



Global Donor Platform
for Rural Development



On Common Ground: **A Joint Donor Concept on Rural Development**

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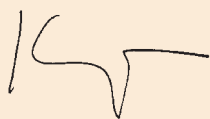
PREFACE

We congratulate the friends and colleagues from member-organisations of the Global Donor Platform for the thought and energetic debate that went into this important new policy document.

And we thank Canada's Catherine Hill for mediating our workshop discussions and the ensuing online discussions and then putting it all down on paper: her work has been painstaking, persistent, insightful and balanced.

This joint concept is a concrete example of donor harmonisation, one of the things the Platform stands for. Here is a shared vision of what must be done, agreement on policy to inform our action. We have found common ground.

For some, this might seem a modest accomplishment. But for those of us who have worked long years in development, it is exciting news, yet another sign of the reinvigoration of rural development.



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About the Global Donor Platform for Rural Development

In December 2003, the Global Donor Platform for Rural Development ("the Platform") was created from a growing consensus among donors that collective action is needed in rural development to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The Platform seeks to increase the overall effectiveness of aid in rural development. This is in line with the recommendations on harmonisation and alignment put forward by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), as well as the Rome Declaration on Harmonisation and the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness.

For more information, see www.donorplatform.org.



1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

[1]

For example, the gender and agriculture literature highlights the “reproductive roles” as those that are often invisible or under-acknowledged by planners and policy-makers – those roles that support the household livelihoods and well-being through child-raising, preparation of meals, caring for the sick and the elderly, etc

[2]

The topics identified are considered to be dynamic and open to change over time. They will therefore be updated by the Platform, in order to provide further opportunities for shared learning on the part of Platform members and other interested individuals and organisations. For more information, see www.donorplatform.org.

What drives rural development? What are the principles or values that are, or should be, guiding donors and partners in rural development? What are the current approaches that are, or should be, undertaken by donors and partners in the delivery of rural development, particularly in the context of harmonisation and alignment? These are some of the questions that the Global Donor Platform for Rural Development members and associate members discussed over the past year to identify areas of consensus in rural development. They identified common areas related to the pillars, or “drivers,” of rural development as well as some of the guiding principles and current general trends in approaches to development aid delivery.

The drivers, principles, and approaches are not necessarily new, but they are important to Platform members, as they represent areas in which they have achieved consensus. These are summarised in this document (the Joint Donor Rural Concept), which is intended as a means of sharing common knowledge and promoting understanding between members and with other interested institutions and parties.

The Joint Donor Rural Concept (JDRC) is one of several Platform products intended to support both shared learning between donor and partner countries and any action they take to address rural development and agriculture within the context of increased harmonisation and alignment. While Platform members chose to focus broadly on rural development in the JDRC, they recognise the special role that agriculture plays in supporting the livelihoods and overall well-being of rural communities. As a document built on Platform member participation, the JDRC tends to highlight those broad general areas where donors were able to reach consensus. Clearly, however, 26 agencies cannot agree on everything.

The JDRC is not intended to elaborate on specific approaches undertaken by different donors. Nor is it meant to focus specifically on either “productive” or “reproductive” ^[1] aspects of rural development and agriculture. Rather, it aims to identify broad areas of donor consensus on rural development and agriculture.

Finally, the JDRC does not look at specific thematic issues of rural development or agriculture (e.g. genetically modified organisms, water scarcity, “peak” oil scenarios, etc.). That is the task of another related Platform document, entitled “Hot Topics” ^[2], which focuses more on the **content** of rural development and agriculture and highlights issues that members have agreed are of global significance in 2006.

The JDRC, by contrast, focuses more on the **processes** related to the delivery of agricultural and rural development aid. The document was produced in line with current international trends towards harmonisation and alignment, and was developed to support efforts to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It also supports the Platform’s mission to share knowledge and improve donor effectiveness.



1.1.1 Building linkages: Rural development and the Millennium Development Goals

• The Millennium Development Goals: Commitments, and agricultural and rural development

Three-quarters of the world's poor live in the rural areas of developing countries and depend primarily on agriculture for their livelihoods and overall well-being. Rural poverty persists because of many interlinked factors. These include, but are not limited to, (1) policies that directly or indirectly favour "productive" or large-scale farmers over "less productive" or smallholder farmers, and urban centres over rural areas; (2) insufficient recognition of the role played by subsistence and "reproductive" labour^[3]; (3) a lack of commitment on the part of policy makers, donors, and implementers to ensuring gender equity in all areas of rural development, particularly in terms of property and inheritance rights; and (4) inadequate compensation for agricultural labour. Furthermore, over the last few decades, rural development and agriculture have seen a drastic decline in development investment and assistance.

In 2000, the member states of the United Nations adopted the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals^[4]. The MDGs state key objectives and set measurable targets for sustainable development and poverty reduction. Governments have committed themselves to meeting these by 2015. Lessons already learned suggest that strengthened agricultural production and rural development are essential to meeting these goals.

As a set of goals agreed upon by most heads of state, the MDGs provide the overall umbrella for current development discourse, policy development, and action. The MDGs have forced rural development strategies to be re-examined and more rigorously implemented at all levels. They have also helped to ensure that they are far more focused on poverty reduction.

• Achieving the Millennium Development Goals:

Rethinking agricultural and rural development policy and investment

Bilateral and multilateral funding agencies and the governments of developing countries have recently made more concerted efforts to rethink agricultural and rural development policy. This is in part because of the persistence of rural poverty. It is also very much due to the realisation that declining investment in rural development and agricultural sectors has had a negative and far-reaching impact on rural communities. Achieving the MDGs requires stronger partnerships between donor and partner countries – partnerships that will require new levels of mutual trust, respect, and accountability.



[3] Though the literature on gender, food security, and poverty exposes these well-researched issues, they remain marginalized in agricultural and rural development policy

[4] www.un.org/millenniumgoals

"We've been presiding over a decline in foreign assistance to agriculture and rural development. From a high of \$3.5 billion in 1995, World Bank lending in this sector had fallen to \$800 million by 2002".

