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Entangling rural and urban Kenya: Investor farmers and farming from afar

This project aims to contribute to relational understandings of the rural and urban by investigating the increasing acquisition and control of rural agricultural land by urban-based, medium-scale farmers in Kenya. These urban-based individuals and households are seeking reliable financial returns through agricultural investments, and as such are investor farmers who engage in agricultural activities largely in absentia, that is while not being located full-time in their farms (Leenstra, 2014; Macharia, 2020; van Dijk, Limpens, Kariuki, & de Boer, 2022). Instead, they coordinate agricultural activities on their landholdings through a farm manager, that is by farming from afar. While urban-based, Investor farmers have been described as potential models of agricultural entrepreneurialism and innovation (Goedde et al., 2019; Leenstra, 2014; van Dijk et al., 2022), their role and place in deepening and modelling the development of commercial agriculture in Kenya remains underexamined. Through its integration of agrarian political economy and trans locality studies, this project seeks to investigate the emergence and implications of activities by urban-based, investor farmers. Specifically, the project will examine how trans local relations and interactions, flows and mobilities shape and mediate the processes of: (i) gaining access to and control of rural agricultural land; (ii) agricultural production from afar; (iii) accumulation and utilization of agricultural surpluses generated; and (iv) contestation of these foregoing processes, for urban-based, investor farmers engaged in farming from afar. The project pays close attention to the changes in policies, infrastructure and technologies that have enabled the deepening of existing, and development of new pathways and mechanisms that entangle the rural and urban in Kenya.