



Tropentag, October 7-9, 2008, Hohenheim

“Competition for Resources in a Changing World:
New Drive for Rural Development”

Interlinks Between Cash Crops, Food Crops, Food Security and Smallholder Farms in Western Kenya: Disentangling the Old Rural Development Fashion?

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Abstract

For several decades now, the notion about rapid population increase and the resultant influx of urban areas due to rural-urban migration has been a familiar theme in the development discourse of Sub-Saharan Africa. Due to the dependency of the majority of rural dwellers on agriculture for livelihoods, the best approach of enhancing rural development, so the argument went, was the increase in rural agricultural productivity and effectively the rural dwellers' purchasing power, leading to a reduction in rural urban differentials. In no region is such a scenario as explicit as in East Africa and particularly in Kenya. The various government policy programmes, for example the Special Rural Development Programme (SRDP) and the District Focus Strategy for Rural Development (DFSRD) were attempts to cement this policy.

With data of 182 sample farm households from western Kenya, the major objective of the research was to examine the interlinks between cash crops, food crops, food security and smallholder farms in a region characterised by continuous decline and subdivision of farm size. The data comprising of two equal groups of both tea farmers and non-tea farmers from 2007 production year was analysed by logit and log linear models for participation in cash crop farming, food security and household income determination.

According to the findings, households that engage in both on-farm and off-farm activities are less likely to experience food insecurity, compared to those engaging in only on-farm work. Such households are also likely to experience less intensity of food insecurity irrespective of the crop mix. Participation in cash crop farming is also likely to be undertaken by farm households also practicing off-farm work. Moreover, households engaging in both on-farm and off-farm activities achieve higher per area yields of the maize staple and/or the tea cash crop. Conclusively, declining farm size in western Kenya has a strong correlation to food insecurity.

As a policy recommendation, the research points out that the induced approach of considering agriculture as the engine and prerequisite for the transformation of rural economies on which other sectors should be systemically built needs urgent revisiting in terms of future research.

Keywords: Cash crops, farm size, food crops, food security, labour absorption, rural development