Interview with Kevin Cleaver, Director of Agriculture and Rural Development, World Bank, Washington D.C. May 2006. www.donorplatform.org



- **The specific contributions that agricultural and rural development make to achieving the Millennium Development Goals** ^[5]

While agriculture and rural development are particularly tied to MDG 1 (halving the proportion of people suffering from extreme poverty and hunger) they are also directly or indirectly linked to other goals. Agricultural and rural development can, for example, also contribute to MDG 3 (promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls) by increasing people's control over, and their equitable access to, productive resources.

Through increased food and nutrition security and improved incomes, agriculture and rural development can also help to reduce child mortality and improve maternal health (MDGs 4 and 5). Agriculture and rural development have a critical role to play in mitigating the negative impacts of HIV/AIDS. This is particularly true in more marginal rural areas, where access to anti-retroviral therapies is still a remote dream for many, and where food and nutrition security are the key means of treatment (MDG 6).

Improved agricultural practices that promote the sustainable use of natural resources, particularly in so-called "marginal" or "low-potential" areas, help to ensure environmental sustainability (MDG 7). Finally, recent re-examinations of agricultural and rural development investment and recognition of the importance of these issues by donor and partner countries, means that broad scope now exists for strengthened global partnerships for development (MDG 8).

Marginal lands, marginal populations

To meet the MDGs, greater attention is needed to marginal lands – those lands that are considered "low potential" or "lagging." Such lands are often severely degraded and require substantial investment or different strategies to provide a base for men and women's food and livelihood security.

Marginal populations also need more attention in policy making and programming. With changing demographics in rural areas, marginal populations might include: orphaned and/or vulnerable girls and boys (OVCs), elderly women and men taking care of orphans and productive activities, pastoralists, those living with little access to information or rural development services (health, agriculture, education, etc.)

1.1.2 Increasing donor effectiveness: Harmonisation and alignment

There is growing evidence that investment in the agricultural sector is on the increase. After two decades of decline in the foreign assistance provided for agriculture, there has been a perceptible change both in national policies and donor programmes. There has also been an increase in the use of rights-based and/or pro-poor approaches to development within donor circles. Finally, awareness of the important role that agriculture must play in pro-poor growth has been increasing, as has awareness that three-quarters of the world's poor live in rural areas ^[6].

[5] For more information, see Wolz, Axel. The role of agriculture and rural development in achieving the Millennium Development Goals: A joint narrative. Global Donor Platform for Rural Development (GDPRD), September 2005. www.donorplatform.org



[6] Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. Promoting pro-poor growth: Agriculture, 2006. www.oecd.org/dataoecd



• Beyond development assistance: Strengthening in-country and agency processes

Development assistance can support conditions that encourage self-reliant development at the national, regional and community level. To encourage this and support partner countries, donor development policies and assistance processes need to be made more relevant and responsive. In order to carry policy into action, partner countries have prioritised strengthened policy-making processes and institutional capacity building.

There is also a need to strengthen the harmonisation and alignment of the processes that link donor and partner countries, as well as those that link the multilateral and bilateral agencies that support rural development processes.

Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP): An example of cooperation

The CAADP of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) provides a framework for restoring agricultural growth, rural development and food security in the African region. African Ministers first endorsed the programme under a special session of the FAO Regional Conference for Africa in Rome on 9 June 2002. Since then, NEPAD bodies have officially adopted it as the framework for the sector's development in Africa.

The programme provides African governments, in collaboration with their development partners, an opportunity for renewed and re-focused efforts to reverse decades of stagnating economic growth, low agricultural production and declining productivity, food insecurity and increased poverty in the region.

Source: FAO, www.fao.org



• Donor effectiveness and the Millennium Development Goals

Donors must be more effective in the support they provide to rural development. Achieving the MDGs will require stronger partnerships – within and between partner-country governments and donor governments and their agencies. To work, these partnerships must be based on mutual trust and respect. This is a formidable task, but one that must be undertaken if the MDGs are to be met.

Harmonisation and alignment are critical tools for improving the effectiveness of donor assistance. For best use to be made of them, there needs to be (1) a common understanding of the constraints that limit poverty reduction in rural areas and (2) a common response designed to remove such constraints. Through joint analysis and action plans, harmonisation and alignment can help to overcome these obstacles at the country level. Leadership and guidance is needed in this process, which is one which the Platform supports.

• Current donor and government trends supporting development through harmonisation and alignment

In 2003, donors signed up to the Rome Declaration on Harmonisation. In this, they agreed to harmonise their aid policies, procedures, and practices. They also agreed to undertake analytical work jointly, in order to prepare common country assistance strategies and results frameworks, and work together to review implementation. In 2005, governments and donors gathered in Paris to declare their commitment to aligning their programmes with partner countries' planning, financial management, and reporting processes. As Michael Wales, Platform Co-Chair, says, "the two need to go together ^[7]." Some key guiding fora and declarations on harmonisation and alignment are considered in the box on page 8.

[7]
"Towards a more flexible approach," Interview with Michael Wales, Platform Co-Chair, Platform Speaking www.donorplatform.org



Key international fora and declarations guiding partners and donors

Monterrey Consensus

The Monterrey conference highlighted the importance of building partnerships among donors and developing countries as a means of making more effective progress towards the MDGs. The Monterrey Consensus called on development co-operation agencies to “harmonise their operational procedures at the highest standard so as to reduce transaction costs and make ODA disbursement and delivery more flexible, taking into account national development needs and objectives under the ownership of the recipient country.”

www.un.org/esa/ffd/0302finalMonterreyConsensus.pdf

Joint Marrakech Memorandum and Guiding Principles

The Joint Marrakech Memorandum 2004 called on international funding institutions to enhance their organisational focus on results, distil the lessons learned from the experiences of different countries, and disseminate knowledge about what gets results in the contexts of different countries. They recognized the need to align cooperation programs with desired country results, define the contribution that support is expected to make to country outcomes, and rely on – and strengthen – countries’ monitoring and evaluation systems to track progress and assess outcomes. For more information, see www.mfdr.org/2ndRoundtable.html.

