17) notes that "almost one out of every five Kenyans was in severe poverty, in that they could not meet the cost of a basic food bundle even if they spent their entire budget on food." Eighty-five percent of households living in poverty are

in rural areas and household consumption is highly unequal in both rural and urban areas.

Nearly 40% of youth (aged 15-34) in Kenya are in neither education nor employment. Unemployment among youth aged 15-24 stands at 25%, twice the national average. If unemployment and inactivity are combined, 38% of youth are neither in school nor working (Omolo 2010; MoYAS 2011). Unemployment not only contributes to material deprivation but also diminishes youth democratic participation and exacerbates vulnerability and exclusion (EDC 2009). Violence following the 2007 presidential election confirmed these fears. The Commission of Inquiry into Post-Election Violence identified unemployed and poor youth, many of whom were recruited for pay to join political campaigns and criminal gangs, as both the primary perpetrators and targets of the post-election violence (MoYAS 2011; EDC 2009). Following the post-election violence, issues of youth poverty and unemployment were identified as critical issues and led to a series of recent post-basic education reforms promoting "skills for jobs."

While Kenya is rapidly urbanizing, rural areas still account for the majority of the youth population and the preponderance of households living in poverty. High levels of youth unemployment, poverty and inequality have persisted over time, affect multiple dimensions of youth participation in society, and leave youth vulnerable to incentives and manipulation associated with criminality and violence. In order to understand education reforms designed to provide "skills for jobs," it is useful to discuss Kenya's economic and labor environment.

Skills, Jobs and the Informal Sector

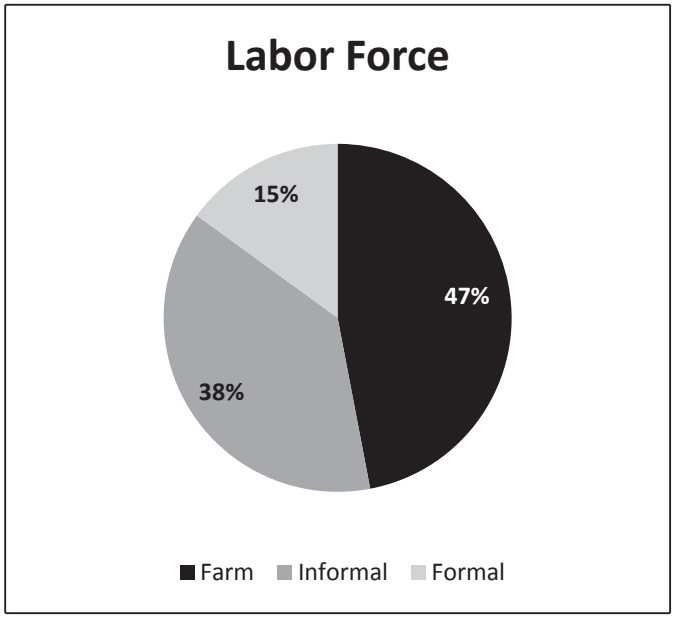
Every year over 500,000 youth leave basic and post-basic education and seek access to further education and training or employment (MoYAS 2012; Adams 2011). Constraints to accessing further education and training leave the majority of youth searching for work. This section discusses factors affecting unemployment and economic growth, provides data on labor market trends and the informal economic sector, and discusses the implications of directing youth toward informal sector labor. The informal sector is discussed for two reasons: (i) the informal and farm sectors account for 80% of the jobs in Kenya and have accounted for the majority of job-growth in the past decade, and (ii) the "skills for jobs" discourse often identifies non-agricultural self-employment, entrepreneurialism and small enterprise development as offering pathways out of poverty (see World Bank 2008; World Bank 2012b).

In Kenya high unemployment and lackluster economic growth are explained by several factors. Omolo (2010, p. 3) notes, "Kenya's unemployment is mainly attributed to the slow growth and weak labour absorptive capacity of the economy, mismatch in skills development and demand, imperfect information flow and inherent rigidities within the country's labour market." According to an Investment Climate Assessment, firms in Kenya identify tax and regulation, infrastructure services, corruption and cost of finance as greater constraints to growth than worker's skills (World Bank 2008). These factors,

among others, limit the absorption of job seekers into the labor market.

Kenya can be characterized as having a dual economy including a large and growing informal sector and a relatively small formal and modern jobs sector. The vast majority of Kenyan workers, including 90% of employed youth, work in the agricultural and non-farm informal sectors. In 2005, the labor force in Kenya had 10 million workers with the farm, informal non-farm and formal non-farm sectors accounting for 47%, 38% and 15% of the workforce, respectively (World Bank 2012b, using KIHBS 2005/2006 data) (see Figure 1). Distribution of employment among young workers (15-34) among the farm and informal non-farm sectors is 48% and 42% respectively (World Bank 2012b). The remaining 10% of youth are employed in the formal non-farm sector[5].

