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**DEVELOPMENT VALUE CHAINS MEET  
BUSINESS SUPPLY CHAINS**

**The concept of Global Value Chains unraveled**

*Sarah Drost (Maastricht School of Management),  
Jeroen van Wijk (Maastricht School of Management),  
Sietze Vellema (Wageningen University and Research Centre)*

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Postal address  
Burgemeester Oudlaan 50, room T7-26  
3062 PA Rotterdam, The Netherlands

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# DEVELOPMENT VALUE CHAINS MEET BUSINESS SUPPLY CHAINS

## The concept of Global Value Chains unraveled

*Sarah Drost (Maastricht School of Management),  
Jeroen van Wijk (Maastricht School of Management),  
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### **Abstract**

Value chain promotion is considered a key element of private sector development strategies and pro-poor growth. However, (value) chain concepts are rather complex and unclear. This paper unravels the concept of global value chains and studies the diversity of key value chain-related (supply chain, commodity chain, value chain) approaches. To this aim, we reviewed academic literature and donor agencies' reports, and consulted a limited number of key informants of donor agencies. This paper distinguishes between the strategic management perspective and the development perspective and reviews added values and limitations of each approach. The results suggest that practitioners use an eclectic approach towards the value chain concept, although the concept originates from clearly distinctive paths and could be susceptible to miscommunication and misuse. The authors avoid misunderstanding by explicitly opting for a public and pro-poor perspective of the concept of the Global Value Chain.

## 1. Introduction

In a globalizing world where economic interdependencies are increasing, where life and work in local communities are connected to external dynamics and where the majority of the millennium goals still have to be met, the concept of the Global Value Chain (GVC) provides a useful insight in studying economic activities in widely separated locations that are increasingly inter-connected.

The concept of GVCs can be found in many forms and has many definitions. This paper presents a short overview of the development of the global value chain concept in various theoretical approaches. In particular, we distinguish between the strategic management perspective, which relates to the idea of global supply chains, and the development perspective, which uses the concept of global commodity chain/value chain, filière and other more comprehensive concepts. We focus on power relations and governance in the chain, different levels within the chain network (actor, service provider, influencer / facilitator), and buyer-driven versus producer-driven chains. Many of these concepts are used interchangeably although they originate from clearly distinctive disciplinary backgrounds. With several actors from different levels, backgrounds and perspectives, supply chains are often confused when discussing value chains or vice versa. This leads to considerable misunderstandings. The concept of value chains, developed and popularized in 1985 by Michael Porter, can lead to confusion, since it originates from a strategic management perspective and shares little similarity with the value chain concept from a development perspective. Other confusions are triggered by the use of the concept Global Commodity Chains (GCC), and practitioner's versus academic perceptions of the concept. The Global Value Chain Initiative describes a value chain as "the full range of activities that firms and workers do to bring a product from its conception to its end use and beyond (website Global Value Chain Initiative)". Value creation is emphasized at each point in the chain from turning raw goods into final goods for consumption. In addition to private goods, value chain creation also applies to public goods, such as water and waste products. The term "global value chain" is used when the value chains are divided among multiple firms and spread across wide geographic areas. This document presents an overview of the various theoretical approaches to the concept of GVC and examines the added value as well as the limitations of each approach. Academic literature and donor agencies' reports, and consulted a limited number of key informants of donor agencies. The paper, finally, argues in favour of one particular definition of GVC.

