

# A rural transformation agenda



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*The crafting of a new global development agenda is a unique opportunity to refocus policy, investments and partnerships on inclusive and sustainable rural transformation. Without this, rural-urban inequalities will deepen, cities will struggle and global food security will be at risk. Conversely, rural transformation can be a powerful engine of sustainable development in all its aspects – from economic growth to poverty eradication, from a healthy environment to inclusive societies, from gender equality to food and nutrition security. As United Nations Member States deliberate on the post-2015 agenda, there are many entry points through which they can seize this opportunity to promote rural transformation. In particular, IFAD has identified four clusters of issues of universal resonance, each underpinned by five target areas. While not covering the whole rural development agenda, these provide a map of areas where catalytic action may be inspired by new goals, targets and indicators adapted to different country circumstances.*

## WHAT FUTURE DOES THE WORLD WANT?

Global consultations on the post-2015 development agenda show great convergence of ambitions. Women and men from all walks of life want a world where extreme poverty has disappeared, everyone is well fed, all children have access to quality education, economies are dynamic and the benefits from growth are equitably shared, decent jobs are available to everyone, natural resources are used sustainably and temperature increases from climate change are manageable. All people want a world where they can live in peace and their voices are respected in public decisions. This future is ambitious but achievable. The challenge is to ensure that this shared ambition is reflected in the new development agenda.

## INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE RURAL TRANSFORMATION IS KEY TO THE FUTURE WE WANT

Achieving this future requires a fresh look at rural areas and their inhabitants. Current patterns of economic growth are often accompanied by spatial inequalities that undermine progress towards

<sup>1</sup> This overview document represents a synthesis of 4 policy briefs produced by IFAD, complemented by joint work with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP) in the area of food security, nutrition and sustainable agriculture in the post-2015 agenda. IFAD's work in the post-2015 debate is inspired by its unique mandate to invest in poor rural people to enable them to overcome poverty and to transform their lives.

inclusive, peaceful and dynamic societies. Meanwhile, a growing urban world is increasingly in need of a range of goods and services that must come from rural areas – from nutritious food to jobs, energy, environmental services and much more.

A transformation of rural spaces, productive sectors and societies is needed – one that is inclusive, dynamic and sustainable. To promote this requires a new development paradigm that empowers rural people to play their economic, social and environmental roles to the full. The post-2015 development agenda can encourage this through goals, targets, indicators and implementation modalities that give explicit attention to rural women and men and their role in building a better future.

## **FOUR KEY ISSUES AROUND WHICH THE POST-2015 AGENDA CAN CATALYSE RURAL TRANSFORMATION**

While the entry points to promoting rural transformation will be context-specific, there are four key issues that can help catalyse the transformation.<sup>2</sup> These are:

- Leveraging the rural-urban nexus for development
- Promoting an empowerment agenda for rural livelihoods
- Investing in smallholder family agriculture for global food security and nutrition
- Promoting the resilience of poor rural households.

## **LEVERAGING THE RURAL-URBAN NEXUS FOR DEVELOPMENT**

Rapid urbanization is transforming the global landscape and generating new challenges and opportunities for development. In many contexts, it is accompanied by rural concentration of extreme poverty, despite the immense potential of and demands on the rural sector. Moreover, growing rural-urban interdependence often coexists with major gaps in rural-urban connectivity – in infrastructure, energy, and the smooth flow of people, goods, knowledge and finance. Going forward, the rural space needs to play a central role in creating more sustainable and inclusive economies and societies. As the rural population grows, it is imperative to boost rural economies and jobs for young people in particular. And as the world becomes more urban, the rural space has to transform to expand the efficient and sustainable supply of a wide range of goods and services.

A policy agenda around these issues requires investing in quality data concerning rural areas and rural societies. Systematic rural-urban disaggregation of data related to post-2015 goals and targets is of critical importance to build a solid evidence base. The agenda needs to cover a number of key target areas, such as securing the asset base of rural women and men, addressing rural-urban gaps in quality of services and opportunities, strengthening rural-urban connectivity, and inclusive territorial and ecosystem governance.

