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The Scramble in Africa: Reorienting Rural Livelihoods

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Abstract

Structural adjustment and market liberalization policies of the past 15 years have accelerated deagrarianization in sub-Saharan Africa. Peasant producers have veered away from production of traditional export crops and commercial staple foods in rural areas remote from roads and urban markets. Nonagricultural income diversification has been substituted in the search for much-needed cash earnings. Citing recent village survey evidence, this paper argues that the economic restructuring of African smallholders' work lives has been accompanied by deep-rooted social change. Divisions of labor and decision-making power within peasant households have altered and wealth differentiation between households has deepened. Depeasantization of the countryside is currently taking place, as rural household members of both genders "scramble" for viable livelihoods.



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Keywords

Africa; rural; peasant; labor; income; diversification

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