

Agriculture and Agricultural Research in the Rural-Urban Continuum

GORDON PRAIN

International Potato Center (CIP), Global Program, Social and Health Sciences, Peru

The presentation discusses the way most agricultural researchers are urban-bred or at least urban based and we have a tendency to mythologize the rural character of small-scale agriculture and the low-income rural households at whom our research is aimed. The rural-urban divide we set up has its roots in history, colonial politics and development thinking and practice and brief examples are provided of these divisions. This is contrasted with the opposite tendency in the livelihoods of many urban and rural families in the developing world, especially with structural adjustment during the 1980s and globalisation since the 1990s. For them rural and urban are points on a continuum of opportunity and struggle. This includes rural agricultural households seeking non-agricultural rural income sources to supplement their livelihoods, temporary migration, co-management of rural and urban plots and multi-locational households.

The presentation examines the reality of the rural-urban continuum in the livelihoods of low-income households in different parts of the Global South, especially Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America. Rapid growth in urban food markets has clearly offered opportunities to farming households, especially those in peri-urban and urban areas able to access those markets. Urban growth has also offered employment in urban areas, leading to changing social and especially gender dynamics in peri-urban and rural agriculture. There have been health effects of these changes, which have not always been positive. There are also policy and institutional issues which often impact negatively on families trying to manage these changes. Finally, the presentation offers some suggestions about policy changes which could support the provision of healthy food for urban populations by households which are engaged in different points along the rural-urban continuum.

Keywords: Health effects, low-income households, social and gender dynamics, urban food markets