

Mangnus, Ellen; Wegerif, Marc

Article

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Research in Globalization

Provided in Cooperation with:

Elsevier

Suggested Citation: Mangnus, Ellen; Wegerif, Marc (2025) : Global currents, local tides: An examination of the dynamic interplay between global value chains and local food markets, Research in Globalization, ISSN 2590-051X, Elsevier, Amsterdam, Vol. 10, pp. 1-8, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.resglo.2025.100287>

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/331210>

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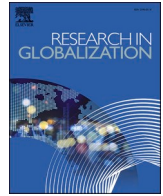
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Global currents, local tides: An examination of the dynamic interplay between global value chains and local food markets[☆]

Ellen Mangnus^{a,*}, Marc Wegerif^b

^a (Public Administration Group), Wageningen University, The Netherlands

^b Department of Anthropology, Archaeology and Development Studies, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Global Value Chains
Development
Practice based approach

ABSTRACT

This article contributes to a special issue critically examining the shift from an “international” to a “global” development paradigm. Focusing on global value chains, the paper critiques the convergence-divergence thesis of Horner and Hulme (2019), which posits that globalization leads to converging development trends across countries but diverging inequalities within them. The article argues for a more in-depth examination of how local contexts, market practices, and actors interact with global dynamics. Through a narrative review, the paper traces the evolution of global value chains—from a framework for analysing transnational supply chains to a development tool—and critiques its limitations in addressing the complex inequalities that emerge both within and between countries. Focusing on food production, trade, and consumption, the article proposes a practice-based approach to globalization that more effectively captures the dynamics of global–local interactions and offers a nuanced understanding of how people shape—and are shaped by—globalization in their daily lives.

Introduction: Globalization and global value chains

The widespread use of the term “global development” calls for careful attention to the ways in which it is interpreted and enacted. This special issue builds on the widely discussed and much-criticized convergence-divergence thesis of Horner and Hulme (2019). The authors, in their introduction of the term “global development,” claim that globalization has led to similar development patterns worldwide. Based on statistical analysis, they observe converging development trends between countries, while inequalities within countries are diverging. From this observation, they argue that traditional development categorizations, such as North-South or developed-developing, are no longer appropriate. Inequalities are now omnipresent, but no longer confined to specific regions. As a result, the term “international development,” which implicitly refers to a North-South binary, is no longer adequate.

Additional arguments for adopting a global development lens pertain to the interconnected nature of globalized capitalism and the challenge of achieving sustainable development worldwide. The converging divergence thesis, according to Horner and Hulme, can be theorized as a product of economic globalization, manifested in the emergence of global value chains. In this paper, we critically examine how global

value chains have been studied in relation to development. Our narrative review details how global value chains analysis has evolved from an analytical framework to study geographical patterns of value creation, retention and capture in the global economy (Gereffi, 1999, Neilson, Pritchard et al., 2014) into a tool to steer development (Ouma, Boeckler et al., 2013).

Horner and Hulme (2019) call for a shift towards ‘global development’ to better address current development geographies. However, this perspective has received much criticism. The main critique is that it overlooks power dynamics and the historical roots of the converging/diverging trend, which is a globally uneven system still maintained and propelled by capitalism today (Büscher, 2019). In fact, critics argued that the convergence-divergence trend observed in statistical data can be explained by capitalism’s imperative for accumulation in a world where no major uncaptured regions remain to be absorbed into the global economy. This leads to the need for accumulation by dispossession and the production of poverty in wealthier areas. (Nealon, 2007). Horner’s (2019) analysis of trade data and human development indicators, it was argued, overlooks the political economy dynamics and power relations that brought countries closer together while causing divergence within them.

[☆] This article is part of a special issue entitled: ‘Global Development’ published in Research in Globalization.

* Corresponding author at: Wageningen University, Hollandseweg 1, Gebouw 201, 6706 KN Wageningen, The Netherlands.

E-mail address: ellen.mangnus@wur.nl (E. Mangnus).

In this paper, we align with this line of criticism, arguing that the implications of globalization require deeper scrutiny than simply concluding that inequality and poverty show not everyone has benefited. We propose a novel perspective that focuses on how people organize markets and, in doing so, co-shape development. This perspective allows for studying the extent to which their decisions and practices are influenced by global processes, and, conversely, how these decisions reshape the materialization of globalization on the ground. This paper seeks to understand **how the analysis of Global Value Chains (GVC) has developed over time, and how can incorporating local contexts, perspectives, and market practices improve our understanding of the relationship between globalization and development.**

Two questions guided our study:

How has the analysis of Global Value Chains (GVC) developed over time, and what impact has this had on our understanding of the relationship between globalization and development?

