



LABOUR MARKET  
INTELLIGENCE PARTNERSHIP

# Skills for Work and Life: Towards a Transformative Approach



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# The Return of Skills and Work to the Development Agenda

- ❖ WDR on Jobs
- ❖ GMR and UNESCO WTR on Skills
- ❖ McKinsey and OECD on manufacturing, skills and employment
- ❖ Youth unemployment crisis
- ❖ Post-2015 debate and acceptance of limitations of MDG approach
- ❖ see – (<http://norrage.wordpress.com>)

## Thinking more Radically about Skills and Work

- ❖ Skills must be closely related to work but both need to be reconceptualised

## Existing VET Orthodoxy

- ❖ Human Capital
- ❖ Productivism
- ❖ Employability
- ❖ Rates of Return
- ❖ Critiques of Public VET
- ❖ VET Toolkit

## Productivism

- ❖ 1. training leads to productivity, leads to economic growth (training for growth);
- ❖ 2. skills lead to employability, lead to jobs (skills for work).

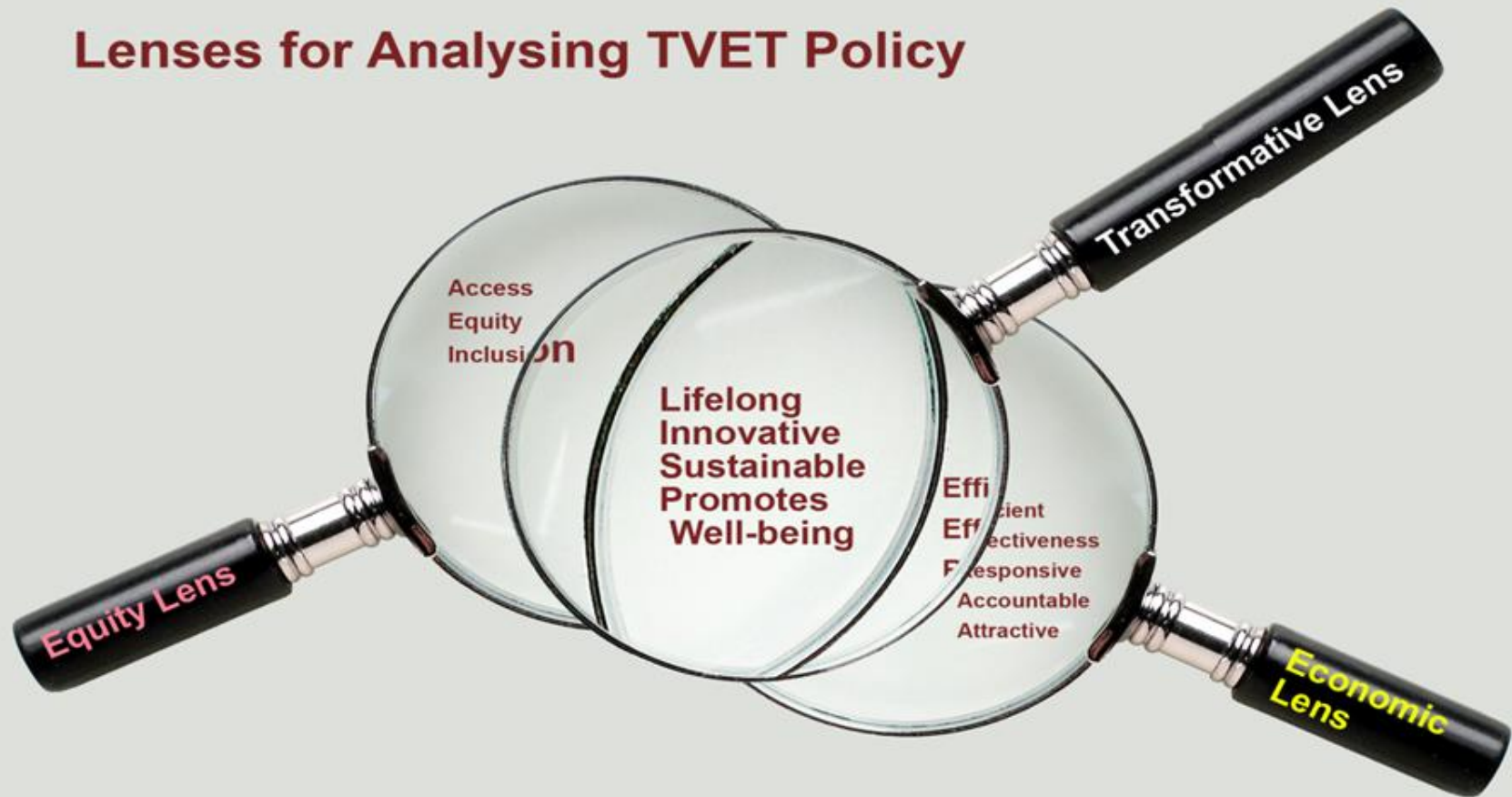
(cf. Giddens 1994; Anderson 2003)

