

Back to the village? Motivations for leaving and prospects for return

Rural-urban migration in Bangladesh and Senegal

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Abstract: Migration continues apace worldwide, and has many causes. In Bangladesh and Senegal, the capital cities continue to attract numerous migrants from rural areas. Most of those interviewed for this study hope to return to their villages. City life presents many challenges. Farmers who have chosen to stay in the countryside see good reasons to do so. However, more business opportunities are required to increase the attractiveness of rural life for the young generation in farming communities.

Introduction: weather, migration and a touch of romanticism

With the beginning of each new year, the Serer people of West Africa, Senegal's third largest ethnic group, invoke the proverb 'ngam jam, o yas jam', or 'rain in peace, sow in peace'. They summon it again when the relentless rainy season begins in June, bringing with it abundant pastures, fat goats, and relieved farmers – ending in October when the rain gives way to the hot, dry Harmattan winds.

Bangladesh contains over ten times the population of Senegal on a smaller area of land. There, the floodwaters of the Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna river basin nourish the country's nutrient-rich alluvial floodplains between June and October. In Bangladesh and Senegal, farmers account for half the population {1}{2}. In both countries, they grow their staple food crop, rice, chiefly in this period of abundant water. Climate change, however, means that the start of the rains is becoming increasingly unreliable.

Climate change and extreme weather events are a leading cause of in-country and international migration. They can inflict acute devastation on agro-rural populations, who may spend years recovering. Droughts and floods are, however, not the only causes of migration. Insufficient or unequally distributed public investment in infrastructure and education may also persuade people to seek a better future elsewhere. Personal aspirations include the pursuit of better economic prospects for their children. Discrimination can also be a powerful driver of migration. More dramatically, armed conflict forces millions of people worldwide to flee their homes for other areas.

There is no universally agreed definition of migration. However, a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report on migration and climate change describes it as “the process of moving within or across borders, either temporarily, seasonally or permanently. Migration is commonly associated with an element of choice, and [...] is considered to be voluntary in nature. “This differentiates it from displacement, “where there is no choice but to move, either temporarily or permanently, within or across borders [...], for example in the case of a severe flood or political unrest {3).

Though these definitions are practically helpful, the smallholders from Bangladesh and Senegal who contributed their stories to this report illuminate for us the limitations of viewing migration as either forced or voluntary. In reality, the distinction between voluntary migration and displacement is not always so clear. The circumstances, choices, pressures, and impulses that lead to or allow for a person to migrate exist along a spectrum between voluntary and forced migration.

The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations estimates that in 2017 there were 258 million international migrants. In 2016, almost 26 million of them were refugees and asylum seekers {4}. A further 40 million people are internally displaced. The largest total population of migrants (around 763 million) are internal. A ‘large share’ of them, according to the FAO, are from rural areas {5}.

Over 75 percent of poor and food insecure people worldwide live in rural areas {6}, and most depend on agriculture to live. Compared with many cities, their communities provide considerably less attractive prospects for young people about to enter the workforce. Near-constant financial insecurity goes hand in hand with low crop yields, and limited or no options to increase their productivity. Many smallholders have few possibilities to enlarge their holdings, increase their bargaining power, or access functioning, lucrative markets.

Many young and/or skilled people from rural areas believe that there is no option to escape poverty within the community. They, therefore, choose to work in urban areas, often sending remittances home to the families who remained behind. In many African countries, over 50% of rural households report having at least one internal migrant {7}. As this report underlines, internal migration is predominantly a household livelihood strategy, and can offset irregularities in household incomes {8}.

Money received from urban relatives has a positive impact on rural livelihoods. Interestingly, remittances appear to be resilient to global economic shocks. Research by the International Migration Institute at the University of Oxford shows that of the seven countries studied, such payments were only mildly affected by the global recession in 2009 {9}. However, we have found no evidence of widespread improvements in farm productivity due to such remittances. Migration itself cannot support agro-rural development. Indeed, conventional wisdom has it that the related loss of human capital and labor may negatively affect farm production. However, our report suggests that, at least in Bangladesh and Senegal, the absence of a migrant family member does not necessarily cause a decline in productivity. In both countries, numerous young and/or educated people leave rural areas for urban towns and cities.