Figure 1: Share of Kenyan Labor Force by Occupation



Informal workers are defined as non-wage workers (own account workers, working employers, unpaid family workers), apprentices, and self-employed workers. World Bank (2012b) in a review of KIHBS 2005/06 data considered workers' status by looking at answers to four questions

(i) Participants' reported status (informal or formal),
(ii) Participants' employment status (wage employment, self-employed, unpaid family workers, apprentices, paid employees in the jua kali sector),
(iii) Employers registration status (whether the participant's employer was

[5] These percentages are collapsed from a range. Actual figures may vary by +/-2%.

registered with the Registrar of Companies) and

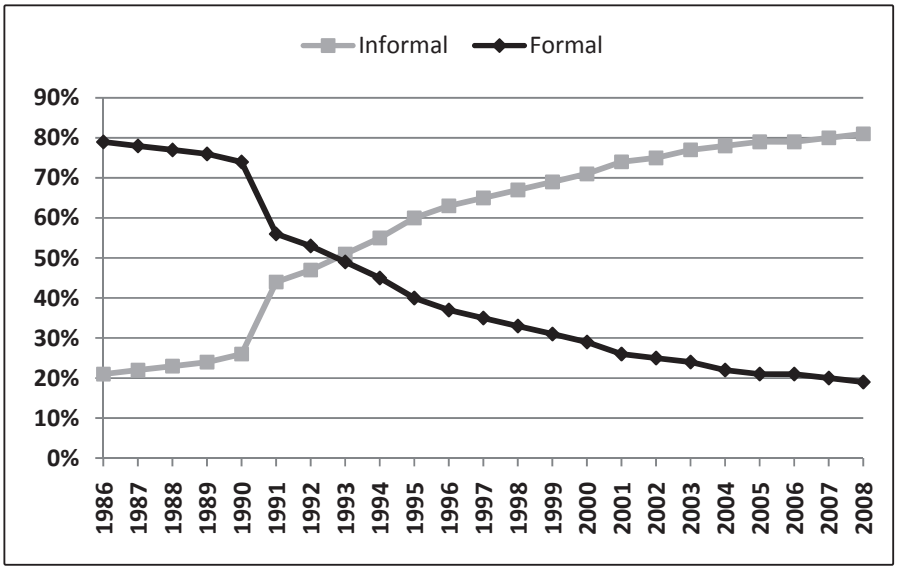
(iv) Firm size (does the firm have more than 10 employees).

Depending on the lens used, the informal sector accounted for a 61% - 66% share of total non-farm workers in 1999. The definition used in the World Bank analysis of 2005 KIBHS data hews closely to the second bullet, participant's employment status.

The informal sector has realized extraordinary growth in the past two decades and accounts for the majority of jobs (56%) in rural areas. Figure 2 identifies the share of jobs in the informal and formal sectors over two decades. In 1986, the formal sector accounted for 79% of jobs while the remaining 21% of workers were employed in the informal sector. In 2008, the formal sector accounted for 20% of jobs while the remaining 80% of workers were employed in the informal sector[6]. During the same period, the number of workers increased six-fold, from 1.5 million workers to 9.9 million workers (Sivi-Njonjo 2010). Omolo (2010, p.9) notes:

This period of rapid growth in informal employment in Kenya (1991 onwards) coincided with the period when the Kenyan labour market started suffering formal sector employment losses triggered by liberalization policies, renewed government strategy towards promotion of growth and development of the informal and jua kali[7] sector (1992), and broadening of the definition and more consistent capturing of informal sector data in the national statistics.

Figure 2: Share of Jobs by Informal and Formal Sector Classification (1986-2008)

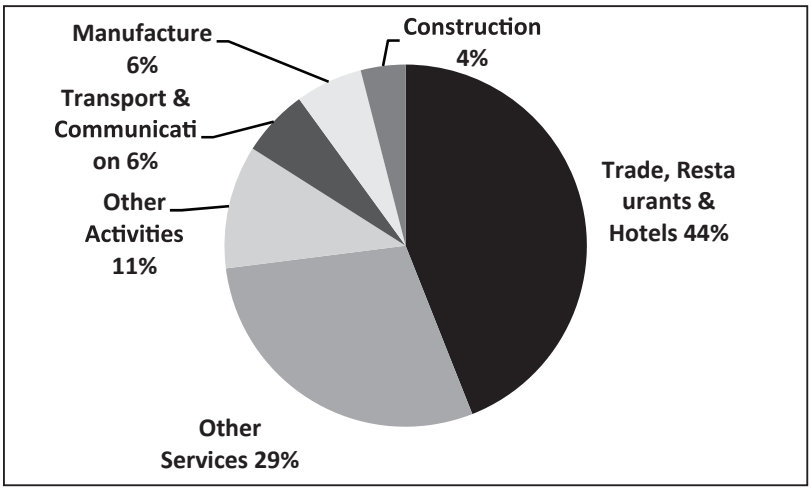


[6] Omolo includes both farm and informal non-farm workers in his figure for informal sector workers.

[7] *Jua kali* includes "artisanal makers in the informal sector who produce consumer and capital goods under minimal regulation and protection from the government, (King, 1996, cited in Daniels 2010).

