



**RESEARCH ON TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL SKILLS FACILITATING
INTEGRATION INTO THE LABOUR MARKET**

**RESEARCHING TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL SKILLS
DEVELOPMENT: END OR RENAISSANCE OF
EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH IN AFRICA?**

*Michel CARTON (NORRAG and Graduate Institute of International and
Development Studies, Switzerland)*

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ERNWACA (Educational Research Network for West and Central Africa) aims at increasing research capacity, strengthening collaboration among researchers and practitioners, and promoting African expertise on education so as to positively impact educational practices and policies – www.ernwaca.org

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More of the same?

“The new approach to industrial policy recognizes the need to redirect policy and resources towards the development of appropriate human capital. Government should use targeted incentives to facilitate entry into technical and scientific education that provides the skilled labour force crucial for innovation” (UNCTAD-UNIDO, 2011, 68-69).

“An immediate organized effort should be made to help bridge the gap between supply and demand in the various categories and levels of manpower needed for the industrial development of the African developing nations” (ECA, 1966, 17).

“A new and broader approach to, and a new emphasis on, agricultural education and training are required. One reason is to provide the next generation with the skills, understanding and innovative capacity that they require to practice sustainable agricultural intensification – as well as strengthen individual capabilities” (IFAD, 2011, 171).

“Education in rural areas and the application of science to rural and agricultural development has been a major concern of Unesco from its earliest days, since one of the most urgent problems facing developing countries is the serious shortage of personnel trained for agricultural development” (L.Malassis, UNESCO, 1966, 7).

“The combination of population growth associated with high fertility rates and the slow pace of job creation in Africa presents challenges to its youth. Despite annual economic growth rates of 6 percent or more, there has not been a sufficient increase in stable employment opportunities for young people. The pressure to create new jobs will only increase over the coming decades” (E. Zuhelke, World Bank, 2009).

“The number of new jobs which can be created in the modern sector in any one year is limited. In many developing countries, the maximum number of new modern sector jobs which can be expected would not provide for more than twenty to thirty percent - sometimes no more than fifteen percent - of the number of young people coming onto the job market in that year” (R.Dore e.a., ILO, 1976, 2).

“Indigenous apprenticeship is at the heart of the explanation of the birth and growth of a free enterprise economy in Nigeria. Many of the best Nigerian entrepreneurs have started in trade, construction or sub contracting activities (A. Callaway, 1972, 188, data 1963).

“It is important to recognise that it is necessary, even urgent, to address not only the problem of youth unemployment and the lag between the educational system and the labour market needs in particular, but also the situation of people employed in the informal economy” (17th African Union Summit, 2011).

“The issue is not to consider supporting training in and for the informal sector as a per se activity, but to situate this support vs. a vs. the problems self-identified by the concerned people in the sector as well as the contribution this support could provide to some other interventions, particularly related to its economic dimensions” (M.Carton, 1980, 3)

“Training schemes in the informal sector are only truly effective when they also address the economic and social environment they take place. Training is only one way among many to alleviate poverty and reduce unemployment. It helps young people to enter the job market and enables small and micro-entrepreneurs to expand into promising trades and niche markets” (French Agency for Development, 2007)

A minimum of 30 years has passed between each component of these pairs of declarations were made by different policy making organisations, in Africa and in the world!

Did research play any role in the formulation of the descriptions and/or prescriptions that these Africa related development stakeholders have made in the “past” i.e. 30-40 years ago?

Did research have a role in the disappearing for 20 years in the development discourse about some key sectors like agriculture, industrialisation, technical and vocational education and training?

Did researchers use their knowledge to demonstrate that the consequences of undermining universities in the 80’s, as a component of structural adjustment programmes, would have a price to be paid up to day in terms of research capacities?

Is this price not too high to allow research to play a role in today’s revisiting of the sectors that were at the top of the national and international policies agenda in the 70’s-80’s, and are today presented as “new”?

Researching education is not worth and serious? Let’s try skills development in Africa!

Coming to educational research, one can raise the following questions:

- Did it play its functional but also critical and forward looking roles not only about the study of schooling, but also of non formal education and technical and vocational education and training, in spite of the ups and downs of the globalisation discourses and processes as reflected in the above mentioned policies since the 70’s?

- Were the positions of some economic development pioneers like K.Lewis known by educational researchers, so that they could have influenced the policy makers when this author writes in 1955: “expenditure on bringing new knowledge to peasant farmers is probably the most productive investment which can be made in any of the poorer agricultural economies” (K.Lewis, 1955, 187)?

