

Keys for rural territorial development

Claves del desarrollo territorial rural

Juan Patricio Molina¹

ABSTRACT

This article presents the introductory discourse of the Symposium on Rural Development with Territorial Approach organized by the Research Group on Rural Management and Development at Universidad Nacional de Colombia, held in Bogotá on March 4 and 5 2010. As the framework of the sixty papers presented at the symposium, the concepts of territory and rural development with territorial approach are introduced. Five key elements of rural territorial development are examined.

Key words: planning, poverty, agriculture, capabilities.

RESUMEN

Este artículo recoge las palabras introductorias al Simposio Internacional sobre Desarrollo Rural con Enfoque Territorial organizado por el Grupo de Investigación en Gestión y Desarrollo Rural de la Universidad Nacional de Colombia, celebrado en Bogotá el 4 and 5 de marzo de 2010. Como marco de las sesenta ponencias expuestas durante el evento, se introducen los conceptos de territorio y de desarrollo rural con enfoque territorial y se examinan cinco elementos claves para abordar esta temática.

Palabras clave: planeación, pobreza, agricultura, capacidades.

Introduction

The International Symposium on Rural Development with Territorial Approach held in Bogota in March 2010 was a setting of academic interaction to conceptually and purposefully examine rural territorial development from experiences and analysis by organizations from civil society, academia, public institutions, and international agencies. Interest lied in being aware of progress and testimonies on initiatives within the rural development with territorial approach, to contribute to its socialization and identification of policy proposals.

This article seeks to present reflections on rural development with territorial approach, interpreting elements derived from the papers presented at the symposium. Five categories or key analyses are proposed.

Concept of territory

By nature, territory is a living reality and, thus, it is dynamic, flexible and with permanent possibilities for renovation. A territory without human beings is no longer a territory. Humans give it its shape, contents and future. In addition to processes of territorial use and occupation, our relationship with its natural base, with its infrastructure and its services,

with institutions and the market and, in general, our cohabitation relationships, directly or indirectly measured by those elements, bestow identity and quality to our territory.

The identity of a territory is manifested by its economic and social features, demographic and cultural aspects, and environmental and political characteristics. If we deal specifically with the economic, that identity is constructed from leading sectors in its development, which result from the gradual process of specialization.

Our quality of life is associated to that of our territory. The symbiosis between one and the other is ever more evident. Particularly in the rural environment, making it dependent on a direct and immediate relationship with increasingly scarce natural resources that require much more efficient management agreed upon collectively, and in which traditional and modern units of production coexist, whose interdependent development is necessary for long-term territorial competitiveness.

Concept of rural development with territorial approach

Hence, rural development, traditionally focused on the productive dimension of the rural population, must assign

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¹ Rural Development and Management Research Group (Grupo de Investigación en Gestión y Desarrollo Rural), Faculty of Agronomy, Universidad Nacional de Colombia. Bogota (Colombia). jpmolinao@unal.edu.co; jpatriciomolina@gmail.com

more importance to the possibilities of benefiting from the varying potential of the whole territory. This assumes that small producers progress toward greater appropriation of what should be of their territory and, consequently, on new ways of relating to such. We believe that therein, in this inclusive design which emphasizes the quality of rural life as a great purpose, lays the key for rural development with territorial approach.

This deals with the consensus construction of territorial strategic views from those sectors identified as key for fostering development, adding to such proposals to strengthen the role of the small producer. This would mean a transition from rural development centered on the productive unit that assumed territory as an exogenous or hardly modifiable variable to one that incorporates rural development as an endogenous variable, as a way of more decisively influencing upon the income and quality of life of the productive unit, whether it is or not agricultural in nature. What is important is the articulation of the specific activity with the territorial context in which it is located.

Carlos Julio Jara, director of IICA Sustainable Rural Development (Costa Rica), and Germán Escobar RIMISP researcher will address in depth these concepts related to rural territorial development (Escobar, 2010; Jara, 2010).

