

“Leaving no one behind”

LIVING UP TO THE 2030 AGENDA



The 2030 Agenda is a global commitment, made at the highest level, to “leave no one behind” in realizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Arguably, this is one of the most challenging features of the agenda, and an apt theme for the 2016 session of the High Level Political Forum (HLPF), as the foremost global forum for follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda.

Nowhere is the challenge of leaving no one behind more salient than in rural areas. Since the vast majority of people living in poverty are in rural areas, “leaving no one behind” clearly demands a special focus on rural women and men.

Rural-urban gaps exist for virtually all development indicators. The 2016 session of the HLPF is an opportunity to consider how to put poor rural people at the centre of national, regional, and global efforts to implement the agenda and to measure progress.

POINTS FOR CONSIDERATION BY DECISION MAKERS

WHAT DOES “LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND” MEAN?

According to the United Nations Secretary-General’s report, *The Road to Dignity by 2030*, “leaving no one behind” means that every goal and target in the 2030 Agenda can only be considered as achieved if they have been met for every group within society. There are many facets to this commitment, including affirming human rights and equal human dignity as the underlying principles of the agenda, prioritizing outreach to the most vulnerable and putting them first, addressing inequalities, and promoting inclusive models of economic growth.

The implications of this commitment for follow-up and review have been discussed in the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) and the United Nations Statistical Commission, for example. This discussion has focused on the need to generate indicators and data to address coverage of the SDGs with respect to specific population groups, as well as data disaggregation. However, from a follow-up and review perspective “leaving no one behind” is equally about whether specific efforts are made to address the development challenges and concerns of rural women and men, and whether they have an active role in the follow-up and review process.

WHY “LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND” MUST BE CENTRALLY ABOUT POOR RURAL WOMEN AND MEN

According to World Bank data, about 78 per cent of the world’s population who live in extreme poverty are in rural areas. Moreover, rural people generally fare worse than urban people in multidimensional poverty measurements.¹ Rural poverty is particularly associated with specific types of livelihoods, notably agriculture (including landless agricultural labour, pastoralism, artisanal fisheries and forestry), and has other features besides low income, including poor access to services, insecure access and control over productive assets, and social marginalization.² It exists in countries with different income levels, countries in special situations (e.g. in conditions of fragility), and also in many countries that have undergone rapid urbanization in recent years.

¹ See for instance <http://www.ophi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Poverty-in-Rural-and-Urban-Areas-Direct-Comparisons-using-the-Global-MPI-2014.pdf>.

² *IFAD Rural Poverty Report: New realities, new challenges: new opportunities for tomorrow’s generation*. Rome: International Fund for Agricultural Development, 2010.

Within rural areas, different types of inequality often compound poverty. For instance, poor rural women suffer from unequal access to land, tend to be relegated to low-return or low-pay economic activities, and have less access than men to finance, technology, markets and decision-making. Similar constraints often affect young rural people. Inequalities within rural areas are also often linked to ethnicity, as in the case of indigenous peoples, among whom income poverty is often more prevalent than in other population groups.³ Displaced population groups also typically face multiple forms of deprivation, and there is evidence that rural areas are often intensely affected by the consequences of conflict and displacement.⁴

Virtually all the goals and targets in the 2030 Agenda, if they are to be reached, will demand actions to radically transform the lives of hundreds of millions of poor rural women and men. However, this requires that implementation measures address their specific needs and explicitly aim to build their capabilities. For this, we need both a focus on reaching those farthest behind, and recognition of the immense contribution that poor rural women and men made to development – as food producers, entrepreneurs, environmental stewards and contributors to climate change mitigation. Their role can be even more enhanced as key partners in the 2030 Agenda.⁵

QUESTIONS FOR THE HLPF

There are four main implications of the discussion above for decision makers at the HLPF:

1. Encouraging a specific focus on bridging rural-urban gaps in human development indicators

A first question to pose is whether implementation of the 2030 Agenda is prompting policies and programmes aimed at raising human development indicators in rural areas and for all rural groups. The HLPF should underscore the imperative of bridging rural-urban inequalities in human development indicators, as well as gender-based and other inequalities in rural societies, and also make room for learning about positive national and local experiences.

Under this heading, it is important to ask whether plans are in place or activities under way to extend the rural reach of basic public services – e.g. for education, nutrition, social protection, and health care. A second question is whether these are tailored to the realities of different groups in rural areas (e.g. rural women's time and mobility constraints, linguistic and cultural requirements for outreach to indigenous peoples' communities, etc.). A third question is whether initiatives are informed by evidence about "what works" and by the perspectives of poor rural people. A fourth is whether adequate resources are being invested in building institutional capacity in rural areas for programmes that address human development. Finally, it is important to consider if policies and programmes are informed by consideration of the way in which rural societies are evolving, and what this entails in terms of requirements for human development.

In keeping with the integrated nature of the SDGs, this can be tackled not only through a traditional focus on public services, but also by bringing a focus on human development into other relevant parts of the agenda. For instance, among its areas of focus in supporting countries in achieving Agenda 2030, IFAD has identified mainstreaming nutrition into smallholder agricultural development and a multi-pronged agenda (spanning human, social and economic development) for rural women's empowerment. Based on IFAD's experience,

³ For instance, a 2015 World Bank study found that indigenous peoples were 2.7 times more likely to live in extreme poverty than other population groups in Latin America. See http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2016/02/03/090224b08413d2d2/3_0/Rendered/PDF/Indigenous0Lat0y000the0first0decade.pdf.