Service jobs account for the majority of work in the informal sector. Figure 3 shows distribution of employment in the informal sector (World Bank 2012b). Trade, restaurants and hotels and other services account for 44% and 29% of non-farm informal sector jobs, respectively. Manufacturing and construction account for 10% of jobs. The structure of the informal sector points to numerous possibilities for skills development programs. Notably, several jobs in the formal sector (e.g. trade, transport, building, agriculture) correspond with the jobs in the informal sector which suggests that workers in the informal sector can transition to formal sector work.

Figure 3: Distribution of Employment in the Informal Sector(2005/2006)



An increase in the share of informal and casual labor over the past two decades has increased the uncertainty Kenyan workers face in securing predictable employment and livelihood. The number of "casual workers" in wage employment has increased from 18 per cent in 2000 to 30 per cent in 2010. Omolo (2010, p. 13) notes,

> Most employers in Kenya, including the public sector ones have resorted to the increasing use of casual, temporary, part-time, contract, sub-contracted and outsourced workforces to ostensibly reduce labour costs, achieve more flexibility in management and exert greater levels of control over labour.
>
> …Overall, the casual relationships between employers and workers have impaired labour relations, eroded worker protection and transferred additional responsibilities, such as social and trade union protection, job security, and wage negotiations to the worker. This leads to lack of motivation and increases shirking, which decreases effort. This could partly explain the persistently low levels of labour productivity,

low enterprise competitiveness and the slow economic growth rates in Kenya.

In a speech on youth employment in Kenya, the Minister for Youth Affairs and Sports notes that casual workers often do not have access to "freedom of association and collective bargaining, right to paid leave, and the right to social protection as provided under the National Social Security Fund and the National Hospital Insurance Fund" (MoYAS 2011, p. 7).

Given the some of the attributes of informal sector labor, it is worth asking, "What are we promoting when we promote education for informal labor?" To what extent is policy supporting skills development for informal sector work improving livelihoods or perpetuating economic and social inequality? If the majority of labor in the informal sector remains an insecure means of livelihood with low pay and poor benefits compared to formal sector employment, then we should not be surprised if youth continue to compete heavily for limited formal sector jobs.

In considering the above questions, it is useful to recognize that the distinction of work as "formal" and "informal" is a social construct, a matter of definition and government regulation. Rights and benefits (e.g. access to publicly-funded health insurance and social security) associated with formal sector jobs represent political and public policy decisions, not intrinsic features of formal sector work. Improving social protection could increase the attractiveness of informal sector employment to youth. However, absent improvements in workers' rights and social protection, skills development promoting informal sector employment may do little to increase the attractiveness of work in the informal sector.

Before concluding, it is important to note that "governments can draw on a range of tools to boost the retention of existing jobs and the creation of new jobs as the economy slows down," Ernst (2012, p. 13). Policies supporting job retention and job growth include increasing direct hiring by the government, providing fiscal stimulus to boost aggregate demand, providing subsidies to boost private sector hiring, expanding the monetary base for improved liquidity or making changes to trade policy to strengthen job retention. Put another way, "skills development" is but one of several strategies to meet job retention and creation objectives.

This section identifies lack of skills development as one of several factors contributing to unemployment and sluggish economic growth. It also notes trends and characteristics of the labor market. While the informal sector has absorbed the majority of new workers over the past two decades, the conditions of informal sector work are likely to be unattractive to most job seekers. The unattractiveness of informal sector work to youth is echoed reinforced in the following section. Subsequent discussion will look at post-basic education and youth to discuss criticisms of the current education system, youth employment interests and recent reforms in two skills development programs.

Youth Perceptions of Skills Development and Informal Labor

There is a long history, internationally and in Kenya, of resistance to supporting youth technical and vocational education (McGrath et al. 1994; Lauglo and McLean 2005). Secondary schools in Kenya are identified as privileging knowledge associated with formal sector work over that associated with work in the informal sector. This sentiment is echoed by data identifying youth employment interests. In both cases, there is a strong bias against agricultural work and jua kali employment. However, with secondary schools increasingly unable to facilitate student access to further study and wage employment, there is some evidence of the increased value youth are placing on skills development and technical education.

The elite model of secondary education, developed during the colonial era, provided secondary access to a small number of pupils. In this system, success in secondary education often led to tertiary access and the guarantee of wage employment. Sivi-Njonjo and Mwangola (2011) note, in the dominant model of education, success is defined by securing a good (e.g. formal sector) job and is mediated through an "exam-driven" culture. Increased participation in secondary education combined with limited access to tertiary education and low formal sector job growth have severely compromised the elite model: success in post-basic education is increasingly unable to facilitate student access to further study and wage employment. Instead, the majority of secondary leavers transition directly into the world of informal, casual or part-time labor. EDC (2009, p. 41) notes, "the education system raises expectations, leading school leavers to disdain agricultural work, without providing the knowledge, skills, and disposition to seek livelihood through enterprise and self-employment."

