

Gender equality in global value chains: podcast transcript

Introduction: [00:00:00] You are listening to a podcast from The University of Manchester.

In this podcast series, hear The University of Manchester's Dr Nic Gowland, interview some of our leading experts about how their research is helping to deliver the UN Sustainable Development Goals for global health, equality and sustainability.

Dr Gowland: [00:00:26] Today, I'm speaking to Professor Stephanie Barrientos, Emeritus Professor in the Global Development Institute at The University of Manchester. Thanks very much Stephanie for doing this podcast and welcome.

Prof Barrientos: [00:00:37] Thank you. It's good to be with you.

Dr Gowland: [00:00:39] The area of research we're going to unpick today looks at gender equality across global value and supply chains.

Uh, before we jump into that area of research, as I've done in the other podcasts, I'm keen to know how you came to work in such an important area of research. Were there any early inspirations or influential people or moments that led you to where you are today?

Prof Barrientos: [00:01:00] Yes, I probably..., I think with many academics, um, particularly who are engaged in impact, it probably goes back a long way. I left school at 16, um, and worked, uh, in all sorts of jobs until I was 22 when I went to college and then I went to university as a mature student. So I had experience, um, of work, um, uh, and the world of work, particularly at the lower end, um, and, at university, I became very interested in international development and, um, did a PhD related to international development.

Um, and so I then did a lot of research in the area and I just became very interested in, in some of the narratives around developing countries, particularly, um, in Chile. That was my very first research, um, uh. There was a narrative. that Chile was a great economic success in the 1990s because they were exporting a large amount of fruit and wine.

Um, but I knew that, uh, behind that there were hundreds of thousands of women workers who were doing the work, but who were really getting very, very poor pay, very little support. Um, and so I started to research the full value chain from the consumer end, um, where the final product is sold through how it's produced, how it's distributed, and then who are the workers?

Um, and my engagement with women workers in Chile was very informative because I had the idea that they were highly exploited, which they were, but, um, they were very clear in discussions that this was the first time that they had been able to work and be paid for it and now have an independent income.

In other words, there were gains as well as losses. Um, and so I became very intrigued in how, uh, different in different fields, different types of consumer products, how are they produced? How do they move through the value chain, who are the workers or the small-scale producers at the other end. Um, and global value chains are very, very profitable.

Um, but the workers in the small-scale producers often get a very small percentage of the, the benefits, if you like, um, especially women who constitute the majority in many cases.

Dr Gowland: [00:03:19] That's interesting. It's an issue we obviously hear more about now, but probably still not enough. But at the time, was your work in Chile quite ahead of its time then? Was it, was it quite a difficult kind of issue to, to raise?

Prof Barrientos: [00:03:30] yes, I think it was just, people were unaware really of the ways in which value chains operated and that they were highly coordinated by the lead firms. So the retailers, the supermarkets, the big brands, coordinate their value chains, right the way down to the, to the actual producer..., small-scale producer.

Um, and the types of terms and conditions in which production takes place is determined by them. It's a very different to more traditional markets, which are through large numbers of intermediaries. But there was always..., um, from early on, I came across, um, a small group of, of other researchers who were very interested in global value chains, probably where my work was more innovative was that I focused on workers, which others..., some others did, but not many.

Dr Gowland: [00:04:20] So, what did they focus on if not workers?

Prof Barrientos: [00:04:21] Usually, on the firm, on the interfirm relationships and the way in which trade was changing through global value chains, that trade was no longer really between countries, but was increasingly between companies where the lead firms, the big retailers, the big brands could really coordinate right the way down, um, and well in advance.

The big brands and the big retailers will pre-program nine months, even up to a year in advance, what production should take place, when it takes place, how it takes place..., but don't really bring into account, um, the kind of workers that are needed to produce it. And I focused in on the workers. Um, there are well over 450 million workers in global value chains, mainly in low-income countries, many more..., um, the data doesn't include some of the lowest income countries, um, and nearly half of those are women. So the outsourcing, or the sourcing, of production from low-income countries by big brands and retailers in North America and Europe has generated millions of jobs in the developing world. Um, um, in the case of women..., for many women who traditionally didn't have access to the labour market, they weren't able to get independent incomes and that's been a great advance, but, and there's a big but there... The pay and conditions, um, and security of work is very poor, especially for women.