Rome Declaration on Harmonisation

In February 2003, the heads of bilateral and multilateral development institutions and representatives of the International Monetary Fund, as well as those of other multilateral financial institutions and partner countries, gathered in Rome, Italy to reaffirm their commitment to eradicating poverty, achieving economic growth, and promoting sustainable development. This was done through the Rome Declaration on Harmonisation. The Declaration stresses the need for partner countries to assume stronger leadership roles when coordinating development assistance. It also stresses that the donor community has a responsibility with regard to building their capacity to do so. The Rome High Level Forum on Harmonisation recognized that the most effective collaboration and harmonisation is that which takes place in the field in partner countries, under host-government leadership. For more information, see www1.worldbank.org/harmonization/rome/hlf/Documents/RomeDeclaration.pdf

Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness

In early 2005, government ministers of developed and developing countries, along with the heads of multilateral and bilateral institutions resolved to take action to reform the delivery and management of aid in line with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness commits countries and their institutions to measurable and monitorable actions designed to significantly increase the effectiveness of aid. The Declaration includes the statement that developing countries must exercise effective leadership when implementing their development policies and strategies, and when coordinating development actions. It requires donors to base the overall support they provide on the receiving countries’ national development strategies, institutions, and procedures. It also requires them to work in a way that ensures that their actions are more harmonised, transparent, and collectively effective. All countries must commit to managing resources and improving decision-making in order to achieve results, and all must pledge to be mutually accountable for development results. For more details, see www1.worldbank.org/harmonization/Paris/FINALPARISDECLARATION.pdf

1.1.3 The Platform's role in agriculture and rural development

- **Increasing the overall effectiveness of aid in rural development:**

- Growing consensus for collective action**

The Global Donor Platform for Rural Development was created in 2003 as a result of a growing consensus among donors that collective action would be required to achieve the MDGs, particularly those related to agricultural and rural development. The Platform seeks to increase the overall effectiveness of the aid provided for agricultural and rural development.

- **Improving donor/partner country cooperation and collaboration**

The Platform recognises the need for improved donor cooperation, and collaboration and coordinated dialogue with partner countries. It also recognises that this must be based on country-owned processes. This is essential to any efforts to produce pro-poor growth in the rural areas of developing regions, and thus to achieving the MDGs. Key to sustained and effective rural development will be a reduction in the duplication and overlap of effort, as well as in agency rivalry. Achieving this means addressing differences in donor policies, approaches, and institutional arrangements.

- **Improving lesson-learning**

The Platform recognises that the efforts of more than one agency are required to address the needs of the rural poor. It also recognises the existence of competing agendas and limited financial resources. To address this, it works to improve and systematise inter-agency lesson-learning and to build consensus among rural development stakeholders as to what works and what doesn't.

Specifically, the Platform seeks the following:

- ❖ To ensure that the needs of and opportunities for the rural poor are appropriately addressed in policy debates at international, regional and national levels. It works towards this in particular by highlighting the importance of rural development and agriculture in relation to achieving the MDGs.
- ❖ To raise the quality, and heighten the impact, of rural development investment through better practice, networking, shared learning, and the collection and dissemination of innovative approaches. This will be achieved by communicating research and providing leadership in rural development thinking, in order to build consensus amongst donors as to what works in practice. Efforts also entail focusing on "hot topics" that need resolution or further study, and work to identify and close information gaps.
- ❖ To foster harmonisation and alignment efforts in rural development and agriculture at the country level. This should facilitate country-led efforts to harmonise donor policies, procedures and practices. Such efforts also involve helping to align the efforts of donors working to support national rural agricultural and development strategies.



2. BUILDING CONSENSUS: DRIVERS, PRINCIPLES, AND APPROACHES

From 2005 to 2006, the Platform sought consensus among its members and associate members on the matters considered in this document: the Joint Donor Rural Concept (JDRC). Placed within the guiding framework of the (MDGs), the JDRC reflects those areas in which Platform members have found common ground, in terms of identifying the key “drivers” or (“pillars”) ^[8] of rural development and the guiding principles and approaches for rural development delivery.

• Drivers of Rural Development

Platform members agree that there are certain drivers that hold up, or move, rural development processes. These drivers include: people-centred development; local governance; economic drivers; natural resources; rural infrastructure; rural service systems; and economic governance from global to local levels.

• Guiding Principles for Delivery

Platform members suggest that there are key principles or values that should underscore rural development assistance delivery. These include the following: people-centred and pro-poor change; good governance, institutional aspects and financial management; demand-driven planning and implementation; partnership; equity and equal opportunity; and the sustainable use of natural resources.

• Approaches to Delivery

Approaches to delivery are the “tangible” or “practical” commitments that donors make in terms of delivering development. Platform members agree that approaches should recognise and build on current efforts to harmonise and align development assistance. They suggest that approaches to rural development delivery should be multi-sectoral, participatory, committed to the long term, and results-oriented.

The drivers, guiding principles, and approaches are explored in greater detail in the following sections.

2.1 Objectives of agricultural and rural development

2.1.1 Overall objective

The overall objective of agricultural and rural development is to improve the living conditions of people in rural areas in a way that is sustainable in the long term. In this way, agricultural and rural development will contribute to efforts to achieve the MDGs.

2.1.2. Specific objectives

Specifically, agricultural and rural development can strengthen rural women and men’s livelihoods; improve food and nutrition security at the intra-household, household, community, and national levels; and contribute to the overall well-being of rural people. Agricultural development can help to reduce poverty, particularly in a policy environment that stimulates affordable and stable food prices and supports adequate, long-term employment and in-comes for rural men and women. In the rural areas of develo-

^[8]
Note: the Platform team that originally drafted the outline for the JDRC referred to these as “pillars,” that hold up, or are the foundation of, rural development. The term was revised to “drivers” by a broader group of Platform members attending the Brussels workshop in 2006.





ping countries, agriculture is the major employer, as well as a key source of national income and export earnings. Moreover, it can stimulate non-farm economic growth and a demand for consumer goods and services ^[9]. In line with the MDGs, good agricultural practices can also contribute to the sustainable management of natural resources.

Sustainable and regenerative agriculture can help to mitigate the various risks that rural people face as agriculturalists. Poor rural people, particularly women, face many risks associated with environmental, political, economic, and health-related factors. Lack of adequate rural services, information, infrastructure, and institutions can increase women and men's exposure to many of these risks. In many parts of the world, particularly Sub-Saharan Africa, HIV/AIDS has exacerbated farmers' vulnerability to different types of shocks, as they try to cope with illness and death in their households and communities – which results in, amongst other things, labour shortages.

Agriculture and rural development policies, investments, and programmes must build on rural women and men's existing knowledge and skills. They must also be based on an improved understanding of the different needs, priorities, and constraints that limit and influence different individuals, both within and between households. This is key to strengthening agriculture and ensuring rural development that will reduce the risks farmers face and lessen their vulnerability to different types of shocks.