How are local contexts, perspectives, and market practices incorporated into the analysis of Global Value Chains, and how can this be improved?

Our narrative review shows that the ubiquity of global value chains has not simply led to global divergence within countries, but rather to a tapestry of inequalities occurring at multiple levels. Globalization, in the form of the expansion of international value chains, has been widely embraced as a path to development, including by the governments of emerging and developing economies.

With this, we argue, a narrow conception of development—one that focuses on linking producers and consumers to global markets—has been and continues to be propagated. While this approach has, at times, created opportunities, in other cases, it has resulted in immiseration and new or exacerbated inequalities, going beyond mere convergence at the national scale and divergence within countries. We argue, therefore, that the relationship between globalization and development requires a deeper understanding of the realities faced and shaped by producers and consumers on the ground as they strive to make a livelihood. While they may sometimes aspire to connect to global value chains, in other cases, they choose not to (Tobin, Glenna et al., 2016; Manda, 2020 #1512). Horner and Hulme (2019) argue that embracing the concept of ‘global development’ will ultimately lead to a re-examination of the geographical imaginaries that determine the flow of knowledge and money within development interventions. We oppose the idea that achieving truly diversified geographical imaginaries can be accomplished without a well-grounded understanding of people’s agency and the factors shaping it in a specific context (Hart, 2015). We propose adopting a practice lens to examine daily livelihood practices, such as farming, trade, and procurement, as this approach offers a more nuanced understanding of how people negotiate and reshape global influences. Next, we explore the history of the value chain concept as an analytical tool for analysing inequality in market relations, and how it has evolved into a tool for intervention to bring about ‘development.’ We then discuss the criticisms of ‘Value Chains for Development’ and the adjustments made in response, which have led to a more nuanced understanding of the complex processes of change at the intersection of global value chains and local contexts. We discuss several territorial approaches developed to deepen the understanding of the environmental, social, and economic conditions in a given place as key determinants of development. While these approaches provide valuable insights into the interactions and influences shaping developmental pathways within a defined system, they also tend to obscure the shaping power of global processes. We discuss how the study of daily practice of food production, trade and consumption could lead to a more in depth understanding of how globalisation and development intersect.

Methodology: Narrative review

To understand how global value chains have been framed, conceptualized, and enacted in relation to development over time, we conducted a narrative review of the literature on value chains and development. Narrative reviews are a form of knowledge synthesis often considered non-systematic, as the authors’ unique perspectives influence the selection of literature and its interpretation. This subjectivity can make them less reliable compared to other types of reviews (Sukhera, 2022). Despite their limitations, narrative reviews are invaluable for providing a comprehensive summary that includes interpretation and critique. They enable researchers to outline existing knowledge on a topic while conducting a subjective analysis of the entire body of literature. Reviewers highlight the advancements in a field, identify emerging theories, and explore how evidence is perceived from various perspectives. This overarching view facilitates the generation of new insights and approaches in well-established, thoroughly researched areas.

Important in a narrative review is that the reviewers make their own position clear. We are both sociologists with extensive field experience researching food markets, trade networks, and local food systems. Our work has focused on how these systems are organized and how actors within them adapt their practices to shifts in the broader political economy (for example: political crisis and food shortages in Mali (Mangnus & Vellema, 2019), food supplies in Tanzania (Wegerif & Wiskerke, 2017) and the contribution of street traders to food security in South Africa (Wegerif, 2022)). It is also from this starting point that we begin our review of the literature on value chains and development. Although narrative reviews do not typically involve strict, pre-determined inclusion or exclusion criteria, a clear demarcation of the boundaries and scope of a topic is required. The resources selected for this review all concern peer-reviewed academic papers on the interconnection between value chains and development, with a particular focus on agri-food markets and the roles of producers, laborers, and consumers at the lower end of the chain. The following terms were used to search literature in Scopus: Global Value chains AND development. Global value chains AND smallholders. Global Value Chains AND local markets. For each of the three searches a database was created including the 50 most cited articles. These articles were all reviewed. In addition, the reference lists of a number of pivotal papers were checked for relevant papers. Papers were reviewed on two elements: their understanding of the link between value chains and development, and their findings. Not all reviewed papers were cited. For example, while many papers highlight the diverse negative impacts of global value chains on smallholder farmers, not all were included, as our focus was on understanding how the intersection between value chains and development has been studied and understood over time. History of Value Chains as an analytical concept.

