

Agriculture and Trading Provide Effective Bridges from Rural to Urban Livelihoods

Trading and traditional farming – familiar rural activities – can carry peri-urban people into new activities that are income generating. These activities are often of particular importance to women.

Farming and trading, usually in agricultural produce, were the most frequently mentioned income-generating activities in all three of the peri-urban interface areas (PUIs) involved in the research. All three studies showed that food production systems that took advantage of urban markets featured significantly in the livelihood strategies of many people living in the PUI. The activity that dominated seemed to be the result of the characteristics of a particular location. Cropping systems were heavily dependant on soil characteristics with the major constraint on crop production being the availability of water. For instance, in the East Kolkata Wetlands, fish-rearing based on urban sewage was of specific importance.

Trend to High Value Agriculture. Peri-urban agricultural activities tend to move towards production of high value, perishable goods such as vegetables, fruit, milk, eggs and fish, taking advantage of the ready urban market. People moving into these more productive forms of farming sometimes displace those who have traditionally undertaken these activities.

One of the most important considerations in terms of crop selection for the poorest farmers is the speed of the production cycle. For these people, it is important to achieve the briefest possible gap between purchasing seed and other inputs, and the availability of produce to sell.

The research also shows diversity in cropping provides an effective cushion against livelihood shocks. Interventions that introduce improved agricultural techniques, livestock husbandry, soil fertility and water management serve to encourage cropping diversity and to promote agro-forestry.

Natural Resource Linked Trading. Much of the trading done by peri-urban residents is derived from familiar natural resource based productive activities. People may sell their own produce, or else purchase that of others on a wholesale basis, reselling to retail clients. It may involve acquiring agricultural or locally produced consumer goods in more rural areas (such as leaf plates in Hubli-Dharwad and grass mats or shoes in Kumasi) and selling closer to the city.

Bridging Role of Agriculture and Trading. It is important to note how farming and trading have provided routes by which poor peri-urban people can move into new income-generating activities. Despite an overall decline in agricultural livelihoods, crop farming remained important to most of the people in the three case studies, and it could be geared to urban markets. At the same time that it served as a base for moving to new activities, it provided a safety net as well. Trading farm products to the city opened ways to trade of other kinds, such as that of urban products to peri-urban residents.

Women's Involvement. Trading and agriculture frequently hold particular importance for women. For example, trading in Kumasi is especially well suited to the needs of women. It provides reasonable returns, rapid payback, and the capacity for women to match their time and labour input to their personal circumstances.

Improving their access to credit allowed many women to expand and diversify their existing activities or to move into new trading activity. For instance, there were women who engaged in mushroom cultivation, soap production and farming activities and also took up trading, when they obtained credit through the research interventions in Kumasi

*This is a message from new research into lives affected by the meeting of rural and urban, of country and town: the meeting called the **peri-urban interface**. It is a product of ten years of study, focusing on livelihoods, systems of production and poverty in Kumasi (Ghana), Hubli-Dharwad and Kolkata (both India). It was funded by the Natural Resources Systems Programme of the Department for International Development of the UK Government (DFID), for the benefit of developing countries. The view expressed are not necessarily those of DFID.*

A synthesis of findings and **the direct source of this brief is "A Synthesis of Peri-Urban Research of Kumasi, Hubli-Dharwad and Kolkata PUIs"** at <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/dpu/pui/research/previous/synthesis/index.html>

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Policy Implications

Because familiar trading and agriculture work can carry people into activities that earn incomes while sustaining their livelihoods, encouragement of them can play a strategic role in interventions that aim to

help peri-urban poor through the transition from a rural economy into a monetised urban economy. Such interventions may be even more appropriate to rural development policy than to those of urban development.



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