## 2. Strategic management perspective

Supply chain

### Supply Chain approach

Origin: Supply Chain Management (SCM)

Added value: Manages the total flow of goods from suppliers to the ultimate user.,

Limitations: Less equipped for analysis of social and environmental sustainability issues

Unit of analysis: Lead firm

*Source: Jones & Riley (1987) and Hines (2004)*

In the business management literature, supply chains are commonly used as a core concept of strategic management. Supply chains are defined as "the alignment of firms that bring products or services to the market" (Stock and Lambert, 2001), or as "all interactions between suppliers, manufacturers, distributors, and customers" (Heizer and Render, 2001). There is a considerable amount of literature on (global) supply chains, which concentrates on the physical flow of products through the chain. The supply chain concept originates from Supply Chain Management (SCM) that was introduced by Oliver and Webber in 1982 as a new, integrative philosophy to manage the entire exchange of information and movement of goods between suppliers and end customers. The trend in global outsourcing and offshoring (also referred to as international insourcing) resulted in expanding supply chains that blurred the boundaries of firms and countries (cf. Mol, 2007). The strategic reality thereby was different than the strategic intent of firms. Due to the considerable transaction costs involved in 'going global', the intention to outsource globally often resulted in regional outsourcing in reality (Mol et al., 2005). The concept of supply chains in these firms developed from the purchasing and operations management literature (Hines, 2004) which focuses on improving logistics (how to manage these boundary crossing supply chains) and views the firm as the main unit of analysis. Management of the supply chain is very relevant since customers' have a choice: product delays (no proper logistics) will probably easily shift customers to competitive firms providing similar products that are in time.

Value chain concept Porter

### Porter's Value Chain concept

Origin: Supply Chain Management

Added value: Creates a competitive advantage for a firm (through cost reduction measures and differentiation)

Limitations: Less equipped for analysis of social and environmental sustainability issues, focusing solely on processes within one company

Unit of analysis: Individual firm(s)

*Source: Porter (1990)*

Since interactions between suppliers, manufacturers, distributors, and customers add value to a product, the supply chain is often referred to as the 'value chain' or 'demand chain' in the strategic management literature (Van Wijk, Danse and Van Tulder, 2008). For instance, the value chain approach, developed by Michael Porter in 1985, is primarily used to analyze the core competences of the firm to achieve cost reduction and differentiation.

A firm's value chain is "an interdependent system or network of activities, connected by linkages. Linkages occur when the way in which one activity is performed affects the cost or effectiveness of other activities" (Porter, 1990: 41). Porter speaks of the 'value (chain) system' when he refers to "a firm's relationships with upstream suppliers and downstream customers", comparable to the notion of 'supply chain'. Porter's notion of the value chain system encompasses solely the range of internal value-added processes within one company, and differs from a development perspective that focuses on a network of companies. To date, the strategic supply chain literature has not really focused on the analysis of sustainability issues (Van Wijk, Danse and Van Tulder, 2008). Recent literature at the corporate level has been trying to integrate sustainability issues under the heading of 'Sustainable Purchasing Management', but this research has not yet been well developed (viz: Van Tulder, 2009).

### 3. Development perspective

In contrast to the strategic management perspective, commodity/value chain concepts from a development perspective are concerned with the whole process of value creation from primary processing to consumption, instead of mainly focusing on the 'retail side of the chain' and on the activities that get raw materials and subassemblies into a manufacturing operation smoothly and economically. Moreover, GVC analysis presents a theoretical approach which is more appropriate for studying sustainability in supply chains.

According to Bair (2009), the 'global chains' literature started with the world-systems tradition of macro and long-range historical analysis of commodity chains (Hopkins and Wallerstein, 1986), and was elaborated with the Global Commodity Chain (GCC) concept of Gereffi (1994) and others within a political economy of development perspective. It was finally developed into the Global Value Chain concept; clearly inspired by its GCC predecessor, however, also derived from other theoretical and disciplinary affinities (see next paragraph).

Global Commodity Chain: Wallerstein & Gereffi

### Global Commodity Chain approach

Origin: World Systems Theory

Added value: The commodity chain framework offers a new paradigm to deal with development issues and focuses on the full length of global chains (appealing for scholars in development studies)

Limitations: Minimal definition GCC, regulation not adequately incorporated in framework, 'commodity' chains mainly on industrial commodity chains (not agricultural, no service sector), Producer-driven versus buyer driven distinction too rigid and uncontextualised.

