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Is there a 'learning crisis' in Africa? Education and development post-2015

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These essays are reflections upon a roundtable held on 12 March 2015 in the University of Manchester, entitled 'Education and the Political Economy of Development: The 'Learning Crisis' in the Developing World?'

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Is there a 'learning crisis' in Africa? Education and development post-2015

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This collection of essays arose from a roundtable discussing the role of education in development. Education is often seen as the 'silver bullet' for development – both for individuals as a way to personal advancement and progress, and for national development strategies. But how well is education working to equip young people for future challenges in developing societies, and what is the potential of formal educational strategies to transform entire societies and economies? Goal 2 of the MDGs sought to achieve universal primary schooling, and the 'developing world' achieved 90% enrolment by 2010. As we reach the end of the MDGs, what should the development priorities be for the post-2015 development agenda? Is a focus on enrolment the wrong strategy? Is the quality of education much more important? If so, what are the challenges for measuring, monitoring and achieving this? In short, is there a 'learning crisis' in the developing world, what can be done about it, and what role we should expect education to play in ending global inequalities?

The Open Working Group proposal for Sustainable Development Goals, currently under negotiation, has proposed a goal (#4) to "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all". This includes the following targets:

> "4.1 by 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes
>
> 4.2 by 2030 ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education
>
> 4.3 by 2030 ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university
>
> 4.4 by 2030, increase by x% the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship
>
> 4.5 by 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and children in vulnerable situations
>
> 4.6 by 2030 ensure that all youth and at least x% of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy
>
> 4.7 by 2030 ensure all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including among others through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender

equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development

4.a build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all

4.b by 2020 expand by x% globally the number of scholarships for developing countries in particular LDCs, SIDS and African countries to enrol in higher education, including vocational training, ICT, technical, engineering and scientific programmes in developed countries and other developing countries

4.c by 2030 increase by x% the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially LDCs and SIDS."[1]

We will know in September 2015 whether these goals and targets have changed, and what actual percentage figures the international community can agree upon. It is clear, however, that education is a priority for sustainable development, and that the MDG focus on enrolment in primary education has been broadened to include more attention to educational quality and outcomes.

These goals are explicitly global in scope, and indeed many of these targets (such as an "appreciation of cultural diversity" and "education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive") will also prove a challenge for many so-called "developed" countries. However, it is also true that many people regard Africa as the continent with the greatest development and educational challenges. For Hulme and Wilkinson, "Africa remains the source of much concern and a continent in which progress towards the MDGs is at best poor".[2] Sub-Saharan Africa has made the most progress toward achieving MDG2 of universal primary access, from 60% in 2000 to 77% in 2012 (and North Africa is not far from the target of 100%), but it is also the continent with some of the most stark problems in delivering quality education for all, as the essays which follow confirm.[3]

A discussion of the relationship between education and development, and the quality of education, also invites reflection on the question of the broader purpose or function of education. Education is not the same thing as formal schooling (and the proposed SDG explicitly highlights "lifelong learning opportunities for all"), and education can be a good in itself, not just because it can drive development or poverty alleviation.

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1   See https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgsproposal.html (accessed 21 April 2015).

2   David Hulme and Rorden Wilkinson, 'Introduction: Moving from MDGs to GDGs', in Rorden Wilkinson and David Hulme (eds) *The Millennium Development Goals and Beyond: Global Development after 2015* (Abingdon; Routledge, 2012), p. 10.

3   See http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/mdgoverview/mdg_goals/mdg2.html (accessed 21 April 2015).

The essays which follow explore these questions in a number of ways, and in varied contexts. Some draw explicitly on theorists of development and education like Amartya Sen, Henry Giroux, and Paulo Freire. Sen's influential concept of development as freedom emphasised that development meant "a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy",[4] and his work on human development was influential in placing a vision of a critical, democratic, emancipatory education at the heart of what development meant, going well beyond a narrow focus on economic growth. Critical theorists like Giroux and Freire have also drawn attention to the role of some types of formal education in disciplining society and restricting individual freedoms – "the role of the school as an agency of social and cultural reproduction in a class-divided society",[5] or Freire's critique of a "banking" model of education where "students are turned "into 'containers,' into 'receptacles' to be 'filled' by the teacher. The more completely she fills the receptacles, the better a teacher she is. The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are".[6] One of the most powerful theorists of education is bell hooks, whose *Teaching to Trangress* powerfully conveys experiences of segregated and racialized education in the USA, and which makes a powerful case of an engaged pedagogy which is fun, exciting, critical and transgressive: "a movement against and beyond boundaries".[7] These theorists remind us that education is political, and schools and universities are sites of political struggle over the languages, knowledges and authorities through which social order is maintained and reproduced.