## **PROMOTING AN EMPOWERMENT AGENDA FOR RURAL LIVELIHOODS**

Many countries have made great progress in reducing poverty over the past 30 years. However, in many parts of the world poor rural people remain marginalized – socially, economically and politically. Indeed, growth processes have at times increased marginalization. For example, long-standing factors limiting secure access to land for rural women and indigenous peoples have been reinforced by new pressures on the natural resource base linked to rising prices of agricultural commodities, urbanization, mining, land-use conversion and deforestation. Therefore, a broad empowerment agenda for rural livelihoods is a moral imperative. This includes fostering a range of interrelated processes that enable rural people to access and secure control over assets and to contribute to decision-making processes at all levels. In many contexts, promoting rural empowerment is also a smart strategy to boost inclusive growth. It is essential to build the capacity of rural people to drive change in key areas of sustainable development such as natural resource management and agricultural productivity.

<sup>2</sup> Each of these issues is addressed in an IFAD post-2015 policy brief, available at <http://www.ifad.org/governance/post2015/index.htm>.

The post-2015 development agenda can be designed to address this challenge by focusing attention on inclusive and secure access to land, natural resources and productive services, promoting the participation of rural people and their organizations in markets and public life, strengthening their access to decent job and business opportunities, and supporting rural women's empowerment and the rights of indigenous peoples.

## **INVESTING IN SMALLHOLDER FAMILY AGRICULTURE FOR GLOBAL FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION**

Agriculture is strategically important for sustainable development. It is a major employer and a means of reducing poverty. Agriculture is a key user of natural resources and a provider of environmental services (including carbon sequestration). And it is the sector on which food security and nutrition chiefly depend. In coming years, agriculture needs to change profoundly to meet increasing demands while facing harsher environmental conditions, more competitive and volatile markets, and the effects of climate change.

Small family farms have a central role in food security and nutrition from the household to the global level. While highly heterogeneous, in the aggregate they provide income and environmental services to a large share of the world's population. Growing demand for high-quality nutritious food and other agricultural goods will create opportunities for many small farms to become viable businesses. However, many of the factors underlying rural poverty and marginalization constrain the entrepreneurship of smallholder farmers, in particular women.

In the post-2015 agenda, critical target areas around this challenge include small farmers' (women's and men's) secure tenure over natural resources, their access to productive services, finance and markets, and balanced growth in agricultural productivity, sustainability, resilience, efficiency and nutrition sensitivity. Moreover, sustainable value chains and inclusive business models are key to leverage growing private investments and reduce transaction costs through innovative partnership approaches.