Two seminal schools of thought have left their mark on the study of transnational trade flows: World System Research, originating in sociology and economic history scholarship (Weissenbacher, 2024) and Global Commodity Chain research with its roots in business economics and industrial organization theory (Bair, 2005). Both advanced the commodity chain framework as a solution to the methodological gap in analysing transboundary flows and micro–macro linkages, which are inherently challenging to study within spatially bounded units of analysis (Gereffi, 1994).

Central to world system research is the core-periphery notion, a concept that highlights the unequal distribution of rewards among the various activities—and, by extension, geographies—within commodity chains (Wallerstein, 1974, Arrighi & Drangel, 1986). Following world system scholars, the process of globalization began in the sixteenth century with the advent of capitalism. The characteristics of the periphery’s dependence on the capitalist core changed over the centuries, leading to the formation of the capitalist world economy. While the core countries benefited from this process, it also led, by the same

token, to the 'development of underdevelopment' (Frank, 2023) in the periphery. Imperialism was the term used for the dependent relations between core and periphery (Galtung, 2023). According to world-systems researchers, commodity chains are a key element of the capitalist global economy. They define commodity chains as "networks of labour and production processes whose end result is a finished commodity." In this view, commodity chains are not merely sequences of steps involved in transforming raw materials into a final product. They also encompass a series of productive activities linked to the social reproduction of human labour power (Goldfrank, 2012). World system researchers are primarily concerned with how commodity chains structure and perpetuate a stratified and hierarchical world system.

In contrast, global commodity chain researchers perceive global commodity chains as an organizational structure closely linked with the internationalization of production and the economic integration characterizing the world economy since the 1980s. They regard globalization as a contemporary phenomenon (Bair, 2005). Commodity chains are analysed as networks of interlinked firms—manufacturers, suppliers, and subcontractors—across global industries, connecting them to international markets. The analysis involves identifying all actors (i.e., firms) involved in producing and distributing a particular good or service, and examining the nature of the relationships between them. Researchers in Global Commodity Chain studies focus primarily on how participation in these chains can enable industrial upgrading for exporters in developing countries (Bair, 2005).

Important concepts for understanding how businesses and (implicitly) states can benefit from the global economy include the notions of *governance* and *upgrading*. Initially, only two forms of chain governance were distinguished: Producer-driven chains are characterized by the centralization of knowledge, capital, and technology within the lead firm, which exercises significant control over key decisions regarding production, location, and pricing. (Kaplinsky & Morris, 2001). And second, buyer-driven value chains in which distributors and retailers dominate the chain through their influence over branding, design, and market functions. Buyer-driven commodity chains, in particular, reflect the experience of many developing countries gradually integrating into the global economy through industrial production without possessing the power to dominate value chains (Gereffi, 1999). In 2005 Gereffi et al. (2005) introduced a more refined framework that broadens the understanding of value chain governance by considering the social embeddedness of coordination, reflected in the complexity of information, its codification, and the actors' abilities to interpret and act upon it (Gereffi, Humphrey et al., 2005; Bush, Oosterveer et al., 2015). The term changed from Global Commodity Chains (GCC) to Global Value Chains.

The Global Value chain governance framework posits five governance structures- market, modular, relational, captive, and hierarchy—that differ in coordination, the complexity of information codification among chain actors and the suppliers' capability to interpret and act upon this information.

