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for Rural Development

## Agenda 2030 and relevant SDGs for rural transformation: How holistic can donors be?

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*[The views expressed in this document are those of the consultant author and do not necessarily represent the views of the Secretariat or the Members of the Platform]*



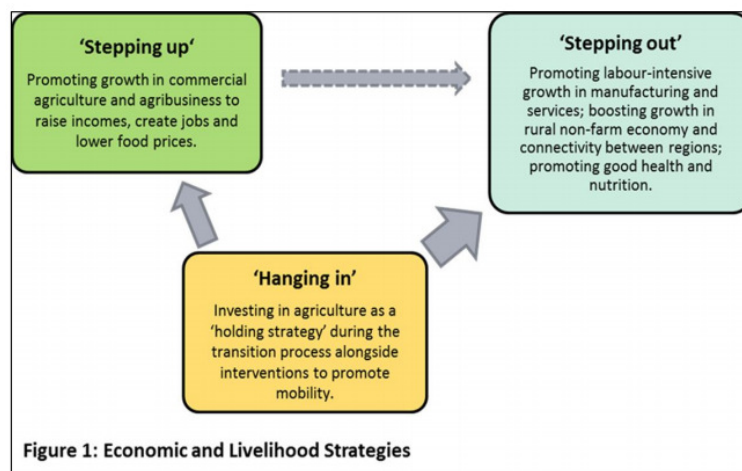
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# Agenda 2030 and relevant SDGs for rural transformation: How holistic can donors be?

## 1. Reprise

This presentation builds upon the paper (Barrett, 2016) tabled at the Platform AGA in January 2016. It had been developed during 2015 through consultation with Platform members, other stakeholders and a review of available information and literature. It was lightly updated in August 2016 and was included in the background papers for this meeting.

The central narrative in that paper was that members of the Platform need to think beyond SDG 2 (*End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture*) in considering the challenges and opportunities ahead. What might this mean for areas of joint working through the Platform? While agriculture, food and nutritional security should remain a major focus of attention, world leaders are increasingly preoccupied by challenges in the global economy and the need for job creation. In particular, the background paper pointed to SDG 8 (*Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all*) as one with which Platform members should engage, especially in the context of the rural population. This means not only looking at livelihoods in primary production, but also in the value chains and non-farm economy, much of which is interdependent with agriculture's progress. Attention is needed not only to those who are 'hanging in' or 'stepping up', but also for those who are trying to 'step out' of agriculture (DFID, 2015):





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The paper set out the evidence that donors are already doing this, in different ways, while partners are also giving greater attention to job creation and economic growth as outcomes of agricultural development.

Furthermore, a new framing of rural development should not be limited to SDGs 2 and 8. A review of all 17 SDGs and 169 targets suggested that agriculture and rural development (ARD) provides a primary entry point for achieving SDG 13 (*Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts*). ARD policies and programmes can also contribute very significantly to other global goals, including

- SDG 1** *End poverty in all its forms everywhere* (given that poverty is often deepest, most intractable and at greatest scale in rural areas)
- SDG 5** *Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls* (given the feminisation of agriculture)
- SDG 10** *Reduce inequality within and among countries*
- SDG 15** *Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss*

The paper made the case for the Platform to think more strategically and coherently about rural transformation in the 2030 Agenda:

- Building common ground within the Platform and with other stakeholders on a broad approach to rural transformation that includes social, economic and environmental perspectives.
- Continuing attention to agricultural transformation.
- Continuing attention to food and nutritional security.
- Greater attention to non-farm jobs.
- Greater attention to rural transitions and urban linkages.
- Knowledge generation and sharing, advocacy and networking about advances in policy and practice

## 2. Recent developments

Other presentations at this meeting show the rapid growth of interest and activity relating to rural transformation over the last year. In particular, IFAD's flagship Rural Development Report (IFAD, 2016) on 'Fostering inclusive rural transformation' provides comprehensive review of the data and evidence. The UN Committee on Food Security (CFS) is developing a work stream on urbanisation and rural transformation. OECD, FAO and UNCDF have been working jointly on the territorial approach to rural development (OECD/FAO/UNCDF, 2016). This was also the subject of a major international conference earlier this year (Proctor *et al.*, 2016). The NEPAD Rural Futures conference held in Cameroon in September 2016 (NEPAD, 2016) set out the evidence of and a vision for a "*new emerging rural world*" in which employment and empowerment of youth and women would be a high priority (Pesche *et al.*,



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2016). The strategy proposed for achieving this would include catalysing the food and agriculture system; stimulating growth of rural non-farm economies, building and sustaining the rural human capital base; building institutions for rural transformation and ensuring political will as the over-riding mover of rural transformation in Africa.

