



Tropentag, October 5-7, 2011, Bonn

“Development on the margin”

## Locating the Margin? Agriculture and Livelihoods Along the Rural-Urban Continuum of African mid-Sized Towns

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### Abstract

Subsistence and market agriculture typically play a significant role in the local livelihoods of rural people in sub-Saharan Africa. Increasing evidence also points to its importance to many urban and periurban households. Yet there is limited conception or understanding of how the relative contribution of agriculture to local livelihoods changes along dynamic urbanising gradients. Marked spatial and temporal changes in human population density, governance systems, land and resource tenure arrangements and other opportunities potentially change the relative contribution and significance of agriculture to local livelihoods. This paper reports results from studies of five mid-sized towns in four African countries, *viz.* Botswana, Cameroon, South Africa and Tanzania. In each town a standard questionnaire and GIS approach was used to assess various facets of agricultural production along a continuum from the centre of the town through the suburbs and periurban zones outwards into the surrounding rural areas. After capturing details regarding access to land, size, tenure and residency time, we assessed the prevalence of engagement in the production of staple crops, vegetables, fruits and livestock. This was complemented by indicators of the degree to which these activities contribute to household food security. The results indicate that the contribution of agriculture to local livelihoods is dynamic in space and time. Whilst there was the expected decrease in the importance of agriculture with increasing urbanisation, the results regarding prevalence were less predictable. At more nuanced levels there was high variability between towns, between locations along the rural-urban continuum, and even between households at specific points along the continuum. These results show that there are no distinct margins in space or time for agricultural activities in mid-sized sub-Saharan African towns, which in turn has important implications for town planning and land-use zonation, as well as local and larger scale programmes and policies to reduce livelihood vulnerability and land- /food insecurity.

**Keywords:** Food security, livelihoods, periurban, urbanisation