[9] Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. Promoting pro-poor growth: Agriculture, 2006. www.oecd.org/dataoecd

[10] For more on the changing delineation of rural areas, see: Harvey, J. A view from the north. Rural areas in 2016: Vacant or vibrant? DFID, 2006

2.2 Drivers of rural development

The Platform recognises that there are many ways to frame “rural development” and “rural spaces.” There is, however, no consensus as to what actually defines “rural”. This said, it is perhaps more important to recognise that rural areas are forever changing, depending on many circumstances – economic, demographic, political, environmental, and socio-cultural.

The line that divides rural and urban spaces is becoming harder to define, as people's lives increasingly cross the boundaries that divided them physically, socially, and economically. This is because people are migrating to find work, sending money (remittances) back to their families and communities in rural areas, and extending their kinship and social circles ever more widely ^[10].

The blurring line between rural and urban areas: diversifying livelihoods, diversifying spaces

Increasingly, urban and rural areas are linked and interdependent – with people migrating daily or seasonally for work, and goods and services moving from one area to another. Migration is increasingly important to livelihood diversification for many households. The proportion of rural households' incomes that is derived from non-farm sources (including cash transfers and remittances) can be as high as 50-90 percent in sub-Saharan Africa, 60 percent in South Asia, and 40 percent in Latin America.

Source: Harvey, J. A view from the north. Rural areas in 2016: Vacant or vibrant? DFID, 2006.

As rural areas change, so too do agricultural and rural development – as they are multi-faceted and dynamic and depend on a multitude of factors which affect them in specific contexts. However, the Platform recognises that there are certain factors that “drive” rural development. These are referred to here as “drivers of rural development” and are discussed below.



2.2.1 People-centred development



Women, men, boys, and girls lie at the heart of agriculture and rural development. Through their different but linked roles, relationships, and responsibilities, they create the web of life that is rural development. Their roles, relationships, and responsibilities also cross vast distances. This links different urban and rural spaces, as rural workers migrate to urban areas. It also supports rural development, as the same workers send remittances back to their families. However, despite the fact that people lie at the centre of development, certain other drivers are needed to help individuals and households sustain their livelihoods and improve their overall well-being.

The gender-related and socio-cultural dynamics of rural communities are diverse and complex. Understanding them is crucial to promoting agricultural and rural development policies, programmes, and interventions in ways that are meaningful and sustainable. Policy and programming must therefore consider the different needs and priorities of rural men and women (and boys and girls), as well as the constraints they face.

Responsive and sustainable rural development can be a driver for social cohesion and vice versa. Such social cohesion is crucial to efforts to maintain the well-being of rural communities. This is particularly true in the context of the HIV/AIDS epidemic ^[11], which is striking at the heart of rural communities in many regions – particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa. In fact, social cohesion has been found to play a key role in HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment, as well as in providing food and nutrition security.

2.2.2 Local governance

Robust local governing bodies help to strengthen rural development and sustain agricultural production. Strengthening the capacity of local public institutions is key to implementing rural development policies and regulatory frameworks. Effective local governance is also crucial to encouraging investment in rural spaces.

Increasingly, governments are decentralising many of their functions to local levels. Financial decentralisation must be a part of this process, as this will provide local public institutions with the means needed to implement programmes. Without this, action will be limited and slow, as local governments will have to wait for approval from central bureaucracies. Finally, both strong formal and informal rural institutions are critical to efforts to help rural households avert risk and reduce

[11]

"Agriculture is the main source of livelihood for the majority of people affected by HIV/AIDS around the world".

Source: International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), HIV/AIDS and Food and Nutrition Security: From Evidence to Action, 2005

2.2.3 Economics

Agriculture is a driving force of rural development, as well as of development in general. As the basis of most of the world's livelihood systems, it will play a crucial role in efforts to meet the MDGs. Agriculture is a major employer, and a key contributor to the national income and export earnings of many developing countries ^[12].

It is also important to note that increasing focus is being placed on value chains and the "supermarketisation" of the rural economy. This is putting new pressure on men and women, who must now meet the standards required by consumers and supermarket chains in towns and cities. These value chains also add new dynamics associated with concentrated market power, and these are often at odds with the needs of impoverished farming communities.

[12]

Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. Promoting pro-poor growth: Agriculture, 2006. www.oecd.org/dataoecd

Holding up the rural population: Achieving immediate gains through agriculture

“About 70 percent of the MDGs’ target group live in rural areas, particularly in Asia and Africa, and for most of the rural poor agriculture is a critical component in the successful attainment of the MDGs. Even though structural transformations are important in the longer term, more immediate gains in poor households’ welfare can be achieved through agriculture, which can help the poor overcome some of the critical constraints they now face in meeting their basic needs”.
World Bank, IFPRI. Agriculture and Achieving the Millennium Development Goals, n.d

Sustainable, regenerative, pro-poor agricultural growth is key to reducing environmental, economic, social, and political risks. It is also essential for poverty reduction. However, technological improvements alone cannot reduce rural poverty and strengthen agriculture and rural development. National governments and donors must consider, in a more systematic way, both the processes of social change and the environmental constraints that rural men, women, boys, and girls face when trying to ensure their livelihoods. Overcoming poverty also means improving access to land, water, credit and other productive resources and services. It also calls for production to be diversified, in order to build stronger livelihood strategies and reduce the vulnerability of households to shocks.

While agriculture is the backbone of many national and household economies, providing the lifeblood for rural communities, it is also vulnerable to sudden shocks and long-term trends including, for example, droughts, floods, economic crises, and the HIV/AIDS pandemic. It is becoming increasingly well recognised that HIV/AIDS is devastating agricultural production and eroding the agricultural knowledge and skills which are usually passed down from parents to children. As such, it is impacting on individuals, households, communities, and the national economies (and food security) of many countries, particularly those in Sub-Saharan Africa. The establishment of a multi-donor task force to combat chronic illness is therefore high on the agenda of many donor agencies, as this would constitute a tangible answer to a risk that is being faced by more and more rural households around the world.



2.2.4 Natural resources

Agricultural production depends upon natural resources, just as rural women and men depend upon agricultural production for a great part of their livelihood strategies. Sustainable farming methods are key to conserving soil, water, forest, livestock, and other genetic resources.

