

Rural areas of the South in the year 2016 – a likely development scenario

The rural areas of the South have undergone vital socio-economic and technological changes marked by globalization, economic liberalization and political decentralization and by the information and communication sector. Will these changes suffice to improve the living standards of the rural population and lessen the urban-rural gap or will the rural sector remain in isolation and be also in ten years time home of the poor?

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Over the past twenty years, the countries of the South have been marked by sweeping policy changes that have considerably impacted on improving the living standard of the rural population. These include

- Economic globalization that modifies the relationship between the international, national and local scales, as well as presenting challenges for production, commercialization, and access to markets, capital and information;
- Structural adjustment programs with a mixed impact on rural development;
- The development of new technologies, particularly in the information and communication sector;
- Economic liberalization that has led to a marked reduction in the state's hold on rural development;
- Political democratization, empowerment of women and the establishment of different civil society movements that have greatly contributed to the debate and orientation of rural development (CTA, *Information and Agricultural & Rural Development*, Paris 2000).

These changes and policy approaches are still in place and continue to contribute to a certain extent to improving the life of rural people. It is within this context, therefore, that a decade from now – in the year 2016 – the rural areas of the South have to be viewed. However, the South is a highly diversified region in terms of geography, population dynamics, economic structure, and technological development. We have to realize that levels of rural development will vary greatly from sub-region to sub-region and even from one country to another within the same sub-region, depending on the different socio-economic factors that shape rural development. Having this in mind, we will attempt to view the likely general picture or trend in rural areas ten years from now.

Agriculture and trade in ten years time

Since agriculture is the mainstay of most rural people as well as the main economic stimulus, it would first be appropriate to see how agriculture would look like ten years from now.

Generally speaking, agricultural performance is expected to show a substantial increase due to better technology, improved seeds, fertilizer, extension work, better information and market access. However, due to poor management of natural resources (depletion and degradation), there will be a decline in soil quality, making the land less productive. Agricultural output per capita will either show little increase or remain constant, particularly in Africa. According to a study by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), smallholder farmers in the South reach productivity levels that are only about one third of potential yield under optimum conditions (IFAD 2003). The liberalization of international trade will affect each country in a region differently, and also the diverse rural communities there. Nevertheless, rural areas with well developed agricultural production technologies and a working food-processing sector will benefit more. On the other

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hand, African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries, whose economies depend heavily on agriculture but which are not yet developed, will continue to have difficulties because the majority of farmers have little knowledge about the interlocking and complex factors of both the



Only few girls in rural India attend a primary school, let alone secondary education.

expected to show a modest increase, as the overview for each sector indicates:

Water supply and sanitation are one of the most important basic services. Currently, 69 percent of the rural population in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), and 80 percent in the South Asia Region (SAR) have access to safer drinking water. In sub-Saharan Africa, the current access to rural

water supply is only 40 percent, while sanitation is even worse at only about 24 percent (IEA 2003/UNICEF/WHO). On the basis of past performance of the sector, a modest increase can be expected, meaning that fewer children will die from water-borne diseases, more women will have time to engage in productive activities. However, given the current population growth and the historically limited budget allocation for the sector, a significant change is quite unlikely.

Great efforts will also be made to improve and expand **educational opportunities** in rural areas. In this regard, focus will centre on reducing illiteracy which is quite high in Africa and South Asia, particularly among rural females, but less frequent in Latin America and the Caribbean. Given the concerted effort by governments and the MDG targets, literacy in rural areas is expected to show an encouraging substantial increase during the coming decade. A reasonable increase is also expected in both primary and secondary school enrollment ratios. However, we will continue to observe fundamental imbalances between enrollment and funds, overcrowded class rooms, poorly equipped learning facilities and imbalanced student and teacher's ratio. A crude conclusion is that the past trend will more or less continue: i.e. one out of every five children aged 6–11 will not be in school, about 50 percent of girls will not be able to get primary education. In the rural areas of South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa less

than three out of five children will reach grade five.

The **health service** is also a major problem not only in rural areas, but in urban zones as well. The major health problems are communicable diseases and those related to infant and child mortality, maternal mortality and, of course, HIV/AIDS. Although health infrastructures may slightly improve, access to services is not expected to improve due to limited budgets, extreme shortage of health personnel and poor medical facilities. Overall, the most pressing health problems in rural areas will continue, the alarming number of deaths, particularly of women aged 15–30 years, and the current high infant and child mortality rate will hardly improve. Furthermore, a significant proportion of the rural population will continue to suffer from malnutrition.

HIV/AIDS – the most serious threat for the African continent

HIV/AIDS has already touched every corner of the South, affecting parents, children and youth, old and young. The following data indicate the seriousness and magnitude of the problem.

- While only 10 percent of the world's population live in sub-Saharan Africa, this region is home to more than 60 percent of the population affected by HIV/AIDS, which is 25.8 million. In 2005, an estimated 3.2 million people in the region became newly infected, while 2.4 million adults and children died.
- In 2005, some 8.3 million people were living with HIV in Asia, including 1.1 million people who became newly infected in the past year. AIDS claimed some 520,000 lives in 2005.
- The number of people living with HIV/AIDS in Latin America has risen to an estimated 1.8 million. In 2005, approximately 66,000 people died of AIDS, and 200,000 were newly infected. Among young people between 15–24 years, an estimated 0.4 percent of women and 0.6 percent of men were living with HIV in 2005. The AIDS epidemic claimed an estimated 24,000 lives in the Caribbean in 2005, making it the leading cause of death among adults aged 15–44 years. A total of 300,000 people are currently living with HIV/AIDS in the region, including 30,000 people who became infected in 2005 (UNAIDS: *Regional Report & Statistics 2005*).