Dr Gowland: [00:05:59] Okay. You mentioned a few times there, global value chains. Can you just explain what global value chains are and how they influence, you know, you and I, and almost everyone on the planet?

Prof Barrientos: [00:06:10] Well, now it's recognised that global value chains play a major role in trade. So, somewhere between 60 and 80% of all trade passes through global value chains, um, and essentially a global value chain is where the linkages between all the firms are from - starting with the retailer, who sells to the consumer. All the, um, backward linkages are highly coordinated, whereas in traditional trade, they would have gone through intermediaries, um, where you wouldn't really know from one intermediary to the next, who was involved in the..., in the trading linkages. Um, the, the big, the big brands, big companies, uh, pre-program um, they, they have very strict terms and conditions. They determine the quality of the product, they determine when it's produced, how it's produced, um, what the price is. The, the price is often put on the product at the point of production with their label. So it's, it's much more coordinated and therefore much easier as a researcher to, to find out who the workers are in a..., in the value chain of a product

when you buy the product. Whereas when there are a lot of different intermediaries, it's very difficult to know who was involved in producing it.

Dr Gowland: [00:07:29] Crucially these value chains start, do they normally start with low-paid workers in low-middle income countries? Is that, is that reality?

Prof Barrientos: [00:07:36] Depends on the type of product, but I've particularly focused on food, um, chocolate, um, fruit and vegetables, fresh flowers, um and apparel, um, garments, ready-made garments in particular. Um, that is fairly labour-intensive and that is mainly sourced now from Africa or Asia or Latin America, depending on the product.

Um, you still have global value chains that have obviously much more high-tech products and many of those will be produced in Europe or North America. So it really depends on the product, but most supply chains will still..., even for the high-tech supply chains, will have inputs that will have been sourced in lower income countries.

So, so global value chains are a really critical part now of world trade, um, and have been critical in bringing many lower income and middle-income countries into the world trading system.

Dr Gowland: [00:08:39] So just to put that into kind of perspective, you know, someone listening to this podcast, is it quite likely the clothes they are wearing were made by people in low middle-income countries? Probably a woman?

Prof Barrientos: [00:08:50] Yep. It definitely is. So the clothes you wear, the shoes you wear, um, the electronics you use your mobile phone... Um, probably the computer that you're looking at this podcast on, the radio that you're listening to it through, um, all of those products will have..., uh, the food you eat.., you ate before you started to listen, the coffee you're drinking as you listen..., all of this will have been sourced through, through global value chains, and varying a bit by product and country. Um, uh, the majority, or in many cases, a significant proportion of the workers will be women, but very importantly, women are often concentrated more in the more insecure types of work, whereas men are more concentrated in the better paid, less, uh..., more secure work.

Women are more concentrated in the lower paid, less secure work, even though they play really a critical role to producing high-quality, um, high-value goods at the end of, at the end..., at the consumer end. But a lot of that value gets captured along the way by big distributors and lead firms.

Dr Gowland: [00:10:05] This brings us nicely on to your area of research.

Um, and it's a simple question for me to ask, but I imagine a complex answer. Why is it then that women are concentrated in insecure work?

