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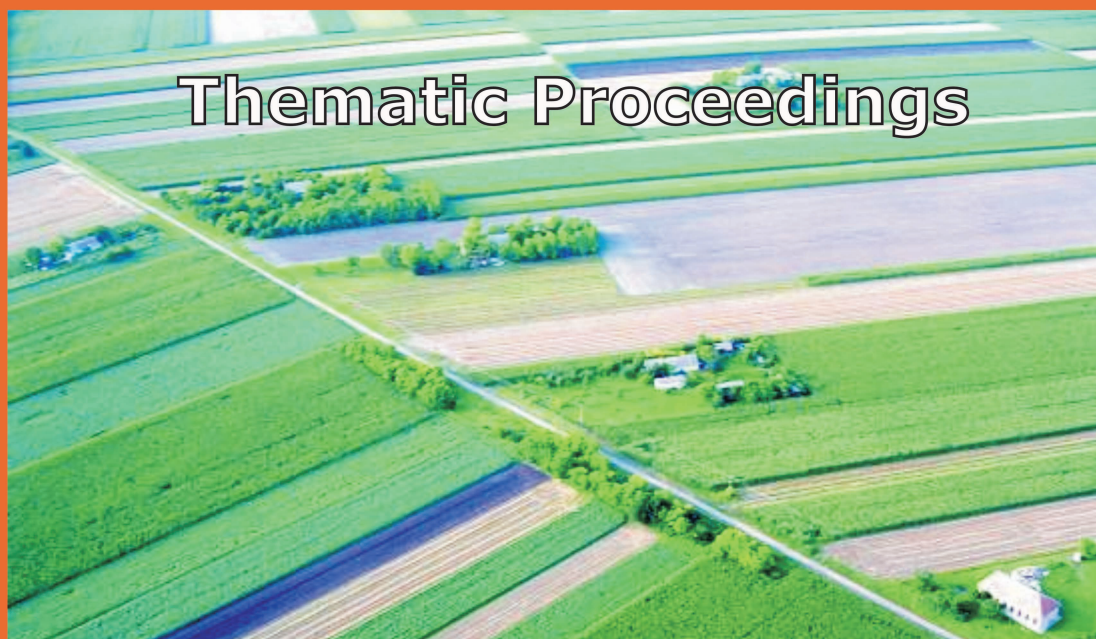
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European Association
of Agricultural Economists

100th Seminar of the EAAE

DEVELOPMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL AREAS IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE



Edited by
Danilo Tomić
Miladin M. Ševarlić



21st – 23rd June 2007
Novi Sad, Serbia



Serbian Association
of Agricultural Economists

CURRENT STATE AND PROSPECTS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL REGIONS IN SERBIA

Radojka Maletić, Slobodan Ceranić, Tamara Paunović¹

1. CURRENT STATE OF RURAL COMMUNITIES IN SERBIA

Numerous factors have influenced and intensified the mechanical movement/mobility of population and their transfer from rural areas into more urban communities, creating in this way unreal picture of urban characteristic/trait of the country. According to data from 2002 ratio of urban and rural population is 60% : 40% (based on second OECD criteria formed on basis of share of productive in total areas).

Food, agriculture, rural development and preservation of natural environment are only parts of this very complex issue. The following fact confirms this:

- share of primary agricultural production in total national income is 23.8%;
- average size of farm/agricultural individual household in Serbia, according to the latest census, is only 2.42 ha of farmer's own land surface. On the territory of Vojvodina size of average farm is slightly greater, 3.38 ha;
- approximately 10% of 7,5 million (based on report by FAO) of current population of Serbia is living in poverty (less than 1US\$ per day) which is cause of constantly present insecurity relating to everyday providing of food;
- more than half of the population living in rural areas is in constant uncertainty relating to their future and future of young generations;
- urbanization trend continues and very soon most of the population will be living in cities. More significant migration of people from rural regions into urban communities and change of enterprise from agricultural activity to other occupations have contributed to demographical changes of the structure of population and agricultural households. Structure of agricultural households according to age of the people living in them indicates the situation where older family members are mainly occupying agricultural households and still are engaged in agriculture as their main enterprise. For instance 45% of total number of members of agricultural households which are engaged exclusively in agricultural production are 50 or over fifty years old (427,305);

