

# Policy in Focus

A publication of  
The International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth

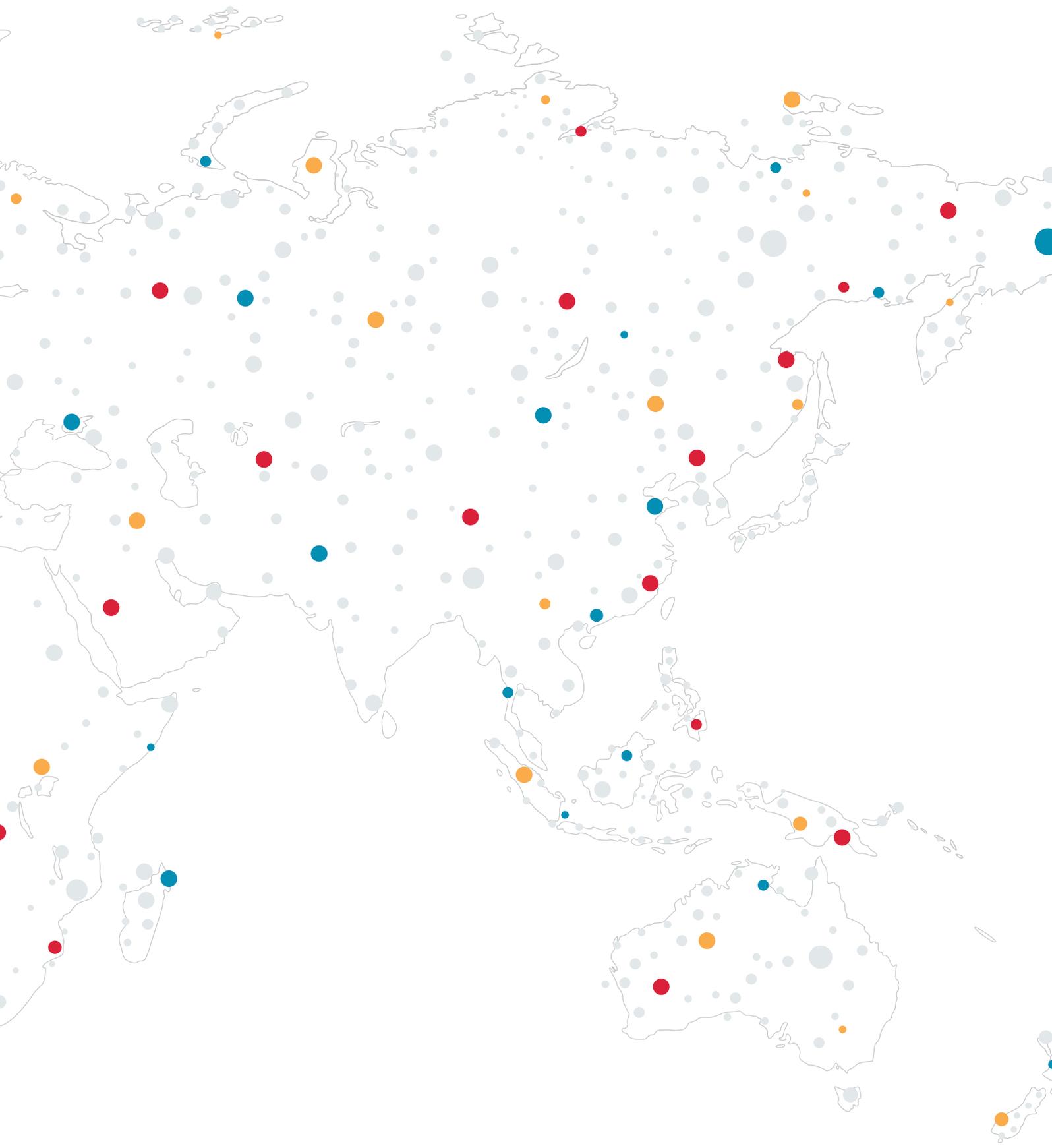
Volume 16, Issue No. 1 • April 2019



Rural poverty reduction  
in the 21st century

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# Policy in Focus



The International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG) is a partnership between the United Nations and the Government of Brazil to promote South–South learning on social policies. The Centre specialises in research-based policy recommendations to foster the reduction of poverty and inequality as well as promote inclusive growth. The IPC-IG is linked to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Brazil, the Ministry of Economy (ME) and the Institute for Applied Economic Research (Ipea) of the Government of Brazil.

**Director a.i.:** Niky Fabiancic

**IPC-IG Research Coordinators:** Diana Sawyer; Fábio Veras Soares; Rafael Guerreiro Osorio and Sergei Soares

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**Specialist Guest Editors:** Ryan Nehring, Cornell University and Ana Paula de la O Campos, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

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**Art and Desktop Publishing:** Flávia Amaral and Rosa Maria Banuth

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**Editor's note:** We would like to express our sincere appreciation to all the authors for their generous and insightful contributions, without which this issue simply would not have been possible.

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# Editorial

While political dynamics differ greatly from one place to another, rural areas continue to have legitimate grievances. Poverty in rural areas is both more prevalent and more acute than in urban areas—about 80 per cent of the world's extremely poor people live in rural areas.

This will certainly need to change, especially if governments and development organisations are serious about achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Rural populations are on the front lines of climate change mitigation and adaptation and will need to be a productive force to ensure the food security needs of countries and communities around the world. Political will and leadership are needed to make rural development and poverty reduction a priority. Rural poverty in the 21st century presents new challenges and opportunities for governments and organisations that share the goal of pro-poor development.

The classic dichotomies between rural and urban environments are becoming less relevant as linkages

between the two are becoming more evident. Rural populations are also increasingly diversifying their livelihoods: while the agricultural sector remains the most important, other sectors are crucial to generate income for poor people in rural areas.

The articles in this issue offer insights into what has been done to reduce rural poverty; they present some of the progress that has been made and offer suggestions for different ways in which further progress can be achieved. Our objective is to increase the visibility of rural areas and the centrality of its residents in meeting cross-cutting existential challenges in the 21st century. We hope that it helps contribute to the debate by communicating the urgency and importance of reducing rural poverty to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and revitalise rural areas around the world.

*Ryan Nehring and Ana Paula de la O Campos*

# Rural poverty reduction in the 21st century

Ryan Nehring<sup>1</sup> and  
Ana Paula de la O Campos<sup>2</sup>

The widespread industrialisation of the 19th and 20th centuries was fuelled by a vision of development as a progressive modernisation of production—from agriculture to manufacturing. The role of rural societies in that process lies at the heart of understanding large-scale social and political transformations (Moore Jr. 1966). Yet processes of structural transformation and growth have not been completely inclusive and have led to differentiated rural worlds in the 21st century that have seen less progress than their urban counterparts. Overall, global poverty has fallen over the last several decades, including in rural areas. However, despite these gains, poverty continues to be a persistent feature of rural areas and societies. About 80 per cent of the world's extremely poor people<sup>3</sup> live in rural areas, and, in many regions, rural areas have experienced few positive changes in their overall well-being (World Bank 2018). It is also in rural areas where poverty is most severe.

This issue of *Policy in Focus* assesses the historical and current state of rural poverty, as well as some of the key factors and approaches for poverty reduction in rural spaces that are facing both new and persisting challenges. Increasingly high levels of connectivity are making urban–rural dichotomies much less evident. A study by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO 2017) found that most people in the developing world—except for several countries in Latin America and the Caribbean—live in or around small cities and towns with populations of 500,000 or less. Thus, despite ongoing urbanisation, the dichotomies between rural and urban environments are increasingly blurry. This is complicated by the fact that most urban areas in developing countries tend to be sparsely populated and maintain strong linkages to agricultural activities. Rural areas also contain great diversity in terms of agroecological conditions, social relations and cultural and economic activities. Therefore, efforts to reduce rural poverty

in the 21st century must consider the different levels of interconnectivity, as well as the opportunities generated, between the different geographical spaces.

Rural societies are as important as ever, including in the developed world (Scoones et al. 2017). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are now calling for the elimination of extreme poverty for all people everywhere by 2030. Development efforts, social mobilisation, investment and renewed attention from States will need to focus on rural areas. Historical patterns of poverty reduction in rural areas suggest that this new focus will need to be based on multisectoral approaches that target some of the most vulnerable populations, such as women, indigenous peoples and those without land, while balancing these efforts with overall local development. It also needs to be based on reducing inequalities between rural and urban areas, including by supporting positive interactions between both environments to stimulate inclusive growth.

The aim to reduce rural poverty in the 21st century importantly intersects with a range of other global challenges. Effects from climate change will be pronounced in many areas around the world, and rural populations, often dependent on for their livelihoods, will potentially be the most affected and will also be at the forefront of mitigation and adaptation efforts. Recent calls to double the global food supply also present an opportunity for rural populations—specifically those living in poverty—to meet the world's food demands. Agriculture is the primary livelihood source for poor people in rural areas, and their productive capacity could potentially be key to expanding future food production in more sustainable and nutritious ways. Such a 'pro-smallholder' approach in poverty reduction has been put forward to focus on the productive potential of at least some of the poor people in rural areas, although these efforts are still incomplete.

Those people living in extreme poverty in rural areas are also an extremely diverse

group, comprising fisherfolk and forest communities, while other non-agricultural activities also constitute an important part of their incomes (De la O Campos et al. 2018). It is up to governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), multilateral institutions and other actors to establish how these populations can be part of building a more sustainable and inclusive agricultural and environmental transformation.

The authors featured in this issue come from a wide range of institutions—governmental, non-governmental and academic—and represent different disciplines and perspectives from around the world. Their collective scholarship is an urgent reminder of the importance of rural development in the eradication of extreme poverty (SDG 1) by the rapidly approaching deadline of 2030.

Following this introductory article, Carlos Oya presents a critical view of the 'pro-smallholder' approach to rural poverty reduction. He reminds us that the poorest people in rural areas typically rely on wages for their livelihoods. Thus, it is crucial to understand labour market dynamics if employment creation is to establish productive linkages between urban and rural areas. Instead of past industrialisation processes, Oya sees 'industries without smokestacks' as one area of hope, where rural producers may find new income generation opportunities in horticulture and fruit production ('industrialisation of freshness'). Support for such agro-industrial sectors may offer decent employment opportunities for many of the world's poor people in developing countries. These new labour dynamics are one way in which cycles of poverty can be overcome.

The specificities of why poverty persists in rural areas is discussed in the article by McBride and Quiñones. At the heart of their work is an explanation for why these 'poverty traps' exist and the dynamics present in different contexts. Much like Oya, the authors see hope in the closing of the agricultural productivity gap as one way to increase rural incomes and provide a path out of poverty. Yet they stress the

“ Poverty continues to be a persistent feature of rural areas and societies.



Photo: Mokhamad Edliadi/CIFOR. Elderly woman working in the field in Nalma, Nepal, 2017 <<https://bit.ly/OJZNil>>.

heterogeneity of rural poverty dynamics, reminding us that there is no single policy ‘panacea’. Effective efforts to reduce rural poverty will depend on different dynamics in different contexts.

Indeed, it is crucial to understand regional variations in the causes and responses to rural poverty as policy prescriptions are made. Significant gains in reducing rural poverty have been made in Latin America until recently. Carolina Trivelli’s article analyses the recent gains in rural poverty and remaining challenges for the region to meet the SDGs. She highlights some recent trends of rural poverty in Latin America. In the early 2000s, the region was characterised by rapid urbanisation, followed by sustained poverty reduction. However, the most recent trend of increased poverty rates in rural areas is connected to a historical reliance on extractive industries—from illegal economies to a focus on commodities, and to the sustained neglect of gender and generational inequalities. A renewed focus on rural development and improving the rural world more broadly could provide more opportunities for those livelihoods that have been historically neglected.

One proposed way to both support and measure the progress of the SDGs worldwide is the Sustainable Rural Livelihoods framework. Ian Scoones, a key voice for livelihoods thinking, summarises this framework and explains how its “integrated, cross-sectoral approach”

is relevant for bringing power and political economy into SDG planning and monitoring. He proposes six key questions as an entry point into the politics and policies behind the SDGs, to focus on “real transformative change”.

The question of which policies and strategies could best address rural poverty in the 21st century is taken on by Maya Takagi and Ana Paula de la O Campos. Their article lays out the key components of a multisectoral strategy for rural poverty reduction. It is structured in a multi-tier set of components that includes both policy and political dimensions. Concerns over broad areas or levels of development (i.e. participation, territorial development and economic inclusion) provide crucial guidance for strategy and programme development. Within these areas, specific policy arenas (such as social assistance and value-chain development) can respond more closely to the specific needs of different rural populations and sectors. Finally, coordination between different stakeholders and the participation of rural poor people themselves (and their organisations) are highlighted as necessary political components of multisectoral strategies for poverty reduction.

Marygold Walsh-Dilley gets to the heart of the political dynamics at play in strategies for rural poverty reduction by looking at the importance of thinking about resilience. The term ‘resilience’ has exploded as a buzzword

in the development community and is particularly relevant for rural areas, as poor people in these areas are more exposed to climate-related shocks and natural disasters. She focuses on the key traits of using resilience as a powerful concept in reducing poverty and inequality. In particular, she focuses on 'resilience-building' as a forward-looking concept that can include participatory frameworks, equity and political processes at the centre of development. An important claim here is that "resilience is not objective or neutral", as it depends highly on the political and socio-ecological context of the vulnerable communities in question.

One common trait among poor people in rural areas is their structural exclusion from rights or from control over natural resources. Ben McKay's article on land access and control describes four forms of exclusion that poor people face in gaining access to or control over land, which is key to sustaining rural livelihoods. He describes three interrelated challenges to democratise natural resources: recognition, redistribution and retribution. A focus on the structural barriers and inequities present in rural areas introduces the central role of political economy as both part of the problem and part of the solution regarding poverty reduction. McKay shows how this is a persisting problem that has historically lain at the heart of rural conflict and persisted into the 21st century.

Access to and control over resources can also promote more inclusive

migration flows as a last resort for rural populations. Mohan and Flaim present four recommendations for harnessing migration as a productive force in rural poverty reduction: facilitate remittances and promote wealth distribution; reinstate and fund state welfare structures; reduce barriers to migration and work; and safeguard migrants' rights and dignity. Their recommendations are based on a historical trend of state promotion of migration as a necessary precondition for industrialisation: what they call "development-induced dispossession". This process has often coerced many rural populations to migrate out of necessity and limited the extent to which rural development, combined with their policy recommendations, can be used to support conditions of pro-poor migration and poverty reduction.

Another important issue for rural populations is access to social protection. Andre Allieu, Ana Ocampo and Natalia Winder Rossi outline the barriers that remain for rural populations to access social protection, which is at the heart of SDG 1.3: "implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all". The authors understand that there are both explicit and implicit barriers for rural populations to access social protection, due to the heterogeneity of rural contexts. They present five policy recommendations to address them: consider rural living and working conditions; expand and adapt legal frameworks of social protection and



Photo: ILO/Pradip Shaky. Local women building a cottage in Rajhena village, Nepal, 2011 <<https://bit.ly/OJZNil>>.

“ The aim to reduce rural poverty in the 21st century importantly intersects with a range of other global challenges.

include rural populations; make social protection more affordable for rural populations; enhance delivery capacity; and move rural social protection forward. Their article is an excellent outline of how such an agenda should be shaped in the future.

A human rights-based approach has allowed for many policies and programmes to be implemented in rural areas—from the right to food to the right to work. Blondeau, Garcia-Cebolla and Vidar outline the ways in which rights-based approaches can be used in rural poverty reduction strategies. They draw on numerous examples around the world to highlight the power of rights-based approaches in “enhancing access to justice and the functioning of efficient recourse mechanisms” for rural populations. The importance of voluntary guidelines highlights one of the current examples of how rights-based approaches are being adopted by States, with support from international organisations such as the FAO.

Some of the results of state investments in agricultural and rural development are discussed by Bernstein, Johnson and Arslan. Their article reviews the existing evidence on the impact of such investments on rural poverty. They use the SDG targets as a framework to assess the gains made in rural poverty reduction so far. The results show that investments in agricultural and rural development have had a limited impact on poverty reduction (SDG 1), but that there are more positive results for food and nutrition security (SDG 2). They regard the largely restrictive criteria used to measure the impact on poverty as one plausible explanation for the limited results. Conversely, the rich and diverse criteria available for indicators of food and nutrition security have allowed for more promising evidence. The authors provide a broad framework for further data collection on the linkages between investments in agricultural and rural development and their potential impact on the SDGs.

Social protection is one policy area that has shown promise in reducing rural poverty. However, as Tebaldi and de la O Campos show in their article, the needs of rural women have been systematically absent in the design of many social protection policies and programmes. The authors identify key bottlenecks and design



Photo: Abbie Trayler-Smith/Panos Pictures/DFID. Solar power brings clean energy to poor rural areas, Orissa, India, 2009 <<https://bit.ly/OJZNil>>.

features of social protection, where rural women’s needs are not being met.

Gendered inequities are also a regressive feature of access to and control over natural resources. However, as Youjin Chung shows, the common policy response of promoting resource equity through individual property reforms and by reducing time poverty has its limitations. She stresses a focus on gender relations as a way to reframe the debate for gendered forms of inequality and poverty. This would require qualitative approaches to the understanding of poverty and potential policy solutions beyond quantitative outcomes (such as land ownership or increased incomes).

Taken together, this collection of articles on rural poverty reduction may raise more questions than provide clear-cut answers. A powerful conclusion could be that rural poverty reduction is both urgent and necessary if we are to achieve the SDGs. We understand that the necessary centrality of rural areas is a complex, multisectoral issue. Decades, if not centuries, of a disparity between poverty reduction in urban and rural areas indicates an imbalance in investment and attention to rural populations. A renewed focus on rural development can, and should, characterise the potential for widespread poverty reduction into the 21st century. The contributions in this issue provide clear clues to the nature of the problem and promising avenues in the search for a solution. ●

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1. Cornell University.
2. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).
3. Using the World Bank’s threshold of USD1.90 per day.

# Labour and rural poverty

Carlos Oya<sup>1</sup>

Conventional wisdom on rural poverty has for a long time proposed a 'smallholder path', whereby changes at the margin to improve smallholders' livelihoods are expected to be the main engines of rural poverty reduction.<sup>2</sup> The narrative starts from a consideration of smallholder farmers as the 'rural poor' and land productivity as a key policy target, since increased productivity can directly improve food security and farm income via direct production and farm surplus.

This view is based on a static picture that unfortunately tends to oversimplify or even ignore the lessons of centuries of capitalist development. It has been popular, especially among non-governmental organisations (NGOs), many aid agencies and advocates of smallholder farming, also partly because it provides a good fit to static 'logframe' approaches to economic development, where a broad characterisation of the 'poor' is taken as a starting point, their 'livelihoods' described as dependent on small-scale farming or other small-scale rural activities such as forestry, fisheries or livestock rearing (typical of pastoralist groups), and, therefore, small-scale farm (rural) productivity growth is seen as the main mechanism for reducing poverty.

However, history belies this static picture and presents an alternative view that puts structural transformations (within and between sectors) and the role of labour markets in reducing poverty at the centre of analysis. Both in early industrialised capitalist economies and the latecomers, poverty reduction has been the outcome of a combination of factors that has always included structural change, usually in the form of industrialisation, and significant modernisation and transformation of agricultural production, usually leading to the rise of a capitalist agricultural sector, stretching to a wide range of rural-based activities such as forestry, livestock/cattle raising and fisheries. This process has been historically uneven, diverse and often incomplete, especially in poorer countries.

