

**External Review of the Rimisp Rural Territorial Dynamics (RTD) Project:  
Scientific Contributions and Policy Influence**

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**December 12, 2011**

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**Project Evaluated: IDRC Project #104513 – RIMISP Core Support for Rural  
Development Research (Latin America and the Caribbean)**

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## Executive Summary

RIMISP Core Support for Rural Development Research (Rimisp-Rural Territorial Dynamics or RTD Project) is a five-year program funded by IDRC in July, 2007 at a level of \$10M; supplementary funding of approximately \$4M has been provided to date by other donors. The program integrates and synthesizes policy, practice and intellectual debate at a flexible, sub-national geographic scale in a way that links and cuts across disciplines. The *general objective* of this research-based policy advisory and capacity building program is to contribute to the design and implementation of more comprehensive, cross-cutting and effective public policies that will stimulate and support rural territorial dynamics in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). The initiative was designed and implemented through a networked program involving a diversity of actors.

This evaluation focuses on the program's scientific contributions and policy influence; a companion evaluation focuses on organizational issues. The primary users of this external review are IDRC management and other donors interested in investing in a Rimisp-RTD follow-up program. Data for the evaluation were gathered from multiple sources, including; reviews of selected documents; interviews with selected RIMISP staff; and interviews with key network members and representatives of research and development organizations working in LAC, and (to a limited degree) with development experts working in Asia and Africa. Approximately 50 individuals were contacted, including those who participated in the evaluator's site visits to Chile, Peru and El Salvador. A technical evaluation of the Rimisp-RTD website was also undertaken.

**Research Activities** – Research began with the preparation of detailed maps (referred to here as 'poverty maps') for eleven countries in LAC that depicted changes over time at municipal-level in per capita income, poverty and income distribution; these maps were then used to select for detailed study 19 territories that had successfully promoted per capita income growth. The final phase of research is synthesizing scientific contributions and distilling policy messages.

**Scientific Contributions** – Scientific contributions began with the identification of the few geographic areas that had experienced rural income growth in LAC over the past two decades or so. Research on these success stories is making more concrete the notion and the potential usefulness of territories for science and for policy. It became clear that territories could be *created* based on shared, grass-roots visions of the opportunities for sustainable, inclusive growth, and on the shared commitments to promote it. New sets of actors, new rules of engagement, and new sets of supporting policies are required to identify and to solve territorial problems, and there are efficiency gains from choosing territories over existing (generally static) municipalities, states, etc. Innovative contributions by the private sector and by actors from medium-sized cities will be fundamental in many cases. A broader gender lens addresses differences in access to markets, credit, assets, etc. among males, females and other demographic groups, and focuses attention on the bidirectional links between differential access and sustainable, inclusive growth. Spatial and other disconnects between traditional policy instruments and those required to promote rural territorial dynamics are being identified, and solutions are being proposed in some cases. Related, the circumstances under which place-based policies may be more cost-effective than spatially-blind policies are beginning to emerge. The final round of synthesis work should identify the territorial characteristics that are necessary for sustainable, inclusive growth to take place, and the traditional and innovative policy actions required to shape them.

**Research Productivity** – The scientific program continues to mid-2012 and products will emerge for several years thereafter. To date, approximately 100 internally reviewed Working Papers have been produced. Five papers derived from this Working Paper series have been published in peer-reviewed outlets (with others currently under review), and many of the Working Papers will be included in four edited volumes and a planned special issue of an international journal. When all of the planned publications emerge, the body of published work will be well within the acceptable range for a project of this type and scale, both in terms of volume and quality.

**Policy Influence** – Even at this early stage, Rimisp-RTD has achieved considerable policy influence. The Rimisp-RTD poverty maps forcefully remind stakeholders of the persistent pockets of rural poverty that remain in LAC, while highlighting the small collection of successes that may be replicable with innovative policy action. The territorial focus reverses the trend towards atomistic decentralization, calls instead for planning and cooperation among selected (usually neighboring) administrative units, and provides guidance regarding which stakeholders to involve and how to do so – the Humedal Cerron Grande Project in El Salvador and the Chiloé Project in Chile demonstrate the logic and effectiveness of this approach. Working Groups on Rural Poverty and Development, such as the one officially launched recently in Mexico, make use of evidence-based policy guidance from Rimisp-RTD, and international agencies such as IFAD are reshaping their rural development strategies based on the concept of territories and the results emerging from Rimisp-RTD research. The recent elevation of two Rimisp-RTD collaborators to ministerial-level positions in LAC reflects the high quality and degrees of policy engagement of many Rimisp-RTD collaborators, and is also a signal of the expected benefits of the territorial focus.

**Conclusions** – An impressive and regionally unique combination of scientific output and policy influence has emerged at Rimisp over the past four years – much of this progress would not have occurred without the IDRC grant, which I view as cost-effective. Scientifically, the Rimisp-RTD project has undertaken a body of research on rural territorial dynamics that is unprecedented in LAC as regards its geographic scope, its uniformity, and its depth. The research approach adopted by the Rimisp-RTD that focused on territories that experienced growth in per capita income is scientifically justifiable. The volume of scientific output to date has been impressive and the quality of most of the work is high. Looking forward, while the preliminary round of site-specific and synthesis work will be concluded by mid-2012, much important work will remain to be done, and continuity in research focus will pay scientific and policy-influence dividends.

An expanded network of research collaborators, many of whom are politically well-connected and very active, have allowed Rimisp to establish a set of broad-based and efficient research projects, and to quickly leverage early learning and preliminary research results into policy influence. Rimisp has very clearly become a reference point for researchers and an entry point for donors interested/active in LAC. However, influence outside of LAC has been smaller. Relatively small investments in document and website translation, a website upgrade, and strategic involvement in extra-regional activities and events convened/managed by others could help extend the reach of Rimisp without compromising ongoing activities and partnerships in LAC. Greatly expanding Rimisp-RTD research/outreach activities outside of LAC is not recommended.

## **Body of the Evaluation Report**

### **Background of the Study**

The project, RIMISP Core Support for Rural Development Research (Latin America and the Caribbean)-104513, was funded by IDRC in July, 2007. It was originally established as a \$10M, five-year program of which IDRC would fund \$5M and Rimisp would seek the remaining funding from other donors. However, after only six months of operation (January, 2008), IDRC funded the second half of the program so that it was fully funded as originally designed. Subsequently, Rimisp generated approximately \$4M of additional co- and parallel funding for the program.