In the following essays, David Hulme reflects upon the changing place of education in development strategies, and makes the case that it "is not just about short-term poverty reduction – it has a major role in long-term national development." Nicola Banks discusses her work with youth in Uganda and Tanzania and notes how formal education does not currently prepare them for the challenges they will face outside the classroom. Helen Underhill proposes that we view education more broadly as social learning, and that social movements and activist struggles in places like Egypt provide "a space of valuable and often transformative learning". Dereck Arubayi's research focuses on discourses of youth and development in Nigeria, and he offers the concept "*youth-flation*" – where ever more youths are chasing ever-more limited available opportunities. Finally, Paul Skidmore is working to set-up a new network of schools in West Africa, and he concludes that whilst the solutions to the learning crisis may not be easy, they are at least simple. All five of these essays – whilst they may disagree on many things – surely agree that education (like development) is *political* and contested, and reflects broader power relations in international politics.

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4   Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (Oxford: OUP, 1999), p. 3.

5   Henry A. Giroux, *Teachers as Intellectuals: Toward a Critical Pedagogy of Learning* (Westpoint: Bergin and Garvey, 1988), p. 6.

6   Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, translated by Myra Bergman Ramos, with an introduction by Donald Macedo (New York: Continuum, 2005), p. 72.

7   bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the practice of freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

High Quality Education for National Development

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Education is still considered a key strategy for reducing poverty by the poor. Universal primary education was included as a Millennium Development Goal, and it looks as though the new Sustainable Development Goals will aspire to provide pre-primary, primary and secondary education for all. This emphasis on quantity however is not enough. We need to ensure quality. Alongside this, education should not just be thought of as a poverty reduction tool but as central to national development. Higher education is costly but essential as national development requires a proportion of the population to be highly skilled. Like it or not public investment in the education of non-poor people has to be an element of the education budget.

Poor people commonly identify education for their children as a key household strategy but they are increasingly worried about the low quality of education. In countries like Bangladesh and India, the poor are sending children to private fee paying schools in the belief that they are of a higher quality than state schools. Families are also paying for after-school tuition as they don't believe that private or state schools can fully provide what children need. Some very poor households invest in private tuition.

The political capacity and commitment in Bangladesh and Ghana to improve quality of schooling is being examined by the <u>Effective States and Inclusive Development Research Centre</u>. When you look at these two very different contexts you can see that expanding education is a big part of the political agenda in both countries. In both countries political parties make manifesto commitments for expanding primary education, education for all and secondary education. But when you look for quality pledges, it's not on the political agenda. There is little evidence of debates between parties and politicians, or demands from the 'consumers' of education related to quality. Quantity is a political priority, but quality, which is so important, isn't spoken about. Why has quality decreased so much, and why is it so bad in many countries? If this isn't addressed, families with incredibly low incomes will continue to spend scarce resources on private schools and private tuition despite the existence of and political commitment to 'free' public schools.

Education does not have the same impacts on incomes and prospects as it did twenty or twenty-five years ago. Then primary education could be seen as 'liberational'. Back then, if you had a primary education in Bangladesh, you would be able to get a low paid job such as a clerk or cleaner. Nowadays you would need a secondary education for this…or maybe more. This is partly due to primary education being more widespread, it is no longer being limited to an elite few. It is also partly due to the quality of education decreasing and the world has changed. Primary schooling doesn't deliver increased productivity or access to a range of different jobs as it did before.

Education is not only a poverty reduction tool. Poverty reduction was the main focus of the MDGs and this looks to continue in to the SDGs. Thought about in this way, education can be misframed. To reduce poverty, you logically focus on primary education for all in order that individuals are able to benefit from basic education. But education also has to be about national development. For national development – to have growth, create jobs, pay for public services and have law and order you need nationals who are training as doctors, engineers, accountants and statisticians. You need significant investment in education beyond the

primary and secondary levels. Countries cannot simply say that higher education is too expensive, but have to work out the trade-offs. Education is not just about short-term poverty reduction – it has a major role in long-term national development.