A 2003 survey completed by the Institute for Economic Affairs, a think tank based in Nairobi finds that youth skills development and employment interests do not align well with existing labor possibilities (see Figures 1 and 3). Forty-one (41) percent of youth preferred to work in the services, 25% in enterprise, 14% in social service, 7% in industry and 6% in public service. While the near majority of the labor force in Kenya is employed in the agricultural sector, only 5% of the youth in the 2003 survey, indicated an interest in working in agriculture. One stakeholder working on the reform of Youth Polytechnics notes that, "the majority of youth see agricultural work as punishment."

There is some, albeit limited data, that perceptions of youth polytechnics many be changing and of the possibilities of technical training to lead to employment – especially in rural areas. Ohba (2011) finds such evidence in a study of the impact of secondary school fee abolition in rural areas. The majority of families participating in the study were employed in subsistence agriculture and lived in areas with few formal employment opportunities. Ohba finds many primary leavers identifying technical and vocational training as a more promising route to securing a livelihood than secondary. Over 50% of the participants in the Ohba study opted to attend youth polytechnics and made the decision after receiving secondary school admission letters. One study participant notes, "If

you go to polytechnic, you can get a job immediately after you complete the course. But it is difficult for secondary leavers: I've seen such people around here. They either go to a polytechnic course or help at home," (Ohba 2011, p. 407).

In tracing a random sample of 110 youth polytechnic graduates, Kinyanjui notes, "PGs [polytechnic graduates] have a niche in the rural labour market …with regard to the spatial dimension of the labour markets, the graduates are employed or self-employed in small towns within the study area or in villages," (Kinyanjui 2007, p. 55). Recent enrollment growth in public and privately run polytechnic schools and technical training institutes also point to the value households place on technical education.

As discussed here, youth prefer academic secondary education and formal sector employment. A "skills for jobs" lens identifies the elite secondary model as out of step enrollment pressures and the changing economy and argues for increased focus on skills development relevant to the world of work. While limited, some studies point to a niche role for youth polytechnics related to their historical mission of rural development. However, changing youth perceptions about skills development related to informal and agricultural employment appear to be a steep hurdle to increasing interest in youth polytechnic education.

Recent Skills Development Reforms in Post-Basic Education

Recent reforms in secondary education and youth polytechnic institutions and the development of short-course skills training programs reflect pressure to expand post-basic education and provide "skills for jobs." In addition to labor market factors, MoYAS (2012) and Omolo (2010) identify the following as barriers to youths' successful entry into the labor market in Kenya: youth skill deficiencies (sector specific skills and soft skills), mismatch between youth employment expectations and employment opportunities, weak links between education and employment, a weak entrepreneurship culture and unequal opportunities (MoYAS 2012; Omolo 2010). Recent reforms in youth polytechnic and short course programs prioritize youth development of sector-specific technical skills and are designed to support participant transition to the world of work. Short course programs discussed in this paper also emphasize pupil development of non-cognitive skills and target enrolment of marginalized and disadvantaged youth.

In the last five years, the Government of Kenya has abolished secondary schools fees and supported a large scale revitalization and reform of youth polytechnics. During this period, secondary school enrollment has doubled to reach 1.4 million pupils while youth polytechnic enrollment has increased three-fold to reach 75,000 youth. The past five years has also seen implementation of several short-course skills development programs. The short-course programs discussed here seek to provide unemployed and otherwise disadvantaged youth with short-duration skills training and internships to support their transition to employment. Skills development reforms emerged, in part, as a response to high unemployment and the youth violence following the 2007 presidential election.

Youth polytechnics are post-basic vocational and skills development institutions which operate under the authority of the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (MoYAS). Youth polytechnics emerged from the village polytechnic system which was created following Kenya's independence with a mission to support rural development. The vast majority of the 800 youth polytechnics operate in rural areas. Described as moribund in 2005, youth polytechnics have undergone a curriculum revision, massive expansion of infrastructure, and provided extensive professional development support to youth polytechnic instructors[8]. The new curriculum follows a two-year course: one year of study and training, one semester of attachment (an internship with a private employer) and one semester of exam preparation[9]. Exams in the new curriculum emphasize trainee demonstration of technical skills and allow for graduate transition to tertiary education or the world of work.

MoYAS has realized progress in a number of areas, but has also identified factors constraining the capacity of youth polytechnics to meet skills development objectives. In 2007, as a result of MoYAS negotiation with the Ministry of Finance, youth polytechnic students gained access to a Youth Polytechnic Tuition subsidy of 15,000 Kenyan Shillings per trainee per year. MoYAS has made improving youth perceptions around agriculture and agri-business as a high priority: A recent MoYAS partnership with Amiran, a greenhouse company, has seen increasing the number of youth interested in agriculture as a business and enterprise opportunity[10]. As for constraints, a survey completed by MoYAS in 2012 identifies generally low qualifications of youth polytechnic instructors and limited amount of modern equipment as critical barriers to meeting skills development objectives. MoYAS (2012) also finds that most youth polytechnic activities are delinked from the community and the private sector and that industrial attachments are haphazard and too short. MoYAS plans to implement tracer studies to track graduates' entry into the world of work and/or further education and training in the near future.