This program of research addresses rural development in a manner very different to past practice: integrating and synthesizing policy, practice and intellectual debate at a *flexible*, sub-national geographic scale in a way that links and cuts across different disciplines. The initiative was designed and implemented through a networked program involving a diversity of actors.

The *general objective* of this research-based policy advisory and capacity building program was to contribute to the design and implementation of more comprehensive, cross-cutting and effective public policies that will stimulate and support rural territorial dynamics. Specific objectives to strengthen rural territorial development were to: (1) inform policies with strategic, research-based analysis of the dynamics of rural territories and of the determinants of change; (2) strengthen the capacity of public and private development agents to engage in policy-making and program-implementation processes; (3) facilitate dialogue and interaction among rural development practitioners, policy-makers and researchers from Latin America and other regions on approaches to rural territorial development; (4) strengthen the capacity of selected postgraduate university programs in Central America and the Andes; and (5) to support the consolidation of Rimisp as a leading rural development knowledge center.

The program ends in June of 2012, with a significant number of ongoing operations that involve about 20% of the IDRC grant and 40% of the additional (non-IDRC) resources. The scope of the review is the overall program, consisting of the IDRC grant, part of which was utilized as co-funding with several other large grants from the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), New Zealand Agency for International Development (NZAID) and the Ford Foundation, and several minor grants. The program is a single, integrated effort and while Rimisp is accountable to IDRC for the \$10M grant, the review of the IDRC contract/grant needs to take into account the co-funded activities.

## Intended Users & Uses of the External Review

The primary users of this external review are IDRC management and other donors interested in investing in a Rimisp follow-up program. The secondary user is Rimisp.

The key general uses of the overall external review are to:

- account for the \$10M investment;
- better understand how the core funding modality affected key dimensions of scientific and organizational performance in the program;
- assess issues that are of special interest to IDRC and supplemental to the coverage by the program monitoring and evaluation activities; and
- provide guidance for future programming.

This document reports the finds of the evaluation that focused on *scientific contributions and policy influence*.<sup>1</sup> More specifically, the following issues were addressed:

- the quantity and quality of contributions made to the state of knowledge about rural development, including the strengths and weaknesses of the integration of gender dimensions into the research and policy recommendations;
- the theory of change of the Rimisp program, whether it remains valid, and whether or not their work adds up to reasonable progress in that direction;
- the scientific productivity reached in the Rimisp program in relation to the level of investment made by IDRC in the program;
- the intellectual influence of the Rimisp program on key research and development organizations active in a regional or in specific national contexts, including (but not necessarily limited to) universities, large NGO's and think tanks and their networks, and some social organizations and movements, as well as multi-lateral organizations as relevant; and
- policy changes, policies being considered for change/adoption, and any modifications to policy change mechanisms in the region as a result of the Rimisp program.

## Values and Principles Guiding the Evaluation Process

Several very important factors influenced the data available for this study, and the interpretation and use of the study's results.

First, the Rimisp-RTD project is ongoing and may just now be entering its most productive phase regarding the generation of suitably vetted scientific products and the policy recommendations based on them. One commonly employed 'rule of thumb' in the arena of agricultural policies is that it takes about a decade from the conclusion of completed body of research to effect comprehensive changes in major national policies.<sup>2</sup> These factors suggest that this review is premature; another few years, at least, would be required to more concretely judge the effectiveness and the cost-effectiveness of the Rimisp-RTD project. Therefore, this review

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<sup>1</sup> A companion document (Weyrauch, 2011) focuses on organizational issues.

<sup>2</sup> Personal communication, Julian Alston, world leader on the economic returns to agricultural research. Also see Salter and Martin (2001).

makes an effort to identify scientific contributions and policy influence *to date*, and also attempts to *look forward* and assess likely future scientific contributions and policy impacts.

Second, the very considerable co-funding secured Rimisp-RTD complicates the evaluation, in part because co-funding did not begin when the IDRC grant was made.

Third, time constraints precluded reviewing all of the documents or contacting all of the individuals that the evaluator would have liked to have included in the data used for this assessment. With that said, I believe the documents reviewed and the individuals contacted provided an information base to adequately support this evaluation, and the conclusions/suggestions it contains.

Fourth, views differed among stakeholders regarding some of the issues dealt with in this review. Whenever a consensus view was possible to determine, it is reported. Whenever stakeholders' views were sharply divided on an issue, multiple views are reported.

Fifth, there are some disciplinary issues that are beyond the ability of this evaluator (an economist) to address. Whenever such issues arose, input from experts in the field was sought.

Sixth, this review takes as given the results of earlier internal and external reviews of the Rimisp-RTD project.

Finally, Rimisp is one of many organizations in LAC doing research on or seeking to promote sustainable, inclusive growth,<sup>3</sup> so attribution issues loom large regarding contributions to science and (especially) to changes in policies, policymaking processes, and policy dialog.

### Description of Methodology

The following data collection methods were employed in this evaluation:

- initial orientation meeting at Rimisp offices in Santiago, Chile;

- review of documentation relevant to the Rimisp program, including the initial proposal, annual progress reports, documents available on the Rimisp web site, evaluations conducted by the Rimisp M & E system, and key publications resulting from the program;<sup>4</sup>

- review of the recent international literature on rural development theory and practice;

- interviews with selected Rimisp staff, authors of important Rimisp-RTD reports, and a selection of key stakeholders within the research networks developed for the program;

- interviews with staff from selected key organizations active within and outside the region; and

- interviews with representatives of selected agencies that ultimately provided co-funding or parallel funding to the program.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Echeverri and Sotomayor (2010)

<sup>4</sup> See Annex 3 of this report for a list of documents consulted.

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix 2 to this report for a list of individuals contacted.

## Acknowledgements

Rimisp research and support staff worked tirelessly and cheerfully to prepare and deliver the large volume of information upon which this study heavily relies, present and discuss issues related to the program's scientific contributions and policy influence, and help to arrange meetings with stakeholders.

IDRC-Montevideo staff was instrumental in launching this study, and provided very efficient logistical support and guidance on issues of substance throughout the evaluation period.

A long list of stakeholders graciously agreed to provide input into this study; the time and effort they dedicated to preparing for and participating in interviews was considerable.

Finally, a very able set of anonymous reviewers provided suggestions for improving the accuracy and the usefulness of this document.

The efforts of these groups are very much appreciated.

All errors are mine.



