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“Development on the margin”

Emerging Economic and Social Upgrading in the Kenyan Cut Flower Global Production Network

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Abstract

Satisfying the ever-demanding tastes of global consumers has led supermarkets to source products from farms scattered across the globe. Today global production networks carrying fresh cut flowers are amongst some of the defining characteristics of production spaces, particularly in developing countries where such networks can and/or do provide important opportunities for economic and social upgrading. Upgrading is the shift to value added activities in production, to expand technology, knowledge and skills, and to intensify the gains captured from participating in global production networks. The process by which economic actors (firms and workers) evolve from low value to comparatively high value activities in global production networks can be described as economic upgrading. On the other hand, when there is an improvement in the rights and entitlements of workers that lead to an enhancement of their working conditions, then the process of social upgrading can be seen to have been set in motion. A key challenge to promoting decent work in global production networks is how to improve the position of both firms and workers. The export of cut flowers in Kenya has expanded exponentially in the last two decades. The expansion of global production in labour intensive industries has been an important source of employment generation. This has led to an expansion of paid work in the horticultural sector, whose labour force is not only predominantly female, but is often temporary, low paid, informal and insecure (*i.e.* vulnerable). This presentation attempts a preliminary analysis on the emerging opportunities and challenges for promoting economic and social upgrading within the Kenyan cut flower global production network.

Keywords: Cut flowers, economic and social upgrading, global production networks