## **PROMOTING THE RESILIENCE OF POOR RURAL HOUSEHOLDS**

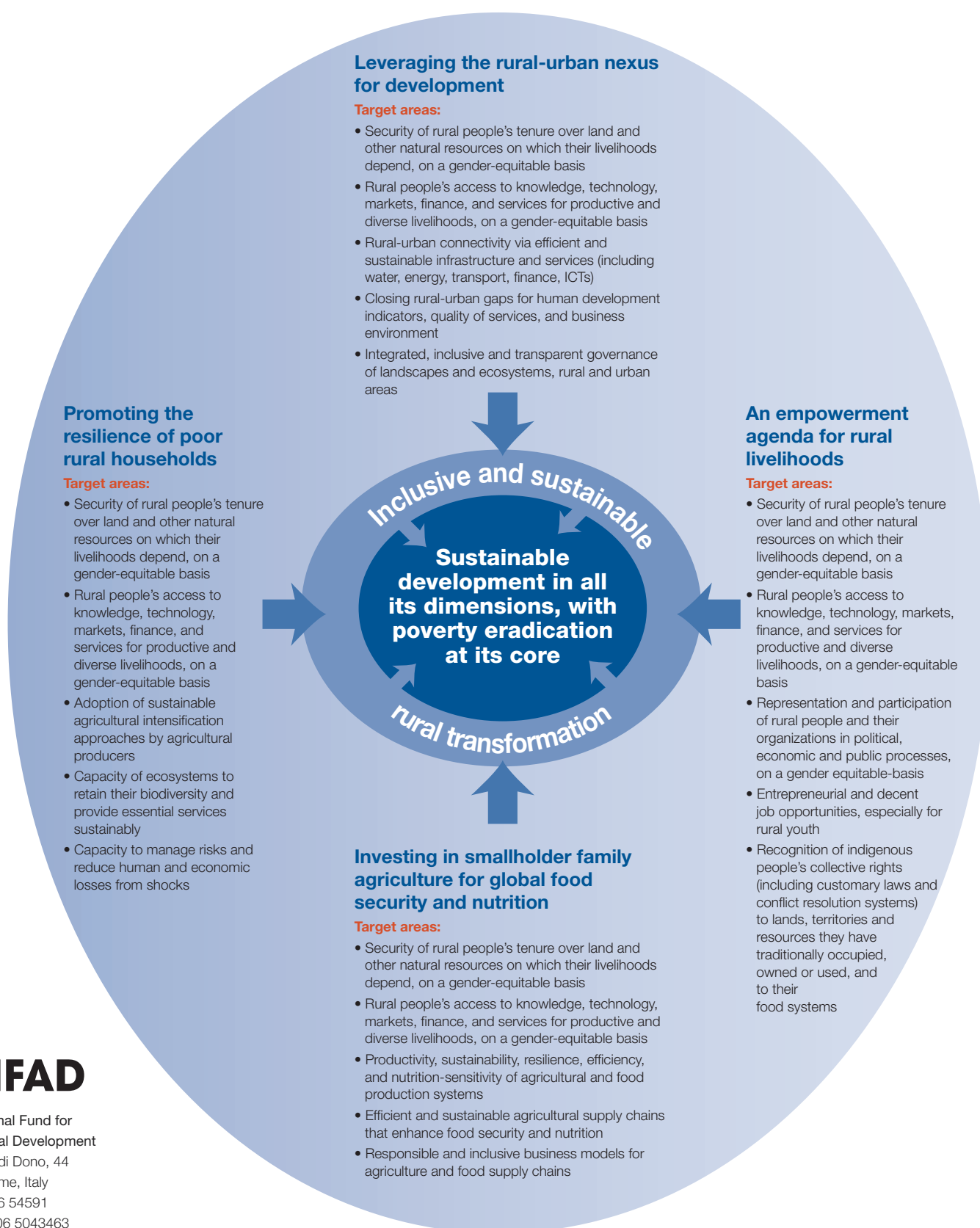
Rural people are vulnerable to a range of shocks that push them into poverty, keep them poor or prevent them from moving out of poverty, as they are unable to seize new opportunities linked to urbanization and to a growing demand for rural goods and services. Some of the risks that rural households face are long-standing, while others are new or increasing. For example, new types of market risks and sources of price volatility are emerging, the natural resource base is increasingly degraded or scarce, and climate change has a multiplier effect on virtually all risks that rural households face. Many risks are also interlinked and reinforce each other, such as environmental risks and price volatility.

Understanding risks and shocks that affect poor rural households is a precondition for policies and investments to enable them to fully participate in rural transformation. Public institutions play an important role in realizing strategies that promote resilience, such as by providing incentives for investments that reduce vulnerability to shocks (for instance climate-proof infrastructure); providing public goods that buffer shocks or that improve risk management capacity (social protection and education); fostering well-functioning markets; and ensuring good governance.

However, developing and enforcing these strategies requires collaboration among public and private actors at all levels. Rural people's own institutions play a vital role, and their own institutional resilience also requires support.

Relevant post-2015 target areas related to this challenge include secure tenure over land and other natural resources, access to knowledge, finance, services, markets and technology, adoption of sustainable agricultural intensification approaches, access to risk management tools, and healthy ecosystems.

# TARGET AREAS AROUND 4 KEY ISSUES CONCERNING RURAL TRANSFORMATION AND THE POST-2015 DEVELOPMENT AGENDA



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