As a side note, it is also worth remembering that rural migration is not one way. Worldwide, there are numerous examples of people returning to the land, or farming for the first time. Often, they have earned enough money in the city to invest in their second career in the countryside. In some cases, hard-nosed pursuit of a business opportunity drives the decision. In others, family reasons predominate. Sometimes, a degree of romanticism may play a role. In Bangladesh, the Swedish aid worker Bo Kramsjö noted this latter motivation among internal migrants still planning their return: “Among those who moved to the urban centers a dream of

a blissful retreat back to the native village was the ideal. A mud house with a pond edged by palms. A staircase down to the water, for the daily bath and where the carps are jumping. A couple of cows and some goats, a paddy field and vegetables... A life in harmony, far away from the urban toil and strife. A quiet life, with warm and tender relationships [and] no sharp elbows..." {10}

Global population growth, often coupled with rising incomes, continues to increase the demand for food. By 2050, the FAO expects that the population will rise to almost ten billion, increasing the demand for food and agricultural produce by 70 percent over that of 2009 {11}. This booming market should enable many farmers to flourish. If they are to gain from it fully, however, smallholders will require public investment, infrastructure such as roads and storage, access to new technology, clean seed, good farm inputs, credit, education, and training.

From Bangladesh to Senegal: farmers at a crossroads

A predominantly agrarian country, Bangladesh, like Senegal, farms from a low technology and resource base. Agriculture contributes 15 percent {12} and 17.5 percent {13} of the GDP in Bangladesh and Senegal respectively. The area of agricultural land is similar (88,680 km² and 91,942 km² in 2015) {14}. Rice is the dominant crop in Bangladesh alongside tobacco, tea, and jute, of which Bangladesh is the world's largest exporter. Senegal's staple food crops are rice, corn (maize), sorghum and millet {15}. However, its cash crops (groundnuts, cotton, gum arabic and sugarcane) dominate the agricultural sector. Groundnuts alone account for 40 percent of cultivated land, cotton another 33 percent {16}.

Since Senegal's independence in 1960, cereal yields have doubled, from 549 kg per hectare to 1,110 kg {17}. Bangladesh, independent from Pakistan since 1971, has fared better. There, cereal yields have almost tripled in the last 60 years. This has largely been due to investment in research, importation of irrigation pumps and diesel engines, liberalization of irrigation restrictions and privatization of fertilizer distribution {18}.

Bangladesh, however, continues to be hit by flooding. This directly affects the lives and livelihoods of the rural population, which accounts for 70 percent of the total and 77 percent of the workforce {19}. Each year, approximately 100,000 people are forced to migrate internally during the monsoon season. In 2014, two-fifths of the country experienced floods that left ten million people homeless and destroyed four-fifths of the crops {20}. 2017 was another year of disastrous floods in some areas. The country pays a heavy price for the fertile soil caused by abundant water.

Senegal, on the other hand, lies mostly in the semi-arid Sahel region of Africa. Unrelenting heat and irregular rainfall have led to frequent droughts and occasional megadroughts for several millennia {21}. A significant amount of irrigable land in Senegal has been degraded or is otherwise lying fallow due to drought. In the floodplains, farming suffers from dam-building, over-exploitation of the soil {22}, desertification, overgrazing, deforestation and climate change {23}. These conditions have caused yields to decline {24} in recent years. The country consequently struggles to meet domestic calorie demand, contributing to a trend of rising food prices. The United Nations World Food Programme estimates that 17 percent of Senegal's

population are food insecure {25}. In Bangladesh, the proportion is closer to a quarter of the population {26}.

Senegal's 'groundnut basin', on which most of the country's crop is grown, covers around 69,000 km², 34 percent of the total surface area. In the 1960's, Senegal was at one time the source of one-fifth of all the world's exported peanuts. Particularly vulnerable to climate change, drought, and flooding, and at the mercy of a declining global market and volatile prices, groundnut yield is stagnating. Today, Senegal produces only about one percent of international peanut exports. Nonetheless, the country is still highly dependent on these sales. Approximately one million people there are engaged in groundnut-related agricultural activity {27}. To increase diversification, the Senegalese government has recently directed subsidies and services towards increasing the domestic production of other crops, notably staples {28}.

