

Rural Inequalities: Evaluating approaches to overcome disparities

2-3 May 2018, Rome, Italy

Conference Concept Note

The conference on **Rural Inequalities** organized by the Independent Office of Evaluation of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), a United Nations specialized agency, will explore critical questions regarding whether strategies and programmes that aim to eradicate rural poverty reduce disparities within rural areas. The number of people living in extreme poverty stands at 836 million. This figure is especially alarming given the rise in the estimated number of chronically undernourished people in the world – from 777 million in 2015 to 815 million in 2016. In all regions, rates of extreme poverty and food insecurity are higher in rural areas, where three-quarters of the extremely poor and food-insecure people reside.

The Agenda 2030 vision and commitment that “no one will be left behind” calls for eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, combating inequality, preserving the planet, creating inclusive and sustainable economic growth and fostering social inclusion. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) place a strong focus on inequality and marginalized groups as well as multiple dimensions of well-being. Research has shown that high and rising inequalities can hamper poverty reduction as well as economic growth and productivity. The roots of deprivation and inequality cut across multiple aspects of people’s lives and need to be addressed if extreme poverty is to be eradicated and food insecurity eliminated, as envisioned in SDG1 and SDG2.

A wide range of approaches have been adopted to reduce rural poverty, from social protection to sustainable livelihoods to wealth creation. The impact of such approaches on rural poverty is typically measured in terms of household incomes and assets, human and social empowerment, food security and agricultural productivity, and institutions and policies. The underlying key question and test of success is whether they have contributed to reducing inequality within rural communities, which may be considered a root cause of rural poverty. Evaluation has the potential to inform organizations and governments if their interventions are indeed contributing to reducing inequality within rural areas and what is needed to reorient strategies towards higher impact.

Objective of the Conference

Despite the many interventions designed to reduce rural poverty, few have measured their impact on reducing inequalities within rural areas. Therefore, this conference seeks to examine approaches to rural poverty reduction that have had an impact on four main areas of inequality within rural areas, which overlap vertically and horizontally to create a complex matrix of relationships:

- i. **Resources.** Rural poverty results from inequalities in groups’, households’ and individuals’ access to resources (such as income, land, inputs, capital, education and public transfer payments), their ability to use these resources, and their ownership of them.
- ii. **Resilience.** The rural poor often lack the ability to cope with environmental degradation, climate change and economic shocks and risks.
- iii. **Relationships.** Social relationships are a key determinant to an individual’s ability to access resources and cope with shocks. Unequal power relationships tend to underlie other inequalities, particularly for women, youth and indigenous peoples, and can perpetuate intergenerational poverty.
- iv. **Rights.** Political rights and voice, ensured through the enactment and enforcement of laws and policies, are fundamental to truly eradicate rural poverty, particularly with regards to labour and land for marginalized groups, such as women, youths and indigenous peoples.

Structure: The two-day conference will be structured along these four areas. Plenary sessions for each area will be supplemented with presentations on approaches by governments, international agencies, academics and non-governmental organizations that have had a positive or negative impact on rural inequality.

Audience: Senior representatives from UN agencies, IFIs, academia and government.

Presenters: Academics, development practitioners from UN agencies, international financial institutions, research institutions, non-governmental organizations, and government.

Preparatory process: An advisory panel of leading experts will meet in December 2017 to discuss the conference’s scope and key questions, after which a full concept note and list of presenters will be developed.