Despite the continuous dominance of the pro-smallholder narrative in much of the current development policy discourse, this conventional wisdom is now being gradually replaced by a more nuanced view that a productive agriculture is critical for employment creation and poverty reduction through various pathways depending on the agrarian context (Christiaensen and Martin 2018). Thus, growth in agricultural productivity may have strong poverty-reducing effects through different mechanisms: releasing (agricultural) labour to non-agricultural activities (manufacturing, mining, services), often including wage employment, and from less productive home production into agriculture and other rural-based economic activities.

Agricultural output and productivity growth may benefit poor households via farm income, lower food prices, increased wage employment and rising farm and non-farm rural wages. The 'pathways out of poverty' described by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO 2019) now include a wider range of mechanisms such as the often-emphasised greater access to assets and credit, increased agricultural productivity, and less conventional options such as decent employment opportunities, stronger social protection systems or 'stronger institutions'.

Therefore, recognising the diversity of mechanisms and heterogeneity of the reality of rural areas calls for rethinking of the dominant 'pro-smallholder' narrative. Both social differentiation of smallholder farmers (engaged in crops, livestock and/or fishing) and the conspicuous presence of rural wage employment are phenomena that cannot be ignored and have important implications for rural poverty reduction strategies.

First, the poorest of poor people in rural areas tend to depend on casual wages, not only in contexts where landless poor wage workers are numerous, as in South Asia, but also in settings where working poor people may also have access to some land (sub-Saharan Africa) but are too

poor to farm or survive on their meagre farm output, whether derived from crop production, livestock or small-scale fishing. While this reality is sometimes portrayed as a distress-driven 'last resort', it still implies that trends in rural wages are critical for poverty reduction in the short to medium term, and indeed access to more decent seasonal agricultural wage jobs tends to be associated with significant poverty reduction (Van Hoyweghen et al. 2018; van den Broeck and Maertens 2017).

Second, the need to move rural workers (whether producers or wage workers) from low- to higher-productivity activities underscores the imperative of rural economic transformations alongside broader processes of structural change and urbanisation. Thus, the 'last resort' casual agricultural jobs need to give way to better-remunerated and higher-productivity agricultural and non-agricultural jobs, which requires the emergence of more dynamic sectors and activities driven by more sustained capital accumulation.

In China, where it is often argued that poverty reduction was primarily the result of institutional changes (household responsibility system) that led to greater production incentives for small farmers and, therefore, agricultural growth, it cannot, however, be argued that poverty reduction was mainly the result of gradual improvements in smallholder productivity.

The story of poverty reduction in China, as in many other successful development experiences, is one of mass internal labour migration towards manufacturing hubs, increasing labour productivity within and across sectors, and significant rural transformations that led to the mass creation of non-farm jobs in Township and Village Enterprises (TVEs). The conditions for the contributions of smallholder agriculture to broader structural change in China had of course also been built on the legacy of a radical redistributive land reform in the 1950s and the public goods associated with large-scale investments in the collectivisation of agriculture in the Maoist era (Bramall 2004).

“ After the reforms of the 1980s, the contemporary agrarian landscape in China today has been significantly transformed.



Photo: Françoise Gaujour. Rural development in Guangxi, China, 2016 <<https://bit.ly/OJZNil>>.

After the reforms of the 1980s, the contemporary agrarian landscape in China today has been significantly transformed and rendered much more capitalist in the space of only four decades (Zhang et al. 2015). Transformations like the ones experienced in Europe, USA or in China, for example, do not, however, need to (and perhaps cannot) be replicated with identical features in contemporary low-income countries, especially if we consider the environmental costs of historical examples of accelerated transformation through fossil fuel-driven industrialisation.

Despite the growing urbanisation in poor agrarian-based economies, especially in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, where the bulk of the world's poor people are concentrated, demographic projections indicate significant growth of the labour force and new rural labour market entrants in future decades. Therefore, the imperative of job creation and decent work in rural areas of Africa and Asia cannot be ignored. Urban-based manufacturing and services will indeed absorb an increasing share of the labour force in the near future, as they have done recently in most parts of Asia, but rural-based activities will need to generate high numbers of jobs in absolute terms.

The nature of the new jobs will also matter, as poverty reduction will be an outcome of the returns to labour that new activities have to offer. This requires an understanding of what jobs there

are actually in sub-Saharan Africa, a task that has been undermined by data collection systems that render many of the footloose rural wage workers 'invisible' and, therefore, the extent and nature of farm and non-farm rural wage employment poorly understood (Oya 2015). Indeed, understanding labour market dynamics, within and across economic sectors, and the resulting quantity and quality of jobs is crucial to understand rural poverty dynamics.

How can more and better jobs be created within the rural space in agrarian-based economies? Considering the limitations of manufacturing development in absorbing the vast reserve army of labour present in rural areas of developing countries, there is now growing consensus that structural change is not simply a process of transferring surplus labour from smallholder farming (including livestock, forestry and fisheries) to industries with smokestacks in overpopulated urban agglomerations. While that process is certainly under way, albeit unevenly, there are many other ways of increasing labour productivity by creating jobs in a wide range of activities without smokestacks, even in the agricultural sector, broadly understood.

In the long term, economic history has taught us that, apart from a sustained transfer of surplus labour from low-productivity agriculture to higher-productivity agriculture, capitalist development leads to the transfer of

labour to other more productive and technologically dynamic agricultural forms of crop/livestock production.

This is particularly true in the current context of globalisation, in which increasingly sophisticated global value chains coordinating the production and trade of an ever-wider range of agricultural commodities and derived products continue to penetrate a growing number of producing countries, including many among the poorest in the world.

The global business revolution of the past few decades, the growth in agricultural trade and the continuous technological innovation impacting on agricultural production, processing and trade have led to the emergence of new 'industries without smokestacks' associated with an impressive range of agricultural products, especially in horticulture.

The boundaries of 'farming' need to be reconsidered in light of the emergence of the 'industrialisation of freshness', which is manifested in the growth of factory-like farming with degrees of technological sophistication that may well exceed those experienced in certain manufacturing sectors (Cramer et al. 2018).

The employment and poverty reduction effects of these developments cannot be ignored (van den Broeck and Maertens 2017). Indeed, the employment effects—direct, indirect and induced—of the growth of export-oriented



Photo: Stephan Bachenheimer/World Bank. A farmer sorts tomatoes, Ethiopia, 2012 <<https://bit.ly/OJZNil>>.

“ There are many African countries, such as Ethiopia, where much of the rural population still tries to survive in low-technology, low-productivity small-scale farming or livestock rearing.

technologically dynamic horticultural and fruit production are very substantial (Cramer et al. 2018). There are many African countries, such as Ethiopia, where much of the rural population still tries to survive in low-technology, low-productivity small-scale farming or livestock rearing, but where thousands of jobs have been created by emerging farm industries without smokestacks. Perhaps these are not enough yet to absorb the growing mass of underemployed rural youth, but the opportunities are there to expand if investment is leveraged to support the ‘industrialisation of freshness’, in the same way that TVEs and rural industrialisation in China had a transformational impact on rural poverty via employment linkages.

A key empirical question for rural poverty reduction, especially in poor agrarian-based economies, is whether employment generation in these emerging activities:

- substantially contributes to the reduction in the currently very high levels of underemployment; and
- offers higher returns to the labour of people who for too long have struggled to eke out a living by farming a small piece of land. History suggests that should be the case. ●

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1. School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London.

2. The use of the term ‘smallholder path’ encompasses a wider range of economic activities beyond crop production, especially livestock rearing, forestry and fisheries, as long as these are practised at a small scale, are informal and have relatively low labour productivity.

# The puzzling persistence of rural poverty

Linden McBride<sup>1</sup> and Esteban J. Quiñones<sup>2</sup>

Persistent poverty in rural areas does not depend on the formal identification of a poverty trap; embracing this empirical reality is essential for researchers and policymakers alike. In this article we discuss the conundrum of persistent rural poverty and the extent to which the theory and empirics of poverty traps can assist us in better understanding and fighting rural poverty. We discuss the geographic nature of persistent poverty, and the relationship between rural poverty and the agricultural productivity gap. Finally, we highlight some of the recent progress made in understanding, and designing policy for, the multidimensional factors that contribute to persistent rural poverty.

The theory of multiple equilibria poverty traps is conceptually compelling in several respects. It suggests that there is a non-poor, stable level of welfare that households could enjoy if they could just be pushed over a threshold. It also suggests ready policy solutions such as social safety nets to keep households from falling into poverty, transfers to pull households out of poverty, and targeted interventions, such as index insurance and microcredit, to correct the sort of financial market failures that, combined with uneven access and returns to technologies, can produce poverty trap dynamics (Barrett 2005).

However, with the exception of studies that focus on remote populations for which:

- livestock is the primary productive asset and store of wealth (for example, see Lybbert et al. 2004); or
- differences in returns to economic activities are determined by geographic factors (For example, see Ravallion and Woden 1999; Jalan and Ravallion 2002), the empirical evidence for this classic definition of poverty traps is “elusive” (Kraay and McKenzie 2014). The lack of strong evidence for poverty traps may be due to inadequate data or the methodological challenges of their identification. Or the lack of strong evidence may be because poverty traps are truly uncommon.

Overall, the evidence most consistent with the formal theory of poverty traps is that of geographic poverty traps (Kraay and McKenzie 2014). Using data from 1990s Bangladesh, Ravallion and Woden (1999) find that living standards are lower in poor areas than in non-poor areas after controlling for observable non-geographic household characteristics, suggesting significant, spatially determined, structural differences in returns to household and human capital. Jalan and Ravallion (2002) also find that geographic characteristics determine the productivity of households’ capital.

An extensive body of work by Chetty and Hendren (2018a; 2018b) also demonstrates the importance of geography and related contextual factors in determining the long-term health, education and opportunity of individuals even in the developed world. Although they do not directly test for the presence of poverty traps, the work by Chetty and colleagues is a striking demonstration of the factors that shape upward mobility for households that are better off to begin with and those that result in persistent poverty for marginalised households.

Geographically determined returns to capital suggest that migration is a promising route out of poverty; indeed, many scholars have found just that (for example, see Clemens et al. 2008 and Bryan et al. 2014). A related literature finds that livelihood shifts combined with migration to less rural areas has high returns (Beegle et al. 2011). The upfront and risky investment of migration gives rise to diverging welfare trajectories characterised by high returns for those who migrate and low returns for those who remain behind. In an analysis of seasonal internal migration in Bangladesh, Bryan et al. (2014) identify just such poverty trap-like dynamics in which very poor households must overcome a cash-on-hand threshold to enjoy the significant and positive returns of the risky undertaking of migration.

In part, the puzzle of rural poverty is the puzzle of the productivity gap between agricultural and non-agricultural sectors. The empirical regularity that returns to

labour are greater in non-agricultural than agricultural sectors and the related finding that household expenditures are greater in urban than in rural areas has been documented by many scholars (Young 2013; Lakagos and Waugh 2013; Gollin et al. 2013; McCullough 2017). Known as the agricultural productivity gap, these sector- and location-determined returns suggest that poverty, inequality and underdevelopment could be addressed by simply reallocating production inputs such as technology and labour across sectors and locations.

Of course, the solution is not so easy: Young (2013) Lakagos and Waugh (2013), Gollin et al. (2013), and Herrendorf and Schoellman (2018) find that these productivity and expenditure gaps are not the consequence of market failures and barriers to mobility but, rather, the efficient sorting of labour, based on skills and abilities, between sectors. If the skills and abilities on which labour sorts are randomly distributed, then poverty traps are indeed a poor explanation for the productivity gap. However, given that there is overwhelming evidence that human capital development is linked to parental resources, it is reasonable that poverty trap-like welfare dynamics may play a role.

Additionally complicating the identification of poverty traps is the fact that, over short time scales, there is little observable difference between conditional convergence and a poverty trap (Ghatak 2015). Moreover, convergence may be so slow as to make the distinction between conditional convergence and a poverty trap meaningless, as the promise of convergence to a higher equilibrium is little consolation to households facing long-term poverty and inequality. For example, Arunachalam and Shenoy (2017) find no evidence of a poverty trap in India, but strong evidence for caste-determined conditional convergence. In similar fashion, Dillon and Quiñones (2016) do not find evidence of poverty traps in northern Nigeria in communities where livestock remains the dominant asset, but show that growth is slow and that cultivation of additional land is a mechanism through which households avoid falling into poverty.



Photo: John Hogg/World Bank. Children studying in Ondangwa, a small town that combines rural and modern life, Namibia, 2007 <<https://bit.ly/OJZNil>>.

Regardless of whether or not poverty traps are the cause of persistent rural poverty, persistent rural poverty exists (Baulch and Hoddinott 2000; Dang and Lanjouw forthcoming). Moreover, it is crucial to not conflate a lack of strong evidence for poverty traps with a lack of need for anti-poverty policy. However, when the exact cause of persistent rural poverty remains elusive, how can one design anti-poverty policies?

A recent collection of research on poverty traps (Barrett et al. 2018) emphasises the multidimensional nature of poverty and points out that failure to recognise the multiple dimensions of, and underlying mechanisms that contribute to, poverty—including asset dynamics, heterogeneous capabilities, financial market failures, behaviour and preferences in the face of risk and shocks, and psychological factors such as depression and aspirations—can lead to poorly targeted programmes that, at best, are inefficient and, at worst, lead to unintended consequences.

Increasingly innovative and promising approaches—from nation- and continent-wide policies to local, small-scale, but hopefully scalable, interventions—suggest that anti-poverty policies are moving in the right direction, albeit non-linearly. Tackling the agricultural productivity gap, the Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Programme, initiated in 2003, has the intention of increasing agricultural productivity and decreasing rural poverty across the African continent via public expenditures in the agricultural

sector. However, implementation across countries varies, and evidence on the effectiveness of the programme thus far is mixed (Benin 2016). Other policies for which there is positive empirical evidence include public investment in agricultural research and development, investment in infrastructure such as roads, irrigation and electrification, and investments in health and education (Mogues et al. 2015).

On a micro scale, programmes such as microfinance, index insurance, safety nets and cash transfers have each shown promising results, although evaluations of such interventions are ongoing (Jensen et al. 2017; Barrett et al. 2018). In reviewing the latest research on poverty traps, Barrett et al. (2018) point out that interventions addressing the underlying structural mechanisms of persistent poverty (e.g. resolving financial market failures) can have big, indirect and lasting impacts. In addition, they find that programmes tackling multiple dimensions of poverty head-on have had large impacts, citing integrated poverty graduation programmes such as those developed by BRAC.

Because path dynamics can be shaped by and vary considerably due to geographic, societal, household and psychological characteristics, and because market failures can be household-specific, we should not seek panaceas, nor should we expect that all households will benefit in the same way from an intervention. This means we have a great deal to learn about how welfare dynamics differ across individuals and

households, as well as the heterogeneous impacts of anti-poverty programmes (Barrett et al. 2018). Athey and Imbens (2017) and Chernozhukov et al. (2018) offer promising developments in this direction in their work on estimating heterogeneous treatment effects using machine-learning methods. Along these same lines, Barrett et al. (2018) argue for an integrative model of and policy approach to poverty that encompasses assets, capabilities and shocks and accommodates not just the physical but also the psychological aspects of deprivation.

As reasoned by T.W. Schultz in his 1979 Nobel Lecture, “most of the world’s poor people earn their living from agriculture, so if we knew the economics of agriculture, we would know much of the economics of being poor”. There is little empirical evidence for the existence of poverty traps outside pastoral eastern Africa; however, there is a preponderance of empirical evidence demonstrating the persistence of rural poverty and the agricultural productivity gap, as well as the economic benefits to migration, suggesting we have a great deal more to learn about the economics of agriculture, mobility and poverty, as well as the shared factors shaping them. ●

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“ We have a great deal more to learn about the economics of agriculture, mobility and poverty, as well as the shared factors shaping them.



Photo: DFAT. Elderly woman holds up some of the vegetables she has grown in Guguletu, South Africa, 2009 <<https://bit.ly/1mhaR6e>>.

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1. St. Mary's College of Maryland.
  2. University of Wisconsin–Madison.

# Rural poverty challenges in Latin America in light of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Carolina Trivelli<sup>1</sup>

Despite the drastic reduction in poverty rates in Latin America over the past 15 years (from more than 65 per cent to less than 48.6 per cent), rural poverty—whether monetary or multidimensional—remains unacceptably high, far greater than in urban areas, and strongly concentrated in certain territories and vulnerable populations (ECLAC 2018). Today, almost half of all people living in rural areas in Latin America live in poverty—almost twice the average urban poverty rate for the region.

The key issue is that rural poverty, which had been falling steadily in the region, stopped decreasing in 2014, and has even increased since: between 2014 and 2016 the number of people living in poverty in rural areas increased by 2 million. Current levels of rural poverty in Latin America make it very difficult to achieve the goals set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 1 (“End poverty in all its forms everywhere”).<sup>2</sup>

There is, therefore, an urgent need to resume and renew initiatives aimed at reducing rural poverty globally, not only to return to the downward trend, but also because rural poverty continues to affect practically half of the rural population of Latin America. The effort required is substantial and cannot be limited to waiting for better growth rates or continuing to do what has been done over recent years. These will no longer suffice.

## Rural poverty in Latin America

According to the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC 2018), 48.6 per cent of the rural population in Latin America live in poverty, and 22.5 per cent in extreme poverty. Although both rates are substantially lower than those of the early 1990s, they are double the urban poverty rate and three times the urban extreme poverty rate.<sup>3</sup>

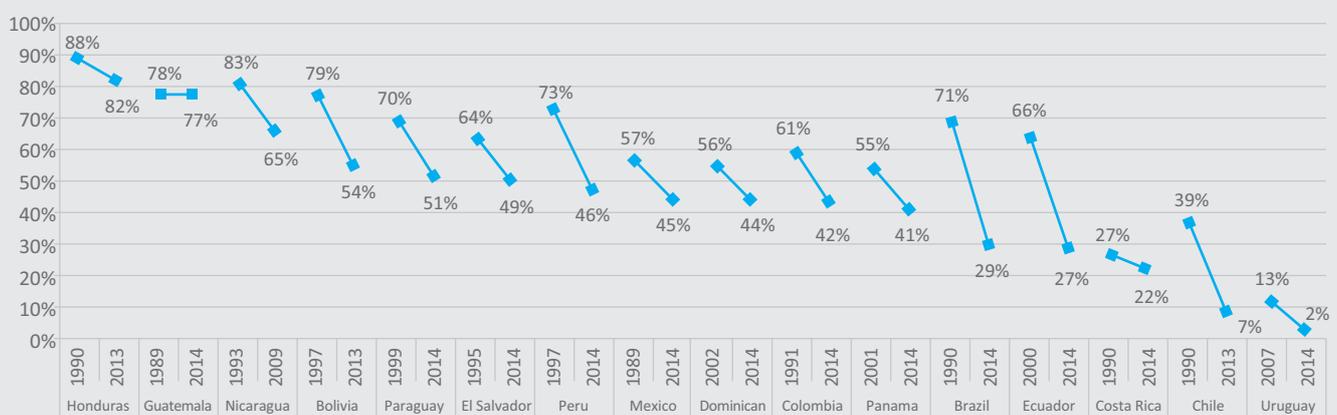
These poverty indicators are the monetary indicators that assess the capacity for consumption of rural households. Although they do not account for

other dimensions of well-being, they are comparable in time and between countries and are considered official in most countries in the region.

