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World social situation 2021: rural development for an inclusive future

Note by the Secretariat

Summary

The present note examines development challenges in rural areas and presents policy recommendations to promote inclusive and sustainable rural development. The note summarizes the main findings of the *World Social Report 2021: Reconsidering Rural Development*.

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I. Introduction

1. Rural development is essential to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and make progress towards the guiding principle of leaving no one behind. Sustainable, vibrant rural economies are key for poverty eradication and can help to reduce inequality and promote inclusion. They make it possible for countries to develop and industrialize.

2. There are pressing reasons to reconsider rural development strategies. First, poverty and inequality persist in rural areas, which are home to 43 per cent of the world's population but to 80 per cent of people living below \$1.90 a day. Secondly, access to education, health and other services is generally more limited in rural areas than in urban ones. Thirdly, rural development strategies are not proving adequate to protect the health of the planet. The continued loss of forests and wilderness has been a contributing factor to climate change and is also widely held to be a reason for the increased frequency of zoonotic diseases, such as the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). Climate change, in turn, is affecting rural livelihoods disproportionately, with further implications for rural poverty.

3. The present note proposes new directions for rural development strategies. A key message is that rural populations must not be viewed merely as disadvantaged groups in need of assistance. Instead, with the adoption of appropriate strategies, rural development can be a powerful force for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

II. Social development challenges in the rural world

4. The share of the population living in rural areas differs greatly from country to country, as does the depth of the rural development challenge. In 2020, 67 per cent of the population of low-income countries and 58 per cent of the population of lower-middle-income countries lived in rural areas, as compared with about 20 per cent of the population in high-income countries. Overall, low-income and lower-middle-income countries are home to about 70 per cent of the world's rural population.¹ In most countries, income per capita is lower in rural areas than it is in urban ones. Over 70 per cent of the world's rural population lives in countries where the agricultural per capita income is lower than the national per capita income.

A. Rural poverty

5. Poverty remains a rural challenge. About 18 per cent of rural residents live in extreme income poverty, compared with 5.3 per cent of urban residents. As a result of the high prevalence of poverty and the significant size of rural populations in many developing countries, four out of five people living in poverty live in rural areas. Much like poverty rates at the national level, rural poverty rates are highest in sub-Saharan Africa, where more than 50 per cent of the rural population live in extreme poverty in numerous countries. The situation of the rural poor is made worse by deficiencies in access to public services, infrastructure and social protection. The COVID-19 pandemic has compounded their already vulnerable position by reducing incomes, limiting mobility and reducing food security.

6. In recent decades, poverty has declined faster in rural areas than in urban ones, despite persistent rural disadvantages. A study of 19 countries that have data shows

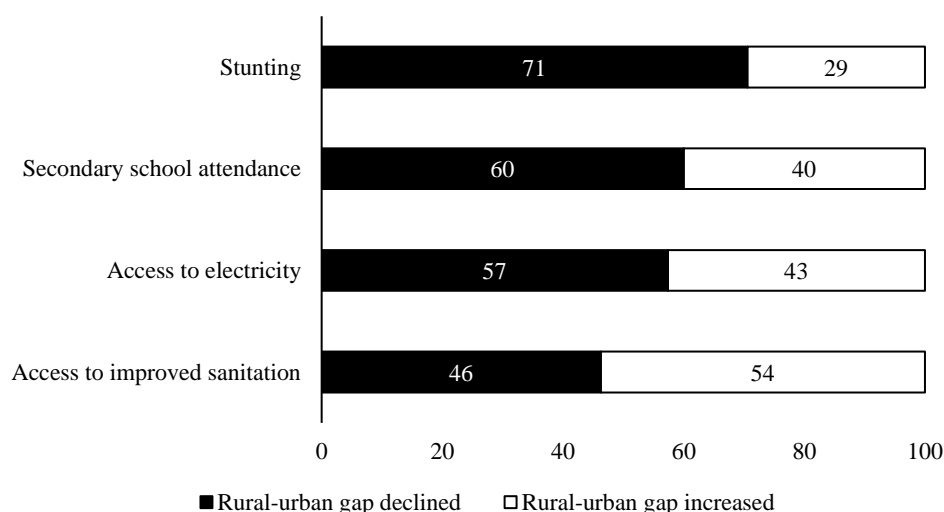
¹ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *World Urbanization Prospects 2018* (accessed 20 May 2021).

that the rate of rural poverty reduction has been higher than that of urban poverty reduction in all of those countries except one.² However, reaching the very poorest remains challenging. Over the past 30 years, developing regions have made little progress in raising the level of consumption of the poorest, who often experience chronic poverty. In other words, the poorest have been left behind.

