

# rural livelihoods

research findings for development policymakers and practitioners

## New thinking needed to tackle the rural employment crisis

**A** further 106 million people will have joined the rural labour force in the developing world by 2015. What work will they find and where? Can enough jobs be created in rural areas, or must more people migrate to cities?

A briefing paper from the Overseas Development Institute, in the UK, provides an overview of rural employment trends.

An estimated 450 million, out of a total agricultural labour force worldwide of 1,100 million, are hired workers. This work is increasingly casual. Rural work, especially farming, is difficult, monotonous and dangerous. About 170,000 agricultural workers are killed each year. Few workers are protected from sickness, accidents or unemployment. Discrimination against female workers is common, with many being paid far less than male counterparts. In India, female agricultural labourers earn 72 percent of male rates.

For activities that require little land, factory-style operations applying economies of scale are possible. Industrialised farming is set to become more important because it produces the higher-value foods increasingly demanded as urban incomes rise.

Dramatic improvements in transport and communications mean many poor households now combine farm and off-farm activities seasonally. There has been a striking increase in temporary and circular migration. In Andhra Pradesh, India, a recent study in six villages shows that more

than 40 percent of villagers commute daily to urban centres. China has over 125 million rural-urban migrants.

A lack of data means the importance of internal movements is not fully appreciated.

The authors note:

- Rural public works programmes rarely create sustainable jobs.
- Too little vocational training is provided in rural areas.
- The prohibition of child labour has rarely made a difference in rural areas.

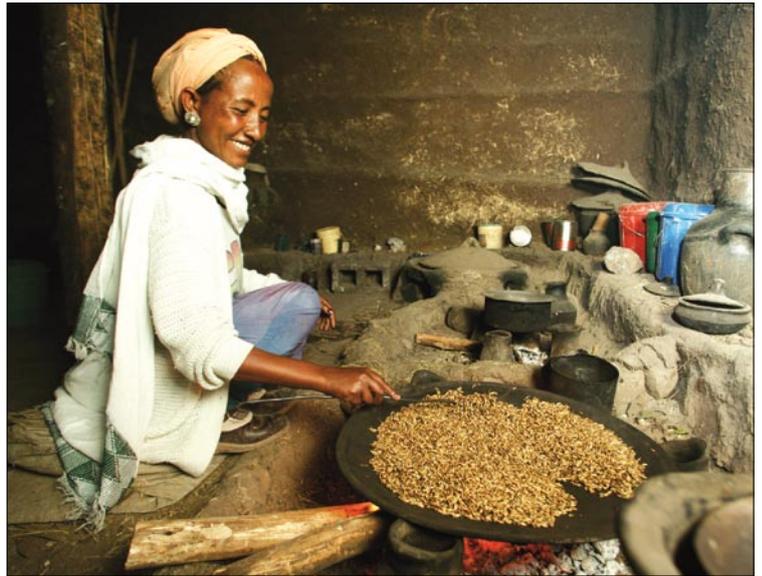
While health and education services in most rural areas are lacking, some countries are making corrective efforts. In Latin America, cash transfers to rural poor people are offered, on the condition that children go to school and pre-schoolers attend clinics.

The critical problem for rural employment is that much labour leads only to poverty-level wages. Policymakers must recognise that industrial forms of farming, such as horticulture, may create some new jobs. However, the main contribution to rural employment will have to come from higher productivity and better returns to self-

employed farmers and those operating small rural businesses.

Governments need to:

- encourage the non-farm economy to create jobs and put upward pressure on rural wages
- invest in rural people through basic education, skills, health and



'Sunrise Restaurant' in Ethiopia's Delanta Plateau. Tsehay Mewcha, the restaurant owner and member of the Oxfam community saving and credit scheme, makes *talla*, a local barley-based beer. The waste residue is fed to cattle and helps fatten them.

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early nutrition interventions to reduce disparities between rural and urban populations

- reduce the costs and risks of migration by providing information, better transport, remittances services and making rights to public services and protection portable – there are innovative migrant-support schemes in India to learn from
- push for better labour standards, end child labour and tackle gender inequalities
- explore new ways to provide social protection that is no longer linked to specific full-time jobs.

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*Rural Employment and Migration: In Search of Decent Work*, Overseas Development Institute Briefing Paper 27, by Steve Wiggins and Priya Deshingkar, 2007 (PDF) [www.odi.org.uk/publications/briefing/bp\\_rural\\_employment\\_oct07.pdf](http://www.odi.org.uk/publications/briefing/bp_rural_employment_oct07.pdf)

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## How can small-scale producers compete globally?

