

Natural Resource Use, Incomes, and Poverty Along the Rural–Urban Continuum of Two Medium-Sized, South African Towns

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Summary. — Urbanization is a significant driver of global change, reshaping livelihoods, productive activities, and incomes. Yet, many elements of what are typically regarded as rural activities can be found in urban places and vice versa. We report on the incomes from land- and cash-based activities along the rural–urban gradient of two South African towns. Although the dominant income strategies varied, all households had more than one income source. Use of wild resources and agriculture were common in urban settings, although variable between and within towns. Poverty levels would be 5–10% higher in the absence of natural resource-based incomes.
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1. INTRODUCTION

Urbanization is a major driver of economic, social, and ecological change throughout the world as it restructures traditional notions of what is perceived as “urban” and “rural” (Montgomery, 2008; Satterthwaite, 2014; Tacoli, 2006; UNFPA, 2007). Smaller urban centers of less than 500,000 inhabitants are emerging as prominent as they house over half of the world’s urban population (World Bank, 2009), but have received relatively scant attention in urbanization and livelihood studies and debates (Berdegué, Carriazo, Jara, Modrego, & Soloaga, 2015; Nel, Taylor, Hill, & Atkinson, 2011; Parnell & Walawege, 2011). Current demographic transformations have shifted from the developed regions of Europe and North America to developing countries, with sub-Saharan Africa experiencing the highest urbanization rates over the last four decades (UN-HABITAT, 2006; World Bank, 2009). Subsequently, rural–urban links have played an important role in stimulating and supporting livelihoods as urbanization trends reshape the rural–urban continuum, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa (Tacoli, 2006).

The nature of urban transformation over the last century has resulted in the emergence of complex settlement systems, blurring the distinction between urban and rural areas (Cohen, 2004). “This process of urban growth, largely in non-contiguous transitional zones between countryside and city, is increasingly being referred to as ‘peri-urbanization’” (UNFPA, 2007, p. 48). This blurring of the distinction between urban and rural is perhaps most evident in the small urban centers in low- to middle-income countries, particularly in Africa (Satterthwaite, 2006; Simon, McGregor, & Nsiah-Gyabaah, 2004). Peri-urban areas host a variety of activities from arable farming, animal husbandry, cottage industries to industrial expansion, residential urbanization, and waste disposal (UNFPA, 2007). These areas can deliver goods such as food, energy, water, and building materials; as well as provide ecological services like green spaces and water supplies (UNFPA, 2007). Problems associated with rapid urbanization – such as increased pressure on resources, slum development, poor service delivery, and environmental degradation – tend to be most pronounced in peri-urban interfaces (McGregor, Simon, & Thompson, 2006). The urban fringe has received little attention, partly due to a widespread perception that peri-urban areas are

transitional zones, which thus merit little interest or importance due to their perceived short-term nature (Simon, 2008). Yet, rural, peri-urban, and urban environments typically interact along a continuum which is dynamic and transformative (Berdegué *et al.*, 2015; Iaquina & Drescher, 2000).

Livelihood strategies along the continuum are influenced by household assets, composition, decision making, and social networks all embedded and operational in broader governance and vulnerability contexts. The accumulation and diversification of assets available to households is viewed as a key dimension to procuring sustainable livelihoods (Barrett, Reardon, & Webb, 2001; Dovie, Witkowski, & Shackleton, 2003; Erenstein, Hellin, & Chandna, 2010; Thulstrup, 2015). Livelihood strategies are not static, but rather evolve according to opportunities and constraints that emerge from the growth of towns and cities, as well as the increasing complexity of the rural environment (Bryceson, 2002; Neves & du Toit, 2013). For example, urban livelihood practices in sub-Saharan Africa have increasingly incorporated urban farming into survival and cash income-generation strategies (Crush, Hovorka, & Tevera, 2011). Conversely, rural livelihoods in sub-Saharan Africa often incorporate non-farm strategies such as urban-based employment to supplement the use of land-based strategies, which strengthen rural–urban linkages (Agergaard & Birch-Thomsen, 2006; Bryceson, 2002; Kruger, 1998; Neves & du Toit, 2013). Urban households are often regarded as relying on the cash economy as a means to procure a living; however urban livelihoods are potentially more diverse than is commonly appreciated. Mixing of both urban and rural strategies, especially at the peri-urban interface, can result in more secure livelihoods (Baker, 1995). According to Kruger (1998), rural attitudes and assets are retained in cities along with close links to migrant’s home villages in Botswana, a dynamic that is common throughout sub-Saharan Africa (de Wet, 2011; Hebinck & Lent, 2007; Tacoli, 2006). As summarized by Kruger (1998, p. 134)

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“Whilst the persistence and adaptation of rural–urban interrelations as an integrated part of the urbanization process in sub-Saharan Africa has been widely recognized, their impact on urban livelihoods has received little consideration”. The deconstruction of rural, peri-urban, and urban concepts has led to the recognition of the fluidity and mobility of these areas and the assumed predominant livelihood activities over space and time.

