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Major drivers for rural transformation in Africa: Job creation for rural growth

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Rural transformation processes: can we learn from other experiences?

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Executive Summary

Developing rural areas is a pressing need and a timely investment. Attention is to be refocused on rural communities and their potential to be drivers of growth, job creation, balanced development, prosperity and social peace. Strong determination to tackle the challenges that stifle this potential is essential, locally and particularly at national strategic, decision-making levels as well as internationally. Developing a strong rural stakeholders' "voice", and broad partnerships to ensure coherence, and carrying out practical, integrated approaches that "make a difference" are also key.

Rural areas hold considerable potential for economic growth, innovation, high returns and productive, good jobs. Repeatedly "missed opportunities" include wasted agricultural produce for lack of local processing, storage, marketing and transportation; and severely under-valued, under-used, and under-developed human resources, particularly youth and women. New opportunities are rapidly emerging and spreading, such as organic farming, national and international value chains, eco-tourism, green jobs, local solar energy production, and ITC.

However major challenges continue to stifle rural potential, from lack of investment in rural areas (particularly in socio-economic rural infrastructure), to serious decent work deficits such as: high rates of unemployment and underemployment, especially among youth and women; limited social protection; extensive child labour, and bonded labour in certain contexts; low organization of employers, workers and producers; weak local government; widespread informal activities, temporary or casual labour, with poor working conditions; and exclusion from the scope of labour laws, among other due to non-existent or weak labour inspection.

Today we are at a particularly propitious juncture to mobilize to seize opportunities for a rural "take off" and tackle the challenges that impede that take off. Rural areas are spotlighted, in particular in MDG work, as no goal can be achieved (especially MDG 1 and its targets to halve extreme poverty, the proportion of hungry people, and achieve full and productive employment) if rural communities, where three quarters of poverty concentrates, are not expressly targeted. Rural empowerment is also central to other current pressing concerns, such as economic growth and recovery, food security, climate change, management of migration flows, and socio-political stability.

Capacity does exist to unleash rural development, particularly in the form of vast national and international experience and expertise in that area,; as well as an increasingly marked convergence of visions among development actors, for instance concerning the need for a more positive and proactive stance, and the need to support both farm and non-farm activities.

Key elements for an effective rural empowerment strategy include: (1) a sharpened vision, through more and better data, and a positive view of rural areas that is no longer be equated with backwardness; (2) a clear focus on youth and women, as drivers of rural development; (3) integrated approaches consisting of multidisciplinary packages of measures, including the "voice" of rural stakeholders, and based on coordination and synergies among national actors as well as within the development community; (4) pragmatism, to replicate and upscale existing successful approaches that have "made a difference", and ensure these approaches reach policy level and are mainstreamed into countries' economic and development strategies; and (5) moving decisively "from words to ACTION".