Prof Barrientos: [00:10:15] For a number of reasons, particularly for the labour intensive work. Partly because the types..., if you think of the types of consumer goods we now buy, more and more women have entered the labour force and, and, and, and particularly in North America and in Europe. Um, and as they have... they've wanted to buy goods, such as ready-made garments or ready-prepared food, um, uh, which traditionally they might've made..., women would have made in the home themselves..., but now they buy it, um, uh, ready-produced, um, and quick and easy to use... And so, you've had an increase in the sort of production, the commercial production, of goods that are..., women have been traditionally involved in producing, and secondly, I think very importantly, um, from the 1980s onwards, you had increased sourcing of goods from low and middle-income countries, which had, before that maybe been produced in North America or

in Europe. Um, but one of the key parts of these global value chains is that they..., they operate on what's called a "just in time" basis. So, there's this constant flow of goods, and the price of these goods at the consumer end has relatively decreased. So, they're relatively affordable now... to buy goods that in the past, you might not have been able to buy. And, in order to push the price down and keep the efficiency of production and keep very high-quality production, because these are often quality goods, the pressure on the suppliers from the buyers is to, um, receive a low price in terms of the cost price that they receive, but then also to pay low wages and to have a very flexible labour force, so that as the different orders come through or there's shifts in orders, they can respond very, very quickly. And then in many of those low-income countries, women have traditionally..., the gender division of labour has cast women as..., as being in the home, as being more subservient. This is the sort of social, cultural norms that have held women back. And so suppliers have been able to bring women in, to work into paid work at relatively lower wages and on a more insecure basis, um, than men. So, it's a combination of different pressures, I think, that comes together, but this is generated income, uh, jobs and incomes, for hundreds of millions of women who I think have benefited from receiving now, for the first time often, an independent income.

Dr Gowland: [00:12:53] Like all things it's much more complex than just it's a bad or a good thing.

Moving onto the case study then, can you give an introduction to your, your research in this area over the last..., so there's a couple of decades almost, isn't it all sort of 15 years...? What have you been doing in this area and what, and what have you been finding?

Prof Barrientos: [00:13:10] Yes. So, I think initially I started around 1998 / 2000, um, by doing research in Chile, on Chilean fruit, um, and the fruit workers who produced that fruit. Um, and that really led me into analysing the..., the value chain. Then increasingly I moved to the Institute of Development Studies at Sussex at the University of Sussex and became more and more involved in different research projects on different types of commodities.

So, I did a lot of research, um, in South Africa, on South African fruit, um, and Ghana on cocoa, um, in East Africa on fruit and vegetables, flowers... Then I got..., became more involved in analysing the apparel value chain, um, and did research in Bangladesh, um, and in India. But in all of those cases, I was really focused on the position of workers or small-scale farmers in those value chains, how the value chain operated, um, and, and the position of workers. And one of the findings that I had very early on was that, um, because of the linkages across value chains, there was more leverage to..., to pressure for improvements in working conditions. Um, particularly NGOs were very involved in that, in pressuring brands and retailers to improve conditions... So, you could see that whilst there were a lot of problems for women workers, there were also potential opportunities. And also, my research showed that where improvements were made, uh, for women workers, often productivity went up, efficiency went up and the quality of production went up. Um, and the stability of the workforce, the workforce became more stable. So, there were also business benefits. It wasn't just for the women themselves. Um, and through that research, I was asked to..., um, uh, initially by Cadbury..., um, and then by other companies, to provide advice on what improvements they could make. They often came under..., I should say, I'm not a campaigner... I am a researcher. Very, very clear about that. Anything that I do, I have to be able to publish on and everybody can see it. It's available to everybody. Um, but I was asked to provide

advice, um, by different companies on the types of improvements that they could make. They'd often be put under pressure, but they wanted advice on the types of improvements they could make, um, particularly on gender.

So when they were implementing initiatives in their supply chains, and for multiple reasons, they were doing this, not just because of, um, uh, civil society pressure, but also, um, in the case, say of Cadbury, because of increasing concern in, in the chocolate, world of chocolate manufacturing, confectionary, um, that, uh, conditions for small holder farmers, who are the majority of the producers, were very poor, and increasingly farmers were leaving. Um, with increasing demand for chocolate, there, wasn't going to be much chocolate if you didn't invest in the cocoa communities. So I became involved in, in advisory groups to help promote, um, in that case, uh, the, the position of cocoa farmers. Bringing a gender lens..., demonstrated that women might not be the majority of farmers, they're only about 25% of the farmers, but they do nearly half the work. If you don't invest in, in the work that they do, you're not going to get good quality, you're not going to get, increasing yields and you're not going to get good quality cocoa. So that was work that was quite influential on Cadbury.