Specific attention has to be paid to marginal and fragile agro-ecosystems, in order to ensure that their biological diversity, and the production base used by rural women and men, is maintained and used in an equitable and sustainable manner. This will ensure that people have long-term livelihood and food security. This may require special approaches or techniques to be used, such as soil conservation, and regenerative land use. It may also require conflict mediation to resolve disagreements over resource use.

Another key challenge to meeting the MDGs in all rural areas is the need to address the severe gender inequity that limits women’s access to, and control of, natural resources. Lack of security with regard to land tenure further aggravates food insecurity for women. This is particularly so in cases where women have lost a spouse and risk having their property and assets taken by relatives or other interested parties ^[13].



[13]
Report of the FAO/Oxfam
GB Workshop on Women’s
Land Rights in Southern
and Eastern Africa,
Pretoria, South Africa,
17 – 19 June 2003.
[www.oxfam.org.uk/what_
we_do/issues/livelihoods/
landrights](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/what_we_do/issues/livelihoods/landrights)

2.2.5 Rural infrastructure

Effective infrastructure is another key element of efforts to alleviate poverty in rural areas. Adequate public investment in rural infrastructure plays an essential role in improving agricultural production, promoting growth of the non-farm economy, and strengthening rural–urban demand linkages. Improved roads, market areas, grain storage and mills, irrigation schemes and communication, and the provision of electricity to rural areas, are all crucial for stimulating pro-poor growth.

Though donors and governments recognise the importance of infrastructure in developing markets, stimulating trade, and providing services and information to rural areas, they have skimped on the investments made in rural infrastructure – particularly those needed to improve/build secondary and farm-to-market roads ^[14]. Improving the current situation will require both donors and partner countries to be more committed to providing rural infrastructure.

Improving rural infrastructure is also key to combating chronic illnesses such as HIV/AIDS. However, it also needs to be acknowledged that opening up new roads and trade linkages can boost the spread of HIV/AIDS in rural areas. Any integrated rural development strategy must therefore take account of these threats and acknowledge the multi-faceted dimension of rural development.



2.2.6 Rural service systems

Clearly, rural infrastructure and rural service systems are strongly linked. Just as clearly, the provision of effective rural services is a key ingredient in efforts to alleviate rural poverty. Greater attention therefore needs to be paid to improving the coverage of rural service systems such as:

- Financial services – examples include credit and savings schemes.
- Health services – more and better health units are needed. Provision of such services should include ensuring broader access to voluntary counselling and testing services and access to anti-retroviral therapies.
- Agricultural research, extension and veterinary services – these need to respond to the needs of different clients. They also need to recognise changes in demographic (population-related) needs. So, for example, the proportion of child-headed and grandmother-headed households has increased, and such households have specific needs and face specific constraints.
- Primary and secondary schooling for all girls and boys.

All of these services are needed to drive rural development in a sustainable and responsive manner. And, they must be provided in a way that ensures that they are able to respond to the needs of small-scale farmers in particular. This may require the capacity of the institution used to train rural service providers to be strengthened, in order to ensure that they are better able respond to the needs of small-scale male and female farmers.

In many countries, government-driven agricultural research and extension systems have been weakened considerably over the last two decades. These institutions need to be rebuilt as joint ventures between public and private stakeholders along certain guidelines ^[15].

Strong rural services systems, together with strong infrastructure, will help countries to achieve the currently elusive MDGs, particularly in areas where rural people still base their livelihoods on agriculture.

[14]
Wolz, Axel. The role of agriculture and rural development in achieving the Millennium Development Goals: A joint narrative. Global Donor Platform for Rural Development (GDPRD), September 2005. www.donorplatform.org

[15]
For more information, see www.neuchatelinitiative.net



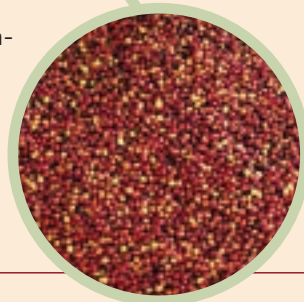
2.2.7 Economic governance from the local to the global level

Rural development can only be effectively promoted in the long term if coherent frameworks and policies are in place at both the international and national levels. Such frameworks must guide and promote fair policies and practices (agricultural, trade, economic, social and environmental) in both donor and partner countries.

These frameworks must be provided with technical, financial, and institutional support, which would include capacity building to ensure the coherent implementation of international agreements at the national and sub-national levels (including value chains). Many conventions and agreements are available to guide national and regional agricultural and rural development policy and programming.

The MDGs are the current development umbrella under which donors and governments are framing their efforts to alleviate poverty and improve the livelihoods and well-being of the world's poor. Conventions also exist that address issues such as climate change, desertification, and biological diversity.

Rural development and agriculture are also influenced by regional and international trading agreements, including those produced under the guidance of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and other trade-related bodies and fora. Above all, coherent frameworks and policies are needed, as are effective implementation mechanisms at the national level.



2.3 Guiding principles

Platform members consider guiding principles to be those conceptual values that should guide donors when intervening in rural development. Investment in rural development, for example, should be guided by, amongst other things, the principles of gender equity, pro-poor growth, participatory decision-making, sustainable use of resources, and good governance. Guiding principles mark the key values that underlie development assistance. These are different from the “approaches” discussed in Section 2.4. Approaches are the tangible strategies that donors should consider when delivering rural development assistance ^[16].

2.3.1 People-centred and pro-poor change

People-centred development considers the needs, priorities, interests, and challenges faced by the men, women, boys and girls involved. It also recognises that they must be actively involved in designing their own futures, and that they have the capacity to make decisions in this respect. Focusing on people results in a focus on pro-poor growth. And, being guided by pro-poor, people-centred principles improves our understanding of the livelihood strategies of rural men and women. Ensuring such a focus would include broadening our perspectives, to include both economic and non-economic activities that occur both on- and off-farm.

It also means considering other linked issues, such as health and education (both formal and informal), as taking such issues into account is necessary to strengthen the responses made to agricultural and rural development.