B. Rural inequalities

7. There has also been progress in reducing rural-urban gaps in access to basic services and opportunities (see figure). On average, progress in rates of secondary school attendance, the reduction of stunting and access to electricity has been somewhat faster in rural areas than in urban ones since the 1990s. Nevertheless, even if the progress observed in these dimensions of well-being continues at the same pace, rural areas will still lag far behind urban ones by 2030.

Percentage of countries with declining/increasing urban-rural gaps in basic indicators of well-being, 1990s to 2010s



Source: Based on data from 57 countries obtained from multiple indicator cluster surveys and demographic and health surveys.

8. While poverty rates remain higher in rural areas than in urban ones and access to basic services and opportunities is more limited in rural areas, income inequality is often lower in rural areas. This is the case in 44 of the 56 countries for which rural and urban income inequality estimates (based on the Gini coefficient) are available.³

² *World Social Report 2021: Reconsidering Rural Development* (United Nations publication, 2021); Department of Economic and Social Affairs calculations, based on data from the World Bank LAC Equity Lab, available at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/lac-equity-lab1/poverty/head-count>, and the World Bank PovcalNet tool, available at <http://iresearch.worldbank.org/PovcalNet/home.aspx>.

³ Based on the latest available year of data on income inequality measured using the Gini coefficient. Data from LAC Equity Lab; Luxembourg Income Study's Data Access Research Tool; PovcalNet; the National Statistical Office of Thailand; the National Statistical Office of Mongolia; National Statistics Office of Mongolia and World Bank, *Mongolia Poverty Update 2018* (Ulaanbattar, 2020); and United Nations University-World Institute for Development Economics Research, World Income Inequality Database, version of 6 May 2020. See *World Social Report 2021* for additional information.

9. Despite differences in inequality levels, rural and urban inequality trends follow a similar (national) pattern: that is, inequality generally increases or declines in both rural and urban areas at the same time. Regions, rural and urban areas and different sectors of the economy are linked, including through trade and migration, and share common institutions and national development patterns. The roll-out of social protection programmes or the implementation of national education plans, for instance, generally help to reduce inequality in both urban and rural areas. Linkages between urban and rural areas also affect rural development, including poverty and inequality trends. The extent of these linkages depends on geographical proximity and connectivity (transportation and means of communication) between rural areas and urban centres and the distribution of resources, among other things. Strong urban-rural linkages foster the diversification of economic activities in rural areas and help to reduce rural poverty.

10. Notwithstanding progress in closing rural-urban gaps and reducing poverty, inequalities in access to services and opportunities remain high within rural areas and are persistent for specific groups. On average, wealthier, more educated rural households are almost as well off, in terms of health and educational outcomes, as the average urban household, while rural households in the bottom wealth quintiles are far worse off. For indigenous peoples and ethnic minority groups, wealth and opportunity gaps between them and the ethnic majority are greater in rural areas than in urban ones, according to available evidence.⁴ The overlay of gender with rural residence confers additional disadvantages on rural women, who face more obstacles to accessing education than rural men or women in urban areas and have lower levels of ownership and control of assets, less access to paid employment and lower access to public services.

C. Reducing poverty and inequality in rural areas as complementary goals

11. Reductions in rural poverty have not always led to reductions in rural inequalities or in inequalities between rural and urban areas. In China, India and Indonesia, for instance, rural inequality increased or remained constant while rural poverty fell sharply between the 2000s and the 2010s.

12. Additional data on rural-urban gaps support the finding that rural income inequality can rise despite progress in reducing other dimensions of disadvantage.⁵ In Bangladesh, India, Indonesia and Viet Nam, for instance, rural-urban gaps in key indicators of well-being declined between the 1990s and the 2010s, while income inequality, as measured by the Gini coefficient, increased.

13. In fact, regional and time trends suggest that declines in inequality are not a systematic outcome of growth and development. The same economic forces and policies that drive falling poverty can cause a rise in inequality within rural areas and between urban and rural areas. Agricultural development, a key driver of rural poverty reduction, can exacerbate rural inequality if those who are better off reap greater benefits from agricultural growth. Unequal access to resources such as land plays a key role. Inequality trends may also vary depending on the sector and nature of economic growth. Urbanization and diversification away from agriculture in

⁴ See *Report on the World Social Situation 2016: Leaving No One behind – The Imperative of Inclusive Development* (United Nations publication, 2016) and Maitreyi Bordia Das and Sabina Anne Espinoza, *Inclusion Matters in Africa* (Washington, D. C., World Bank, 2020).

