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## **Making the Right Connections: Globalization, Economic Inclusion and African Workers**

### **Introduction: Globalization, African Workers and the Terms of Inclusion**

**Kate Meagher, Laura Mann and Maxim Bolt**

#### **I. Introduction**

Economic resurgence in Sub-Saharan Africa raises new questions about who benefits from inclusion in the global economy. Over the past decade, donors and investors have scrambled to take part in the rise of the African Lions, associated with average annual growth rates pushing 5%, improvements in governance and talk of an expanding middle class (August 2013; Economist 2011; Roxburgh et al. 2010; African Economic Outlook 2015). Yet rapid economic growth has not trickled down to the majority of African populations. Nearly 50% of Africans still live below the poverty line, more than two thirds of non-agricultural workers earn their living in the informal economy, and youth unemployment is rising, particularly among university graduates (African Economic Outlook 2010; Vanek et al. 2013; Garica and Faures 2008). Closer integration into the global economy through global value chains, digital networks, innovation hubs and inclusive business models is viewed as essential to turning growth into job creation in a region in which escalating unemployment is compounded by the highest population growth rates in the world. This special issue examines the positive and negative effects of global economic inclusion for African workers, with attention to the terms of inclusion fostered by globalizing economies.

Clarifying the way in which globalization affects African labour dynamics requires an engagement with debates about the meaning of global economic inclusion. Market-led approaches identify economic inclusion with greater participation in global markets (World Development Report 2013; de Haan and Thorat 2013; de Mello and Dutz 2014; African Economic Outlook 2015). Addressing poverty and economic exclusion involves reducing the barriers to participation by enhancing labour market flexibility and bridging market failures that limit access to resources and employment opportunities among the poor and unemployed (African Economic Outlook 2014; London and Hart 2011; WDR 2013; Mendoza and Thelen 2008). An emphasis on 'inclusive markets', 'financial inclusion' and 'inclusive growth' seeks to address economic exclusion by connecting the poor more directly into the global economy.

Conversely, structuralist perspectives define economic inclusion, not just as inclusion in global economic systems, but as inclusion in the *benefits* of the global economy (Heintz 2009; UNRISD 2010). They note that inclusion in global markets can increase rather than reduce the vulnerability of workers in developing countries. As Phillips and Sakamoto (2012:288) explain, 'contrary to orthodox assumptions that 'inclusion' in global economic activity (through employment) is the key to poverty reduction or 'social upgrading', the terms of this inclusion can instead create and perpetuate poverty for a large part of the world's labour force'. The central issue is not just the presence or absence of connections to the global economy, but the economic and power relations embedded in those connections. Greater attention to the terms of global inclusion for rural and urban workers in developing countries has triggered a proliferation of research on processes of 'adverse

incorporation', defined as 'inclusion on worse terms' (Barrientos et al. 2013; Hickey and du Toit 2007; Meagher and Lindell 2013; Phillips 2011).

Understanding the implications of global economic inclusion for African workers has been complicated by the complex changes in the nature and organization of employment. Amid processes of globalization, economic restructuring, diversification and informalization, African workers have been forced into a range of new labour categories, including graduate micro-entrepreneurs, informal workers in formal firms, and modern forms of bonded labour. These arrangements often blur traditional distinctions between formal and informal, skilled and unskilled, free and unfree labour. Indeed, some scholars argue that these binary distinctions obstruct the task of understanding the dynamics of labour transformations in the context of globalization. Lerche (2011) and Barrientos et al. (2013) have called for the varieties of vulnerable labour to be represented as a continuum of 'unfreedoms' with decent work at one end and extremes of forced and child labour at the other. They argue that examining gradations of informal and unfree labour as a continuum facilitates a clearer understanding of the impact of globalization on promoting or undermining the creation of decent work.

Yet a similar continuum of labour quality outlined in the World Development Report on Jobs (2013) puts forward a very different interpretation of the boundary between decent and indecent work. According to the authors, 'Jobs are activities that generate actual or imputed income, monetary or in kind, formal or informal. But not all forms of work can be deemed jobs. Activities performed against the will of the worker or involving violations of fundamental human rights should not be considered jobs.' This account excludes as illegitimate forms of work only forced and child labour, while asserting that 'informal jobs can be good jobs for development in less developed countries' (ibid.:33-4). The process of global economic inclusion does not only involve the incorporation of workers, but unleashes new struggles over the boundaries of legitimate and illegitimate forms of work.

