

Name: Linda Steinhübel

Country of Origin: Germany

Current Position: PhD Candidate

March 2016, with a Master degree in “Sustainable International Agriculture“ and still not feeling done with learning. I was not yet sure, what exactly I wanted to do but I knew “something with development”. During the last three years I studied agricultural and development economics from a variety of angles and met students from every corner of the globe – all with never putting a foot outside the western world myself. So, what did I really know? I decided it was not enough and that there was more for me to learn, specifically on location. My chance came with the start of the new Indo-German project “Social-ecological systems in the Indian rural-urban interface: functions, scales, and dynamics of transition” funded by the German Research Foundation. The project aims at understanding the multiple consequences of urbanization on ecosystems and society in and around Bangalore, a megacity in Southern India (for information see <https://www.uni-kassel.de/fb11agrar/en/sections/home/for2432.html>). Several PhD positions opened up in the Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Development and I got the one at the chair of Prof. von Cramon-Taubadel. Our particular subproject is interested in the effects of urbanization on agricultural commercialization and intensification, and eventually on the nutritional status of smallholders. To analyze these interactions, we needed data. The plan was a survey of 1200 farm households along the rural-urban gradient of Bangalore.

A few months of questionnaire preparation later and together with some other PhD students employed in the project I landed in Bangalore in October 2016 – full of ideas, ambition, and largely unrealistic expectations. We moved into an apartment, three rooms for eight people plus four- to six-legged uninvited subtenants. After a couple of weeks of constant noise (traffic, temple bells, street dogs, etc.), frustrating visa regulations, limited success in enumerator training and questionnaire pretesting, and basically zero privacy, I was only one more catastrophe away from sending the termination letter I had already drafted to perfection in my head. “Something with development” looked so much more romantic in theory than in practice. However, for no yet identified reasons the day came and things fell into place. I guess there is some truth to the saying “Everything is possible in India”. The survey found its rhythm and we gained in speed, enumerators became friends, and when I left Bangalore in March 2017, I left a place that felt like home – in the best possible meaning of the word.

Back in Germany the “scientific” part of the PhD started and the new agenda was set on data preparation, analysis, and paper writing. To large parts also because of the great liberty I received from my supervisor, I was able to work on three quite different but all the more interesting papers. In the first paper, we were able to identify the importance of secondary towns (smaller towns in the periphery of large cities such as Bangalore) and income diversification on farmers’ decisions to intensify their agricultural production. In another paper, we analyzed farmers’ decisions to adopt borewells. The Bangalore area is prone to droughts, especially with advancing climate change. Thus, learning about potential coping mechanisms applied by farmers can help in future policy making balancing smallholder well-being and environmental depletion. In my current paper, I collaborate with ecologists and we investigate how agricultural

intensification in terms of chemical fertilizer and pesticide use affect wild pollinator communities, which are essential for the common fruit and vegetable production in the Bangalore area.

If everything goes according to plan, I will finish my PhD this year. What I will do afterwards? I do not know yet. However, if there is one thing that the PhD taught me, there is always more to learn, in the academic sense and simply about myself.