Project Title: **My Farm in the Home Village: The Role of Urban Dwellers in Transforming Rural Land Uses in East Africa’s Rift Valley**

More than half of Africa’s population is expected to be living in urban areas by 2050 (UN 2014). Rapid growth of peri-urban commercial centers and improvements in transportation are accelerating the rate of material and informational exchanges between urban and rural areas, allowing individuals to operate at multiple locations along a rural-urban continuum. My research seeks to link East African urban growth to rural land use dynamics. Recent studies have documented the role of urban-rural connections in buffering urban food needs and rural cash demands, but further research is required to understand urban dwellers’ reliance and impact on forested hinterlands. In fact, drivers of land use change in tropical Africa are so poorly understood and so different from other world regions that experts have named them “the African exception.” To understand the role of urbanization in reshaping rural landscapes, I will first identify new land cover patterns at two rural sites using remote sensing. Then I will collect ground-based household data on urban linkages and agricultural shifts, relating the satellite view-from-above to the ground truth. At the end, I hope to assess how urban dwellers rely on rural lands as part of their economic portfolio, and therefore reveal their role as key producers of rural landscapes. This inquiry will provide theoretical insight on how East African rapid urbanization is rooted in the rural, and will enrich our understanding of urban-rural social and economic connections. My work will also help fill the knowledge gap regarding drivers of land use changes in tropical Africa, and thus provide practical information to improve forest and land management policy.