Short-courses offer a short-period (e.g. a few months) of training on non-cognitive and sector-specific skills with an internship under a professional supervisor or master crafts person. Programs emphasize partnerships with businesses in the formal and informal sectors and, in the two programs reviewed, suggest the possibility of targeting enrollment of marginalized populations. The Kenya Youth Empowerment Project (KYEP),

[8] The recent youth polytechnic reform is based on the National Technical Industrial and Vocational Education and Training (TIVET) policy framework of Sessional Paper No.1 of 2005 (MoYAS 2011).

[9] The youth polytechnic curriculum is comprised of twelve subjects: Agro-Business Development; Building Technology; Carpentry and Joinery; Electrical and Electronics Technology; Fashion Design and Garment Making Technology; Food Processing Technology; Hair Dressing and Beauty Therapy; Information Communication Technology; Leatherwork Technology; Metal Processing Technology; Motor Vehicle Technology and Refrigeration and Air Conditioning) and offers a general education stream (MoYAS 2011).

[10] Stakeholders at MoYAS and KEPSA indicated that as the majority of farmers in Kenya are more than 50 years old, youth skills programs should include support for developing the next generation of farmers and agri-business entrepreneurs.

implemented by the Kenya Private Sector Alliance (KEPSA) and funded by the World Bank, and the CAP-Youth Empowerment Institute (CAP-YEI), implemented by the CAP Workforce Development Institute and funded by the MasterCard Foundation, are two examples of short course skills development programs[11].

Both KYEP and CAP-YEI operate small scale skills-development programs in urban and peri-urban areas and target enrollment of marginalized youth[12]. Programs operate on a six-month schedule in which three months of training are followed by a three month internship. KYEP participants receive two weeks of life skills training, five weeks of core business training and a variable amount of sector specific training. Life skills training seeks to develop participant work-relevant attitudes, self-confidence, self-awareness and improve personal management and goal setting skills. Participants in the micro and small enterprise development course receive an additional three weeks of entrepreneurship training. CAP-YEI training includes content on job market skills, life skills, savings education and small business development support followed by a three-month internship. Technical training areas include micro and small enterprise development; hospitality, retail, automobile, agriculture and logistics. Based on the availability of internships, CAP-YEI recently expanded training to include courses on industrial garment manufacturing and electronics[13]. Sixty percent of KYEP participants enroll in the course on micro and small enterprise development. For the internship, participants are matched with a mentor who is often a master craftsman and a member of a jua kali association. In KYEP, master craftsmen mentors receive training on mentoring, pedagogy and business skills[14]. For internships, KYEP provides stipends of 6,000 shillings a month for interns and 3,000 shillings per month for employers. To support participant transition to employment, CAP-YEI offers pre- and post-job placement counseling and support.

KEPSA staff identified as valuable program elements youth's development of life skills, work ethic (by being at the work site) and the internship (bridging the gap between the youth and the employer). Initial observations of the CAP-YEI program indicate

[11] The Kenya Private Sector Alliance is a member organization representing the private sector at the national level and is responsible for implementing KYEP. World Bank (2012b) and Adam (2012) offer examples of other skills development programs operating in Kenya.

[12] To identify participants, KEPSA used the following criteria: Applicants must be (i) 15-29 years old, (ii) have been out of school for one year, (iii) be considered "at-risk," (iv) have a minimum of eight years of formal education and (v) be an unemployed Kenyan citizen. CAP-YEI targets 17 to 25 year old marginalized urban and suburban youth from slums. This group includes dropouts, young women, underemployed youth, internally displaced youth and migrants with a combined skill deficit profile (work skill deficits and self-management skills).

[13] KEPSA provides training in the following sectors: energy, finance, ICT, manufacturing, micro and small enterprise development and tourism. CAP-YEI sector training areas include Hospitality, Retail, Automobile, Entrepreneurship Development, Agriculture & Floriculture, and Logistics. MoYAS (2012) finds that additional courses in which youth would be interested include Kienyeji (indigenous) chicken rearing, fish farming, greenhouse farming, bee keeping, garbage collection and recycling.

[14] World Bank (2012b) suggests that improving the teaching and mentoring skills of master craftsmen mentors is an important part of supporting skills development in the informal sector.

that the program helps marginalized youth become less shy and develop more courage and drive in pursuing employment. Both KEPSA and CAP-YEI are in the process of evaluating participants development of skills and transition to employment or further education and training.

Recent skills development reforms reflect a number of choices and possibilities for post-basic education. Additional discussion on skills development and equity follows.