## Evaluation Findings

### *The Scientific Contributions of the Rimisp-RTD Program*

The seminal contribution of Schejtman and Berdegue<sup>6</sup> is the RTD program's intellectual point of departure. This paper is recognized and appreciated by all Rimisp collaborators (and many others) as a fundamental contribution to the stock of knowledge, and one that has immediate resonance with a very broad array of stakeholders throughout LAC. In short, this paper, and some important Rimisp work leading up to it,<sup>7</sup> argues that a new socioeconomic and geographic 'lens' is required to identify options for and ways to promote sustainable, inclusive growth in rural areas in LAC – the proposed geographic lens is the *territory*, which is larger than a município (or county) and smaller than a state (or region), and is comprised of a set of stakeholders that are called upon to promote sustainable, inclusive growth.<sup>8</sup>

The core of Rimisp-RTD research portfolio is comprised of a set of detailed, empirical studies of 19 territories that succeeded in promoting per capita income growth, and some ancillary research activities.<sup>9</sup> The research program is geared towards identifying the circumstances under which sustainable, inclusive growth has occurred in LAC, assessing the poverty-reduction and other benefits of this growth, and identifying the role of public policies (and in some cases, corporate policies) required to promote such growth. The scientific contributions of the Rimisp-RTD project have already begun to change the ways in which researchers and practitioners think about rural development.<sup>10</sup>

### *Defining Territories—Why and How?*

RTD research began with the preparation of a collection of detailed poverty maps.<sup>11</sup> These maps permit, for the first time in the context of developing countries, spatially and temporally comparable measures of changes in rural poverty.<sup>12</sup> Among other things, these panels of poverty maps remind all stakeholders of the persistent (and in some countries, pervasive) pockets of poverty that remain in rural areas in LAC, and identify the relatively few collections of municípios (win-win-win territories, they came to be called) that had managed to increase income, and to reduce poverty and income inequality.

The next step in the RTD research program was to select a subset of 19 territories that generated income growth (the first 'win' underlying the poverty maps) and to undertake quantitative and qualitative field research to determine how per capita income growth was achieved, and with what consequences for income inequality, poverty and natural resource management. At this point, RTD's research focus broadened beyond the pair of economic measures used to identify win-win outcomes, to include an array of factors that influenced productivity growth, production

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<sup>6</sup> Schejtman and Berdegue (2007), which takes as background, among others, Acemoglu et al. (2002), Krugman (1991, 1998).

<sup>7</sup> Especially the work on rural non-farm employment, see Escobar, Reardon and Berdegue (2001).

<sup>8</sup> Reducing poverty, and making the ownership of and access to assets and services more equitable, are key objectives of sustainable, inclusive growth.

<sup>9</sup> Rimisp-RTD (2009), page 12.

<sup>10</sup> These categories roughly follow de Janvry and Saudoulet (2007).

<sup>11</sup> See, as examples, Larrea et al. (2008), Escobar and Ponce (2008) Naude et al. (2009) and Favareto and Abramovay (2009).

<sup>12</sup> Escobar and Ponce (2008) is an example of an important Rimisp-RTD contribution to the stock of knowledge on this issue.

technology choices, changes in competitive advantage, and factor mobility, all of which helped determined income growth, equity and environmental outcomes.<sup>13</sup>

Several important scientific contributions related to setting territorial boundaries have emerged from this work. First, the boundaries of territories are not historical accidents or (necessarily) drawn to match existing political boundaries. Rather, territories are *created* based on shared, grass-roots visions of the opportunities for sustainable, inclusive growth, and the shared commitments to promote it.<sup>14</sup> Second, the notion of territories represents a reversal of the tendency towards atomistic decentralization that is occurring in much of LAC, where resources and responsibilities are being delegated to municipalities and in some cases to communities. Where municipalities are too small to cost-effectively provide services such as education or healthcare, to support large-scale production activities, or to solve environmental problems, territories offer a framework for *municípios* to work together to provide services at the appropriate scale (e.g., one hospital or high school serving a set of municipalities) or to comprehensively address environmental problems.

### *An Expanded and Enriched Intuitional Setting*

Through the territorial lens, the Rimisp-RTD project is helping to recast the institutional setting needed to effectively promote sustainable, inclusive growth. First, which I consider an emerging fundamental scientific contribution, the importance and the roles of medium-sized cities in defining territories and in understanding RTD processes are now better understood.<sup>15</sup> The incorporation of cities, some of which are located outside the boundaries of territories,<sup>16</sup> has generated some new insights into urban-rural linkages, which could in turn lead to new policy instruments or actions to promote rural development. Second, large-scale private sector actors have long played a role in rural development in LAC,<sup>17</sup> but Rimisp-RTD is exploring ways of managing large-scale enterprises to increase their contributions to meeting territorial poverty and equity objectives.<sup>18</sup> The Chiloé Project is an example of the potential for careful real-time project development and management activities to yield important scientific insights.

### *Production Systems and the Ecosystems that Support Them*

The approach taken by Rimisp-RTD on environmental and natural resource management issues goes *beyond* the endowment of natural resources within a given territory and its role in determining the productivity and profitability of alternative production systems.<sup>19</sup> Case studies in El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile all revealed the complex and often site-specific relationships between of ecosystem service flows and sustainable, inclusive growth.<sup>20</sup> In some cases (e.g., the birth, collapse and rebirth of the salmon industry in

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<sup>13</sup> See Rimisp (2008).

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Diaz et al. (2010)

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Berdegué et al. (2010).

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Hernandez and Trivelli (2011).

<sup>17</sup> See Bebbington, mining examples.

<sup>18</sup> See, as examples, Ramirez et al. (2010) and Escobal et al. (2011d).

<sup>19</sup> Environment and natural resources were not explicitly included in the original set of criteria for identifying successful RTD cases. See internal evaluation (2010) for a review of this issue.

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Escobal et al. (2011).

Chiloé, Chile), the improved understanding of the symbioses between ecosystems and production systems has allowed researchers to identify the environmentally imposed limits to production, and to suggest new local monitoring and evaluation (M&E) activities to guard against overstepping them.<sup>21</sup>

### *Social Settings and Key Stakeholders*

The need for collective action to solve some types of problems or to take advantage of some types of opportunities is not new,<sup>22</sup> but Rimisp-RTD research is discovering that problems and opportunities seen through the territorial lens require different sets of actors and different mechanisms for ensuring that the ‘voices’ of different stakeholder groups are heard and have value.<sup>23</sup> Embracing the spatial dimensions of ethnic and other social factors, using these concretely to define territories, and tapping and managing the energy of these groups to promote RTD are important and innovative contributions. In addition, the extra-territorial actors (by definition those located outside territorial boundaries, which can include international actors) are now seen as fundamental players in determining rural development success/failures, and not only in the more obvious cases of territories in which large-scale natural resource extraction is ongoing,<sup>24</sup> but also in cases where the linkages are more diffused (e.g., via remittance transfers).<sup>25</sup>

Rimisp-RTD research is also probing the costs associated with establishing and managing territories, and the new skill sets that may be required to do so (e.g., experienced facilitators to work with public/private stakeholders to exchange views, and especially to sustain negotiations with these groups and arrive at a set of agreed-upon objectives and investments/activities<sup>26</sup>). Rimisp’s innovative internal policy action fund<sup>27</sup> not only motivates researchers to explore these issues in practical ways, but also shed lights on the costs of new territory-based activities.

