

RURAL-URBAN LINKAGES

For the majority of policies, people and their activities are classed as either 'rural' or 'urban'. However, the links between rural and urban locations, people and activities are key components of livelihoods and local economies; they are also engines of economic, social and cultural transformations.

Rural-urban interactions can be defined as linkages across space (such as flows of people, goods, money, information and wastes) and linkages between sectors (for example, between agriculture and services and manufacturing). In broad terms, they also include 'rural' activities taking place in urban centres (such as urban agriculture) and activities often classified as 'urban' (such as manufacturing and services) taking place in rural settlements.

Our work seeks to:

- Improve our understanding of how changing rural-urban interactions affect the livelihoods of low-income and vulnerable groups in urban and rural settlements (including developing appropriate methodologies)
- Support the capacity of local institutions and government to identify the opportunities and constraints for poverty reduction and regional development provided by rural-urban linkages, and act on them
- Help develop a dialogue between national and local government to ensure a better integration between national macro-economic and sectorial policies and local initiatives.

The principal topics that we work on are:

Governance, migration and local economic growth in small urban centres

Small urban centres play an increasingly important role in rapidly urbanizing nations. Large 'urbanizing' villages can be engines of agriculture-based economic growth for their surrounding region, while international migrants' remittances invested in construction and businesses outside the large cities attract internal migrants and

contribute to processes of urbanization. Such rapid transformations often entail growing inequalities and environmental degradation, making effective and accountable local governance systems more necessary than ever.

The role of urban centres in the development of their surrounding rural region

In many low and middle-income nations, demand for food by urban households is far more important than exports for most producers, especially small-scale family farmers in rural and peri-urban areas. Access to urban markets depends on: physical infrastructure (including road networks and affordable transport); the relations between producers and traders; and farmers' information on how markets operate, including price fluctuations and consumer preferences. Appropriate policies need to be built on detailed, location-specific information on these issues.

Income diversification and rural non-farm employment

There is ample evidence that most rural (and in many cases urban) households rely on the combination of farm and non-farm income sources, thereby reducing fluctuations and risk and, in some cases, increasing their asset base. Research on this theme focuses on transformations in local Labour markets (often influenced by globalization) and how they affect different groups on the basis of gender, age, migrant status, ethnicity, wealth and location.

Migration and mobility

With urbanization and changing employment patterns, migration and mobility (such as commuting between rural settlements and urban centres) are increasingly important. Specific areas of interest are the differences and reasons behind in the mobility of different groups (including the often unintended impact of national macro-economic and sectorial policies), and the impact of migration on households and communities in both sending and receiving settlements.

Migration, mobility and climate change

This is a rapidly emerging concern in the policy and research communities, but one on which there is still very limited evidence. While environmental change is likely to become an increasingly important factor in the distribution and mobility of people, it is not the only one and in many cases not the most significant. Detailed information on the duration, destination and composition of various migrant flows is the precondition to the formulation of equitable policies that support mobility as one of a number of key strategies of adaptation to the impacts of climate change.

Transformations in peri-urban areas

The immediate periphery of urban centres often undergoes processes of extremely rapid transformation. There are many opportunities, such as increasing urban demand for high value horticultural and livestock produce which often trigger agricultural intensification; and non-farm employment opportunities help households diversify their income sources. But there can also be many constraints, which can result in environmental degradation and the marginalization of vulnerable residents. Specific areas of interest are transformations in land tenure and natural resource management (and their impact on low-income groups), and the management of different types of wastes originating from the urban centre.