Unit of analysis: Countries

*Source: Gereffi (1994), Raikes, Jensen & Ponte (2000), Bair (2009)*

A commodity chain is "a network of labor and production processes whose end result is a finished commodity" (Hopkins & Wallerstein, 1986: 159). Each process within a commodity chain can be represented as boxes or nodes linked together in networks, linking households, enterprises and states around the world.

According to Gereffi et al. (1994: 2) “the analysis of a commodity chain shows how production, distribution, and consumption are shaped by the social relations” that operate in the different segments and processes within a commodity chain.

Moreover, the commodity chain framework offered a new paradigm to deal with development issues on the distribution of wealth: competition and innovation within the different nodes of a commodity chain play a pivotal role in shaping the distribution of wealth.

On the other hand, critics of the GCC concept stress its minimal definition, its main focus on industrial commodity chains and thus not on agriculture, and the lack of adequately incorporating the issue of regulation in the framework (Raikes, Jensen & Ponte, 2000).

However, the concept offers a framework to understand uneven distributions of power within a global value chain. Gereffi (1999 & 2005) continues by presenting the distinction between producer-driven and buyer-driven commodity chains and he (1994) identifies a governance structure in Global Commodity Chains which defines how financial, material, and human resources are allocated and flow within a chain, as a result of power relations.

Gereffi (1999) distinguishes between producer-driven (PDDC) and buyer-driven commodity chains (BDCC), with the first concentrating the control in the chain on the producer side and the latter putting emphasis of (decentralized) production networks on the retailer and wholesaler side. Examples of producer-driven commodity chains are technology intensive industries, which produce automotive, computers and aircraft, whereas buyer-driven commodity examples are garments, footwear and consumer electronics, often controlled by brand name companies. Critics state that the producer-driven versus buyer-driven distinction is too rigid and uncontextualised (Raikes, Jensen & Ponte, 2000). However, the model highlights the importance of coordination across firm boundaries but more specifically, the growing importance of new global buyers (mainly retailers and brand marketers) as “key drivers in the formation of globally dispersed and organisationally fragmented production and distribution networks” (Gereffi & Korzeniewicz, 1994). Other authors also highlight the important role of global buyers, for example in promoting agricultural and manufacturing producers and traders in developing countries (e.g. Humphrey, 2004). Later, we will discuss a more complex typology than the PDCC-BDCC distinction which includes international trader-driven and technology-driven commodity chains.

*From GCC to GVC and governance in the chain*

#### **Gereffi’s Global Value Chain**

Origin: World System Theory

Added value: The work of Gereffi and others has contributed to a better understanding of the existence of entry barriers and unequal access to markets, and to uneven power and wealth distributions along the chain, and makes us aware that explicit notions of the power that the different chain actors possess, should always be included in any value chain analysis. Next to this, value chain analysis is not just about the ‘retail side of the chain’ (as stated before, the supply chain literature is mainly occupied with this side), but also manufacturers can determine the rules of the game, especially since they are specialized and have the knowhow of the production process. Gereffi’s model can be used for both analysis (researchers) and strategy (development workers). Moreover, he has facilitated the understanding of business management thinking for development workers.

Limitations: Not comprehensive enough (value chains are embedded in broader relationships).

Unit of analysis: Transnational networks of companies

*Source: Altenburg (2006), Raikes, Jensen & Ponte (2000)*

Another source of confusion in the definition of the Global Value Chain is that it is used interchangeably with the concept of Global Commodity Chains by some authors (i.e. Daviron & Ponte, 2005). However, there are some differences. First, although both concepts are derived from a World System Theory, the GVC construct is also influenced by transaction cost economics (Sturgeon, 2009), which becomes apparent in the typology of possible governance structures that can be found at the interfirm boundary linking suppliers to lead firms (see below). Second, GVC analysis focuses on the structure of the world economy, but its level of analysis is the transnational networks of companies rather than countries (Gereffi and Korzeniewicz, 1994). Third, GVC analysis was developed under the name of ‘global commodity chain’, but the term ‘commodity chain’ has been replaced by ‘value chain’ in the recent literature in order to enable coverage of those products that lack commodity characteristics (Gibbon and Ponte, 2005: 77), including service sectors. Moreover, the GVC concept is favoured over ‘commodity chains’ or ‘supply chains’ since it is perceived as “being most inclusive of the full range of possible chain activities and end products” (Gereffi, Humphrey, Kaplinsky, and Sturgeon, 2001).