To conclude, education plays a major part in global and national development and helping poor people improve their lives, but issues of quality and higher education must be addressed for it to successfully play a key role in sustainable national development.

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Education and the Political Economy of Development: The 'Learning Crisis' in the Developing World?

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I have been doing research into the social and economic lives of young people in Uganda and Tanzania since 2011. That's in two guises – firstly working for an NGO called BRAC, where I did extensive research into young people's lives to help inform and extend our programmes for youth development, then secondly, in my research here looking at young people's experiences of urban poverty in Tanzania.

Education is obviously absolutely central to experiences of young people, right across the youth age spectrum from 15 to 24 (although 'youth' technically extends up to 30 and 35 in Uganda and Tanzania respectively), whether that's about current problems while in school or how it prepares young people for life afterwards. Priorities may change from education to employment over time, but it's my belief that you can't look at these independently of one another, so I will discuss both briefly today.

For children and younger youth, staying in school is a priority. Universal Primary Education – and more recently Universal Secondary Education in Uganda – has led to massive improvements and gender parity in school enrolments. Concerns remain, however. Enrolment, does not necessarily lead to retention, and free tuition does not mean free education. Poverty is still a factor that causes school drop-out, with parents still having to pay additional costs for uniform, pens and equipment, books, food etc. And if we look at it from a school's point of view, it causes serious problems in quality, because the government allocation per student is so low. Every year we go on a fieldtrip to Uganda with our Masters students. Last year when we went to a primary school, which is one of the best in the region, the Headmaster told us that the allocation she received from central government was around £8 per student. Is that enough to run a school, pay for teachers' salaries, books, or infrastructure improvements? It's simply not enough.

When I was doing fieldwork in Tanzania a lot of the young people were often laughing about 'Saint Kayumbas'. I asked what Saint Kayumba's were, and it led to more laughter. This was a local nickname that young people across the country had given to government schools. It comes from a marketing campaign that shows a young man, called Kayumba, struggling to learn about computers in a poorly equipped school. The advert shows him looking confused in a classroom with no books, with one teacher drawing a computer on the blackboard in front of up to 100 students, sharing desks and chairs between them. "This is a mouse" The teacher said, pointing at a hand-drawn mouse on the board, "This is a screen". Saint Kayumba's were discussed with great amusement, highlighting that young people had found a way to create a parody of the futility of teaching – and learning – in such poorly equipped environments.

But this hides a very serious point, when it comes to learning outcomes, motivations to stay in school, and the ability of education to prepare young people for work and life after they finish their education. This is a serious issue – young people are well-connected into the global economy through TV and movies, some through the internet, and subsequently, many of them want to work in the modern economy. Does such poor quality education prepare them for the types of jobs that they aspire to? Would you be able to learn about computing by drawing pictures of the hardware on a blackboard? Absolutely not, I struggle to deal with new softwares and new technologies every time I meet something new. It's only through trial and error

that you start getting to grips with these things, and the earlier you're exposed to it, the easier it becomes, which is perhaps why my 8 year old nephew is quicker on the iPhone than I am.

Would you feel motivated to come to school if these were the conditions you were learning in? We have to consider young people's motivations. Quite often when the issue of school retention is discussed, we look at the costs of education as the main reason that kids drop out of school. But young people also have to see the point of it, that staying in school will better prepare them for life when they have finished.

When the quality of schooling is so poor, and when the labour market outside of education offers so few opportunities for young people, many just don't see the point. Young men in particular, make the decision that their time is better spent dropping out of school and start trying to find a way in life sooner rather than later. They join the labour market with less education, but the reality of work for young people is that they jobs they can access don't require the education kids receive in school. Most are forced to look for small bits of work here and there – running errands, doing manual labour, wheeling and dealing, trying all sorts of routes to find small amounts of money from here and there which they can accumulate to start small enterprises. Even if they stayed in school an extra 2 or 3 years, they say, they would come out and do exactly the same job, only they'd be poorer, with less income, and less of the networks they have built up over that time.

It's hard to argue with that rationale given the situation that young people find themselves in. In the last few years Uganda has made some changes to its curriculum, integrating 'entrepreneurship' as a new module within the curriculum. It's positive to see the government adapting the curriculum in line with labour market needs and in line with the needs of today's young people, all of whom highlight that given their desire for training in business and financial management. But this shouldn't attract attention away from the need for government to find ways of expanding the sectors of the economy that create more jobs, because in the long run, entrepreneurship alone cannot solve the youth unemployment crisis.