⁵ See *World Social Report 2021*, table III.A.3.

developing countries, for instance, can concentrate economic returns in urban areas and wealthier households.

14. Persistent and growing inequality can be detrimental to growth and poverty reduction. In rural areas with high inequality, people in poverty (who are already disadvantaged in terms of access to resources) benefit less from subsequent growth, or even from periods of agricultural expansion. Left unaddressed, challenges faced by the rural poor in trying to escape poverty and fulfil their potential ultimately lead to constraints on rural economic growth.

III. The environment and rural development

15. Current rural development strategies are not environmentally sustainable. While successful in terms of increasing global food production and helping to reduce hunger and malnutrition, agricultural practices have contributed to the degradation and depletion of water and land resources. Natural resources are the basis for sustainable and productive agricultural systems. Climate change, land degradation, pollution, loss of biodiversity and the depletion of natural resources are major impediments to achieving a sustainable agricultural livelihood, which many of the poorest and most marginalized in rural areas depend on. Moreover, events related to climate change, like droughts and flooding, disproportionately affect rural communities living in extreme poverty that rely greatly on agricultural incomes and natural resources. In fact, if no action is taken, climate change could push an additional 100 million people into extreme poverty by 2030.⁶

16. With regard to water resources, efforts to increase agricultural output have led to the cultivation of high-yielding varieties of different crops, requiring large amounts of chemical fertilizers, pesticides and controlled irrigation. Across the world, irrigation accounts for 69 per cent of all freshwater withdrawal.⁷ This is highest in South Asia, reaching about 90 per cent. Climate change is further disrupting the availability of renewable freshwater resources.

17. The excessive impounding and withdrawal of water has reduced freshwater flows reaching the sea, thereby affecting aquatic life and biodiversity and contributing to global ocean degradation. The drying up of major rivers as a result of extraction of water for various commercial uses is also threatening the ecological substratum on which the economy and societies of these river basins rest. Current freshwater withdrawal and use levels are therefore socially and environmentally unsustainable. In fact, a large gap will emerge between the projected demand and the available supply by 2030 if current trends continue.

18. There has also been an increase in the use of chemical fertilizer and other chemical inputs. The global use of chemical fertilizer increased from about 11 million tons in 1961 to about 109 million tons in 2018.⁸ Yet, while in many regions the use of such chemicals is excessive, in other regions, especially sub-Saharan Africa, fertilizer use remains low, limiting agricultural productivity growth in many countries. Run-off from these huge volumes of chemical fertilizers and pesticides has become a major source of water pollution, often proving deadly for the freshwater fish stock.

⁶ Stephane Hallegatte and others, "Shock waves: managing the impacts of climate change on poverty", Climate Change and Development Series (Washington D.C., World Bank, 2016).

⁷ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *United Nations World Water Development Report 2020: Water and Climate Change* (2020).

⁸ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations statistical database (FAOSTAT), fertilizers by nutrient dataset (accessed on 20 May 2021).

Agriculture, as a result, has overtaken industries as the major source of pollution of inland and coastal waters in many countries.

19. With regard to land resources, the rapid expansion of croplands and pasture has often been achieved by clearing forests and encroaching on the wilderness. Some 30 per cent of the global forest cover has been lost in the past century and 20 per cent of the standing forest has been degraded between 1990 and 2015. A direct consequence of deforestation, caused by the expansion of agriculture, is the loss of biodiversity. The conversion of natural habitats to agricultural land has also been the main driver of biodiversity loss. At the same time, the replacement of diverse, local crop varieties with genetically modified ones by many farmers has contributed to genetic erosion, threatening plant genetic diversity and the resilience of agriculture against the changing climate.

20. Moreover, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change attributes about 31 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions directly to agricultural and land-use changes, suggesting that rural land-management practices have a direct impact on climate change. Unsustainable farming practices used on a massive scale also exacerbate soil erosion. Meanwhile, poorly planned construction of infrastructure in rural areas has led to the irreplaceable loss of natural and cultural sites in many countries.