## The governance of global value chains

Gereffi et al. (2005) present five (analytical) types of global value chain governance: –hierarchy, captive, relational, modular, and market. These range from high to low levels of explicit coordination and power asymmetry and also range in transactions costs of switching to new partners (i.e. in a market type of governance, the costs of switching to new partners are low for both parties). A variety of network forms of governance situated between spot markets, on the one hand, and large vertically integrated corporations on the other, has been the result of an ongoing globalization of production and trade. Vertical disintegration of transnational corporations (TNCs) means that they are “redefining their core competencies to focus on innovation and product strategy, marketing, and the highest value-added segments of manufacturing and services, while reducing their direct ownership over ‘non-core’ functions such as generic services and volume production” (Gereffi et al., 2005: 79). Finally, the authors conclude that the structure of global value chains depends critically on three variables: the complexity of transactions, the ability to codify transactions, and the capabilities in the supply base (e.g. highly knowledgeable users, such as manufacturers in the automobile industry, can play a significant role in shaping the ‘rules of the game’). Here we can see that the GVC construct is also influenced by transaction cost economics (Sturgeon, 2009).

## 4. Comprehensive chain concepts

Bair (2009) distinguishes several chain-like concepts or constructs, emerging from agro-food studies and international production network studies, to describe the organisation and geography of production in the economy. Agro-food studies developed the chain-like concepts ‘commodity system analysis’ (Friedland, 1984), the ‘systems of provision theory’ (Fine & Leopold, 1993) and the ‘filière approach’. We will only discuss the filière approach in this short draft paper. The international production network studies involve the chain-like concepts ‘Global Production Network’ (GPN), the supply chain management (SCM) and Porter’s value chain concept.. However, in this document, SCM and Porter’s value chain concept are positioned under the strategic management perspective and the GPN framework is placed under the development perspective, since it evolved from the GCC concept. In addition to GPN, other, more comprehensive approaches comparable to GVC are discussed below.

Filière approach

### Filière approach

Origin: Agro-food studies

Added value: A neutral, practical tool of analysis for use in ‘down-to-earth’ applied research

Limitations: Most work is rather technical, lacks consistency in the filière tradition, and focuses mainly on local and national levels of the chain (not global).

Unit of analysis: Local or national production level

*Source: Raikes, Jensen & Ponte (2000) & Altenburg (2006)*

The origins of the filière tradition can be found in “technocratic agricultural research” (Raikes, Jensen & Ponte, 2000:2) since it was developed by researchers at the Institute National de la Recherche Agronomique (INRA) and the Centre de Coopération Internationale en Recherche Agronomique pour le Développement (CIRAD).

It is applied mainly to agricultural commodities and had no specific time frame. The main objective of this approach is to “map out actual commodity flows and to identify agents and activities within a filière (or chain), which is viewed as a physical flow chart of commodities and transformations” (Raikes, Jensen & Ponte 2000:14). Whereas the global commodity chains approach is generally concerned with the full length of chains and the role of social key actors within the chain, the filière tradition mostly focuses on local or national levels of the chain, and the technical side of material flow within the chain (Raikes, Jensen & Ponte, 2000).

Sub-Sector Analysis, Industry Level Analysis, Global Production Network, and the Cluster Development Approach

Sub-Sector Analysis, Industry Level Analysis, Global Production Network, Cluster Development Approach

Origin: International production network studies, agricultural economics, Gereffi’s GVC

Added value: Enriches traditional approaches on GVC with more comprehensive views on the GVC concept, including impediments to growth external to the chain, social, institutional and cultural aspects

Limitations: None of the concepts are all-encompassing.