The research program has also incorporated innovative gender components into selected case studies.<sup>28</sup> This work has moved away from ‘feminizing’ research, taking a broader age/gender approach to the problem, addressing issues related to differences in access to markets, credit, assets, etc. among males, females and other demographic groups (e.g., very young and very old), as well as the potential effects of sustainable, inclusive growth on these sub-groups *because of* their differential access to markets, etc.<sup>29</sup> This research also focuses on the flip-side of the issue, i.e., the *effects of* differential access on the potential for sustainable, inclusive growth.<sup>30</sup> For example, historically determined supply/demand relationships in local labor markets were shown to be of fundamental importance to the success of the salmon industry in Chile; labor mobility

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<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Ramirez et al. (2010).

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, Ostrom (2001).

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, Hernandez and Trivelli (2011).

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Hinojosa et al. (2011).

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, Stefoni (2011).

<sup>26</sup> Personal communications, Eduardo Ramirez (Rimisp-DTR).

<sup>27</sup> This is the Rimisp-RTD Advocacy Fund.

<sup>28</sup> For the framework, see Paulson et al. (2011), and for an example, see Rodriguez et al. (2011).

<sup>29</sup> See, Paulson et al. (2011)

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Portillo et al. (2011).

unconstrained by tradition gender roles helped keep production costs low in the Chiloé territory.<sup>31</sup>

### *Linking Territorial Development to Regional/National Strategies and Policies*

Resources and decision-making power over them are housed in existing institutions that generally do not have territorial objectives or policy instruments designed to promote sustainable, inclusive growth at the territorial level. Promoting territorial objectives therefore requires establishing policy links between territorial objectives and national strategies/actions. To lay the groundwork for such linking activities, the Rimisp-RTD research program systematically assessed the policy objectives, tools and implementing agencies in several countries.<sup>32</sup>

The recent (controversial, even within the World Bank) World Development Report<sup>33</sup> put place-based policies at the bottom of the priority list for interventions to spur rural development. Rimisp-RTD takes a different view, and, based in its site-specific research and its synthesis work, is positioning itself to identify the socioeconomic, agroecological and political circumstances under which place-based policies are more cost-effective at promoting inclusive, sustainable development than are the spatially-blind policies aimed at promoting the spatial concentration of economic activities.<sup>34</sup>

### *Low-Hanging Scientific Fruit*

In addition to the established contributions noted above, several of the forthcoming research products will also make important scientific contributions.

Rimisp-RTD has generated a unique set of high-quality panels of poverty maps. These maps, a description of the tools used to create them, and a synthesis of their contents will be set out in a volume slated for publication next year. However, with focused effort, the maps and especially the underlying data can be used to begin to disentangle the factors associated with different degrees and definitions of sustainable, inclusive growth. The existing cadre of young Rimisp-RTD researchers has the skills necessary to undertake this work; time available to pursue these activities and input from collaborators<sup>35</sup> and other research partners will be the limiting factors.

Rimisp-RTD project is currently in the process of synthesizing the lessons learned from the 19 case studies of successful territories<sup>36</sup> plus some ancillary research. This final phase of the current research plan could usefully focus on distilling key messages from the rich sets of

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<sup>31</sup> E.g., see Ramirez et al. (2011).

<sup>32</sup> See, for example, Cox (2008).

<sup>33</sup> World Bank (2009).

<sup>34</sup> Berdegué et al. (2011)

<sup>35</sup> See, for example, Escobal and Ponce (2011b) and Saavedra, Arias and Escobal (2010).

<sup>36</sup> An alternative scientific approach would be to choose a set of lose-lose territories, or so-called spatial poverty traps, and use them as a basis for understanding the *absence* of sustainable, inclusive growth. Rimisp-RTD might productively collaborate with the Chronic Poverty Research Center (CPRC) on this issue.

data/information available.<sup>37</sup> Overinvesting in ‘new research and capacity-strengthening activities’<sup>38</sup> could delay efforts to generate scientific contributions from existing data.

A set of five central themes have been identified to guide synthesis work.<sup>39</sup> What will emerge will likely be in the form of analytic narratives that enrich discussions and focus future research. These narratives will help prepare Rimisp-RTD to concretely guide the ‘new phase of policymaking and institution-building for rural development.’<sup>40</sup> This process will be challenging, in part because of the very unique sets of characterizes of some of the most successful territories.<sup>41</sup>

The scientific contributions of the synthesis process would be especially useful if the following issues could be addressed:

- identify the fundamental characteristics<sup>42</sup> that can be used to define and describe territories, and the minimum data sets and analytical methods required to do so;<sup>43</sup>
- identify the territorial characteristics that are *necessary* for sustainable, inclusive growth to take place *and* that can be addressed via policy action;
- demonstrate ways in which territorial objectives can be linked to national/state-level objectives and to the policy instruments used to achieve them; and
- assess the lessons learned from the win-win territories<sup>44</sup> that might be applicable for geographic areas that have *not* been able to achieve sustainable, inclusive growth in LAC.

While there is much to do over the next seven months or so to complete this project, some productive forethought during this final phase could be given the following issues/activities, which may become central foci of future research:

- how best to nest territories into existing national and local debates/power structures;
- perhaps in collaboration with existing or new partners, develop the formal capacity to predict the effects of changes in policies, technologies and market prices on sustainable, inclusive growth,<sup>45</sup> and the environmental and other knock-on effects of such progress at the state and national levels;<sup>46</sup> and
- build upon Rimisp-RTD success in designing and promoting rural territorial development projects,<sup>47</sup> and use these projects as testing grounds for some of the core hypotheses regarding policies for promoting sustainable, inclusive growth, and also to generate concrete estimates of the costs associated with promoting RTD.

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<sup>37</sup> See, for example, Alavaro et al. (2011).

<sup>38</sup> Berdegué et al., cover-page box (2011).

<sup>39</sup> Berdegué et al. (2011).