Short-course programs focus on helping participants develop non-cognitive and sector-specific technical skills, with an emphasis on the former. Interviews with MoYAS, KEPSA and CAP-YEI all indicated the importance of youth acquisition of life skills and business/employability skills. Some of the skills identified include work habits and attitudes, self-confidence, self-awareness and improve personal management and goal setting skills. One stakeholder from KEPSA noted that in addition to strengthening youth skillsets for employability, there is a need to change youth mindsets so youth learn "to appreciate the opportunities around them." The extent to which development of non-cognitive skills are integrated into youth polytechnic curriculum is unclear. A skills gap analysis conducted by MoYAS in 2012 indicated that youth polytechnic graduates do not have sufficient training in "soft" skills, including business management, communication, customer care and social skills.

Youth polytechnic and short-course programs also focus on pupil development of sector-specific skills or enterprise development. The extent to which course offerings are supply- or demand-driven and relevant to the local economy is unclear, however, it is likely that youth polytechnics have less flexibility in changing and updating courses, as curriculum must past through several stages of quality assurance. Survey data from youth polytechnic trainees, graduates and employers, identify important skills gaps as the capacity of YP graduates to use modern machines, equipment and tools, trade knowledge and practical exposure to the world of work (MoYAS 2012)[15]. Similar data for short course programs was not accessed.

Recent expansion and reform of post-basic schooling represents a significant policy step and financial commitment by the government of Kenya. However, as 50% of secondary-school aged youth do not have access to post-basic education, an equity lens and a "skills for jobs" lens suggest further expanding access to skills development. For formal education programs, the financial and opportunity costs of attendance may continue to exclude youth form the poorest households. Kinyanjui (2007) finds that youth from poor households were less likely than their peers from moderate-SES households to enroll in youth polytechnics and secure employment following graduation. In terms

[15] While the majority of youth express negative perceptions of agriculture, MoYAS (2012) finds that additional courses in which youth would be interested include Kienyeji (indigenous) chicken rearing, fish farming, greenhouse farming, bee keeping, garbage collection and recycling. This review does not provide extensive discussion on skills. What types of skills should every youth polytechnic trainee develop? To what extent should trainee interest and local context influence YP and short course development of cognitive, non-cognitive and technical skills?

of opportunity cost, the two-year duration of youth polytechnic courses is seen by many youth, researchers and educators as longer than required for students to develop desired competencies (MoYAS 2012; Kinyanjui 2007). Short-course programs suggest one possibility to reduce the opportunity cost of skills development training.

Skills development also takes places outside of formal education. King (2011) and Adams (2011) identify opportunities for skills development in the context of increasing use of casual labor and the World Bank (2012b) estimates that the jua kali sector may host as many as 180,000 youth apprentices. King (2011, p.7) argues "it will be important to get behind the rhetoric of skills for poverty reduction and growth …to recognize how particular cultures and traditions of work (e.g. casual labor) are already deeply affecting the poorest and most vulnerable young people."

As discussed here, these programs point to the influence and possibilities of a "skills for jobs" focus in education. Earlier sections identified factors contributing to unemployment and low growth in Kenya, characteristics of the informal sector and informal sector employment, youth education and employment interests and critiques of the secondary education. However non-economic factors may also mediate the utilization of skills in the labor market.

Other Enabling Environment Factors

The economic, labor and educational context should be considered when analyzing the possibilities and limitations of a "skills for jobs" approach to education reform. However, it is also likely that many non-economic factors mediate the relationship between skills and employment. Discussion in this section draws on data from focus groups where Kenyan youth identified factors which would shape the future of Kenya. While the data do not explicitly state that identified factors mediate skills utilization, they point to limitations in a "skills for jobs" framework and suggest a need to have a broader expectation of post-basic education.

Following the 2007 post-election violence, the Institute for Economic Affairs organized a "youth futuring" exercise where youth focus groups answered the question, "How will youth shape the future of Kenya?" The Kenya Youth Scenarios (KEYS) exercise collected data from youth focus groups in each of Kenya's nine provinces. Youth were presented with data in fourteen areas (e.g. culture, governance, agriculture, education, the economy) and asked to identify key drivers of the future and develop scenarios for what Kenya might look like in 2030 (Sivi-Njonjo and Mwangola 2011).

Factors youth identified as shaping the future of Kenya include high levels of poverty and inequality, ineffective governance structures and high levels of corruption at the local and national levels, ethnic discrimination and conflict and ongoing tension over land tenure and land reform (MoYAS 2011; Sivi-Njonjo & Mwangola 2011; MoYAS 2012; World Bank 2008). Many of the issues raised point to historical and structural inequalities and unequal political power. While the majority of focus groups identified

education as important to future development, disillusion with education was also evident. Education was identified as being without values and no longer translating into a better life.

Concern over corruption, political patronage and equal participation in the political system and government institutions was echoed in all KEYS focus groups. EDC (2009, p. 4) corroborates these concerns noting, "youth feel acutely disempowered by existing governance councils and procedures, where they often have only a token representation, and where policies are not implemented as stated due to a high level of corruption." Corruption and patronage in the political system, widely seen as divided along ethnic lines, is seen as a critical hindrance to country human and economic development (World Bank 2008). The investment climate assessment identified these same issues, corruption and regulation, as contributing to unemployment and lackluster economic growth.