Meanwhile, production in the groundnut basin continues to deteriorate. Soil degradation due to the production of groundnuts has forced many farmers to search for more fertile land. Others choose to leave farming behind altogether and seek a more stable income in the informal sector in Dakar. In the capital, less than a third of the population is below the poverty line, a stark contrast to rural Senegal's 80 percent poverty rate {29}.

But the future is not necessarily urban, and city life certainly does not offer prosperity, health, and happiness to all. The movement of farmers into other sectors in cities presents new challenges for the urban-centred economies of Bangladesh and Senegal. These find themselves having to absorb surplus labor even when unemployment may already be high. Like those interviewed for this report, many rural-urban migrants take low-wage jobs in the informal sector. Most have every intention of returning to their villages when the time is right.

The main purpose of the research detailed in the following report was to better understand the circumstances and attitudes that lead smallholders to migrate to urban areas in their own countries and to identify what would motivate a return to the countryside. In addition, the interviews examined the motivations and intentions of rural dwellers who have so far chosen not to migrate.

Views of the real experts: interviews with migrants and non-migrants

To explore these topics more deeply, in 2016 the Syngenta Foundation conducted interviews in Bangladesh and Senegal. In each case, one set of interviews took place in the capital (Dhaka and Dakar, respectively), and one set in rural areas. The urban survey focused on internal migrants from the countryside. All interview partners were citizens of the countries concerned.

A number of similarities prompted us to choose Bangladesh and Senegal. As outlined above, smallholder agriculture plays a central role in their economies, with rice among the leading crops. Both countries continue to witness a strong influx of rural inhabitants into towns and cities. Despite very different histories, both are now largely functioning democracies. Both, despite their difficulties, are held in high regard for their relative progress and stability compared with some other nations in their regions.

There are also similarities in the cultural sphere. Both countries have a largely Muslim population. With Bangla (often known as Bengali), Bangladesh has a dominant national language; Wolof enjoys similar majority status in Dakar and the rural area of Senegal in which we conducted interviews. Similarly unifying cultural features, we assume, facilitate internal migration to a comparable degree. A further reason for choosing these particular Asian and African examples was that the Syngenta Foundation already had employees in both countries. Widely used local languages made it easier for them to conduct interviews. We gratefully acknowledge the contributions of those involved, both from our teams and those whom they interviewed.

In Dhaka, local Bangla-speaking colleagues from the Foundation interviewed ten men aged 26-42. Most were married, and either illiterate or with limited schooling. Most were the main money earner for their families, whether with them in the city, or still in the countryside. Three had wives also employed in Dhaka. Their family villages were typically 220-300 km away from the capital. At the time of interview, length of residence in Dhaka varied considerably. However, all except one had lived there for at least two years. Four worked in small-scale commerce, three in the garments industry, and two as rickshaw pullers.

When asked why they had left the countryside, almost all migrants to Dhaka provided financial explanations. Some described these in general terms, mentioning poverty, or lack of a job and money. One former agricultural laborer described in more detail how, 14 years before, the gaps between his periods of temporary hire had become too long. Four interviewees explained their migration with the need to pay off loans; two of them had had to default on repayment while living in the countryside. Many regarded their remittances to family members in the villages as very important. Almost all also gave financial explanations for young people's general inclination to migrate.

As an organization working with smallholders, a key interest of the Foundation was to explore participants' emotional, material or other bonds to the countryside. The Dhaka residents' current ties to farming varied considerably. Most, however, had little or no involvement in village life. The form of occupation, rather than migration distance, can be a deciding factor. A fish seller, a mason and a security guard lived entirely in Dhaka; both rickshaw pullers spent several months per year in their villages. Social status may also play a role. The one unmarried interviewee, a well-educated textile worker, went home only occasionally. A married, illiterate, employee from the same sector said he was often in the family village. Typically, time spent outside Dhaka is not at the cost of social networks there: our interviewees had made almost no new contacts in the capital. Urban friendships tend to be only with immediate colleagues.