Central to value chain analysis is also the concept of 'upgrading', which refers to how participants in value chains can improve their position in the chain and capture greater 'value added' (Humphrey & Schmitz, 2002). Over time, various forms of upgrading have been identified, including process upgrading, product upgrading, functional upgrading, and inter-chain upgrading. Criticized for focusing solely on the firm level and neglecting the impact of upgrading on workers and farmers—specifically in terms of working conditions and income—two additional dimensions were later incorporated: economic upgrading and social upgrading. Economic upgrading focuses on value capture at the firm level, while social upgrading addresses the improvement of workers' rights, entitlements, and the overall quality of their employment. (Bair, 2005; Milberg & Winkler, 2011). Nonetheless, the central thesis remains that participation in Global Value Chains is fundamental for upgrading and, consequently, for development. As a group of influential value chain researchers has put it: "The most fruitful response is not to debate whether global economic integration should take place at

all, but rather to examine how this integration can be managed in order to produce positive effects for a majority of participants." (Gereffi, Humphrey et al., 2001: 1). This starting point fundamentally differs from world-system theorists that recognize the possibility of mobility between different tiers of the world-system but contend that what is pertinent is the reproduction of a hierarchically structured global capitalist economy. The main focus of global value chain analysis has been on the structure, governance, and performance of global value chains (Bush, Belton et al., 2019; Pietrobello, Rabelotti et al., 2021).

Although the Value Chain concept was initially strongly North-South oriented, in recent years there has been more attention to the shifting dynamics of global trade and the greater prominence of Southern actors. Horner (2022) refers to the emergence of more polycentric trade system and calls for greater attention to the existence of multiple value chains and production networks serving different end markets – including domestic, regional and global. In a similar vein the conceptualisation of governance has been broadened. Scholars for example identified different roles of the state in facilitating upgrading (Horner, 2017; Eckhardt & Poletti, 2018). Others paid attention to public and private collaboration leading to hybrid governance arrangements (Bair, 2017) and the influence of novel parties, such as assurance and tech-companies (Kruk, Toonen et al., 2023).

Broadening and enriching value chain analysis

Critiques of the Global Value Chain approach have been extensive and varied. In this section, we list the frequently mentioned criticisms.

First, the concept of upgrading itself has faced criticism, particularly due to the lack of clarity around how firm-level upgrading translates to broader units of analysis traditionally seen as spaces or containers of development, such as national or regional economies. (Bair, 2005). Researchers, often drawing on empirical studies, called for caution and a closer examination of who truly benefits from upgrading. Functional or intra-chain upgrading, which involves suppliers taking on additional responsibilities at the behest of the lead firm, could, in practice, result in offloading less profitable activities onto more vulnerable firms (Bair, 2005). In particular women were found to lose out due to integration into value chains. Their burden of work increases, while gaining little or no power over what is produced and the income from it (Riisgaard, Fibla et al., 2010; Coles & Mitchell, 2011; Baglioni, 2022). Equally it was questioned whether workers would benefit in the form of higher wages, greater job security, or improved working conditions from working for firms integrated in global value chains (Ponte, 2002; Ponte & Gibbon, 2005; Barrientos, Gereffi et al., 2016; Ponte, 2022). Case studies also showed how the successful upgrading of some producers led to the exclusion of the majority, who were unable to comply with stricter criteria, from opportunities for new skills, technologies, and markets. (Milberg & Winkler, 2011; Selwyn, 2019). Terms such as *immiserizing growth*, an increase in economic activity which delivers lower standards of living (Kaplinsky, 2000; Shaffer, Kanbur et al., 2019) and *adverse inclusion* (Hickey & Du Toit, 2013) were introduced to emphasize that the value chain heuristic was not able to address how and why the gains from globalization were shared.

From a different perspective, yet with a similar call for critically examining who benefits from participation in global markets, geographers emphasized the importance of place in global production and consumption. They advocated for considering the horizontal relations and networks at each node of the value chain. In independent studies, Fold (2008) and Neilson and Pritchard (2011) argued that there is no generic answer to whether global value chains have a positive or negative impact on local livelihoods. The outcomes are site-specific and strongly depend on the local mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion at play.

Authors such as Vicol et al. (2018) and Xu (2019) have highlighted the varied impacts of Global Value Chains on different community groups, showing how some benefit while others face limitations. Their

studies contribute to a substantial body of empirical work that illustrates the diverse change pathways catalysed by value chain interventions. These authors stress the importance of understanding how global flows intersect with existing agrarian social structures. Similarly, political economists have called for increased attention to the global and local power structures shaping value chains. Researchers such as Belton (2016), Saguin (2018), and Behuria (2020) emphasized that development pathways are influenced by pre-existing power, class, and gender relations that structure access to productive resources such as land, capital and technology. The authors noted that value chain interventions can reshape these relationships, sometimes deepening existing inequalities and other times alleviating them. They raised questions about who benefits from value chain development, particularly in cases where livelihoods are highly diversified (Neilson & Shonk, 2014).