Youth focus participants in four provinces (i.e. Nyanza, Rift Valley, Coast and Northeastern) identified land reform and agricultural matters as critical issues facing economic growth, poverty reduction and participation. The N'dungu Commission Report, based on a commission of inquiry on "Illegal and Irregular Allocations of Public Lands" notes, "Land retains a focal point in Kenya's history. It was the basis upon which the struggle for independence was waged. It has traditionally dictated the pulse of our nationhood. It continues to command a pivotal position in the country's social, economic, political and legal relations" (N'Dungu Commission, quoted. in World Bank 2008, p. 107). Notably, land inequality in most parts of Kenya has increased over the past decade (World Bank 2008). Two scenarios developed by the Rift Valley KEYS focus group identify how factors of ethnicity, governance and land reform could shape the future of the Rift Valley province.

> Bandaptai is a scenario where communal land injustices are addressed through comprehensive land reforms, ending communal grievances. Land is eventually privately owned on the basis of willing buyer, willing seller. Adoption of modern technological farming methods and agro-processing, lead to high productivity, high profit margins and improved quality of life. There is also stability and security due to resolved historical land issues.

> Bogoria is a story of very slow growth as a result of ethnic dominance in the private ownership of land. Other communities not considered indigenous are excluded causing inter and intra ethnic divisions that results to mass exodus and increased numbers of internally displaced persons. Political zoning escalates increasing the number of vigilante groups that are formed to protect communal interests. Government institutions protect certain interests, alienating others hence slowed productivity leading to a food crisis in the country (Sivi-Njonjo and Mwangola

2011, p. 41)[16].

The above scenarios identify the complex social milieu in which a "skills for jobs" paradigm would operate. Historical patterns of land ownership, class and ethnically based grievances, and untrustworthy governance structures and political process all impact the extent to which modern farming methods can be introduced and succeed. Youth polytechnic focus on agribusiness development identifies a critical need; however, the KEYS critique leads one to wonder whether improving youth skills is more important than land reform. What good are skills (for jobs) if the majority of the population does not have access to sufficient land, capital and credit? What is the likelihood that expansion of skills development programs in agribusiness will result in the creation of more and better jobs than comprehensive land reform?

Identity, by ethnic affiliation and gender, further shapes the enabling environment described by youth[17].Youth in focus groups from Northeastern and Coast Provinces indicated that they feel marginalized by the central government. Sivi-Njonjo and Mwangola (2011, p. 28), paraphrase sentiments of the Northeastern focus group thusly, "we experience constant harassment and discrimination especially from the Kenyan police who often label us as foreigners mainly because they cannot differentiate between Kenyan Somalis and Somalis from Somalia." Perceptions offered by a focus group from Central province identify ethnic tension and feelings of mistrust from Kikuyu youth. "We feel like we have to pay the price for Kikuyu [political] dominance in the country. In fact, we feel that the problem of illicit brew [alcoholic beverages] in central province is a deliberate attempt to reduce Kikuyu dominance," (Sivi-Njonjo and Mwangola 2011, p. 32).

Gender constructs and expectations influence the education and labor possibilities and the political participation of women (Sivi-Njonjo and Mwangola 2011). Women have lower access to secondary and tertiary education and formal sector employment than men. The gendered nature of the youth polytechnic course enrollment and of the labor market is evidenced in other studies (World Bank 2008). Though disaggregated data are difficult to come by, several sources suggest that the majority of polytechnic trainees are male. The majority of female youth polytechnic trainees are enrolled in fashion and design, garment making, catering and ICT while male trainees dominate engineering related trades such as motor vehicle and electrical engineering and welding trades (MoYAS 2012). In terms of political participation, women in the Western Province focus group noted:

> As young women of this area, we feel particularly disadvantaged by certain cultural practices that hinder us from political participation. Traditionally, we do not have a

[16] Bandap is a Kalenjin word meaning journey and Tai means ahead. The phrase is used here to mean 'a journey to prosperity'. Bogoria Is a name of a place in Kenya with hot water springs due to volcanic geysers.

[17] Kenya's population by ethnic group is Kikuyu 22%, Luhya 14%, Luo 13%, Kalenjin 12%, Kamba 11%, Kisii 6%, Meru 6%.

> youth identity because when we are unmarried, the community views us as children who cannot 'address' elders and ask for votes. When we get married, young women 'belong' to their husbands. We are no longer youth but adults. We therefore cannot vie for political seats on a youth ticket even when we are within that age bracket (Sivi-Njonjo and Mwangola 2011, p. 36).

Ethnic and gender identity are freighted with historical and cultural meaning, identified with particular labor and political affiliations and provide differential access to political, cultural, educational and economic relationships and networks. These differences in social and cultural capital suggest the possibility of ethnic and gender identity as factors mediating the relationship between skills and employment.