This special issue seeks to advance the analysis of how global inclusion is reshaping opportunities and terms of employment for African workers in the context of resurgent growth. What kinds of new economic opportunities are being created by global connections, and how are they reshaping formal as well as informal labour markets? How do they affect the scope for agency and livelihood security among African workers, entrepreneurs and professionals? What are the implications of these transformations for employment, poverty alleviation and economic transformation within African societies? To what extent do these processes of economic change signal a new era of rising incomes and opportunity for African workers, and in what contexts do they represent novel forms of exploitation and adverse incorporation, characterized by expanding employment on disadvantageous terms?

To address these questions, the articles presented here draw on fresh empirical material from a number of globalizing African countries to interrogate contemporary debates about economic inclusion. The scholars involved were initially brought together in a panel on African workers and globalization at the 2013 European Conference for African Studies, with one outside addition. Articles cover East, West and Southern African cases, focusing on some of Africa's most globalized economies, with a view to examining how workers are affected in best-case scenarios of dynamic global inclusion. Particular attention is paid to the refashioning of linkages between the local and the global, formal and informal, and the mediation of these interfaces by state policy, local associations and an ethically-styled business infrastructure of enlightened capitalism, social

enterprise and corporate social responsibility. The objective is to explore how African workers engage with new openings from below in the face of competing agendas of incorporation from above. While some have suggested that 'African Lions' might be poised to have their day in the sun, this special issue examines who will be the lions and who will be the gazelles in the encounter of Africa's footloose labour, striving graduates and intrepid entrepreneurs with the opportunities and demands of the global economy.

This introductory article will set the scene by reflecting on the wider historical, structural and theoretical issues informing the global inclusion of African workers. It will focus on two broad questions: how has engagement with the global economy affected African workers over time, and what is the transformative potential of global connections in the current era? The next section will place the continuities and transformations of African workers' engagement with the global economy in historical context. This will be followed by a consideration of the contemporary context, involving a brief outline of the seven articles in this special issue, and an examination of the structural realities of global connections in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The final two sections examine the effect of global connections on the terms of inclusion, first by focusing on the factors leading to adverse incorporation, and secondly by focusing on alternative possibilities for promoting economic transformation and long-term improvements in the livelihoods of African workers.

## **2. Incorporating African Workers: Transformations and Historical Continuities**

When thinking about the developmental role of global connections, it is important to remember that the engagement of African workers in the global economy is nothing new. Historians and anthropologists have traced a long history of African engagement in global systems of production and exchange as traders, as slaves, as migrant workers in mines and plantations, and as peasant farmers producing export crops (Cooper 2001; Hopkins 1973; Austen 1987). What is novel in the current conjuncture are the specific mechanisms and terms on which African workers are being incorporated into globalized systems of accumulation. This is not so much a question of transnational linkages, but of how workers are defined as valuable in relation to the global economy. Global linkages have always involved more than just connecting with African labour; they play a central role in fashioning and refashioning the definition of legitimate work and the terms on which Africans are recognized and rewarded as workers.

From the outset, global connections have not necessarily offered African workers a path out of vulnerability. One of the earliest engagements of African workers with the global market economy involved the intensification of vulnerable labour through the slave trade. In the early colonial period, interests shifted to the creation of a system of free wage labour, involving new struggles over labour control and the boundaries of legitimate work. On the one hand, the colonial authorities had to uproot labour from indigenous systems of labour control (Guyer 1993; Brown and van der Linden 2010). On the other hand, viable labour markets had to overcome the existence of an 'exit option' which allowed African workers to flee or withdraw into subsistence or informality if wages or working conditions in the colonial economy were unattractive (Hyden 1983; Ferguson 2013; Lemarchand 1992). Strategies of outlawing local slavery, coercive taxation systems, destroying and criminalizing competing local activities, and inculcating Christian work ethics were used to drive African workers into labour markets and cash crop production to make them useful to the needs of colonial capital (Arrighi 1970; Comaroff and Comaroff 1991; Cooper 1992, 1998; Freund

1988; Watts 1983; Wrigley 1957). As the articles in this special issue demonstrate, new forms of labour discipline, religious ethics, and regulatory change continue to play a role in redefining the boundaries of labour control and legitimate work in contemporary efforts to adapt African workers to the demands of globalizing economies.