Countries are increasingly implementing measurement methods that seek to capture the multidimensional character of poverty. This tendency, strongly based on efforts by the Oxford Policy and Human Development Initiative (OPHI),<sup>4</sup> has made it possible to arrive at estimates that, although requiring better adaptation to the rural environment, also indicate a reduction in rural poverty levels in recent years. However, they show that poverty remains at high levels, even higher than the rates registered using monetary measurements (Santos et al. 2015).

Comparing the two measures to better understand rural poverty trends, we found that almost all countries show progress in both poverty measures.<sup>5</sup> Some countries have been very effective at increasing rural consumption without improving general well-being (such as Brazil and Peru), while others have

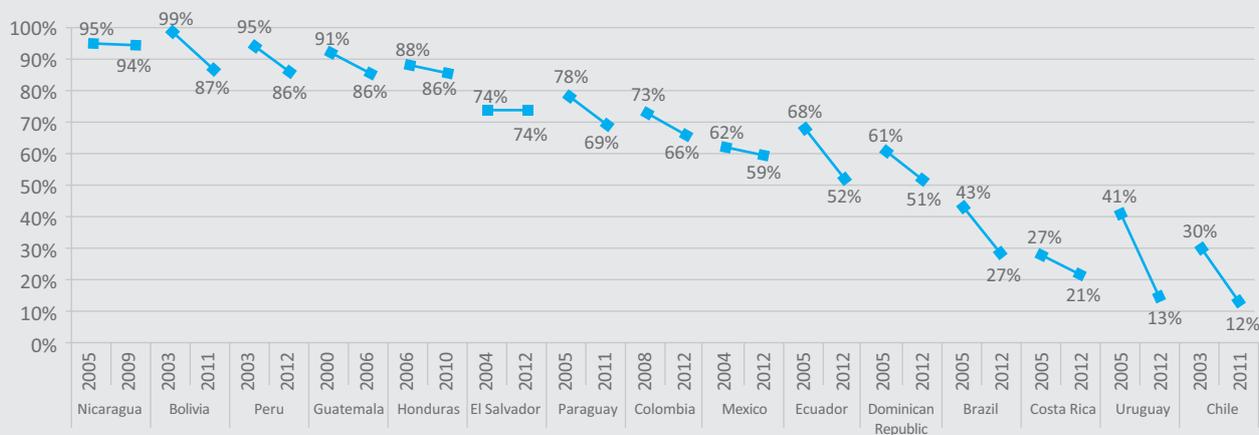
**FIGURE 1:** Rural monetary poverty rates in Latin American and Caribbean countries



Note: The dates given for each country correspond to the first and last years for which ECLAC data are available.

Source: Author's elaboration based on ECLAC's Household Database.

**FIGURE 2:** Percentage of people in a situation of rural multidimensional poverty in Latin American and Caribbean countries, around 2005 and 2012



Source: Santos et al. (2015), based on household surveys from each country.

been able to reduce both poverty measures (such as Uruguay and the Dominican Republic) or unable to significantly reduce either of them (such as Honduras and Guatemala).

Each poverty measure reflects the types of policies implemented by each country, revealing a complex approach to achieving more consumption and better living conditions. Some invest in improving services for poor people in rural areas, but they have not been able to help poor households translate these better conditions into more consumption.

Cash transfer programmes—the most prominent social programmes in the region<sup>6</sup>—have had a positive and significant effect on consumption, but without quality services or access to minimum infrastructure, such as housing and safe drinking water, they are not enough to ensure increased consumption, which can translate into better and sustained living conditions. The use of multiple poverty measures helps us understand poverty and allows us to better identify how to improve countries' efforts to reduce rural poverty.<sup>7</sup>

Regardless of whether monetary measurements, multidimensional methodologies or other sets of indicators are used, there is no question that rural poverty levels are unacceptably high.

This is not a new phenomenon. Rural poverty has historically gone hand in hand with the region's economic model, based mostly on extractive industries—most rurally based but not involving the poor populations—with few linkages to other economic activities and insufficient job creation. Despite the recent period of economic growth experienced by Latin American economies, this economic model's impact on rural poverty has not been enough to overcome the differences between urban and rural areas.<sup>8</sup> Historically, the persistence of poverty in most of the region's countries has been in rural areas. Evidence has also shown that certain rural territories concentrate the greatest and deepest poverty, and that they tend to face poverty traps and inequalities that limit their opportunities for overcoming their current status (Bebbington et al. 2017; RIMISP 2018). Territories facing poverty traps require structural transformations and a complex set of public and private goods and services to be able to allow citizens to escape the poverty trap and move sustainably out of it.

#### New developments

At least three new trends related to rural poverty have appeared in the early 21st century, influencing how the challenge of eliminating poverty has been faced. The first stems from the rapid urbanisation of Latin America. As nearly 81 per cent of

the population now live in urban areas, the face of poverty is no longer rural.<sup>9</sup> According to ECLAC (2018), 29 per cent of people living in poverty in the region and 41 per cent of those in extreme poverty live in rural areas. Despite the greater incidence of rural poverty, its lesser weight in the population as a whole (and in the electoral arena), combined with the complexities and high costs of addressing it, have driven it off the priority list of public policy.<sup>10</sup>

The second new trend is a rapid and steady reduction in rural poverty between 2002 and 2012. This reduction is explained by both the recent economic windfall experienced by some of the region's countries and by the implementation of policies targeting the groups and territories suffering the greatest exclusion and poverty.<sup>11</sup> Average growth in the region was high, and in some countries it was even higher for the poorest 40 per cent of the population (Cord et al. 2015). However, the agricultural sector grew (except for some of the agroindustry) at a slower pace than the rest of the regional economy, affecting the direct benefits to agricultural producers, all living in rural areas (ECLAC, FAO, and IICA 2017).

High and sustained economic growth has been crucial for the reduction of poverty. However, just as important were the policies that leveraged and augmented



Photo: Christopher Rose. Family farm in Taray, Peru, 2013 <<https://bit.ly/1jNlqZo>>.

“ Rural poverty needs to be eliminated not only due to a moral imperative or to ensure citizenship and rights to rural people, but because it is at the core of several interlinked processes affecting opportunities for development and peace in rural and urban areas.

the impacts of this growth on rural poverty, which were made possible thanks to a fiscal bounty. Although it is common to focus on examples of social policy—for instance, conditional cash transfers and non-contributory pension schemes—these were accompanied by investments in infrastructure and the provision of public services to integrate rural areas with new and better opportunities, as well as access to services. This helped leverage the growth of new economic projects that included rural areas.

Unfortunately, the high-growth cycle appears to have ended, giving way to a more modest one—albeit still positive—and the impact of social policies on rural poverty appears to be losing steam. Social programmes have stopped expanding, and innovation has stagnated.<sup>12</sup> In addition, investments in infrastructure are being negatively affected by fiscal belt-tightening and in some cases are set back by the effects of the corruption that is being slowly unveiled throughout the region. There is a dire need for an expansion of public services, based more on quality improvements and the joint provision of multiple services simultaneously than on efforts to expand coverage.

The third trend is recognising the interdependence between what happens in rural areas and processes that are vital for development, stability and well-being in the region's countries. Rural poverty is closely connected—often as both cause

and effect—with the region's basing the lion's share of its growth on extractive industries, which are usually located in rural areas. Rural poverty is linked with nutrition and the feeding of cities; with containing the growth of illegal economies, such as drug trafficking, illegal mining and illegal logging; with internal and international migration; with violence in cities and the lack of public security; with the persistence of gender and generational inequities, as well as those related to groups of indigenous and African descent; and with climate change and increasing environmental vulnerability.<sup>13</sup> Rural poverty needs to be eliminated not only due to a moral imperative or to ensure citizenship and rights to rural people, but because it is at the core of several interlinked processes affecting opportunities for development and peace in rural and urban areas.

#### Rural poverty in 2030: will it matter?

The World Bank (2018) recently published a call to consider various ways of measuring poverty to better understand it and address the challenge of eliminating extreme poverty by 2030, ensuring sustained pathways towards improving the well-being of populations living in poverty. It also called for more urgent initiatives, because at the current pace, this goal will likely not be achieved.<sup>14</sup>

It is important to add, however, that even if high and sustained growth rates in Latin America are indeed achieved in the next few years, structural inequalities

“ A renewed emphasis on the sustained reduction of rural poverty is fundamental to achieving social inclusion for all citizens.



Photo: Pedro Ventura/Agência Brasília. The programme for the purchase of agricultural production ensures the purchase of foods from smallholder farmers, Brasília, Brazil, 2015 <<https://bit.ly/1mhaR6e>>.

remain. For example, there are still persistent gaps between urban and rural areas, which demonstrate that rural areas respond less to growth. Moreover, the gaps could widen with economic growth alone.<sup>15</sup>

In this scenario of moderate growth and persistent rural lag, there is an urgent need for renewed debate to identify issues and commit to new interventions targeting rural areas. Learning from the successes of past decades, this could lead to envisioning a new pathway towards the elimination of rural poverty. Above all, however, it is crucial to ensure that the rural world is at the centre of any development agenda, as illustrated by the SDGs of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

A renewed emphasis on the sustained reduction of rural poverty is fundamental to achieving social inclusion for all citizens. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO 2018), 132 of the 169 indicators that measure progress toward the 17 SDGs depend on the rural world to some extent, with 36 of those depending exclusively on progress in rural areas. There will be no substantive progress in achieving these goals if rural lag is not addressed.

This renewed emphasis will make it possible to capitalise on the results achieved so far and on lessons learned about poverty reduction, and to spur development processes that include

and are centred on the rural world, which requires leaders who work together and have actual decision-making power. It is both a political and an economic issue. The challenge today, with higher or lower growth rates, is to create the conditions for such leaders to emerge and act, so that they may carry greater weight in public debate, grounded in an institutional framework that guarantees the resources— financial, political, human, cooperative etc.—to launch a new cycle of policies, commitments, knowledge and political debate around the urgent need to eliminate rural poverty.

Latin American countries have relevant experience from recent years on rural poverty reduction that could be unpacked to define an interlinked set of policies and interventions aiming to eliminate rural poverty. This set of actions will need to consider at least five key intervention areas: the development of family farming; expanded social protection (including economic inclusion); non-agricultural development and jobs; new business models to sustainably manage and use natural resources; and the provision of complete sets of rural infrastructure (roads, energy, communications etc.). There needs to be significant institutional change so that the public and private sectors are able to provide all these interventions together, in an interconnected fashion, instead of one at a time.

The main challenge, however, remains the inclusion in national agendas of concrete commitments to eliminate rural poverty. ●

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Photo: Becky Williams. Rural school in Honduras, 2014 <<https://bit.ly/1jNlqZo>>.

“ Latin American countries have relevant experience from recent years on rural poverty reduction that could be unpacked to define an interlinked set of policies and interventions aiming to eliminate rural poverty.

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1. Institute of Peruvian Studies (*Instituto de Estudios Peruanos*—IEP) and coordinator of the Alliance for the Elimination of Rural Poverty (FAO/IFAD). The author is grateful to Carlos Urrutia for his support.

2. See <<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/poverty/>>.

3. Around 1990 the rural poverty rate was more than 65 per cent and extreme poverty more than 40 per cent (ECLAC 2018).

4. See <<https://ophi.org.uk>>.

5. Honduras and Guatemala could be considered exceptions.

6. Conditional cash transfers targeting women with children and social pensions (unconditional cash transfers) are relevant. Almost every country in the region features these types of programmes. In Latin America more than 120 million people live in households that receive at least one cash transfer programme. Although not all of them cover rural areas, a significant proportion of poor rural households benefit from these programmes.

7. As recommended by the World Bank (2018), we need to figure out the poverty puzzle.

8. Regional GDP was 50 per cent higher in 2016 than in 2002, and per capita GDP grew by 26 per cent over the same time period (ECLAC 2018).

9. In 1950, only 42 per cent of the population of Latin America lived in an urban centre (ECLAC 2017).

10. A complementary and equally important issue is the urgent need to evaluate the definitions of ‘rural’ used in the region. Current definitions have raised serious questions. See the argument posed by Dirven (2011).

11. Calvo-Gonzalez et al. (2017) estimate that nearly two thirds of the reduction in poverty in Latin America is attributable to economic growth. Trivelli and Urrutia (2018) replicate the study for Peru, and while finding similar results for overall poverty, the percentage of rural poverty reduction attributable to growth was only around 50 per cent. The reduction of rural poverty requires more than just economic growth.

12. Not only due to the more limited fiscal space in most countries but also to a change in the relevant political orientation of various countries (Brazil being the main example). The last scalable innovation in social policies was the implementation of cash transfer programmes. Challenges still include coverage and complementarity among social programmes and the quality of services—such as education and health care—and interventions to support sustained economic inclusion of poor populations. These challenges are well discussed in Levy (2015).

13. For an extended discussion of the multiple interdependencies of rural poverty, see FAO (2018).

14. According to the World Bank’s estimates, to achieve the global goal of eradicating extreme poverty, countries would have to grow at an average annual rate of 8 per cent.

15. There is an interesting contrast between how Latin America followed a different path from South East Asia, where before achieving high economic growth rates, agriculture and rural areas received significant investments and were subject to reforms that allowed them to better realise the benefits of future economic growth.

# Sustainable rural livelihoods and the Sustainable Development Goals<sup>1</sup>

Ian Scoones<sup>2</sup>

## The Sustainable Development Goals: an ambitious agenda for rural development

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have laid out an ambitious agenda for all of humanity. Making them a reality is, however, a significant challenge. With 17 goals, numerous targets and indicators and a voluntary, country-led process, the danger is that a bureaucratic box-ticking exercise will ensue. Yet the SDGs offer the opportunity to connect the challenges of rural development in new and potentially transformative ways.

All goals are of course relevant, everywhere, and it is the interactions between them that are essential, with impacts differentiated by location and social group. Rather than focus on one goal or another around special interests or sectoral priorities, the challenge should be to connect sustainable development challenges in ways that make sense for particular people and places.

This article argues that linking livelihoods approaches with political economy analysis is an essential step, requiring new platforms, methods, skills, people and institutions for an integrated approach to connecting SDG implementation in rural areas.

## The rise, fall and new rise of sustainable livelihoods approaches

How can this be accomplished? One possible way is to draw on and expand frameworks that have proven helpful for generating integrative development thinking and practice in the past. One such framework is the 'sustainable livelihoods framework' (Scoones 1998). Created many years before the SDGs, it became popular among donor agencies, international organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and national governments (Ashley and Carney 1999; Hussein 2002). It offered the prospect of getting out of narrow, sectoral silos and connecting development challenges across fields through a bottom-up perspective. In relation to rural livelihoods, agriculture was linked to off-farm diversification and

migration to towns and the importance of remittance flows, while the ability to undertake any of these activities was related to access to resources (demarcated then in relation to a series of 'capitals') and the functioning of institutions and organisations.

In turn, outcomes could be assessed in relation to diverse criteria, including income, inequality, empowerment, 'decent work' and environmental sustainability—or indeed any other criterion seen to be important in any setting. Wider contexts were also seen to influence different livelihood pathways, whether in relation to politics, terms of trade, climate change or cultural norms. In other words, the framework, starting from how people made a living in particular places, spanned the full range of the SDGs, elaborating connections from the ground up, rather than suggesting goals and targets from above

Livelihoods thinking emerged in response to the problems of narrow sectoral approaches, arguing for an interdisciplinary, holistic analysis to define responses that made sense. Since the peak of enthusiasm in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the popularity of livelihoods approaches has waned. Many agencies, including early advocates, refocused on a narrow economic agenda, where more participatory, inclusive approaches to rural development were replaced in favour of efforts to improve business or trade or to support particular groups. The skills associated with livelihoods programming and wider policy analysis were often lost, as policy agendas, institutional mandates and career incentives narrowed.

Despite their many successes, livelihoods approaches were seen to be too open-ended, and not suitable for an impact-led, results-based agenda. Institutional and professional biases reasserted themselves, as the specialists in economic analysis—social policy or agronomy, for example—reclaimed their budgets and institutional positions. It is not as if these themes were not present in the various livelihoods approaches that emerged earlier; they just

did not have supremacy, and budgets, power and control were less concentrated in an integrated, cross-sectoral approach.

Of course, many continue to use livelihoods approaches for research, policy and practice around the world. Complex problems require integrated responses. 'Complexity-aware programming', 'adaptive management' and 'resilience approaches' are some of the labels that persist, often without incorporating the lessons learned from earlier approaches. Nevertheless, many students and practitioners continue to make use of the many variants of the sustainable livelihoods framework, even if departmental labels, job descriptions and budget line designations have changed.

## Connecting the SDGs: the need for an integrated approach

With the faddism of the development industry, it is of course no surprise that ideas, concepts and frameworks come and go. However, the emergence of the SDGs as an overarching approach to development, agreed across the United Nations system, suggests that a grounded and integrative approach is urgently needed if implementation is to deliver the type of radical transformations envisaged. Sustainable rural development will not be realised if policymakers and practitioners proceed goal by goal, target by target, governed by elaborate monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and impact protocols. Instead, a return to a more integrated approach is required, allowing debates to occur about synergies, connections and trade-offs across the SDGs.

Negotiating across the SDGs is inevitably a political process. For example, investing in large-scale commercial farming may result in increased employment and a growth in trade, but will it decrease rural inequality and protect land and water resources alongside climate mitigation with long, export-based value chains and high-input fossil fuel-based mechanisation? By contrast, small-scale production may offer opportunities for a more sustainable use of resources, but it may remain embedded in structures of power

that are not conducive to gender equality, and working, health and safety conditions may be less than acceptable.

Achieving sustainability across environmental, economic and social spheres is, therefore, centrally about political negotiation between different actors and interests. The pathways that emerge, and the directions that social and technical innovation takes, necessarily involve some people winning, while others lose out. What is 'best' for a particular place cannot be decided through technocratic diktat but must emerge through inclusive, participatory deliberation that allows for dissent, disagreement and inevitable conflict. Such processes must involve political negotiations, and require people and institutions, at local, national and global levels, to broker, facilitate and allow

all voices to be heard, and alternative pathways to sustainable development to be uncovered and realised (Leach et al. 2010).