One strategy that has rarely been examined outside of rural areas is the collection and consumption or sale of wild resources such as firewood, medicinal plants, construction materials, and wild foods. Within sub-Saharan Africa, rural household income is closely related to the use of such natural resources and in recent decades numerous studies have illustrated the importance of land-based strategies (such as arable farming, livestock husbandry and, increasingly recognized, wild resource collection) to rural livelihoods (Babulo *et al.*, 2009; Campbell, Jeffrey, Luckert, Mutamba, & Zindi, 2002; Collier & Dercon, 2013; Thondhlana, Vedeld, & Shackleton, 2012). While there is a growing body of knowledge regarding the importance of natural resources in rural livelihoods, there are significant gaps in understanding of the links between livelihoods and natural resources within urban and peri-urban contexts (Schlesinger, Drescher, & Shackleton, 2015), because collection of wild resources is rarely considered in national income and expenditure or economic surveys. The traditional focus of research around the use of natural resources has overlooked the potential contributions they can make in urban and peri-urban environments, particularly within the context of poverty alleviation debates and programs (Davenport, Shackleton, & Gambiza, 2012; Kaoma & Shackleton, *in press*; Schlesinger *et al.*, 2015; Stoian, 2005). Yet the incorporation of natural resources into the strategies of poor urban households is likely to be complex, multi-dimensional, and diverse (Davenport *et al.*, 2012; Slater & Twyman, 2003).

Mirroring patterns in rural areas, the contribution of natural resources within urban livelihoods is likely to be highly variable in nature, magnitude, and timing, being subject to factors such as availability, location, seasonality, cultural norms, class, gender, and personal preferences (Schlesinger *et al.*, 2015; Slater & Twyman, 2003). In some settings these ‘hidden’ strategies might only make a small contribution to overall livelihoods, but could enable the urban poor to construct diversified and more secure livelihoods (Davenport *et al.*, 2012; Slater & Twyman, 2003) or provide crucial safety nets during times of shock or stress as they are in rural areas (Shackleton & Shackleton, 2004; Wunder, Börner, Shively, & Wyman, 2014). These contributions, however small, or timings during times of heightened need, may make the difference between survival and despair, or poverty and sustainability.

Natural resources have been found to act as invaluable safety nets and contribute toward the livelihood security of the rural poor (Shackleton & Shackleton, 2004; Wunder *et al.*, 2014). While natural resources typically may not make large contributions to urban livelihoods, unless based on commercial trade, although largely unquantified, the high incidence of urban poverty in South Africa poses the possibility that the use of natural resources may also be a significant urban safety net. Yet, the national income and expenditure survey, of over 25,000 households, undertaken every 5 years, does not include self-collected resources as a source of income. The work of Davenport *et al.* (2012) in three small South African towns showed that this indeed might be the case, but it requires further elucidation for larger urban centers with a significant economic base. Kaoma and Shackleton (2014)

recently revealed significant use of tree products by the urban poor in South Africa, harvested from residents’ own homesteads and open spaces within towns and the urban periphery. Similarly, urban agriculture has often been regarded as a strategy employed by the urban poor (Ashebir, Pasquini, & Bihon, 2007; Crush *et al.*, 2011), but this has been questioned in South Africa (Webb, 2011) and further afield (Zezza & Tasciotti, 2010). Yet, studies of urban agriculture in South and southern Africa have rarely considered it against alternative livelihood and income strategies available to urban households. For example, Shackleton *et al.* (2010) reported that 96% of urban and peri-urban farmers around the city of Durban collected indigenous vegetables in and around their fields, indicating that urban agriculture was more complex than current literature suggests. Most national IES surveys do include urban agriculture, (but recall method surveys notoriously underestimate what is produced and consumed (e.g., Beegle, De Weerd, Friedman, & Gibson, 2012), but none include wild collection or trapping of resources and foods. Sri Lanka’s IES includes firewood, but not other collected natural resources (DCS Sri Lanka, 2015).

Generally, poverty in Africa has been discussed extensively from a rural perspective; however urbanization trends are shifting the locus of poverty from rural into urban domains (Ravallion, Chen, & Sangraula, 2007). Many African urban areas experience high levels of urban poverty and sub-Saharan Africa has one of the highest rates of slum growth (4.5% p.a.) globally (Parnell & Walawege, 2011; UN-HABITAT, 2006; UNFPA, 2007). In South Africa, poverty is a widespread phenomenon and affects millions of people (Aliber, 2003). South Africa’s current migration and urbanization trends are still strongly influenced by the country’s legacy of apartheid, thus giving urbanization patterns a distinct racial component which is still reflected in many urban areas and shape current livelihood possibilities (King, 2011; Mears, 1997). Increased population pressures have aggravated the high number of poor people throughout the country, and the highest incidences of poverty are located in metropolitan areas and former racially defined homelands (Noble & Wright, 2013; South African Risk & Vulnerability Atlas, 2010). Some of the challenges faced by poor people living in urban areas within South Africa include limited access to economic opportunities, secure housing, basic services, and social services (South African Risk & Vulnerability Atlas, 2010).

Within the context of significant gaps in understanding of the nexus between urbanization, livelihoods, and natural resource use (Davenport *et al.*, 2012; Nel, 2007; Nel *et al.*, 2011; Schlesinger *et al.*, 2015), we sought to examine and characterize livelihoods along the rural–urban continuum of two medium-sized towns in South Africa. In particular we asked (i) how do livelihoods change along the rural–urban continuum?, (ii) what is the contribution of natural resources to the household livelihood portfolio? and (iii) does natural resource use impact the prevalence of household poverty along the rural–urban continuum?

2. STUDY AREAS

Two medium-sized towns, Queenstown and Phalaborwa, were selected in South Africa’s Eastern Cape and Limpopo provinces, respectively (Figure 1). The selection criteria included a population of between 100,000 and 200,000 inhabitants, as well as close proximity to populated rural areas. For each town the rural–urban continuum was divided into the Central Business District (“CBD”), formal suburban

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