



Addressing poverty and inequality in the rural economy from a global perspective



Andrés Rodríguez-Pose^{*}, Daniel Hardy

Department of Geography and Environment, London School of Economics, UK

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Available online 26 February 2015

Keywords:

Poverty
Inequality
Rural development
Territorial approaches
Place-based development

ABSTRACT

Recent decades have seen the rural areas of developing and emerging countries undergo significant structural changes. They are the source of several pertinent international concerns, including extreme poverty and hunger, and rising spatial and interpersonal disparities, challenges that national governments and the international community have made limited headway in alleviating to date. By analysing the range of rural development approaches implemented in recent decades, we develop a picture in which territorial approaches have become more mainstream. Since the turn of the century in particular they have gradually supplanted more traditional place-neutral approaches, which, we argue, have served to increase rural-urban disparities and exasperate the incidence of poverty in rural areas. Rural territorial development approaches, where able to mobilise sufficient participation and coordination between local stakeholders, civil society, and various multi-level actors, offer the most favourable means of gaining a better understanding of the many social, economic, institutional assets within a region. They can be harnessed to drive brands of regional development that are not only sustainable, but also more equitable and inclusive across different segments of the population and territories.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Introduction

The global challenges of poverty, inequality and food security are to be “won or lost in the rural areas of the developing countries” (Anríquez & Stamoulis, 2007: 6). This statement, far from hyperbole, is a natural consequence of the overwhelming concentration of the poor and hungry in the rural areas of low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). It is estimated that 1.2 billion poor people (living on \$1.25 or less each day) lead out their lives in rural areas – representing some 75% of those in extreme poverty globally (World Development Indicators, 2013). In terms of food security, 805 million people, according to the FAO (FAO, 2014), or 870 million people, according to the UN (UN., 2013), go hungry each day. This, again, is largely a rural phenomenon. With the Millennium Development Goals reaching their expiry date, and the formulation of a post-2015 development agenda well underway, it is clear that progress on rural issues has been underwhelming and deserves more attention. If we are serious about tackling poverty, inequality and hunger, rural areas – as their principal locus – demand more

concerted and committed efforts from the international development community.

This is not to say that the plights faced by rural communities have not been accorded with high regard by international organisations, governments and local communities over the years. Since the 1950s rural issues have oscillated in and out of vogue in development debates (Jerve, 2001). Indeed, during the 1970s and 1980s development had a strong rural emphasis. The last two decades of the 20th century, by contrast, were conspicuous for their limited attention to rural matters (ILO., 2008; ILO., 2011). Only recently have rural issues resurfaced as priority policy areas. Whilst this renewed attention is welcome, in light of the far from positive international track record in terms of alleviating persistent rural problems to date (World Bank, 2007), there is a great need to review and understand rural challenges – to evaluate what works, where it works, and why. Admittedly, unambiguous answers to rural problems are few and far between: nevertheless, to sustain progress on poverty and begin to stem widening interpersonal and spatial (particularly urban-rural) disparities – which are fast becoming one of the major threats to growth and sustainable development in many LMICs – rural challenges must be met head on.

The purpose of this research is to identify clear trends in rural development theory and practice over the last few decades. We

^{*} Corresponding author. Department of Geography and Environment, London School of Economics, Houghton St, London WC2A 2AE, UK.

E-mail address: a.rodriguez-pose@lse.ac.uk (A. Rodríguez-Pose).

seek not only to identify instances of rural success, failure and ambiguity, but to also consider whether issues of poverty, inequality and food insecurity in rural areas can, or indeed should, always be addressed with specific policies. Building on this analysis, we will then endeavour to articulate some key themes, priorities and gaps in rural development theory and practice.

Poverty and inequality in rural areas: Factfinding

2008 marked the much-anticipated moment in time that the world became more urban than rural. For many developing, low and middle income countries, however, their reality remains predominantly rural (IFAD, 2010). As Fig. 1 illustrates, more than half of the inhabitants of LMICs live in rural areas. Although this share has fallen dramatically since the middle of the last century, absolute numbers of rural inhabitants continue to grow. In LMICs alone, rural populations increased by over 80% in the last half century, and by 100 million in the last decade.

In spite of the scale of rural challenges, there has been a tendency for development policy to favour “industrial, urban and service sectors at the expense of agricultural and other rural sector development” (Anríquez & Stamoulis, 2007: 6). Although this urban policy bias is consistent with the global trend of radical urbanisation (Scott, 2002), there is a patent need to achieve a greater sense of balance in the rural direction. Urban issues are real and pertinent, but if we are serious about tackling a host of global issues, such as poverty, inequality, hunger, and socio-political stability, among other interrelated issues, rural problems deserve more attention.

Poverty, inequalities and food insecurity

There is a clear association between poverty and rurality within countries for which data is available (see Fig. 2). Geographically, the incidence of rural poverty (defined at the \$1.25 [PPP] level) is at its most acute in Latin America and the Caribbean, followed closely by Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia (see Fig. 3), although at the country level there is significant diversity, with high incidences of rural poverty in all of the global regions.

