

International Conference

Dynamics of Rural Transformation in Emerging Economies

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<http://www.ruraltransformation.in>

Why an International Conference?

One fourth of the world's population lives in the rural areas of Brazil, China, India and South Africa.

Rural households in these emerging economies play a key role in the management of millions of hectares of land and forest. They are one of the world's largest producers of food and are a key contributor to the global economy. Yet they represent about one third of the world's poor and almost half of the world's rural poor, and experience some of the greatest challenges of human development.

The rural areas of these emerging economies are undergoing rapid and deep economic, social, demographic, cultural and political transformation.

Change in rural societies is necessary and even indispensable for the sustainable development not only of these countries, but of the world more generally. Rural areas should not only seek to address human development and social justice, but be fully recognized and secure in their rightful place as key contributors to national and global economic development and environmental sustainability.

The transformation of the rural areas in the emerging economies is happening in a context of rapid globalization making any change in an individual economy interactive with the rest of the world.

This raises questions as to how country-specific transformation policies can best be tailored to respond to both the domestic and international trends. As these may not always coincide, it makes change an even greater challenge.

The challenges of rural transformation

This Conference will focus on four of the key challenges faced.

The human development gap. Globally, the rural areas of Brazil, China, India and South Africa represent a large proportion of the world's poor. Some of these areas experience the deepest challenges of human development. These challenges have a negative impact on the channeling of benefits and promoting involvement of the rural poor, particularly the women and youth, in the development agenda.

The rural – urban gap. In some of these countries, the economic and social distance between the rural and urban communities and sectors is increasing. In some cases the gap in per capita income between rural and urban areas is rising. In relation to education, social services and infrastructure, rural areas face more challenges than urban areas. In specific rural provinces this gap is even more marked.

The conflict between production and the environment. The transformation of rural societies is putting enormous pressures on the environment. Often these pressures extend well beyond the borders of these countries with national and global implications. Global warming and changes in weather patterns are

further influencing the rural future. Yet through new models, rural areas may offer key solutions to environmental sustainability nationally and globally.

Regional imbalances. The pace and nature of the transformation processes are not always well-balanced across the countries' regions. In some cases there exist marked spatial inequalities whereby certain rural areas prosper economically, in some cases reducing social inequality, whereas others experience deepening poverty and economic stagnation.

Because of the scale of rural societies in these countries and of the resources involved, these challenges are not exclusively rural issues or even national ones; they are indeed global concerns. When these challenges are addressed, then the 1.6 billion rural inhabitants will reach their real potential to contribute to their countries and to our planet, producing more and better quality food, creating more productive jobs that support better livelihoods, safeguarding culture and traditions, and looking after the vast natural resources under their stewardship.

Taking forward innovation and new approaches

This Conference is based on the premise that the challenges faced in rural areas can be met successfully if strategies and policies are no longer rooted in the old paradigms of rural development. In contrast to even the recent past, the transformation of the rural areas in the emerging economies is now happening in the context of ever enhancing globalization making any change in a given rural economy interactive with the rest of the world.

New and innovative approaches are being put in place by emerging economy countries to address these challenges. Whilst each in their own way are tailored to specific contexts, together and through shared learning a new paradigm for rural development can be realized.

The global financial crisis further has highlighted the need for fresh ideas and approaches. Not only are these countries being challenged to mitigate the economic and social impacts of the crisis; they are also expected to play a major role in pulling the world's economy out of recession. This means that in the future, new options to deal with rural transformation will become possible, in a way not seen since the 1980's.

The objectives

The Conference seeks to stimulate this emergence of new frameworks, approaches and strategies for dealing with the major challenges posed by the dynamics of rural transformation in emerging economies driven by national and international trends.

It will bring together senior-level policy makers and public sector administrators, academia and civil society, to share models, experiences, and innovations that work drawn from emerging economy countries themselves including new and flexible approaches that leverage the forces of globalization for the benefit of rural populations. It will strengthen understanding between countries facing similar challenges and build new networks between common interest groups.

Key themes

The program of the Conference will be organized around six themes.

Theme 1. Human development and social inclusion. At the heart of our concern about the rural transformation in emerging economies is the question of what is its impact on the well-being and opportunities of rural people, households and communities. The issues of poverty, gender, ethnic, and income inequality are of paramount importance. Social protection strategies including income transfer schemes and skills and professional development are important as the pace and depth of the change is leaving millions behind. On the other hand, the rapid changes taking place demand new skills on the part of individuals, enterprises, organizations, and communities. It is questionable whether the existing strategies, including educational systems, are the most appropriate and effective. The development of indigenous knowledge systems and the integration of these skills with new thinking are also of crucial importance.

