



Ismail Doga Karatepe | Christoph Scherrer [eds.]

The Phantom of Upgrading in Agricultural Supply Chains

A Cross-Country, Cross-Crop Comparison of Smallholders



Nomos

Edition
Rainer
Hampp



Labor and Globalization
Edited by Prof. Dr. Christoph Scherrer

Volume 22

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© Coverpicture: Manish Kumar, 8 April, 2018: Wheat harvester in Kharbhaiya Village of Patna district, Bihar.

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Table of Contents

Foreword: Global Value Chains and Transformations in the Food System	vii
<i>Walter Belik</i>	
Acknowledgments	xii
Contributors	xiv
List of Acronyms	xix
Introduction to Upgrading in Agriculture	1
<i>Ismail Doga Karatepe and Christoph Scherrer</i>	
Part I: Upgrading in the Supply Chains of a Staple, a Stimulant and a Perishable Crop	
1. Smallholders in the rice value chain of Bangladesh and India	27
<i>Jakir Hossain, Manish Kumar and Ismail Karatepe</i>	
2. Organic rice in land reform settlements of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil	91
<i>Michele Lindner, Rosa Maria Vieira Medeiros and Sergio Schneider</i>	
3. Economic and Social Upgrading in the Coffee VC in a Comparative Perspective	111
<i>Du Quynh Chi, Daniel Hawkins, Clésio Marcelino de Jesus, Antonio Cesar Ortega, Bruno Benzaquen Perosa, Santosh Verma, Ismail Doga Karatepe and Christoph Scherrer</i>	
4. Economic and social upgrading in global agro-food VCs: Mango in Brazil and Pakistan	174
<i>Mubashir Mehdi, Burhan Ahmad, Thales Penha, Walter Belik, Valdênia Apolinário and Ismail Karatepe</i>	
5. Economic and Social Upgrading in the Mango Value Chain in Ghana	227
<i>Khiddir Iddris, Francis Enu-Kwesi and Angela D. Akorsu</i>	
Part II: Reflection on the Case Studies	
6. Power Relations in Global Agricultural Value Chains	261
<i>Christoph Scherrer</i>	
7. Social upgrading in agricultural value chain: a state theoretical perspective	297
<i>Ismail Doga Karatepe</i>	
8. The Phantom of Upgrading in Agricultural Supply Chains—Lessons for the Future	315
<i>Ismail Doga Karatepe and Christoph Scherrer</i>	

List of Tables, Figures and Boxes..... 329

Foreword: Global Value Chains and Transformations in the Food System

Walter Belik

The publishing of this volume dedicated to the discussion of the role of Global Value Chains in agriculture could not be timelier. With the participation of more than 15 authors, experts in agricultural production and international trade from the Global South and Europe, this book is a great contribution to the understanding of the condition of poverty and the deficits of decent work in food production.

We are living in a moment of transition in the Global Food System evidenced by the rupture of several elements that allowed its consolidation in the post-war period followed by a phase of exuberance, as observed in the last two decades. According to the classic contribution of Harriet Friedmann (1992) the Fordist Food Regime was characterized by the paradigm of distance and durability. Food production was based on "non-places" and its consumption took place regardless of seasonality and always in search of less perishability. In other words, in the Fordist Food Regime, food supply changed the food's location attributes to geographic indeterminacy and altered the products' natural condition in favor of greater durability. In the age of globalization, this process has been intensified, homogenizing the consumer's food habits and guaranteeing the supply of varied products throughout the year. For these foods to travel to ever greater distances it became even more necessary to alter their natural characteristics guaranteeing greater durability, either through logistics and packaging for transportation or through their chemical composition.

The combination of trade wars, logistical difficulties, environmental concerns, changes in demography, and increased income – (including in developing countries), are contributing to the mentioned rupture. The relative cost of food has been reduced over the decades. Food has become increasingly homogeneous, standardized and the diet more monotonous. Yet, one in every nine inhabitants of the planet is still undernourished and approximately 3 billion do not have access to a healthy diet (FAO, 2020).

In this context, the movement around "decommoditization" is growing, a process by which producers and traders manage to create and appropriate quasi-rents promoted by the differentiation of their products and market segmentation. Besides indicating a general change in the strategies of competition in the Food System, this change also exposes oppositional tendencies: extensive delocalized

versus local production, homogeneous versus diversified diet, reduced production costs versus the search for sustainability, employment of cheap labor versus decent work, among other topics.

Anyway, the new post-Fordist paradigm shows that there is a potential that has been underutilized, left aside, and that could now be recovered. It is the appropriation of rent, in the Ricardian sense, generated from the importance of new attributes to produce, given by location. This valuing of the locational origin of the consumed food on the part of consumers was long in the making and is based on signs of quality such as certification, brand, culture, and tradition.