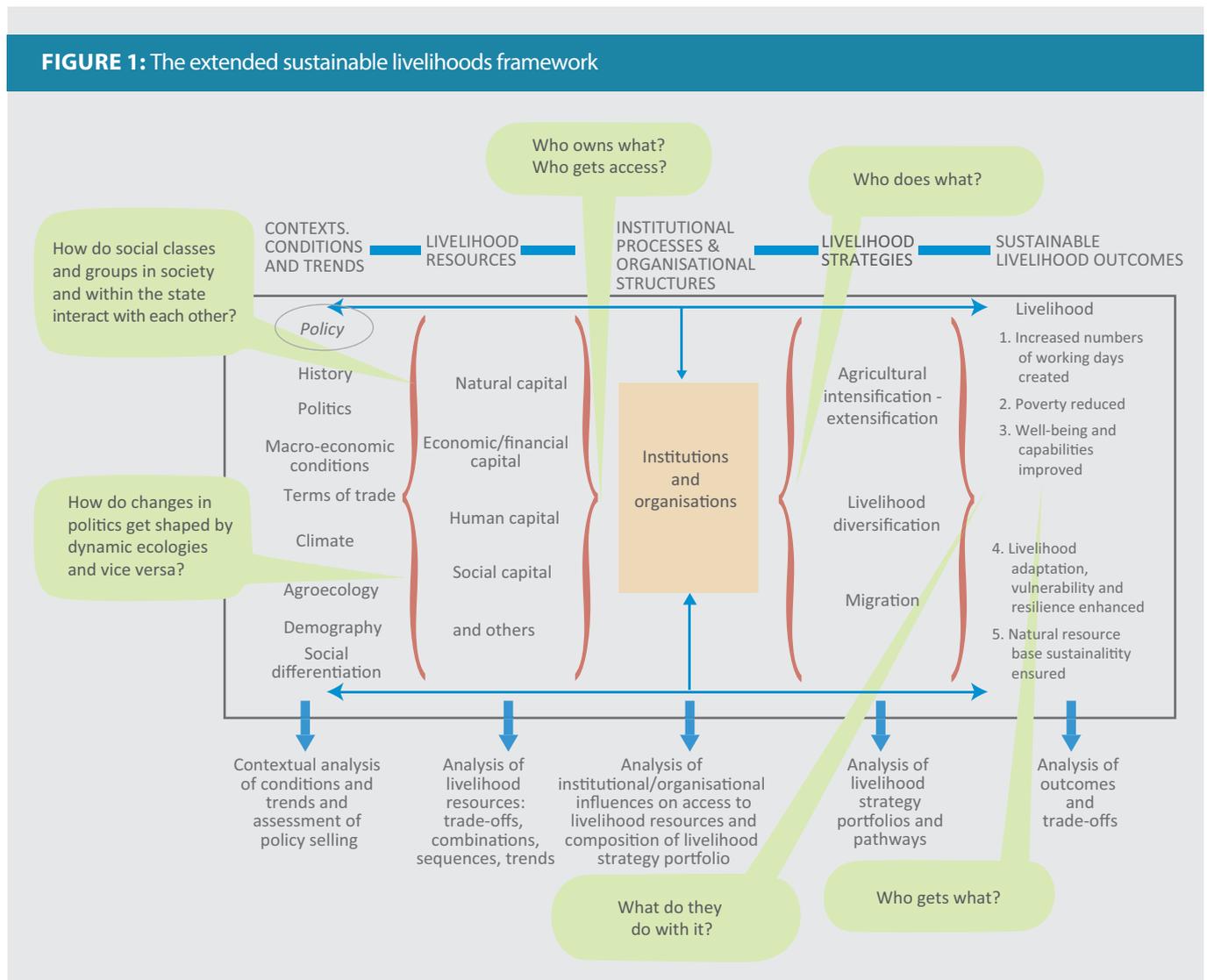
**Power and political economy: extending the livelihoods approach**

Some of the very legitimate critiques of the early versions of the sustainable livelihoods framework—and particularly the versions that were adapted for use by development agencies—focused on the lack of attention to politics, power and political economy. Some argued that the approach was too deterministic and too technocratic and contestation, dispute and patterns of winners and losers were not made clear (De Haan and Zoomers 2005; Sakdapolrak 2014). Politics of course appeared in discussions of the 'institutions and organisations' acting as mediating between resources and activities, and

so affecting outcomes; but in many of the more operational applications, this element became side-lined in favour of a rather mechanistic institutional or policy design focus, rather than attention to the contestations around access and control, as originally intended.

A decade after the publication of a Working Paper that outlined the sustainable livelihoods framework (of course drawing on many precedents, most notably the foundational work by Robert Chambers and Gordon Conway (1992), but also earlier traditions of integrative rural analysis), I was persuaded—somewhat reluctantly—to reflect back on the applications of the sustainable livelihoods framework in order to look forward (Scoones 2009). This paper was later developed into a short book, *Sustainable*

**FIGURE 1:** The extended sustainable livelihoods framework



Source: Scoones (2015).

“ The SDGs offer the opportunity to connect the challenges of rural development in new and potentially transformative ways.



Photo: Tri Saputro/CIFOR. A villager taps a rubber tree, Indonesia, 2013 <<https://bit.ly/OJZNil>>.

*Livelihoods and Rural Development*, which aimed to link the original framework with a wider concern with agrarian political economy, making politics, power and control central (Scoones 2015). The result was an extended framework diagram, articulating key questions in agrarian political economy (Figure 1).

Four core questions are asked (Bernstein et al. 1992, 24–25; Bernstein 2010):

- Who owns what (or who has access to what)? This relates to questions of property and ownership of livelihood assets and resources.
- Who does what? This relates to the social divisions of labour, the distinctions between those employing and employed, as well as to divisions based on gender and age.
- Who gets what? This relates to questions of income and assets, and patterns of accumulation over time, and so to processes of social and economic differentiation.
- What do they do with it? This relates to the array of livelihood strategies and their consequences as reflected in patterns of consumption, social reproduction, savings and investment.

In addition to these four, we can add two more, both focused on the social and ecological challenges that characterise contemporary societies:

- How do social classes and groups in society and within the State interact with each other? This focuses on the social relations, institutions and forms of domination in society and between citizens and the State as they affect livelihoods.
- How are changes in politics shaped by dynamic ecologies and vice versa? This relates to questions of political ecology, and to how environmental dynamics influence livelihoods. These in turn are shaped by livelihood activities through patterns of resource access and entitlement.

Taken together, these six questions, all central to critical agrarian and environmental studies, provide an excellent starting point for any analysis across the SDGs, when seeking to link rural livelihoods with the political economy of agrarian change in any setting.

Long-term, historical patterns of structurally defined relations of power between social groups are central, as are processes of economic and political control by the State and other powerful actors, together with differential patterns of production, accumulation, investment and reproduction across society. Methodologically, such an approach requires attention to the tensions, contradictions and opportunities that arise between the highly specific, diverse, complex and contextual settings within which livelihoods are played out

and the wider structural, historical and relational forces that continuously shape and reshape what is possible for whom. Following the plea of Bridget O’Laughlin (2004), this allows analysis to move beyond mere empirical description of multiple cases to explanations rooted in understandings of wider structural relations, patterns and processes.

Taking a differentiated view of rural livelihoods in any context, we see that rural dwellers may be farmers, workers, traders, brokers, transporters, carers and others, with links spread across the urban–rural divide. Classes are not unitary, naturalised or static. Given this diversity of hybrid livelihood strategies and class identities, accumulation—and, therefore, social differentiation and class formation—takes place through a complex, relational dynamic over time (Cousins 2010).

Indeed, only with a longitudinal perspective, rooted in an understanding of the political economy of agrarian change, can longer-term trajectories of livelihoods be discerned. Rural livelihoods are not isolated and independent, amenable to narrow development interventions, but tied to what is happening elsewhere, both locally and more broadly. For these reasons, a wider political economy perspective is essential for any effective livelihoods analysis, and indeed any assessment of SDG interactions.

### **Making political economy central to the SDGs**

It is essential to rescue the SDGs from a graveyard of technocratic-bureaucratic approaches, where goal-specific indicators, monitoring and impact assessment take over, locked into a sectoral view of the world, where the politics of interactions, connections and negotiations are ignored.

This requires new ways of thinking and working, and a revived livelihoods approach, rooted in an understanding of political economy can offer a way forward. By examining diverse pathways of change in a particular area, the contests between SDGs come to the fore, with winners and losers identified. Asking the six questions highlighted earlier shows how accumulation by some affects others, and how benefits and their distribution are contested over time.

Only with such an analysis can we get to the heart of the politics of the SDGs, and establish the platforms that are required for real transformative change. This will require new integrative institutions, with new people with new skills of more integrative analysis and practice. Reinventing, revitalising and resuscitating sustainable livelihoods approaches, but adapting and extending them for new demands, presents an urgent challenge for rural development and the SDGs. ●

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1. This article draws on Scoones (2015).
2. ESRC STEPS Centre, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, Falmer, Brighton BN1 9RE, UK <[www.steps-centre.org](http://www.steps-centre.org)>.

“Rural livelihoods are not isolated and independent, amenable to narrow development interventions, but tied to what is happening elsewhere, both locally and more broadly.”

# A multisectoral rural poverty reduction strategy: key components

Maya Takagi and  
Ana Paula de la O Campos<sup>1</sup>

Poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon, and as such, strategies to reduce it should recognise and address its different manifestations.<sup>2</sup> The following approaches, conceived and evolving over time, can be considered part of the developmental efforts to address the multidimensional aspects of rural poverty, recognising the role of agriculture as an important sector:

- **Inclusive value chain development** aims to address poverty through improved linkages between businesses and poor households (Horton et al. 2016). These models are based on the integration of broader dimensions of agricultural production and natural resources management—for example, passing on increased shares of export prices to producers, including input provisions, storing, processing, transportation, trade and distribution. One of the most successful examples that integrates all these elements is that of the cocoa sector in Ghana (see Vigneri and Kolavalli 2018).
  - **Income diversification and employment generation:** Promotion of non-farm activities with the aim of providing additional support for poor farmers, through infrastructure development, investments in small industries, fostering local food markets and services; and investment by public–private partnerships in rural areas for the generation of labour-intensive sectors. The generation of off-farm employment was a critical piece of China’s success in reducing poverty (see de Janvry et al. 2005).
  - **Combining social assistance with economic inclusion interventions** that result in an integrated and sequenced package of programmes that target extremely poor people. These interventions aim to address the inequitable distribution of resources and market failures, including access to assets, land, animals, labour, tools and human capital; enhance access to liquidity and credit; reduce the burden of care; and improve the ability to manage risk (Davis 2014). For a successful application in Peru, see Escobal and Ponce (2016).
  - **Local and territorial development:** Local development is a process of diversification and enhancement of economic and social activity at local scale, in a specific geographical space or ‘territory’, through the mobilisation and coordination of its material and immaterial resources. A territorial approach to development recognises the complexity of social, political, economic and environmental interactions within a territory and works to empower local stakeholders to find sustainable solutions to natural resource and developmental challenges, including poverty reduction (FAO 2014). This approach has been implemented in several countries in Latin America (Brazil, El Salvador and Colombia), as a mechanism for implementing their national development plans.
  - **Participatory community development** is a process in which communities define the priorities and share the results of the policies and initiatives. It requires active engagement of all members of the community; building critical consciousness; advocating for the inclusion of women, children and illiterate, poor and excluded people; opening spaces for involvement in decision-making; and building political capabilities for democratic engagement (Cornwall 2002). This approach has been implemented in India through the *Panchayati-Raj*, a constitutional body and implementation mechanisms of rural development programmes, and the *Gram Sabha*, a forum of participation of rural people that aims to provide a voice to the poorest members of their communities.
- These different approaches have had varying degrees of success in their implementation. However, they all point to important elements that are necessary for addressing the multidimensional nature of rural poverty. Based on minimum living standards established by the multidimensional poverty measures, as well as different approaches of participatory rural development and poverty reduction, the key components of a multisectoral strategy for rural poverty reduction could be based on the following components, depending on the different needs and priorities of distinct countries and their populations:
- **Basic investments** (services and infrastructure): Ensuring the provision of adequate services for education, health care, roads and connectivity to urban spaces.
  - **Social assistance:** Social protection instruments for poor and extremely poor people. This includes information systems and data collection instruments, enabling governments to identify poor and vulnerable people. This can be developed at territorial level, including community targeting mechanisms. In addition, mechanisms are needed to enhance the shock-responsiveness of social protection programmes to crises and/or climate events, including for non-poor people.
  - **Productive inclusion**, which comprises initiatives that enable poor people to access economic opportunities in different sectors. This entails agricultural development and fostering the sustainable management of resources, including agro-ecological zoning—which defines the suitability of areas for the production of specific crops, considering climate variability and market access; analysis and articulation of market options using a territorial/urban–rural linkages approach; special grants for developing and implementing investment plans for agricultural development and

environmental schemes, focused on poor small-scale producers, and forest communities; capacity development of rural organisations and the formation of associations to support their access to markets and credit; and developing public credit and insurance systems for small-scale producers.

- **Pro-poor value chain development** is also vital, including the identification of job-intensive value chains at territorial level, in agriculture (crop, fisheries, forestry etc.) as well as within the environmental sector, according to agro-ecological characteristics; special grants or loans for local governments to develop and implement investment plans for industrial development; skills development tied to the job profiles demanded by value chain development, with differentiated approaches for working with youth, women, indigenous peoples and other vulnerable groups; and infrastructure and market plans for industries associated with investment projects, promoting urban–rural linkages through markets.

The different components of a multisectoral strategy need to reinforce each other. To that end, they must be implemented simultaneously, in the same targeted territories, and also aligned with other fundamental macroeconomic and structural reforms to promote inclusive growth. The implementation of these basic elements is often compartmentalised, creating numerous initiatives and projects that are funded by different partners, do not communicate with each other and, thus, fail to build on each other.

Fostering participatory mechanisms and coordination is extremely important, as this allows communities themselves to define their own priorities, as well as their own implementation and monitoring mechanisms. It can also facilitate better integration of initiatives towards a multisectoral strategy. Therefore, a fourth component of the strategy could include a component aimed at enhancing multisectoral and multi-stakeholder coordination:

- **Coordination:** Promoting the creation of coordination mechanisms between involved ministries at the national



Photo: UN Women/Ryan Brown. Woman diversifies her sources of income, Aldea Campur, Guatemala, 2018 <<https://bit.ly/OJZNii>>.

and regional levels, with clear mandates, decision-making power, budgets and incentives, and reporting mechanisms. This includes consultative mechanisms with civil society and rural organisations; strategic partnerships with the private sector to foster access to markets, infrastructure and job creation; developing a monitoring and evaluation system; and maintaining communication, transparency and accountability mechanisms. ●

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1. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).
2. The Oxford Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), for example, includes three dimensions and ten indicators that already provide clear policy guidance on how poverty is reduced: enhancing access to food (either through employment or social protection support), a minimum level of living standards and basic services (health, education).

# Resilience and rural poverty reduction

Marygold Walsh-Dilley<sup>1</sup>

Poverty reduction efforts must attend to questions of resilience because climate, market and social volatility threatens to undo them. Poor people are the most vulnerable to such changes. This is particularly true in rural areas, where both the majority of the world's poor people reside and the primary economic activity—agriculture—is already highly dependent on frequently unpredictable climate and market cycles. Thus, resilience thinking should be an important part of development strategies, critical to pursuing the development goals of reducing poverty and ending hunger.

However, resilience-building itself is not necessarily equitable or pro-poor if the voices and needs of rural poor people are not integrated into resilience definitions and efforts (Matin et al. 2018; Béné et al. 2014). For resilience to be a truly useful tool for development and not just another re-enactment of existing strategies, practitioners and policymakers must take care to engage in resilience frameworks in careful and critical ways. Development practitioners and policymakers who want to use resilience thinking must consider the politics of resilience, that equitable or pro-poor resilience requires paying attention to how power is distributed and how vulnerabilities emerge, and that building resilience might be at odds with growth or efficiency goals. Taking these three factors into account will go a long way to ensuring that we foster a version of resilience that is equitable and socially just, and able to contribute to the sustainability of development goals.

Resilience thinking is a dynamic framework oriented towards recognising and encouraging the capabilities and opportunities that abound in even highly vulnerable or constrained environments. The approach recognises not just the failures among rural poor populations, but that these communities possess and can cultivate resources and strategies for flexibility, adaptation and innovation to help them cope with adversity. The resilience concept in use today draws on several fields,

including ecology, psychology and disaster risk reduction. Social-ecological systems resilience, an idea that came out of ecology in the 1970s, stood against equilibrium theories by highlighting that unexpected shocks and threats to a system often resulted in systemic change.

The most successful systems, this perspective argues, are those that are resilient to change by adapting to threats (Folke 2006). Psychological perspectives on resilience that emerged at the same time emphasised the positive strengths and competencies that ensure adaptation by individuals or populations within the context of trauma or adversity, and, like ecology, encourage a vision of resilience that nests the individual within larger systems (Masden 2001; Murray and Zautra 2012). Disaster and hazards management perspectives emphasise the need for planning and preparedness to mitigate the negative effect of shocks (CINRHD 2012). Taking these perspectives together, we can see some of the cross-disciplinary power of resilience thinking: recognising change as a central dynamic to our social-ecological reality, we can foster our human capacities for planning, organising and building relationships to help us cope with the negative impacts of such change.

As practitioners and institutions turn towards resilience as a key process for development, we are learning more about how to foster resilience in the context of poverty and insecurity. Some characteristics that contribute to resilience include (see Bahadur et al. (2014) and Walsh-Dilley et al. (2013) for reviews):

- **Diversity and redundancy:** Diversity, including crop and other ecological diversity, diversity of livelihood strategies and diversity of backgrounds and experiences within the human community, encourages resilience because it provides alternatives and helps manage risk when strategies become compromised by quick shocks or slow-moving threats. Human diversity fosters a range of knowledge and learning opportunities that can be harnessed to respond to hazards.

Redundancy, too, can contribute to adaptive capacity by providing back-up systems. A diversity of crops means resilience to particular diseases or stressors, and a diversity of livelihood strategies, including those outside agriculture, means resilience in the face of drought or market downturns.

- **Education and the capacity to learn,** including informal, indigenous or local knowledges: Cultivating the ability to learn helps create novel solutions and creative strategies for coping with unexpected challenges. A key assumption of social-ecological systems theory is that we do not always know how threats will impact our systems on the ground; therefore, we must remain intellectually flexible to devise solutions once those impacts become apparent. The implication is that hierarchical systems of command-and-control or expert-driven efforts are not always the primary or most important ways to build resilience, because they lack site-specific, timely knowledge and are less able to nimbly and flexibly respond to shocks (Scoones 1999). Blending different forms of knowledge gives a better chance of anticipating and managing processes of change (Mitchell and Harris 2012). Formal education is important, but so too are opportunities such as farmer-to-farmer learning, opportunities to share indigenous knowledge, lay experimentation and other forms of informal learning and knowledge generation.
- **Adaptive governance and connectivity between institutions at different scales:** Governance institutions that are decentralised and adaptive foster resilience because they are more in touch with local realities and needs and are more flexible. Civic engagement and democratic participation are important; having strong institutions that foster engagement means that people are better able to organise in the face of shocks. Resilience may require quick reorganisation of governance structures. And, especially



Photo: UN Women/Gaganjit Singh. Rural women share their experiences of using technology to catalyse change <<https://bit.ly/OJZNil>>.

“ Resilience thinking is a dynamic framework oriented towards recognising and encouraging the capabilities and opportunities that abound in even highly vulnerable or constrained environments.

for rural areas, the oversight of natural resources by local users can contribute both to mitigating or preparing for potential threats as well as a quick ability to respond to threats.

- **Preparedness:** Communities that work together in advance of shocks, planning for known threats and exercising creative problem-solving, are better able to adapt than communities that do not. This preparatory work establishes processes and pathways through which adaptation and coping can take place.
- **Equity:** The equitable distribution of risk, and high levels of equity in general, contribute to building resilient communities (Nelson et al. 2007). Unequal societies are more likely to have uneven adaptive outcomes, such that the resilience of some comes as the expense of others. Justice and equity are important considerations to make when developing preparedness pathways.
- **Social cohesion and shared social values and ethics:** Groups that trust each other are better able to reach agreement and distribute resources equitably during a crisis. This is built by stronger social networks, social capital and solidarity, and fostered by civic engagement and social interaction.

Many of these characteristics overlap, providing a strong network of resources for resilience. However, while resilience

is a dynamic framework with potential to generate productive innovation in development practice, it is also important to avoid the assumption that resilience is both easily understood and necessarily good (Hornborg 2009). Resilience is a socially constructed concept, whose definition, conceptualisation and operationalisation are negotiated across different sets of actors (Beymer-Farris et al. 2012). That is, ‘resilience’ is not an objective state or outcome to achieve, but is, rather, determined in good part through political processes. How resilience is defined, and who gets to do so, is not straightforward. Resilience is conceptualised and used by different groups to serve a variety of interests and purposes (Cretney 2014), but not all groups have the same access to power to have their priorities heard and included in these discussions (Walsh-Dilley and Wolford 2015).