21. The COVID-19 pandemic has made the consequences of the loss of forests and wilderness clear.⁹ The frequent occurrence of various zoonotic epidemics, such as severe acute respiratory syndrome, Middle East respiratory syndrome, Ebola virus disease and Chikungunya, result, to a large extent, from the fact that the loss of forests is increasing contact between humans and non-humans, enabling the transmission of diseases from animals to humans. The sustainable management of forests can not only reduce the likelihood of future zoonotic disease outbreaks, but also regulate the health of ecosystems, biodiversity and climate, as well as enhance people's livelihoods.

IV. Investment and productivity challenges for rural development

22. Raising agricultural productivity is key to eradicating poverty. The tepid growth of agricultural productivity and the persistent productivity gap between developed and developing countries in the past two decades are causes for concern. Without an acceleration in agricultural labour productivity growth, it is estimated that countries with large shares of agricultural workers in the workforce are unlikely to reach target 3 of Sustainable Development Goal 2 (doubling the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers) by 2030.¹⁰

23. Chronic underinvestment in the agricultural sector is a key factor behind the weak growth in agricultural productivity of many developing countries. It is reflected in the low rates of net capital stock per agricultural worker in low-income countries as compared with those in middle- and high-income countries (see table). Low investment in agriculture is due to declining and volatile agricultural prices, lack of access to agricultural knowledge and technology, inadequate infrastructure, insecure access to land, persistent gender gaps in access to productive resources, climate change and environmental degradation. Neglect of the agricultural sector and the

⁹ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "Financing sustainable forest management: a key component of sustainable COVID-19 recovery", Policy Brief No. 88, 12 November 2020.

¹⁰ Douglas Gollin, "Farm size and productivity: lessons from recent literature", IFAD Research Series No. 34 (Rome, IFAD, 2019).

ongoing disruptions to the agricultural global value chain induced by the COVID-19 pandemic also add to the downward pressure on agricultural productivity.

24. Even where there have been improvements in agricultural productivity, these have not necessarily led to broad-based and immediate poverty reduction, especially in countries where poverty is more prevalent among landless rural households that engage mainly in non-farm activities. Creating and maintaining a vibrant non-farm economy in rural areas is therefore crucial for lifting, and keeping, many rural residents out of poverty. A robust rural non-farm economy also presents a significant potential for generating jobs for the growing young labour force found in many developing countries.

Net capital stock per worker in the agricultural sector, relative to high-income countries, 2008–2017

(Median among high-income countries = 100)

Income group	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Upper-middle-income countries	51.2	46.0	46.3	46.4	40.1	41.5	41.6	47.5	50.5	51.0
Lower-middle-income countries	20.6	18.7	18.8	21.2	18.9	18.9	20.0	23.6	23.3	23.4
Low-income countries	1.7	1.6	1.8	2.0	1.9	2.0	2.2	2.5	2.6	2.9

Sources: Department of Economic and Social Affairs calculation, based on data from FAOSTAT, and Alistair Dieppe, ed., *Global Productivity: Trends, Drivers, and Policies* (Washington, D.C., World Bank, 2021).

Note: Median value among countries is used for each income group. Net capital stock is calculated by cumulating historical series on physical investment flows and deducting the part of assets that is depreciated in each year.

25. Expansion of the rural non-farm economy is not an automatic consequence of higher agricultural productivity however. The continuous improvement of human capital, infrastructure and governance is essential to enable the reallocation of resources to rural non-farm sectors and productivity growth in these sectors. Some frontier technologies can also help to mitigate the disadvantages that rural firms face. Their extensive adoption can pave the way for a more vibrant rural non-farm economy.

V. In-situ urbanization: the transformation of rural areas for inclusive development

26. The classical pattern of structural change, with the share of agriculture in the overall economy steadily declining, has often resulted in rapid urbanization, increasing the share of the population living in urban areas and providing new opportunities for rural residents in close proximity to urban hubs. Urbanization can be driven by migration from rural areas or it can take place through the reclassification of previously rural areas into urban areas.¹¹ In some cases, rural areas lie on the outskirts of existing cities and towns and are absorbed by them. In other cases, rural areas are far from existing cities and towns and grow into new urban centres. While rural-urban boundaries can shift as a result of economic forces and population dynamics, administrative decisions can also redefine them. Administrative decisions may promote urbanization in some cases and discourage or even prevent it

¹¹ The criteria used to define rural and urban areas differ widely between countries. The most commonly used criterion is population density. However, what is considered dense in one country may be viewed as sparse elsewhere. Another criterion used is the nature of the predominant economic activity, with areas dominated by agriculture regarded as rural and areas that are predominantly industrial or with commercial activities regarded as urban.

in others. These decisions may also take the form of restrictions on the mobility and resettlement of people.¹²

27. An alternative approach, referred to here as in-situ urbanization, focuses on the improvement of the standard of living of rural populations to urban levels. Governments seek to improve the standard of living in rural areas by expanding non-farm opportunities and improving access to health-care services, education and efficient transport networks to close the gap between rural and urban areas. This is accomplished through concerted efforts to deliver urban-level services and infrastructure to rural areas without attaining urban levels of population density. Sweeping technological changes, among other megatrends, open new possibilities for industrialization, structural transformation and the reduction of poverty in rural areas, as long as there are supportive policies in place. Several examples of in-situ urbanization in different countries provide important lessons.