In 1961, eminent professor Lauchlin Currie, formulator of the national program for economic and social development “*Operación Colombia*”, suggested: “The model we propose for Colombia is not one of a nation full of peasant proprietors working in their small properties with hand tools, but rather of a nation like Canada or the United States where a relatively small number of large farm owners cultivating the best land and employing modern techniques and a lot of machinery, have reached enormous progress in agricultural productivity, with consequent welfare for their countries. The selection of these two models will be decisive for the future of Colombia” (López, 1962). And added alluding to the smallholding that, more than employment, what is important is what the work produces and this unfortunately, is extremely low (Currie, 1961).

Today, 50 years later, it is no secret that rural-urban migration has been more due to the crisis of the sector than to the transformation process of the agrarian structure, according to that desired by Currie, with highly efficient producers of food and raw materials, and without poor smallholders who would have more productive jobs and better quality of life in the cities. In effect, for him the

basic explanation of Colombia’s backwardness lay in that about 60 or 70% of the workforce was unemployed (in disguised manner or dedicated to working with near-zero productivity), according to results of his analysis for the time (Currie, 1965).

Alternately, it has not been possible to consolidate a development model based on strengthening land ownership and its equitable distribution, from the successful implementation of agrarian reform policies, as a strategy to deliver the countryside from poverty and the nation from its backwardness.

We failed both ways. Instead of the agrarian revolution posed by any of these two options, a combination of phenomena has occurred reinforcing a bimodal structure that evidence, in some instances, consolidation of nuclei of rural economy competitively articulated to markets and development of modern production systems appertaining to commercial agriculture; and, in others, sociopolitical degradation with implications on the concentration of property and in displacement of the population.

Of the eight-million agricultural workers that existed during the 60s, a population estimated around four-million remains, which continues being considerably important not only in terms of their contribution to employment and national output, but also to the nation’s political stability (Garay *et al.*, 2009).

We could state that the agrarian reform and rural development policies integrated to the 70s and 80s already had ingredients of territorial vision, but without having resolved it, an issue addressed by Absalón Machado in his analysis of the historical context (Machado, 2010).

To deepen into these ideas, we present valuable international experiences: Rosa Gallardo from Universidad de Córdoba (Spain) on the European case (Gallardo, 2010); Miguel da Silveira from Embrapa on the Brazilian case from the perspective of the multi-functionality of family agriculture (D’Silveira, 2010); María Oliva Lizarazo from IICA Ecuador on the Latin-American global vision; and Álvaro Rivas from Universidad Nacional de Colombia on experiences in Honduras. Additionally, we have the presentations on Mexico, Bolivia, and Guatemala by Luis Natividad, Juan Peter Nina, and Alma Lorena del Cid (Del Cid Pérez, 2010), added to the contributions from Universidad de Caldas and from Universidad Nacional on conceptual approaches (Aranda *et al.*, 2010) and methodologies to identify territories (Montoya *et al.*, 2010).

Certain keys for the rural development with territorial approach

From the abstracts of the presentations and from our group experience, certain keys are suggested, some long-standing and not yet resolved, which are pertinent for the territorial approach and for the purposes of the symposium.

First key: Territorial planning

The quality of a territory is directly associated to its planning, that is, to the solution of conflicts of land use and of its occupation by the people. This is one of the main problems of the rural nation. According to most revealing data we have on agriculture, there are only 4.9-million hectares when the vocation is in the order of 15-million, a low figure compared to the 114-million hectares in the national area. In pasture for livestock on the contrary, we have 42-million against a vocation of 18-million (IGAC, 2002). This means we are using more than twice of the suitable land for cattle raising and only a third of that suitable for agriculture.

Plans for rural municipal planning because their lack of financing and of sufficiently disaggregated primary information contradict consultation processes with the population. Regarding the rural, these plans should have greater rigor and disaggregation at the countryside level, as a basic municipal subdivision, and should be elaborated in participative manner. Otherwise, we will continue with exercises not pertinent to the realities we are seeking to modify.

To illustrate this first key, we present several works from Universidad Nacional (Palmira, Medellín, Bogotá, and IDEA branches), from Universidad Distrital, and from *Fundación Esawá*.

