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Case Study 1

Best Public Policy is Achieved Through Dialogue: Rural Dialogue Group's Experience in Latin America

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In Latin America, strategies to influence public policy are not always effective. The public policy networks are restricted in number and have relatively homogeneous actors. Without dialogue, the public policies run the risk of making mistakes and not being relevant to the reality of people's lives. Comprehensive and inclusive dialogues are more likely to respond adequately to the problems of the population and formulate effective public policies.

Rural Dialogue Groups (RDGs), driven by the Latin American Center for Rural Development (Centro Latinoamericano para el Desarrollo Rural, RIMISP) in partnership with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) in Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador and Mexico, have achieved concrete outcomes demonstrating that dialogues are a successful methodology for the development of rural areas in Latin America.

The RDGs are groups with 10 to 30 influential people from different sectors (government, guilds, producers, academia), which defines an agenda based on national contexts, public debates and political opportunities in the field of rural poverty. It also addresses various issues relating to the agenda, generating analysis and proposals for policy makers. With over four years of work in the countries where they are run, the RDGs show how dialogue has become a successful tool for policy influence and change.

In Ecuador, the contribution was related to the enactment of the National Policy on Supply of Certified Seeds of the Ministry of Agriculture for small rice and corn producers. Both the decision to conduct the first Competitive Improvement Plan to extend it to other production chains (bananas, rice, palm oil, quinoa) has been taken by the Minister from inputs and dialogues developed by the group. The methodology is as follows:

- Presentation of analysis and debate in the Group (extended meetings lasting half a day)
- Specific studies or consultancies; where upon
- Determination by the authority of strategy, policy or program that incorporates the proposed elements are expected.

In Colombia, RDG has contributed significantly to the Rural Mission and the National Planning Department (DNP). The group is a learning space and guidance for policy, recognised valuable to exchange experiences, debate and recommendations to approach authorities and public officials. It is also an instance of joint networks of actors with experience in rural development, strengthening the possibility of informed debate and the establishment of areas of joint work.

With the DNP, we worked on defining categories of rurality, which are suitable to classify territories and group them for intervention. This work resulted in a document prepared by the Directorate of Sustainable Rural Development (DDRS) under the Rural Mission. Also debating and installing in the discussion of key people and the guidance documents for the policies related to rural development, elements such as the territorial approach and the importance of citizen participation, multi-sectoral, integration and differentiation of the territories.

In El Salvador, the RDG supported the National Environmental Policy and the draft Law on Food Security and Nutrition and Food Sovereignty, with the Agrarian Commission of the Legislative Assembly. In Mexico, the RDG has formed four working committees, focused on the dialogue for the incidence in the public budget reformulation, aimed at rural development, the functioning of agro food markets, the reform and improvement of the system of social protection and reduction of the violations of human rights.

Lessons and key mechanisms

The RDGs have been effective for the following reasons: a) the conversations that take place between people who have direct experience and with people with political capital on rural issues; b) developing a direct and effective communication between decision makers and representatives of several groups (guilds, small producers and academia); c) it combines different ways of knowing: generating technical and empirical knowledge, which delivers information relevant to for public policies and strategies in the countries; d) providing technical assistance to governments, supporting decision makers in processes of change.

The best public policy is achieved through dialogue and the Rural Dialogue Groups are a successful mechanism to achieve it.

For further information, visit: <http://rimisp.org/proyecto/impactosgranescala>