¹ Radojka Maletić, Slobodan Ceranić, Tamara Paunović, Faculty of Agriculture, Belgrade, Serbia

- number of agricultural households, according to 2002 census, was 778,891, of this number majority are small size farms. Households of size bellow 3 ha dominate with over 60%, and with ownership of land of over 20 ha bellow 1% of total number of family households;
- of approximately 4.2 million hectares of cultivated agricultural land (based on 2002 census), only 30-40% can be used for intensive agricultural production. Of this surface each year several thousands of hectares are lost due to aggressive urbanization, erosion and unplanned and excessive exploitation of mineral raw materials;
- level of utilization of water resources which can be used in agricultural production is very low, especially in dry and semidry areas, whereas, at the same time, there is very distinct trend of pollution of water courses. Irrigation systems aren't functioning at all. Change of climatic conditions additionally contributes to inefficiency of agricultural production;
- biological diversity is continuously being disturbed and it is of vital importance for permanent ensuring of agricultural production and continuous providing of the society with food;
- over the period of last twenty years, in Serbia, great wood areas have been cut in an unplanned manner. Necessary protective and regulatory function of forests, connected with climate, soil and water, as well as function of forests as habitats of biological diversity and source of food and raw materials is constantly endangered;
- absence of partnership between urban and rural areas as consequence has that rural areas in the vicinity of larger urban and industrial centres are exposed to macro economical and social changes;
- and, still very distinct migration from rural areas, typical primarily of structurally poorer areas of peripheral rural regions with economical stagnation, lack of or loosing employment, low level of provision of everyday needs, low quality of living conditions and uncertainty relating to the existence.

Rural area in Serbia as developing country, with all differences of initial conditions, fulfils all important life functions, equally as in any other developed country.

If there is intent to provide present and future population of our country, where currently certain food deficit is evident, with main needs and services on every part of its territory, especially since this relates to majority of population with modest income, than we need to exploit the existing basis of natural resources in accordance and harmony with sustainability principles, but more rational, intensive and with more care than in present situation.

In the last decade numerous international conferences and meetings on the highest levels focused the attention of global public, states, international organizations and civil society reminding them about urgent need for action, and defining adequate recommendations, goals and measures. Among most important are:

- World Conference on Agricultural Reform and Rural Development – WCARRD (Rome, 1979)
- UN Conference on Environment and Development - UNCED (Rio de Janeiro, 1992)
- UN Conference on Population and Development (Cairo, 1994)
- World Summit on Social Development (Copenhagen, 1995)
- 4. UN World Conference on Women and Development (Peking, 1995)
- FAO International Technical Conference on Plant Genetic Resources (Leipzig, 1996)
- UN Conference on Human Settlements - HABITAT II (Istanbul, 1996)
- World Summit on Food Safety (Rome, 1996)

Conclusions of mentioned conferences and many others were used to define goals and measures which will contribute to more certain supply of food, sustainable agricultural and rural development, but also protection of natural resources in agriculture, forestry, fishery and rural regions.

2. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL REGIONS IN SERBIA

It is necessary, and also urgent, to establish adequate frame conditions in order to realize development of rural areas as diverse area for living, economical and cultural activities. In order to ensure sustainable development of acceptable living conditions, it is necessary to find answers to many social, economical and ecological challenges. Key to the future sustainable development of rural regions is in creation and development of own conditions, development of own potentials and exchange of experiences with other regions.

Development strategies need to reflect adequately the diversity of initial conditions which represents chance/opportunity but also limitations of desired development. Regional and local subjects must be allowed to react to their problems in a specific way, independently and responsible as much as possible, with greatest flexibility.

Main component of every strategy of development of rural regions has a long-term goal to provide for all people permanently independent life, i.e. life determined by their own decisions. Necessary assumption for successful realization of social, economical and development adequate to environment of the primary rural area is effectiveness of the struggle against poverty in these areas and certainty in providing sufficient quantities of food for human population.