## Employability

- ❖ Orthodoxy uses an Anglo-American Initiative Employability vision rather than a Continental Interactive Employability approach (Gazier 1999)
- ❖ Latter stresses broader political economy as well as role of individual

# UNESCO's Three Skills Lenses

## Lenses for Analysing TVET Policy



## A New, Broader Notion of VET

- ❖ Vocational learning is something we all do
- ❖ It takes place in homes, communities, workplaces, educational institutions, etc.
- ❖ It is informal, non-formal and formal
- ❖ It can take place throughout lifetimes
- ❖ It is not confined to any level of education
- ❖ Radically different from views of Ministries of Education





## A Rights-Based Perspective on VET

- ❖ All of Tomasevski's 4 As can be applied to VET:
  - ❖ availability of provision at the systemic level;
  - ❖ access in practice;
  - ❖ acceptability in terms of quality, process and content; and
  - ❖ adaptability to the needs of individuals and groups.
- ❖ Possibilities of a vision of vocational learning for all based on a realisation of the multiple forms of vocational learning that individuals do and could access AND on a rights-based commitment to acceptability and adaptability



## VET and Sustainability

- ❖ VET orthodoxy's roots in productivism mean that it is not attuned to sustainability issues
- ❖ Recent rise of “green skills”
- ❖ Need to go beyond this to think of VET that is sustainable and sustainability-enhancing across social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainability



## VET and the Capabilities Approach

- ❖ Well-being and flourishing are the goals of development; economic development only a means
- ❖ We must be informed by a social justice perspective
- ❖ Aggregate goals need determining by public debate
- ❖ Powell (2012) on South African FET capabilities:
  - ❖ learners' voices
  - ❖ capabilities to choose and to aspire
- ❖ VET should be about supporting vocational learning that people value for their lives and livelihoods

## **The Centrality of Work to VET**

- ❖ VET must be closely related to work but what if our understanding of work is flawed?

## Alternative Perspectives on Work (1)

- ❖ Work is central to any thinking about human life and development
- ❖ However, work needs to be conceptualised in ways that stress how its potential to fulfil wider human needs can be maximised – we need to protect and expand notion of “decent work”
- ❖ Work includes activity in “the other economy”:  
“concerned with the direct production and maintenance of human beings as an end in itself.”  
(Donath 2000: 115)

## Alternative Perspectives on Work (2)

- ❖ Voice, agency and aspirations (see Appadurai 2004) matter in all this  
(cf. Bonvin on capability for work)
- ❖ At the same time, access to and status of VET and many forms of work are unequal and structured profoundly by class, gender and race  
(cf. Marxist perspectives)
- ❖ New cultures of intergenerationally sustainable production and consumption must be developed  
(cf. ecological approaches)

## Transforming Skills and Work (1)

- ❖ Thinking more critically about the nature of the work and lives we are preparing learners for
- ❖ Broadening our notion of skills for employability
- ❖ Conceptualising VET's role in supporting “the other economy” and transforming the gender division of labour
- ❖ Supporting sustainable consumption and production

## Transforming Skills and Work (2)

- ❖ Taking better account of learner voice and aspirations
- ❖ Re-imagining the role of providers and other intermediate institutions as bridge builders between learners and the economy
- ❖ Developing a new VET policy toolkit and evaluative framework fit for a more fully human approach to VET



## Conclusion

- ❖ The insertion of skills and work into the current development debate should be welcomed
- ❖ VET is about the economic dimension but must be equitable and transformative too
- ❖ Work is central to human lives but it needs to be understood at its broadest
- ❖ We urgently need a theory of how skills and work relate to human development, a practice of how to achieve this and an approach to its evaluation