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“Solidarity in a competing world —
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The Contribution of Agricultural Value Chain Promotion to Food Security – Evidence from German Development Cooperation

SABINE BRÜNTRUP-SEIDEMANN¹, MARCUS KAPLAN¹, MARTIN NOLTZE¹, SIMON BETTIGHOFER²

¹*German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval), Germany*

²*World Health Organization (WHO), Switzerland*

Abstract

The promotion of agricultural value chains is currently perceived as one of the most promising approaches in international development cooperation. Proponents claim that the promotion of value chains contributes to poverty reduction and food security for smallholders and rural labourers. Yet, there is only limited evidence in how far and through which pathways the promotion of agricultural value chains contributes effectively to these prominent development goals. This is due to methodological challenges when evaluators have to disentangle the multiple cause and effect issues in systemic and complex sector environments.

We used a mechanism-centered approach to investigate the impact of agricultural value chain promotion on food security using the case of German Development Cooperation in two partner countries. Adopting a theory-driven approach, four case studies were carried out, including maize and pineapple value chains in Ghana and rice and cashew chains in Burkina Faso. The case studies are accompanied by a literature and a portfolio review as well as expert interviews.

The evaluation identifies positive food security effects for both export crop and staple food crop promotion. However, the impact pathways are different. The promotion of export value chains addresses the access to food through higher farm profits which may translate into increased food consumption. However, the results also show that export chains are prone to price and production volatilities in global food markets posing an economic risk to value chain actors. On the contrary, the support of staple food chains addresses the access to and the availability of food at national markets. This is particularly decisive for countries with reduced food availability and non-functioning food markets. Lower profits for staple food chains are partly offset by fewer risks due to international price fluctuations. In both cases, entry barriers hinder the successful inclusion of the less market-oriented and resource-endowed producers. The authors conclude that successful support strategies have to be case- and context-specific taking both staple food crop and export crop promotion into consideration. Moreover, the findings suggest that combined approaches may come with additional positive effects with regard to economic risks, food availability and food access.

Keywords: Agricultural value chains, evaluation, food security, German Development Cooperation