Unit of analysis: Sub-sector, industry, inter-firms, and clusters of firms

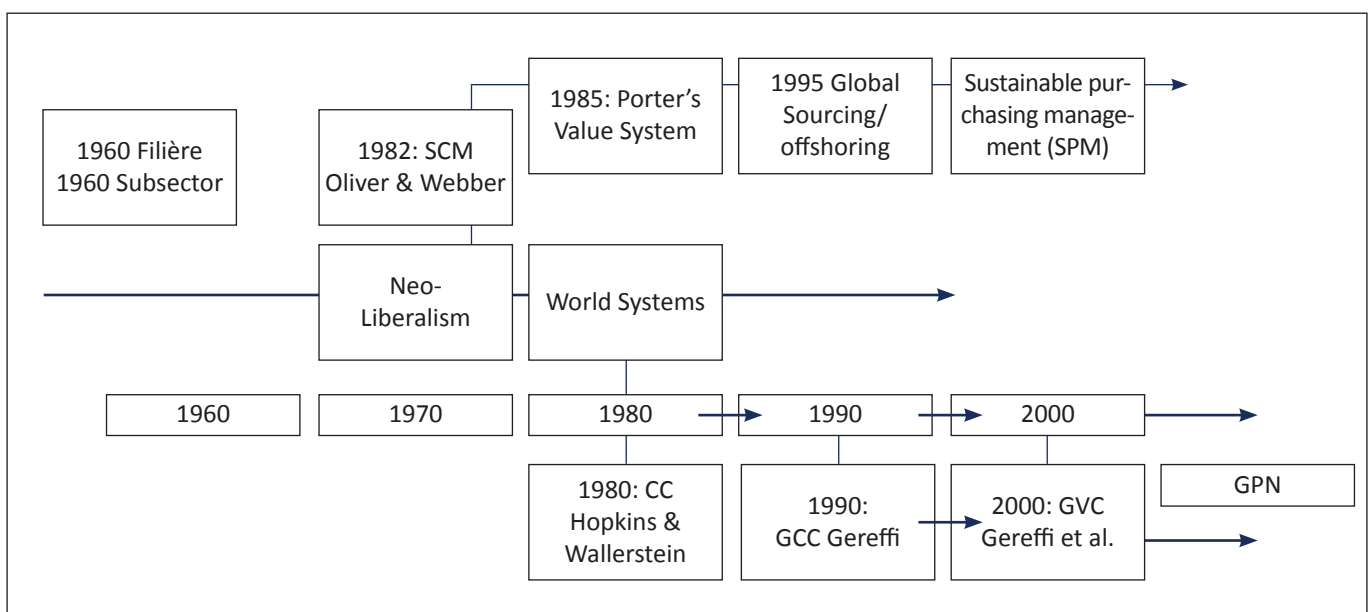
Source: Altenburg (2006), Bair (2009)

Other, more comprehensive approaches to the GVC concept are the sub-sector analysis, the industry level analysis, the Global Production Network and the Cluster Development Approach. Because it is beyond the scope of this paper to elaborate on all these approaches, we only briefly indicate their key characteristics. The sub-sector analysis definition is largely identical to value chains, however, it focuses on the industry level and highlights the external impediments to growth, such as trade barriers, pricing regulations, and property rights etc. The Global Production Network (GPN) approach (‘Manchester School’) builds upon the GCC concept, but considers the linear chain metaphor as too simplistic. For example, inter-firms are imbedded in societies and display social and institutional variations, and flows of knowledge in the chain can circulate in “complex multidirectional rather than unidirectional ways” (Altenburg, 2006). The Cluster Development Approach emphasizes upgrading strategies in value chains by showing “that small firms in clusters, both in developed and developing countries, are able to overcome some of the major constraints they usually face: lack of specialized skills, difficult access to technology, inputs, market, information, credit, and external service” (Giuliani et al., 2005).