These questions about whose knowledge and values matter have important consequences. Resilience-building efforts or outcomes may favour some parts of social-ecological systems over others, and compromises and trade-offs are necessarily part of resilience efforts (Cote and Nightingale 2011; Coulthard 2012). Even the scale of resilience can be contentious, as approaches that frame resilience as adhering to individuals—as is common throughout development practice (Mackinnon and Derrickson 2013; Watts 2011)—can come at the expense of collective action and political solutions to crises (Aradau 2014).

“ Recognising change as a central dynamic to our social-ecological reality, we can foster our human capacities for planning, organising and building relationships to help us cope with the negative impacts of such change.



Photo: Kate Evans/CIFOR. Acai nursery - a state government initiative to assist reforestation, Acre, Brazil, 2013 <<https://bit.ly/OJZNil>>.

Resilience theories are forward-looking, enjoining us to anticipate threats and ensure the capacities for future adaptation. Yet such approaches are critiqued for failing to look backwards; they frequently leave unexamined how and why particular groups or individuals experience greater vulnerability to shocks or changes (Watts 2011; Adger 2006).

These vulnerabilities are often directly linked with contemporary outcomes such as poverty, hunger or poor health. Thus, to be truly pro-poor, ‘equitable resilience’ must take into account “social vulnerability and differentiated access to power, knowledge, and resources” (Matin et al. 2018, 198). Without adequate access to resources, including education, governance institutions and mechanisms for political inclusion, vulnerable communities are excluded from decision-making related to adaptation and risk management, creating barriers to resilience-building (Matin et al. 2018). Access to these resources is precisely most uncertain for rural poor populations, who are less likely to be integrated into formal institutions of education and governance.

For rural people, access to land and water—and the meaningful opportunity to participate in their governance—are also critical for building adaptive capacities. Rights-based approaches emphasise that access to the social, political and natural resources needed to build resilience should be protected as rights. Vulnerable people are entitled to the resources they need to build the capacity for resilience (Walsh-Dilley

et al. 2015; Adger 2006). Access to these resources helps minimise vulnerability and generate opportunities for autochthonous and local resilience-building.

Resilience-building makes sense and fits in with other development strategies. It bears restating, however, that resilience-building is not the same as poverty reduction, risk management or growth. Since redundancy, diversity and social-ecological relationships are central to building resilience, efficiency concerns are external to resilience frameworks. Highly resilient systems will likely grow more slowly, perhaps making slower gains at poverty reduction, but these gains will be less vulnerable to reversal when conditions inevitably change (Folke 2006). Monocropped plantation agriculture, for example, is highly efficient and easily integrated into market structures, but it also creates vulnerability to disease and market volatility.

A rural system that emphasises diversity in terms of crops planted and sources of livelihoods is more likely to remain viable when the market for a particular crop falls or a disease attacking a particular crop spreads. Risk management is also synergistic with resilience but is not equivalent, since risk management works best to identify and mitigate the impact of known hazards and measurable risks (see Park et al. 2011; Mitchell and Harris 2012).

Managing for resilience—building in flexibility, adaptive capacity, diversity and equity as strategies for the unknown

shocks and volatility of the future—might look quite different from these other development strategies.

Resilience-building is not necessarily pro-poor or the most efficient means of reducing poverty. Indeed, resilience frameworks have been thoroughly critiqued from the social sciences for favouring the already advantaged and privileging existing, frequently highly unequal, social relations (MacKinnon and Derickson 2013; Watts 2011; Matin 2018). Nonetheless, including resilience thinking in development strategies has great potential to improve outcomes for poor people and ensure that they are not made more vulnerable to the volatility of climate, market or politics. But resilience is not objective or neutral. It is both a concept whose definition and measurement involves political contestation and a process that is constantly being worked out, with the aim of providing and protecting the resources available to rural poor populations—those who are particularly vulnerable to environmental and social shocks. Putting rural communities in the driver’s seat to shape what resilience-building looks like will go a long way towards supporting equitable and pro-poor resilience capacities. ●

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Photo: UN Women/Ryan Brown. Rural women diversify incomes and build resilience, Aldea Campur, Guatemala, 2018 <<https://bit.ly/OJZNil>>.

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1. University of New Mexico.

# Land access and control: rights, reform, and restitution<sup>1</sup>

Ben M. McKay<sup>2</sup>

Policies concerning access to and effective control over land and other natural resources are crucial for inclusive growth and poverty eradication. Despite global trends of migration from rural to urban areas, poverty and hunger remain disproportionately rural problems. Over 70 per cent of the estimated 1.4 billion people living in extreme poverty worldwide reside in the countryside, and the vast majority (86 per cent) depend on agriculture—and land—for their primary source of livelihood (World Bank 2007; IFAD 2010). Small-scale farms provide a livelihood for 2.5 billion people and produce the majority of the world's food supply, including up to 80 per cent in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa (IFAD 2016). Their access to land and other productive resources is vital for an inclusive and sustainable development model.

Yet in the current global context, land access for small farmers—and particularly poor people in rural areas—is increasingly threatened by agro-extractivist<sup>3</sup> expansion, as well as what the World Bank refers to as the “rising global interest in farmland”, otherwise known as ‘global land grabbing’ (Deininger and Byerlee 2011; Borras et al. 2012). The extractive character of industrial agriculture is not only environmentally destructive but also excludes poor rural populations and is often controlled by multinational market oligopolies, putting into question what socio-economic benefits actually remain in-country (McKay 2017). These new dynamics are increasing the rate of rural–urban migration and forcing poor people in rural areas into precarious conditions of pluriactivity, as rural poverty is, for the first time in a decade, on the rise (Urioste 2017; FAO 2018).

In this context, it is urgent and necessary to not only focus on redistributive land policies but a more comprehensive set of policies which explicitly focus on the most marginalised, vulnerable and commonly excluded populations. Rather than leaving access to and control over land to the

whims of the market, it is argued that land policies need to have a pro-poor design with participation from both the State and civil society to democratise land control and enable rural people to have an adequate standard of living, free from impoverishment and injustice.

## Recognising and addressing forms of exclusion

Exclusion can take many forms, but it is worth highlighting four fundamental forms that are common in many rural societies:

- i. socio-economic or ‘productive’ exclusion;
- ii. gender-based exclusion;
- iii. generational-based exclusion; and
- iv. ethnic-based exclusion. Pro-poor land policies should recognise the plurality of the marginalised and most vulnerable peoples and address these principal forms of exclusion.

## Socio-economic or ‘productive’ exclusion

Poor people in rural areas are often excluded from accessing land and other necessary productive resources due to the very nature of their impoverishment: they cannot afford land, do not have sufficient access to credit and cannot make the necessary capital investments for production (see McKay and Colque 2016). In this regard, land policies need to have an explicit ‘pro-poor’ character—that is, they must transfer land-based wealth and power to poor people. Rather than understanding landed property rights as tradeable commodities to be allocated most efficiently, we need to understand that they in fact represent social relations between people (Tsing 2002). Redistributive land policies are not simply about redistributing the land title to the landless, but fundamentally transforming the unequal land-based social relations in rural society. This entails ensuring that poor people have both access to and control over the land and other productive resources to put that land into production. This includes access

to payable credit, technical assistance, markets, infrastructure, education and capital, as well as real representation and participation in the institutions that govern.

## Gender-based exclusion

Historically, land reform programmes were often gender-blind, assuming that the household would distribute resources equitably. Men were often identified as the ‘heads of household’, and the land title was often solely under their name, ignoring the well-being of women not only regarding intra-household relations but also their lack of rights in the event of divorce or widowhood (see Razavi 2007). Presently, across many countries in Latin America, land policies have changed to a dual-headed household system, recognising and giving rights both to men and women as the heads of household and land title owners.

However, there is a crucial difference between women's land rights being formally recognised on paper and making those rights real, meaningful and tangible. In Latin America, for example, progressive-left governments in Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador and Venezuela incorporated gender equality into their agrarian reform/land regularisation programmes, yet with very different results. Deere (2017) finds that women have achieved stronger, more tangible land rights in Brazil and Bolivia predominantly due to the role of relatively autonomous rural and urban women's organisational alliances, their active participation in civil society in making demands to the State, and the role of women in key positions within the State.

This is in contrast to Ecuador and Venezuela, where “the voice of organized rural women has been rather muted” with regards to gender equality in new land policies, which has resulted in weaker, less tangible rights to, and effective control over, land (Deere 2017, 274). The participation and empowerment of women in decision-making arenas, both in civil society and within the state apparatus, is of crucial importance for gender equality.

### Generational-based exclusion

For rural youth, access to land and employment opportunities has become increasingly difficult. In many regions throughout the world, the availability of land is dwindling, as new (transnational) actors have emerged eager to invest in land, leading to a concentration of control (Borras et al. 2011).

For small-scale farms, land is often insufficient to divide among children, while the highly mechanised trajectory of agro-industrial development has decreased the need for labour. Young people cannot wait for many years to take over the farm, much less if the conditions for small-scale farmers remain poor. If this trajectory continues, the majority of rural youth will be forced to migrate elsewhere, raising important questions for the future of young people, rural areas and our food system (see White 2012). Can urban areas absorb the billions of smallholders threatened by agro-industrial expansion? Or will such rural populations become surplus to the needs of capital accumulation and expand the urban slums?

These are important questions and should be of great concern to all, given that smallholder agriculture remains “the world’s biggest single source of employment and livelihoods ... and if given the necessary support by states can provide decent labour incomes when things are organized properly” (Bernstein et al. 2018, 708). Land policies and programmes that target rural youth, which include options to attain land access as

well as training, are necessary for farming futures and to avoid a social crisis of expanding slums and surplus populations.

### Ethnic-based exclusion

The rights of indigenous and tribal peoples were recognised internationally with the International Labour Organization’s Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (C169) in 1991,<sup>4</sup> and many nation States have since granted—to various extents—territorial rights to indigenous groups.

The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)<sup>5</sup> was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2007 and is hailed as “the most comprehensive international instrument on the rights of indigenous peoples”. Of course, this did not emerge out of thin air but is the result of contentious politics and ongoing forms of resistance by ethnic-based movements around the world.

In Latin America, for example, unprecedented indigenous movements emerged most prominently and overtly in the latter part of the 20th century to challenge ongoing neo-colonial injustices perpetuated by neoliberal regimes (Yashar 2005). The positive correlation between regions rich in natural resources and the impoverishment and displacement of indigenous peoples stresses the importance of recognition, protection and support for indigenous communities, especially in the context of extractive sectors which often threaten resource access, contaminate resources and displace



Photo: Juan Carlos Huayllapuma/CIFOR. Children from the La Roya indigenous community, Iparia, Peru, 2015 <<https://bit.ly/OJZNil>>.

“ It is urgent and necessary to not only focus on redistributive land policies but a more comprehensive set of policies which explicitly focus on the most marginalised, vulnerable and commonly excluded populations.

“ Many developing countries are plagued with a highly unequal landholding structure.



Photo: Women draw resources from agroforestry, Indonesia, 2013 <<https://bit.ly/OJZNil>>.

the most marginalised groups in the areas in which they operate. In this context, the need for real and enforceable rights, including the right to free, prior and informed consent (FPIC), is crucial for the protection of indigenous livelihoods.

#### Democratising access to and control over natural resources

If land policies are to facilitate inclusive growth and reduce poverty, they must be democratic, designed to benefit the majority, and work to dismantle the unequal relations of access to and control over land which have plagued many countries since colonialism.

This requires addressing three interrelated challenges in the political economy of land control:

- i. recognition, which entails respecting and protecting existing land access which may be under threat;
- ii. redistribution, which entails redistributing effective formal and political control over the land from the landed to the land-poor; and
- iii. restitution, which entails democratically restoring land control to those who have been displaced due to violent conflict, civil wars or outright theft (Franco, Monsalve, and Borrás 2015, 67). A comprehensive set of land policies must address these three interrelated challenges simultaneously, while addressing the forms of exclusion previously mentioned.

#### Recognition

In the current context of the ‘global resource rush’, existing access to land for the most marginalised and vulnerable groups in society is increasingly threatened. Agricultural and extractivist frontiers are expanding, often disproportionately threatening existing land rights of minority ethnic groups, women and rural youth. Protecting existing tenure rights refers not only to private property rights but to collective/communal land rights such as those granted to various ethnic groups and, in some cases, peasants and smallholders.

In South Africa, some 2 million households engage in agricultural production in communal areas yet remain subject to tenure insecurity (Cousins 2017). Solely focusing on and recognising private titling schemes threatens these livelihoods. As Cousins (2017, 14–15) argues, “securing tenure rights should remain a key object of land reform, in urban as well as rural areas, and focus on legal recognition of social tenures rather than on private titling”. In Bolivia, despite granting a record number of autonomous Native Community Lands (*Tierra Comunitaria de Origen—TCO*), the State has simultaneously opened up protected areas for hydrocarbon extraction and infrastructure development through Supreme Decree 2366 of 2015.

In Colombia, 50 per cent of the country’s 102 indigenous communities are at risk of disappearing, and the most threatened are those richest in natural resources, due to expanding extractivist frontiers (HCHR

2014). In these settings, there is an urgent need to strengthen the protection of existing land rights and recognise diverse forms of tenure, beyond private titling, to reduce poverty and foster inclusive growth.

#### Redistribution

Many developing countries are plagued with a highly unequal landholding structure. In these settings, it is crucial to transfer not only land titles but also effective access to and control over land and other natural resources. Redistributive land policies which aim to alleviate poverty and facilitate inclusive growth must take into account the imbalanced relations which exist between the land-rich and the land-poor. Land reform policies which rely principally on the workings of the market presume that ‘rational’ individuals will enable land markets to work efficiently and thus facilitate a voluntarist ‘willing-seller, willing-buyer’ competitive market environment, lowering land prices and transaction costs through quick and non-contentious land transactions.

However, in many settings these market-led policies have only exacerbated land-based inequalities, since those without access to capital, credit, technical assistance, authority, legal aid etc. are often excluded or subordinated or cannot prosper in a competitive land market and, therefore, are often forced to sell and become indebted (see Cousins 2017; Borrás 2003; Lahiff, Borrás Jr., and Kay 2007). Land reform policies cannot rely solely on the market or the State but will

be most successful when decision-making and participation are carried out at the local level and synergies between the State and society prevail (Borras 2008; Fox 1993). Loopholes in land ceiling policies and policies to avoid land-based speculation by absentee landowners are important to redistribute land to poor people. Most importantly, redistributive land policies must involve the active participation and empowerment of poor and landless people in rural areas if the unequal land-based social relations are to be transformed.

### Restitution

In many countries, violent conflict has resulted in widespread displacement of rural populations. The right to restitution for displaced victims is a necessary component of any set of comprehensive land policies which aims to be socially just and democratic.

However, restitution policies to date in countries such as Colombia and South Africa have been difficult, cumbersome bureaucratically, expensive and often unsuccessful (Cousins 2017; McKay 2018). Experiences from Colombia and South Africa beg the question as to whether land restitution is possible when land is highly concentrated by an economically and politically influential elite. While restitution is undoubtedly important, political, human and financial resources may be wasted if efforts are continuously blocked by a class of landed elites.

This does not mean that land restitution should be abandoned, but that land policies must work to integrate recognition, redistribution and restitution into a comprehensive approach which ultimately addresses such land-based injustices. Land restitution policies which transfer land to poor or displaced populations are bound to fail if they are not accompanied by other processes of democratisation and do not address the forms of exclusion previously mentioned.

### Conclusion

Democratising access to natural resources requires a set of comprehensive policies which work to dismantle unequal land-based structures of wealth and power which continue to plague development. As Ronald J. Herring (1999, 1) wrote, "land confers power in agrarian systems;

reform policy must work through a system of power to restructure its base". This article has outlined four principal forms of exclusion which are usually neglected or inadequately addressed and often contribute to severe shortcomings and failures in land policies. It has also argued that land policies must simultaneously address issues of recognition, redistribution and restitution in a democratic and relational way which transfers effective control over land and political power from large-scale landowners to those who are landless or land-poor. Challenging existing power structures requires pressure and strategic alliances from all fronts, including civil society, pro-reform state actors and multilateral institutions. ●

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1. Parts of this article draw on McKay (2018).

2. University of Calgary.

3. See McKay (2017) for an elaboration of the concept of agro-extractivism.

4. See: <[https://ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100\\_ILO\\_CODE:C169](https://ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C169)>.

5. See: <<https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples.html>>.

# Beyond migration for/or development

Taneesha Mohan<sup>1</sup> and Amanda Flaim<sup>2</sup>

In 2015 the estimated number of international migrants was 244 million people, or 3.3 per cent of the total global population (IOM 2018). Of this estimated population, approximately 150 million were migrant workers, a significant number of whom come from rural areas (Ibid.). While these numbers alone are staggering, the true exodus from rural places can only be appreciated when they are added to the number of internal migrants, estimated in 2013 at 763 million people (FAO 2013).

What do these numbers mean for rural development agendas? Under what conditions might migration alleviate (or exacerbate) rural poverty and agrarian dispossession? And, with this in mind, what can development practitioners do to ensure that migrants, their families and communities are able to benefit from the various financial, socio-cultural and familial sacrifices they make to forge a new life away from home?

## Migration as development agenda(?)

Development theory has evolved considerably since the end of the Second World War, yet the centrality of rural-to-urban migration in the pursuit of economic growth has remained a constant. When development was defined as industrialisation in the post-war era, rural-to-urban migration was viewed as necessary for the production of an industrial workforce and the elimination of 'backwards' or 'traditional' agrarian commitments.

More recently, departures from villages for ostensibly cosmopolitan industrial centres are cast as 'rational' moves out of sure poverty and debilitating debt traps. In this development story, enterprising migrants will participate in formal labour markets and diversify their income portfolios. As extended household livelihood strategies, remittances home will reduce the labour burdens incurred by migrants' absences, pay for the educations of their siblings or children and health-care costs of their ageing parents, and improve

overall family wealth. Moreover, this story continues, the aggregate efforts of enterprising migrants will drive economic development in both destination and sending communities. Indeed, the international development discourse, exemplified in the following promotional statement for the 2018 Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM),<sup>3</sup> reflects a persistent enthusiasm for rural out-migration as a viable strategy for poverty reduction and economic growth in the global South: "Migration provides immense opportunity and benefits—for the migrants, host communities, and communities of origin."

While evidence suggests that rural out-migration can contribute to household livelihood strategies, rural poverty reduction and even national development, it does not guarantee economic mobility or rural poverty alleviation for individuals, families, communities or States. Rather, evidence suggests that rural-to-urban migration that results in secure, formal occupations is on the decline, and is being replaced with temporary, circular forms of migration into informal, insecure jobs that are characterised by violence and human rights violations (IOM 2018). Moreover, research indicates that even when migrants are able to secure work, their capacities to remit, and for rural family members to receive and benefit from remittances, may depend on a range of demographic, cultural and political factors, such as legal status (see, for example, Amuedo-Dorantes, Puttinanun, and Martinez-Donate 2013; Howell 2017; Massey, Durand, and Pren 2014; and Wu and Treiman 2004). Against the backdrop of resource privatisation projects, industrial-agricultural initiatives and extreme weather events—all of which disproportionately impact rural communities—the utility of rural out-migration for advancing rural development is in question.

