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“Resilience of agricultural systems against crises”

Value Chain Development Interventions in Francophone Africa: A Review of Donor Approaches

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Abstract

Value chain development has become a prominent tool in development assistance. Due to the concept's inclusive approach, which considers all stages of a product's transformation from conception to disposal, it has been increasingly applied in interventions targeting sustainable agricultural development. In Francophone Africa, agricultural value chain development has traditionally been shaped by the French *filière* – an early value chain concept that places much emphasis on state control. This study strives to measure the extent to which the *filière* framework continues to influence value chain interventions in the region. Particularly, it addresses the question of whether value chain development projects targeted at Francophone African countries share common characteristics and draws implications for project design from its findings. For this purpose, twenty project documents published by various international aid agencies focusing on Francophone African countries were assessed against ten predetermined criteria. The study revealed remarkable similarities – the most dominant being a high degree of government control, a strong focus on firm development and an emphasis on institutional frameworks, which were independent of the targeted commodity, recipient country and even the implementing agency. To obtain indications on whether these findings were specific to Francophone Africa, similar documents focusing on Anglophone African countries, which do not have a history of *filière* approaches to value chain development, were subsequently included. This comparison showed large deviations, with interventions targeted at Anglophone Africa placing a very low emphasis on the criteria of government involvement, firm development and institutional frameworks. These findings indicate that the French *filière* approach continues to decisively shape value chain development in Francophone Africa irrespective of the project-implementing organisation.

Additionally, striking findings were made concerning environmental and gender mainstreaming considerations within value chain development interventions, which featured lowly for both examined regions. In a time when environmental sustainability and gender equality have become conceptualised by the current development discourse these findings are surprising, indicating that a large proportion of agricultural value chain development projects might not yet have caught up with these development paradigms.

Keywords: *Filière*, Francophone Africa, value chain development