And Cocoa Life under Mondelez has integrated a very strong gender dimension. I did similar advisory work for other companies. I was an advisor on a project for Nike, where they were looking to improve conditions for women workers. So, I again, brought a gender lens into that. I did advisory work for Marks and Spencers, um, as well, uh, similarly, um..., how could they enhance gender within their..., and women, gender quality, within their global supply chains. Um, and I then got bigger and bigger research grants as the sort of the research continued and my engagement um, continued. Um, so I led with Professor Gary Gereffi at Duke University uh, on quite a large program, called Capturing the Gains, that was from..., roughly from 2008 through to 2012, where we led..., uh, researchers in a number of different countries... They were about..., in the end... I think it was about 40 researchers involved, um, in 20 different research institutes across a number of different countries, looking at, um, different types of value chains. Um, and that yielded very, very important findings.

I think a number of research publications, um, came out of that. And then from that program, um, then, uh, the United..., sorry, the Department for International Development at the..., in the UK, under the UK government, um, decided to, uh, to put on a large program, um, which, uh..., called Women..., uh, Work Opportunities for Women in Global Supply Chains. This, this came really out of their engagement, um, in the United Nations high-level panel on women's economic empowerment..., the DFID program was really promoting research and engagement to try and promote them... as economic empowerment. And then, through that program, um, of which I was the research lead, there were a number of all the partners in that program, it's a large, uh, multi-million pound program over a number of years... I continued to engage with companies, um, including Marks and Spencers, and, um, and I think through that, uh, the combination of that research and that engagement then led to, or contributed to..., um, Sedex, which is one of the largest social compliance programs, um, in the world, um, which is there really to..., to help oversee and provide a platform for all the social auditing that goes on in supply chains to try and at least ensure minimum pay and conditions and working conditions for workers. Um, but one of the big findings from the WOW programs, we call it, Work Opportunities for Women, um, was that really the invisibility of women workers..., that there isn't good data on, on, on the number of

women, there isn't good data on where they're working, partly because they largely are in insecure work, the casual workers, um, and in the case of cocoa, they're not the cocoa farmers, they're, they..., they're the, the part of the contributing family labour on the farm. So there is very, very little good data. And what we then did was to really demonstrate ways in which you could use social compliance, and Sedex being one of the largest to generate more systematic data on what women did, where they are, what types of activities they're involved in..., um, and Sedex set up a gender working group, um, as a result of that. And so that's sort of ongoing work that they're now doing..., but I think it was an example of how the sort of research engagement, research engagement, um, and with other organisations as well....

Um, I've, I've done advisory work with Oxfam with Christian Aid, um, with DIFD, with the ILO (International Labour Organization) so, um, with multiple different actors, because I think really from my own experience, um, and and one of the, the goals, as I said, is that I think global value chains actually provide an opportunity to make improvements...

Uh, but you'd have to leverage that change, but that everybody, all different actors have to be involved. Companies themselves, the suppliers, governments, and international organisations and civil society organisations. And where I've really seen change, take place and improvements being made is when you get, what I call, the critical mass.

Um, and so that's something that it's been fascinating to watch, um, over many decades. Um, I think that I've seen a lot of change take place, uh, but I also see the massive challenges which continue.

Dr Gowland: [00:21:55] It's funny you say that I was going to ask, you know..., you've got some massive companies there that you're engaging with... Um, is there still a huge amount of work to do in this area?

Do we need, you know, all, all big companies, I suppose, that use those global value chains to be, to be looking at this?

Prof Barrientos: [00:22:10] Yes, I would, I would argue yes. Um, and I think, um, the, the gender challenge, challenges are only, uh, I mean, the challenges for women workers and men workers actually for both are only going to get bigger, um, in the future.