Understanding the agency of producers and firms requires recognizing how they respond to institutions emerging from horizontal networks, such as customary access arrangements, local regulations, social norms, trade cooperation rules, state production legislation, and global food safety standards (Bush & Oosterveer, 2007, Vicol, Fold et al., 2019). For instance, McCarthy, Gillespie et al. (2012) found in their research on the embedding of the global oil palm value chain in different localities in Indonesia that local regime interests and agribusiness strategies largely determine outcomes upstream in the chain. Among the many empirical case studies illustrating how multi-scalar processes shape outcomes of economic policy, Behuria's (2020) detailed account of the role of the Rwandan state and domestic politics in shaping upgrading pathways in the coffee sector highlights the selective benefits for coffee producers who were co-opted into the strategy. These political-economic dimensions, the authors argued, require more explicit recognition in value chain analysis. As an analytical tool, Global Value Chains—primarily focused on internal chain relationships and margins—was inadequate for accurately mapping the types of horizontal exclusion processes. They proposed a reinvigorated and re-politicized Global Value Chains framework to understand the politics of value distribution in value chain-focused development interventions (Vicol, Neilson et al., 2018). (Vicol, Neilson et al., 2018). These researchers confirmed the divergence thesis, noting that the growing local inequalities they observed were tied to processes of standardization and managerialization within Global Value Chains, from which only an elite could benefit (Baglioni, Campling et al., 2023).

Above critiques resulted in extensions of the value chain analytical framework, taking into account gender and the environment (Bolwig, Ponte et al., 2010, Ihalainen, Schure et al., 2020) nutrition (Allen & De Brauw, 2018) and climate (Joshi, Rasul et al., 2016). Others called for combining the framework with livelihood approaches such as the sustainable livelihoods framework (Challies & Murray, 2011, Neilson & Shonk, 2014) and power analyses (Lang, Ponte et al., 2023).

Value chains for development

As policy-oriented researchers looked for ways to turn the insights from value chain analysis into effective policy interventions that could help local firms improve their positions within specific value chains, the approach gradually evolved into a tool for intervening in emerging economies (Ouma, Boeckler et al., 2013, Werner, Bair et al., 2014). This transformation involved a shift from viewing value chains as an analytical tool for understanding the global economy to seeing them as opportunities for development and policy intervention (Werner, Bair et al., 2014). Since the early 2000 s, donor organizations, non-governmental organizations, multilateral organizations, and national governments have increasingly incorporated value chain interventions into their strategies (FAO, 2016; CARE, 2015; (Begovic & Baldini, 2016). Various sectors – such as apparel, fruits, horticulture and electronics – were empirically investigated to identify leverage points for change (Bair, 2005, Oya, 2012). Particularly for ways in which small-scale farmers and entrepreneurs could be integrated into and benefit from

value chains (Barrientos, Dolan et al., 2003, Riisgaard, Fibla et al., 2010, Coles & Mitchell, 2011, Seville, Buxton et al., 2011, FAO, 2014a, Henson & Humphrey, 2015).

Coinciding with neoliberal reforms at multilateral institutions, an overall decreasing Western aid-budgets and a stronger engagement of the private sector in development aid (Oya, 2012, Mawdsley, Murray et al., 2018), value chain development became widely adopted as a 'pro-poor' market intervention. In practice this often meant technical support for process and skills upgrading, facilitating market access, and bridging the gap between producers, workers, and other related value chain actors (Dolan & Humphrey, 2000, Daviron & Gibbon, 2002, Mather & Greenberg, 2003, Daviron & Ponte, 2005, Muradian & Pelulessy, 2005, Poulton & Macartney, 2012, Fold, 2014, Werner, Bair et al., 2014, Mayer & Phillips, 2017, Liverpool-Tasie, Wineman et al., 2020).

Associated with this emerged a vocabulary featuring words such as 'entrepreneurial farmer', 'pro-poor markets,' and 'the rise of the south' (Bolwig, Ponte et al., 2010). Exemplary of this trend is the *Guiding principles document* of the FAO stating that the "ultimate objective" of value chain development "is not to assure their (smallholders) survival but to facilitate the transition of some of them to become sufficiently large, commercially viable farming operations and help others to transition out of agriculture altogether" (FAO, 2014b: 19). Following suit, national governments such as those in Ghana, Ethiopia, and Kenya adopted a global value chain approach in their economic and agricultural policies (Ouma, 2010, Mayer & Phillips, 2017).