### **3. Uncertain times**

The British referendum decision to leave the European Union may seem to have limited relevance to the issue of rural transformation; or the acrimonious public policy debate in the United States in the run-up to next month's presidential election. What both situations reveal is the unpredictable and potentially enormous consequences of protracted economic difficulties, and the way in which public opinion can change when people become disaffected with the status quo and feel that their governments either do not recognise their plight, do not care or are ineffective to take action.

Nick Hurd, UK Minister of State at the recently created Department for Business, Enterprise and Industrial Strategy, commented recently that the UK is developing a new Industrial Development Strategy which will differ from previous ones in ways which are rooted in 'an understanding of place' – recognising the swathe of people who feel disconnected from Britain's recent economic success.

This sense of a growing constituency whose lives and communities are disconnected from national politics and the economy is not restricted to Britain and North America. It has emerged in several southern European countries in recent years. It was perhaps evident in the outcome of recent regional elections in Germany and may surface in the French presidential elections next year.

A recent report by the McKinsey Global Institute (MGI, 2016) suggested that in many advanced economies not only is income inequality worsening, but the current generation of young people may experience significantly lower incomes than their parents, which is unprecedented.

The shifts align (as cause, effect or both?) with a significant decrease in the overall level of public and political support for internationalism; a significant slowing down of globalisation; increasing protectionism in a number of emerging economies; and a slowing of world trade, which may grow this year more slowly than the rate of global economic growth, for the first time in some 15 years.

This is impacting on donor funding for overseas development assistance, not only in relation to maintaining aid budgets, but also in the appetite for preferring international development spending which simultaneously contributes to wider national objectives such as trade, security, migration or geopolitical interests.



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In this context, the onus is upon ARD policy makers and development practitioners to underline the critical contribution of inclusive rural development and transformation to social and political stability in partner countries. ‘Leaving no-one behind’ (SDG10) is a deeply political agenda, not just a moral responsibility to tackle hunger and poverty in countries which are unable to do so without our support.

#### 4. So what does it actually mean in practice?

So are we advocating a return to integrated rural development programmes? This was a dominant paradigm among the donors from the late 1960s onwards, until overtaken by sector-wide and structural adjustment approaches led largely by the international financial institutions. The answer here is a clear ‘no’. The lessons learned from that period were that area-based donor-funded investments were ineffective without changes in the policy environment, where political will was often lacking and institutional capacity was weak. Results were generally unsustainable and un-scalable without external technical and financial support.

A new approach to rural development and transformation would build on the proven success of recent decades about what works in development:

- Strong ownership by national stakeholders, including not only government (at multiple levels) but also private sector (in its diversity, including farmer organisations) and civil society.
- Tackling policies as well as investments (both public and private) with accountability and transparency.
- Evidence-based approaches which are both resilient and sustainable.
- Creating the enabling environment for responsible, inclusive private sector investment.
- People-centred approaches, seeking local solutions to local challenges and opportunities.

A *systems* rather than *integrated* approach is needed – a systems analysis means understanding the key interlinkages between different strands of the rural economy; and selecting a limited number of evidence-based interventions (policy reform or public investment) that will unlock a step-change in the rate of sustainable and resilient development.

A new approach to rural transformation must also take into account that the rural world is (a) very different to what it was even ten years ago and (b) extremely dynamic, complex and diverse, even within a given country.

The connectedness of the rural population to the modern economy has changed and continues to change dramatically in many places - whether in terms of proximity to a secondary town, through access



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to mobile banking by cell phone; through access to off-grid electricity, rural transport or market information. Health services and education levels have greatly improved in many rural areas, albeit not everywhere. Accountability of public authorities for the delivery of services is steadily improving. There are new and rapidly growing urban markets for rural produce, providing opportunities for both value addition of traditional agricultural produce and diversification to meet the needs of changing urban diets.

This makes it critical that a strategy for rural transformation is based on the specific context of the country and region concerned, and involving the local stakeholders in needs assessment and prioritisation of the strategic response – in relation to both policy/regulatory reform and public spending. There will be no golden bullets or one-size-fits-all. On the other hand, we do need to document and share the plenty of evidence about what does work: it is important to win the hearts and minds of policy makers and other stakeholders that rural transformation is both feasible and worthwhile.

What we do know is that each country is now in the process of prioritising among the SDG goals and putting metrics on their national targets. This is the time for donors to be at the table with national stakeholders to help ensure coherence of policies and programmes that impact on rural areas, in ways which meet both short-term needs for food and nutritional security but also longer term aspirations for rural and structural transformation. One of the key messages coming out of the 2016 IFAD Rural Development Report is that inclusive rural transformation is fundamentally dependent on political leadership within the partner country.



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