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CENTRE FOR COMPETITION,  
REGULATION AND  
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# Power and Inequality in Value Chains and Production Networks



**Call for papers** for an international conference to be held at the University of Johannesburg on **13-14 June 2024**



The globalization of production has yielded new winners and losers within and across nations, spurring much debate on the different forms of inequality that it engenders. There is also increasing interest in how the emergence and consolidation of global, regional and local value chains and production networks may exacerbate inequalities – and whether and how value chains may be leveraged to mitigate them. The dominant discourse speaks for more widespread inclusion and upgrading towards higher value-added activities as the main pathways for addressing global North-South inequalities. But despite massive value chain participation, many Global South actors have failed to significantly improve and/or retain the value added they create. Existing power dynamics within value chains and production networks have been shown to play a significant role in limiting the success of upgrading efforts and value chain-led development more broadly, contributing to persistent inequalities. Scholars are therefore asking critical questions about the degree to which participation in value chains facilitates positive outcomes – such as improved firm competitiveness, employment generation, better working conditions and livelihoods – and/or negative ones, like immiserating growth, environmental degradation, labour exploitation, and increased inequality.

While the role of various forms of power is being increasingly examined in the analysis of governance in value chains and production networks, inequality has been approached rather implicitly and has often been confused or equated with power asymmetries. In this conference, we seek to more systematically link analyses of power in value chains and production networks with different dimensions of inequality. We thereby aim to engage with the conditions under which inequalities are challenged, mitigated, or exacerbated.

Past research has shown that power and inequality may reinforce each other, but also that there can be trajectories of change. Power asymmetries may be contested by supposedly 'powerless' actors; disruptive events such as the COVID-19 pandemic may reshuffle power constellations; 'silent' powerful actors such as regulatory institutions may reclaim influence; and private and public governance instruments may shift power balances, in turn re-shaping existing inequalities.

To identify time-sensitive action points, where political pressure or strategic action in relation to disadvantaged actors is possible and effective, we seek to further develop analytical frameworks that can guide a more focused and empirically comparable study of how power dynamics shape different dimensions of inequality in value chains and production networks.

To take stock of the state of the art in this field and chart new research and policy directions, the Centre for Business and Development Studies (CBDS), Copenhagen Business School and the Centre for Competition, Regulation and Economic Development (CCRED), University of Johannesburg are organising a two-day international conference to be structured along four main sessions:

- a session including a series of contributions arising from the 'Power and Inequality in Global Production Systems' (PIPS) project, funded by the Independent Research Fund Denmark, which ends in August 2024; this project focused empirically on the wine and fish value chains originating in South Africa and Chile;
- two sessions featuring scholarly contributions from other researchers and projects around the world; and
- a 'think tank' session where research results will be discussed with public sector, industry and civil society actors in view of exploring strategic, policy and activist measures to address existing power dynamics and inequalities.

To be considered for the conference, please submit a title, an abstract of maximum 500 words and a 2-page CV to both co-organizers, Stefano Ponte (spo.msc@cbs.dk) and Reena das Nair (reenadn@uj.ac.za) by **Friday, March 15**. You will know if we are able to include you in the programme by Wednesday, April 3. We are looking for proposals from both experienced scholars and early career researchers, and especially those from and/or based in the Global South.

Selected participants will have their costs covered by the project, including travel (economy class), accommodation (three nights in a mid-range hotel), meals and local transport in Johannesburg. They will be required to present a draft of a paper (**5,000-8,000 words**) at the conference, based on the theme of the accepted abstract. The draft papers will need to be sent to the organizers by **Monday, June 3**, so they can be sent out to discussants in advance.

Following the conference, selected papers could be included in a special issue proposal for possible publication in a development studies or international political economy journal.

For any question of clarification you may need, please contact the organizers via email.