Underscoring this trend, a historical analysis by Neilson et al. (2014) shows how the critical content of the value chain concept was largely emptied as the framework was adapted to the needs of development agencies and donors. They argue that the resulting "diluted version" of global value chain analysis adopted in policy circles primarily served to stabilize a development paradigm rooted in neoliberal orthodoxy. This critique is part of a significant body of studies criticizing the value chains-for-development approach (Neilson & Shonk, 2014, Vicol, Neilson et al., 2018). Likewise Vicol et al. (2018) criticized the overly depoliticized upgrading narrative employed in value chain interventions in the global South. Such perspective overlooked the influence of local politics and social relations of production.

Whether as a result of these critiques or not, over time, the goals pursued through value chain development broadened to include poverty alleviation, and environmental sustainability (Bush, 2018, Bush, Belton et al., 2019), gender equality (FAO, 2016, Kruijssen, McDougall et al., 2018, Kruijssen, Danielsen et al., 2022), climate resilience (Hochachka, 2023), and food and nutrition security (Aderibigbe, Ezekiel et al., 2022).

More recently the value chain for development strategy shifted away from merely linking (and upgrading) producers in the Global South to firms and consumers in the Global North to more broadly connecting producers in economically disadvantaged areas to higher-value markets, often in urban settings. Urbanization and a rising middle class spurred domestic value chain development programs and interventions (Horner, 2016, Hernandez, Belton et al., 2018).

Critics of the value chain approach to development interventions have raised concerns about its narrow scope, linear nature, and the fundamental assumptions underlying the framework. Authors, such as Amanor and Chichava (2016) highlighted the colonial undertones present in global value chain interventions. While others, including Moseley, Schnurr et al. (2015) and Gengenbach, Schurman et al. (2018), argued that the approach reinforces and expands the structures of global capitalism. They echoed the findings of Hickey and du Toit (2013) that integrating farmers into global value chains increases their financial risks and debt dependency. Additionally, questions have been raised about the ethics of drawing farmers into global dependency relations (Banks & Overton, 2022). Selwyn (2019) coined the term 'Poverty Chains', illustrating how workers in value chains are systematically paid less than their subsistence costs and how transnational corporations use their global monopoly power to capture the largest share of value. This critique is part of a rapidly expanding body of literature examining the

intersections between ‘development’ and capitalism (Mawdsley, Murray et al., 2018, Alami, Dixon et al., 2021).

Territorial and systems approaches

In response to critiques that value chain analysis and interventions overlook horizontal relationships shaped by institutional, social, and historical contexts, and thus fail to fully capture development impacts (Riisgaard, Bolwig et al., 2010, Ouma et al., 2013, Ponte, 2022), territorial and systems approaches were introduced. The Global Production Network approach- “a relational and geographical method for studying global-local interaction”- is a prominent example (Henderson, Dicken et al., 2002, Ponte, 2002, Gibbon, 2008, Riisgaard, Bolwig et al., 2010). Global Production Network scholarship emphasizes the relationships between global markets and territorial or place-specific development processes (Henderson, Dicken et al., 2002, Coe, Hess et al., 2004). It allowed for identifying organizational, technological and spatial regimes that captured and distributed value locally (Coe & Yeung, 2015). Those critical of the approach argue that despite its focus on networks, the linear movement of goods from producers to consumers still structures much of the analysis (Bair, 2005). Understandings of how lead-firm driven networks shaped development trajectories was thin. Bair and Werner (2011) and Werner (2015) called for more attention to the exclusionary development outcomes produced and reproduced by value chains. Attention shifted to the actions, agencies and regional contexts of secondary and tertiary suppliers not part of the networks, particularly in the Global South (Bair & Werner, 2011, Gerber, Turner et al., 2014, Horner, 2016, Coe & Yeung, 2019, Steenbergen, Eriksson et al., 2019, Subramanian, Bavinck et al., 2023), and to how vulnerable communities got excluded from the benefits of globalization (Werner, 2016), McGrath (2018).

