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Liberalizing Rural-to-Urban Construction Land Transfers in China: Distribution Effects

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Abstract

China's land market is characterized by a dual urban-rural system, with the government in control of rural-urban land transfers. In recent years, different types of pilot projects have been implemented to experiment with liberalizing markets for rural-urban construction land transfers. The objective of this study is to gain insights into the distributional effects of three different types of land marketization rules by making a comparative analysis of three pilot projects carried out under each of these marketization rules. We find that transfers facing more liberalized marketization rules result in higher shares of land revenue flowing to the rural sector and thereby reduce the rural-urban income gap. But direct transfers between rural and urban land users also contribute to growing income inequality within the rural sector, as households living in urban fringes benefit relatively more from such transfers. A tradable quota system can reduce the impact of location on the price of land, and thereby contribute to a more equal distribution of the revenues of rural-urban land transfers within the rural sector.

Keywords: Land market; distribution; tradable quotas; China

1. INTRODUCTION

China’s land market is characterised by a dual-track system based on a division into urban and rural sectors. Under this system, rural land cannot be transferred to urban users directly by rural households (the land users) or by village committees (the formal land owners). The land must first be transferred to the government, i.e., rural collective-owned land must first become state-owned land (Lai et al., 2014; Liu et al., 2014a), which means that the government actually controls rural-urban land transfers.
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