Figure 1 presents a visual representation of the approaches discussed above.

In summary, many key debates on the operationalisation of the GVC construct remain valid, including questions such as “commodity chain or value chain?”, “are all global commodity/value chains global?”, “how can we avoid neglecting place and gender in the linear GVC construct?”, “what are the roles of the state and transportation?”, “how can we avoid functionalist determinism (the organisation of contemporary commodity chains is inevitable)?”etc. (Bair 2009).

Figure 1: History of the GVC concept



Source : own compilation



## 5. GVC in practice

### Practitioner approach on GVC

Origin: Combinations of literature (Porter, Filière, Gereffi etc).

Added value: Translates the academic discussion on development economics into practice; the practitioner develops operational tools on value chains (i.e. for development workers) in order to enhance the comprehension of a value chain as a social system placing human beings in the centre (GVC analysis inform forms of activism designed to promote upgrading in the chain)

Limitations: Fails to draw general conclusions of GVC and risks constructing a GVC concept from a variety of schools of thought, regardless of their original purpose.

Unit of analysis: Chain operators

*Source: own compilation, GTZ (2007), Bair (2009)*

There is a need for governments of developing countries and donor agencies to better understand the dynamics of value chain integration and to assess the risks and opportunities especially for poor people in developing countries. Practitioners (development workers, trainers, government workers etc.) are mainly concerned with how economic actors can gain access to the skills, competences and supporting services required to participate in GVCs. They use GVC analysis as an operational tool in their field work/trainings etc. instead of a merely analytical tool (academic). Practical field tools are for example 'chain mapping' and chain upgrading strategies.

The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) developed a manual on actor-oriented methods for promoting economic development within a value chain perspective (ValueLinks methodology). According to GTZ, value chain promotion harnesses market forces to achieve development goals. The concept evolved from a public perspective and aims at economic growth as a means to alleviate poverty. The commercial market development approach of the manual, with its pro-poor growth strategy, clearly distinguishes itself from a supply chain management approach. The latter aims at optimising the logistics of input sourcing and marketing in order to achieve profits, from the perspective of a particular lead company. The focus is on economic growth, not on poverty alleviation. According to GTZ, this 'private management instrument' is 'much more limited in scope'. And value chains are not only an economic concept but also constitute social systems in which people interact (GTZ, 2007).

### The eclectic practitioner

Other literature specifically addressing practitioners (Kaplinsky and Morris, 2000) also explicitly mentions the considerable overlaps between the concept of a value chain and similar concepts used in other contexts, such as the Porter concept, the filière, and the concept of global commodity chains without, however explaining the ins and outs of each approach in detail. In addition, the value chain definition used in the Value Chain Development (VCD) course<sup>3</sup> developed by the Match Maker Associates Ltd (MMA) in 2004, is constructed by three different authors who highlight various aspects of value chains (MMA, 2004). Another important observation is that practitioners do sometimes explicitly recognize the multiple definitions and interpretations of value chains and therefore provide examples of what value chains are typically not (Kaplinsky and Morris and the MMA). This document aims at a more integrated approach, highlighting added values and limitations of each approach.

In general, practitioners construct an operational GVC concept from a diverse range of available literature ; in short, they engage in eclectic methods<sup>4</sup>. A reason for the eclectic use of sources could be that NGOs experience difficulties in adopting both pro-poor growth and commercial objectives, and therefore apply knowledge on supply/value chains from both developmental and business literature. However, using parts of the wide range of concepts, regardless of their original purpose, could be risky, since it undermines the original context and could lead to 'confusion of tongues'. Therefore, it can be worthwhile to make the path and history of the concept of preference explicit, as the authors wish to do at the end of this paper.

<sup>3</sup>The course is prepared for VCD practitioners working on the ground in economic development programmes.

<sup>4</sup>Eclectic is 'that borrows or is borrowed from diverse sources'. Oxford English Dictionary, assessed 23 March 2010.