Werner (2016) suggested studying the connection between development and global production networks through ‘conjunctures’ of multi-scalar processes, social formations, power relations, histories and structures. These conjunctures reveal the disarticulations inherent in global production, providing insight into the structural drivers of inequality and potential solutions to the challenges posed by economic globalization. While grounded in specific contexts, these conjunctures simultaneously (re)produce global processes and systems, and are themselves partially shaped by them. As a result, they generate geographically diverse outcomes, even if forces such as neoliberalism seem uniform. The question of how to study this dynamic in relation to global value chains remains an ongoing debate (Peck, 2024).

Recent food systems approaches similarly aspired to reveal the interactions between various value chain activities, food security outcomes, and the social and environmental context in which the intervention occurs (Dengerink, Dirks et al., 2021). Central to these approaches is the recognition of complexity and multi functionality of the local landscape or social and ecological system, and the impacts and trade-offs of production activities (Van Berkum, Dengerink et al., 2018, von Braun, Afsana et al., 2023). Food systems approaches have been broadly embraced (see for example: the Milan Pact 120, the New Urban Agenda of the United Nations and the United Nations Food Systems Summit held in 2021). Yet, also food system analysis has restricted analytical power in understanding global-local interactions. Generally, food systems approaches have given limited attention to the power relations and processes of accumulation involved (Clapp, 2021). The politics of this was reflected in the wide range of actors who boycotted the UNFSS of 2021 claiming the process had been captured by corporations. (Canfield, Anderson et al., 2021). Recent papers have sought to better understand the political economy of food systems (Béné, 2022).

To address these trade-offs, there is a need for epistemological and methodological innovations that facilitate the study of the interaction between place-based processes and global processes.

Practice based approaches to development

We propose that practice-based approaches can reveal how global value chains direct and are directed by, or mediated through the everyday practices of producing, trading, and consuming. Referring to routinized actions and sayings, practices are continuously shaped and reshaped by knowledgeable and capable actors with little discursive reflection on the material and social conditions that shape them (Spaargaren, Weenink et al., 2016). Practices are situated within particular cultural contexts and reflect what local agents value and know.

Production, consumption, trade, markets, and thus value chains, from this perspective, are also shaped by the values, knowing’s and meanings that producers, traders, and consumers assign to commodities. It is through these practices that external interventions and information are translated into local effects. For example, research into how fishers responded to increasing monitoring and reporting requirements in a Fair Trade tuna fish value chain by Doddema et al (2018) revealed that new reporting practices were only accepted if they aligned with established routines of the fishers. As such global value chains governance and procurement practices interacted in shaping how fairness was monitored and implemented.

A practice oriented analyses does more than describe everyday activities, it reveals underlying structural, spatial, historical and social formations and factors that determine or shape the ways global value chains intersect and create place-specific disarticulations. Research by one of the authors on food markets in Dar es Salaam, for example, revealed how trading practices- involving numerous traders, public markets and small shops –were historically and socially deeply embedded (Granovetter, 1985) and symbiotic (Wegerif, 2020) apt to meet the quality and food requirements of consumers. Shoprite, the South African based largest supermarket group in Africa, and Kenyan supermarket groups Uchumi and Nakumatt, pulled out of Tanzania as they could not compete and expand their market share in such context (Wegerif, 2018, Wegerif, 2020). Similar dynamics were found in highly corporate dominated South Africa where supermarkets operate increasingly centralized and controlled value chains for their supplies while street traders linked to public markets, and collaborating with each other through socially embedded relations (Granovetter, 1985) cater to different consumer segments while also creating an important market for large- and small-scale farmers (Tempia, Nakana et al., 2023, Wegerif, 2024). A closer scrutinization of how such global value chains intersect with local processes and are reshaped by them allows for a better understanding of why some processes are embraced while others are not. It makes explicit that actors restructure and utilize what is imposed or offered to them, combining and transforming it with what they already know (Nicolini, 2012). Our own research in Mali showed the adaptability of trader networks to changing contexts. Examples include a trader network establishing itself as cooperatives to get access to development finance, while in practice continuing to operate like a trader network (Mangnus & Schoonhoven-Speijer, 2020).

To conduct a practice analysis it is crucial to first identify the practices linked to the intersecting global value chain. This zooming in as Nicolini et al. (2016) calls it, requires a detailed and grounded explanation of the practices in a way that allows for identifying patterns and axes of differentiation (based on gender, class, race). The second step, zooming out, requires relating the practices to the external forces that are associated with them (Murphy, 2019). Here one tries to understand how local farming practices interact with global value chain dynamics.