- Why educationists did not pick up the visionary analysis done in 1960 by one another development economist pioneer, A.Anderson, stating that “education receives only passing reference in most of the now vast literature on technological change, modernization and economic development? A few writers accord it major importance, but they (referring to K.Lewis quoted above) only occasionally amplify on their reasons” (A.Anderson, 1966, 259,)?

- Did research policy makers draw some consequences in terms of a meaningful support to educational research, from one another statement by Anderson: “ A functional approach to education requires attention to the relation between formal education and other training. Schools spread the basic sort of knowledge that encourage flexibility in later occupational roles and stimulate countrywide communication. Apprenticeship in various forms is essential for the creation of that kind of human capital we call know-how. In all these contexts, a loose structure without sharp boundaries implements the adoption of a functional program of education and its rapid diffusion” (A. Anderson, 1966, 276)?

- 35 years later, can we be optimistic about the future of educational research, when the President of the WB Group delivers a “revolutionary” speech of 14 pages on Democratizing development economics which includes only five times the word education, meaning that the influence of educationists on development economics is close to nil (R. Zoellick, 2010)?

The same question can be raised when looking for education in the sector priorities of CODESRIA, as well as in the French Institut de Recherche pour le Développement (IRD-Mali) on-going project Sustaining human and social sciences research on contemporary Mali: no trace of a concern for education!

Educational research in Africa was considered as “overlooked and undervalued” by the Educational Research Network for Education in Western and Central Africa (ERNWACA) in the mid 90’s (R. Mclure, USAID, 1997). The present document aims, through the lens of the new skills development discourse, at revisiting this conclusion by using the states of the art done in three countries (Burkina-Faso, Ghana, Ivory Coast) on 20 years researching on technical and vocational skills development. These case studies are complemented by the same type of reflection in some countries of Latin America as well as by a critical analysis of the relations between policy making and research on the same topic in South Africa. The three first documents have been produced by the ERNWACA Chapters in these countries, in collaboration with NORRAG. All the documents, including the present one, will be made available and presented at the ADEA Triennial to be held in Ouagadougou in February 2012, the theme of which being Promoting critical knowledge, skills and qualifications for sustainable development in Africa: how to design and implement an effective response through education and training systems?

It must be noted that it will be the first time that African Ministers of Education and Training (in the larger sense of the term) will seat together in such an assembly, underlying the importance and urgency to deal in an integrated and holistic way with some issues like the role of technical and vocational skills development as an instrument to facilitate the inclusion of youth in society, both socially and economically, as well as sustainable economic development. In order to clarify the reference “model” for the notion of technical and vocational skills development, Annex 1 presents a visualisation by R. Walther (co-coordinator of the ADEA Triennial) of the change of perspective that passing from technical and vocational education and training (TVET) to technical and vocational skills development TVSD represents (R. Walther, 2011). For simplification reasons, SD will be used as an abbreviation for TVSD.

Educational research: the dunce in a second rate social sciences classroom?

We have noted above that, according to ERNWACA, educational research would not have been at the top of any research efficiency ranking in the 90’s. Looking at the way educational research has dealt with the field of SD over the last 20 years is being used in this paper as an instrument to check whether the institutions, actors, working and financing conditions it implies are to day in a survival or a (pre) renaissance situation. It is hoped that at least the pre-renaissance one is on its way, in order to contribute to the minimal necessary knowledge creation and accumulation that is badly needed to support some sound policy discussions on SD!

Answering the question needs first to put educational research in the broader context of social sciences. As mentioned in the 2010 World Social Science Report (WSSR):

“The science institutions in many sub-Saharan countries have been systematically eroded and destroyed over the past three decades through international economic policies as well as by the devastating effects of domestic policies and events. The cumulative effect of these policies over time has been a decline (at least in relative terms) in scientific output, changes in modes of scientific work, the devaluing and degrading of the science profession and, of course, the brain drain. Many people have commented on the lack of indigenous African theories and conceptual models to address the region’s social dynamics and challenges. This is not a new observation. It is clear, however, that this call for theoretical innovation and more sociological imagination is even more relevant in an age of globalization and internationalization, of the continuous decline of key scientific institutions including research centres, societies and journals, in many countries, and of the widespread lack of government support for social sciences research in sub-Saharan Africa” (Mouton, WSSR, 2010, 67).