Finally, when devising pro-poor rural development strategies it is important to consider the role played by markets and value chains – from the local to the international. These must be scrutinised in terms of their function, their fairness, and their accessibility to rural men and

[16] Platform members noted that the principles and approaches outlined in this document should not be seen as conditionalities for governments.



women. This is particularly crucial when producing interventions designed to minimise risk and support the diversification of rural household economies and livelihood strategies.

2.3.2 Governance, institutional aspects and financial management

Democratic development needs democratic government – and vice versa. Good governance is intrinsically linked to people-focused development. If there is to be any chance of meeting the MDGs, particularly in relation to rural development, greater emphasis must be placed on promoting and empowering rural institutions – all the way from community to national levels. Such efforts must therefore involve fiscal decentralisation, so that funds are more readily available to support initiatives being run by local institutions.

Effective rural development delivery often involves reforming rural development institutions, particularly those in the public sector. When undertaking these reforms, transparency and accountability mechanisms must be strengthened, as this will promote good governance and democratic development. Accountability and transparency must guide all partner country and donor processes across all levels. Such processes must also be participatory and inclusive, while all the time guarding against “elite capture” – when benefits accrue to the most powerful people in communities.

2.3.3 Demand-driven planning and implementation

Effective rural development requires us to move towards “demand-driven” responses that build on the different needs of rural men and women. This must consider the development context of the people involved and their livelihood strategies, as well as other circumstances, including the constraints they face. All of this must be done in line with the other guiding principles identified, particularly those of people-centred development, partnership, and equity.

The need for demand-driven responses is a principle that guides many of the actions of donors at different levels. In line with the Rome and Paris Declarations and a stronger commitment to partner country ownership of development processes, this principle calls on donors to work with partner countries based on their demands. Such demands must, in addition, be grounded in an assessment of their priorities that they have undertaken themselves.

2.3.4 Partnership



One institution alone cannot develop rural areas; nor can only one sector. Life in rural spaces is complex, building on a diversity of institutional bases. All stakeholders must work together to improve rural men and women's livelihoods, food security, and overall well-being. This calls for partnerships between sectors (such as agriculture, education, and health), as well as between public, private, and civil society institutions. Institutions such as producer and farmer organisations need to be strong to ensure the sustainability of rural livelihoods.

In order to promote viable and sustainable rural development, it is crucial to develop effective policy and regulatory frameworks. These must promote innovative, appropriate, accessible, and effective public-private-civil society partnerships in rural spaces. Such partnerships may be between part-

ners within a country. They may also include South–South partnerships between public, private or civil society sectors in the South. Such partnerships are particularly relevant to participatory technology research and development.

Increasingly, private sector resources are interlinked with rural livelihoods. Where the public sector provides regulatory frameworks and policies, the private sector can, and should, provide the productive investments necessary. Policies and frameworks should clearly define the respective roles that each sector will play in supporting sustainability.

Rural development partnerships – whether they are multi-sectoral or a combination of public, private, and civil society partnerships – should build on, and expand, the existing skills and knowledge available within households, communities, and rural institutions. It is widely understood that women and men’s livelihood knowledge and skills may differ. It must also be realised that so too may their livelihood priorities and the constraints they face. Similarly the knowledge and skills of communities and institutions will vary depending on the local context. Partnerships need to adapt to local, social, and historical contexts in rural areas.



2.3.5 Equity and equal opportunity

Many international instruments are available that guide development and call for equity and equal opportunity. Signed and ratified by numerous countries, examples include instruments to protect human rights as well as more specifically the rights of children, women, workers, and those affected with HIV/AIDS. The Millennium Declaration, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2000, reaffirms the many commitments to equity and equality found in these conventions and declarations.

Principles of equity and equal opportunity that guide rural development delivery must recognise the different needs, priorities, and interests of men, women, boys and girls, as well as the different constraints they face. They must also take into account the fact that the amount of access and control that rural women and men have to different productive resources varies across different socio-economic groups. This affects their ability to access and use a range of resources, including land, water, livestock, and agricultural inputs and services.

Clearly, addressing such issues requires donors to have a better understanding of the changing demographics of rural spaces. Examples of such would include being more aware of the increasing prevalence of child-headed, female-headed and grandparent-headed households in a number of regions, and the implications this has for rural development policies and strategies. It would also entail examining policies that call for promotion of migration away from rural areas in order to diversify livelihood strategies. Associated with this would be the positive effects (such as money being sent home) and negative impacts (such as increased productive/reproductive responsibilities) that such migration has on those left behind.

If agriculture is to fuel the economy and provide people with the opportunity to diversify into other livelihood strategies, both male and female smallholders must have access to rural finance. Rural development must be guided by the principle of gender equity, particularly in terms of property rights and land reform. Above all, there must be equity and equal opportunity for smallholder farmers in policy, planning and implementation.



Equity, Equality and the Millennium Declaration

The Millennium Declaration, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2000, considered certain values to be central to international relations in the twenty-first century, two of which are crucial to the area of equity and equal opportunity, as follows.

- **Freedom.** Men and women have the right to live their lives and raise their children in dignity, free from hunger and from the fear of violence, oppression or injustice. Democratic and participatory governance based on the will of the people best assures these rights.

- **Equality.** No individual and no nation must be denied the opportunity to benefit from development. The equal rights and opportunities of women and men must be assured (Para 6).

The Millennium Declaration resolved that promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women are effective ways of combating poverty, hunger, and disease and stimulating development that is truly sustainable (Para 20).

Those involved also noted that they would spare no effort to promote democracy and strengthen the rule of law, as well as respect for all internationally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to development (Para 24).

To this end, they resolved to respect fully and uphold the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Para 25).

Source: 55/2 United Nations Millennium Declaration, Resolution adopted by the General Assembly, 18 September 2000. A/RES/55/2
www.un.org/millennium/declaration/ares552e.pdf



2.3.6 Sustainable use of natural resources

All rural development delivery should be guided by the fact that natural resources need to be used sustainably, a principle which is reflected in a number of international conventions. Examples include the United Nations' conventions on biological diversity (CBD), combating desertification (UNCCD), and climate change (UNCFF).

Agriculture's role in ensuring environmental sustainability by 2015

"Agriculture is implicated both as a means to effectively address many of (the problems associated with biodiversity, critical natural habitats, climate change, unsafe water and sanitation, etc.), and as a source of and a contributory factor to the problems that MDG 7 was formulated to address... With appropriate regulatory institutions in place to safeguard the benefits that society as a whole draws from the environment, an emergent agricultural sector need not lead to environmental degradation."

