

Special Issue for the *Africa Journal of Management* on  
Sustainability and Global Value Chains in Africa

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## Sustainability and Global Value Chains in Africa

There is increasing interest in economic growth and sustainability in African countries (Africa Report, 2011). The escalation of social, political, and ecological problems on the continent since the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Neff, 2007; Zoogah, 2013) has been accompanied by commensurate escalation in the continent's potential to contribute demographically, politically, socially and economically to global prosperity (Africa Report, 2011). While environmental, social and economic performance of most African nations and companies are below the levels of other world regions, the continent has the youngest average age among all on the planet, and is a focus of global investment and development. As a result, the Agenda 2063 and the Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) seek not only to harness the large market size of Africa but also to establish mechanisms that enable African economies to create enabling environments that support vibrant businesses without harming people and the natural environment. African conceptualizations of prosperity itself can provide a template for innovative business and public policies that can shape new approaches to development for both the private and public sectors. Engagement of all sectors is critical to the achievement of economic goals, such as those expressed under AfCFTA (Ghadge et al., 2019) and as the UN Sustainable Development Goals under the UN Global Compact. Private-sector organizations – including corporations and non-governmental agencies – working together with representatives from all levels of government -- highlight the important role of Africa in scaling sustainable solutions to the most pressing problems in the world today.

Global value chains (GVCs) and, in particular, the procurement practices of companies sourcing in Africa, are shaping environmental practices and, therefore, sustainability of labor practices and environmental impact in Africa (Gibbon & Ponte, 2005). Western companies, for example, use defined supplier codes of conduct regarding labor and environmental practices to improve working conditions, product quality, and environmental impact of African suppliers, thus making these suppliers competitive globally (McGahan & Distelhorst, 2019). Through such actions, procurers around the world have the potential to mobilize collective action with other companies or government bodies to improve sustainability. However, as Taglioni and Wrinkler (2016) indicate, African nations view GVCs as potential traps that create a new core-periphery pattern with “good” jobs in the North and “bad” jobs in the South (World Bank, 2020). Another challenge is that many African businesses lag behind in measuring, reporting, and addressing sustainability concerns, issues, and problems. In Kenya, for example, only 0.05 percent of all registered businesses in the country

are accounted for in the national Global Compact Network – even though the country is strong in exporting to Western countries.

Understanding these challenges and other factors affecting the sustainability of various business and public practices in Africa requires nuanced analysis. The ethnic and cultural diversity of Africa as well as national laws, local institutions, power, dependence, transparency, and distance between organizations involved in global value chains are likely to influence sustainability. Also important are the underlying mechanisms of policy that drive change in the sustainability practices of African organizations in all sectors; contingencies influencing GVC behaviors towards sustainability in Africa; and strategies that encourage suppliers to act sustainably in multinational value chains (Ponte & Ewert, 2009). For example, we can understand the diffusion of multinational buyer firms' sustainability strategies into the business practices of companies in Africa.

The objective of this special issue is to consider these issues regarding sustainability and GVCs in Africa. To accomplish this, we seek to draw attention to the conditions and terms under which companies in Africa operate in supply chains involving international buyers. Suggested areas and questions include (but are not limited to) the following:

### **1) African companies' response to Multinational Buyer Firms' sustainability requirements:**

- What is the effect of Global Value Chains on sustainability policies and practices in Africa?
  - How do multinational companies achieve compliance with sustainability standards when sourcing from Africa countries?
  - Do multinational buyer firms' "supplier sustainability auditing" and "capacity building" activities successful support the achievement of alignment with African suppliers on sustainability requirements?
- How do African suppliers interpret multinational buyer firms' sustainability requirements, and how do they evaluate the benefit of changing accordingly?
  - Does the rooted diversity within and among African nations affect the interpretation of sustainability requirements?
  - What can be done within local markets to advance sustainability consciousness among producers and consumers?
- Are multinationals promoting the achievement of the SDGs through their participation in African markets?

- What unique tradeoffs do both multinational and African organizations face in pursuing the AfCFTA goals and SDGs? How are these tradeoffs addressed and resolved – within the company and with respect to external supply chains?
- What mechanisms are in place particularly in the public sector to assure the alignment of the policies and activities of SDGs with African needs, perspectives, and values?
- What flagship examples of effective GVCs exist? What are the histories of these GVCs? How were goals aligned, and what problems have participants in these GVCs faced over time?
- **2) African context:** How does supplier readiness to comply with international standards of sustainability – and the SDGs – vary systematically by country?
  - What role does ownership structure and investor identity of suppliers play in the GVC's sustainability performance? What are the mechanisms that account for alignment and malalignment?
  - Does the rooted diversity within and among the African nations affect the diffusion of sustainability practices?
- What uniquely African innovations in GVC development have emerged?
  - Which African companies, countries, and jurisdictions have prioritized and pursued the implementation of scaled sustainability goals in negotiations with foreign multinational companies seeking to develop GVCs that involve African organizations?
  - How have African companies dealt with challenges and problems in prioritizing sustainability criteria in GVCs?
  - Which SDGs and AfCFTA goals have been met in Africa? Where has progress been most significant, and where is the opportunity for achievement greatest?

The special issue editors encourage other relevant and interesting research questions not anticipated here but which advance the scholarship of management in Africa with regard to sustainability and GVCs. Interested scholars are invited to first submit an extended abstract that outlines the paper. The authors of the most promising papers that fit with the special issue theme will receive a first

review with suggestions and recommendations, and be invited to submit a full paper. The full papers are subject to the journal's review process.

### **Submission Guidelines**

**Abstract Submissions:** This Call for Papers has adopted a two-stage process. Authors must first submit a five-page abstract (double-spaced, 12-inches, New Times Roman, 1-inch margin around the paper with appropriate paragraphing) that specifies the following: 1) research question, 2) hypotheses (for empirical papers) and 3) methodology (for empirical papers). For conceptual papers, we would appreciate clarity on the contribution and model (if any) and how the paper will enhance the science of management. The deadline for submitting abstracts is June 30, 2020.

**Full Paper Submissions:** Authors whose abstracts are accepted will be invited to submit a full paper. It is expected that the authors at this stage will meet the deadline in order for the Special Issue to meet the publication deadline. Papers should be no more than 10,000 words, including references, tables, and figures. Appendices must not exceed 2,000 words. They will be blind-reviewed following the journal's standard review process. Manuscripts should be prepared according to the guidelines of the Africa Journal of Management (AJOM).

Authors should refer to the AJOM website for instructions on submitting a paper. Submission must be done via the Africa Journal of Management Editorial Manager. The deadline for submitting full papers is December 31, 2020.

The Special Issue's tentative publication date is December 2021. Authors may send queries to the SI editors via email.

### **Due dates:**

Abstracts due: June 30, 2020

Full length manuscript: Dec 31, 2020

Final manuscript: June 30, 2021

Publication (online): September 315, 2021

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