We have to also recognise that the education crisis goes beyond poor quality education and is closely linked to problems in the economy and the labour market, which don't reward education sufficiently in income or in job availability. In both Uganda and Tanzania, young people are in a situation where they are better educated than their parents' generation, but there are so few economic opportunities available to them that this isn't translating into better outcomes for them.

So, I will finish by highlighting that the education crisis is a lived reality for young people in Uganda and Tanzania that negatively affects their life chances long after their education is finished. The key messages are that:

– We absolutely have to put focus onto the quality of education, as well as its relevance to young people's lives and the opportunities that await them.

– We need to think about education and curriculums within the bigger picture of local economies and labour markets.

– We need to act now. This is one of the biggest issues facing young people right across the world today.

Development, Education and the Learning Crisis: An alternative approach

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As a former secondary school teacher in the UK with experience of education in Nepal, Kenya and Uganda, I increasingly perceived the education system to be a structure that could, ultimately, leave some of my students excluded and marginalized, and others wrestling between their creative ambitions and defined and structured careers paths that promised financial security. Such consequences of a marketised system of 'schooling' (Giroux, 2001) aligns with dominant discourses of development; progress towards development is judged by economic performance (GNP or GDP), and a student's performance is judged by how prepared they are for entering the economic market. Despite scholarship to the contrary, and as evidenced by the increased prominence of issues of quality over quantity, the dominant approach to education essentially argues education equals development.

Although he acknowledges that wealth is important to development, in his framework 'Development as Freedom', Amartya Sen (1999) does so by reminding us it is because of what wealth can allow us to do – wealth provides access to the freedoms we enjoy. However, Sen also shows that an expanded understanding of what development *is* lays the foundation for alternative approaches where more prominence is awarded to the interconnected dimensions of human freedoms. For example, in exploring the importance of democracy, Sen argues being able to discuss and debate is important for developing an understanding of economic needs and therefore being able to participate in economic development. Two issues emerge here that are useful for thinking about education and development: the first is advanced by Freire's (1970) conception that education follows a 'banking' approach whereby passive students are vessels to be filled with knowledge by their teachers (this concurs with the criticisms that development programmes focus on education enrolment rather than quality). Sen raises the importance of skills in debate and critical thought that do not exist in the banking method of education. The second issue concerns whether such debates can be had – even if the skills for being able to debate and discuss economic needs are there, there must also be the political freedom to do so.

My research examines Egyptian diaspora and activism related to the continuing 25th January Egyptian revolution in 2011 and finds that the act of engaging in contentious politics was, for many, a learning process in itself. For example: learning how to organize events and demonstrations, including keeping people safe, engaged and wanting to participate; learning how to talk to and work with others, particularly people outside their peer group or daily life experience; and, learning how to write press releases and convey arguments coherently to media across the world on television and radio.

Many (in particular young female British Egyptians) noted the sense of empowerment that they gained by being part of a movement, connecting with other Egyptians and learning practical skills as they participated. This is particularly pertinent when we see that for many in my study the 25th January revolution was their first experience of political or social activism; although, since Sisi took the presidency and marked the return of military rule, some are struggling with what they perceive to be their failures, activists have learned about their agency to affect change, collectively and individually.

Also important for their impact on the *shape* of social change, by mobilizing within a social movement, diaspora activists learned about, challenged and contested various structures and manifestations of power. Learning about (including being more critically reflective of) the relationship between institutions such as the media, police and the judiciary, for example, is an integral stage of the process of social change in Egypt. It is important because, as one participant reflected, to create change you have to understand *what* you are trying to change and where the power lies. Talking with other activists at demonstrations and sit-ins, reading more widely, questioning and debating with family and friends, also facilitated learning about power in society, particularly among the elites and how this travels to the various institutions.

Studies of 'social movement learning' (see Hall and Turay, 2006) reveal the transformative potential of learning through mobilisation, in this case for the activists themselves and for processes of development. Diaspora are predominantly conceived as economic actors in development because of the remittances they send 'home', but this study of diaspora politics (Sheffer, 2003) reflects the wider contribution they can make to social change. It also shows that, in order to understand the role education could have for development, we need to understand how learning can shape, support and enable human freedoms in all its forms, and to recognize learning happens in many spaces (Schugurensky and Myers, 2003). Social movements can be a space of valuable and often transformative learning as activists gain new knowledge about and skills for creating and engaging with processes of social and political change and, while I am certainly not advocating a rejection of formal education, I would contend that discourses of education and development could gain much from understanding alternative approaches to social change. Learning in social movements is one such alternative.