28. Poor rural areas in Japan were able to transform into modern communities with high income levels and improved well-being. This transformation was driven by a conscious effort to close disparities between urban and rural areas, through land reforms, the establishment of agricultural cooperatives, price subsidies to farmers and other measures that improved agricultural productivity. Eventually, many rural areas located on the outskirts of large cities became a part of metropolitan areas, producing non-rice agricultural products (such as flowers, fruits and vegetables), providing residential neighbourhoods for those working in the cities and hosting manufacturing and service activities.

29. Sri Lanka achieved middle-income status with less than 20 per cent of the population living in urban areas and low levels of rural-urban inequality. Under its rural-first principle, the country guaranteed rural inhabitants free education and medical services of the same quality available to its urban population through a hub-and-spoke system, in which small cities and towns served as hubs of education and health-care services that all the people of the adjoining rural areas could utilize. The Government set up enough schools and hospitals in these hubs, built a dense road network and ensured a subsidized, efficient bus transportation system from rural areas to the hubs. The country's small size facilitated the success of the hub-and-spoke system.

30. In China, the Government-led process of in-situ urbanization involved the creation of new city centres, reclassifying areas from rural to urban and developing housing and other infrastructure through the creation of township and village enterprises. These enterprises led to the creation of non-farm employment for more than 100 million people between 1978 and 1997 and accounted for about 30 per cent of China's gross domestic product by the end of the twentieth century.¹³ These structural changes and infrastructure improvements in rural areas contributed to significant reductions in poverty.

31. The process of rural development in these countries has been successful in many ways and for considerable periods of time. However, it has also presented challenges. Japan, for example, faces challenges associated with the sustainability of trade-protective measures for rice and with a shrinking and ageing rural population. In Sri Lanka, changing economic conditions are making it challenging for the country to maintain some of the social programmes based on the rural-first principle. In China, despite the numerous measures and institutions aimed at retaining the population in

¹² The hukou (household registration) system of China is an example. Rural inhabitants face restrictions to migrating to and taking up residency in cities.

¹³ Charles Harvie, "China's township and village enterprises and their evolving business alliances and organizational change", Economics Working Paper No. 99-6 (New South Wales, Australia, University of Wollongong, 1999).

rural areas, there has been massive internal migration to the cities. Inadequate health, education and social protection systems and persistent rural-urban differences in standards of living continue to drive people (particularly youth) away from rural areas.

32. Despite these challenges, China, Japan and Sri Lanka have managed to raise the income of rural residents closer to that of urban residents, create non-farm, industrial employment opportunities in rural areas and narrow or even eliminate urban-rural disparities in education, health and other indicators. These examples offer valuable lessons for future strategies of rural development.

33. Rural development has been further spurred on by digital technologies, which are allowing workers to perform many economic activities from rural locations, as the COVID-19 pandemic has shown. Recent progress in 3D printing technology has, for instance, made manufacturing increasingly possible in rural areas. The Internet can improve access to information, services and entertainment among rural residents and help to end the rural-urban divide, provided that there are policies in place to support the lives and livelihoods of rural people and to close the current digital divides.

34. Digital technologies are also helping farmers to optimize resource use, access extension services and obtain real-time weather and market information. Electronic commerce platforms are both connecting rural areas with a much wider customer base and integrating smaller rural firms into local, national and even global supply chains. The rapid increase in the use of mobile telephones has allowed for the expansion of digital financial services in rural areas, with large parts of Africa now relying on mobile banking.

VI. Promoting inclusive, sustainable rural development

35. Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals calls for giving rural development an active role in the overall development process of a country. While rural development strategies and priorities differ by country, there is ample evidence of what has and has not worked to leave no one behind in rural areas and protect the environment.

