



Aide-Mémoire

Eradicating Rural Poverty to Implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

United Nations Economic Commission for Africa ■ Addis Ababa
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I. Introduction

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development promises to leave no-one behind and reaching the furthest behind first. Meeting this ambitious development agenda requires visionary policies for sustainable, inclusive, sustained and equitable economic growth, supported by full employment and decent work for all, social integration, declining inequality, rising productivity and a favorable international environment. In the 2030 Agenda, Goal 1 recognizes that ending poverty in all its forms everywhere is the greatest global challenge facing the world today and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development.

While remarkable progress has been made over the past decade in such areas as job creation, gender equality, education and health care, social protection measures, agriculture and rural development, and climate change adaptation and mitigation, the pace of progress has been insufficient and uneven to fully meet the Sustainable Development Goals and targets by 2030. Countries continue to face major challenges to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda despite strong economic growth. Key among them are unacceptably high levels of poverty, especially in rural areas; high and worsening inequality in many countries; unemployment; the uneven impact of new technologies; and the ongoing effects of climate change and natural disasters. In light of these concerns, the General Assembly, at its seventy-third session, adopted a new resolution entitled “Eradicating rural poverty to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” (A/RES/73/244). This resolution highlights the imperative to eradicate poverty in rural and remote areas to ensure that no one is left behind and reiterates the urgent need to accelerate the pace of rural poverty eradication.

The Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit to the General Assembly at its seventy-fourth session a report on the status of the implementation of and follow-up to this resolution in order to identify the gaps and challenges faced in rural poverty eradication, especially in developing countries. In view of this, the Division for Inclusive Social Development (DISD) of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs is organizing an Expert Group Meeting on the “Eradicating rural poverty to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”. The meeting will be held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia from 27 February to 1 March 2019.

II. Background

In 2015, an estimated 736 million people in the world lived on less than \$1.90 a day. A large majority of these – about 80 per cent - live in rural areas¹. Most of the rural poor are family farmers, subsistence producers, or landless agricultural workers composed of fisherfolk, pastoralists, and forest-dependent peoples. Many of them have limited access to productive assets, have low levels of educational attainment and face a disproportionately large burden of diseases and other adverse health conditions. Further, many of them – about two thirds – depend on the agriculture sector, either as from work on their farms or agricultural wage employment. Further, the extreme rural poor also have poor or inadequate access to basic infrastructure and public goods and services. In 2014, only about 73 per cent of residents in rural areas could access electricity as compared to 96 per cent of urban residents. In 2015, only 55 per cent of the rural population had access to safely managed drinking water services compared to 85 per cent of the urban population. The consequence of rural neglect and agriculture is manifesting itself in widening rural-urban disparities in income, jobs, education and health outcomes, and other opportunities.

Hence, eradicating rural poverty is a vital tool for implementing and achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Meeting this ambitious development agenda requires visionary policies and strategies for those left behind, particularly the rural poor. Eradicating rural poverty requires investing in both rural inhabitants (people-centered development) as well as in poor, remote and disaster-prone areas. Recent research points to a transition in thinking, pointing to the importance of both people-centered and place-based policies.² “Failure to craft effective, place-sensitive policies has allowed growth and opportunity to concentrate in fewer and fewer places while leaving others behind”.³ Further, rising inequality has also meant that growth is by-passing people living in poverty, particularly those living in rural and remote areas. Countries that have successfully reduced poverty have focused on both people-centered and place-centered policies and strategies. Successful countries have also not solely relied on markets to spread opportunity to all. In many cases, the State has played a more active role in ensuring that development efforts have a pro-poor focus and include rural and remote areas. The State has played a major role in the provisioning of critical basic infrastructure (e.g. clean water and sanitation, electricity, and roads), education, healthcare, social protection, markets and connectivity. And after decades of neglecting agriculture, the World Development Report 2008 also made a case for using agriculture for development.⁴

In contrast to thriving urban/metropolitan areas, rural areas are struggling under the weight of poor or inadequate investment in agriculture, infrastructure and basic services, worsening the depth and severity of poverty, rural-urban income disparities, unemployment and underemployment, economic stagnation and social decline. In many countries, the rural economy is not sufficiently hitched to the urban economy. Forces such as globalization and the rise of information technology have weakened the contribution of rural economies to

¹ FAO. 2018. Ending Extreme Poverty in Rural Areas: Sustaining livelihoods to leave no one behind. Rome.

² Austin, B., Glaeser, E., and Summers, L. 2018. Jobs for the heartland: place-based policies in the 21st-century America. Brookings Papers on Economic Activity, Spring.

³ Hendrickson, C., Muro, M., and Galston, W.A. 2018. Countering the geography of discontent: strategies for left-behind places. The Brookings Institution. November.

⁴ World Bank. 2008. *World Development Report 2008: Agriculture for Development*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank.

broad national economic growth, leaving these areas and their inhabitants further behind. The neglect of rural development and agriculture has worsened rural poverty.

To address these failures and expand opportunity, a focus on eradicating rural poverty requires an identification of the gaps and challenges that all countries face, particularly developing countries. It has become increasingly essential to establish the constraints to raising real wages and savings by the rural poor, improving access to and the quality of public education and health care systems, establishing reasonably well-functioning rural markets and closing the digital divide. It also requires focusing on new understandings of the characteristics, trends and dynamics of rural poverty and its key drivers. Of importance is the identification of the material constraints on the freedom of rural dwellers, particularly that of smallholder farmers, pastoralists, landless agricultural workers, women, youth, and indigenous groups, to pursue their own economic interests such as access to land, credit and natural resources. The elderly and persons with disabilities living in rural areas are also the most vulnerable due to lack of social protection. Rural women particularly face significant challenges in accessing productive resources, extension services, and markets.