<sup>40</sup> See Berdegué et al. (2011), penultimate sentence, point #20.

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, Cerdan et al. (2011). The synthesis team might consider omitting some ‘outlier’ win-win-win territories from their analysis.

<sup>42</sup> These may differ from the set of criteria original set out by Berdegué and Schejtman (2004).

<sup>43</sup> There are economic models that could be employed to examine the issue of where to draw the boundaries (e.g., Taylor 2011); these models may be particularly useful if beneficiaries are to be taxed to support some RTD activities and investments.

<sup>44</sup> See Ochieng and Obote (2007) and Schuftan (1993) for a discussion of the positive deviance approach.

<sup>45</sup> See, for example, Olfert et al. (2011)

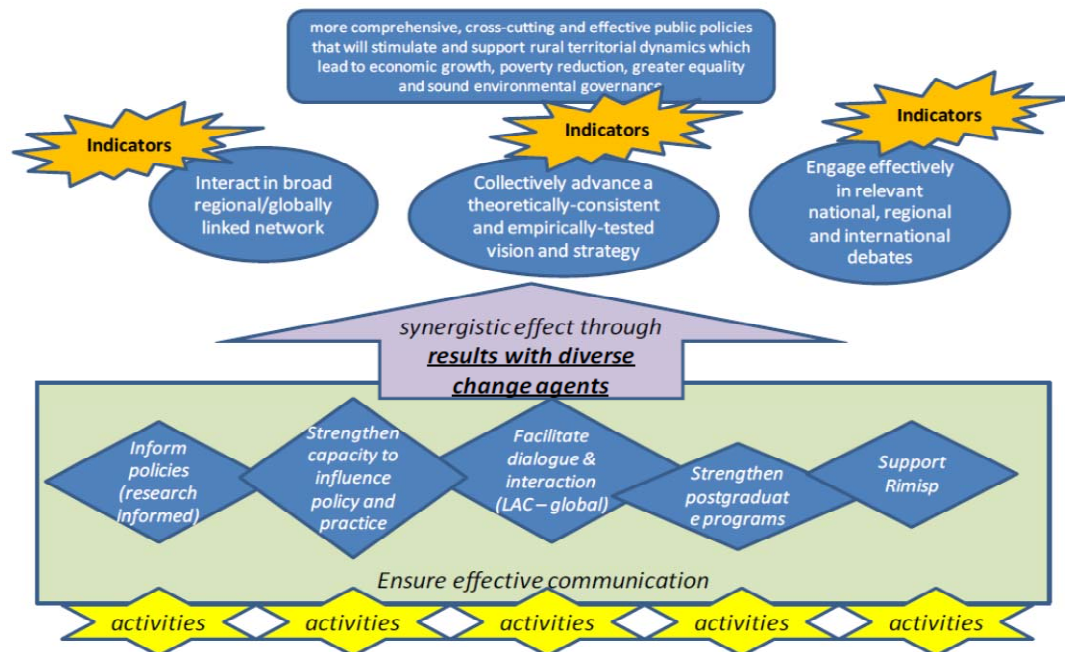
<sup>46</sup> This may induce the need for a new set of collaborators specialized in the development of predictive models to support sustainable, inclusive growth in rural areas.

<sup>47</sup> For example, the recently approved IFAD-co-sponsored Mixteca Project in Mexico.

## The Rimisp-RTD Program's Theory of Change

The theory of change of the Rimisp program is captured in the following figure which first appeared in the Rimisp-RTD planning document in 2007.

Figure 1: Rimisp-RTD Theory of Change



(Guijt and Iturralde, February, 2009)

The figure captures the strategic pass-through of information and knowledge (some new, some old) from research and other activities to (hoped-for) changes in fundamental public and private sector policies that can promote RTD. Since it was first proposed and agreed upon, progress has been made in refining the definitions that run from activities to the ultimate objective of identifying policy actions for promoting inclusive, sustainable rural development. Progress has been faster for some of the ‘steps’ set out in the figure than for others. Research activities mature slowly, hence, many of the research results needed for ‘advancement of a theoretically-consistent and empirically-tested vision and strategy’ are forthcoming. On the other hand, the presence of a functioning network of collaborators at the outset of the project, along with well-established links to policymakers and policy analysts in many countries in LAC, have allowed the RTD project to ‘engage effectively in national, regional and international debates’ in some cases very early on.

While the figure above remains the published benchmark, RTD research has highlighted several fundamental factors that could be introduced to strengthen the figure and the theory of change it proposes.

First, territories, even those few that have successfully promoted sustainable, inclusive growth in LAC, differ quite significantly from one another as regards their natural resource endowments, connectedness to markets, institutions, etc., and all of these factors influence the activities

required to promote territorial rural development.<sup>48</sup> So, a ‘layer’ of research and outreach activities could be included in the figure to inform the activities selected.

Second, the formation of effective coalitions is fundamental for RTD success;<sup>49</sup> while elements of these coalitions may appear organically in territories, in most cases such coalitions will need to be developed and empowered to effectively negotiate territorial objectives. A ‘box’ in the figure highlighting the importance of the coalition formation and management processes would be useful.

Third, there are often disconnects between territorial objectives and both higher-level (e.g., state-level) and lower-level (e.g., village-level) objectives; these disconnects need to be overcome to promote RTD. The figure could benefit from explicitly mentioning the intra-territorial and extra-territorial issues.

Finally, negotiated outcomes need to ‘feed back into’ activities via M&E so as to permit adaptive management at territorial level.

There may be scope for the RTD synthesis team to reflect on and modify the contents of the arrows, ovals, etc., contained in the current theory of change figure.<sup>50</sup>

### ***The Scientific Productivity of the Rimisp-RTD Program***

To date, approximately 100 Rimisp-RTD working papers<sup>51</sup> have been produced and most of these are destined for publication as book chapters, journal papers, or both (see below).

In addition, at least five papers reporting the results of RTD-supported research have been published in peer-reviewed journals, and several others are in the pipeline or will shortly enter it.

A strong case can be made that the flow of peer-reviewed scientific products will increase over the next several years as data collection and analyses associated with the RTD project come to an end, and the publishable elements of those analyses emerge. Indeed, this is what one would expect from research projects of this size, complexity, and modus operandi (i.e., projects that move forward incrementally with the identification of new objectives and activities based on what has been discovered by past activities).

More specifically, the following peer-reviewed edited volumes (titles are provisional) are currently being produced and will likely emerge in 2012.

