

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.

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