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RURAL SOCIOLOGISTS IN THE TRANSFORMATION OF AFRICAN AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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This double issue stems from sessions held at the 2016 Congress of the International Rural Sociology Association (IRSA) in Toronto, Canada. To strengthen professional collaboration across Africa, a group of African and Africa-centric rural sociologists examined recent policy and program initiatives in African agricultural and rural development. The paper sessions were designed for two purposes: (1) to stimulate the design and implementation of effective rural policies through scientifically sound and critical social analyses; and (2) to demonstrate the roles that rural sociologists in Africa play in that process.

The context for these sessions was framed by the Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP), an ambitious vision of the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) to improve productivity and growth in African agriculture. CAADP was established in July 2003 by the African Union to implement their policy agenda to transform Africa at the country level. Since then, however, CAADP is far from achieving the anticipated results of food and nutritional security.

As can be seen in the following articles African rural sociologists are focused on improving the livelihoods of rural populations. Their activities involve the communication, promotion, and analysis of policies implementing the CAADP agenda through government extension systems or NGOs. The analyses range from the introduction and adoption of specific innovations to more broadly focused national government programs to stimulate agricultural productivity of small farmers. True to the practical spirit of rural sociology, these authors go beyond purely academic analyses to assess the local impacts and policy implications for scalable efforts.

Characterizing the policy implementation context, Naswem and Ejembi reflect on the history of agricultural extension in one nation, Nigeria. Building on this analysis, they evaluate the potential for revitalization of the Nigerian extension system through Nigeria's most recent agricultural development policy initiative: the Agricultural Transformation Agenda.

Mubichi compares policies for the promotion of soybean production in two neighboring countries in southeastern Africa (Malawi and Mozambique). Controlling for agro-ecological conditions, the analysis demonstrates the role of a country's economic policy in translating NEPAD's continent-wide agricultural development effort at the national level.

Jacobs et al. compare NGO approaches as mechanisms to promote the socioeconomic development of rural populations in the Jos Plateau in Nigeria. They argue that the strength of NGOs is their ability to listen to and address felt needs. The analysis highlights the desire of rural populations for programs that focus on health and sanitation rather than merely focusing on agricultural development.

The following set of three articles on Ethiopian agricultural development by Clark, Cafer, and Cochrane highlight the complexity of agricultural development at the macro-, meso-, and micro-levels. In an analysis of food and nutrition policy, Clark traces how the promotion of pulses for improved nutrition must contend with conflicting policy priorities across multiple levels of governance. Cafer dissects how the government's top-down approach to the promotion of production inputs and agricultural extension practices constrain the possibilities for improved smallholder productivity. Finally, Cochrane examines how the different world views of agricultural development advocates and smallholder farmers create barriers for the communication and ultimate adoption of improved technologies.

The second issue of the set begins with two articles highlighting the introduction of information and communication technologies (ICTs). Freeman and Mubichi explore the potentials and uses of ICTs as sources of information and networking for agricultural development in Mozambique. The paper by Lawal-Adebowale examines the extent to which the use of ICT causes global inclusion of rural populations politically, culturally, economically, and technologically.

Finally, Ransom and Bain test the extent to which a livestock ownership program targeting women in Uganda provides a mechanism for the improvement of women's and household livelihoods. Their findings indicate that poorer households do not necessarily own smaller livestock, but that the number of animals does increase with household income. Their data provide more insight regarding intra-household dynamics and the complexities that livestock transfer programs must navigate.