Current behavior, however, says little about future intentions. Most of our survey participants said that they would like to spend more time in their villages. Eight of ten plan to move back entirely. (One of the two exceptions cannot move 'back' – flooding destroyed his village). Typically, this move would be within the next five years. Family ties play a role in these intentions. However, quoted advantages of the countryside also include quieter roads and better food. Although the migrants are aware that housing, in particular, has been improving in country areas, they did not mention this as motivation for a move. This finding runs contrary to

one recent academic claim that many of the negative “issues surrounding rural housing are the reason for urban migration” {30}.

Three migrants noted that a return would be even more attractive if there were good rural employment opportunities. Many of these opportunities will need to come from outside farming: About half of our interviewees noted that their labor is already not even required at harvest time. The need for more rural off-farm jobs is soon likely to become acute. This became particularly clear in an interview with a long-time foreign resident of Bangladesh, who works there for a large international NGO. Dhaka, he points out, already has a major unemployment problem. People move there from the countryside, not from desire, but “because they had to”. However, the textile industry, traditionally the employer of female rural migrants, is unlikely to continue growing significantly. Jobs in this sector may, indeed, move away from Bangladesh to lower cost countries {31}.

According to our NGO interview partner, in 2015 Bangladesh was believed to have some eight million off-farm businesses. Many of these non-agricultural economic units are tiny, such as those of individual tea-sellers. He sees four main brakes on business creation and expansion. Willing entrepreneurs lack access to what he calls “real business finance”, to market intelligence, skilled workers, and support services. Chambers of Commerce and trade associations provide advice, but only to larger companies. He believes that these organizations will increasingly “open up downwards”. The government is keen to ensure that at least 30% of bank lending is to rural customers. As of today, however, there is a “massive opportunity” yet to be realized {31}.

Through the eyes of a social worker

“Every migrant dreams of settling back in the village”

In Dhaka, we also talked to the Bangladeshi manager of a ‘livelihood empowerment’ project. He works with numerous city migrants. His impressions over the years broadly match those we acquired in our interviews. They also provide some additional insights. The comments are summarized below.

<p><i>What are frequent features of migrants’ lives before coming to Dhaka?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Loss of all permanent assets to sudden disasters like floods or fire. ● Poor living conditions, children’s limited access to schools, little scope for future improvement ● Passing crises due to political engagement, crime, social conflict ● Lack of regular income from agriculture ● Lack of regular job for daily laborers
<p><i>What are migrants mainly hoping to achieve in the city?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Regular job and more income ● Better living conditions and clothing ● Better health services ● Better education for children ● Savings for a secure future
<p><i>What changes have you noticed in rural migrants over the past few years?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● More attention to posture, speech, dress and cleanliness ● Both men and women decide to marry in town and settle there

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Unskilled youth acquire skills in the city ● Use of bank accounts ● Economically solvent
<i>What are the main differences between male and female migration?</i>	Women mainly look for jobs in the garment industry. They then try to arrange jobs for relatives so that they can stay with them and provide security in town. Men mainly migrate to earn more, however hard the work. This is typically during a lean season in agriculture. Once they acquire skills, they switch jobs for more income. Men try to save money for assets in the village.
<i>What is the particular attraction of the city for migrants who stay a long time?</i>	Migrants of both sexes stay if their earnings are sufficient for good family prospects. Better access to child education and health facilities is also important. Some stay because they do not have any resources in the village.
<i>How often do migrants choose to return to the countryside forever?</i>	They return to their villages or neighboring small town if they can create resources there from their own savings. This is usually after 10-20 years.
<i>What makes them decide to do so?</i>	All migrants dream of settling back in their villages when they have enough money. Many feel uncertain and uncomfortable in fast, expensive, busy urban life. Older unskilled migrants also return when city work becomes too hard.

City life does not always meet expectations

Conversations with Senegalese migrants to Dakar revealed a number of similarities and some clear differences to those in Dhaka. In both capitals, interviewees' decision to move had been primarily economically motivated. Emotional ties to their new surroundings remained limited. City accommodation had proved expensive both in Dakar and Dhaka. Food prices caused complaints in the former. Migrants to Dakar held farming in higher regard than their Bangladesh counterparts. However, they had on average also moved further from their villages.

