

# Beyond the rural-urban divide

**THE THEME OF** this issue, rural-urban interactions, is increasingly recognized as central in processes of social, economic and cultural change in both cities and countryside. Despite this renewed interest, however, empirical studies of the scale and nature of the interactions between rural and urban areas still have a relatively limited impact on development policy and practice.

Spatial policies such as regional development planning have traditionally been the tools used by policy makers in the South in their attempt to encourage a "better balance" between cities and countryside and to reduce migration pressures on large urban centres. Sectoral strategies give a high priority to agriculture and rural development, on the assumption that this will help address rural poverty and that the benefits will be concentrated in the regions or rural areas to which these programmes are directed. In many instances, however, this has not been the case, and the main beneficiaries often have been large farmers and wealthy or well-connected businesses. Meanwhile, the goods and services required by the new economic activities stimulated by these policies often draw from businesses located outside the regional boundaries, and rising incomes are often spent or invested elsewhere.

The relatively high rates of failure of these strategies are often due to the lack of recognition of the complexity of rural-urban interactions which involve spatial as well as sectoral dimensions. The case studies reviewed in the Guide to the Literature (pages 147-167) describe the large and often growing flows of people, goods and waste between rural and urban areas, and the related flows of money and information. They also show how assumptions of a sectoral divide, whereby rural populations are seen primarily as agricultural producers while urban dwellers are thought to engage in industry and services, are increasingly misleading. The growing evidence of the scale and nature of urban agriculture and of rural non-agricultural enterprises and employment suggests that these distinctions are over-simplified descriptions of both rural and urban livelihoods. The "urbanization" of rural economies and employment structures

is also often most evident in the areas immediately around or well-connected to the urban areas - and, in many instances, as Kelly's paper illustrates, this is characterized by conflicts between low-income groups and the wealthy and well-connected individuals and businesses for access to land and water.

The papers in this issue show that populations and activities described as either "rural" or "urban" are more closely linked across space and sectors than is usually thought, and that categorizations are often misleading. Households may be multi-spatial, with some members residing in rural areas and others in towns, and engage in agriculture within urban areas or in non-farm activities in the countryside. At a different level, many urban enterprises rely on rural produce or rural demand for their profitability. One consequence of these strong interrelationships is that both rural and urban areas are affected by current transformations at the macro-level, including structural adjustment programmes and economic reform. In addition, for both urban and rural populations, recent and current changes in the global economic, social and political context have resulted in deepening social polarization and increasing poverty.

Several of the papers focus on what is perhaps the most visible form of rural-urban interactions, namely migration. Krüger's paper describes how the inhabitants of a low-income settlement in Botswana's capital, Gaborone, maintain strong links with rural home areas where many also own assets such as cattle and land as an important safety net in the face of the uncertainties of urban life. A similar case is described by Smit's paper in the context of Durban, in South Africa, where a number of low-income migrant households keep homes in both the city and the rural home area. Smit suggests, however, that government policies often neglect the significance of these links. In particular, housing subsidies are allocated in either urban or rural areas and do not take into account household size, thus encouraging the break-up of extended households and the severance of links between rural and urban members. In the different context of Senegal's capital city Dakar, Fall's paper shows that migrants' loy-

alty to their rural homes becomes increasingly difficult to maintain with time, and that in order to gain access to employment and some sort of security in the city, they need to become part of new urban solidarity networks, often at the expense of the old ties with home areas.

Through the perceptions of recent migrants to Harare, the paper by Potts and Mutimbirwa describes how Zimbabwe's economic reform has affected both rural and urban populations, and shows how the strength of rural-urban interactions and the interdependence between city and countryside (for example in the form of remittances from urban dwellers to their rural relatives) does not allow the impact of structural adjustment programmes to be geographically defined despite the policy's strategic aim to decrease imbalances and income gaps between rural and urban areas. In most countries, migration has continued, fuelled by increasing poverty, although it also shows significant differences in terms of direction and of the groups involved. The paper by Izazola, Martinez and Marquette describes these variations in Mexico City, where the movement of middle-income households to secondary cities is influenced by a concern for the impact of environmental degradation on their quality of life and by employment opportunities in new and relocated industries. By contrast, low-income rural migrants' concerns with home ownership eclipse any negative environmental perceptions and they still tend to migrate to Mexico City where employment opportunities and access to land are seen as more promising.

The importance of differences in migration flows is discussed in detail in the paper by Chant, which shows how gender and household organization have an important influence on gender selectivity in the movement towards the cities. This, in turn, contributes to the diversity of low-income households and to the increase in the number of women heads in both rural and urban areas. However, the feminization of household headship is not necessarily negative for women. Policy interventions should take into account household diversity and acknowledge the need to address not only inter- but also intra-household inequalities in order to promote gender equality and poverty reduction.

The paper by Kamete describes different types of interactions between a small town and its surrounding rural area in Zimbabwe, focusing on flows of goods and livelihood channels. The paper shows that the directions of these flows are far more complex than usually thought and that rural and urban populations have developed mutually beneficial survival strategies in the face of debilitating economic reforms. Straddling the rural-urban divide is, therefore, vital for the agricultural labourers in the commercial farms owned by white farmers, who can get provisions and sometimes find jobs in the town, as well as for the urban dwellers, for whom the farms provide both supplies of foodstuffs and firewood, and a market for goods such as clothes and services such as hairdressing, in addition to temporary employment in times of hardship.

Rural-urban interactions are often more intense in peri-urban areas. Land markets and land uses in previously "rural" areas become increasingly influenced by urban demand for foodstuffs and for real estate. The paper by Birley and Lock describes the importance of agriculture in peri-urban areas, focusing on the often neglected aspect of the health problems facing producers, inhabitants and consumers. The risks posed by this sectoral form of interaction reflect both the impact of other urban based activities such as pollution from heavy metals and from the re-use of solid and liquid wastes, as well as more rural and agricultural problems such as those related to the uncontrolled use of agro-chemicals. Finally, the paper by Kelly describes another aspect of rural-urban interactions which is often overlooked, namely the political dimension. Kelly shows that in the process of land conversion in Manila's extended metropolitan region, policy decisions and regulations made on the basis of agreed development priorities are subsequently circumvented through the use of political power relations which involve the national level of policy formulation, the local level of implementation and the interpersonal relationships based on patronage and subordination in the rural areas. As a consequence, land is converted to a variety of urban and industrial uses despite the fact that, in many cases, small farmers were entitled to ownership under the recent Philippine land reform act.

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