**Book 1 – Rimisp-RTD Case Studies and Synthesis.** This volume will contain research results from the RTD study sites in México (Yucatán), El Salvador, Nicaragua (Santo Tomás), Colombia, Ecuador (Loja and Tungurahua), Peru (Cuatro Lagunas, Jauja and Valle Sur), Bolivia, Chile (O’Higgins and Chiloé), and Brazil (Jiquirca, Cariri and Santa Catarina), plus a synthesis chapter based on the early case study sites. The manuscript will be delivered to the publisher by mid-December, 2010; it will be published by Teseo Press, Argentina.

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<sup>48</sup> See Berdegué et al. (2011).

<sup>49</sup> Díaz et al. (2010).

<sup>50</sup> A theory of change figure currently being used by IFAD (available at: <http://www.ifad.org/nena/retreat/territorial/pntd.htm>) might be a useful model.

<sup>51</sup> Available at: [http://www.rimisp.org/inicio/nuevas\\_subsecciones.php?id\\_subseccion=30](http://www.rimisp.org/inicio/nuevas_subsecciones.php?id_subseccion=30)

**Book 2 – Panels of National Poverty Maps at Municipio Level.** This book is based on the panels of poverty maps developed for 9 of the 11 RTD site countries. It will contain a methodological chapter by Peter Lanjouw (World Bank) and a comparative analysis chapter by Modrego and Berdegué. The manuscript will be delivered in January, 2012; it will likely be published by FCE, Press. Interest in this volume is particularly keen at the World Bank, since (as noted above) this is the most comprehensive set of rural poverty panel analyses ever been undertaken.<sup>52</sup>

**Book 3 - Gender Systems and Rural Territorial Development.** This book will be comprised of a chapter setting out a new methodological framework for addressing gender issues in the context of RTD research and action, six case studies on gender analysis and a synthesis chapter. The expected completion date is March, 2012; negotiations are underway with the publisher, Teseo Press, Argentina.

**Book 4 - Urban-Rural Relationships and Territorial Dynamics.** This book is the result of a co-sponsored workshop involving Rimisp-RTD and the Catholic University, Lima. RTD researchers contributed a chapter on rural cities. The book is edited by Prof. Jose Canziani and will be published by the Catholic University Press, Lima, Peru.

In addition to these volumes, an array of research products spawned by Rimisp-RTD research (but going well beyond the core Rimisp-RTD research themes) will emerge, especially from the stronger and more research-oriented collaborators.<sup>53</sup> These products include eight MSc theses (several have already been completed), most of which focused on gender issues.<sup>54</sup>

Negotiations will soon begin with the editors of several international journals for the publication of at least one special issue dedicated to selected site-specific Rimisp-RTD research papers and a synthesis paper.

A blue-ribbon committee of Rimisp-RTD researchers<sup>55</sup> has been assembled and charged with the task of writing the synthesis document covering all of the field-based research efforts, plus supporting research. Five themes have been selected for syntheses: extra-territorial actors, local management of natural resources, production and access to markets, cities and territories, and social coalitions. The Brief based on the draft synthesis paper prepared for the Rimisp-RTD International Board demonstrates that concrete progress is being made.<sup>56</sup>

Finally, Rimisp-RTD researchers and collaborators continue to actively pursue opportunities to present papers at regional and international conferences.<sup>57</sup> For example, Rimisp-RTD program-related papers have been presented in major conferences such as the Latin America Studies Association (Rio and Toronto), the XXVII World Conference on Agricultural Economics (Beijing), the 5th Nordic Latin American Research Network Conference (Copenhagen), the 2011 Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers (Seattle), the 48<sup>th</sup> and 49<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Personal communication, interview with World Bank researcher.

<sup>53</sup> For example, see Trivelli et al. (2010).

<sup>54</sup> See, as examples, Rodriguez et al. (2011) and Bornschlegl et al. (2011).

<sup>55</sup> Comprised of Julio Berdegué, Javier Escobal and Tony Bebbington.

<sup>56</sup> Berdegué et al. (2011).

<sup>57</sup> List of recent presentations provided by Gilles Cliche (Rimisp-DTR).



Meetings of the Brazilian Rural Development Society (SOBER), and the Biannual Meeting on Rural Development Research (SEPIA) in Peru.

So, to date, what has been the cost-effectiveness of the scientific production of the RTD project?<sup>58</sup> One hundred internally reviewed Working Papers is a very impressive point of departure for this research program. Five papers derived from this Working Paper series have already been published in peer-reviewed outlets (with others currently under review) and many of the Working Papers have identified for inclusion in four edited volumes and a planned special issue of an international journal. Therefore, when the currently planned publications emerge, the body of published work will be large and the core of this literature will be of high quality. In my view, Rimisp-RTD's scientific production is well within the acceptable range for a project of this scale and type.

When assessing the cost-effectiveness of the resources allocated to Rimisp-RTD, it may be useful to imagine scientific productivity under several alternative (albeit hypothetical) scenarios regarding support for RTD-focused research in LAC: (a) that the funds did not come to Rimisp at all; (b) that the funds came to Rimisp in as a series of smaller and more narrowly focused RTD projects; and (c) that the funds were distributed (say) equally among the various Rimisp collaborators currently involved in the RTD project.

Under alternative scenario (a), one could expect that Rimisp would have continued to work on the issues related to RTD and that the group would have attracted some additional funding to support those efforts. However, the geographic scope of the work would have been smaller and the array of collaborators identified more limited (probably to those with the best track records of delivering high-end research products). With fewer 'data points,' the intellectual scope of research would have been narrower, with possible negative implications for synthesis work and the number of scientific products produced.

Under alternative scenario (b), research progress would have been slower and transaction costs higher, again with likely negative implications for scientific productivity.

Alternative scenario (c) is in many ways the most interesting of the three, since it envisions a similar flow of funding to LAC research/outreach organizations currently involved in the Rimisp-RTD project, but without Rimisp-RTD's strong leadership. All of the collaborators queried indicated (of course) that direct funding would have been welcome, but all acknowledged also that the types of research undertaken *independently* would have been much different (with each collaborator pursuing its own RTD-related objectives and using research methods that each was comfortable with), the scientific products produced would have been quite different, and (hence) the potential for synthesis would have been greatly limited.<sup>59</sup>

Finally, as regards the scientific output of the Rimisp-RTD project, two points merit mention. First, most of the scientific products produced to date are in Spanish, thereby limiting the access of non-Spanish-speaking research and outreach communities. Second, the management of RTD research and the generation of RTD research products may have 'crowded out' other Rimisp

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<sup>58</sup> Recall that the project is ongoing and hence Rimisp-RTD has not received all of the resources earmarked for this project, and that publication lag times in research can be considerable (see, e.g., Salter and Martin, 2001).