The 14 male and two female interviewees in Dakar spanned a wider age-range than in Dhaka but were similarly poorly educated. Only half were currently married. Their villages' distances from the capital varied considerably; two had moved about 500 kilometers in search of work, one even further. Many were the families' main earners; relatives with them in Dakar tend to be siblings rather than spouses or children. All had lived at least three years in the city, some for most of their adulthood. The range of employment type was broader than in Bangladesh, but many jobs were related to cars. Several migrants sold clothes or refreshments.

As with their Asian counterparts, interviewees' primary motivation for migration was financial. Their remittances enable country relatives to cover their daily needs, and are a source of family pride. The money transferred also enables families to employ immigrant harvest labor from neighboring countries. Our survey participants believe that lack of work, and therefore of farm income, in the dry season are the main drivers of young people's migration.

Currently, those asked spend almost all their time in Dakar. As in Bangladesh, this does not, however, indicate strong emotional bonds with the capital. A number of Senegalese see worrying temptations there for young men. Social networks are also weak: New friendships arise only in the workplace. Even after 30 years in Dakar, one migrant said that he still does not "feel like a real inhabitant". Out of 16 interviewees, 14 miss the rural life. Eleven said they want to return to their villages. Seven would do so within five years, and two more would join them

if sure of profitable rural employment. Sufficient city savings, any prospect of good village jobs, and of such farm improvements as irrigation, all provide motivation for a return.

As with those contemplating a move away from Dhaka, migrants in Dakar also believe that country food is healthier. In addition, Senegalese migrants complain about the heavy cost of city living. Village dwellers tend to view city workers as much wealthier than they really are; one migrant confided in us that his rural relatives' endless demands for gifts are a major reason why he rarely visits them! High rents and food bills rapidly erode higher urban incomes. Another interviewee said he would make this clear to the youth of his village when he eventually returns.

In both cities, we also asked for survey participants' views about farming, and about changes in the profession during their absence. Senegalese migrants particularly mentioned the spread of mechanization. Their Bangladesh counterparts commented on the rise in yields, thanks to better farm outputs, notably hybrid seeds. Mechanization will probably soon be a major topic there, too: Dhaka migrants repeatedly stressed the shortage of rural labor and the corresponding rise in farm costs.

In Bangladesh, interviews commentated favorably on the fresh air and natural surroundings of rural life. However, they see farming as hard work and unprofitable. Migrants to Dakar are more enthusiastic: "Farming is everything", said one. Another called it "sacred and noble". At a more modest level, many migrants see agriculture as a source of fresh food and – at least theoretically – of income.

The draw of the village: Better food, landholdings and ties to the Motherland

To examine a possible difference in attitudes, we put the same question to country dwellers. In Senegal, the advantage almost universally associated with farming was the easy access to good food. Rural Bangladeshi interviewees tended rather to see the pros and cons of agriculture in business terms: Prices and yields determine their attitude towards farming.

For our rural survey in Bangladesh, we spoke to ten men in the districts of Dinajpur and Nilphamari. The youngest was 20, the oldest 35. Most were married and their families' main earners. Education levels were notably higher than in our urban cohort. Farm sizes ranged from 0.3 to six acres; many of the holdings have shrunk considerably over the last two generations. Interviewees typically grew rice and vegetables, both for sale and family consumption. Most had additional sources of income, such as a rice mill, a shop or an electrical wiring business.

Despite the decrease in landholdings, almost none of the farmers had plans to move to a city. One had already done so in the past, and returned to the village. The tenth interviewee, so far the father of a son, saw possible migration as a route to better education for his children.

For several of those preferring to remain in the village, their choice had an economic component. To paraphrase one person's answer: All his assets are here. Another farmer saw good business opportunities, others pointed to their landholdings as reasons to stay. An additional recurring theme was more emotional: Villagers feel strong ties to the countryside as their "Motherland". This expression appears in many contexts in Bangladesh, not least on the annual Language Movement Day, celebrated shortly before these interviews took place. Patriotic identification with land and language runs deep.

Farmers are, however, well aware that the rural Motherland has lost some of its appeal. Most interviewees could think of numerous people who had recently left their villages. Typically,

these migrants were younger than 30, our arbitrarily chosen cut-off age for differentiation. Some farmers also mentioned double-digit departures of villagers over 30. Cities' main pull is the hope of better incomes. Views on the consequences of migration for farming varied: some interviewees pointed to rising labor costs, others saw no problems. One explained that mechanization would replace the absent villagers. The majority of those asked agreed, however, that remittances from urban family members were important. These pay, for example, for extra harvest labor.