The above data clearly show that during the coming decade AIDS will continue to be the major threatening disease and a development problem that has a heavy

domestic and international markets. Thus, during the coming ten years, farmers of these regions will be forced to participate in these markets on an inequitable basis. Many are currently passive participants and will continue to be so, often obliged to sell low (immediately after harvest) and buy high, with little choice of where they conduct their transactions. They will face the risk of marginalization, which will cause a decrease in farming income, an increase in rural poverty levels and out-migration toward urban areas.

Access to basic social services

The main basic social services associated with raising productivity and the living standard of the rural population are health, education, water supply, sanitation, electricity and transport. Each region being socially and economically diverse, access to these basic services in rural areas will vary greatly from one region to another. Taking into account the targets of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the current trend to improve access to basic services in rural areas, overall access in the coming ten years is expected to show a modest increase, regardless of the quality of the service. Although it is difficult to talk in quantitative terms, the physical infrastructure i.e. the number of health services (hospitals, health centres, drugstores), primary and secondary level schools, water supply and sanitation schemes and electricity are

impact on human welfare, socio-economic advances, productivity, and social cohesion. It will be a particularly serious health problem in sub-Saharan Africa where some 60 percent of the people affected by AIDS are living. According to the UNAIDS report, the rate of infection is expected to decrease for the coming decade, but the overall number of people living with HIV/AIDS may continue to increase, particularly in rural areas (HIV Infection Rate, *UNAIDS report*, Nov. 2005).

People who are likely to be affected are those within the 15 – 30 year age bracket. East Asia and the Pacific currently have a relatively small number of individuals infected with HIV, but UNAIDS predicts that by the year 2010 alone, there will be about 11 million new cases of which about 50 percent are expected in the rural areas of this region (World Bank, *East Asia and the Pacific – Fact Sheet*, July 2005). To sum up: due to the lacking strong awareness, high level of poverty and very little access to anti-retroviral treatment, the vulnerability and risk of the rural population is expected to increase. Particularly vulnerable will be rural areas along routes, nomadic pastoralists and women remaining in farms with seasonal migrant husbands.

Infrastructure and demographic trends

Electricity is one of the major infrastructures that will impact on poverty alleviation in rural areas. During the coming decade the electrification rate is expected to increase rapidly particularly in rural areas of North Africa, the Middle East, Latin America and to a certain degree in Asia. According to a study by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), in the year 2030, electrification in these regions will reach up to 100 percent, whereas over half of the population in sub-Saharan Africa, which is an estimated 680 million people, will still be without electricity. About 80 percent of rural Africa will continue to use fuelwood for cooking and lighting not only for the coming ten years but also in the long run. This will cause further environmental degradation thus endangering the agricultural sector, the lifeline of the rural population (Yinka Adeyein, *Economic Commission for Africa*. Addis Ababa, 2005).

Rural transport is another critical pre-requisite to improving rural livelihoods. During the coming ten years, it is believed that rural motorized transport will improve considerably thanks to the construction of new rural roads and the maintenance of existing ones. This in turn is expected to improve the lives of the ru-

Water supply and sanitation are one of the most important basic services, but the current access to rural water supply is only 40 percent in sub-Saharan Africa.



Photo: Wicke

ral population because an effective transportation system will reduce transaction costs for business, integrate regional markets, spur efficiency gains, create new jobs, boost the export of locally produced goods and provide better access to social services.

Demographic trend. Several disturbing demographic trends are likely to affect overall development in rural areas of the South. According to the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) global population numbered 6.5 billion in 2005 and is currently growing by some 77 million per year. By the year 2025, world population is projected to reach 7.9 and 9.1 billion by 2050 (UNFPA Report 2005). Almost all of the net increase is occurring in the developing world, particularly in the South. For rural areas this would mean more mouths to feed and more people requiring services. Thus population growth is going to be a crucial variable in the food security equation of rural areas. The rural-urban drift is also expected to be rapid, driven by the desire to find a better income and leaving the dependent groups of the population (elderly people, children and women) in the rural areas.

The role of natural resources and communication systems for rural areas

Management of natural resources. Given the continuous population pressure on land and the limited knowledge of the population regarding these resources, better management of natural resources can hardly be expected. In fact, based on the current trend, we will observe greater deterioration of natural resource, for example high soil degradation, deforestation for firewood, loss of agro-forestry resources and less protection of wildlife.

Information and communication. The use of information and communication tech-

nologies in everyday life is rapidly expanding in almost every country and is now seen world-wide as both a necessity and an opportunity. Significant improvements in information and communication are foreseen for the coming ten years. Large quantities of information will be available for the rural population on topics such as the market-price of commodities, inputs, production techniques, storage and food technologies etc. The speed at which this information circulates will accelerate considerably. The number of radios and television sets will also increase substantially. Telecommunication networks will continue to develop, particularly with the opening of private telephone services and shops (standard and mobile telephones). Internet communications are also expected to show a reasonable increase

Conclusion

Despite the many persistent efforts made during the last two or three decades, the living standard of the rural population has not improved and is not expected to improve during the coming ten years. The likely scenario is, that the gap between urban and rural areas will widen. Most of the poorest people will continue to live in rural areas and this will not change in the foreseeable future. The lives of the rural population will mainly be characterized by isolation, exclusion and unreliable access to even the most basic economic opportunities and social services. Agricultural output per capita will either decline or remain constant. HIV/AIDS will continue to be a major health threat. In brief, the technological advances which have created numerous new economic opportunities and reduced poverty in many parts of the world will hardly have any significant impact on the rural population of the South, at least in the coming ten years. The majority of the rural population will continue to live on less than one dollar a day.