Um, the big challenges those companies face are one of the first challenges is wanting to produce quality products at affordable prices. It varies, obviously not for the niche type products, but for the vast majority of goods. So that's always been a challenge. And I think that's one of the things my research demonstrated - that there are gains for women workers and gains for companies to, to provide better support. Recognition of the women that are working for you or in your supply chain, um, and then support, um, and, reasonable remuneration or, or fairer remuneration, um, conditions of work and recognition of their rights. So, um, so that's been important, but these companies now face big challenges..., big challenges around climate change, around sustainability in the future. Uh, COVID has really brought to the fore, um, the kinds of challenges they face in terms of having resilient supply chains or being able to cope in the, in the, in the face of crises.

Um, and, um, certainly in relation to..., COVID has affected, disproportionately affected, the most insecure workers. Often when the, when the, when the virus hit and when their lockdowns hit and suppliers were cut off or..., and had to lay off workers, it's the most insecure workers that often were laid off first and they are disproportionately women.

So women were definitely just disproportionately affected. Um, but also if you want to build back, uh, better in my..., I would argue you've got more resilient, more sustainable value chains, that can deal with these kinds of shocks. Because this was a, a health shock, but we're going to get climate change shocks occurring as well. Then you need to have better support for workers, more equitable um, value chains, I mean. Indeed, McKinsey has said that, um, in a..., in a very important report, that, um, that building back with gender equality will generate far more growth in the future than building back without, um... And McKinsey obviously is a commercial organisation, but they have, um, done research that, that supports that argument.

Dr Gowland: [00:24:48] Yeah. I mean, it's fascinating hearing you talk about all these, these different things and companies you worked with. So, so what was the sort of impact then that this, this research has delivered so far? Because of course this is ongoing, isn't it?

Prof Barrientos: [00:25:01] Yeah. So, um, I mean, there's the direct impact. So, for companies that I work with very closely, who I advised, and then they directly implemented changes in their supply chain.

Um, it's um..., this is their numbers, in terms of the numbers of workers they reached for whom they made changes, but roughly 390,000 workers in different types of supply chains, both food and garments... Um, then there are what I call the more indirect, um, uh, impacts. So, for example, Marks and Spencers, uh, one of the changes they made in their Plan A, which is their kind of program that covers different aspects of environmental, environmental, and social sustainability..., um, they made a commitment to..., that by 2023, 25% of the leadership of, um, um, senior management and..., and other parts of management in their supply chain, should be women. Um, and that program, which we were involved with through WOW, which is trying to help to implement that... So, my research helped to inform that. And then the WOW program is..., is helping to implement that. If they roll it out, they have a million workers in their supply chain. So, um, that that's obviously got quite a lot of reach. And Sedex, which I mentioned, which is this large social compliance program, um..., they are now trying to enhance gender visibility across all of the different companies that feed into their platform. Um, and in total they, they would reach, if assuming that they did that, they would reach, um, approximately 33 million workers in their supply chain. So. But obviously that is in the future. So, it's ongoing. So, you can see the sort of... then from the immediate impacts... then slowly scaling up, um, as, as activities, um, progress.

Dr Gowland: [00:27:06] To me that's staggering, the amount of people that could be positively influenced by, by that research.

So. I think it's very impressive. You mentioned one example of M&S for example, um, increasing the number of women in leadership positions. Can you explain why, why that is important? Because I hear this a lot and I think I understand that, but I'm sure some people maybe don't understand why is it important to empower women by having women in leadership positions?

Prof Barrientos: [00:27:30] Well, I think the first thing, um, and, and this certainly is where our research was very important. I mean, for me, one of the key things, if you, if you, if you say there's gender equality or you're promoting gender equality, is that women have to have the opportunity, um, and the resources and the support to be able to move to better-paid jobs, more secure jobs, into supervisory and into management positions.

