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The Problem of Promoting Equitable Development: Value Chains, Power Distribution and Development Models

Pui Yi Wong and Edmund Terence Gomez
Department of Administrative Studies and Politics, Faculty of Economics and Administration, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur 50603, Malaysia.

Abstract

This article reviews two books on value chain research against the background of the outcome document from the Third International Conference on Financing for Development (FFD3) convened by the United Nations in 2015. The books – compilations of papers on Value Chains, Social Inclusion and Economic Development: Contrasting Theories and Realities (Helmsing and Vellema, 2011) and Markets and Rural Poverty: Upgrading in Value Chains (Mitchell and Coles, 2011) – and the FFD3 document all share similar themes on the pursuit of economic development in an environmentally sustainable and socially just manner. However, most contributions in both books as well as the FFD3 process stop short of acknowledging the influence of political economy on their debates, which this review argues must be incorporated to better understand the asymmetries of power distribution. This is crucial in order to formulate clear strategies that can adequately address development issues pertinent to developing regions such as Southeast Asia.

I. Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), an ambitious development agenda to replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), are well underway globally after being formally adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015. The success of the SDGs hinges on an event held earlier in the same year, where governments, intergovernmental institutions, the private sector, and civil society gathered at the Third International Conference on Financing for Development (FFD3) in Addis Ababa to discuss how to mobilise resources for sustainable development. The FFD3 was the first of three major international summits in 2015 and its outcome document, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA), set the momentum for all countries towards sustainable development.