Therefore, success of the policy of rural development is mainly determined by the degree of success of suggested and realized measures against unemployment or achieving the highest possible level of employment. To this purpose, it is necessary to ensure work places in agriculture, forestry and fishery, and additional alternatives of employment and sources of income for all population groups. Further, there is need for creation of new, high qualified work places and their permanent employment, which would provide means of existence in rural regions. Therefore it is necessary to provide that all people should have opportunity to acquire general and expert education in order to exploit newly created employment possibilities.

Hypothesis of sustainable development is based on equal legal access to land, water, forest and genetic resources, as well as credits, turnover capital, technology, knowledge and expert advice. Modern economy and management of production areas (land management) includes and demands legal and planned security in relation to ownership and utilization of land. This also requires integral concept for efficient and environmentally friendly utilization of land, which encourages harmonisation of demands regarding higher quality of land economy. High quality legal regulations should offer answers to mentioned questions and ensure balance of interests regarding use of land. Only vital basis for human existence and development can provide stabile eco systems.

Using more efficient instruments and measures, policy of preservation of environment could even be more successful and in this way load/burdening would be reduced to minimum or avoided completely and danger of disturbance of existing quality of environment would be limited. This relates first of all on market compatible policy instruments of environment protection, which can make the protection of natural resources and their more efficient use more active through system of state/government financial incentives.

Sustainability of rural development is conditioned by balanced partnership between urban and rural regions. Harmonization of interests on broader basis and improvement of cooperation within and between regions should be the main part and goal of this development partnership which has to be most important task and scope of policy of the Government on state, regional and local level. Only complementary role of cities and rural regions, and their mutual cooperation with certain adjusting to concrete conditions of region or location, as well as procedures and mechanisms are basis of establishment of balanced partnership.

The most important assumptions for development of rural areas are efficient and for environment acceptable infrastructure, ensuring of equal access of all interested to created network. Adequate and continuous providing of production and consumer goods, as well as providing of social and cultural services, especially in the field of health care and education, present absolute priority in our regions.

Infrastructure which completely satisfies needs for education, health care and cultural needs, are main integral elements of the strategy of rural development. This demands efficient coordination to the maximum between regional development and planning of use of natural resources, especially land, all harmonized with governmental policy of development of rural regions.

Policy goals in rural development, in regard to development of rural areas, are important for providing of multifunctional agriculture and forestry and optimization of their effects. This is important since agriculture and forestry have to provide services in accordance and harmony with world market conditions and constantly increasing competition.

3. INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT TO DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL REGIONS OF SERBIA

Sustainable rural development demands respecting of human rights and basic freedoms, establishing of democracy, public and effective legal framework, and responsible and transparent management of natural resources. This is the only way to eliminate long-term poverty and lagging in all spheres of life of rural populations, enable economical and social development of these regions and avoid or solve conflicts among people. Therefore, civil society must create space and include all interested groups to participate in responsibility and take on their own responsibility. There is no doubt, established political, social and economical frame for development of rural areas are important assumption for realization of right to development and employment, and ensuring of production of sufficient quantities of food to satisfy the needs of population in Serbia. Implementation of defined should be carried out through institutional bodies such as Government and government institutions, regional communities, municipality, public corporations, all in accordance with size and goal of planned activity.

Identifying of main goals in policy of rural development is primarily related to three following categories, and this is the case in most of developing countries but also developed countries:

1. Agricultural land and village with more pleasantness in work

It is necessary to give support to individual agricultural workers in many different roles which they have, especially in continuous guarantees of healthy and high quality food products as well as revitalization and development of our rural regions. Not only is the scope of support provided important but also type and method. It is necessary to follow the sustainable way and measures taken as incentive and support to agricultural production need to have «friendly» effect on environment, and quantity shall not be forced in pursuit of quality. Consumers are very important, production methods, value of rural regions, but it is also important

