



Shifting South: decent work in regional value chains and South-South trade

How is trade changing in sub-Saharan Africa? What does it mean for export-oriented businesses? Are standards changing? Will these have an impact on working conditions?

This new ground-breaking research programme is being launched to answer some of these questions. The research will:

- investigate the rise of South-South trade through regional and domestic markets
- analyse what this means for decent work – especially women in precarious jobs
- focus on specific commodities and value chains in the horticulture and garment sectors in South Africa, Lesotho and Kenya.

Why is this research needed?

African producers have long established supply chain relationships with retailers based in Europe and North America through global value chains. Increasingly however, this is changing. We are seeing more African-based retailers supplying and selling products in regional and domestic markets. This is part of a rapid shift from North-South to South-South trade flows and the rise of regional continental trade agreements.

Large retailers in Europe and North America apply private standards, including codes of labour practice aimed at ensuring decent working conditions in their global value chains. Many are also members of multi-stakeholder alliances such as the Ethical Trading Initiative and expect suppliers to meet labour standards based on ILO Core Conventions and national legislation. Some retailers based in Africa also apply codes of labour practice, and participate in multi-stakeholder alliances. Others expect suppliers to comply with government legislation as the basis for ensuring decent working conditions.

The study will analyse the roles of private standards, national labour legislation and regional trade agreements in promoting decent work. It will help to understand the role of governments and the private sector in regulating trade and labour standards in domestic, regional and global value chains.

How will the research make a difference?

This research will help policy makers, producers and suppliers in the private sector, workers and civil society organisations, as well as international organisations to channel their own policies and

practices in the right direction, based on better evidence and information.

The research will explore the potential development of African-based multi-stakeholder and/or public-private 'ethical trade platforms' to help achieve the Sustainable Development Goals on decent work, gender equality and prosperity.

Who is involved?

This is a two-year research programme involving international collaboration between academics, practitioners and policy makers at the cutting edge of global value chain analysis, decent work and ethical trade in the UK, South Africa and Kenya. It is funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council under the Global Challenges Research Fund. Collaborators include:

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