According to Coriat (1997), the transformations in the Food System point to a flexible production process with a regime of variety based on three characteristics: virtual control of procedures, reactivity (demand-pull) with maintenance of zero stock and just-in-time production, and differentiation based on originality and quality. Since food production is based on natural processes with their own sequences and cycles, it is more than necessary to develop comparative case studies in different countries, with different production conditions, markets, and food characteristics.

Usually, in business literature, the integration of global value chains is presented as a solution for the low income and marginality of small producers. As demonstrated in this volume by the comparative analysis of the cases of stimulating (coffee), highly perishable (mango) and staple (rice) agricultural products, the results are not automatic. The axis of coordination and command of the value chain of these products has been moving downstream, with greater power being exercised by traders and distributors. Consistent with the new relations between the sphere of production and commercialization, integrated systems impose an indirect subordination of agriculture, appropriating quasi-rents due to location and climate, without however generating major advances in terms of social upgrading. However, it is important to point out that this relationship of subordination does not occur in a generalized and homogeneous way, and in some cases, it is possible to combine economic benefits with social upgrading. In these cases, the social advances are due to the introduction of health protocols demanded by governments or final consumers in their commercial relationship with the producers.

In this new economic and social environment, even in situations where the domestic market has a significant weight in the demand for the product, it is observed that it has been possible to achieve benefits for the small producer or rural worker in comparison with his old work process, illustrated by the figure of

the treadmill. Interestingly, with the application of the digital economy and better distribution logistics moving to a post-productionist environment, it is even possible to deepen the appropriation over nature and, thereby, to create new incomes from the re-connection between field and consumer. The "metabolic rift" (Schneider and McMichael, 2010) that separates agriculture from its biological foundations and humans from nature can be reduced if not with the prevalence of an ecologically integrated paradigm (Lang and Heasman, 2004), as desired, but with movements towards a better relationship of production and products with local characteristics.

Apart from social pressures and consumer preferences, there is also an evident wear and tear on the Productivist-based Food System with the excessive use of long-distance transport, pressures on water use, soil wear and public health costs.

There is a long way to go for a transformation towards giving access to food to the enormous amount of malnourished people, guaranteeing food sovereignty for all independent of their food preferences as well as discontinuing production and consumption processes that harm the environment. This transformation will face a strong opposition on the part of the agents who control the value chain. They will react with selective, co-opting social policies, green washing, and product differentiations according to the purchasing power. All these actions allow companies to capture new rents resulting from this new competitive environment without objectively changing the production framework.

Given that an important part of the costs resulting from agricultural productivism's impact on the environment and health is borne by the public, the production and supply of food must become democratized. The big question is how to promote the transition to a sustainable food regime in a situation where the political forces in its support are increasingly disorganized around the world, even discounting the worsening caused by COVID 19. In fact, many organized social actors and governments seem to be increasingly distant from the lived experiences of ordinary people. We know that with more regulation and support for food production we could increase the supply of food to combat malnutrition, but without access programs for the population and with an open economy and prices given by the market, any public policies would still be insufficient to promote gains in terms of food and nutrition security. The weakness of public regulation also manifests itself in the aspects of health, traceability, and food safety, making room for private certification mechanisms that ultimately serve corporate interests to the detriment of local food needs (McMichael, 2013).

Ironically, it is precisely in these situations in which private certifications predominate, that in certain cases small producers can capture larger portions of the value generated in the production process. The emblematic case analyzed in this volume is that of rice, considered as a basic product for domestic consumption, with its exports taking only a portion of the supply. In India, government regulations on the chain are very strict, controlling compliance with fungicides and pesticides, and monitoring stockpiling to keep prices stable. In Bangladesh, government control over the value chain is somewhat weaker and there is little interference with marketing, also direct government procurement is not practiced. In this regulatory environment, small producers in India achieve some economic gains in the organized sale of the Basmati variety, while farmers in Bangladesh, without many options, are entirely in the hands of intermediaries and millers. A greater gain is obtained when it is possible to offer valued products with attributes based on color, cleanliness, homogeneity, aroma, etc. A similar situation is found for the organic rice produced in Brazil, with the difference being that in this South American country, the workers' organization achieved complete control of the production chain resulting in significant social upgrading.