Two issues are specifically crucial for social sciences research: “the individualistic research does not have much influence on society and rarely carries much weight. Governments and decision-makers - but also university bureaucrats - are impressed and influenced by size (large centres, networks and think tanks) and continuity in scholarship over time. Where social science scholarship is primarily individualistic, it is unlikely to be taken seriously or to influence policy. So its status will be low and negligible. Perhaps even more serious are the intellectual consequences of this form of research. It leads to fragmentation of effort, lack of critical dialogue within a community of scholars and often a lack of methodological rigor. Discipline-based work will eventually decline and basic scholarship such as social theory will also suffer. Individualistic research is one side of the coin of which the other face is consultancy research. ‘Consultancy’ social science refers to the widespread practice of academics engaging in consultancy work – mostly for international agencies and governments – to augment their meagre academic salaries. It is most prevalent in specific disciplines such as the health sciences, business studies, ICT, and monitoring and evaluation work, but is still widespread and on the increase” (Mouton, WSSR, 2010, 65).

This situation is both the consequence and reason for what Mouton names the “deinstitutionalization of science”: “With the decline in the number of robust and vibrant university-based research centres, we are witnessing an increase in trans national and regional research networks. One could argue that such networks are emerging as a direct result of globalization, greater international collaboration and increased access to the Internet. At the same time, such networks are also filling the void left by the lack of strong national research centres. The vast majority of these networks focus on interdisciplinary and more applied fields of the social sciences. Examples are the Sahara Network for the Social Aspects of HIV and AIDS, and the African Labour Research Network. These networks are predominantly sustained by international agency funding. Most of them are engaged in a range of activities, which include research but also capacity-building and training, networking through conferencing and other means, as well as advocacy and policy work” (Mouton, WSSR, 2010, 67).

Educational research follows exactly the same pattern in most West African countries but, on top of the difficulties coming from its too broad definition of a so called interdisciplinary field as well as of the predominance of consultancy as a deterrent to autonomy, there is some more difficulty to run efficient networks. Not being a discipline but an interdisciplinary field, it can’t progress through the two dominant knowledge production forms that are individualistic and consultancy based, as interdisciplinarity needs teamwork and detailed and well managed working conditions. Consequently, the launching and functioning of networks which could be compared to the above mentioned ones are difficult: networks depend on people who know how to connect individuals, institutions as well as resources, and who have a disciplinary/thematic scope which is relatively specific (HIV/AIDS as a field, economics as a discipline). The field of education being too large and

scattered, the definition of scientific and institutional niches allowing the creation of a critical mass of knowledge and resources is often difficult. This leads to a kind of an infernal spiral preventing scientific and social recognition as well as policy impact. The possibility of considering SD research as a potential revival path will depend on a drastic change of the today's educational research work environment and conditions.

Consultancy, capacity building, research governance, advocacy: with a touch of science?

In his analysis of social science research in Africa, Mouton underlines the theme of research's autonomy that has been at stake for decades in many countries for historical, political and social reasons. This point relates to the two types of knowledge production mentioned above: based on individual's initiative or consultancy. The first type is obviously autonomous but usually without much relevance and impact. The second type is aimed at having largely pre-determined impact and is rarely autonomous. The case studies from the three West African countries, South Africa and Latin America covered by the ERNWACA-NORRAG contribution to the ADEA Triennial show clearly that consultancy work is dominant in spite of being often considered as antagonist to autonomy and quality work.

The South African case study provides an interesting perspective articulated with the overall transformation stages of this country's society since the early 90's: the author identifies three successive periods for SD research, namely Construction, Early Critique and Deconstruction (L.Powell, 2011). These three "seasons" might apply to the new perspective that ADEA is proposing with TVSD as a larger and more dynamic perspective than TVET, which remains one component of a SD strategy (see Annex 1). The issue for researchers and policy makers is not to keep criticising the limits of TVET but to build a new vision where research is one important instrument for relevant and sustainable decisions. At the same time, the limits and problems of the new SD "model" will have to be progressively identified in order to move towards a deconstruction/reconstruction stage. Such a process would reflect a different mode of governance of a policy making process, where autonomous (functional and critical) research as well as consultancy and quantitative data collection are needed. In other words, the a priori opposition between consultancy type "research" and fully autonomous research could be less extreme than how it is often presented. That is why researching on the economics and political sociology of consultation in Africa (that is very rare in every field, including education) and connecting the results with the on going works on the designing of some new modes for university research governance could help decision makers as well as academics to relaunch a constructive dialogue. (It is worth noting that these topics were covered during a NORRAG-DSE workshop in 1995 (K.King, L.Buchert, eds, DSE, 1996)).