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Capability Development beyond Human Capital: Rethinking Youth in Development in Nigeria

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In contemporary development discourse, the emergence of the Jomtein Declaration on Education for All (EFA), that shaped the MDGs and is currently shaping current post-2015 SDG agenda, advocates formal and informal education models as strategies for human and inclusive development. However, with the interwoven nature of global-regional and local policy buzzwords that is underlined by mimetic approaches to human and gendered development, the effective implementation of youth-specific development interventions and deployment of youth capabilities remains uncertain. In this context, the resultant effect of narrowly focusing on human capital without human capabilities has created a paradox and a shift from an era 'of jobs without education to education without jobs' that fits the current national development narrative of 'jobless growth'. However, with the realization of the importance of youth as 'leaders of tomorrow' and as Nigeria's 'most valuable resource' their agency and capabilities are becoming critical in ensuring that Nigeria's vision 20:2020 target of becoming amongst the top 20 countries in the world by year 2020 is met.

This paper presents a context-specific interpretation of how youth are constructed and positioned in development in Nigeria. It also discusses how the twin-challenge of capability gaps and capability traps produce a phenomenon of *youth-flation* – whereby there are more youths chasing limited available opportunity structures. It concludes suggesting that the extent to which youth capability development programmes, prepares young graduates for the challenges of national development in Nigeria, will depend on level of support and opportunity structures made available across youth life-course. Furthermore, it recommends critical human capital development areas that need to be reviewed if youths are to become and be positioned effectively in addressing challenges of national development.

A Nigerian youth is a person who is between 18-35 years of age. Beyond this age-related construction (ARC), the social construction of youth in development across Nigeria's social history has drastically changed. At a point in Nigeria's history, youths were seen as critical agents of Nigeria's nation building and pioneers of the country's democratic struggle. However, with antecedents of youth movements (in the 1920s through to Nigeria's independence in 1960), youth leadership and the agency of educated intelligentsia was instrumental in the formation of the first political parties and stabilizing the challenges of the neo-colonial Nigerian state (Olaiya, 2014). Indeed from the epoch of the Nigerian war, exacerbating post-civil war factors (e.g. high poverty and unemployment, poor implementation of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), and disconnects between policy, implementation and impact on youth livelihoods) have informed the problematic social construction of youth as rebels (e.g. leaders of social protests) and agents of political destruction (because of deviant involvement in cultism, militancy, religious extremism). Since then, the political economy of youth in Nigeria has reproduced a problematic-asset based dichotomous perspective of youth that is embedded in rhetoric of global youth development interventions. These interventions have suggested, through which Human capital (education in particular) and programmatic (youth-service organizations) interventions, ways that youths can 'become' (included) and 'belong' (participate) in processes of Nation Development in Nigeria. In other words, although Nigeria retains a problematic

rationale for interpreting the social reality of youth, positive youth development interventions that informs the political economy of youth in Nigeria's national development discourse advocates for formal/informal educational strategies and programmatic interventions for youth inclusion, participation and eventual empowerment. In this regard, youths are seen as futuristic agents of change (NESG, 2012) and as drivers of Nigeria's knowledge economy.

The foregoing positive constructions of youth in development in Nigeria has been strengthened further by the formation of youth-specific Ministries Departments and Agencies (MDAs) (e.g. Federal Ministry of Youth Development), policies (National Youth Policy), action-plans (Strategic framework for implementation of the national youth policy), programmes (e.g. National Youth Service Corps) and methodologies for understanding the positioning of youth in development (e.g. Nigerian Youth Development Index) which are critical to ensuring that the capabilities of youth in Nigeria is maximized (FMYD, 2007, 2008, 2009; FRN, 2009, 2010). This focus on maximizing and effectively utilization of youth capabilities as exemplified through the aforementioned capacity development strategies is considered important if Nigeria is to fulfil the global mandate of MDGs and its national vision 20:2020 of becoming amongst the top 20 counties in the world by 2020. The FRN (2010: 669) opines that:

