



University of Nairobi



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Natural  
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## The Politics of Private Standards (POPS)

*African horticulture is responding to market demand for quality produce that also complies with buyer codes on agricultural practice and labour rights by establishing private standards initiatives (PSIs)*

*What do PSIs mean for regulation and stakeholder relationships in developing countries and along the global value chain?*

### Background

Private standards initiatives in agri-food industries may cover the technical aspects of the goods traded, (e.g. food safety and quality), or may relate to the process or production methods (e.g. good agricultural practice [GAP] and labour standards). These initiatives take different forms, but comprise the varied organisations and individuals who develop, monitor and promote new standards. Our project is concerned with how the emergence of these initiatives changes the responsibilities, roles and inter-relationships of different stakeholders in agribusiness and the implications of this shift in power.

Private standards set in motion a highly *political* process that is not easy to predict

PSIs may be a mechanism to

- improve product quality and competitiveness
- facilitate access to higher value markets
- localise standards so that they are more appropriate to local conditions and issues
- improve farmer and worker welfare
- provide a space for the participation of previously voiceless groups

However, it is also possible that they might:

- overshadow or conflict with government regulation of business
- undermine the capacity of trade unions to represent their members
- fail to empower workers and other unheard groups to have a voice or improve labour standards
- prevent other regulatory approaches being developed

### Who we are

The POPS Project team comprises: team leader, Dr Anne Tallontire (Sustainability Research Institute); Valerie Nelson and Adrienne Martin (Natural Resources Institute) and Dr Maggie Opondo (University of Nairobi), who will also be coordinating the field work in Kenya. The project builds on earlier work by the team on analysing the gender implications of codes of practice, assessing the impact assessment of codes and developing guidelines for applying codes with smallholders (for DFID and Ethical Trading Initiative).

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## What does the POPS project mean for you?

This research aims to provide greater understanding of how PSIs operate, who they represent and how they interact with and involve existing organisations, such as:

- NGOs and other organisations working directly with small producers
- Businesses involved in agri-food chains, both as buyers and suppliers
- Institutions involved in standard setting and monitoring, both in the South and internationally
- Trade unions and other organisations representing or organising workers & workers themselves
- Government departments at the local and national level and international organisations

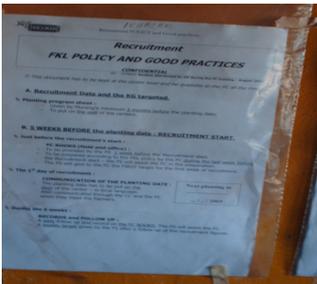
All of these organisations are likely to have an interest in the effectiveness, sustainability and development impacts of PSIs. We aim to engage key stakeholders in the research process, through interviews and participation in workshops, and also through communication of the results.

## What we plan to do

Our field research will take place in the Kenyan horticulture sector, particularly flowers and vegetables. Kenya is a key player in high value agricultural exports and the location of considerable activity on private standards. The project will focus on two kinds of initiatives in Kenya:

- Good agricultural practice, particularly through the implementation of EurepGAP and KenyaGAP
- Labour standards, for example through the Horticulture Ethical Business Initiative, HEBI

We plan to interview key individuals in Kenya and Europe, identify who is involved in PSIs and those who may be excluded, facilitate stakeholder workshops in Kenya involving the critical actors in PSIs as well as organise focus group discussions for those stakeholders who do not have a voice. Field work will take place from September 2007 to mid 2008. Our report will be ready in mid-2009.



Photos: Maggie Opondo

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