Central to practice approaches is a desire to ‘see’ the macro-structural, global through the everyday worlds and agencies of actors situated in particular places.

Conversely, when applying a practice-based approach to large-scale phenomena like the world market or global food systems, the starting point is the assumption that what occurs here and now is deeply interconnected with events happening in other places and times. This

perspective suggests that to explore how large phenomena emerge and unfold through the interconnections of practices, we must always begin with a specific “here and now” and trace the connections (Nicolini, 2009). In this view, large-scale phenomena are understood as complex networks, nexuses, or assemblages of practices. For example, a global value chain can be seen as a series of interconnected, situated practices. Actors on the ground constantly renegotiate their positions within dynamic markets and networks of socially embedded economic relations and as such co-shape value chains. (Granovetter, 1985; Wegerif, 2020). By studying how practices evolve and interact it becomes possible to understand what works for producers, farmers and traders and therefore what should be valued and built on for development.

Discussion: Putting local realities upfront

Our narrative review of the evolution of global value chain analysis reveals the expansion of the analytical framework has significantly over time. Similarly, in practice, i.e., value chains for development, the objectives have grown to encompass environmental and social values. This shift has contributed to a diversification of GVC governance, now involving not only lead buyers but also states, NGOs, and technology companies. As a result, hybrid governance structures, such as public–private partnerships, have emerged (Bair, 2017). Yet the core logic remained in place; the assumption that for achieving development linking up to global economic processes is key. Critiques ranged from ‘a need for more attention to diverse implications and pathways’ to dismissing value chains as captive and exploitative (Selwyn, 2019). The latter argument, we contend, equally ignores the agency that people have to resist and reshape global–local interactions.

Empirical literature shows how Global Value chains contributed to shifting and in some cases reinforcing inequalities, leading not simply to a global divergence within countries (Horner & Hulme, 2019) but to a tapestry of various inequalities that take place at multiple levels.

This observation holds two consequences: First, the assumption that globalization leads to converging divergence as proposed by (Horner & Hulme, 2019) requires a critical look. More insight is needed into how globalization materializes and gets reshaped on the ground. Second, using global value chains as a strategy for development is risky. Interventions typically focus on efficiency improvement and economic performance and disregard the complexity of smallholder livelihoods that shape development pathways in different contexts (Tezzo, Bush et al., 2024). Territorial and systems approaches have partially addressed the limitations of the linear value chain approach by emphasizing interactions, long-term and unintended consequences, and the multi-layered processes involved in change. We propose that to understand how globalization, through global value chains, affects development, it is necessary to observe how people act, interact and co-construct these global flows on a daily basis. Food production, processing, distribution and procurement are socially embedded practices. Such an approach allows for the various ways in which people respond to and shape globalization.

We outline two ways in which a social practice approach can help reimagine global–local interactions in food trade in specific and development in general. A first way is to study the activities that together form a value chain as practices that are deeply socially and spatially embedded (Tezzo, Bush et al., 2024). Examining the values, meanings, and social relations inherent in these practices enhances our understanding of how global trade impacts local food practices and related inequalities. And vice versa, how global trade is shaped by these as evolving production and consumption practices accommodate changes in the conditions of practices higher up in the chain (Tezzo, Bush et al., 2024).

Second, a practice lens reveals that recognizing farmers and traders as active agents in shaping food systems—connecting, reshaping, and navigating between different value chains and markets—provides a much more diverse perspective on how globalization impacts and

creates opportunities for local livelihoods.

Development from a practice-oriented perspective emphasizes what people value and how routines are embedded and constrained by material contexts. A practice-oriented approach to development then implies empowering those who actually produce, process, distribute, and procure food. Taking such a perspective, a truly diverse range of imaginations about what development is can emerge.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Ellen Mangnus: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Investigation, Conceptualization. **Marc Wegerif:** Writing – original draft, Conceptualization.

Ethics approval

Original research was carried out according to guidelines/codes of good scientific practice (Dutch Scientific Research Organisation).

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare the following financial interests/personal relationships which may be considered as potential competing interests: Ellen Mangnus reports article publishing charges was provided by Wageningen University & Research Social Sciences. Ellen Mangnus reports a relationship with Wageningen University & Research that includes: employment. If there are other authors, they declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

Data can be requested from the grant recipients.

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