Connecting knowledge on the consultancy world with research on governance issues has to be articulated with the up to date discourse on capacity building on (CB) proposed by international as well as by continental organisations. Collecting data on consultation would surely confirm that it is a dominantly short term, project and aid related and calling very often on academic skills, having obvious consequences for the quantitative and qualitative research capacities of tertiary education institutions. At the same time, the World Bank Institute, the CB branch of the Bank, aims " to build skills among groups of individuals involved in performing tasks, and also to strengthen the organisations in which they work, and the socio-political environment within which they operate".

Unfortunately, the situation of research at large seems reflecting an implicit policy of the Bank, i.e. that research institutions are not concerned by this capacity building objective! But it might better so, knowing the conclusions of an Evaluation of the World Bank Support to CB implemented in some African countries: « most support in country programs remains fragmented, designed and managed project by project. While the Bank is moving to better customize its capacity building approaches to country conditions, it needs to develop sector-specific guidance on diagnosing capacity needs and evaluating capacity building measures” (WBI-IEG, 2005).

The research programme launched in 2008 by IDRC on University research governance in West and Central Africa, which documents and discusses the situation in different countries. As expected the results of the study confirm that the consultancy market has had and still have a devastating impact on research capacities in many African universities. This reflects, apart from the fact that IDRC is today the largest remaining international agency dealing with research policy and instruments in Africa, that a reconnection between research, development strategies and policies is at work. One another IDRC project Improving the quality and relevance of university research has been launched in 2010 that should capitalize on the prerequisites in research governance as proposed by the previous project. These two IDRC sponsored projects could be considered as a way to implement the CB policy of the WB. We could imagine that the two studies lead to a revisiting of the academic consultancy “research”, based on an analysis of the balance between its pros (field experience for academic staff, source of funding for underfinanced public universities, source of information on the real life of policy making and implementation..) and cons (academics having less experience than specialised firms, slow outcomes delivery conditions, mission creep/overreach...). Studying educational research through the lens of consultancy could then contribute to propose some different scenarios for a new research policy in universities. Concretely, further exploiting the cases of the consultancy based SD “research” to be presented at the ADEA Triennial could provide some interesting change-oriented indications.

The above-mentioned SA perspective on SD research sheds also a new light on the advocacy dimension that some parties insist on connecting with research outcomes. For Monroe “advocacy, like the policy process itself, is both a process and an outcome. It includes the persuasive behaviours used in the political or public policy arena (i.e. process) and the policy positions one takes and encourages others to take through one’s research and scholarly writing (i.e. outcomes)” (Monroe, 1995, 425). For example, one can advocate for a larger SD perspective instead of a TVET one only (see Annex 1). Advocating for such a vision can be very persuasive in the political spheres (unemployed youth is a social bomb), but a costs and financing analysis of different forms of SD will show that not many state budgets can afford (re)developing TVET, as an alias for SD, and comply at the same time with the EFA objectives of the MDGs. This means that the advocacy work has to rely not only on some relevant socio-political positions but also on a strong analytical knowledge of the micro and macro-economics of education (i.e. schooling, as EFA is mostly and wrongly limited to that modality). The following macro-economic analysis is a demonstration that some worldwide campaigns advocating for EFA can have some risky consequences.

“ Compared with the evolution of the GDP, the external financial needs (for supporting EFA) are following a very dangerous increasing trend, that is not the case for the GDP. The point is that these needs are only covering the EFA ones. This would not harm the school and production systems. Covering the further financial needs stemming from the intake in secondary education of the increasing number of children leaving basic education as well as keeping after 2015 the same pace for the financing of primary education, would by the contrary lead to some even more aggravating consequences for public finance - an even larger share of external financing being necessary (C.Quenum, 2009, 12). This is explicitly acknowledged by the EFA Report for Africa since 1997 (UNESCO-BREDA, 2007, 34). This analysis seemed unfortunately not being known and understood by the majority of education researchers who attended the ERNWACA colloquium for its 20th anniversary in December 2009 in Bamako, where it was presented....

Researching SD: a window of opportunity to be open...without learning outside?

No wonder that under such circumstances, the influence of educational research on national, regional and international policy making is far from being what could be expected. The situation is even more precarious when the policy motto becomes Skills Development. This perspective, as already underlined, implies a much larger spectrum of stakeholders than TVET: firms, artisans, civil society organisations, trade unions, public and private TVET organisations, Ministries of Education and Labour - whose needs and demands for knowledge are different and even contradictory.