New thinking, innovative/out of the box and mutually reinforcing policies and strategies that are guided by national circumstances and priorities are better placed to get to the core of these issues and hence are imperative if the international community is to eradicate poverty in all its forms everywhere. Solutions to addressing the structural causes and constraints behind poor agricultural and rural development efforts in developing countries have been suggested in the past. However, implementing these solutions has fallen short due to a combination of factors that include lack of political will and financial and human resources. Hence, the plethora of existing solutions has not resulted in major reductions in rural poverty and hunger in many developing countries. In fact, per capita food production has been declining in sub-Saharan Africa and other parts of the developing world. A recent FAO study also suggests that in Latin America and the Caribbean, rural poverty has actually risen for the first time in a decade, reversing earlier gains.⁵ Between 2014 and 2016, two million people joined the ranks of the region's rural poor, taking the total to nearly half of the rural population. Many of these are subsistence farmers and landless agricultural workers.

III. Objectives, Key Questions and Methodology

This expert group meeting will bring together experts to (i) identify the gaps and challenges faced in rural poverty eradication, especially in developing countries (ii) review key trends, patterns, and underlying drivers of rural poverty; (iii) reflect on progress toward ending rural poverty in all its forms everywhere; (iv) review lessons learnt from designing and implementing rural poverty eradication programmes, policies and strategies in various national contexts that can be leveraged to spur further progress in those countries or regions lagging behind and to contribute to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; and (v) come up with key policy messages and recommendations for eradicating rural poverty.

The meeting will be a three-day event that will allow a robust exchange of national experiences and new ways of thinking that can contribute to achieving the objectives of the meeting among policy makers, academia, think tanks, civil society and representatives from the United Nations

⁵ FAO. Panorama de la pobreza rural en América Latina y el Caribe 2018. Santiago. Número de páginas (112)

system, regional organizations, government officials, and independent experts. Invited experts will set the stage for the meeting by making presentations on rural poverty in developing and developed countries. The interaction will foster understanding the gaps and challenges of eradicating rural poverty everywhere.

To achieve its objectives, the meeting will seek to answer key questions such as:

- i. From a policy perspective, what are the main reasons for a separate focus on rural poverty?
- ii. How is the challenge of ending extreme poverty in all its forms everywhere understood?
- iii. What are the gaps and challenges faced in rural poverty eradication, especially in developing countries?
- iv. What are the key trends, patterns and underlying drivers in rural poverty eradication?
- v. What additional efforts are required to tackle the root causes of rural poverty?
- vi. Why should countries and the international community focus on rural poverty and what are its costs to society?
- vii. What are the gaps and challenges in promoting a shift in the composition of the non-farm economy that contributes to eradicating rural poverty?
- viii. What are the key gaps and challenges to improving opportunities in rural areas, particularly those related to schooling, jobs and wages?
- ix. How can the rural economy attract the right industries and be hitched to larger regional economies and global value chains in order to draw jobs and prosperity to rural areas?
- x. What are the data gaps and challenges in rural poverty eradication?
- xi. What is the role of agriculture in rural poverty eradication?
- xii. How can countries ensure implementation of appropriate social protection systems and measures in rural areas?
- xiii. How can countries leverage on infrastructure development for rural poverty eradication?
- xiv. How can the voice and participation of people living in poverty and people in vulnerable situations be central to all national actions to eradicate rural poverty?
- xv. What further actions can governments undertake to raise resources to finance inclusive rural development efforts and agriculture?
- xvi. How can countries tackle the urban-rural digital divide?

IV. Expected outputs

The meeting is expected to provide substantive input for the preparation of the report of the Secretary-General on “Eradicating rural poverty to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” to be submitted to the 74th session of the General Assembly.

In addition, the meeting will also produce the following outputs:

- i. Substantive papers on the theme of the meeting, with concrete policy recommendations, prepared by experts;

- ii. A meeting report, summarizing the deliberations of the experts and key recommendations to be included in Secretary-General's Report.

V. Organizational and administrative matters

About 15 experts will be identified and invited by the Division for Inclusive Social Development taking into consideration gender and geographical balances. The meeting will be held at the Economic Commission for Africa in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and is scheduled to take place from 27 February to 1 March 2019. The Division will meet the costs related to the participation (travel and per diem) of all the invited experts from outside the United Nations system.

Invited experts will provide brief background papers (approximately 5-10 pages, in English) to the United Nations Secretariat by 15 February 2019 for distribution to other participants. Each background paper should address a specific agenda item and include a summary of the expert's own research and evidence from other sources, as well as references to relevant parts of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. All sessions of the meeting will be in plenary and invited experts will lead-off discussions of each session by presenting papers which will then be followed by in-depth plenary discussions. During the wrap up session of the meeting, participants will outline the major conclusions and recommendations of the meeting. The Division for Inclusive Social Development will prepare a final report summarizing the key conclusions of the meeting. With participants' permission, the background papers and presentations will be posted on the Division's website (<https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/egm-rural-poverty.html>).

Presenters are encouraged to prepare PowerPoint presentations and to share them in advance with the organizers, if possible. All papers and presentations should be sent to **Ms. Meron Sherif** (sherif4@un.org), with a copy to **Mr. Amson Sibanda** (sibanda@un.org). Participants are expected to arrive in Addis Ababa on 26 February 2019 and to stay throughout the duration of the meeting.

VI. Documentation and the Language of the meeting

The documentation of the meeting will be comprised of relevant publications, documents and materials related to rural poverty eradication. With participants' permission, the background papers and presentations will be made available on the Division's website.

The working language of the meeting will be English. Documentation for the meeting will also be provided in English.