Second key: rural poverty and local capabilities

Rural poverty has been a historic constant. According to the Mission for the Connection of the Series of Employment, Poverty and Inequality (MESEP, 2008), the estimation for 2008 indicates that of the 11,048,014 rural inhabitants in Colombia (equivalent to 25% of the country's total population), 65.2% are poor, *i.e.*, 7,203,170 inhabitants. Agricultural workers, being the poorest in the rural environment, correspond to at least the rural indigent population that, according to the same source, amounts to 3,601,685 inhabitants.

This dramatic reality cannot be disregarded. Life in the rural world continues closely linked to agricultural activity: 74% of the rural homes are related to agriculture (CRECE,

2006). But the economic diversification of the rural world is also undeniable, as an indicator of adaptation to the new development challenges.

Diversification and specialization, accompanied by the generation of productive employment and incomes, by technological development and innovation, by changes in the structure of the property, and by new territorial possibilities for broad population sectors, by endogenous development and by construction of interregional balances to mitigate the lag of the most backward regions, are ways of facing the multi-causal phenomenon of rural poverty.

On this broad variety themes, we will have presentations from ESAP (Higher School for Public Administration) on food safety and territorial development, from the Council on Competitiveness in Nariño on competitiveness and agro-ecology (Ruiz, 2010); from IICA (Inter-American Cooperation Institute for Agriculture) on adoption of territorial approaches based on the experiences in southern Tolima; from ECOFIBRAS on natural fibers in Curití (Santander); from the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine and Zoo-technology at Universidad Nacional on milk commercialization channels in the Province of Sugamuxi, ornamental fish production in the Amazon, and plantain problems in Quindío; and from the Agricultural Entrepreneurial Provincial Center (Agrosur) in Huila.

But the issue of rural poverty does not only afflict agricultural workers, who represent 60% of the rural poor. Identifying the other sectors is a fundamental task in each territory. The perspective of rural development with territorial approach must serve to visualize new strategies of attacking rural poverty from all the population sectors.

With this logic in mind, strengthening the local capacities is the order of the day.

There are several papers addressing this topic. We cite those from the Management and Rural Development Group at Universidad Nacional (Pachón, 2010), (Parrado, 2010a), (Ángel, 2010), the one from Universidad Nacional at Palmira on the collective construction of endogenous growth, the one from Universidad de Caldas on the importance of traditional knowledge, the one from Corpoica and from the PBA Corporation addressing participant rural innovation and rural extension, as mechanisms of participation to bridge the communication gap between state institutions and the population (Gutiérrez, 2010). Additionally, some reflections on rural productive enterprise and human rights and sustainability are addressed in papers from

Corporación Plantta (Salcedo, 2010) from Universidad de la Salle (Murcia, 2010) and from the Rural Management Corporation (Chaparro, 2010).

Strong State support to employment and income productive projects is a necessity, which generates accumulative impacts in development and in combating poverty. Thus, understanding the main tendencies of agricultural development is a necessary framework to set paths for rural development, concerning the challenge of making small producers participants of the possibilities offered by the new production dynamics and the expanding markets. Doctor Juan José Perfetti illustrates on the issue (Perfetti, 2010).

It is surprising that, with State support to productive projects of employment and income generation to decisively attack poverty, it is difficult to institutionalize suitable instruments, proven by initiatives of international cooperation. We are referring, for example, to the proposals of the MIDAS program presented in one of the papers.

Enhancing local capacities also assumes addressing another new theme among us. It is the structuring of regional networks that involve public and private players (Bayona *et al.*, 2010). This means that relationships among players in a territory gain in diversity and content around purposes of common benefit. These networks would start from a basic level of mutual awareness among players, but would have a potential for evolution toward cooperation among its members and toward higher levels of association, on the basis of values like solidarity and trust. The role of the State is decisive in promoting those networks, when dealing with territories with unarticulated players. Nevertheless, that role should start losing importance with the development of the networks (Perfetti *et al.*, 2009).