<sup>59</sup> Personal communications from collaborators in Peru and El Salvador.

research activities and their products, so the ‘net effect’ of RTD on overall Rimisp publications may be smaller than the count of published papers noted above.<sup>60</sup>

### *The Demand for Rimisp-RTD Research Products*

Alongside this supply of research materials, there has also been considerable increase in the demand for Rimisp products.<sup>61</sup> While this trend is impressive, a technical review of the Rimisp-RTD website identified a series of security- and productivity-enhancing investments that should be made in order to more efficiently and confidently meet future demand.<sup>62</sup> Box 1 summarizes the issues highlighted in the technical review.

#### Box 1: Summary of the Technical Review of Rimisp-RTD Website

##### **Website Security**

- Security vulnerabilities exist
- Entire system could be relatively easily compromised
- At least one attacker has already taken advantage of weak security

##### **Website Usability**

- Website consists of large, separate components that make access slow and challenging
- Website does not follow established Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)

##### **Website Traffic Analysis**

- Traffic increased over the period 2009-2011
- Majority of visitors were from Chile, speak Spanish, and arrive via search engines
- Average time spent and number of pages viewed per visit decreased over the 2009-2011

##### **Recommendations**

- A website overhaul; for a complete set of recommendations, see Annex 4

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<sup>60</sup> Personal communications from Rimisp research staff.

<sup>61</sup> See Rimisp (2011).

<sup>62</sup> See Goettsch (2011).

## *The Intellectual Influence of the Rimisp-RTD Program*

Even at this relatively early stage in the research-to-policy-change process, the Rimisp-RTD project has begun to influence the thinking and actions of collaborators and of key stakeholder groups from the local to international levels, and to have some effects on policies and on policymaking processes. These contributions are presented in several categories.<sup>63</sup>

### *Expanding Policy Capacities*

Improving Knowledge and Data<sup>64</sup> – Rimisp-RTD collaborators tapped large sets of highly detailed secondary data to produce a unique set of panels of poverty maps.<sup>65</sup> Nineteen case studies of successful territories identified by these maps were undertaken. These studies gathered large amounts of new quantitative<sup>66</sup> and qualitative<sup>67</sup> data that are being used to shed new light on the factors influencing sustainable, inclusive growth in rural areas.

Improving Ability to Communicate Ideas – New data, new analytical tools, and large numbers of stakeholder and researcher meetings have helped prepare collaborators and their partners to articulate the core RTD messages to their constituencies, and to convincingly weave the RTD messages into their home institutions' programmatic and political agendas.<sup>68</sup>

Develop New Talent for Research and Analysis -- Within Rimisp, a concerted effort has been made since the beginning of the RTD project to identify, recruit, train, empower, and effectively use the analytical toolkits of young researchers.<sup>69</sup> A key element of this strategy has been to link these new recruits (and others within the RTD project) with world leaders on selected analytical techniques and issues.<sup>70</sup> Some RTD collaborators (e.g., GRADE) have also been catalytic in upgrading the skill sets of some research partners.<sup>71</sup> There have also been spill-over effects to students participating in Rimisp-RTD activities at both the MSc and PhD levels.<sup>72</sup> RTD research and outreach activities are also influencing formal training programs (e.g., a Rimisp-RTD collaborator was recently named Coordinator of the MSc Program in Territorial Development at the University of Central America, El Salvador).<sup>73</sup> For other collaborators, exposure to the new analytical tools brought a new appreciation for the challenges associated with doing rigorous analytical work, but probably no lasting upgrades of skills or shifts in the in-house disciplinary mixes.<sup>77</sup>

### *Broadening Policy Horizons*

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<sup>63</sup> In this section, I borrow from the types of policy influence set out by Lindquist (2001).

<sup>64</sup> It is noteworthy that a young Rimisp scientist recently received a grant from the Chilean equivalent of the National Science Foundation to pursue RTD research.

<sup>65</sup> These maps were produced with input and guidance from leading international experts (see Elbers and Lanjouw, 2011); Rimisp-RTD identified and facilitated this collaboration.

<sup>66</sup> See, for example, Escobal and Ponce (2011a).

<sup>67</sup> See, for example, Asenio and Trivelli (2011).

<sup>68</sup> For example, personal communication, PRISMA (El Salvador).

<sup>69</sup> See the organizational evaluation document (Weyrauch, 2011) for evidence on the change in the age structure of Rimisp research staff since 2007.

<sup>70</sup> Notable examples include Peter Lanjouw (World Bank) and Tony Bebbington (Clark University).

<sup>71</sup> E.g., see Escobal and Ponce (2011b).

<sup>72</sup> Personal communications, Susan Paulson (U. of Lund) and Michael Carter (UC Davis).

<sup>73</sup> Personal communication, Livia Ivette Gomez, Researcher at Nitlapan, El Salvador.

Providing New Opportunities for Networking/Learning – The knowledge generated by the Rimisp-RTD program is being shared within the expanded RTD network and more broadly. Within the network, structured semi-annual meetings and frequent visits to sites by RTD staff have led important cross-learning experiences, especially important among collaborators who have traditionally been less involved in research.<sup>74</sup> Outside the network, knowledge has been shared through an array of professional meetings in LAC and more broadly (see Scientific Productivity, above). A recent, large meeting in India was Rimisp-RTD first major international event outside of LAC.<sup>75</sup>

More generally, in terms of knowledge sharing, all of the collaborators interviewed reported that their association with Rimisp has led to a broader understanding and more fruitful discussions of rural development issues.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, some collaborators rely upon Rimisp to monitor research and policy trends in LAC, and to report these findings and to provide interpretations of them at research and other meetings.<sup>77,78</sup>

Introducing New Concepts to Frame Debate – The concept of a ‘territory’ is not new, but its use in framing rural development objectives and public- and private-sector actions to achieve them is.<sup>79</sup> The Rimisp-RTD program’s analytical rigor makes the debate on territories more concrete. The introduction of intermediate cities, especially those located outside the boundaries of territories, increased the numbers and types of groups that needed to be considered for coalitions. Last, but perhaps most important, the central focus on poverty and equity altered both the objectives and the methods of achieving them for many collaborators, some of whom focused almost exclusively in natural resource management issues prior to joining the Rimisp-RTD project.<sup>85</sup>

### *Enhancing Policy Debates*

Improved Debate among Collaborators – To date, not a single collaborator has left the Rimisp-RTD project, in part because of the richness of the formal and informal exchanges that participation in the network affords them. Collaborators reported having new information in hand for identifying territories and new arguments for weaving territories into policy debates.<sup>80</sup> Of particular importance to collaborators are the field-based (re)confirmation of some of the necessary ingredients for promoting RTD, e.g., the key roles of municipal in supporting the sustainable intensification of small-scale agriculture in Guatemala.<sup>81</sup> Questions remain regarding the extent to which, and the circumstances under which, territories can be the effective counterweights to highly centralized foci of past/some current governments, but that new discussion has begun.<sup>82</sup> These enhanced debates have increased the demand for input from

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<sup>74</sup> Personal communication, Trivelli (IEP) and Gómez (PRISMA).