Theme 2. Jobs and economic diversification. It appears that diversification of the rural economy beyond its agrarian tradition is both one of the primary results and one of the major drivers of the rural transformation taking place in emerging economies. Infrastructure, including ICTs, and the development of new economic alternatives such as processing and sustainable tourism feature as major enablers of economic diversification, as well as a condition for its social and economic effects to be more fairly distributed across the different sectors of the rural population. The Conference seeks to complement the discussion of non-farm employment and incomes by emphasizing how the dynamics of rural economic diversification are related to each of the four challenges discussed above.

Theme 3. Agriculture and food. While the rural economies of the emerging countries have diversified and will continue to do so, agriculture and food production continues to be the most important rural economic activity. Under this theme, it is expected that the Conference will consider: (a) the dynamics of change in the agrifood systems in emerging economies, (b) how agrifood systems are contributing, or could contribute to meeting one or more of the four challenges described above, and (c) the socio-economic restructuring and service support required to nurture the sector.

Theme 4. Environmental services and energy. The provision of environmental services and of clean and renewable energy appears as new demands are being placed on rural societies in emerging economies. Many hopes for new rural development options are placed on the continued growth of these service functions. Yet, there are also important questions raised about the impact of these nascent industries on food provision and food prices, on trade through new non-trade tariffs, or on the trade-off between poverty reduction and environmental conservation objectives. The Conference will present and discuss the dynamics of these new rural services and their actual or potential contribution to the four challenges.

Theme 5. Urbanization and rural – urban linkages. Unprecedented rural-urban migration is taking place in many emerging economy countries. Rural areas are increasingly interlinked with cities. It is probably the case that sustainable rural development depends on how urbanization is managed as well as the quality and strength of rural-urban linkages. Under this theme, the Conference will have contributions that will help in understanding the dynamics of demographic change, industrialization, skills change and migration. It will recognize the scale of rural-urban migration which in turn impacts on local and global environmental issues, and discuss the dynamics of rural-urban linkages. It will explore how rural areas may both benefit from linkages as well as minimize the negative effects of migration on the rural poor and the environment.

Theme 6. Governance, policy and institutions. What changes take place or fail to do so; why do they occur in certain places and not in others; the distribution of the opportunities, benefits and costs of the transformation; and the effectiveness of policy attempts to deal with the consequences of change, are all dependent to a large extent on the nature and quality of governance systems, policy processes and formal and informal rural institutions. Recommendations related to the previous five themes can be reduced to

naïve and technocratic illusions if they are not accompanied by an understanding of governance, policy and institutional issues. This theme includes specific reference to the challenges of policy coordination across different policy sectors and agencies, as well as between different levels of government (national, provincial, local). Last, but certainly not least, the questions of forms of rural development support programs, participation and real stakeholder engagement, and social control and accountability are important topics in Theme 6 of the Conference.

Contributions

The Conference will feature:

- Inaugural session
- Four keynote presentations by distinguished scholars and policy makers of international stature
- Approximately 70 paper presentations, of which about 40 will be invited and the rest will be selected from open submissions.
- A mix of plenary and parallel working sessions
- A synthesis panel at the end of the conference to draw the main results, conclusions and recommendations.

The conference will offer simultaneous translation in English, Portuguese, and Mandarin Chinese.

Participants

Up to 300 participants with over 70% from key emerging economy countries and 30% from other emerging, developing and OECD countries. Conference participants, as both presenters and attendees, will represent: political figures from the large emerging economy countries of Brazil, China, India and South Africa; national government representatives; provincial/regional governors; associations of rural peoples and civil society organizations; natural resources managers; academics and policy think tanks; private sector, including banking institutions and business associations; International Financial Institutions and other development agencies.

Expected outcomes

Participants will have gained exposure to a range of experiences and innovative practices on rural development, drawn from emerging economy countries and, where relevant, key selected experiences from other countries. They will have had the opportunity to meet with and work together with peer groups in other countries, forging informal and potentially formal common interest networks.

It is hoped that the Conference will generate a communiqué or joint statement on rural dynamics, economic growth and the reduction of inequality.

One year after the Conference, it is hoped that:

- Some level of cooperation between the different stakeholder groups in the different countries/regions will be forged to take forward the agenda to foster rural change and transformation processes and to cooperate for shared learning.
- Outcomes will feed into the agenda of national and regional policy makers and other interested development partners, including the International Financial Institutions.

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