**R**apid globalisation of agricultural trade is forcing small producers to compete with large enterprises that have better access to business services and a greater ability to meet international quality standards. Collective action in producer organisations is an important strategy for small-scale producers who want to access, compete in and increase their bargaining power in the market.

A book from Oxfam GB draws on experience in nine countries to provide guidance for the staff of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working to develop the capacity of producers' organisations (POs).

Since the 1980s, market liberalisation has led to the reduction of support services provided by the state and put an end to guaranteed markets. Most farmers have to market their produce without access to reliable or affordable inputs or financial and

transport services. Those who can access markets are often vulnerable to buyers who take advantage of small producers' weak bargaining position.

Local and global markets are often uncompetitive, driven by the interests of buyers who can influence prices, impose demanding standards and force small producers to take more risks. After a long period of decline in the total value of aid to agriculture, rural development planners are recognising the need to link small-scale producers to markets, rather than just promoting agricultural production. Agricultural development and promoting POs has again become a 'fashionable' economic development strategy.

- Some fundamental problems in the market cannot be overcome by POs alone, no matter how well-organised they are.
- POs usually reflect the social context in which they operate and may exclude women or other marginalised groups from participating or from positions of power.
- Unless basic legal and political constraints to economic development are addressed by the state, there may be little point in investing resources to support POs. POs formed in response to external agencies, rather than producers' own

initiative, will often struggle to develop into sustainable businesses. Development NGOs should be cautious about creating new POs:

- If laws do not provide a suitable framework for POs to operate, it may be better to invest resources to help producers advocate for legal change.
- If POs are to succeed, economic considerations should be the first priority.
- Wherever possible POs should try to raise some of their capital from members' contributions to increase their ownership and commitment to the business.
- Promoting equal participation of women in POs requires attention to how underlying gender attitudes and the division of labour within the home and on the farm affect women's opportunities and confidence.

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*Producer Organisations: A Guide to Developing Collective Rural Enterprises*, Oxfam Great Britain, by Chris Penrose-Buckley, 2007 (PDF)

[www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/downloads/produorgs\\_book.pdf](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/downloads/produorgs_book.pdf)

## People's access to common resources under threat

**C**ommon resources and property, such as access to shared land, are important to many rural livelihoods. However, people's access to common resources is under threat from outside interests and insecure legal rights.

Common resources are those that people access, use and manage collectively. They can help people to meet their everyday basic needs and provide a 'safety net' – a source of food or income – during difficult times. They can also generate some regular income from small-scale commercial use. For example, in Akok village, Cameroon, cash crops are grown alongside traditional products, such as cassava and plantain, on common forest lands.

To assess the status of common resources across the world, researchers from the International Land Coalition and the CGIAR Systemwide Programme on Collective Action and Property Rights compared 41 case studies of common property from 20 countries. People use and manage common resources in several ways.

Customary law and practices are an important basis for regulating access and management of a resource. Group identities define who is included and excluded from using a resource. In some cases, external projects have helped to secure people's access to common resources. Most of these are conservation projects in protected areas, with involvement from international organisations.

Secure tenure is necessary for sustainable and fair resource management. However, this is often threatened by outsiders, such as

migrants, investors and state agencies, who have competing interests.

- In most places, there is no legal support for customary rights. This can lead to conflict if other people claim the rights to use a resource or if state laws allocate such rights to others.
- Outside investment in industries such as mining or tourism brings revenue to governments but often means communal rights are lost.
- Women and lower caste community members are often excluded from using common resources when elite local groups ignore laws to meet their own interests.
- Even where common property rights are legally recognised, it is difficult for rural people to register these because legal processes are expensive and complex.
- Governments can create laws and support projects to recognise common property rights, but even where these exist they are often not enforced.

The research also highlights more encouraging case studies that identify some ways to protect poor people's access to common resources:

- Collective action and organisation, often supported by non-governmental organisations, is the most common response to pressures and threats.
- The role of community action in advocating for the recognition of common resources in laws and policies is increasingly important.

- In most places studied, there is currently a lack of laws recognising common property rights, but reforms are underway in an increasing number of countries.
- Empowering customary authorities through the decentralisation of power has improved rights and reduced conflict in some countries. However, traditional authorities require further support to exercise this power accountably and settle conflicts.

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*Securing Common Property Regimes in a Globalising World, Synthesis of 41 Case Studies on Common Property Regimes from Asia, Africa, Europe and Latin America*, International Land Coalition: Rome, by Andrew Fuys, Esther Mwangi and Stephan Dohrn, 2007

[www.landcoalition.org/cd\\_ILC/CD%20commons/index.html](http://www.landcoalition.org/cd_ILC/CD%20commons/index.html)

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