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“Bridging the gap between increasing knowledge and decreasing resources”

Rururbanisation – A Threat to Agricultural Intensification and Food Security?

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Abstract

This paper addresses the challenge of agricultural intensification to meet food security in Africa. The case study is based on the development of a high-potential area in Babati District, Manyara Region, Tanzania, over the last 20 years. The development from agricultural frontier to high-potential integrated agricultural production is now abandoned for urbanisation “by definition”. Although still rural in character, the villages in focus have recently become part of the administration of the town council, which means that the process to certify individual rights of occupancy is halted. The individual household’s control over the land is an important incentive for further investments and land intensification. This process has been identified in Tanzania since the 1930s (Kilimanjaro), but seems now to reach a large number of medium- to high potential areas around market towns. The results are based on extensive field research by the author in the 1990s, which has been followed up with data collection in 2013 and 2014 in the same villages. The data sets show that farmers – in spite of tripled maize yields over 20 years and significant signs of successful intensification and diversification – are forced to look for new frontiers in more distant areas with lower potential. This is a problem for overall food production levels as well as for sustainable land use in vulnerable environments. The study discloses parts of the rich heterogeneity in rural Africa, where high-potential areas with stabilising population numbers are taken out of business, therefore denying farmers their role as engines in the process of sustainable agricultural intensification.

Keywords: Agricultural development, rururbs, sustainable intensification, Tanzania, urbanisation