Consequently, the range of disciplines, methodologies and techniques necessary to cover the different dimensions of SD is larger than for researching education, usually understood as school related institutions and policies. As for researching education (=schooling), researching SD needs psychology and pedagogy but should, in principle, call also on economics (micro and macro), sociology, anthropology, socio-linguistics, law, history (institutional and economic), political science, demography, and statistics. If the major part of educational research is not calling on many of these disciplines to day, researching SD can't exist without them in order to tackle such topics as: efficiency-efficacy of the supply vs. demand approaches as defined by the stakeholders; individual and social rates of return; social criteria for accessing to different forms of SD; representations of TVET amongst potential concerned population; meaning of terms like enterprise, crafts, apprenticeship, informal sector; meaning of the right to education in relation to SD; colonial history of production related training; a posteriori long term analysis of the relations between education+training and growth; different forms of governance of SD systems; influence of the demographic situation on the demand for schooling+SD; SD data collection and analysis instruments. A one more difficulty lies in the fact that some related research fields like demography/labour/employment, growth, social protection - all fields obviously related to education and SD - develop their own logics without nearly any reference to the latter.

It is impressive to read a recent interview of the Chief economist of AfDB (M.Ncube, 30th Oct. 2010) at the same time as the Strategy for higher education, science and technology of the same organisation (Feb. 2008): the words education, skill, qualification, science and research do not appear once in the interview as energy, infrastructures, growth, raw materials are repeatedly used! The only support for research mentioned in the Chief's economist's interview concerns health, confirming what was said earlier about the comparative advantage of this field vs. education. The same for the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) that has dramatically switched its priority from basic education to higher education, TVET and research: in a one hour and a half interview (2009, see WAEMU-UEMOA site) of the exiting (1st Sept.2011) Secretary General, the latter refers to education and training issues for five minutes only! In a more positive way for education+SD research a project supported by IDRC West and Central Africa deals with the Labour market dynamics in times of crisis: evidence from Africa. This project is grounded in the 2010 ILO report concerning joblessness among young people (aged 15-25): "The latter has increased by seven percentage points since the start of the global financial crisis - the largest two-year increase on record in countries for which data is available. High levels of youth unemployment are problematic, because young people who do not go to school or work are likely to deskill and may develop social problems that reinforce their exclusion from the labour market. They also form a volatile political constituency. And, in some African countries, the situation is complicated by civil war, political unrest and internal displacement ". Launching a research project referring to this ILO report will need to call, for obvious socio-political reasons, to some more disciplines than labour and employment economics, i.e. conflict and migration studies, political science... The weight given to SD as a one component of a scientifically grounded labour market dynamics analysis will have to be checked in the outputs of this project.

The G20 Human Development Pillar of its Development Working Group follows the Multi-year action plan on development adopted at the G20 Seoul Summit, that calls on international organizations to work together, under the coordination of the ILO, to support developing countries, in particular low-income countries “to continue to develop employment-related skills that are better matched to employer and market needs in order to attract investment and decent jobs.” The Seoul development plan specifies actions to be undertaken in the areas of internationally comparable and practical skills indicators for employment and productivity, and support to national employable skills strategies. This Inter-Agency Group on TVET (UNESCO, OECD, WB, ILO, ETF) should lead to the creation of some data bases allowing the construction of a powerful instrument from which researchers should start later to raise questions and next proceed to a deconstruction, as suggested by the South African “model”!

If the fulfilling of the G20 objectives in terms of the creation of international skills indicators is a precondition for the launching of meaningful and grounded research activities on SD, we can't ignore the following warning by S.McGrath: “ Arguably, too much of skills research mirrors the focus of governments and agencies in looking at the policy level. Yet, skills systems are filled with people and learners who are ultimately at the heart of TVET. This clearly raises methodological issues regarding whose perspectives are reflected by research and which of the multiple relevant knowledge about TVET are privileged and which silenced » (S.McGrath, 2011). This point refers again to the research autonomy issue raised by Mouton in the WSSR 2010, which is also a today's concern when it comes to universities, as illustrated by M.Tidjani during a conference organised by NORRAG in June 2009 on Policy transfer/policy learning: interactions between international and national skills development approaches: « The LMD - BA, MA, PhD reform - offers an example of policy transfer. It comes out of the Bologna process in Europe and follows the signature in 1998 of a Declaration on the harmonising of the architecture of higher education in Europe. In the last few years, it has reached the shores of Africa. This is a case of a blanket transfer of an organising model. First worked out in Anglo-Saxon countries, the reform is exported to the countries of the EU before being transferred to certain African countries. The latter did not develop it, but they accept it as a modernisation par excellence and integration tool for their higher education systems. While states are the ultimate carriers of the policy, it follows the indirect route of a regional integration organisation (WAEMU) that stimulates, through a directive, its implantation in member countries. »

Tidjani is less pessimistic as far as scholarly research in social science is concerned: “the sector uncovers a situation of partial policy transfer: certain segments of research activity are transferred and function in accordance with autonomous logic but, in some cases, enclaves of international level achievement and competitiveness may appear merely connected to local research » By the opposite, “sub-contracting practices may change universities in mere data production agencies, thereby annihilating the potential for independent research production of a quality grade valid in the markets of the global knowledge “ (A.Tidjani, 2009, 8-9).