Um, and, um, so the first thing is to know where they are in what I call the pipeline. And so a lot of our work was focused on how to actually reveal the pipeline and understand where women are at what, at what point. So why is it important to do that? So obviously as you get more and more women moving into supervisory and management positions, that's demonstrating that you are providing that support because that's the outcome, is that that more and more women have come in and that's a big improvement for women workers themselves. They're getting a better income. And there's a lot of research that argues that if you..., there were shows that if you increase the income of a woman, she's more likely than, than a man to spend more of it on her children, and on education and on their health. So therefore, for future development, it's also very important, but the work we did in, in, um, Kenyan flowers, shows, um, and I think this is really critical., um, of..., that was just an example where they did really move women into, uh, a high number of women supervisors.... There used to be a lot of problems in Kenyan flowers, because of male supervisors harassing temporary women workers. And so there were a lot of campaigns. I was in..., many others importantly were involved in research that showed firstly the problems, but secondly, the potential solutions. Um, but when they did move women into those positions, when they did give them permanent contracts and move them up, quality went up, productivity, went up, labor went up, turnover went down. When I was doing research in Kenyan vegetables, much later on, I was interviewing, uh..., involved in interviews with vegetable workers, with one in particular, uh, focus group um, some of the women said that, um, they would prefer to be working in flowers than in vegetables. So I said, well, why do you, why do you want to work in flowers?

Well, "because they have much better pay and conditions than we get, and the trouble is they won't leave their jobs. So we can't get into the flower sector" - this is in the same area, uh, "we can't get in". And of course, for me, that was confirmation that, um, things had improved, and very, very importantly, one of the things was there was evidence that there's less sexual harassment, um, by male supervisors of female workers, um, and that when it does occur, and it could occur anywhere in any workplace, as we know, um, there were now mechanisms through which, women workers could make, uh, confidential complaints or that they had some, some faith in..., that they could make complaints and that something would happen.

So that was, uh, uh..., and not all flower farms. But the more progressive, the larger flower farms, um, we certainly saw improvements. I should add though, always very important..., uh, whilst (there were) many improvements..., the real wages of the women workers had not gone up significantly. Their nominal wages had gone up, but the cost of living had also increased.

So, there were still issues, um, over pay, um, and that remains a big issue in the global value chain.

Dr Gowland: [00:31:18] But when you're reeling off these numbers, like I said before, it's quite staggering, the amount of people who could be impacted by this. And I'm sure you've got many personal stories of people who've been improved. You, you must be quite proud of what you've done over the years.

Prof Barrientos: [00:31:32] Well, I mean, I wouldn't say proud. I mean, it's taken a large number of people and I'm only one, both in terms of the research, um, and in terms of those who were involved in the campaigns and those in the companies who fight for these improvements as well.

So, um, in that respect, I, I feel very privileged to be part of that group. Um, I do feel, um, very pleased that, that I think we've seen positive change, if 10 or 15 years ago, um, you know, you would have seen some of the commitments that companies are now making, would have been unbelievable 10 or 15 years ago. So I think, um, I feel more privileged to be part of, of a movement that is driving these kinds of changes, but I'm equally aware of the challenges and that those challenges, uh, will continue to increase, um, particularly with things like major, external shocks, such as pandemics, such as, uh, um, increased competition between countries, the sort of nationalism that's been growing up...

Uh, there are a number of different external threats that, that could push women, women workers back into a, uh, more adverse positions. And at the same time, very importantly, I mean, in terms of gender equality, women have never got rights by waiting for it to happen. It's always been a struggle. Manchester..., work Manchester University have done for many years...

Manchester has a history of engagement with the suffragette movement in the UK, um, and gains have only been made through struggle. So, I do see it as an ongoing struggle, but thankfully, a struggle that more and more people recognise the benefits of.

Dr Gowland: [00:33:26] Yeah, absolutely. Um, I feel like I could ask you questions about examples for hours, but conscious of time...

Um, I will mention the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Um, your work obviously addresses two of them. Very clearly, I think so one of them is obviously goal 5, gender equality. The other one is recognising decent work and economic growth. Um, just to comment on that, Stephanie, of the importance, I mean, you've mentioned it there - about the importance of collaboration, but the importance of these global..., across border, um, pieces of work?