<sup>75</sup> See Abel and Iturralde (2011).

<sup>76</sup> For a more comprehensive review, see the results of the online survey in Weyrauch (2011).

<sup>77</sup> There are currently no regional alternatives to Rimisp for these services (personal communication, Kaimowitz, Ford Foundation).

<sup>78</sup> For example, personal communication, PRISMA (El Salvador).

<sup>79</sup> For example, personal communication, Stubbs (IFAD).

<sup>80</sup> Personal communication, participants at a breakfast meeting attended by the Minister of the Environment and a representative of the President’s Office.

<sup>81</sup> See Alvarado et al. (2011).

<sup>82</sup> Personal communication, Dr. Tohá.

Rimisp; some collaborators indicated that they looked increasingly to Rimisp to signal the ‘minimum disciplinary mix’ and the ‘minimum data sets’ necessary to reasonably address the challenges and opportunities for given territories.<sup>83</sup> These debates are also enriched by considering the time and out-of-pocket costs of establishing and maintaining programs to promote RTD. All of the policymakers interviewed reported that their workdays were ‘overflowing’ with commitments – if new activities are required of them, then some current commitments will have to be reduced or ignored.<sup>84</sup> Finally, while some collaborators were somewhat dissatisfied with what they saw as the slow pace of moving from research to policy action, all appreciated the need for careful thinking, data collection and rigorous analyses – in addition to rigor, Rimisp-RTD has injected patience into debates on territorial policies.

Stimulate Dialog among Decision-makers – Rimisp in general, and Rimisp-RTD in particular, deserves some credit for ‘breathing new life’ into the issue of rural development. There has been a long history of generally unsuccessful efforts in LAC to promote rural development (e.g., Integrated Rural Development Projects of the 1970s-80s).<sup>85,86</sup> The Rimisp-RTD poverty maps and other Rimisp research<sup>87</sup> remind decision-makers within and outside public policy arenas that despite significant progress in some countries in reducing poverty (e.g., Brazil), much work remains to be done. The case studies of success stories demonstrate that alternative outcomes exist and that they do not depend on sets of agroecological, socioeconomic or historical circumstances that cannot be replicated.<sup>88</sup> However, while it is possible to stimulate innovative policy dialog when the policy ‘cart’ is placed before the evidence-based research ‘horse,’ accelerating the generation of case study research results, and especially the synthesis work based on them, is important.<sup>89</sup>

### *Affecting Policy Regimes*

Modification of Existing Programs or Policies – It is very early in the research-to-policy change process to expect major victories as regards shifts in policies or programs. That said, several territorial development projects being designed in collaboration with Rimisp-RTD have recently been funded by bilateral or national agencies.<sup>90</sup> Another pending success, this time in the corporate world, is the nearly completed project with a very important industry association in Chile that will focus on developing and implementing new partnerships and funding mechanisms for promoting sustainable, inclusive growth in a territory in that country.

In addition, the groundwork within the Rimisp-RTD project is being set for future policy-change successes. For example, reviews of policy instruments and implementing organizations in

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<sup>83</sup> Personal communication, PRISMA.

<sup>84</sup> Personal communications, dinner meeting with collaborators and partners in El Salvador.

<sup>85</sup> De Janvry and Sadoulet (2007).

<sup>86</sup> FAO (2005).

<sup>87</sup> Berdegué and Schejtman (2007).

<sup>88</sup> Berdegué et al. (2011).

<sup>89</sup> There is some urgency on this issue, vague notions regarding what territories might be or how they can be useful in solving problems in rural areas can undermine the term’s usefulness.

<sup>90</sup> E.g., the Mixteca Project funded by the Government of Mexico and by IFAD.

selected countries have been done<sup>91</sup> and the very rich historical backdrops against which new policy options must be projected have been prepared.<sup>92</sup>

Finally, many Rimisp-RTD collaborators are well-positioned to swiftly communicate practical policy guidance to decision-makers of authority, or currently occupy such positions themselves.

### *Expanding Rimisp-RTD Influence beyond LAC*

As noted above, the influence of Rimisp-RTD in LAC is large, especially in the Andean countries, Mexico and selected countries in Central America.<sup>93</sup> Indeed, the Rimisp network is the only responsive entity of its kind in the region and it is becoming a point of references for researchers and donors interest/active in LAC.<sup>94</sup> But Rimisp-RTD influence outside of LAC has been smaller, in part because the majority of its scientific output is in Spanish. The recent India conference helped establish Rimisp-RTD in that region, but follow-up activities there are pending, as are similar strategic, exploratory activities/events in Sub-Saharan Africa.

### *Conclusions of the Evaluation of Rimisp-RTD's Scientific Contributions and Policy Influence*

An impressive and regionally unique combination of scientific output and policy influence has emerged at Rimisp over the past four years – much of this progress would not have occurred without the IDRC grant, which I view as cost-effective. Scientifically, the Rimisp-RTD project has undertaken a body of research on rural territorial dynamics that is unprecedented in LAC as regards its geographic scope, its uniformity, and its depth. The volume of scientific output to date has been impressive and the quality of most of the work is high. An expanded network of research collaborators, many of whom are politically well-connected and very active, have allowed Rimisp to establish a set of broad-based and efficient research projects, and to quickly leverage early learning and preliminary research results into policy influence. Rimisp has very clearly become a reference point for researchers and an entry point for donors interested/active in LAC. Relatively small communication and outreach investments, and strategic involvement in extra-regional activities and events convened/ managed by others, could help extend the reach of Rimisp without compromising ongoing activities and partnerships in LAC.

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<sup>91</sup> See, as examples, Ropert (2009) and Favareto (2009).

<sup>92</sup> See, for example, Ospina et al. (2009).

<sup>93</sup> It is also true that Rimisp-RTD has benefited greatly from its collaborators.

<sup>94</sup> For example, the incoming Director of FAO recently requested an interview with Rimisp staff.