The formalization of African waged employment from the late colonial period improved terms and conditions of employment, and made permanent jobs in formal sector firms or public administration into important markers of economic modernization and personal economic success, particularly in the emerging middle classes (Ferguson 1999; Freund 1988). However, as Brass (2009, 2010) and others have detailed, colonial export production also continued to make significant use of non-waged and unfree labour, including peasant labour, forced labour, and coercive forms of labour contracting, wherever free waged labour proved costly, disruptive or unavailable (Brown and van der Linden 2010; Freund 1988; Martino 2012). Although forced labour was regarded as morally and legally unacceptable by colonial and metropolitan governments, its continued practice in many parts of West, Central and Southern Africa via chiefs, labour contractors and other intermediaries, allowed forms of work deemed illegitimate within market economies to play a lasting role in global production systems. As many of the articles in this special issue reveal, the role of brokers and intermediaries is echoed in contemporary labour practices for integrating formally unacceptable labour arrangements into global value chains.

Despite the persistence of informal labour systems, ideologies of modernization converged with legal regulations and local aspirations to support a trajectory of labour formalization during the independence period. This was abruptly reversed by crisis and economic restructuring in the late 1970s and 1980s. Once again, the economic and regulatory demands of the global economy radically restructured African labour systems. Trade and currency liberalization, the downsizing of the public sector and consequent processes of retrenchment and deindustrialization forced labour out of formal labour markets into burgeoning informal economies in a process Marxist scholars refer to as 'deproletarianization', and others simply call 'informalization' (Brass 1994, 2009, 2010; Vandemoortele 1992; Meagher 1995; Rogerson 1997). In many parts of the continent, real wages fell by over 90% between the early 1970s and the early 1990s among professionals as well as unskilled labour, and informal economies swelled to an average of 72% of the non-agricultural labour force, unravelling local 'expectations of modernity' (Ferguson 1999, ILO 2002; Jamal and Weeks 1993, Vandemoortele 1992; Mkandawire and Soludo 1999; Rogerson 1999).

Unable to absorb their own labour force within formal or informal economic systems, African economies were turned 'from a people-scarce system to a people surplus one...', haemorrhaging workers into petty informal activities and transnational migrant networks (Ferguson 2013:230). In the intervening decades, the boundaries of legitimate work have been reshaped by ideologies of survival rather than modernization, morally revalorizing informal forms of work denounced as backward in an earlier era. Whether the widespread informalization of African economies in the 1980s and 1990s is regarded as a means of cheapening and disciplining labour as argued by Marxist scholars, or as a barometer of Africa's 'structural irrelevance' to the global economy, what is clear is that over time, global connections have been as much as source of vulnerability for African workers as a solution to it (Brass 1997, 2010; Castells 1998; Rogerson 1997).

### **3. New Global Connections: Conduits, Siphons and Intermediaries**

In the new era of 'Africa Rising', we are witnessing a global reevaluation of African workers as productive economic actors. Global engagement with African workers offers welcome employment prospects for expanding pools of unemployed and informalized labour, along with new access to skills, capital and technology. However, global promises of access to jobs come with a further reshaping of the nature of employment. International development discourse is increasingly marked by an inversion of value hierarchies between formal and informal employment (World Development Report 2013; African Development Bank 2013). In the recent World Development Report on Jobs (2013), informal employment is celebrated as 'inclusive', 'transformational', and 'good for development', while formal employment is denigrated as a source of job shortage, economic stagnation, and social exclusion. While formal workers have always represented only a small fraction of the African labour force, the articles in this special issue consider whether global economic engagement with the informal economy represents a new horizon of opportunity for African workers, or a reversal of the developmental commitment to expanding decent employment.