Source: World Bank, IFPRI: Agriculture and Achieving the Millennium Development Goals, n.d.

The sustainable use of natural resources protects them, ensuring that they are available for future generations. A lack of attention to the sustainable use of water, land, and agro-biodiversity can spell disaster for an ecosystem, and consequently for the men, women, boys, and girls whose livelihoods are dependent on this resource base. Agricultural production, as a base of millions of rural livelihood strategies, is inextricably linked to the sustainable use of the soil, water and biological diversity. Development delivery strategies should therefore include ways to maintain and improve the "health" of soil and water, particularly in highly degraded areas. Where feasible, they should also support agroforestry.

Strengthening community management of resources is another key aspect of efforts to ensure sustainability. Such an aim is also linked to the principles of governance, partnership and equality. Communities must feel ownership over their management processes, and must participate in the decision-making processes at the community level and beyond.



2.4 Approaches to delivery

[17]
A word of caution: the term “participatory approaches” can be interpreted in a wide range of ways. A large body of literature discusses and debates the many perceptions and practices associated with the term “participation.”

While “principles” are the values that help to guide development delivery, “approaches” are the different processes undertaken to do so. Approaches to delivery are the “tangible” or “practical” undertakings that donors make when delivering rural development. Such practical undertakings include the mechanisms for establishing and implementing more effective delivery practices, which should complement harmonisation and alignment trends in individual countries.

Regardless of donor involvement, it has been found that governments tend to adopt certain approaches to the delivery of rural development efforts. These include multi-sectoral and participatory^[17] approaches. Building on these government approaches, and in line with recent movements towards harmonisation and alignment, donors must look for more effective ways to deliver rural and agricultural development.

To help with this, the following section highlights the various approaches that Platform members feel are needed to improve aid effectiveness and support rural development in a sustainable manner.

2.4.1 Harmonisation and alignment approach to development assistance

Decades of grappling with the multitude of policy and planning challenges facing rural areas have made it very clear that rural development is complex. In a fast-changing world of “rurbanisation”, the boundaries between “rural” and “urban” areas are becoming more blurred. In such an environment, the management of different donor procedures becomes even more complicated. Recognising these complexities, it is useful to look to declarations such as the Rome and Paris Declarations, as well as to the UN Monterrey Conference on Financing for Development. These can be used to guide the harmonisation and alignment thinking and practice of donors and partner governments working in rural development and agriculture.

The Monterrey Conference highlighted the importance of building partnerships between donors and developing countries in the pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals. The Rome and Paris Declarations called for the strengthening of harmonisation and alignment efforts in these partnerships.

Donors need to align their programmes, procedures, and timetables with the planning and financial management systems of partner countries. Doing this will enhance partner countries’ commitment to, and feelings of ownership over, these procedures and processes.

Partner countries, by the same token, need to work to ensure that donors are better able to rely on their planning and management systems. This would be in accordance with their adoption of international principles and good practices. To achieve this, their initiatives should support decentralisation and the strengthening of local government processes and structures.

These strategies will not only provide immense opportunities for shared learning when being implemented; they will also provide much-needed mutual accountability on the part of development partners and donors.



Managing different donor procedures creates enormous pressure on the partner country involved, by absorbing scarce administrative capacity. Moreover, in contrast to urban areas where infrastructure and services are typically more developed, managing and monitoring rural development in remote areas is difficult. It is in these rural areas that the greatest pressure is placed on human, material and financial resources in terms of access and reporting, which is critical to avoid the corruption and political manipulation of rural services.

There is a need for appropriate programme-based approaches to be used more often, and the same is true of joint planning and pooled funding measures. This said, we should not assume that project funding should not continue, because many donors are still project-focused to a lesser or greater extent. Rural development actually benefits from a wide array of instruments. And, as the Platform recognizes, there is no blueprint for these instruments under the new modes of aid delivery. In fact, much research is still required in order to analyse country realities and develop the necessary road maps.

Finally, efforts to ensure the harmonisation and alignment of rural development must include cooperation and collaboration between a wide variety of actors. Examples of such include the public and private sector, NGOs and other civil society actors.



2.4.2 Multi-sectoral approach

Rural development is multi-faceted and complex, and is made more so by the diverse range of livelihood strategies and agro-ecosystems used by people. What is more, this complexity is compounded by the fact that the various systems involved often occur in the same areas as others (for example the overlapping livelihood systems of pastoralists and sedentary agriculturalists).

Particular issues need to be addressed when implementing multi-sectoral approaches to rural development. These include the need to involve various ministries in order to reflect the different social, health, environmental, and productive sectors involved. They also include the need to consider the role played by local government, particularly in relation to decentralisation processes. More and more service provision is shifting from the public to the private sector. Partner countries are responsible for delineating the responsibilities of the private sector with regard to service provision that distinguish them from the core functions and regulatory process of the government. There is a clear need to define public and private roles and responsibilities in the processes of decentralisation.



Multi-sectoral approaches are holistic and require multi-dimensional analysis. However, follow-up action may include either sector-specific or multi-sectoral strategies and solutions. More holistic analysis can identify and assess socio-economic, technical, and environmental factors that facilitate or hinder agricultural and rural development.



2.4.3 Participatory approach

Participation is a broad concept, and different actors or stakeholders may interpret “participation” in different ways at different times depending on their different interests. Donors are often perceived as external stakeholders with certain interests that serve the interests of those back home in their own countries or organisations. To balance out the equation, participation must consider “ownership” as a key element that must be included in the design of effective approaches to rural development delivery.

“If you want ownership by both the government and the civil society it represents, then the old donor-driven projects have to become a thing of the past. We have to ask the government, with maximum participation of the private sector and NGOs and the farmers themselves, to come up with their own programme.”

Source: Kevin Cleaver, Interview in “Platform Speaking”, May 2006. www.donorplatform.org

In fact, ownership should be the main underlying assumption of any contemporary donor support programme. Policy development and reform, together with programme design and implementation, require social dialogue – through various outreach and participatory mechanisms.

Donors are guided by the Development Assistance Committee’s (DAC’s) Good Practice Papers ^[18] and the Rome Declaration on Harmonisation. These documents stress how important it is for partner countries to assume a stronger leadership role in the coordination of development assistance. They also stress that the donor community has a responsibility to build the capacity of partner countries to do so.