> "In order to improve the quality of education at all levels, NV 20:2020 calls for measures to formulate and enforce higher education standards through quality assurance mechanisms, aimed at enforcing quality, optimal teacher-to-pupil rations, teacher education and training, as well as adequate educational facilities… In order to build the human capacity of the Nigerian population, it is important to recognise that all educational levels play an important role in developing skills that are essential to the success of the employment market and growth." (FRN, 2010; 669)

It is against this backdrop that Nigeria has adapted life-long learning strategies for ensuring youth development through education. This strategy which is embedded as part of Nigeria's human capital development initiative across youth life-course includes: early childhood care development and education (ECCDE); basic education (i.e. primary education and junior secondary school [JSS]); senior secondary schooling (SSS); tertiary education; nomadic education, and; adult and non-formal education (Ezekwesili, 2014). Other strategies (e.g. the establishment of the national youth service corps (NYSC) programme), act as crucial opportunity structure that links youth capabilities (obtained through formal education) to the employment economy (Bodley-Bond and Cronin, 2013; FMYD, 2013). Although education is advocated as integral part of youth capacity development in Nigeria, and the NYSC is seen as a pivotal institution that improves transitions from education to work, the development of young Nigerian graduates is often undermined by problematic social constructions of youth identity in the political economy as well as ineffective deployment of youth capabilities. However in reconstructing the meaning of youth through a youth-friendly lens (World Bank, 2006), The FMYD notes that:

> "Youth are [seen as] one of the greatest assets that any nation can have. Not only are they legitimately regarded as the future leaders, they are potentially and actually the greatest investment for a country's development. Young women

and men are, in particular, recognized as a vital resource whose future prospects are inextricably tied to that of their country. They are the valued possession of any nation or region. Without them there can be no future. They are the centre of reconstruction and development. They serve as a good measure of the extent to which a country can reproduce as well as sustain its self. The extent of their vitality, responsible conduct, and roles in society is positively correlated with the development of their country." (FRN, 2009:2)

Against this backdrop, national youth policy directives, legal and constitutional frameworks, define the dynamics of youth political and socio-economic participation, power, and representations (UNFPA, 2010; UNDP, 2013; Tannock and Sukarieh, 2008, 2015) in the political economy. In this regard, the centrality of positive youth development and empowerment approaches (e.g. Selvam, 2008; Tannock and Sukarieh, 2008, 2011 2015) as encapsulated in the above policy construction of youth that advances the political economy of youth (Cote, 2014) in development in development, seeks to invest (beyond the rhetoric of human capital development) in the capability and skills for national development.

Theoretical context for understanding youth in development in Nigeria

The investment in Human capital (HC) is a critical factor of economic development that is advocated as a strategy to address the challenges of economic growth (Schultz, 1961; Becker, 1964; Nafukho et al., 2004; Sanusi, 2012). The philosophical foundations of HC in mainstream development economics which explain the determinants of unequal growth paths between countries builds on Adam Smith's thesis that: investment in human capital enables an increase in future productivities by providing 'competitive advantage' for nations in the global political economy (OECD, 2011; Chiaperro-Martinneti and Sabadash, 2015). However, with the narrow nature of the HCT, contemporary scholars have integrated the human capital and human capabilities as a strategy to operationalise the Sen's capability approach (SCA) (Sen, 2004; Clark, 2005). In recent studies, the operationalization of the SCA in youth research, seeks to ensure that youth capabilities (e.g. formal and informal educational attainments) work (functioning capabilities relevant to development needs (Selvam, 2008; Chiaperro-Martinneti and Sabadash, 2015). Indeed, the centrality of the SCA in advancing the limitations of HCT is important in the context of youth research because, education and knowledge is not only be viewed as either an 'end' – where high levels of education and knowledge are achieved, or a 'means' – to ensuring work status through obtained education, but should be seen as a conversion factor –through which there is effective capability development of other aspects of people's lives including health, social and intellectual capital.

The repositioning of Youth in Development in Nigeria

The dividends of Nigeria's young demographic power have far reaching benefits. With approximately 70% of the population being youth, and with the country projected to become a major supplier of the global workforce by 2030 (NESG, 2012), the choice of harnessing youth talents for national development is becoming imperative. In this regard, the urgency of strengthening the human capital base in Nigeria, with a specific focus on youth development through the provision of quality education is critical to creating

a competent workforce capable of addressing national poverty and development challenges as well as competing globally. Though there has been a dramatic increase in the budgetary allocation to human capital development between 2012 and 2015 (Table 1.1), a detailed evaluation reveals that education and health are the greatest benefactors of this increase. Other aspect of human capital development including youth development has seemingly declined. This is apparently due to the policy emphasis on education as a means of empowering youths (both women and men alike) for development.