Answering this question requires a closer examination of the structure of global connections that link African workers into the global economy. Understanding how, or whether, global economic inclusion can improve the opportunities and working conditions of African workers, calls for an examination of the actors, processes, institutions and disciplinary techniques through which global linkages operate, and a consideration of how benefits are distributed within them. While global connections can act as conduits of investment, skills and employment opportunities, they also have a potential to serve as siphons, tapping local labour, social knowledge and structures of collective action for the benefit of external investors (Meagher and Lindell 2013; Meagher 2013; Dolan and Roll 2013; Elyachar 2012). More specific questions need to be asked about how global linkages mediate access to the benefits of globalization, and how they interact with the agency of African workers and entrepreneurs.

Examining the technical and institutional dynamics of global value chains, fibre optic cables, transnational kinship or religious networks, and corporate linkages with the bottom of the pyramid, we can begin to grasp the variety and complexity of networks linking African workers to the global economy. Far from constituting smooth direct channels of opportunity, these networks are structured by a range of intermediaries that link global firms and international development actors to the intricate institutional ecosystems of African workers, consumers and entrepreneurs. Reflecting on the rising importance of brokerage in contemporary South Africa, Deborah James (2011) notes its role in linking otherwise incompatible regulatory frameworks of state, market and local civil society. Proponents of bottom of the pyramid initiatives have emphasized the need for 'honest brokers' such as NGOs and social enterprises to mediate the gap between formal corporate institutions and the varied and often informal local arrangements encountered on the ground in African countries (Webb et al. 2010; Rivera-Santos and Rufin 2010; Rivera-Santos et al. 2012). Linkages between African workers and global sources of opportunity are often indirect.

This demands a stronger focus on how brokers and intermediaries alter regulatory systems in the process of connecting global labour demand to local labour supply. Some commentators highlight the role of communal or philanthropic intermediaries in bypassing publicly sanctioned systems of labour regulation. Gavin Smith (1994:80) reflects on how the apparently Polanyian re-embedding of economic activities in communal and societal networks may actually serve to 'shift regulation to new forms and social spaces' – in the process, acting to 'justify forms of labour regulation hitherto deemed unethical by all parties involved, and to delegitimize collective action by people in their

capacity as workers' ((Smith 1994:80-82, see also Corrigan 1977; Elyachar 2005). Similarly, commentators on global value chains have noted that brokers and multiple tiers of intermediaries play a key role in evading labour regulations and squeezing labour in ways that are deemed legally and morally unacceptable in developed and developing countries (Lerche 2011:22; Barrientos et al. 2011; Theron 2005). As James (2011) and others have noted, some intermediate workers may consolidate their positions by actively producing others' informality and vulnerability, such as local notables, educated rural fixers, or graduate SMEs, who facilitate global access to diverse informal labour systems (Bolt 2013; Teglskov Nielsen 2012; Avle 2013). While intermediaries help to link local labour supplies to global labour demand, they can also be used to bypass legal and moral obstacles to intensified labour exploitation.

The articles presented here examine the mechanisms of labour inclusion through a focus on three broad contexts. Articles by Meagher, Pezzano and Dolan focus on workers in the informal economy experiencing globalization from above; Mann and Graham, and Setrana trace the experience of skilled workers engaging with the global economy from below; and articles by Laterza and Bolt examine experiences of globalization by rural workers in dependent labour relations. From the perspective of informal workers, Meagher's article investigates the potential for Africa's rapid population growth and expanding informal economies to generate a 'demographic dividend' capable of fueling rapid development. Drawing on evidence of Africa's stalled demographic transition and its interaction with processes of informalization, she examines who is best placed to reap a dividend from global linkages with informalized pools of African labour. Far from resolving problems of employment and economic inclusion, she shows that the developmental implications for African countries and African workers are likely to be limited. By contrast, Pezzano focuses on the capacity of informal street traders to resist global economic imperatives. He traces how struggles between informal traders, traders associations, and various levels of state authorities in Johannesburg thwart efforts to incorporate informal actors on terms set by powerful global imperatives and formal sector officials. The selective regularization of the right to the city for some informal traders produces a complex intersection of cooption and resistance among excluded traders, blurring the boundaries between informality and state recognition. While the ensuing struggles lead to a legal victory for excluded informal traders in the South African Constitutional Court, they also trigger a political backlash grounded in the organizational imperatives of the global city.

