

Retail Shift: Transforming work and gender in global value chains

The expansion of global retail led by supermarkets and key brands is revolutionising production and distribution of food and consumer goods, with significant implications for work and gender relations. Women represent approximately 70% of retail customers with an estimated US\$28 trillion global spend in 2014. They are increasingly drawn into global production as farmers, workers, processors, entrepreneurs, buyers, service providers and managers. This research examines the transformation of work and gender in global retail value chains.¹ *It asks: how is contemporary retail transforming gendered patterns of work within global value chains, and what are the implications for promoting gender equality?*

Global value chains (GVCs) now account for 60-80% of international trade and account for hundreds of millions of jobs largely in developing countries. Researchers have long examined the implications for suppliers and workers in GVCs. How they can move to higher value activities and incomes or whether commercial pressures drive them into more precarious forms of supply and work. The gender dimension is often overlooked.

Women play an increasing role in commercial production and distribution as retail expands with economic growth in emerging economies. Supermarkets and international companies are commercialising many activities long undertaken by women in the home. This facilitates women's participation in paid work, reconfiguring the mix between commercial production and unpaid social reproduction. Gender researchers have long argued that women's contribution is insufficiently recognised, and their 'socialised' skills undervalued. Yet these skills are critical to quality and productivity in global retail value chains, and enhancing women's incomes promotes household well-being. The need to promote gender equality is being recognised by leading companies concerned about the social and environmental resilience of their supply chains. These processes are challenging traditional gender norms, providing new openings for promoting women's economic empowerment and rights.

This research builds on over a decade of investigation within Africa, Asia and Latin America. Analytically it provides a gender perspective to global value chain and global production network approaches. Empirically, it brings together selected case studies from horticulture, traditional agriculture, apparel and related consumer products, supplying both Northern and increasingly Southern retail markets. It aims to inform companies, civil society and policy makers on promoting gender equitable value chains and enhancing development outcomes.

For further information on the research, publications and related outputs see: <http://www.manchester.ac.uk/research/s.barrientos/personaldetails>

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