Promoting and securing ownership requires complementary capacity building at all levels. This requires concerted efforts to build the capacity of the various stakeholders, particularly that of poor rural women, men, girls, and boys at the community level. Focus must also be placed on boosting the capacity of different kinds of rural development institutions at different levels – ranging from the community to the national level. Sustainability is not possible unless performance is improved at all levels of the development process.

Participatory approaches to rural development necessitate a focus on “process” – including the form and content of the process. Participatory approaches can effectively be used to adapt interventions to suit local priorities and constraints, and to make use of locally relevant knowledge and skills.

2.4.4 Long-term commitment

Agricultural and rural development requires long-term commitment. The past failure of rural development initiatives has been blamed, in part, on a lack of long-term commitment by donors and unpredictable resource flows. Short-term thinking, coupled with the persistent under-funding of agricultural and rural development in national budgets and donor programmes, has threatened sustainability in rural areas.

Moreover, it is difficult to assess the impact of agricultural and rural development initiatives over the short term, particularly in terms of social, economic, cultural, and environmental changes. Rural development is more effective when undertaken using an iterative and phased approach that is carried out over a long period.

[18] OECD/DAC Good Practice Papers: Harmonizing Donor Practices for Effective Aid Delivery, OECD, 2003. www.oecd.org/publications



Commitments to long-term funding help to produce more stable policies and programmes. This in turn generates much more powerful welfare and growth effects within partner countries. Long-term commitment should be credible, not “unconditional.” And, at the same time, the commitments made should be linked to Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRSs) and based on progress therein. This means devising an appropriate system that can be used to monitor and evaluate results and impacts. Such a system must include clear, measurable indicators and benchmarks that are commonly understood and appreciated by all partners. As part of a long-term commitment, it is important to prioritise and sequence programming, strengthening bases where they exist and establishing and then strengthening them where they don’t.

2.4.5 Re-orienting rural development efforts to focus on results and processes

In keeping with the Marrakech Core Principles on development results ^[19], re-orienting rural development by focusing on results can provide mechanisms for the systematic monitoring and evaluation of rural development initiatives. A results-based approach to rural development is useful for ensuring the efficacy, efficiency, and transparency of development processes. Any such approach should be as simple, cost-effective, and user-friendly as possible to ensure sustainability and use.



The OECD–DAC found that the typical African partner country deals with 600 projects, 2,400 reports and 1,000 missions in a year.

Source: African Economic Outlook. AfDB/OECD, 2004.
www.oecd.org/dataoecd

To achieve the MDGs, it is essential to address, and be able to measure the social – not only the technological or economic – aspects of rural development. This calls for the broadening of standard variables and measurement methods to capture these aspects of rural development. It is increasingly important to monitor rural development programmes to assess whether they respond to the needs of a changing landscape of rural households and communities. The need to consider such variables is becoming more important as donor priorities are increasingly emphasising poverty, gender equity, social distribution and the MDGs as priorities.

There is a need for donor flexibility on support as well as a focus on dialogue with all involved partners. Monitoring and evaluation should be part of a continuous (iterative) planning process, carried out at different levels, and should emphasise “learning by doing.” Finally, like other rural development delivery processes, monitoring and evaluation also requires strengthened institutions and capacity across all levels.

[19]
Promoting a harmonised approach to managing for development results: Core principles. Managing for development results: Second international round-table, Marrakech 2004, www.mfdr.org/documents

3. CONCLUSION

Platform members did not find it easy to achieve consensus about either the drivers of rural development or the guiding principles and approaches. However, the contributions – hotly debated in Wakefield, Brussels, and in cyber space – revealed a number of common themes. They thus highlighted the growing consensus between donors on the directions that are needed to reinvigorate agriculture and rural development.

The Millennium Declaration and the related Millennium Development Goals have stimulated donors and partners to re-examine the role that agricultural and rural development plays in securing livelihoods, reducing vulnerability, and improving the overall well-being of millions of people around the world.

Incidences of HIV/AIDS are rising in rural areas, where access to treatment and care, as well as to information about how to prevent infection, lags behind urban areas. The growing impact of this epidemic has made us all acutely aware of the extreme vulnerability of people, particularly women and girls, in rural areas.

This document highlights donor agreement on some of the fundamental drivers of agricultural and rural development. It also indicates the principles and approaches that donors have agreed guide, or should guide, agricultural and rural development delivery in the context of harmonisation and alignment. The “Hot Topics” document, again produced by the Platform, makes clear which thematic areas the members have agreed are of significant importance to rural development and agriculture around the world.

As already noted, there is renewed donor interest in agricultural and rural investment. As a result, the time is now right to explore in greater depth the real-world experiences that countries and donors have had when working to harmonise and align agricultural and rural development in line with the various commitments made in Rome, Paris, Marrakech, and elsewhere. This will allow us to build on the many lessons already learned.

We face many competing development priorities. However, we must recognise that addressing the needs of rural people is crucial if we are to meet the MDGs. One of the greatest challenges now facing donors and partners alike is the need to ensure commitment. This is particularly true of the financial, human, and technical commitment needed to make agriculture and rural development more powerful and effective catalysts of rural sustenance and change than they already are. Perhaps most importantly, there is a need for longer-term donor commitment that builds on the priorities outlined by partner countries.

The JDRC highlights some of the many and diverse challenges facing donors and partners in agriculture and rural development. It also helps to share the combined experience and knowledge of Platform members in relation to efforts to address these challenges. This knowledge can inform the processes of agricultural and rural development delivery. It can also be used to identify issues of concern on which donors and partners could work to find effective, equitable, and sustainable solutions. This reflects the commitment the members have made to the Platform’s efforts to foster harmonisation and alignment in agriculture and rural development.

Consensus has been achieved. Now is the time for action. It is now time to act on the guiding principles and implement the approaches that will lead to more sustainable, equitable, and effective agriculture and rural development for all!



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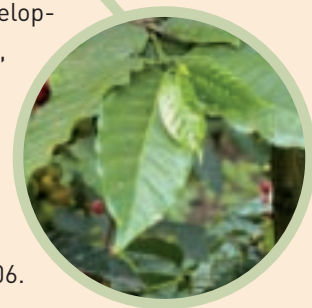
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