Dolan's article examines how informal workers in Nairobi slums are being repurposed through an encounter with corporate Bottom of the Pyramid initiatives. Through the intermediary of a social enterprise, unemployed youth are trained to become entrepreneurs using regimes of corporate discipline normally reserved for wage labour. Discourses of inclusion and empowerment are deployed alongside training and performance metrics that use 'technologies of the self' to impose rigorous labour control on vulnerable informal workers restyled as entrepreneurs. Dolan examines the implications of using poor youth to meet the requirements of the corporate bottom line at the bottom of the pyramid. While the allure of entrepreneurship responds to youthful ambitions for social advancement, the realities of insecure informal work frustrate aspirations and demonstrate the limited capacities of BoP initiatives to transform economic conditions.

Mann and Graham, and Setrana, explore the efforts of skilled labour and engagement with the formal sector to seek out more advantageous avenues of global incorporation from below. Mann and Graham examine the efforts of the Kenyan state and local IT sector to engage with global circuits of hi-tech, professional employment through strategic investments in infrastructure, skills

and business linkages in the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industry. However, they show how late-comer disadvantage combines with political pressures in developed economies to undermine Kenya's access to high value jobs in globalized hi-tech activities. Ideologies of seamless connections to the global economy via fibre optic cables were forced to confront real world hierarchies of lead firms, first movers and experience-based barriers to entry. In Setrana's article, we encounter the individual efforts of Ghanaian return migrants to convert connections to skills and resources abroad into livelihood opportunities after their return to Ghana. Despite favourable economic conditions in Ghana – a country blessed by political stability, rapid growth and new oil discoveries – return migrants grapple with narrowing opportunities abroad and fragile labour market conditions at home. While some migrants are able to parlay global connections into successful livelihoods, they fall short of generating wider dynamics of employment generation and economic transformation within Ghana, leading to calls for state assistance to promote migrant-led processes of globalization.

Articles by Laterza and Bolt examine how participation in global value chains and international charitable initiatives affects rural labour relations in Southern Africa. Laterza deconstructs the inclusive vision of a transnational Pentecostal social enterprise that combines donor resources with timber exports in the operation of an orphanage in Swaziland. Beneath the rhetoric of charity, arrangements rely on cheap highly racialized labour relations based on white management and black workers disciplined through segregation, unfree labour practices, and stark economic inequality. The demands of charitable financing and global timber markets reinforce rather than dissolve coercive colonial systems of labour brokerage and exploitative working conditions. Similarly, Bolt examines how the engagement of South African white farmers in global agricultural value chains perpetuate racialized relations of dependency between farmers and agricultural labourers in response to competitive global price pressures. White farmers use discourses of compliance with labour laws and corporate social responsibility aimed at an audience of state institutions and international supermarkets, while doing little to change the vulnerable conditions of black farmworkers. Instead, senior black farmworkers, tasked with connecting their subordinates to the institutional necessities within their reach, reinforce established paternalist conceptions of workforce hierarchy. In both articles, discourses of corporate and charitable governance often disguise rather than transform the social logics of dependency and racial inequality that endure below the radar of global economic values.

The wide range of global connections and African workers explored by these articles highlights the significant role played by intermediaries in structuring global connections. They offer valuable insights into the ways that that intermediaries and brokers not only connect, but reconfigure, global labour linkages and the distribution of benefits. The complex array of commercial or community-based labour brokers, social enterprises, NGOs and skilled graduates provide insights into the regulatory transformations taking place within these connections, and allow closer analysis of the use of efficiency concerns or charitable cover to mask unstable and often exploitative labour relations. A focus on intermediaries provides a more nuanced analysis of the dynamics of global inclusion by exploring the specific institutional mechanisms through which African workers are included in global circuits of capital, and the embedded regulatory arrangements that define access to the benefits of global inclusion.

#### **4. Economic Inclusion or Adverse Incorporation?**



A central question raised by this special issue is whether integration into global markets creates genuine inclusion in the economic benefits of global markets, or traps African workers in processes of adverse incorporation. The articles presented here confirm that global connections are transforming African labour relations, but not always in the interest of African workers. Collectively, they contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics of global economic inclusion, and the processes that lead to adverse incorporation. In particular, they highlight the selectivity of processes of inclusion, the limited organizational power of African workers to defend their interests within global linkages, and the tendency to focus on the quantity of employment created while obscuring questions of work quality.

