



Agenda 2030 put into practice: what future for rural development?

Concept note of the Annual General Assembly (AGA) 2017 in Brussels

hosted by the European Commission (DG DEVCO)

General objective of Annual General Assemblies of the Platform

The Annual General Assembly (AGA) of the Global Donor Platform provides an open space for debate and possible consensus building by [Platform members](#), partners and invited guests on emerging topics in agriculture and rural development (ARD). In these events participants can benefit from the core functions of the Donor Platform: knowledge sharing, advocacy and networking on key development issues that directly or indirectly affect the lives of poor people in the rural space.

The results of the AGAs inform the further work of the Platform on selected development topics, such as Agenda 2030, gender, land governance, inclusive agribusiness/trade, nutrition and others, and are intended to give new momentum and impetus to the Platform's work.

The deliberations during the AGAs do not aim at operational results, but are designed to elaborate on strategic directions and to support the positioning of donor agencies and international finance institutions (IFIs) in the future setting of ARD in international development cooperation.

AGA 2017 – concept and objectives

Agenda 2030 and rural transformation

We cannot predict the future, but we can become more resilient in planning and programming based on better understanding of donors' own comparative advantages, expertise and expectations. Agenda 2030 frames global development priorities for the next years to achieve among others inclusive and sustainable structural transformation in developing countries. Rural transformation, as a major factor adding to structural transformation, will be of key importance when designing development policy in rural areas. Rural transformation is defined as a process of change in rural areas which depends on many factors and dynamics not only economic, but also social, cultural, political and environmental.

If the challenges and opportunities posed by today's rural transformation are to be addressed according to the concept of sustainability of Agenda 2030, a broader and more inclusive approach will be needed. This approach should support development priorities like economic growth, while maintaining the focus on the most vulnerable and food insecure groups.

In the paper *Implications of Agenda 2030 for Rural Development* commissioned by the Global Donor Platform, John Barrett notes that, beyond SDG 2 (end hunger, achieve food security/improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture), world leaders are increasingly pre-occupied by challenges in the global economy and the need for job creation which relates to SDG 8 (Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all), as emerged in the discussion within the Platform and in other international fora.

In fact, some Platform members have argued that the growing food challenge cannot be divorced from the environmental and occupational ones. These correlations only exemplify how the SDGs may holistically support the rural space, looking not only at livelihoods in primary production, but also at the value chains and non-farm economy, much of which is interdependent with agriculture's progress and rural development.

Overall, Agenda 2030 addresses all aspects of rural transformation, including the nexus and interface between urban-rural linkages. The topic is complex – globalisation of markets, migration, IT communication, new demands on good governance and decentralisation, are creating new relationships and new interactions. On top of this, unlocking new finance through market-based economic growth or the emerging climate regime are bringing about new opportunities in job creation through value-chains and many emerging small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in agri-business.

Complexity of rural transformation and reality check

Rural transformation is defined as a process of change in rural areas which depends on many factors and dynamics not only economic, but also social, cultural, political and environmental. The process is an ongoing phenomenon that is happening in rural areas all over the world and can generate positive and negative effects. The positive outcome depends on the buffering of negative trends by designing policies that install broader support actions for rural development, which are economically viable, socially inclusive and ecologically sound, thus sustainable.

The complexity of rural transformation leaves development partners uncertain about the necessary new design of development cooperation in line with Agenda 2030.

The Platform document *The Future of Donor Programmes in Rural Development* induced a debate about the current shift from an ***integrated approach*** towards rural development to a more overarching ***systems approach***¹. The systems approach should ultimately lead to targeted, evidence-based interventions by donors and international finance institutions that increase development effectiveness.

A systems approach requires great amount of knowledge not only of the different key components and actors, but also of the national, regional and local conditions by governments, civil society and private sector, in particular small and medium-sized enterprises. But it will also require that donors and international finance institutions identify their comparative advantages and their changing role in the development process towards 2030 to guide the choice of right interventions.

It is time for a reality check – how systemic and inclusive can governments in developing countries be in implementing Agenda 2030 in the rural space? And how holistic can donor programmes and investments of International Finance Institutions be? Does the call for Agenda 2030 implementation match the political, institutional and financial reality of decision makers in developing countries and that of the international development community?