The aforementioned places us in the field of local institutions. For the rural poor to access State policies, including those designed to favor them; a strong local institution is required. Experience shows that, in addition to formulating good policies, there should be conditions for these to reach the poor. Without strengthening local institutions, there is little that can be done. The problem lies in the lack of resources in many municipalities, because of the few central government transferences or their low fiscal effort. It is desirable that the territorial institutions assume a leading role in their economic development, overcoming inefficient public management, more concerned on spending than on setting results and accountability for achievements.

The creation of wealth by the private sector should revert, via estate taxes, to strengthening territorial administrations. In this sense, much still needs to be done: according to the geographic institute IGAC (Instituto Geográfico Agustín Codazzi) figures, even though during the 2000 to 2009 period the appraisal of the rural zone increased by 10.8% annually, only 52.8% of the rural properties are updated (IGAC, 2009).

Complementarily to local institutional strengthening, it is convenient for national policies to have highly qualified and decentralized teams for territorial accompaniment, which promote and monitor the application of those policies and facilitate self management.

But there are also territories where creation of new institutions is required. These are areas of poverty and of agrarian boundary, affected by illicit crops and violence, which are hardly starting a reconversion process towards the legal economy. In such, for some years consolidation plans have been conducted, through the coordinated presence of national programs. Given that the future of the State in those zones is at stake, it is fundamental to progress in the creation of new local institutions in line with those contexts, to offer opportune and effective responses by the State to basic problems of social insertion. Institutions, as designed from the national level, do not have the capacity to respond to that challenge.

The issue of illicit crops and violence incorporates particularities to rural development in Colombia, especially in affected areas. Papers like the one from the Social Corporation for Community Advise and Training in Casanare and the one from the Agricultural Workers Association from *Valle del Río Cimitarra* will address this issue from their territorial realities.

Enhancement of local capacities is also effective in the multiplication of policies for the rural environment. Policies from the Ministry of Agriculture, formerly the most important for the rural environment, are now among many coming from a great diversity of sectors: in 2006, 278 programs had been identified for rural environment, distributed into 10 areas of policy and 32 participating institutions (IICA, 2006). Those local capacities are indispensable to channel national resources toward territories that increasingly compete for them.

Third key: land tenure and agrarian structure

Within contexts of profound inequities in the distribution of property, it is very difficult to unleash real processes of

rural development with a territorial approach, *i.e.*, to construct territories offering options for everyone. We feel that agrarian reform and rural territorial development are two sides of the same coin: one cannot be addressed without the other. The problem afflicting the nation in this aspect continues being extremely serious. IGAC in its Atlas on land tenure in Colombia, based on cadastral records, soon to be published, ratifies it thus: increased Gini coefficient in the last 30 years and increase of the national average of the property.

For a State that has suggested agrarian reform policies for the last 60 years, it has been complicated to carry out effective redistribution processes, because of the lack of true political will and because of being lost in a legal labyrinth. Disorganized migration to urban centers or to aperture areas of the agrarian frontier has meant assuming enterprises destined to fail under squalid living conditions, either because of the lack of adequate housing and employment, or because of distancing from economic circuits. Constructing territory under these conditions of instability is a task with enormous obstacles.

The nation requires a new agrarian reform policy that, from the perspective of rural development with territorial approach, rigorously incorporates novel elements on which the State has advanced. We are referring to studies of the conflict of use, to that of the vegetal coverage, to that of the ecosystems, to that of the soil which indicate their potentials and qualities, and to those of land tenure, added to the municipal data bases in socioeconomic, cadastral, real estate taxes, and fiscal terms. Conjugating and superimposing all these variables by regions; currently, the nation has excellent technical possibilities to suggest a more coherent agrarian reform. The answer continues being a firm policy decision.

The aforementioned leads us to proposing that management of rural territorial development policies should be assumed from two complementary approximations: the local and the national. There are policies that must be addressed from the national level. The agrarian reform is one of them. There are also policies that should be placed within the local, as those generating local capacities, according to that already stated.

Fourth key: the local dimension and its relationship with the national dimension

We must overcome the disagreement between the sectorial and territorial approximations. They are not exclusive; on the contrary, both are necessary. The problem is that in Colombia the sectorial policy tends to be self-centered,

disconnected from other sectors and ignoring the territorial views, crucial for their success.

