

MYTH 8: “Urban development is opposed to rural development”

It is often assumed that urban development is opposed to rural development. Among the staff of international agencies, there are ‘rural’ proponents and ‘urban’ proponents. In most agencies, the rural proponents greatly outnumber the urban proponents and some agencies refuse to work in urban areas. In part, this reflects the fact that most poverty in low and many middle income nations is in rural areas, as noted above. But in part, it reflects an assumption that urban development is somehow detrimental to rural development. Yet much of the demand that produces rural incomes (for agricultural and forest goods) comes from urban populations and urban enterprises. Many of the higher-paying jobs in rural areas (including off-farm work) come from urban demand (for instance from tourists) or sub-contracting from urban enterprises. Successful farmers also depend on urban-based facilities and services – markets, banks, processing plants, cold-storage facilities, supply and repair of machinery and agricultural inputs..... Rural populations often depend on their local urban centre for access to hospitals, secondary schools, post-offices and most consumer goods and services – also to many of their civil and political rights (the right to vote, to police protection, to legal services.....). Many low-income households have rural and urban components to their livelihoods – for instance for rural households, one or more family member living and working in an urban centre and sending back remittances or for urban households, links with family or friends in rural areas to ensure a cheap supply of staple foods. Urban households often have children from rural families to stay while they attend secondary school. Urban households may send their young children to stay with grandparents or other family members in rural areas, especially when suffering serious economic problems.

The multiple links between rural and urban economies means that prosperous agriculture often supports rapid urban development – as can be seen in the many cities that are successful because they are in areas with high value crops. Many cities developed rapidly because of the production of coffee, tea, fruit and wine-grapes, mulberry-silk worms, and high value vegetables, herbs or medicinal plants nearby. However, the scale of the links between agricultural production and local urban development is much influenced by the land-owning structure. Very inequitable land owning structures or large plantations can mean little stimulus to local urban development as relatively few local people get good incomes (as plantation workers or agricultural labourers) and most economic linkages are with larger cities (or outside the nation). By contrast, more equitable land owning structures with lots of relatively small and prosperous farms (only a few hectares is needed for good incomes from growing high value crops) stimulates local urban centres. This can lead to many new urban enterprises developing to increase value-added – such as jams, juices or wines from local fruits (one popular brand of fruit-juice in Argentina is even named after the urban centre that is a key service centre for farmers)⁶⁷ or silk clothes from silk-mulberry.⁶⁸ If ways were found to allow farmers in low and middle income nations to get fairer prices and more access to the richest consumers (in Europe and North America) this would

⁶⁷ Manzanal, Mabel and Cesar Vapnarsky (1986), "The development of the Upper Valley of Rio Negro and its periphery within the Comahue Region, Argentina", in Jorge E. Hardoy and David Satterthwaite (Editors), *Small and Intermediate Urban Centres; their role in Regional and, and National Development in the Third World*, Hodder and Stoughton (UK) and Westview (USA).

⁶⁸ Bhooshan, B.S. (1986), "Bangalore, Mandya and Mysore Districts", in Jorge E. Hardoy and David Satterthwaite (Editors), *Small and Intermediate Urban Centres: their Role in Regional and National Development in the Third World*, John Wiley (UK) and Westview (USA), pp 131-184; Benjamin, Solomon (2000), "Governance, economic settings and poverty in Bangalore", *Environment and Urbanization*, Vol 12 No 1, pages 35-56.

stimulate much urban as well as rural development. This would be even more so if there weren't so many barriers around the world's richest consumer markets to the products derived from agricultural goods.

Many rural areas around cities do suffer from urban wastes dumped there or from loss of resources (for instance the pre-emption of water for urban consumers, the loss of agricultural land to reservoirs for hydro-electric dams with most of the electricity produced used in urban areas).⁶⁹ Many fisheries are destroyed or damaged by liquid wastes arising from urban areas – depriving very large numbers of people of their livelihoods. Urban areas often expand over rich agricultural land. But this 'rural loss' is not so much a result of urban development as a consequence of the inadequacies in local governance structures. It is hardly a 'rural' versus 'urban' issue if the air pollution causing acid rain in the countryside is also causing very serious health problems for urban populations, if the city enterprises dumping polluting wastes are also polluting city water supplies (and often exposing their workforce to very dangerous working conditions) and if most of the urban population suffer very inadequate provision for water.

It is often assumed that there is urban bias in development investments. But most urban centres – the smaller and less politically powerful ones – are generally starved of public investments, services and subsidies as most rural areas. There may be 'large city' bias. But as noted above, looking at the levels of premature death, illness and injury among low income groups in most large cities and the lack of public provision for their needs suggests that this is not so. Perhaps 'urban bias' should be more accurately relabelled 'middle and upper income groups in a few large cities' bias.

⁶⁹ This section draws from Hardoy, Jorge E., Diana Mitlin and David Satterthwaite (2001), *Environmental Problems in an Urbanizing World: Finding Solutions for Cities in Africa, Asia and Latin America*, Earthscan Publications, London, 470 pages.