**Pathways of power in African agri-food chains**

**STEPS Conference 2010: Pathways to Sustainability (STEPS Centre)**

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May 2007 - April 2010

Grant ref: RES-167-25-0195

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**Case Study: Labour issues in Kenyan horticulture & floriculture global value chains**

- Global value chains 80s and 90s, bringing cut flowers and vegetables grown in Kenya to be sold in the UK
- Plethora of private standards in recent years to tackle perceived social and environmental problems
- Related initiatives in Europe at international scale on labour rights and good agricultural practice
- Our research on PSIs at different levels (food safety and labour)
- Methods (FGDs at local level, series of stakeholder workshops, key informant interviews)
- A new space – HEBI (Multi-S, southern location)

**Private standards initiatives (PSIs)**

- Organisations/networks/individuals who develop, monitor and promote new standards (on labour rights/ good agricultural practice) in global value chains...response to weak government enforcement
- Driven from & based in North, PSIs then set up in the south
- Early enthusiasm
- But also concerns

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**Power dynamics & pathways in a system**

- Identify core power players or factions in & outside of a powersphere*
- Analyse new spaces for participation** that emerge or are created in the 'powersphere'
- *** claimed, invited, or closed; scale; place/location
- 'Who is included and who is excluded?'
- Who shapes the narratives and who controls material resources?

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*Sources: **Manuel-Navarrete, Polling and Redclift et al, 2009; ** Cornwall, 2002:2-3; *** Gaventa, 2008
Dominant narratives in ethical trade

- Narrow focus on labour and food safety in sustainability
- Voluntary trade standards as the solution
- Kenya stakeholders - demand for standards from large movements of activist consumers, vs retailers managing reputational risks
- Assumptions about who pays - suppliers not retailers
- Whether retailers should make changes to purchasing practices
- Relative importance food safety vs labour issues
- Who should have a voice: Articulation by workers of their views - not valued
- Technicisation of labour rights: output rights (hours worked, H&S etc) prioritized over and above process rights, negotiation & capacity building
- Shift in ETI rhetoric, compliance to transformation, but power relations same
- FT as empowerment and providing worker voice – only ltd as yet?
Dominant narratives 2

Retailers

- Not totally heterogeneous but generally multi-stakeholder initiatives - too slow and ineffective.
- NGOs and multi-stakeholder initiatives mainly service providers (local resource for remediation), irritants when advocacy oriented.
- PSA too expensive No time for developing relationships between stakeholders. Others can represent workers (however effective they are in reality). Prefer ‘command and control’ approaches, harmonisation at global level etc.

Alternative narratives

- Other problems (e.g. wider environmental and social impacts
- What scope for workers to set own priorities?
- Labour issues not less important than food safety
- Building worker awareness of labour rights or potential of FT/other standards to build their voice, limitations of worker committees (welfare focus).
- TUs and NGOs linking up to support workers.

Conclusions

- More thought and attention should be given to how to support less powerful groups to articulate their own narratives, to open up participatory spaces, and to transform labour rights and standards.
- Attention needed for improving not only ecological literacy but also political literacy?
- Useful concepts of powerspheres, factions, spaces, challenges
  - Synthesizing rich empirical material
  - Real time observations/ethnography of values/culture underlying factions, as well as institutions/discourses and material resources
  - Private sector access
  - Use in action research

References


