Emerging Land Issues in Kenyan Agriculture and their Implications for Food Policy and Institutional Reforms

Research findings presented at the Boma Inn, Nairobi on October 30th, 2014

Kenya Land Alliance / Michigan State University Conference

Key conference messages

About 62% of Kenya’s rural population is below the age of 25. Projections of non-farm employment expansion indicate that 15 to 20 percent of the additional 18 million young workers entering Kenya’s labor force before 2035 will be able to find wage jobs. This means that farmers and farmers/growers will have to play an important role in providing employment, young people will require access to land whose demand and value remain high.

Grown that has very little utilisable arable land (less than 100 million hectares), productivity growth on existing farmland will be the most desirable way of raising food production. Sustainable productivity growth will mean finding more efficient use of land and adverse environmental impacts. However, it is almost certain that agricultural growth will require bringing new land under cultivation.

Population growth in densely populated smallholder farming areas is contributing to growing land pressures. Some 52 percent of the sampled medium-scale farmers were found to be somewhat less productive users of land. Farms owned by urban professionals and business people are relatively well-educated. Using their savings from the non-farm sector, the majority of these being in public employment, the minority of these being in the non-farm sector, the majority of these being in public employment, the minority of these being in the non-farm sector.

Life history” surveys of medium-scale farmers reveal that they are predominantly men; their primary jobs were in the non-farm sector, the majority of these being in public employment. Many of these farmers live in urban areas. They are relatively well-educated. Using their savings from their non-farm jobs, they acquired farms and entered farming during their mid-life stages. This profile fits roughly 60 percent of the sampled medium-scale farmers in Kenya. A smaller but still important category of medium-scale farmers was the privileged rural-born men who were able to acquire large landholdings as they started out their careers. Only a small proportion of medium-scale farmers started out as smallholders with less than five hectares of land. This provides room for optimism that young people may be able to enter the farming sector. Their savings from the non-farm sector, the majority of these being in the non-farm sector, the majority of these being in the non-farm sector, the majority of these being in the non-farm sector.

Land markets are developing rapidly in more densely-populated areas. The rise of rental land markets may provide some potential for the youth to access land. Renting land involves paying one-third or more of the value of the crops produced on the rented land, tenants must be extremely productive to make a reasonable livelihood.

Take home messages for policy makers

Governments’ existing strategies are oriented to promote agricultural growth and food security for the millions of their rural constituents who are small-scale farmers. These strategies assume unhindered access to land. In spite of rhetorical support for small-scale farmers, there are increasing concerns that de facto agricultural and land policies have encouraged, the transfer of land to medium-size and large-scale farmers. Given that there is a land shortage, the role of government is to guide the allocation of Africa’s remaining arable land. First, which type of farm structure can provide the most “well above poverty-line” jobs per hectare allocated? Second, which type of farm structure will provide the greatest indirect employment effects through growth multipliers? Labor-intensive farms capable of generating broadly-based income streams will support the growth of Africa’s manufactur- ing and industrial base more than a concentrated farm sector where incomes from surplus production are generated by a small fraction of the rural population.

While interest is increasingly focused on the relative efficiency of small-, medium- and large-scale agricultural production, there are two important criteria to take into account to guide the allocation of Africa’s remain- ing arable land. First, which type of farm structure can provide the most “well above poverty-line” jobs per hectare allocated? Second, which type of farm structure will provide the greatest indirect employment effects through growth multipliers? Labor-intensive farms capable of generating broadly-based income streams will support the growth of Africa’s manufactur- ing and industrial base more than a concentrated farm sector where incomes from surplus production are generated by a small fraction of the rural population.

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