For New Institutional Economics, there is an important differentiation between market conventions, which are informal constraints, self-imposed rules, and rules developed by third parties. Market conventions require knowledge about the practices of all parties involved in the value chain, and consumers are not always able to interpret quality signals and translate them into attributes that are valued through better prices. The self-imposed standards depend on the brand, label, or reputation of the producers so that an extra value in commercialization can be confirmed. Finally, external standards or certifications allow the immediate translation of quality signals and an imagined reconnection of the sphere of production with the sphere of consumption. In the latter case, market regulations in food value chains are directly supported by institutions that are controlled by the dominant links in that chain. In the global market, higher-income consumers need signs of quality, difficult to translate into products from distant markets, a task that can be completed only through certification.

The case studies presented in this volume demonstrate that when it comes to commercialization, markets are not given but built. In other words, agents do not participate in the market, they build the market, and standards and certifications are accepted because they are advantageous for the parties involved even though membership is not voluntary but compulsory. Globally, the emergence of certifications is the counterpart to market deregulation and liberalization.

As can be seen in the pages that follow, the stimulus given by the demand for higher income and the growth in the supply of quality food is one of the gaps that opens the possibility of overcoming the productivist paradigm. However, without the organization of smallholders and workers in agriculture, this change is not enough to promote social upgrading and reduce labor deficits.

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Acknowledgments

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For a better understanding of the upgrading possibilities in agriculture, the ICDD not only brought researchers from Bangladesh, Brazil, Colombia, Germany, Ghana, India, Pakistan, and Vietnam together for a couple of workshops, but also from various disciplines such as development studies, economics, management, political economy, political science, and sociology. Many thanks go to all contributors, who made this volume possible by conducting valuable fieldwork and writing insightful chapters.

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The ICDD is a global multidisciplinary network of nine partner universities across four continents with its head office at the University of Kassel (Germany). The ICDD contributes towards the global fight against hunger and poverty through research and education on the Sustainable Development Goal #8 “to promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all.” It belongs to Centers of Excellence for Exchange and Development (exceed) program managed by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) using funds from the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

As a decent work and development center, we are not only concerned with identifying decent work deficit in the rural areas, but also with the constraints and opportunities for decent work. We hope that this book gives some insights that might be used to develop strategies to overcome these constraints.

Since most of us are not native English speakers, we are very thankful to Madhuparna Banerjee for a superb job in copy editing. Special thanks to Ajla Rizvan for formatting the chapters. Financial support was granted by the ICDD and Hans Böckler Foundation.

Ismail Karatepe and Christoph Scherrer

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List of Acronyms

ACIAR: Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research

APM: Agricultural Produce Markets (India)

ASLP: Agricultural Sector Linkage Program (Pakistan)

B2B: Business-to-business

CACCR: Cerrado Coffee Growers Associations Council (Brazil)

COCEARGS: Central Cooperative of the Settlements of Rio Grande do Sul (Brazil)

COOTAP: Cooperative of the Settled Workers of the Region of Porto Alegre (Brazil)

CSR: Corporate Social Responsibility

DCO: District Crops Officer (GHANA)

FAO: Food and Agricultural Organizations of the United Nations.

FCI: Food Cooperation of India

FGDs: Focus Group Discussions

FLO: Fairtrade International

FM: Fiscal Model (Brazil)

FNC: National Coffee Growers' Federation (Colombia)

GGAE: Ecological Rice Management Group (Brazil)

GIZ: German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ)

GPN: Global Production Network

GVC: Global Value Chains

IBC: Brazilian Coffee Institute

IBGE: Brazilian Statistics and Geography Institute

ICA: International Coffee Agreement

ICO: International Coffee Organization

ILO: International Labour Organization

IMO: Ecological Market Institute (Brazil)

MOFA: Ministry of Food and Agriculture

MSP: Minimum Support Price (India)

MSR: Market Surplus Ratio

MST: Landless Rural Workers' Movement (Brazil)

NBSSI: National Business for Small-scale Industries (Ghana)

NSS: National Sample Survey of India

OBC: Other Backward Classes (India)

PHRDI: Punjab Horticultural Research and Development Institute (Pakistan)

PAA: Food Acquisition Program (Brazil)

PNAE: School Food National Program (Brazil)

PRONAF: National Program to Strengthen Family Agriculture (Brazil)

PT: Workers' Party (Brazil)

PUNSUP: Punjab State Civil Supply Corporation

RMPA: Metropolitan Region of Porto Alegre (Brazil)

RS: Rio Grande do Sul (Brazil)

SC: Scheduled Castes (India)

SCM: Supply Chain Management (SCM)

ST: Scheduled Tribes (India)

Tk: Bangladeshi Taka

TRIPS: Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Right

USAID: United States Agency for International Development

VC: Value Chain

WGD: Working Group Discussion

WTO: World Trade Organization