## Migration: rural poverty reduction or poverty reproduction?

To assume that migration drives development is to assume that these two

dynamics can be disentangled, when they are, and always have been, reinforcing. Rural poverty and food insecurity—both outcomes of decades of agro-industrial development—continue to be among the biggest drivers of rural out-migration. While three decades of neoliberal economic reform registered positive economic growth trajectories at national levels, market-oriented development projects also resulted in the widespread dispossession of peasant farmers from their land, and their transformation into a surplus labour force in both urban and rural sectors that the market is unable to absorb (Misra 2016). In countries that adopted Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs) under neoliberal development schemes, the agricultural sector is still reeling from the effects of withdrawal of state support, rising costs of production and increasing vulnerabilities to the global market. Indeed, with the retreat of state welfare supports, land privatisation schemes and market competition in the neoliberal era, rural out-migration is not driving development. From its nationalistic tendencies to its climactic externalities, development is driving rural out-migration.

While international migration has reduced poverty in certain cases, it has also (re)produced poverty and rural inequalities in others. International migration for rural households is often carried out with the intent of improving socio-economic status back home, and whether regular or irregular, migration requires a huge capital investment. The recruitment process into foreign employment can be extremely tedious and expensive and can render poor people in rural areas vulnerable to exploitation by recruiters and employers. When migrants need to cross international or internal borders but lack the requisite documents to do so, financial costs for travel and risks of exploitation grow further. And when migrants are trafficked, when they must flee unsafe working conditions prior to payment or when places of employment shut down, these costs are never recovered, which drives migrants



Photo: ILO/Apex Image. A migrant worker harvests dates, Bahrain, 2007 <<https://bit.ly/1jNlqZo>>.

“ While international migration has reduced poverty in certain cases, it has also (re)produced poverty and rural inequalities in others.

and their extended households further into indebtedness and poverty. In cases where entire families migrate (a growing trend for working in construction and brick kilns in India, for example), they may lose access to the Public Distribution System, which provides them with food grains at a subsidised rate, and thus increasing food insecurity. Finally, as with other countries that rely on household registration systems, migrants cannot elect representatives if they are not at their home village/town/city during elections. And, as a result of their lack of formal representation, they cannot mobilise labour and wage protections and are deprived of their basic citizenship rights.

Because migration is expensive, and well-paying jobs are increasingly difficult to secure, rural out-migration and remittances may also reproduce or exacerbate rural inequalities. Sunam and McCarthy's (2016) study on Nepal highlights this very point: over a period of 22 years, only 20 per cent of Dalit (ex-untouchable caste) families were able to migrate and achieve a non-poor status, compared to 76 per cent of Chhetris (upper caste). Moreover, the kinds of jobs that are accessible to the different caste groups varied, with those lower in the hierarchy often being relegated to low-paying jobs (see also Howell (2017) for examples in China).

If the path out of rural life does not necessarily lead to better economic

opportunities for communities in the global South, (how) can the unprecedented migration we are witnessing worldwide be harnessed to alleviate, rather than reproduce, rural poverty? For reasons elaborated above, the extent to which rural out-migration can actually contribute to rural poverty alleviation hinges on the broader socio-political context in which migrants are able to migrate freely, secure safe jobs and fair wages and remit funds home that contribute to true wealth production rather than meeting basic needs or debt payments. To this end, we propose the following:

**1. Facilitate remittances and promote wealth distribution**

In terms of rural poverty reduction, remittances can play a pivotal role if migration to fair, secure, employment is facilitated, and transaction costs for remitting are reduced. Compared to other forms of capital flows or development aid, remittances are generally free of political barriers and control and, therefore, can be an important tool of income redistribution among rural sending communities and countries in the global South (de Haas 2005). In countries such as Nepal and Senegal, remittances generate 30.1 per cent and 10.6 per cent of the national gross domestic product (GDP), respectively (World Bank 2019). However, it should be noted that as a national indicator of growth, GDP masks inequalities that

may emerge and grow between rural communities on the basis of ethnicity, gender or other factors. As such, inequalities that facilitate or preclude the capacity to migrate, find reliable work and remit home may accelerate via remittances. With this in mind, tax exemptions on remittances among rural communities who are less able to migrate may enable wealth distribution and mitigate emergent inequalities to some degree.

**2. Reinstate and fund state welfare structures**

For migration to be viewed as a successful development tool, it needs to be combined with various other income-generating activities undertaken by the household. It is within this context that the State needs to engage more deeply with welfare activities. The provision of basic food staples in certain states in India has helped poor people in rural areas free up labour time and move out of exploitative labour contracts. While such safety net programmes are important poverty reduction strategies, they are under constant threat from neoliberal policies.

**3. Reduce barriers to migration and work**

Ensuring free or low-cost worker recruitment channels from rural peripheries can promote safe migration and entry into decent work. For example, much of Thailand's

migrant labour comes from Myanmar and plays an important role in the global food supply. However, this labour force, brought through numerous recruitment agencies, is easily exploited and trafficked via debt bondage, in particular. Non-governmental organisations in Thailand are now lobbying for the government to promote and secure transparent and fair worker recruitment channels, and policymakers should support such measures.

#### 4. Safeguard migrants' rights and dignity

Governments and the international community must refrain from advancing 'migration management' agendas, such as building walls and detention centres, introducing identification regimes and applying stricter border controls. Arguments about their moral costs notwithstanding, such agendas make migration costly and dangerous for the most vulnerable migrants and decrease their capacities to transfer wealth to their rural communities.

#### Directions for future work

Coupled with the assumption that migration can be harnessed to drive development in both sending and receiving communities is the view that migration may undermine development if it is 'disorderly', 'unregulated' or 'unexpected'. This view of migration and its effects on development is also prevalent in the GCM, as it emphasises both the threat and utility of migrants for development purposes, and is largely dedicated to transforming migrants into productive members of formal economies. Indeed, its plans to address the structural causes of irregular and unsafe migration are vague, and elide a primary driver of 20th century and early 21st century migration: the development project itself.

To development practitioners who are truly invested in the welfare of rural people and their migrant relatives, we echo concerns raised by the global peasant advocacy organisation La Via Campesina regarding the potential for the GCM to advance anti-migrant 'migration management' schemes (see point 4 above). In its wholesale rejection of the

GCM, La Via Campesina (2018; 2019) issued an Agreement on an International Pact of Solidarity and Unity of Action for the Full Rights of all Migrants and Refugees, wherein it states:

"... [we] have concluded that the Global Compact for Migration (GCM) does not represent a change in the anti-migrant policies and current offensive against migrants and refugees being waged by many States, especially of the North. The GCM is more of the same: migrants as cheap labor, criminalized for simply being migrants... [We] furthermore consider the GCM a step backwards with respect to human rights and the protection of migrants and our families as established in past International Conventions approved by the United Nations and other institutions such as the International Labour Organization (ILO)."

Humane migration policy and the alleviation of rural poverty are mutually reinforcing goals. To achieve them, policymakers must move beyond the framework of migration for/ or development, and take seriously the contributions of La Via Campesina and the work of other contributors in this volume who call for structural reform in food, land, energy and poverty policy. Without directly safeguarding rural peoples' rights and claims, and without working to redress decades of development-induced dispossession, debt and displacement, rural out-migration will continue to be an index of poor development, rather than development for poor people. ●

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1. Stockholm Environment Institute at York.

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# Removing barriers to access social protection in rural areas: a core priority to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 1.3<sup>1</sup>

Andre Allieu, Ana Ocampo and Natalia Winder Rossi<sup>2</sup>

Social protection has been recognised as an essential component of poverty reduction strategies, as well as being pivotal to ensuring access to basic services, managing risk effectively and contributing to economic development. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has formalised this recognition and commitment across national priorities, with social protection considered a target in itself, in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 1.3: “Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable”, in the context of poverty reduction, but also as a core strategy for reducing inequalities (SDG 10.4).<sup>3</sup>

Governments have recently made important commitments and progress towards SDG 1.3. In addition, many low-income countries have also prioritised the allocation of national budgets to build nascent systems and expand coverage of social protection. However, designing and implementing effective social protection floors requires understanding the specific barriers of access and the needs of those currently excluded from the system. People living in rural areas continue to be left behind in terms of access to effective protection. They continue to be over-represented among poor and excluded populations, despite being the main drivers of the agricultural and food systems in most developing contexts.

Across regions, family farmers face strong constraints in terms of access to infrastructure, social and financial services and innovative technologies, and practices that prevent them from benefitting from important processes of rural transformation, development or urban–rural interlinkages. Their production and consumption decisions are interdependent, further increasing their risk

of falling into cycles of intergenerational poverty. Enhancing their access to social protection and, therefore, their economic and productive capacity represents an essential strategy for the overall objectives of poverty reduction, rural transformation and inclusive growth. It should be an explicit priority and not an afterthought.

Rural people in many parts of the world have long devised ways to cope with risks and shocks through (limited) livelihood diversification and informal institutions for risk-sharing and risk management. But as the frequency and severity of shocks increase, the effectiveness of informal, community-based systems is being challenged.

Only 45 per cent of the global population is effectively covered by at least one social benefit, while the remaining 55 per cent—4 billion people—are left unprotected (ILO 2017). Moreover, the coverage of both contributory and non-contributory social protection is often limited in rural areas, leaving poor households without a minimum income or mechanisms to effectively manage risks and shocks. In many countries (including countries where agriculture is the main source of employment), social protection legislation explicitly excludes the rural population (agricultural workers, fishermen, foresters and casual workers) without the provision of alternative schemes (ILO 2018). For instance, although poorer and rural households are more likely to receive social assistance, they receive slightly smaller amounts of assistance per capita than their better-off and urban counterparts (FAO 2015). In terms of insurance, 56 per cent of the population in rural areas lack health coverage, compared to 22 per cent in urban areas (ILO 2017).

Even when social protection does reach rural areas, these systems rarely respond to the added and specific vulnerabilities of rural areas effectively, including across agricultural subsectors. If there is no

explicit effort made to achieve coverage in rural areas, overall progress on SDG 1.3, as well as on other SDGs, may be stalled.

## What are the key barriers faced by those living in rural areas to effectively access social protection systems?

Understanding the barriers that hinder rural populations’ access to social protection services and benefits is essential to developing appropriate policy responses to effectively bridge the gap in terms of the population covered and the type of vulnerabilities and risks addressed by programmes. Some barriers are explicit, and some are implicit (often financial and administrative)—thus all the more difficult to remove. This requires understanding first and foremost the heterogeneity of the rural population, and then their different needs and possibilities, to tailor or extend existing or new social protection schemes and services.

Some examples include:

- Legal barriers: Social security entitlements are usually set out in national labour legislation, but in many contexts the agricultural sector is not explicitly included in labour and social security legislation
- Low contributory capacity (including costs of affiliation and compliance): The informal nature and type of employment can make it harder for workers to contribute regularly to schemes
- Accessibility of services (such as health care) in rural settings, in terms of physical location, socio-cultural pertinence or information gaps
- Lack of trust in social security systems or a prevailing perception that benefits are not relevant (i.e. benefits only cover life-cycle vulnerabilities, without including livelihood dimensions)
- The structure of social security systems may not be compatible with the

“ Although poorer and rural households are more likely to receive social assistance, they receive slightly smaller amounts of assistance per capita than their better-off and urban counterparts.



Photo: UNDP. Child gets vaccinated at a rural health centre in Piyal Adhikary, India, 2010 <<https://bit.ly/OJZNil>>.

instability (or seasonality) of agricultural employment (i.e. time-frame to receive benefits); and added administrative complexities in rural areas.

#### What options exist to remove these barriers?

Social protection systems have evolved and expanded considerably in recent years in many countries through different types of schemes and programmes, including tax-financed universal schemes, targeted schemes and contributory schemes, supported by stronger policies and more efficient administrative tools in the best cases.

Building social protection floors is particularly relevant for rural populations, given the high levels of poverty, food insecurity and exclusion. In particular, social protection floors seek to ensure the availability, accessibility and acceptability of services, including health care, and promote investments in infrastructure and qualified staff, as key to ensuring rural people's access to services.

Programmes that have successfully covered rural workers and their families are cases where benefits, contribution mechanisms and service delivery have been adapted to the specificities of the rural population. In short, policies and programmes need to make social protection accessible to rural people, and actively address the barriers they face through appropriate programme design and implementation.

Examples include flexible financial transfers to address the financial barriers related to seasonality in incomes of agricultural workers; the introduction of employment or income guarantee schemes to provide some income insurance during slack agriculture or fisheries seasons; the introduction of contribution subsidisation for health and crop insurance; legal and administrative reforms to increase the scope of coverage; and the introduction of universal schemes.

On this basis, we propose several recommendations, which should be considered in the context of different rural populations, the state of social protection and the barriers to access in each context. In addition, these recommendations have policy, programming and fiscal implications, which need to be better understood.

- **Consider rural living and working conditions:** Policy options for extending coverage to rural populations are never exhaustive. However, it is critical to focus on the risks, vulnerabilities and the peculiar conditions faced by different segments as the basis for programme design and intervention. A thorough diagnostics of barriers to coverage for heterogeneous rural populations and their livelihoods (e.g. fisheries, forestry and pastoralist segments) and the reasons behind implementation gaps for existing entitlements would inform an appropriate policy mix (including targeted interventions and special programmes).

- **Expand and adapt legal frameworks of social protection to include rural populations:** Legal frameworks are the basis of rights and entitlements. In the absence of legislation, no entitlements may exist, and coverage simply is not available. Legal frameworks are also an important underlying foundation for government fiscal commitments, accountability and the long-term sustainability of schemes. As a first step to ensuring the coverage of rural populations, national social protection legislation must establish basic legal guarantees and enforce rural entitlements. International/global frameworks on social protection should provide policy guidance and increase the visibility of the plight of the vast uncovered rural populations. Farmer registries can also support the legal visibility of farmers and farm workers, including information not only on assets but also on socio-economic conditions, which can later be linked with social security entitlements.
- **Make social protection more affordable for rural populations:** The low contributory capacity of poor people in rural areas is a significant barrier to their coverage in contributory schemes. This can be addressed through the introduction of subsidised pillars or contributions for income-constrained workers. This approach has demonstrated increases in uptake—for instance, for agricultural insurance and health insurance. For fiscal sustainability and

broader risk pooling, such schemes can be integrated into existing national statutory schemes. For non-contributory schemes, the costs (including opportunity costs) of participation and demonstrating compliance are usually higher for rural populations. They can be reduced by simplifying administrative processes and ensuring that information and social protection services are readily accessible, such that they do not place additional financial stress on rural participants.

- **Enhance capacity to deliver:** Over that last decade, social protection coverage has expanded in many countries. However, many of the poorest people (mostly in rural areas) are not reached, largely because the coverage of social assistance programmes is still limited in many low-income countries because of limited fiscal and institutional capacity. Minimum essential coverage in health and old-age security for all seems to be the outlook for many countries. However, financing and delivering such programmes often requires difficult expenditure choices— informed by appropriate costing and fiscal space analysis. For contributory schemes, the extension of coverage is also closely related to institutional capacity. In both cases, to effectively reach disadvantaged rural populations, additional investments are needed in demand-driven service delivery of social protection, and innovative delivery options need to be sought.
- **Move the rural social protection agenda forward:** Many of the barriers to and issues around effectively extending coverage to rural population are structural—generally related to poverty, informality and the nature of rurality. Addressing these may go beyond programme-specific interventions. A broader integrated rural-specific policy framework may be required. To this end, strong consideration could be given to a global, context-specific policy framework for extending social protection to rural populations, also including the agricultural sector and looking at how coherence with agricultural policies and programmes can support the extension of coverage. This could be a framework for

engagement, support and advisory services for Member States. ●

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3. Social protection is also recognised as key in strengthening the linkages between SDGs 1 and 2, while playing an essential role in access to decent work (SDG 8), climate adaptation (SDG 13) and sustaining peace (SDG 16). For more information, see: <<https://bit.ly/2jHjQmD>>.

“ Policies and programmes need to make social protection accessible to rural people, and actively address the barriers they face through appropriate programme design and implementation.

# Rethinking our strategy of rural poverty reduction: empowerment through a human rights-based approach

Simon Blondeau, Juan Garcia-Cebolla and Margret Vidar<sup>1</sup>

“The law, in its majestic equality, forbids rich and poor alike to sleep under bridges, to beg in the streets, and to steal their bread.” (Anatole France 1894)

The law has historically served as a tool for safeguarding the interests of the more powerful segments of society, who have often used it for their own protection and to maintain the status quo. The quote from Anatole France emphasises that the law can disproportionately affect and negatively impact poorer people. In addition, even when laws by themselves are not explicitly designed to serve rich people, a lack of access, opportunity, education and information contribute to the exclusion of poor people from the protection of the law, forcing them into extra-legality and illegality (Commission on Legal Empowerment of the Poor and UNDP 2008).

Formal equality of opportunity is often not enough to achieve social justice and equality. Achieving the promise of ‘leaving no one behind’ set out in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) requires taking special measures to reach the most vulnerable members of society, particularly poor people in rural areas, through specific laws, policies and financial allocations.

Using the law to achieve social justice, protect the inherent dignity of all and guarantee that everyone enjoys a set of fundamental human rights has received considerable attention since the early 20th century. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, which recognised key civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights, strives to be a common standard of achievement for all peoples and nations. Previously, the establishment of the International Labour Organization in 1919 signalled an understanding that lasting peace could only be achieved through social

justice. Over time, various laws have been adopted in all countries that aim in some way to address social inequalities. Still, these efforts have not gone far enough, or enjoyed sufficient support from national constituencies and international stakeholders. Too many poor people still lack a registered and officially recognised identity, legal entitlements to social protection, and labour laws that protect their health and safety and ensure decent wages. This is especially evident in rural areas, where too many also do not have secure tenure rights to land and other natural resources, rendering the realisation of their equal and inalienable rights a distant fantasy.

Despite important advances in recent years, rural poverty still threatens the lives of a significant proportion of the world’s population. According to the data available from 2015, an estimated 736 million people were living below the international poverty line of USD1.90 a day (World Bank 2018), most of them in rural areas. Poverty also has a direct dual relationship with hunger—from which 821 million people currently suffer—including various forms of malnutrition, such as undernourishment, overweight and stunting (FAO et al. 2018). These people are unable to enjoy some of their most basic human rights on a daily basis, such as the right to adequate food, the right to the highest attainable standard of health and the right to education. They are also unlikely to be effectively enjoying their political rights or able to access justice in practice.

Under a human rights-based approach—as spelled out in the 2003 United Nations Statement of Common Understanding (OHCHR 2006)—clear and specific rights and entitlements anchored in policies and law are fundamental to guarantee basic human rights. It is also necessary to ensure the implementation of actions aimed at ensuring those entitlements through the establishment of programmes, delivery mechanisms and adequate

funding, while devoting special attention to the most vulnerable populations. As countries increasingly develop their capacities to implement a human rights-based approach, human rights principles and tools offer guidance to contribute to rights-holders effectively enjoying their entitlements, which can prove key for marginalised and vulnerable groups, such as poor people in rural areas.

Individuals and communities are fundamental actors in the realisation of their human rights. Thus, it is of utmost importance for policies and laws to empower vulnerable populations so that they can lift themselves and their families out of poverty and enjoy basic human dignity. This is doubly true for rural development and rural poverty reduction measures, as some of the most vulnerable groups live and work in rural areas. In this article we have chosen to examine three distinct policy and legal considerations for the empowerment of rural populations towards enjoying their human rights in dignity: reducing barriers to access to social services, increasing access to work and functional education, and enhancing access to justice and recourse mechanisms.

