



Tropentag, September 14-16, 2010, Zurich

“World Food System —
A Contribution from Europe”

Taking Institutions Seriously: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Rural Development in Kakamega District, Kenya

UTE RIETDORF¹, KARIN GAESING², ANDREW KIPLAGAT²

¹*German Institute for Global and Area Studies, GIGA - Leibniz Institut für Globale und Regionale Studien, Germany*

²*University of Dortmund, Faculty of Spatial Planning, Germany*

Abstract

Despite being the backbone of the economy of most sub-Saharan African countries, rural regions are often peripheral not only in terms of space, but also in terms of inclusion into the realms of national economies and institutions. The development of a rural economy very much depends on growth in regional income and in the volume of goods and services produced, processed and traded. In case of Kakamega District, western Province, Kenya neither agriculture nor most non-farm activities were so far able to secure sustainable rural livelihoods, leaving over half the population living below the poverty line. Interdisciplinary research undertaken between 2004 and 2010 revealed several constraints inhibiting further rural development: restricted non-agricultural income opportunities; incongruence in spatial and economic planning; and weak sector linkages. One of the underlying reasons seems to be a neglect of institutions promoting economic development and governing rural livelihood activities; thereby wasting existing potentials of village communities. As quantitative as well as qualitative research has shown, participatory planning processes, a strong focus on training and capacity building (especially for non-agricultural activities), and strengthening the role of rural traders might provide necessary links to overcome some of the structural weaknesses. In line with this, economic analysis together with spatial planning methods paved the way for successfully introducing new livelihood activities in three selected villages; encompassing bee keeping and zero grazing. Our case studies provide useful insights into how application-oriented research in which local level initiatives is linked to government and non-government institutions prepare the ground for further discussions about reconciling the needs of rural households with sustainable resource management and other overarching development objectives.

Keywords: Institutions, Kenya, rural development