Attention to the selective character of global economic inclusion highlights the reality of winners and losers among African workers (See also Meagher forthcoming). As several of the articles show, inclusion fosters simultaneous processes of differentiation and exclusion among workers, dividing Johannesburg street traders into regularized or irregular operators, black farm workers into regular or undocumented workers, and Kenyan slum dwellers into dynamic BoP entrepreneurs or unproductive hawkers and street youth (Pezzano; Bolt; and Dolan, this issue). In the process, 'usable Africans' are identified, and 'unusable Africans' are deselected, delegitimized, even criminalized (Dolan and Roll 2013). Far from creating channels for benefits to trickle down, such selective and partial forms of inclusion may exacerbate rather than stem the risk of ongoing poverty and political unrest (Meagher forthcoming).

Even among the included, many of the articles highlight the limited organizational power of African workers to translate global connections into meaningful improvements in incomes and working conditions. For many, global inclusion simply means a transition straight from the informal economy into the equally vulnerable 'precariat' (Standing 2011). Transformative discourses of entrepreneurship and poverty alleviation disguise rather than alter conditions of low wages, unstable employment, and harsh working conditions. From below, articles by Laterza and Bolt draw attention to the 'institutional, ideological and geographical barriers' that militate against real economic inclusion. From above, articles by Meagher and Mann and Graham show how the competitive dynamics of global value chains drive risks and costs down the chain, creating 'nodes of poverty' and processes of 'social downgrading' for workers in the lower tiers (See also Barrientos et al. 2011; Nadvi 2004; Goger et al. 2014). Scope for realizing gains is limited to the more skilled, connected and organized workers. For the rest, rather than gaining access to the advantages of global markets, global markets appear to be gaining access to African workers on terms that offer limited opportunities for improving their economic condition.

Indeed, many of these articles indicate that global economic inclusion is more strongly associated with informalization and adverse incorporation than with improvements in incomes and working conditions. Globalizing discourses of market integration tend to draw on notions of expanding opportunity to remaster vulnerable and unstable employment as a source of economic inclusion. There is a tendency to focus attention on the regularization and re-moralization of informal employment, often aided by intermediaries such as social enterprises, Pentecostal religious networks, and CSR initiatives that blur the lines between charity and cheap labour. In analysing the implications of globalization for African workers, greater attention is needed to the quality as well as the quantity of work, and to the structural as well as the individual processes that contribute to the expansion of decent work opportunities. More also needs to be known about how processes of legal, corporate and charitable recognition of informal workers affects prospects for achieving

decent work. Do calls for the recognition or regularization of casualized workers, street traders and ersatz entrepreneurs in BoP initiatives precipitate a normalization of their vulnerable status or open the way to addressing the economic realities of low and unstable incomes. Closer attention to issues of work quality are needed if the flurry of global connections is to move beyond the illusion of inclusion to deliver concrete gains to African workers.

## **5. Making Connections and Transforming Economies**

Collectively, these articles invite further reflection on how globalization can promote more equitable opportunities for African workers. Natural resource windfalls, booming foreign direct investment and expanding pools of skilled labour offer openings for investment in technological leapfrogging and upgrading to higher value sectors. The spread of fibre optic connectivity is transforming a growing number of African economies from 'black holes of informational capitalism' (Castells 1997: 161) and promising to turn African producers into participants in a digital revolution (Graham and Mann 2013). As Mann and Graham demonstrate in the case of Kenya, reaping the benefits of these global connections is not automatic with firms struggling to attract work even after substantial investments have been made. Nevertheless, Kenya's experience may offer important lessons for future African entrants seeking to reap greater benefits from digital connections. Equally, the demographic slow-down in advanced economies draws attention to the rising importance of Africa as a source of labour for the global economy, suggesting policy openings for securing a better deal for African workers (Meagher, this issue). More questions need to be asked about the linkages, alliances and policy strategies most conducive to ensuring that African workers reap their share of the gains.