Table 1.1: Budgetary Allocation Towards Human Capital Development (2012-2015)					
Area of critical Development need	Thematic Focus	2012 (N'Million)	2015 (Projected) (N'Million)	Total Budgetary Allocation 2012-2015 (Million)	% Share of Total Budget (2012-2015)
Human Capital Development	Education	9,850.00	128,000.00	344,350.00	4.78%
	Health	45,310.00	70,000.00	229,310.00	3.18%
	Women and Social Development	7,103.45	6,619.58	28,371.39	0.39%
	Youth Development	11,833.61	6,812.41	35,201.58	0.49%
	Labour and Productivity	15,323.69	14,214.99	58,885.85	0.82%
Total Expenditure:		**89,420.75**	**225,646.98**	**696,118.82**	**9.67%**

Source: (NPC, 2011:19)

Despite these efforts, the FMYD (2009) contends that total investments in youth development by States in Nigeria have remained unimpressive. This continues to feed the viscous cycle of joblessness, criminality, militancy, youth restiveness that further disconnects from mainstream society (FRN, 2004). Though the level of quantitative investment in youth development in Nigeria (in terms of number of schools and infrastructure) has improved in contemporary times (Sanusi, 2012), the quality of graduates that are produced especially from tertiary institutions in Nigeria remain suspect (Ezekwesili, 2014).

Conclusion

In advancing youth positioning in development in Nigeria, examination bottlenecks at each stage of youth transition – from one level of education to another or from education to work, needs to reviewed. Emphasis should be on providing social safety nets, adequate support structures, qualitative skills training and advocacy for entrepreneurial development in terms of youth policy planning as this will help bridging the capability gaps between youth in Nigeria and their counterparts in other parts of the developed world. In context of improving education-to-work transitions, the NYSC programme and the deployment of youth capabilities to places of national development needs should efficient in the sense that skills don't only fit and address challenges of national development but they also function effectively in bring about national transformation. Therefore in attempts to avoid further *youth-flation* the following challenges in the Nigerian educational system need to reconsidered.

1. Outdated curriculum needs to be reviewed

2. Educational training and skills development needs to be realigned to fit the national development narrative.

3. More support structures need to be provided across youth educational pathways in bridging the capability gaps between Nigeria youth cohorts.

4. Examination bottlenecks that continue to limit transition success of youth either from one level of education to another or from education to work need to be reviewed, and

5. Limited opportunity structures that further trap youth and their capabilities in social warehouses as unemployed and people who can be considered as NEETs (not in education, employment or training)

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Tackling the learning crisis: not easy, but simple

Paul Skidmore, CEO of the Rising Academy Network which aims to expand access to quality education in West Africa, https://www.facebook.com/risingacademies

Across the developing world, more children are in school. We should celebrate that, and acknowledge that the job is not yet done: in Nigeria alone, 10.5m children are out of school.[8]

Nevertheless, it is time to move beyond a focus on getting kids into school and start focusing on the quality of the education they receive when they get there.

The story of Mohammed, 13, one of my students in Sierra Leone, illustrates why. Mohammed's father is an illiterate petty trader. Although he never got any school himself, he has always been determined that Mohammed should get a good education. When Mohammed joined us, we asked him, as we ask all our students, to complete a word reading assessment.[9] The assessment, which we administer one-to-one in the child's home, involves reading out a list of 90 words that increase in complexity and difficulty, and from the number and difficulty of the words read correctly an inference can be drawn about the student's reading age based on UK norms.

Mohammed got stuck straight away. He barely made it past the first line or two – words like 'he', 'she', 'cup', 'said'. Mohammed's father couldn't read but he could see that his son was struggling and did his best to encourage him. "Try your best Mohammed", he said. And Mohammed did. He kept trying. But no matter how long he took he couldn't recognise the words, and eventually we had to call time on the test. Mohammed's father was heartbroken. "I've paid all this money for school," he said, "but his head is empty."

Unfortunately, Mohammed's story is far from unique. Across the world we face a learning crisis. 130m children are in primary school but failing to master the basics.[10] 175m 15-24 year olds cannot read a sentence.[11] In East Africa, 1 in 5 kids in grade 7 are operating at grade 1 level. In India 40% of kids in grade 3 can't read a grade 2-level text.[12] And in Sierra Leone, where I work, the number of students graduating senior secondary school with passes in English and Maths is 1 in 100.