36. Countries that have succeeded in reducing both rural poverty and inequalities have invested in infrastructure and public services. They have promoted inclusive agricultural growth and access to land and expanded social protection in rural areas. Sustained investments in roads, electrification, improved sanitation, safe drinking water, education, health care and the bridging of the digital divide in rural areas will be required to eradicate extreme poverty and to close rural-urban disparities. Such investments must also address inequalities in access to public infrastructure and services within rural areas to ensure that no particular area or group of people are left behind.

37. Experience has shown that agricultural growth is two to three times as effective in reducing poverty as growth in other sectors of the economy. It benefits the poorest in society the most. The benefits of promoting agricultural development are both direct, through increased incomes and food security, and indirect, through increased investment in health and education.

38. As populations and economies grow, constraints on available land may rise. Policy choices will influence whether increased competition for resources leads to innovation and inclusive development or to degradation, scarcity and inequalities of access and control over these resources. A fair distribution of land and its natural resources, as well as secure access to those resources, are required regardless of

whether tenure is based on individual or collective rights. A fair distribution calls for enhancing smallholder farmers' access to land. It also requires ensuring that rural women have equal access to both land and natural resources and addressing discriminatory laws and practices that impede their rights in that regard. Improving and digitalizing land registration can help to ensure access.

39. Social protection coverage in rural areas is generally lower than in urban areas. Few social protection programmes are explicitly tailored to the specific vulnerabilities and constraints that rural populations face. There are a number of legal, administrative and financial barriers that must be addressed in order to overcome the low coverage of social protection in rural areas. To overcome these structural barriers, eligibility criteria for programmes can be adjusted to expand coverage; contribution schemes can be modified to account for the characteristics of rural employment, including low, irregular incomes, temporary work and informal employment; participation in contributory schemes can be improved by offering subsidies to the most vulnerable; and indirect financial costs, such as the costs of travelling to payment sites, lost income by being away from work or the costs of compliance with programme conditions, can be lowered by simplifying administrative procedures, ensuring programme conditions are not overly onerous and making services readily accessible by, for example, introducing one-stop shops.

40. Discrimination remains a persistent driver of inequality. Because of the systematic exclusion of ethnic minorities, indigenous peoples and other disadvantaged groups, the benefits of rural growth are likely to be unevenly distributed. While the 2030 Agenda calls for the elimination of discriminatory laws, policies and practices to ensure equality of opportunity for all, there are still laws and policies that sustain unfair treatment. Addressing the root causes of discrimination also calls for structural reforms, starting with the justice system and other national, including rural, institutions.

41. Strategies must also be put in place to prevent rural development from doing environmental harm and, instead, give it a leading role in environmental protection. Most natural capital is located in rural areas and agriculture is intimately connected with nature. An important objective of sustainable rural development is to build resilience and reduce the vulnerability of rural livelihoods to climate change, pandemics, climate-related natural disasters or extreme weather events. Better protection of forests and wilderness will also help to prevent frequent occurrences of zoonotic epidemics and pandemics such as COVID-19.

42. In order to address environmental issues, rural development policies must, first, be directed at protecting water and land resources from depletion, degradation and pollution. Next, promoting mixed, circular and organic farming will help to reduce the impact of agriculture on the environment and maintain biodiversity. In the face of climate change, conserving indigenous seed banks can be vital to boosting sustainable food security, given the greater climate resilience and adaptability of traditional crops with a high degree of genetic diversity. Government institutions should be created or strengthened to ensure sustainable management of natural resources at the local level, including through better involvement of local and indigenous communities. Shifts in rural development strategies must also be accompanied by changes in food consumption patterns, particularly in urban areas, including a shift in diets and a reduction in food waste.

43. Efforts towards inclusive and sustainable rural development efforts should be cognizant of the potential created by frontier technologies. With the right policies in place, these new technologies can close the rural-urban divide. Thanks to advances in communications and other technologies, economic activities that once were confined to cities can now be carried out in rural areas, creating opportunities for in-situ

urbanization, a transition that has been accelerated by the COVID-19 crisis. Policymakers need to make sure that rural residents can adopt and use these new technologies and catch up with urban economies and populations in terms of overall productivity.

44. In promoting sustainable and inclusive rural development, priority should be given to policies and strategies that can help to achieve multiple Sustainable Development Goals simultaneously, including comprehensive public investment directed at improving basic infrastructure; human capital development, including quality education and health care, with gender sensitivity; public administrative services, including law and order, adjudication and justice; communal management of common-pool resources; and broadband Internet and other services related to information and communications technology. Expanding the reach of the Internet and other new technologies to remote rural areas will be particularly important to end the rural-urban digital divide.