## Levels within the value chain network

Finally, reading through the GVC literature, one should be aware of the different levels within the chain network and especially how several authors use (sometimes overlapping) concepts to describe these. For example, Roduner (2007) makes the distinction between value chain actors<sup>5</sup>, value chain supporters and value chain influencers. The 2007 GTZ manual (described above) applies the notions of chain operator and chain supporter and on the macro level organisations shaping the business environment (not in the chain map). Others (such as Wijk et. al., 2009) utilize primary chain actors (and secondary chain stakeholders), service providers and facilitators. There seems to be an interesting inconsistency in the third level: it is described as a chain influencer (could be negative), a chain facilitator (seems to be positive) or as organisations shaping the business environment (could be both positive and negative).

Consultancy agencies could offer a way out. For example, Hans Posthumus Consultancy (2008) distinguishes three types of stakeholders, namely chain actors (those in the chain, the owners of the product taking risk in the chain), chain supporters (those outside the chain that supply goods or services to chain actors), and chain influencers (influence the performance of the subsector, its actors and their supporters). In addition, two more roles are added: chain facilitators and chain builders. The first is “a temporary (catalyst) role by an organisation (often a donor funded project) to “grease” the chain machinery, either between the actors at the various levels or between the actors and their supporters, with objective to improve the performance of the entire chain and its actors”. The second are “organisations that build the capacity of certain (groups of) chain actors, often NGOs with donor funding. Their activities are non-commercial and non-operational, such as strengthening farmer cooperatives” (HPC, 2008).

## 6. Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to present the diversity of forms and definitions of the concept of global value chains (GVCs), and to show how the authors perceive the notion of GVC. Moreover, we reviewed the added values and limitations of each approach.

As this overview has shown, practitioners often engage in eclectic methods. They use the global value chain concept, without clarifying the path and history of the concept they use. The concept originates from clearly distinctive paths and could be susceptible to miscommunication and misuse. The authors avoid misunderstanding by explicitly opting for a public and pro-poor perspective of the concept of the Global Value Chain. For our definition, we adopt insights of GTZ, since it evolves from a public perspective and aims at economic growth as a means to achieve poverty alleviation. In addition, it is useful for studying social and environmental sustainability, governance and uneven power and wealth distributions along the chain. Next to this, we use the general definition of The Global Value Chain Initiative, which clearly originates from the GVC concept of G. Gereffi, and is mainly used in the development literature:

### Global Value Chains: definition used by the Partnerships Resource Centre

The Global Value Chain Initiative describes a value chain as “the full range of activities of firms and workers to bring a product from its conception to its end use and beyond. This includes activities such as design, production, marketing, distribution and support to the final consumer. From the GTZ we add a public and pro-poor perspective: all operators adding value to a particular marketable product on its way from raw material to the final consumer are considered part of the chain. Value chain promotion can restrict market forces from achieving development goals. The GVC concept evolved from a public perspective and aims at economic growth as a means to achieve poverty alleviation. Value chains are not only an economic concept but also constitute social systems in which people interact.

Source: *The Global Value Chain Initiative & The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ)*

<sup>5</sup>Roduner (2007): Value chain actors are actors who directly deal with the products, i.e. they produce, process, trade and own them; value chain supporters are various actors who provide services but who never directly deal with the product, their services add value to the product; and value chain influencers point at stakeholders influencing the regulatory framework, policies infrastructures etc. at local, national and international level.

### Further Reading

Global Value Chain Initiative (Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, England). <http://www.globalvaluechains.org>

Altenburg, T. 2006, Donor approaches to supporting pro-poor value chains. Report prepared for the Donor Committee for Enterprise Development Working Group on Linkages and Value Chains. Available: [http://www.fao-ilo.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/fao\\_ilo/pdf/DonorApproachestoPro-PoorValueChains.pdf](http://www.fao-ilo.org/fileadmin/user_upload/fao_ilo/pdf/DonorApproachestoPro-PoorValueChains.pdf)

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