¹ Over the last year, Platform members and partners have shown much interest in systems approach to address rural transformation. This includes IFAD's flagship Rural Development Report (2016) on *Fostering inclusive rural transformation*, the development of a work stream on urbanisation and rural transformation by the UN Committee on Food Security (CFS), the OECD, FAO and UNCDF joint paper on *Adopting a Territorial Approach to Food Security and Nutrition Policy*, and the NEPAD Rural Futures conference held in Cameroon in September 2016 to set out the evidence of and a vision for a "new emerging rural world" in which employment an empowerment of youth and women would be a high priority.

A tour into the future

To help us in these inquiries we will take ourselves to the future and look back at the ways our work might have transpired. Looking back from the year 2030, the 2017 AGA will take a closer look at where rural transformation might be a decade from now and what role agriculture will play considering the new SDGs, the growing changes in Official Development Assistance (ODA), the challenges of climate change impact, the fact that millions of low-income people in rural as well as urban areas, are still highly food insecure.

The **open discussion with members, partners and invited guests of Day 1** will explore the multiple views of development partners, donors, civil society and private sector on how the rural space in 2030 may look like and what it takes to get there. The **high-level forum on Day 2 (morning)** will complement the findings of Day 1 and heads of programmes/departmental managers will politically and strategically frame the future deliberations of the Platform on donor/IFI support to rural transformation, and help to inform our priorities, programmes and operations.

General objective of the AGA:

To identify approaches and solutions for donors and IFIs to be more prepared and resilient to achieve the ambitious goals of the Agenda 2030 in the rural space in times of uncertainty and complexity.

Looking back from the future, the key note of the AGA will address drivers, dynamics and uncertainties of rural transformation and put forward a realistic vision 2030 of rural areas based on what we know today. The **objective of the AGA** should be achieved by answering ***specific questions inter alia*** guided by the work streams of the Platform:

1. To what extent have territorial approaches in terms of improved governance and decentralisation, comprehensive policies and programmes and the necessary public finance and investments improved the situation in rural space of 2030? This question includes the capacity of local actors to address the uncertainties in building resilience and localized rural transformation. *Voices from developing country governments, civil society organisations and agri-food businesses.*
2. How has the interdependence and nexus of the SDGs and the implied shift from a sectoral or integrated perspective to systems approach/territorial focus affected development cooperation towards 2030? *Voices from international institutions and academia.*
3. How did donors and IFIs ensure that paradigm shifts from sectoral to territorial approaches supported more comprehensive development strategies of partner countries? What had changed until 2030 in terms of revised policy priorities and strategies, programmes and operating models to re-position ARD as an effective mechanism for achieving Agenda 2030? *Voices of donor agencies and IFIs*

Structure of the AGA 2017

Day 1 (1 February 2017):

The 2017 Annual General Assembly of the Platform will begin with the open discussion on *Agenda 2030 put into practice: what future for rural development?* We will begin with a keynote speaker who will set the scene and share future scenarios of the year 2030. Then, we will identify the expectations of developing countries about our common future and the possible leverage points for positive rural transformation. As discussed above, the process of rural transformation and ultimately the implementation of the Agenda 2030 will require higher level of coordination and exchange. In a second panel we will hear from international institutions about their views on future development cooperation. Member organisations of the Platform will respond to the challenges.

In the afternoon, we will explore the critical uncertainties and bench marks of the process leading to the achievement of Agenda 2030. From this, we will zoom back to the present and carry the insights that will enable the Platform membership, partners and invited participants to identify some important starting points to effectively support the ongoing rural transformation.

Platform focal points, partners and invited guests

Day 2 morning session (2 February 2017):

On Day 2 we will welcome a **high-level forum of heads of programmes/departmental managers** in support of agriculture and rural development (ARD). We will invite them to share their vision of 2030, build on the shared conclusions from Day 1 and elaborate on how the directions and choices their institutions took will affect the world's view of 2030. What are the agencies already prepared for? Which trends may still surprise them? What are the financial and programmatic consequences of taking up new roles and ways of working? How can we be complementary to domestic and international finance in the frame of the SDGs, and FCCC (climate finance)?

At the end of this session, we will have identified both the strengths and potential risks of current strategies, and perhaps we have opened the door to some new possibilities.

Heads of departments/ARD programmes, focal points, partners and invited guests.

Day 2 afternoon session (2 February 2017):

AGA Members day with focal points and partners will focus on the achievements of the Platform in 2016, the strategic and programmatic changes in member organisations and the work programme and budget 2017 with the allocations of work streams budgets and other operational details. AGA member day supports the collaboration and communication between members as to make efficient use of the Platforms functions, namely knowledge exchange, networking and outreach.