



Concept Note and Call for Papers for Summer School - 2018

Theme: Global Agricultural Value Networks and Contract Farming in the Contemporary Global South

15 – 19 January 2018, Harare

Introduction

The main theme of the forthcoming Summer School 2018 extends the primary concerns of the Summer School 2017, which explored the diversity of labour questions in the Global South, to focus primarily on the countryside and, in particular, the functioning of corporate and contract farming, and the associated global agricultural value networks (GAVNs). There will also be a secondary focus on the extractive industries and associated value networks which often operate alongside agriculture. The ascendancy of the so-called Global Commodity Chains (GCCs)/Global Value Chains (GVCs)/Global Supply Chains (GSCs)/Global Production Networks (GPNs) in the recent decades is generally well acknowledged. This has happened across all major sectors of the economy, from the extractive and industrial to the service sectors, and agriculture is no exception in this regard. In fact, a handful of global firms and corporations have come to occupy significant power in the agricultural value networks around the world in several activities, which include *inter alia* retail chains in final products, supply of agri-inputs such as seeds, pesticides and fertilizers, and research and development.

Agricultural Value Network: Mechanism

In a very simple/literal sense, the global agricultural value networks (GAVNs) include a set of actors, linked in a sequence of activities, which add value in bringing/supplying a product from its raw material stage to the final consumer. Such actors range from large international and domestic corporates/business houses, agribusiness companies, public and private research and development agencies, trading and procurement agencies, etc. on the one hand to farmers, peasants and landless labourers on the other. Activities of such networks are facilitated by the government agri-policies as also by the powerful international institutions. As is also well-known, in the recent years multilateral agencies have often emerged as strong advocates of promoting the so called ‘responsible investments’ through such GAVNs. These reports often provide very optimistic accounts of GAVNs and the champion the role of big corporations in different ways e.g. as suppliers, distributors, traders, R&D facilitators, buyers of agricultural produce and marketing strategists, etc. *These rosy accounts overlook several adverse outcomes and processes associated with the ascendancy of GAVNs including loss of biodiversity, accelerated land alienation, concentration and control of resources, disappearing livelihoods, weakening of food security etc. in large parts of the developing world.* In tandem with, the ascendancy of neo-liberal macroeconomic policies, the growing power of oligopolistic corporations has created huge distress in several countries in Africa,

Latin America and Asia. Extreme manifestations of what is akin to agrarian crisis in some countries include, for instance, suicides by farmers in India.

Conceptually, in the GAVNs, as in any GVN, core dimensions of the embedded relationship among the different actors hinge around business/work/labour relations and distributional issues. Although, juridically, different actors in value networks appear to be independent of each other, but in reality are entangled in highly unequal power relations. Whether it is economic transactions relating to inputs or outputs, it is the lead firms, which call the shots, and farmers, peasants and agricultural labourers are at the receiving end. Analysts often distinguish between vertical and horizontal relationship in these value networks: the vertical relationships generally denote the hierarchy of actors, essentially to capture the underlying power relations, e.g. from the lead firms to the final producers such as farmers, peasants and agricultural labourers. The horizontal relationship, as the term denotes, is essentially about relationship between those who are on a similar footing. These vertical and horizontal relationships in the GAVNs are critical in influencing distributional outcomes as well as the conditions of workers, including their employment and wages, and the ecological challenges which they face. The world of work for the majority of such producers consists of fragile and vulnerable conditions and overwhelming majority of them make a living through a collection of diverse economic activities, spanning agricultural and extractive activities, across rural and urban areas and international boundaries. One may, justifiably, quibble over fine-tuning of the relevant concepts, but it would be hardly off the mark to consider this large and heterogeneous segment as being co-terminus with Marx's Relative Surplus Population (RSP).

Given the scenario briefly sketched above, the Summer School 2018 will engage with the relevant questions and issues, focusing on the world of labour with respect to GAVNs, corporate and contract farming, and the parallel extractive activities. Potential participants in the forthcoming Summer School are encouraged to examine the different dimensions of the structural/systemic issues of GAVNs in countries of the global south. Gender dimensions associated with all the relevant themes should be kept in sharp focus. The persistent gender segmentation of productive and reproductive work in the agrarian political economy and gender inequalities in access to and control of resources have meant that farmers, peasants and agricultural labourers do not experience GAVNs in gender neutral ways, particularly in a context of extreme social differentiation. Therefore, the gendered experiences of actors within GAVNs have to be accounted for both as a cross-cutting theme and in its own right. We therefore encourage contributions, which address the gender dimensions of all the proposed thematic areas.

As already indicated, topics could include conceptual and empirical discussions of the following for different countries and regions:

1. Formation and growing power of oligopolies in GAVNs;
2. Historical antecedents of colonial plantations and post-colonial state farms
3. The bargaining power of different actors in GAVNs;
4. The dialectics of the quantitative and qualitative attributes underlying corporate and contract farming, nationally and globally;
5. Growing Corporate power on output and input markets and their implications for labour/livelihoods;
6. Gender and social differentiation in GAVNs;
7. Extractive industries and the role of small- and large-scale mining;
8. Implications for food security;
9. Implications for ecology;
10. Emerging conditions of work and workers;

11. Alternatives and resistances to corporate agriculture.

In sum, all these issues, to be deliberated in the proposed Summer School would seek to reflect on some of the major challenges and key concerns associated with contemporary capitalism, the development of GAVNs and other value networks, and the question of labour with a focus on the Global South. As always, it will bring together leading as well as young scholars from diverse disciplines as well as activists, from Africa, Latin America, and Asia in order to engage with the complexities of the labour process at the current juncture.

Interested scholars are invited to submit paper proposals or abstracts (not more than 300 words) no later than 30 June 2017. Authors of selected papers will be requested to develop their full papers by 30 September 2017 and will be invited to participate at the 2018 Summer School in Harare (funds permitting). Some of the articles may also be selected for publication in the *Agrarian South: Journal of Political Economy* and normal peer review process will apply.

Paper proposals should be submitted to Walter Chambati: walter@aiatrust.org and copied to Professor Praveen Jha: praveenjha2005@gmail.com.