The limitations of a "skills for jobs" approach, as indicated by the above issues, also point to a broader mission for post-basic education. Though writing about schooling in Ghana, Sefa Dei (2006) notes that many teachers view students as "disembodied youth," and avoid discussion of ethnicity, language and social class at school. Sefa Dei argues that teachers avoid these issues in order to avoid the conflict and because modern education is seen by teachers as a technical enterprise–focused on subject content such as mathematics or English. Education could, instead, be identified as intimately connected to youths' social and cultural lives, their transition to adult roles and responsibilities and their experiences of living and working in a diverse and socially constructed community and nation.

Discussion

Pressure to expand and reform post-basic education returns us to a fundamental question: What is the purpose of education? From this starting point, we can ask other questions: What knowledge and skills should education disseminate and develop? Who does (or should) make and influence education policy? What are the equity dimensions of different education policies and models? In the majority of countries in sub-Saharan Africa, policy-makers face pressure to expand access to post-basic education to accommodate increased demand for education and pressure to reform post-basic education based on the expectation that skills development will lead to more jobs, less poverty and inequality and strengthened economic growth.

This paper identifies some of the limitations and possibilities of the "skills for jobs" discourse and analyses this discourse with reference to the economy, the broader enabling environment and two recent reforms designed to provide "skills for jobs" in Kenya.

The discussion on the economy and informal labor identifies several factors other than skills, which contribute to high unemployment and sluggish economic growth. Recognizing slow job growth in the wage sector, the "skills for jobs" discourse highlights the possibility of non-agricultural self-employment in contributing to growth and providing a pathway out of poverty. However, while the informal sector has grown to

account for 80% of the available jobs in Kenya, the conditions of informal sector work are likely to be unattractive to most job seekers. Banerjee and Duflo (2011, p. 233-234) put the matter another way, noting:

> There are more than a billion people who run their own farm or business, but most of them do this because they have no other options. … we are kidding ourselves if we think that they [small enterprises] can pave the way for a mass exit from poverty.

If informal sector labor remains an insecure means of livelihood with low pay and poor benefits compared to formal sector employment, we should not be surprised if youth continue to compete heavily for limited formal sector jobs.

This paper identifies criticisms of the current education system, youth educational and employment interests and recent reforms in two skills development programs. Historically, success on the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education was seen at the gateway to further education and wage employment. However given the limited number of secondary leavers accessing tertiary education and wage employment, "skills for jobs" critics argue for increasing the relevance of secondary and post-basic education to workforce needs. In the push toward alternative models and different types of skills, it is worth asking why not implement these reforms in secondary schools (which account for over 90% post-basic enrollment in sub-Saharan Africa and in Kenya)?

Reformed youth polytechnics and new short course programs seek to prepare participants for entry into the workforce and prioritize development of sector-specific and non-cognitive skills. These trends merit some mention of cognitive and non-cognitive skills. First, to what extent should development of cognitive skills be de-emphasized? What is the rationale for de-emphasizing such skills? Development of higher order thinking skills (as defined in Bloom's revised taxonomy) is not part of on in the "skills for jobs" discourse. Why? The emphasis the "skills for jobs" discourse places on non-cognitive skills is likely to offer several important evaluative opportunities.

Given interest in stemming urbanization and the fact that the majority of youth and households living in poverty are based in rural areas, youth polytechnics could play potentially important role in leading rural development in Kenya. A participatory poverty assessment identified the following main factors contributing to rural poverty: limited employment opportunities, health factors, demographic realities, and land pressures and unanticipated shocks such as drought, theft and loss of property. In the same study, factors rural households identified as helping them escape poverty include diversification of off farm income sources (e.g. developing a small business), diversification of farm incomes (diversification of crops or livestock); improvement in farming practice (e.g. commercializing farm production); and social support (World Bank 2008).These issues suggest a number of possibilities for education within and beyond a "skills for jobs" paradigm. Youth polytechnics have historically focused on rural development and show potential to again play this role.

The short-term and demand-driven nature of short courses comes with benefits and drawbacks. The four-year and two-year full-time curricula offered by secondary and youth polytechnic schools respectively present a high opportunity cost to youth from low-SES households. Short-term and flexible short courses reduce this cost considerably. Given the large number of out-of-school youth in Kenya, increasing access to post-basic education through short-courses may be recognized as worthwhile if such access improves youth transition to employment. However, recognizing that such programs may also be designed with the intent of reaching youth from low-SES households or disadvantaged groups, it may be worth asking some critical questions: Are marginalized youth expected to learn a different set of skills or be exposed to different types of knowledge compared to youth enrolled in secondary schools?

High levels of poverty and inequality, ineffective governance structures and high levels of corruption at the local and national levels, ethnic discrimination and conflict and ongoing tension over land tenure and land reform were identified by KEYS focus groups as factors likely to shape the future of Kenya. Such challenges suggest a need for an educational vision broader than that expressed in the "skills for jobs" discourse and requiring expression in all forms of post-basic education. However, education which seeks to overcome these challenges and inequalities is, in many ways, at odds with education privileging the status quo: the success of some pupils and workers in the existing social, educational and employment context. This issue returns us to an important criticism of the "skills for jobs" education agenda: its political neutrality suggests that unequal power is not a hindrance to reducing youth unemployment, poverty and inequality.

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