**Title:** Governance and decent work in regional value chains: transition towards polycentric governance in sub-Saharan Africa?

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**Abstract**

Global value chain (GVC) research has long examined private governance by Northern lead firms. Analytically the literature has shifted from examining lead firm governance towards examining power relations under more diverse forms of governance involving public and private actors. A parallel literature highlights expanding domestic and regional value chains (DVCs/RVCs) that intersect with GVCs, and increasing role of Southern lead firms in shaping governance. However, we have limited understanding of the implications for the relation between public and private governance of decent work within expanding DVCs and RVCs within the global South. This paper draws on cross-country and sectoral analysis of horticultural and garments DVCs/RVCs in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). It focuses on horticultural production in South Africa and Kenya, and garments production in South Africa, Eswatini and Lesotho. The following questions are addressed: *What are the implications of expanding DVCs and RVCs in SSA for public-private governance of decent work? Who or what are the drivers of governance across expanding DVCs and RVCs in SSA?* We reveal that limited private governance of decent work across all RVCs/DVCs is starting a ‘benign transition’ towards public regulation of value chains involving deeper integration of public-private standards. Whilst this is more pronounced in horticulture (due to health and trade risks), nascent shifts are also occurring in African garments. This emerging trend towards ‘polycentric governance’ in RVCs/DVCs is underpinned by a shift away from lead firms’ dyadic and direct power, towards a more diffuse and collective form of power, wherein nation states and national civil society organisations (CSOs) potentially play an increasingly significant role in the governance of decent work across value chains.