There are several ways to address barriers faced by vulnerable populations, especially poor people in rural areas, in accessing basic social services. The Brazilian government, for instance, has implemented several comprehensive social security schemes, including the well-known *Fome Zero* (Zero Hunger) strategy. Part of the strategy aimed to tackle discrepancies and difficulties in accessing information about the different programmes and their specific eligibility criteria. The Single Registry (*Cadastro Único*) was introduced to reduce information gaps, facilitate access to information, reduce transaction costs and increase efficiency through easier identification of rights-holders. This also required special efforts to issue birth certificates and identity documents to

those who did not previously have them, including indigenous people in rural areas. The Single Registry is a one-stop comprehensive portal that allows Brazilian citizens to have direct and transparent access to the available social security schemes, which proves especially relevant for vulnerable populations, since it helps them become more aware of their entitlements and the applicable criteria.

In Chile the national authorities decided to address fundamental barriers and costs faced by vulnerable groups, especially poor people in rural areas, in accessing basic social services through the provision of small cash transfers. The rationale behind *Chile Solidario* was to empower families to access existing basic services. This is especially important for rural families, as the costs and barriers tend to be greater and more arduous to overcome.

In Colombia, under the first item of the Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace, special attention was paid to extensive efforts at national and territorial levels to ensure the effective participation of rural communities in relevant policy processes to bring about comprehensive rural reform. By empowering and involving these communities at the early stages of existing democratic processes, it is hoped that direct and sustainable policy impacts are more likely to be achieved.

Overcoming poverty through the empowerment of vulnerable populations, especially poor people in rural areas, often means ensuring access to decent work opportunities. In India the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) provides a legal entitlement to wage employment for people in rural areas. This universal scheme ensures 100 days of wage employment to every rural household in need of work within two weeks of application and registration. Whenever it is not possible to provide the benefit, the household is entitled to unemployment allowances as compensation. In addition, some other important features of the scheme include social audits to increase accountability, specific considerations for women—both in terms of access to employment and the provision of childcare—to address discrimination,



Photo: Pedro Ventura/Agência Brasília. Smallholder farmer benefits from the Food Acquisition Programme (PAA), Brasília, Brazil, 2016 <<https://bit.ly/1mhaR6e>>.

and a majority of green jobs to contribute to sustainable development efforts.

In rural areas there are also barriers and difficulties faced by small-scale and family farmers in accessing local markets, which represent major impediments to their right to feed themselves. To tackle these challenges, countries such as Brazil and Guatemala have already adopted specific measures to link smallholder farmers with school feeding programmes, while others such as Ethiopia, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda and Uganda are working to this end.

In Bolivia the school feeding law of 2014 aims to contribute to local rural economies while simultaneously helping vulnerable population groups. To overcome some of its challenges, the government has opted to transfer the management of school feeding programmes to communities. This decentralisation aims to foster mechanisms that adequately take into account the specific needs of each community, to more efficiently reach local populations, especially the most vulnerable in rural areas. This law was implemented through specific initiatives and mechanisms that facilitated access by poor people in rural areas and the most vulnerable groups—not just those who are better off within rural areas—to adequate food and the means for its procurement.

From a human rights-based perspective, rights-holders are entitled to specific goods or services, as opposed to

being recipients of charity. Hence, when human rights are not realised for whatever reason, it is important for the entitlements to be clearly defined and the rights to be protected by law. Furthermore, recourse mechanisms need to be available and accessible to allow people to voice their complaints and seek adequate redress. These mechanisms can be judicial—such as courts; quasi-judicial—such as human rights commissions; or non-judicial—such as mechanisms embedded in the programmes themselves. Non-judicial channels are often the most accessible, affordable and timely.

Programmes geared towards enhancing access to justice and the functioning of efficient recourse mechanisms, especially focusing on the most vulnerable populations, can have a definite impact on grievance redressal, while increasing accountability and transparency. To that end, a thorough assessment of recourse mechanisms in land-related disputes in Sierra Leone detailed the potential of non-judicial grievance redressal mechanisms in advancing the rule of law and helping maintain social cohesion. When non-judicial grievance mechanisms are organised in clear, accessible, effective and rights-compatible ways, they are more appealing than formal justice for being comparatively cheap, quick and accessible to the wider public, all while providing justice *in situ* by often employing language and a format that the interested parties identify with and understand clearly (FAO 2016).

“ Individuals and communities are fundamental actors in the realisation of their human rights.



Photo: sandeepachetan. Family works at a farm in Kashmir, India, 2013 <<https://bit.ly/OJZNil>>.

As these country examples show, some of the key elements of a human rights-based approach to rural poverty reduction correlate with fundamental human rights principles, including participation, accountability, non-discrimination, transparency, human dignity, empowerment and the rule of law. These principles guide both the elaboration of policies and their content, implementation and monitoring.

An important consideration for specific human rights-based initiatives to develop policy and legal processes on rural poverty reduction is the promotion and use of consensually adopted global voluntary guidelines.

Voluntary Guidelines are non-binding guiding documents developed and adopted by States, offering a variety of practical ways to address specific thematic issues. Under the scope of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), members have developed and adopted many such documents over the years, which translate key components of a human rights-based approach to the broader issues of poverty reduction and hunger eradication into specific policy areas. Some examples that have a direct impact on rural poverty reduction are the Voluntary Guidelines to support the progressive realisation of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security, and the Voluntary Guidelines on the responsible

governance of tenure of land, fisheries and forests in the context of national food security.

In sum, the underlying component of a human rights-based approach to rural poverty reduction is to ensure that the most vulnerable populations in rural areas are at the centre of policies geared towards empowering them to contribute to and enjoy their fundamental human rights in dignity. ●

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# The impacts of investments in agricultural and rural development on Sustainable Development Goals 1 and 2: a meta-review of evidence <sup>1</sup>

Jill Bernstein,<sup>2</sup> Nancy Johnson<sup>3</sup> and Aslihan Arslan<sup>4</sup>

The first Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 1) calls for the eradication of extreme poverty and the reduction by half of the proportion of men, women and children living in poverty by 2030. SDG 2 calls for an end to hunger and ensuring access for all people to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round as well as the promotion of sustainable agriculture.

While great progress in poverty reduction has been achieved over the last decades, the poorest people are being left behind: over 2.1 billion people still live in poverty,

about 736 million in extreme poverty, and about 815 million live in hunger (de la O Campos et al. 2018; FAO et al. 2018). Over the last 25 years, the number of extremely poor and malnourished people has decreased by 58 per cent and 21 per cent, respectively. However, poverty reduction has stalled due to inequality, and the number of hungry people has increased recently due to climate change, conflict and economic slowdown. Those still living in poverty tend to be chronically poor, facing numerous constraints to addressing poverty and food insecurity. Further gains in reducing poverty and hunger will be more difficult, particularly for this group, the majority of whom live in rural areas

and depend (at least partly) on agriculture for food and income. In sub-Saharan Africa alone, more than 300 million of the people living in extreme poverty live in rural areas.

Over the next 15 years, the way in which we manage agriculture will be a major determinant of whether or not we reach these goals—though rural poverty reduction requires more than just investment in agriculture. The challenges facing agriculture and the institutional environment for agricultural growth and technological innovation are far more complex than ever before. Agricultural investments must now focus not only on increasing yields but also on a more

**TABLE 1: SDG targets and indicators assessed for evidence review**

Targets	Indicators
<b>Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere</b>	
1.1 By 2030, eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere, currently measured as people living on less than USD1.25 a day	1.1.1 Proportion of population below the international poverty line, by sex, age, employment status and geographical location (urban/rural)
1.2 By 2030, reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions	1.2.1 Proportion of population living below the national poverty line, by sex and age 1.2.2 Proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions
<b>Goal 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture</b>	
2.1 By 2030, end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round	2.1.1 Prevalence of undernourishment 2.1.2 Prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity in the population, based on the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES)
2.2 By 2030, end all forms of malnutrition, including achieving, by 2025, the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under 5 years of age, and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and older persons	2.2.1 Prevalence of stunting (height for age <-2 standard deviation from the median of the World Health Organization (WHO) Child Growth Standards) among children under 5 years of age 2.2.2 Prevalence of malnutrition (weight for height >+2 or <-2 standard deviation from the median of the WHO Child Growth Standards) among children under 5 years of age, by type (wasting and overweight)
2.3 By 2030, double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, in particular women, indigenous peoples, family farmers, pastoralists and fishers, including through secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment	2.3.1 Volume of production per labour unit by classes of farming/pastoral/forestry enterprise size* 2.3.2 Average income of small-scale food producers, by sex and indigenous status

Note: This does not include all the targets and indicators under SDGs 1 and 2 but, rather, reflects the targets and indicators chosen as focus areas for the Joint Initiative.  
\*Productivity per land unit was also included in this meta-review.

Source: UN General Assembly (2017).

**TABLE 2: General intervention categories and examples**

Category	Sub-categories/examples
1. Promotion of improved agricultural technologies and practices	Homestead food production/home gardens, bio-fortification, livestock interventions, aquaculture interventions, agricultural commercialisation, extension and advisory services, sustainable agricultural practices, irrigation, agricultural input subsidies
2. Promotion of groups/organisations	Cooperatives, self-help/savings/women's health/ farmers' groups
3. Land tenure security	Land rights, land titling
4. Improving natural resource management at landscape scale	Community forest management, payment for environmental services
5. Improved access to financial products	Microcredit, microsavings, formal banking services, insurance programmes
6. Job creation programmes	Youth/job training programmes
7. Social protection	Cash transfers, public works and employment guarantee programmes
8. Information services	ICT infrastructure, digital banking, mobile phone/media information campaigns
9. Improved infrastructure	Irrigation, roads, electricity, telecommunications
10. Multisectoral interventions (selected studies)	Graduation programmes; water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) interventions

Source: Authors' elaboration.

complex set of objectives, including improving nutrition, preserving natural resources and adapting to climate change.

Research into agriculture and rural development will play a critical role in meeting the ambitious targets under SDGs 1 and 2. Careful analyses of country-specific contexts are needed to address the underlying causes of poverty and hunger, but much can be learned from the available evidence on the types of interventions most likely to be successful in achieving the targets under SDGs 1 and 2 in rural areas.

In recent years there has been heightened emphasis on both the rigorous evaluation of development interventions and systematic reviews and meta-analyses based on such evaluations. The latter have become commonplace as a means to coalesce the existing evidence on a given topic, creating resources for readers seeking to understand large bodies of literature, and often generating new insights in the process.

This article summarises a recently updated mapping of the evidence on the relationship between investments in agriculture and rural development, and reductions in poverty and hunger (Bernstein, Johnson and Arslan 2019). This meta-review uses existing systematic reviews, meta-analyses and comparable comprehensive reviews (hereafter referred

to collectively as systematic reviews) to map and evaluate the evidence regarding the effects of a wide range of development interventions on poverty and hunger.

The question motivating this meta-review is the following: What evidence exists regarding the impact of agriculture and rural development interventions on hunger and poverty, and what does it reveal about the types of interventions that impact hunger and poverty? The goal is to bring together what is known across intervention types and outcomes so that it is available to researchers and development practitioners. Such an assessment is also useful for identifying what types of future research would best complement what exists to inform decisions addressing SDGs 1 and 2.

### Methodology

#### Outcomes and intervention types analysed

The outcomes of interest included in the review are based on the selected targets and indicators for SDGs 1 and 2 (see Table 1), as follows: extreme and moderate poverty; average income; food security (diet quantity); nutrition security (diet quality and/or nutrition); child stunting; child malnutrition, including wasting and overweight; and agricultural productivity.

The review focuses on evidence from a wide range of development interventions:

promotion of improved agricultural technologies and practices; promotion of groups/organisations; land tenure security; improving natural resource management; improved access to financial products; job creation programmes; social protection; information services; improved infrastructure; and multisectoral interventions (see Table 2). We do not include observational studies but, rather, focus on the results of specific interventions that were expected to lead to improvements in one or more SDG indicators. While not all results can be considered causal, given the methods used, we refer to the studies using impact assessment language, recognising that in many—if not most—cases the studies fall short in terms of methodological rigour.

#### Types of reviews included in the meta-review

The meta-review includes systematic reviews of impact evaluations (IEs), comprehensive reviews that provide clear lists and findings from each included IE, and rigorous IEs that cover interventions in multiple countries. Meta-analyses are also included if they accompany a systematic or comprehensive review of the IE literature. Published and grey literature studies since 2000 are included. Only studies from low- and middle-income countries and in English are included. Given the broad range of intervention types and outcomes covered, this meta-review restricted the collection of evidence only to those

already covered by systematic reviews. This means that there may be IEs for an intervention–outcome combination that are not covered, which should be kept in mind when interpreting the findings.

The final database includes 79 unique systematic reviews, including 18 on poverty; 33 on food security; 36 on nutrition security; 24 on stunting; 18 on child wasting and/or overweight; 31 on productivity; and 48 on income. Given that many reviews cover more than one outcome type, the sum of the reviews per outcome exceeds the total number of reviews.

### SDG outcomes

What is most striking about the evidence base regarding poverty (SDG 1) is that for most intervention types it is very limited. This is partly due to the restrictive criteria used to identify the impact on poverty, which included only measures of poverty headcount, severity and depth, to best capture progress as measured by SDG 1. Many reviews that stated they assessed poverty impacts used indicators related to health, education and other areas, rather than the poverty measures explicitly used by the SDGs.

It is interesting to juxtapose the small evidence base of the effects of agricultural productivity improvements on poverty with that of the effect of agricultural growth on poverty using cross-country data and computerised general equilibrium models showing robust evidence (De Janvry and Sadoulet 2010). Demonstrating the impacts of agricultural research and development on poverty is inherently challenging due to the long and complex causal chain between changes in agricultural practices and poverty outcomes (Gollin et al. 2018); however, it is still surprising how few studies have tried.

The evidence base is stronger for food and nutrition security (SDG 2). As might be expected, the evidence base for impacts of agricultural and rural development interventions on income and productivity—both of which are much more proximate outcomes to an agricultural intervention—are well documented and largely positive.

Food security is covered for most intervention types, although not always with a large volume of relevant IEs.

For agricultural and social protection programmes, the evidence shows quite consistently positive effects on food security. This wide evidence base reflects in part the expansive definition we have adopted, including measures of consumption of micronutrient-rich foods, dietary diversity and diet quality.

Undernutrition and, especially, stunting are, similarly to poverty, difficult outcomes to influence directly through agricultural investments. However, in contrast to poverty, many reviews have been conducted on the evidence for the effects of agriculture on nutrition and stunting. Recent recognition of the importance of combating stunting as a development priority and the need for nutrition-sensitive and nutrition-specific interventions has led to interest in the potential of agriculture to make a greater contribution. This helps explain the relatively large number of reviews, and the focus on the production of nutritious foods such as vegetables, animal products and biofortified staples. However, many are inconclusive due to weak study design and the difficulty of influencing complex nutritional outcomes.

Had all studies that seek to assess poverty impacts used the poverty measures used for SDG 1, the evidence base would have been larger and more comparable. Nonetheless, the reality is that impact pathways from agricultural and rural development interventions to poverty and nutrition are complex and difficult to document. Ensuring that IEs also include intermediate outcomes along the pathway is important for expanding the evidence base. Differently from SDG 1, the indicators chosen for SDG 2 do reflect outcomes along a pathway. Some SDG 2 indicators, such as productivity and income, are also relevant for SDG 1, hence investments that address them can harness the synergies between both SDGs.

Despite its importance, cost-effectiveness is commonly noted in many of the systematic reviews covered by this report as an area of research that seriously needs more attention. Only a few include substantial analysis of cost-effectiveness. Others had some mention of cost-effectiveness, but it was either not a major focus or there was limited evidence based on the IEs they examined. Finally, a substantial number of reviews did not address cost-effectiveness at

all. This lack of evidence may be because our search was for reviews of overall programme effectiveness, not cost-effectiveness specifically. Nonetheless, the need for more research in this area was a common refrain.

Many of the systematic reviews included here recognise the importance of context and the challenge of making generalisations about what types of interventions will be effective. There are some contextual issues that are common to many of the reviews, including the state of existing institutions, infrastructure and markets. The fact that context matters came through clearly in the process of this meta-review, indicating a need to more comprehensively study contextual factors in future research and better integrate qualitative and quantitative methods.

### Interventions

Agricultural and social protection programmes have the strongest evidence base for SDGs 1 and 2. Results are also promising for other interventions types: for only one—strengthening organisations and groups—is there no evidence of even potentially positive impacts on any of the outcomes. Evidence on input subsidies is the next thinnest, with just two reviews that present only limited evidence on productivity improvements. For all but one intervention type—sustainable agricultural practices—reviews looked at multiple outcomes. Even where they did not find impacts, the fact that no negative results were found suggests that there are no trade-offs, at least among the interventions assessed in these studies. This finding could result from cherry-picking (conducting studies where impacts are expected) or publication bias, but evidence of what does not work is also important to inform investment decisions, which should be considered by the research community.

The review focuses on single intervention types; however, many projects or programmes include multiple types. With the exception of a small number of interventions specifically targeted at nutrition and health, limited evidence was identified regarding the effects of multisectoral interventions on the outcomes of interest. This could be an important area for future research, with careful attention paid to underlying impact pathways to enhance the generalisability of the results.

“ Recent recognition of the importance of combating stunting as a development priority and the need for nutrition-sensitive and nutrition-specific interventions has led to interest in the potential of agriculture to make a greater contribution.



Photo: Maria Hennies. Family farm in Petrópolis, Brazil, 2014 <<https://bit.ly/OJZNil>>.

### Next steps to expand the evidence base

Most studies reviewed call for greater attention to quality in both measurement and analytical rigour. Given the length and complexity of the impact pathways, this does not just mean more experimental and quasi-experimental studies. Good-quality studies of all kinds are needed, as are ways of synthesising findings and extracting operational implications.

Investment is also needed in the kinds of data and data collections systems that will enable long-term, large-scale monitoring and analysis. Long-term panel data sets and geospatial data are increasingly being collected and made publicly available. Greater transparency and availability of intervention data will enable analysis across interventions and outcomes at scales that are relevant for decision makers.

A corollary to the question this review aimed to answer is: What do we need to know to inform investment decisions in ways that will increase impacts? To answer that question, we need a better understanding of how investment decisions are made, how programmes are designed, and where the entry points for evidence are. The results illustrated by this article could be an important starting point, which would draw on analyses of current projects, as in the meta-review, as well as consultations with stakeholders.

### Conclusion

The strength of this review is its breadth, providing an overview of evidence on the

impacts of a wide range of interventions on a large set of outcome indicators for SDGs 1 and 2. It might generate more questions than answers for each type of intervention—regarding, for example, the geographic and time scales of the interventions evaluated, and the sustainability of their results. It is intended to serve as a resource for deeper investigation into the various types of interventions, to provide a broad perspective on the research landscape relevant to SDGs 1 and 2, and to contribute to the development of meta-review methodology that can simultaneously consider a broad range of interventions and outcomes.

Finally, when considering the available evidence on the extent to which these interventions have influenced poverty and food security, it is valuable to reflect on the following questions: What factors effectively spark economic development that is inclusive and pro-poor—macroeconomic policy, microeconomic interventions or accidents of history? To what extent do the types of interventions included here have the capacity to affect structural change, or, at best, do they serve to alleviate the challenges of poverty until broader development occurs?

It is our hope that this article can provide some insight into the role that the included categories of interventions have played in the process of development and spark further discussion. ●

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1. The authors thank Calogero Carletto, Benjamin Davis, Leslie Lipper and Paul Winters for their continued input and support during the development of this study. The participants of the Joint Initiative Expert Consultation in January 2018 have provided useful feedback. This study was made possible with funding from the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the Independent Science and Partnership Council (ISPC) and logistical support from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

2. Independent Consultant.

3. Independent Science and Partnership Council (ISPC), CGIAR.

4. International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

# How can poverty reduction programmes empower rural women? Considerations from social protection

Raquel Tebaldi<sup>1</sup> and  
Ana Paula de la O Campos<sup>2</sup>

Social protection policies play an important role in alleviating extreme poverty. These policies and programmes can be understood as those which support people via transfers of income and resources that enable them to deal with vulnerabilities throughout their lifecycle, including social insurance, social assistance, public works and sustainable livelihood programmes. The purpose of this article is to present a reflection on how gender inequalities and rural women's empowerment are affected by social protection programmes, and why and how social protection policy should become more gender-sensitive.