We also asked about perceptions of city life. Better access to healthcare and schooling were occasionally mentioned attractions. Overall, however, urban centers are seen as crowded, noisy and expensive, with unhealthier food than in the countryside. There is no romantic belief in the 'Bright City Lights' of international legend. On the contrary, in several interviewees' eyes, farming holds good business prospects that will make rural life even more attractive.

Why are small farms important?

The backbone of food security

Why do the Syngenta Foundation and other organizations attach such importance to smallholder farming? The mathematics of food security provide much of the answer.

In developing economies and emerging markets, most agricultural units are small. A frequently used cut-off size for 'small' is two hectares (almost five acres). By this definition, there are about 450 million smallholders in non-OECD countries. If we conservatively assume an average family of four, about a quarter of humankind currently lives on small farms. Their crops form a backbone of food security, particularly in developing countries.

By 2050, the world's population could rise from today's 7.5 billion to almost ten billion. This rapid increase, combined with other factors, will significantly raise food demand. Farmers and the broader agricultural community will play pivotal roles in meeting needs sustainably. Demand growth will also create opportunities on farms of all sizes.

Smallholders are part of the wider economic environment – in many countries a very large part. The state of the economy affects demand for their produce. Economic growth leads, for example, to changes in consumers' diets. It also provides more opportunities to earn income from non-farm activities, whether in the countryside or the cities.

Conventional wisdom suggests that the number of small farms is increasing, and their average size therefore shrinking. Some experts believe that this trend will continue for another 20-30 years. Others contend that rural-urban migration leads to the pulling together of farm units, and that smallholders are becoming a less significant component of the agricultural population. There is a lack of reliable data. Censuses run only rarely and not in all countries. The data are often open to conflicting interpretations.

What seems certain, however, is that small farms will remain an important part of world agriculture for many years to come.

In Senegal, a stronger desire to leave for the city

In Senegal, we put the same questions to twelve villagers in Pont Gendarme, near the northern coastal town of St. Louis. Eight men aged 17 to 34 answered our questions, as did four women

in their late thirties. Half were married, half single; only one woman and three men described themselves as the main family income-earner. Of the seven who had had schooling and were willing to talk about their educational attainment, four had completed secondary school and one was a college student. Their farm sizes ranged from half a hectare to well over four. Only three interviewees farmed more than two hectares. Five farms had shrunk in size over the last two generations; none had expanded. The main crops grown were rice, tomatoes and vegetables, notably onions. Most villagers – including all the women – had additional sources of income to farming.

Unlike their counterparts in Bangladesh, most of our Port Gendarme interviewees were attracted by the idea of moving to a city. One added “of course”, another that he “often” thought about moving, and a third that he would migrate if unable to see any opportunities in the village. The principal driving force was the need for employment, particularly outside the main agricultural season. The youngest man, a fisher, commented that he would move to help his family. Loyalty to relatives has the reverse effect on older women: family ties are an important reason for staying in the village. Some of the men, on the other hand, either have enough work to do in the fields, or have yet to find urban employment.

Similarities to Bangladesh became more apparent when we asked about people who had recently left the village. All the Senegalese interviewees knew of at least three, some of them many more. The overwhelming majority of migrants, they said, had been 30 or younger. Search for work, to support their families, for example, was an often cited motivation. Lack of personal access to land was another. Most villagers noted that this efflux led to farm labor shortages. Harvesting is not a problem, however, even when urban migrants do not return to help. Plenty of workers are available for hire, typically from neighboring countries. Remittances from urban relatives help cover the cost, but also go towards housing improvements and daily needs.

Intriguingly, rural Senegalese seemed less concerned than the urban migrants about the moral temptations of city life for young men. Only one villager touched on this, and merely tangentially. He said that the countryside was a better place to bring up girls. This is perhaps strange, given villagers’ frequent emphasis on the importance for their children of a suitable moral upbringing. When translating for us into French, our local colleagues called this ‘éducation’. This is different from ‘scolarisation’, the good formal schooling desired by Bangladeshi parents.