⁴ For instance, a large part of the population displaced as a result of current conflict conditions in the Near East originates from rural areas and/or has temporarily settled in rural areas abroad.

⁵ See policy and implementation briefs developed by IFAD during the debate on the 2030 Agenda <https://www.ifad.org/who/post2015>.

investment in skills and education for rural youth based on curricula that prepare them to drive the needed transformation of agriculture and food systems for the future is also critical.

2. Leveraging new investments in infrastructure to fill rural-urban gaps

Boosting coverage, quality and accessibility of infrastructure and services – e.g. energy, transportation infrastructure, information and communications technology, financial services – is an aspect of the SDGs that has captured particular attention. However, the focus has been on urban areas, partly prompted by work around the New Urban Agenda leading to Habitat III. Hence, attention must be drawn to the lack of international attention as to how the enormous infrastructure and service gaps holding back rural areas will be filled. Moreover, filling this gap is essential to supporting sustainable urbanization – a further demonstration of the integrated nature of the SDGs.

The HLPF should prompt greater attention to designing infrastructural investments planned in conjunction with implementation of the SDGs so that they reach rural areas – including ill-favoured areas – and serve poor and marginalized groups within these areas and support their livelihoods. Are measures in place to strengthen the capacity of local institutions to manage new infrastructure efficiently and inclusively? Attention to both questions also should be encouraged in the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Forum on Financing for Development and the annual reports of the Inter-agency Task Force on Financing for Development.

Practical examples of issues to address include whether new commitments or initiatives are emerging related to rural off-grid energy access, green infrastructural technologies, and water infrastructure (including irrigation), and also what role private investors are playing in these areas and what opportunities may exist to expand their role in the interest of poor rural people. In this regard, one critical area of investment by IFAD is promoting public-private-producer partnerships (4P)⁶ using public investments to facilitate innovative collaborations in agricultural supply chains. This includes linking private and public investments in infrastructure and services to direct interventions towards food security, nutrition, poverty reduction and climate resilience. It must also be examined whether emerging investments in large-scale transportation infrastructure are designed and implemented with clear provisions to respect rural people's entitlements and enhance their livelihoods, or with explicit linkages to rural development, food security and nutrition programmes.

3. Investing in rural-specific data and in rural-urban data disaggregation

Discussions around SDG indicators have shown the imperative of tackling rural-urban gaps in coverage and quality of data. There is a need to invest in data specific to rural livelihoods, or particularly relevant to tracking progress among poor rural women and men. SDG targets require, for instance, efforts to strengthen data about land tenure, including both a gender perspective as well as tenure arrangements prevalent among indigenous communities, rural financial inclusion, smallholder agriculture and the livelihoods of small-scale food producers.

Many initiatives are under way, notably under the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics led by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), which deserve support in the next phase of follow-up and review. Bringing rigorous methodologies to assess progress in the design and implementation of rural development, agriculture, and food security and nutrition programmes is also critical. Here, too, there are promising examples, such as the work on impact assessment in rural development programmes pioneered by IFAD since 2012 with a range of partners. This has yielded solid evidence of the impact of IFAD's investments in poor rural women and men in terms of building assets, higher incomes, women's empowerment and dietary diversity.

⁶ See for instance <https://www.ifad.org/what/partnership/overview>.

In the next decade, IFAD will deepen this effort to embed impact evaluation methods into the design of rural development investment programmes.⁷ This will lay the groundwork for the generation of an increasing mass of evidence about successful approaches in realizing the 2030 Agenda for rural poor people. The HLPF is an opportunity for decision makers to send a signal of support of similar efforts and to help make broadly available these experiences.

4. Empowering poor rural women and men to take an active part in follow-up and review

Finally, but perhaps most critically, the HLPF should highlight good examples of how countries have invested in platforms through which poor rural women and men can contribute to Agenda 2030 implementation and to its follow-up and review. It has become commonplace nowadays to call for multistakeholder approaches, but when it comes to inclusion of poor rural women and men, there is still a need for dedicated investment in their capacity to engage effectively and on a level playing field. There is need to build trust and to address transaction costs through specific investments. When it comes to follow-up and review, there is also a need to address formal and informal barriers to participation in dedicated institutional mechanisms, to address diversity within and among rural constituencies, and to support the capacity of rural people's own organizations to engage effectively and on an equal footing with other stakeholders.

IFAD's 40 years of partnership with organizations representing small-scale rural producers, rural women, and indigenous peoples shows both the challenges and the important returns – in terms of ownership of the development process – of empowering rural people's organizations as partners within development programmes and in policy processes. Going forward, the experiences of the IFAD Farmers' Forum and Indigenous Peoples' Forum can provide a practical example of how this can be done in the process of follow-up and review, both within development institutions and at the country, regional, and global levels.

CONCLUSIONS

The global commitment to "leave no one behind" in making progress towards sustainable development necessarily implies a commitment to rural women and men living in poverty, food insecurity and socio-economic marginalization. The HLPF provides an ideal opportunity to pose a number of critical questions about whether this commitment is being met, and to send a powerful signal to all stakeholders about important areas where practical action will be needed in the coming years.



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⁷ IFAD Strategic Framework 2016-2025: *Enabling Inclusive and Sustainable Rural Transformation*. Rome: International Fund for Agricultural Development, 2016.