Reading again the G20 initiative with McGrath's and Tidjani's warning in mind, some worries can be expressed as the word research appears only four times in the 3300 words of the draft Joint inception note, and that “research at the country level” appears only once, the three other research activities referring to the concerned IO's projects. We can fear that calling on tenths of national African consultants to collect data will be the easy way again, the supposedly proposed argument being urgency as well the limited quantity and quality of human resources available in SD related research institutions and networks. The loop is again closed in spite of the capacity building/development and empowerment discourses and projects! Let's hope that the final version of the Inception note will introduce these words as some further objectives of the actions to be launched.

Researching what?

Introducing SD in the field of educational research is then a multi faceted challenge (An indispensable reading is the Handbook of technical and vocational education and training research edited by R.MacLean and D.Wilson, 2009). If the key macro and micro-economic issues (costs and financing, individual and social rates of return of different modalities of SD, economies of scale, trade offs in the state's budgets between different types and modalities of SD...) which are at stake in the related policy discussions are to be put high on a research agenda, the domination of economics can't be the rule even though this is for the sake of today's priority for a so called sustainable growth (that is, en passant, a contradiction in terms!), i.e. sustainable costs!

As mentioned above, many other disciplines have to be called for covering the governance, management, statistical, demographic, socio-anthropological, cultural, historical, socio-linguistics... dimensions of the SD field, starting with the definition of terms: this domain is not an academic game, as the same terms are being (miss) used in many different ways from the top policy leaders down to trainers and "youth". The clarification of the definition of some notions as the latter being an example of the use of socio linguistics for sound action:

- Youth: young people are often defined as those between the ages of 15 and 25, according to social and family traditions. This is perhaps less true today because education (even where minimal), rural-urban mobility and the influence of modernity (television, etc.) can lead to an early exit from childhood and entry to adulthood. On the other hand, a substantial number of children can be found on the African labour markets: in many countries (Madagascar for example) 10% of the active population are between the ages of 6 and 15. At the same time, many projects and programmes aim to reach "young people" up to the age of 25, even though they have achieved social recognition through marriage, inheritance or in other ways. A socio-cultural contextualisation is necessary before defining the limits of a "target" population.
- Inclusion: reconsidering the boundaries of youth is a necessity given the new transitions operating between childhood and adulthood as redefined above. The ending of childhood at age 11 (because of school leaving, economic survival outside the family or early pregnancy) acts as a form of exclusion that should be countered by inclusion in various ways and places as soon as possible to defuse the "social bomb" in this age bracket (Early signs are already present in rural areas, i.e. in the form of petty theft and thefts of standing crops by young people). The use of the term inclusion as a motto without extending the limits of the concept to the broader social life of youth can lead to a wastage of resources.
- Insertion: this notion, more often used in relation with SD than inclusion in many documents and by many actors, is not relevant because it refers to a process that was valid during the 1980s in Europe, where successive periods of schooling, training and employment took place in a linear, continuous and progressive manner. Inclusion, as defined above, can take multiple forms and follow non-linear and discontinuous sequences. Although professional insertion is the objective of many SD programmes, some more variables need to be observed and analysed with prospects for action under those programmes: geographic mobility, subcontracting, creating income-generating activities, and pursuing further education may occur/overlap/be interrupted from a very early age and continue throughout active life, particularly at times of crisis. In that sense insertion, as a difference with inclusion, is not a robust concept to cover the reality of today's youth.

- Enterprise/entrepreneur: SD documents and actors use these terms ad nauseam. An entrepreneur takes risks using own or another's funds with a view to making enough of a profit to at least pay employees and financiers, pay back investment and perform operations. Many SD programmes refer to enterprise, being so misleading for policy makers, aid partners, evaluators as well as for the concerned "entrepreneur": not all graduates of some form of apprenticeship or from a training centre will become entrepreneurs immediately but they will however be inserted socio-economically.