One interviewee said that young migrants leave in the belief that they can find a city job quickly. He and his fellow villagers do not, however, see moving as a very attractive option. As in Bangladesh, most of them point to the high cost of urban accommodation. In addition, rural Senegalese emphasize that city food is more expensive than at home. The ready availability of food is seen as an advantage of village life. However, motivation to remain in the countryside would rise if more land were available, and interest rates on credit were lower.

Credits, loans, inputs: When farming provides good prospects

Conversations with villagers continued beyond or without formal interviews. These revealed considerable female dissatisfaction in the area of credit. Often unable to provide the documentation required by banks, women are obliged to borrow from ‘Mutuels’. For short-term loans, these credit organizations charge lower interest than the banks. However, for clients unable to repay until harvest, their loan charges end up much higher.

A lack of affordable loans limits women's ability to invest in mechanical or other improvements. This is a particular hindrance in the rice supply chain, in which women are the main value-adders. At the time of our survey, a kilo of rice from Pont Gendarme paddies cost FCFA 100-150. Local women's sorting, cleaning, grading and other processing activities doubled this price for roadside sale. Without full access to credit, women are forced to perform most of the work manually. This inefficient method prevents them from raising productivity, and from tackling additional revenue-generating tasks.

Affordable loans are crucial if smallholders are to farm more productively. Development organizations can help them gain access to credit, as well as to other important elements of more professional agriculture. These include better farm inputs in which to invest the loans, such as machinery, irrigation equipment, and healthy, high-quality seeds. Development organizations can also open the door to services as varied as agronomic training or insurance. Help with the creation of large formal groups strengthens smallholders' position in the market. Guidance on fulfilling high production standards enables them to supply more lucrative customers. The overall results of these and numerous other possible measures are better income and livelihoods.

The Syngenta Foundation believes that every smallholding has the potential to be a business – given the right opportunities, and the right enabling environment. Except in absolute emergencies, smallholders do not want charity. Instead, they want chances: the opportunity to learn new skills, use new tools and earn good money in new markets. Contrary to often repeated opinions in some circles, smallholders are also willing to invest in order to acquire those chances. In this respect, they are very like large-scale commercial farmers.

There is also another similarity with large agricultural businesses. Worldwide, farmers share three major worries. Two are systemic, hard to predict, and sometimes disastrous: the weather and politicians. The third consistent concern is hand-over – in other words, who will run the farm in the next generation. In many cases, there is not much time left to prepare that succession. The average (!) age of African farmers is now believed to be about 65, and the situation is similar elsewhere. The flight of rural youth to the cities leaves many farmers without an obvious successor within the family. Selling out to the neighbors is also difficult, when their heirs, too, are cleaning cars or driving rickshaws miles away. Sale is anyway often not an option for the elderly, as the farm is more than just a plot of land. It is their home and old-age security.

The aim of increasing the attraction of smallholder agriculture is not to further split up already tiny family farms, or pin every young villager to the land artificially. That would be bad for them, bad for their siblings, and bad for their country's economy. It would also fly counter to the developments seen, for example, in Europe and North America in the 19th and 20th centuries, and more recently in China. However, a flourishing farm business can offer attractive professional perspectives in a smallholder's home area. Business success leads to greater wellbeing and higher social standing. The chances of finding a family successor should increase accordingly.

Importantly, the development of small farm businesses needs to go hand in hand with growth in off-farm employment. This provides further good rural alternatives to the automatic rush of the young to those initially alluring urban jobs which often turn out to be dreary dead ends. Very important in parallel is the creation of more productive employment in the cities: a safe modern factory, for example, rather than even more competition among roadside tea-sellers. Value-adding off-farm jobs are required to absorb surplus labor productively and drive

economic growth. Many African countries, however, still lack such jobs in the necessary numbers, and the workforce qualifications to fill them.

Private sector investment plays a key role here. However, governments cannot devolve their own responsibility to companies or, indeed, to development organizations. Politicians need to ensure wise legislation and its reliable implementation. Good governance, well-kept roads, and a properly functioning educational system are all necessary state contributions to rural economic growth.

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