to return to tax payers' value of their invested work and means. So, concept of support to agricultural production in rural regions was prepared for the purpose of «ensuring supply of healthy and safe food». However, reforms are not only about providing sure job for our individual agricultural producers, but also to obtain higher value for work done. Therefore, it is important to support production and connect it with different standards of environment protection, animal health and food safety. In most surrounding countries, especially in developed countries, consumers want to know exactly what are they getting and where do the products come from. We must keep in mind that our natural resources are disposable, that crops that we grow lead to danger of other species of plants and animals to become extinct. Reform of incentives must ensure long-term support to agriculture not only financial but also from the aspect of environment protection. These are all things which are important for determining of adequate way in creation of new model of support. Goal is to achieve things like: a) overcome differences between world and domestic prices; b) provide satisfactory job for all those who seize to be active in agriculture, c) ensure agriculture as long-term industry. Reform of the support for agricultural production is moving towards development of rural areas, which is not easy since it includes many aspects of complex issues of rural development. General rules of development of rural regions exist, but they are always very specific and characteristic for each individual country, as well as each region within the same country.

2. Village, better living conditions

Cost of providing main communal services for such settlements is increasing rapidly. Employment in agriculture in rural regions is high, and recently even increasing. Change of structure of employment in rural enterprises is inevitable but it can not be carried out without simultaneous change in structure of rural settlements, structure of land use and development of network of rural infrastructure. This is the greatest challenge facing planners of rural development, even in the next several decades. It is certain that all countries in transition will face reduction of jobs in agriculture and decrease of cultivable land. Question is how to regulate this decrease; concentrating agricultural production in most fertile areas, seize with agriculture in certain zones, or gradual strengthening and support to ecological methods of cultivation in all fields, on all soil types. Everything is closely related to size of funds at disposal, which is limiting factor for developing countries, since they rely mainly on budget means and funds intended for agriculture.

3. Well preserved village and agricultural land

Part of the available agricultural land can be used in intensive agricultural production, but it needs higher investments. In Serbia, we need to ensure means for

direct support for increase of current level of production. Except direct incentives directed towards quality of produced goods, and not only the quantity, it is also important to provide more and better credit conditions, i.e. to enable necessary investments in the sector. Life needs and perspectives of general development, including rural development, are conditioned by natural resources. Quality of the life environment and poverty are closely related, since in order to survive population will exploit relentlessly natural resources. In this way the balance of the eco system is disturbed as well as basic conditions for own survival. Planning of development of rural regions must find generally accepted balance between needs in life in rural communities and possibilities which are presented by their quality and richness of existing land resources.

4. INSTEAD OF CONCLUSION

Based on results and experiences of developed countries frames for solving of issues of rural space and realization of these issues in Serbia are achievable, with constant pointing out of need for respecting of regional diversities. Differences in initial natural, economical and social conditions, complexity and mutual relation of issues/problems and their causes demand integral strategic plan, universal approach of the whole society. All actors included in planning and performing of determined plan at the local, regional and national level, in government administration and civil society, as well as academic and research institutions, are invited and obligated to participate to become engaged, in order to transfer development interests of rural regions into practical solutions. Further development of rural regions demands creation of own policy with aim to preserve life environment, their settlements and population as well as potentials of natural resources.

Priorities of the policy of rural development in Serbia are:

- by legal ways to ensure available production resources for agricultural and rural activities including credits, technology and access to the market,
- establishing and maintenance/preservation of effective, for the environment acceptable, infrastructure for production, processing and marketing of agricultural products, as well as improvement of social sector in rural regions,
- necessary assumption for realization of income and employment is fight against poverty and food uncertainty through education and additional expert training, especially of young population in rural areas,
- encouraging employment in rural regions in agriculture and forestry through diversification and use of different sources of income and possibilities of employment in non-agricultural sector,
- strengthening of efforts for preservation, development and sustainable use of natural resources in rural regions, including preservation of biological diversity,

- achieving balance in economical, social and economical development between rural and urban space including rural and urban settlements, by way of harmonization of interests, cooperation and partnership,
- exchange of experience on possibilities and ways of sustainable development of rural area.

In order to for the process of accessing the European Union to be continued, as well as negotiations with the World Trade Organization, it is necessary to focus on method, type and direction of support, not wasting any time on discussing peripheral things. We must go on, independently and with other countries towards the European Union. We must face the facts not fiction, and we need to move away from fine details in expressions in order to read the moral message which is perceived. And this message is clear and unambiguous: ensuring development in rural regions, creation of conditions of living acceptable for present and future generations, and efficient use of natural resources with preservation of environment.

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