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Urbanisation, Crop-Livestock Intensification and Rural Development: The Case Study of South Asia

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Abstract

Urbanisation in South Asia has been gaining momentum over the recent years through rapid changes in economic activities and migration from rural areas to urban centres. UN projections suggest the world's urban population will grow by more than a billion people between 2010 and 2025, while the rural population will remain stable. This will increase the population share not producing food and may increase food prices putting pressure on the livelihoods of rural as well urban poor if total food production does not continue to grow. On other hand, urbanisation through the accompanying income growth is increasing the demand for high-value products such as fruits, vegetables, milk, meat and fish. In addition, increasing demand for labour from other sectors has also led to higher wages in the primary sector. This calls for urgent attention to examine the sustainability of the primary sector in South Asia, where poverty remains widespread and rural livelihoods dominate. This paper would like to study the role of crop-livestock farming systems in a changing economic space and the livelihood impacts of these changes. We have selected three sites (two from India and one from Bangladesh) based on their farming intensification level (high, medium and low) as examples.

The preliminary results discovered that increasing demand for high-value crops from urban dwellers as well as for labour has brought considerable changes in farming practices in all three study sites, being most pronounced in the high intensity site. Here, the scarcity of labour in agriculture has brought in modern technologies such as tractors and combine harvesters. However, small farmers benefit only marginally from such productivity improvements due to their considerable economies of scale. The greatest benefit to small farmers appears to be the extraordinary rise in land prices due to urbanisation. Nevertheless, the intensification of crop-livestock production is highest where there is an easy access to urban markets. In regard to system sustainability, the low intensity zone appears to be most threatened when assessed by the pressure on biomass resources. However, in regard to ground water use it is the systems in the high and medium intensity zones which are facing severe challenges. Non-farm income plays a major role in financing the intensification of farming for home consumption in the low intensity zone, while in the other sites small farmers prepare their future exit from agriculture through producing for urban markets.

Keywords: Crop-Livestock, intensification, small farmers, South Asia, urbanisation