African states play an important role in promoting effective avenues for the global integration of their workers. But states have responded in different ways to these incentives. On one end of the spectrum articles by Bolt, Laterza and Pezzano in this issue highlight the complicit role of the Swazi and South African states, variously allying with international corporate interests in order to attract flows of foreign investment, or turning a blind eye to immigration infractions and labour violations in white commercial farms, except for periodic raids that only serve to intensify the vulnerability and docility of workers. However, parallel efforts by the South African state to use legal rulings to protect informal workers demonstrates the complex and often contradictory role of the state in mediating global engagement with African workers. The case of Kenya's entry into the globalized IT sector shows that African states can also take a leading role in building more advantageous global connections from below, with a view to fostering more productive and remunerative employment linkages (Mann and Graham, this issue). However, the state's efforts to forge global connections in response to local development needs rather than global labour demand can be thwarted by limited experience, as well as by the power of global market forces and incumbent global firms.

Whatever the response of African states, the articles in this collection highlight the crucial role of local institutions and collective organizations in mediating how global investors engage with workers and local entrepreneurs (Coe et al. 2004). Attention to the role of interests, economic pressures and power relations in shaping the quality of job opportunities reveals both the importance of and the constraints on constructive state involvement in ensuring that linkages with the global economy provide decent employment for Africa's expanding population. It remains to be seen whether the emergence of potential 'developmental states' in Botswana, Mauritius, Rwanda and Ethiopia

(Kelsall, 2013; Mkandawire 2001) and the identification of successful government-led upgrading of agro-processing sectors in Mozambique, Uganda and Ghana (Whitfield et al, 2015) will open the door to the expansion and upgrading of local employment opportunities, or whether these states will be drawn into incentives for the cheapening and informalization of labour in the quest for global competitiveness.

Ultimately, the papers in this special issue raise questions about the implications for African labour of contemporary discourses of inclusive growth (de Mello and Dutz 2014; UNDG 2013). On the eve of the Post-2015 Development Agenda, replete with promises of greater attention to equity and inclusion, there is a need to look beyond global connections to the nature of the economic transformations that they promote. As Cooper (2001:203) reminds us, to understand what the global economy can do for Africa, we need to look at how production is organized rather than just focus on the existence of linkages to a wider spatial system. There is a need to look beyond the mere creation of global employment connections to consider the patterns of connections necessary to generate rising incomes, increased productivity and local economic transformation (Chang, 2002). Simply linking African labour to global demand provides little scope for the kind of strategic agricultural and industrial transformation needed to provide access to dignified livelihoods for Africa's growing population, skilled as well as unskilled, from poor as well as middle class backgrounds. Indeed, global labour linkages may weaken national organic links between agriculture and industry, and lock in incentives for free market policies of liberalization and globalization that encourage cheap labour strategies and trajectories of immiserising growth (UNRISD 2010; Kaplinsky 2000; Whitfield, 2012).

This prompts us to question whether the use of global connections to resolve Africa's employment problems stimulates the right kinds of labour demand. Evidence of 'jobless growth' and tendencies of inclusive initiatives toward casualization and informalization of African labour suggest otherwise. As James Heintz (2009) argues, '[p]rogress in terms of poverty reduction will be far slower if informal employment expands and the returns to labour in these forms of precarious employment do not improve'. From a social as well as an economic perspective, policy initiatives to address youth unemployment by celebrating informal entrepreneurship sit uncomfortably with the aspirational climate of Africa's expanding middle class – as starkly revealed by the death of some 16 Nigerian graduates in a desperate stampede to apply for government jobs in 2014, and the ongoing saga of African migrants fleeing across the Mediterranean in search of better opportunities.

Finally, there is a need to consider the impact of global employment linkages on broader political transformations. Several papers in this special issue signal the dangers of casualization for collective organization. Dolan echoes Bauman's (2004: 90) observation that workers at the bottom of the pyramid are being encouraged to seek "their own *individual* solutions to the *socially* produced troubles". Other articles note the tendency of precarious conditions at the bottom of global value chains to throw traders and skilled as well as unskilled workers back into paternalistic relations and individual survival strategies. Yet Pezzano's account of informal street traders in Johannesburg speaks to the potential of collective organization, showing that even informal organizations can sometimes circumvent processes of adverse incorporation. It also suggests that, for African workers, making the right connections for improved livelihoods may have as much to do with political alliances, state-society engagement and effective use of the law as with global economic linkages.

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