Prof Barrientos: [00:33:57] Yes. And I think probably, just to re-emphasise, I mean, if you want to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, and we know that at least 450 million workers work in these supply chain..., global supply chains, and they account for somewhere between 60 and 80% of world trade, so if you're not promoting, um, better gender equality and better pay and conditions and rights for workers in these global supply chains, um, you're just, you're not going to achieve the sustainable SDGs. Um, uh, so I think that's very, very important, very important..., but also I think, um, in terms of, um, a point that I made earlier, global supply chains have helped many, many women to get work, get paid work.

And there is research that demonstrates that when women get an income, they're more likely to spend it on their families, um, particularly on education and on health of their children. And so, if you want future development, um, to be sustainable, then then raising incomes and, and supporting, um, the position of women in these value chains could make a critical contribution.

But I think finally, um, how will we know whether we've reached the Sustainable..., the... or achieve the Sustainable Development Goals? So I think a lot of the work I've been doing over the past few years, few years with the WOW program, in trying to actually get better data so we can measure and track change over time, um, uh..., because where the data was being generated, it was often overridden as soon as new data came along... So, there's been no way of tracking change. Yeah. So, a lot of the work with organisations, such as Sedex and others, is really to try and help to, to report back into the SDGs in the longer run.

And many companies are interested in doing that, as well as civil society organisations, and obviously governments have a commitment as well. Um,

so therefore I think, yeah, if you, if you don't include global value chains and workers in global value chains, you just won't, you'll never be able to get to those targets.

Dr Gowland: [00:36:05] That's the kind of short to medium term future of this work, and it's really improving that data, and trying to uncover all those invisible workers as you called it... So finally, Stephanie, well, what's next for you?

Prof Barrientos: [00:36:16] Well, I'm carrying on doing work. So, one of the big areas that I'm working on at the moment, um, is the, the, what I've talked about earlier on is the global retailers and brands in Europe and North America.

But what we've seen really over the past decade, or last five to 10 years is the increasing growth of lead firms in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. And that's gone alongside what's called increases in South-South trade. So, more and more trade is between Africa, Asia, and Latin America than previously.

Um, so the question is, are the lead firms within Africa, Asia and Latin America..., are they, um, respecting decent work? Are they promoting gender equality? Um, etcetera. Um, so, that's a lot of my research now. Um, and what are the levers in that situation? And in particular, looking at the role that governments can play within the countries, in which both the retail and the sourcing takes place.

Um, and so I've been doing quite a lot of work on that, uh, quite interesting work at the moment, with a particular focus on Africa. Um, uh, but on South-South and East Africa, but it's still with an interest in, in garments in Asia and Bangladesh. But others are focusing more on that, on those regions and those supply chains...

Um, and then, um, publication, because more and more of my work and..., and what I do want to do..., I, I'm an Emeritus Professor now..., I have more time, but I also have less pressure to publish in academic journals, but want to reach... and have more time to reach, a wider audience, uh... still an informed audience – a research and policy audience.

So I..., I also want to publish more in sort of a wider range of academic, and non-academic, um, outlets.

Dr Gowland: [00:38:12] Excellent. Well, hopefully this podcast can, can help me do that a little bit as well. The whole point of this podcast series is really to show the impact of research from The University of Manchester. And I think this case study is it is a fantastic one to really show that, you know..., that impact around the world potentially.

So, congratulations to you on, on this work. It's..., it's a phenomenal piece of research and thanks very much Stephanie for doing this podcast.

Prof Barrientos: [00:38:34] Thank you.

Ending: Visit our web pages to find out more about how we're delivering the UN Sustainable Development Goals and to keep up to date on our research and its impacts across the globe. Go to manchester.ac.uk/research and subscribe to our mailing list. We're at the forefront in the search for solutions to some of the world's most pressing problems, seeking to be a global force of positive change.

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