When a child comes to school, we make them a promise. We tell them: if you come every day, if you work hard, if you try your best, then you will leave here with the knowledge and skills to make a success of your life. All over the world, we are breaking that promise, and it is people like Mohammed and his father that pay the price.

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8   http://www.aworldatschool.org/country/nigeria

9   For a description, see http://doc.ukdataservice.ac.uk/doc/5585/mrdoc/pdf/bcs70_2004_guide_to_child_assessments.pdf

10   https://efareport.wordpress.com/2014/04/04/250-million-children-not-learning-but-has-there-been-any-progress/

11   ibid.

12   http://img.asercentre.org/docs/Publications/ASER%20Reports/ASER%202014/nationalfindings.pdf

The frustration is that we know what works. A recent World Bank summary of 6 systematic reviews and 227 individual studies looking at the evidence on improving learning in developing countries found that it boils down to two main things: better teaching (in particular, teaching that is more differentiated to the varying ability levels of learners) and stronger accountability for performance.[13]

But if the formula is simple in theory, applying it in practice is anything but. To understand why, we need to understand the politics of reform. Think about the politics of enrolment for a moment. Measures to increase enrolment create a lot of winners. More schools are built, more construction workers have work, more teachers are hired, more photo opportunities are created, fees are removed. It is not that there are *no* costs – the surge in demand typically puts pressure on existing provision and drives up class sizes – but they are spread more thinly and are less visible than the benefits.

The politics of improving quality are almost the exact opposite: they create a lot of losers. Failing schools need to be shut. Bad teachers need to be fired. Accurate and transparent data on the scale of the problem can embarrass policy-makers and school leaders. Old assumptions need to be cast off. And while in the end everyone will benefit from a stronger education system, those benefits are thinly spread and will take many years of determined effort to materialize.

The result is that a great many otherwise laudable initiatives to provide extra learning materials or train teachers fail to deliver the expected benefit because they are taking place in a context in which the incentives to really improve are so weak.

What's to be done? The evidence suggests that what you need to do depends greatly on the particular starting point,[14] but here are four ideas.

First, empower parents and communities through data and greater transparency about just how badly many of their schools are doing. In India, ASER's community-based learning assessments have sparked a revolution in accountability that has now spread to East and West Africa and Latin America.[15] Eventually, every developing country will have its own version of ASER, and not a moment too soon.

Second, encourage innovation. Forget the sterile debate about public versus private schools. The challenge at the moment is that there are not enough good schools full stop. We need more models with a proven capacity to crack the problem of poor teaching and with the potential to scale, and we can't afford to be picky about where they come from.

Third, once we have more models that seem to be working, scale them up. Government will always have a critical role in education, shaping the overall strategic direction of the system, setting minimum standards, and addressing access and equity challenges. But none of those roles require it to be a dominant provider

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13 http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2015/02/26/090224b082b5cbf1/1_0/Rendered/PDF/What0really0wo0n0systematic0reviews.pdf

14 http://www.mckinsey.com/client_service/social_sector/latest_thinking/worlds_most_improved_schools

15 http://www.asercentre.org/

of education itself if there are others who can do it better. A number of countries have created innovative public-private partnership frameworks,[16] as well as putting in place mechanisms that allow top performers within the public system to expand their reach through federations of schools.

Fourth, harness the power of cities. It is tempting to treat education as a national issue and of course it matters that we try to make things better for every child no matter where they live. But counterinsurgency manuals teach the practical importance of securing the big population centres, and education reformers might take a leaf out of the same book. In Sierra Leone, half of junior secondary students live in one of the four biggest cities. Targeted approaches to drive performance in each of those municipalities would quickly start to move the needle nationally, generating momentum and starting to relax some of the binding constraints that make improving education in rural areas even more fiendishly difficult.

"There are no *easy* answers," former US President Ronald Reagan liked to say, "but there are *simple* answers." We know what it will take to address the learning crisis: make teachers and schools accountable for their performance (both from the top-down and the bottom-up), and provide teachers with the support and training they need to enable quality teaching and learning tailored to students' ability levels. It's not easy, but it is simple.

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16 See http://www.arkonline.org/news/public-or-private-there-is-a-third-way-of-delivering-quality-secondary-education-in-africa