## Cash transfers

Cash transfer programmes are often assumed to be empowering to women, presuming a straightforward nexus to women's empowerment or a reduction in gender inequalities; however, the existing evidence supporting this claim is still mixed (De la O Campos 2015; Bonilla et al. 2017), which can be partly explained by the fact that cash transfers do not have women's empowerment as an explicit objective. For instance, the preference for transferring the money to women is usually a design feature of cash transfers targeting children, and when this is clearly expressed in a programme's design, it is generally based on the assumptions that women are the primary caregivers within households and that they will spend the money in a more 'family-responsive' way (as opposed to men), focusing on children's well-being. The main critiques focus on the privatisation of care and the instrumentalisation of women, which are implied in many of these programmes, while the absence of basic child-care services and reproductive health are not resolved.

This criticism is particularly accentuated in the case of conditional cash transfers, which link the receipt of benefits to the

completion of specific activities, usually under the responsibility of women.

Social assistance's programmatic focus on women as mothers and carers also seems to crowd out concerns for their own economic security (especially in old age) and their access to the labour market and economic advancement (Cook and Razavi 2012). Indeed, the transformative potential of social protection programmes is very limited if they are not linked to other policies seeking to expand opportunities for women beyond childrearing and precarious, underpaid work relations. In such scenarios, these programmes can be interpreted as a way of reinforcing traditional gendered labour divisions to cover for the State's shortcomings in actually providing child-care services and promoting decent jobs (Patel and Hochfeld 2011; Sweetman 2011).

Nevertheless, cash transfers provide much-needed financial support to people living in poverty, and these programmes are achieving very important results in a range of areas which matter for women's empowerment and for gender equality. The Overseas Development Institute (ODI 2016a) found that there is relatively strong evidence pointing to an increase in women's decision-making power related to expenditure decisions. There is compelling evidence from sub-Saharan Africa that cash transfers can lead to more investments in productive activities (including those performed by women) and access to credit (De la O Campos 2015b). Regarding other empowerment indicators, cash transfers were found to delay marriage and reduce the probability of women and men engaging in unsafe sex. Women that are recipients of cash transfers therefore need to access the additional social services and livelihood interventions that will complement and reinforce their pathway out of poverty (Ibid.).

## Asset transfer and public work programmes

Worldwide, men continue to own more

(and more valuable) assets than women (Johnson et al. 2016), and in some institutional contexts women's property rights are non-existent or badly enforced. Though not as popular as cash transfers in terms of scale, asset transfers are becoming more prominent in social protection. Johnson et al. (2016) argue that these types of transfers can play an important role in changing gendered patterns of asset distribution. Looking at eight different projects being implemented in Africa and Asia, they found that women's asset control is positively related to development outcomes for themselves and their households. However, it is worth noting that even when transfers were designed to be delivered to women, their retention of control over the asset was not a given: most projects did not succeed in narrowing the gender gap in asset ownership, and some may even increase this inequality when not designed and implemented in a gender-sensitive way.

Public works programmes are another common type of social protection intervention, meant to create infrastructure in remote areas or fill in gaps where certain service provision is needed. These programmes are typically deployed as temporary measures during emergencies—such as natural disasters—and can be more gender-sensitive when they focus on developing infrastructure which benefits rural women (for instance, by diminishing the time they take to perform daily tasks such as fetching water), by ensuring that their participation is equally encouraged by providing child-care and breastfeeding facilities, equal wages and flexible working hours, including in rural areas. If they enable women's participation in non-traditional productive roles and leadership positions, public works programmes can also generate changes in attitudes regarding what is considered suitable as women's work. However, these gender-sensitive considerations are not commonly found in these programmes' design and implementation.

Past evaluations of the world's largest public works programmes find that there is still a long way to go in terms of ensuring that they are promoting women's empowerment. India's Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) has been found to have a lot of potential for women's empowerment by augmenting the number of choices available to women and reducing their dependence on men, though transformative impacts in gender relations still face considerable obstacles in the country (Pellissery and Jalan 2011). Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Programme found that women's participation is severely compromised by other demands on their time for care and domestic activities (Berhane et al. 2011) and that a lot of the gender-sensitive provisions found in programme design were not actually implemented or were simply deprioritised (ODI 2016b).

#### Social insurance

Lund and Alfors (2016, 3) argue that the emphasis on cash transfers has led to the term being used as a synonym for social protection, though they were "never meant to be the whole answer to addressing poverty and inequality". Cook and Razavi (2012) point out that the continuing division between social assistance and social insurance and their differentiated relations to the labour market mean that women are overrepresented as beneficiaries of the former, whose: (i) financial sustainability is less stable (in countries that depend

on donor funding); (ii) benefit levels are lower; and (iii) access is means-tested and (in the case of conditional cash transfers) subject to compliance with conditionalities which may accentuate their time poverty.

Though women's labour force participation has been growing worldwide over the last decades, significant barriers persist in women's access to decent jobs and social insurance schemes, particularly in rural areas. Most of these programmes—precisely due to their contributory nature and their strict connection to formal labour relations—largely ignore women's limited contributory capacity (due to their mostly informally-earned, scant and sporadic income), particularly in the family farm. Additionally, a lot of schemes fail to take into account women's particular lifecycle experience, which may include pregnancies—and, therefore, the need to be covered by maternity leave and specific health services—and a longer life span—which often means that women's pension benefits are 'eroded' over time (Holmes and Scott 2016; UN Women 2015).

Nonetheless, there are examples of social insurance systems that have been reformed, seeking to expand their coverage to informal workers—including highly feminised work sectors such as in the cases of Brazil and South Africa, where domestic workers have seen an improvement in their labour rights; cases of increased flexibility

“Cash transfer programmes are often assumed to be empowering to women, presuming a straightforward nexus to women's empowerment or a reduction in gender inequalities.



Photo: Ollivier Girard/CIFOR. Women carrying cotton, Sissili, Burkina Faso, 2013 <<https://bit.ly/OJZNil>>.

in eligibility requirements, such as in China, where informal workers can contribute voluntarily to participate in formal social insurance schemes; cases of pension reforms in Chile, which introduced non-contributory benefits, top-ups and child credits; and the cases of expanded health insurance coverage in Ghana, Rwanda and Viet Nam (Holmes and Scott 2016). These reforms are positive steps in terms of expanding the coverage of social insurance, but much more needs to be done in terms of adapting these systems to expand their coverage more equally.

### Conclusions

Gender roles and expectations, among other factors, shape women's and men's differentiated access to social protection. A clear example is in the bulk of unpaid work that is consistently assigned to women across countries, which can prevent their access to public works or social insurance via the labour market—trends which are reinforced by gender-blind economic policy and practice. Therefore, social protection systems need to be informed by careful considerations of the gender inequalities, particularly of those experienced by women in rural areas, at play in each particular context, so as not to ignore nor reinforce them. Fortunately, several tools are available for enhancing gender-sensitive social programming (for example, see FAO 2018). ●

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1. International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG).
2. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

“ Social protection systems need to be informed by careful considerations of the gender inequalities, particularly of those experienced by women in rural areas.

# Gender and rural poverty

Youjin B. Chung<sup>1</sup>

Much has been debated and written about gender and rural poverty over the past half a century. Decades of feminist scholarship and activism on gender, the environment and development have contributed to the recognition of gender equality today as both a standalone goal and a guiding principle of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Despite this achievement, what has received far less analytical attention are the enduring ways in which rural women continue to be characterised by a series of 'lacks' in the development policy discourse, and how 'fixing' these deficiencies are assumed to contribute to solving rural poverty.

For instance, Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 sets out to eradicate various forms of resource poverty among rural women, namely with respect to their land and time. The conventional wisdom on rural development proposes that if women are given equal access to land and other material resources, they have a chance of becoming as productive as their male counterparts; the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO 2011) estimates that closing this 'gender gap' in agriculture can improve overall yields in so-called developing countries by anywhere from 2.5 per cent to 4 per cent. In relation to time poverty, it is assumed that if women were 'freed' from their unpaid care work responsibilities and participated in the economy as equally as men, they would add up to USD38 million—or roughly 26 per cent—to global gross domestic product (GDP) by 2025 (McKinsey Global Institute 2015).

While these narratives and figures are attractive, there are limits to these productivist approaches to understanding the relationship between gender and rural poverty—that is, the tendency to equate efficiency gains and economic growth as overriding and normative metrics of development. This article proposes a critical re-evaluation of ideas that are taken for granted about gender and rural poverty, particularly as they relate to land access and unpaid care work.

## Rethinking land poverty

In the wake of the global land rush—the rapid growth in the acquisition of farmland and other land-based resources in the last decade—land titling has re-emerged as a popular response among governments and donors alike. With regards to gender, it has been argued that women who enjoy tenure security, whether through individual or joint titles, are likely to use their land more efficiently and productively than those who do not, and as a result, enjoy overall improvements in their social status, household bargaining power and decision-making authority (Agarwal 1994). However, others have suggested that land titling does not immediately guarantee or translate into productivity gains, although it can be one of many efforts aimed at securing women's land rights (Doss, Meinzen-Dick, and Bomuhangi 2014). Some have shown that efforts to privatise and formalise land can perversely exacerbate insecurity among marginalised individuals and groups, including rural women, by delegitimising pre-existing resource users and increasing rent-seeking activities and land concentration among elites (Meinzen-Dick and Mwangi 2009). Such findings lead Doss, Summerfield, and Tsikata (2014, 12) to argue that "there is little or no evidence that titles to land protect anyone, men or women" from dispossession and impoverishment. The evidence that abounds, to the contrary, is how the effects of land ownership on gender equality and rural poverty reduction are ambiguous and inconclusive.

Continuing to assess the gendered effects of land titling and other formalisation measures will be important, given the multitude of ongoing interventions in different geographical contexts. However, a more transformative approach would require a rethinking of the conventional definition of land: from purely an economic or productive asset, to a source of social reproduction. Social reproduction refers to an assemblage of diverse gendered activities—both paid and unpaid, material and symbolic—which are necessary for the sustenance, resilience and flourishing of human life on a daily and generational basis (Chung 2017). For rural households, social

reproduction is unattainable without land and land-based resources. These include, *inter alia*, forests and tree resources for accessing fuelwood, timber and medicine and for performing cultural and religious rituals; grasses for thatching roofs and weaving mats and baskets; meadows and pastures for grazing livestock; and wetlands and rivers for fetching water, catching fish, and collecting clay and sand for making cooking utensils (Ibid.).

In other words, the daily sustenance, material well-being, cultural vitality and intergenerational resilience of rural communities do not simply depend on access to individual farm plots and titles thereof, but to a wide range of common property resources that give life purpose and meaning. Access to these resources is shaped not only by gendered property relations at the household level, but also by a wider range of social relationships and institutions at the community and state levels that affect people's ability to benefit from them (see Ribot and Peluso 2003). Reframing land as a source of social reproduction would then require a reconsideration of current policy debates from securing individual or joint titles to land for rural women and men, to thinking more broadly about the institutional arrangements and power relations that shape people's access to a broader range of common property resources.

## Rethinking time poverty

Beyond promoting women's increased ownership and control over land, SDG 5 also targets the recognition and valuation of unpaid care work, an essential component of social reproduction often performed by women and girls the world over. The goal is to reduce women's relative 'time poverty' which can negatively impact their earning capacity and income poverty *vis-à-vis* men (Blackden and Wodon 2006). Beyond the provision of a wide range of policy interventions to assist caregivers, progress towards this target is to be measured through national time-use surveys, by quantifying the total amount of time people spend on unpaid care work and disaggregating these data by sex, age and location (rural/urban). It is argued that



Photo: Youjin Chung. A woman farmer holds out a handful of local bean varieties in Swayimana Distrit, Kwa-Zulu Natal Province, South Africa, 2013.

this quantification would allow researchers and policymakers to evaluate the productivity of household production and gauge its economic value and contribution to national GDP (Elson 2017).

While intended to render visible the indispensable role of unpaid care work, this kind of monetary valuation has been critiqued for reducing all social processes and relationships to abstract dollar estimates (Cameron and Gibson-Graham 2003). This productivist approach to understanding unpaid care work also fails to recognise historical processes, such as the legacies of slavery and female domestic servitude, and colonial migrant labour and taxation systems, which have deeply shaped the unequal gender division of labour in different geographical locations. At the same time, attributing monetary value to unpaid care work has the effect of devaluing other important human values, such as nurturance, love, empathy and compassion for human and non-human others which are transferred daily and generationally through the act of caregiving (Chung, Young, and Bezner Kerr, forthcoming).

The current design of national time-use surveys also poses several challenges for understanding the lived realities and perceptions of care work for rural women and men. Time-use surveys assume a rigid boundary between the so-called public and private spheres (e.g. places of work and places of family), which does not always resonate with rural households involved in subsistence or semi-subsistence livelihoods. Moreover, the 24-hour clock

presumed in survey instruments may not register well with agrarian communities whose mode of time-reckoning often depends on the position of the sun and moon and the seasonal variations and fluidity of agricultural work tasks (Ibid.). The synchronous or simultaneous rhythms of care work and farm work (e.g. how women often perform agricultural tasks while carrying their babies on their backs) are also difficult to represent and analyse quantitatively, without leading to simplification or underestimation of women's overall labour contribution.

Last but not least, examining unpaid care work through the lens of time poverty leaves little room for exploring not only the structural inequalities that shape the distribution of social reproductive labour, but also the subjective meanings that caregivers might attribute to their labour, such as positive emotions of joy, satisfaction and fulfilment, beyond the feelings of burden, drudgery and oppression often generalised in the development literature (Ibid.). Given these challenges to implementing and interpreting time-use surveys in rural contexts, policymakers and researchers might consider collecting qualitative data alongside quantitative data, to better understand caregivers' perceptions, attitudes and behaviours towards unpaid care work. Such study should pay attention to social differentiations among rural caregivers, not only across gender, age and location (as it currently stands under SDG 5), but also across race, ethnicity, sexuality, religion and other intersecting inequalities.

## Conclusion

What knowledge do governments, development agencies and civil society actors need to achieve transformative gender justice and agrarian revitalisation in the global South? This article has argued that there needs to be a conscientious effort on the part of all stakeholders involved to rethink and contest the received wisdom that more private property and discretionary time for women result in increased agricultural productivity and rural economic growth. A more fruitful way to understand the relationship between gender and rural poverty would require collaborative research and analysis that begins from the everyday lived experiences and knowledges of women and men who work the land. ●

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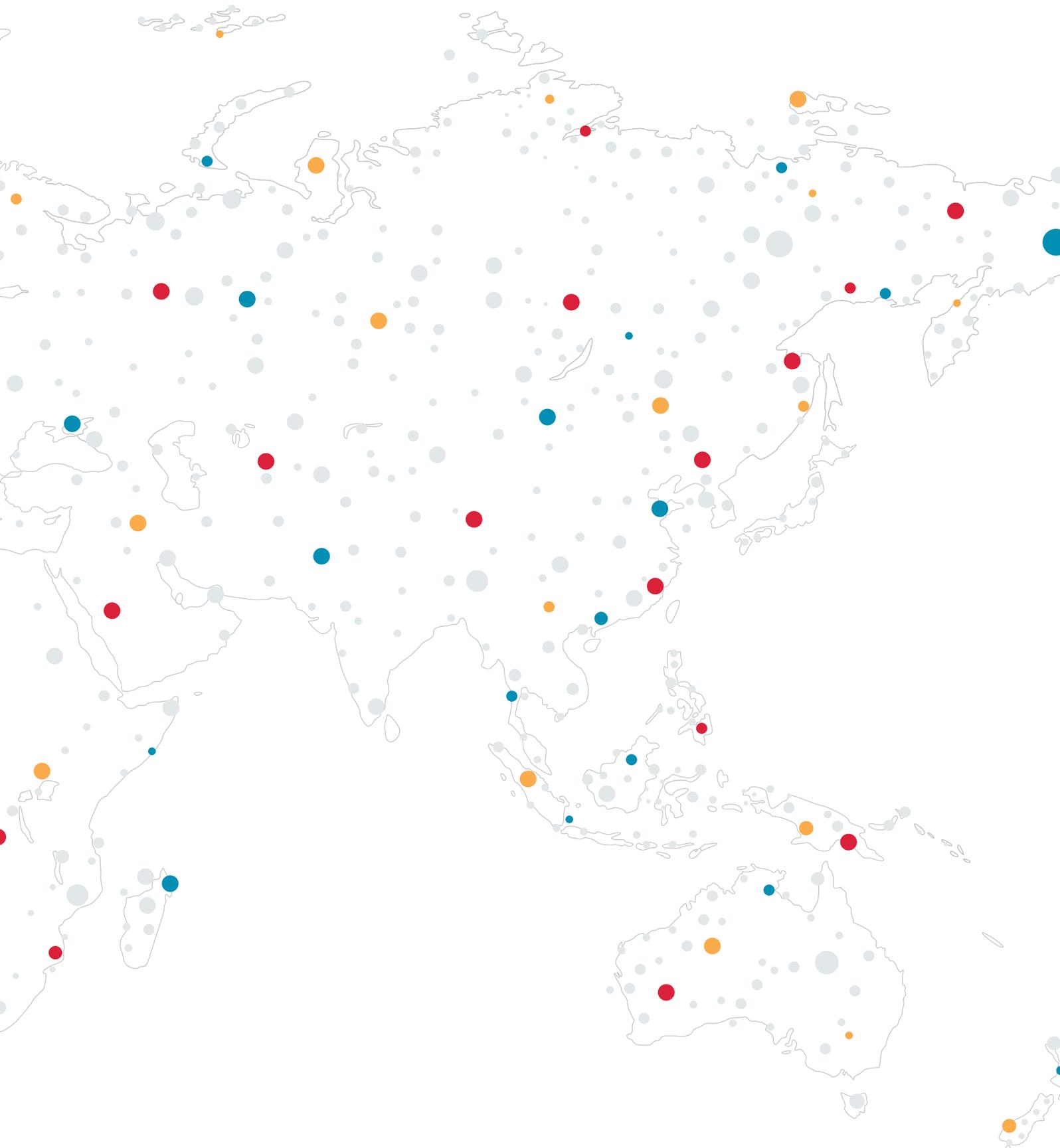
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The aim to reduce rural poverty in the 21st century importantly intersects with a range of other global challenges.

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**Ryan Nehring and Ana Paula de la O Campos**

We have a great deal more to learn about the economics of agriculture, mobility and poverty, as well as the shared factors shaping them.

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**Linden McBride and Esteban J. Quiñones**

Rural livelihoods are not isolated and independent, amenable to narrow development interventions, but tied to what is happening elsewhere, both locally and more broadly.

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**Ian Scoones**

Recognising the diversity of mechanisms and heterogeneity of the reality of rural areas calls for rethinking of the dominant 'pro-smallholder' narrative.

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**Carlos Oya**



**International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG)**

SBS, Quadra 1, Bloco J, Ed. BNDES, 13º andar  
70076-900 Brasília, DF - Brazil  
Telephone: +55 61 2105 5000

[ipc@ipc-undp.org](mailto:ipc@ipc-undp.org) • [www.ipcig.org](http://www.ipcig.org)

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ISSN: 2318-8995



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