We try to establish a dialogue and feedback between both types of policies. Whenever warranted, the sectorial policies should have adaptive flexibility to regional particularities and the territorial levels must strengthen their technical capacities. Unfortunately, many municipal or departmental plans continue being a sum of sectorial proposals that do not integrate a territorial vision.

Likewise, there are policies that should stem from the territorial orbit and be from its direct incumbency. This is a rather unexploited field of work of availing of complementarities with national policies. Here we find interesting developments in municipalities neighboring big urban centers. Bogota, for example, has established its own policy to support rural municipal zones to improve the supply of food products to the capital. These themes of urban-rural relationships will be addressed and presented by Universidad Javeriana, Universidad Nacional at Medellín, Universidad de Caldas, Universidad Nacional at Bogotá (Parrado, 2010b), and the Secretary for the Economic Development of Bogotá.

Fifth key: contextual formation and disciplinary formation

The role of academia in the rural sector, regarding the formation of professionals in rural development, should be based on recognizing that human beings are a vital constitutive part of our territories, which we construct and transform, and that in the final analysis, we are the subject of work of territorial development.

The multiple relationships of human beings with their territory constitute integrality. Merely for the study's convenience, we separate each of those relationships with: the market, production, natural resources, family, neighbors, production unit, and institutions. We also overlook that men and women as couples constitute units that are complemented in decisions and actions.

It is wrong to assume that each of those parts constitutes an autonomous and hermetic whole. We forget that said fragmentation by parts is merely for convenience. Organized construction isolated structures of analysis is dangerous, given that we design a reality that does not exist. Upon stumbling on the dismembered, articulation elements are neglected or are lost in analysis.

The university's function is to provide structuring formation in capacity for synthesis and formulating relationships. Professionals trained in rural development should

not only master the discipline's tools of analysis that give identity to their career, but they should also be familiarized with dealing with complex economic, social, policy, ecologic, cultural, and demographic interrelations, as well as important phenomena in the life of a territory. These professionals must know how to observe and unbind participative processes, find a balance between the ideal and the desirable against the practical and the possible; and they must know how to establish alternatives and select priorities. Finally, they must know how to contextualize and contextualize themselves.

In careers like agricultural engineering, just to cite one, which is at the heart of rural development, there are tensions between disciplinary formation and contextual or relational formation. While the disciplinary increases in specialization in light of the rapid developments in science, the contextual gains complexity through multiplication of relationships and the rate of changes in the environment.

We are convinced that the contextual formation is greatly beneficial for professionals, given that in the short term it will help them clarify their individual inclinations and preferences and in the long term it will permit them to work better in their field of discipline. To progress in that formation, we believe the university-territories link should be strengthened. We will have several papers on these themes like the one from Universidad de Cundinamarca and *Agrovisión* on the agronomist required by Colombia, the one from Instituto Universitario de la Paz (*La Paz University Institute*), the one from Corpoica on comprehensive training of communities, the one from the Collective of Rural Integration from the Faculty of Agriculture at Universidad Nacional (Chiquillo, 2010) (Beltrán del Río and López, 2010), and the one on strategy from the Group on Rural Management and Development at Universidad Nacional (Molina, 2010).

Conclusions

The challenges of rural environment in terms of territorial organization, of struggle against poverty, of construction of local capacities, of equity in land distribution, of harmonization of sectorial and territorial policies, and of formation of human resources, invite to the search for new approximations to rural development that incorporate a broad and integrating view of the territory.

The response to the invitation call to the international colloquium on rural development with territorial approach, held in 2010, indicates that there are multiple experiences

from academia, civilian organizations, public institutions, and international agencies, with valuable input and contributions to progress in methodologies and proposals of rural territorial development policy.

The international presentations also highlight that many countries in Latin America are delving in the conceptualization of rural territorial development and are progressing in a dynamic focused on the construction of rural territories that recognizes the leading and multifunctional role of family agriculture.

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