Many authors have listed some research needs in the SD field:

Jon Lauglo has, since long, reflected on these needs with a policy angle. He considers the following topics as essential: definition of terms; labour market monitoring and forecasting; indicators of performance (including equity); new "models for TVET (national training authorities, training funds, decentralization, private provision, industry based training..); HRD; coping with management complexity; dual systems; low vocationalisation in mainstream secondary schools; TVET for illiterate and semi literate learners; and... a stronger research base! The dream of J.Lauglo is to have focused research (but larger than the present production "which is concerned with pedagogy and curricula because it tends to be an outgrowth of TVET teacher education) with sufficient resources and time in order to collect good primary data" (J.Lauglo, 2009).

Simon McGrath identifies the following broad fields for SD research: employability, decent work and TVET; skills for all (A discussion might open soon on the extension of the right to education/schooling to SD- note of the author); youth or lifelong perspective; TVET second chance, second best; the complex natures of learning and work; the gap between process reforms and individual outcomes; aid and TVET; and.... researching TVET. As already quoted above but worth rehearsing, as it relates to researching research on SD which is the objective of the ERNWACA-NORRAG contribution to the ADEA Triennial: McGrath reminds us that "Skills systems are filled with people and learners who are ultimately at the heart of TVET. This clearly raises methodological issues regarding whose perspectives are reflected by research and which of the relevant knowledges about TVET are privileged and which silenced" (S.McGrath, 2011).

Robert Palmer, a fin connaisseur of informal apprenticeship training (IAT) in Ghana identifies the following research needs: the social composition of IAT; labour markets outcomes of IAT in enabling and disabling contexts; skills for growth and poverty reduction (R.Palmer, 2007). It is worth noting that the comment by J.Lauglo on the domination of TVET teacher training on TVET research applies for IAT. This illustrates the challenge of enlarging the field of TVET research to IAT to get a full SD perspective, as the scientific and policy background are quite different and sometimes opposed between the two worlds. (The three ADEA related case studies reflect this situation).

It is also interesting to mention the research priorities that the Swiss Federal Department for Economy has put forward in the mid 2000s, to be implemented by Swiss tertiary education institutions: learning strategies; social skills; technologies for TVET; economics of training (transitions, skills and work); economics of training (firms roles and training policies).

Finally, in order not to fall in the above mentioned trap consisting of substituting the voices of the "people who are in Africa at the heart of TVET", the research needs identified in the three West African case studies after consultation with the stakeholders (Ministries, training centres, business, NGOs, IOs, researchers) are the following:

- Institutional management: planning, regional development, financing, governance
- Analysis of the demand for TVET based on the knowledge of productive activities and of market needs

- Better knowledge of the SD situation in the informal sector and agriculture
- Development of relevant curricula.

So many ideas, so little experience and means! The key point is now to define some priorities within such a long list at the national but above all regional levels, in order to avoid the dispersion of topics, instruments, and money that has been harmful to the scientific and political reputation of education (=schooling) research. The best way to define priorities lies in the creation of a forum, which would run a reflexive and organisational process with clear steps and deadlines. In some situations, a research “community” pre-exists and can launch such a task. This is partly the case with the “traditional” educational research world. The situation is totally different as far as SD is concerned, as the field is larger than the schooling related research, involves many different stakeholders and is a key burning political issue for national and international policy makers and financing agencies. The challenges and paradoxes of this situation are reflected in the ADEA Triennial: if scientific research in general is dealt with in the Theme 3 document Lifelong acquisition of scientific and technological knowledge and skills for the sustainable development of Africa in the context of globalization, educational research - at large or in relation with SD - is never explicitly referred to. The latter is only referred twice in the Theme 2 document Life long TVSD for socio-economic growth in Africa, which suggests to launch some “research-based empirical evidence to understand the underlying causes of the poor status and attractiveness of TVET” and to make “data collection, analysis and interpretation for management decisions”. We are very far from the numerous above-mentioned research needs, demands and ideas!

The way forward seems long and one can wonder whether the proposed forum would ever take off! One topic could help explicitly facing and may be over passing the difficulties, in spite of its highly sensitive nature: taking stock of the problems encountered by the traditional educational research and creating the conditions for a sustainable SD research policy through a debate around the long lasting question about the priority to be granted to networks or institutions.

Research institutions and networks: an African version of l’oeuf ou la poule?

We have detailed above the base conditions for having some scientifically efficient, sustainable, visible and potentially policy oriented educational research networks. As these conditions are not widely fulfilled, research networks like ERNWACA are facing some legitimacy problems. This is reflected, for example, in the list of networks that the above-mentioned ADEA Theme 2 document is listing:

- Association of African Universities,
- Association for the Advancement of Higher Education and Development,
- Partnership for Higher Education in Africa, Africa Higher Education
- Collaborative, Higher Education Research and Advocacy Network in Africa, etc

as if educational research was not a component of any reflection and action around universities!