Departing from these temporal snapshots of rural poverty for one moment, Fig. 4 illustrates how the evolution of rural poverty tends to follow a downward trajectory on the whole. For countries such as Malaysia and Sri Lanka, the poverty headcount ratio is not only comparatively low, but offers a definite downward trend. Nevertheless, for other countries, including Mexico and the Côte

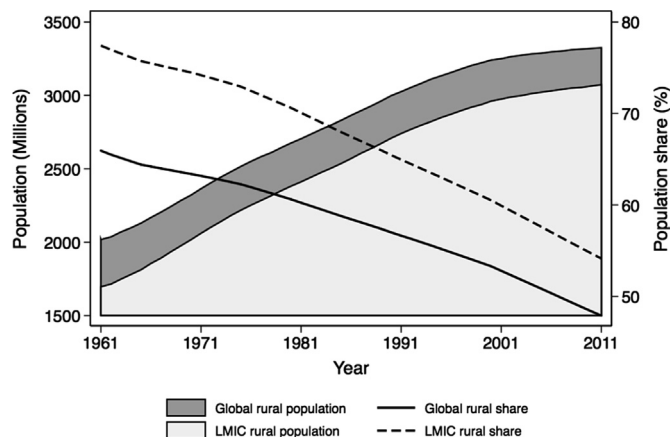


Fig. 1. Rural population stock and share. Source: World Development Indicators; Authors calculations.

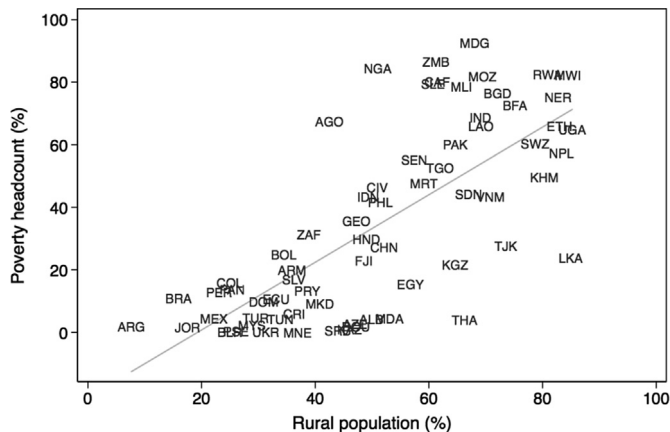


Fig. 2. Rural population and poverty ratio in LMICs. Source: World Development Indicators; Authors calculations.

d’Ivoire, rural poverty is not only a considerable issue, but has evidenced little or mixed progress over the last two decades. Although it is problematic to make generalisations based on such a limited array of countries, these findings are consistent with the view that progress on poverty alleviation has been made. Nevertheless, it is perhaps necessary to note that frequent data collection on poverty is rare in many of the poorest developing countries. If we were to equate data collection with some degree of monitoring and scrutiny of the issues at hand, where such oversight is absent the general picture is likely to be far worse.

Yet, even allowing for the progress that is being made in terms of poverty, the persistence of high levels of rural poverty and uneven progress in several parts of the world, notably Sub-Saharan Africa, ought to keep rural development high on the international development agenda (Dercon, 2009). Moreover, the scale of advances made in alleviating rural poverty may be somewhat masked by urban migration. The number of rural poor fell by an estimated 100 million between 1993 and 2001, but this was partially offset by an increase in the urban poor by around 50 million (Ravallion, Chen, & Sangraula, 2007). This fact suggests tackling poverty in aggregate terms requires a strong emphasis at its rural locus.

Just as for poverty, issues of spatial and interpersonal inequality are at their most acute in developing countries, as illustrated in

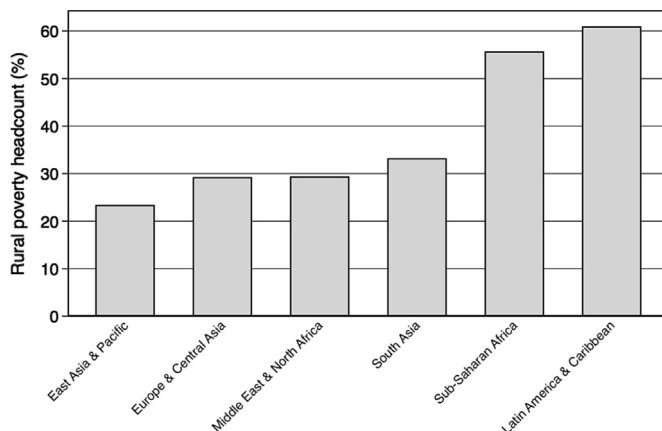


Fig. 3. Rural poverty headcount in LMICs by region. Source: World Development Indicators; Authors calculations.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/83219>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/83219>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)