As explained by Mouton, networking seems being to day the counterpart of the decline of institutions in general. The marginal situation educational research is in and the potential renaissance it might enter in today thanks to the SD “fashion” lead to asses the balance in favour of networks compared to institutions, in relation with this specific field of investigation. This relates again to capacity development. The Capacity development strategic framework (CDSF) of NEPAD (June 2010) states that “the focus to date on traditional skills training alone has not fostered adaptative institutions or created enabling environments capable of empowering individuals to put new knowledge and skills into practice. The CDSF approach is based on a broader understanding of capacity, embracing individuals, organizational and systemic issues.” This statement is of a (too) large nature, but can nevertheless apply to educational research as supported by networks. As long as networks like ERNWACA, in spite of the usefulness of the support they provide for research skills development (such as scientific writing capacities or small grants for individual young researchers – 10% of them only dealing with education-employment relations especially in universities, over the last five rounds), do not contribute to the setting/reinforcing of research institutions, the self-critics done by NEPAD are fully applicable. Individuals take advantage of these skills but fall, voluntarily or not, in the trap of individualistic or consultancy type research.

Networks without a strong institutional basis can't perform well as they become some kind of empty shells. At the same time, the critical mass that isolated institutions (geographically and/or disciplinary) should reach is out of scope for most African educational research institutions. The challenge of taking advantage of the today's concerns for SD is then to simultaneously create network(s) and the institutional base for making it(them) work. Lessons could be drawn from what happens in the health and medical field, in which considerable amounts of financial and human resources are poured. For example, the Wellcome Trust (UK) is supporting an African institutions initiative with £30 million for seven African-led consortia, involving over 50 scientific institutions from 18 countries. The very names of some components of this Initiative could concern SD: Southern Africa Consortium for Research Excellence, Consortium for Advanced Research Training, Training Health Researchers into Vocational Excellence in East Africa, One Health Initiative – African Research Consortium for Ecosystem and Population Health (based at the Swiss Centre for Scientific Research).

It is worth mentioning that agricultural research also has since long put in place some networks/groups as the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), the Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR), the Global Conferences on Agricultural Research for Development (GCRD), all of them with some African based structures/networks.

How to proceed for SD research from now on, by taking stock of the main lessons to be drawn from these cases i.e. a strong link between institutions, consortia (i.e. networks), and regionalisation. Would the proposed forum be launched, it is expected that it would reach the same conclusion! More concretely, which existing platform, organisation, network.. is today ready to welcome such an exercise? The answer could lie in the discourses and actions that many different African continental and/or regional organisations are proposing to day as a reflect of the priority they put since a few years on TVET/SD, such as the African Union, the African Development Bank, The Economic Community of West African States, the West African Economic and Monetary Union. We have seen above that there are some contradictions between these official discourses and the de facto priorities some of their leaders put on programmes and projects which could be defined as using “hard” money for infrastructures, energy.. rather than “soft” money for human and social development through education and training. The same could apply to the numerous international and bilateral public and private aid and development cooperation organisations that are (re) discovering TVET and SD for all kinds of reasons, including security ones!

The two issues that researchers should face, before knocking at the doors of such organisations to ask them supporting a forum on the definition of a SD policy, would then be to explicit the

compromises they would have to make. The terms of these compromises would depend on two questions raised by S.McGrath and L.Powell that will also be the last ones raised in this paper.

Researching for what?

Skills for what development vision?

“It can be argued that our notions of skills are implicitly located in an outdated model of development that privileges economic measures of progress and which downplays the human and sustainable dimensions of development. On the contrary, it may be argued that the primary focus of TVET must be to promote employment and poverty reduction. This debate leads on to a consideration of whether the sole purpose of TVET is instrumental improvement of labour market and economic outcomes or whether TVET has a role to play in moral development, citizen formation, personal self-actualisation, etc.” (S.McGrath, 2011)

Which vision of skills development research?

It is important “providing funding which acknowledges not only the cost of research projects, i.e. project by project funding, but also the cost of maintaining a research community that stays on top of international and national debate by both contributing and challenging these debates. The concepts developed in these debates shape new ways of conceptualising and perceiving which is critical for researchers to continue making the contribution that they have thus far. In a sense, I am arguing here for the importance of not only applied project research, but also for basic research”.

It is important “developing and maintaining a competent and independent research base that contributes to the development of skills development through empirical and evaluative research, but also through the critiques and challenges that they raise, and conceptualises new ways of dreaming” (L.Powel, 2011).

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