

International Best Practice and the Rural-Proofing of Policy: Opportunities for the South African Context

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Summary and Key Recommendations

Globally, rural populations tend to fair worse on important socioeconomic indicators than their urban counterparts. They tend to be poorer, are unemployed in greater numbers, have worse health outcomes and have less access to the social and economic opportunities to improve their situation.

Despite clear systemic inequalities between rural and urban contexts, until the early 1990s policy approaches to rural development and service delivery had focused almost exclusively on agricultural development and reform. Prompted by the efforts of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to promote its 'New Rural Paradigm' as an alternative way of thinking about rural policy, many of the OECD's member states undertook policy reforms that comprehensively changed how the 'rural context' was catered for in government processes.

Both developed (Key examples include England, Finland and Canada) developing nations (key examples include Mexico and China) broadened their rural policy approaches to include a broader range of social and economic services that would promote greater equity between urban and rural settings. There are a number of important lessons from these examples that give insight into the structural and process reforms that could be put in place to do this. These include:

- The formation of a stand-alone statutory body that is mandated to coordinate and oversee the development/revision of policy and its implementation that caters for the needs of rural communities and contexts. This includes the coordination of partnerships between implementing agencies and departments to ensure greater efficiency and impact
- A rural policy strategy that legally requires that all social and economic policy under development/review be rural-proofed, i.e. policies are examined objectively to determine if they have a different impact in rural areas to urban areas and that adjustments are made to account for rural need and contextual factors
- The development of guidelines and toolkits that should be used by policymakers to rural-proof policy
- The participation of academe and civil society to fill technical gaps
- The mainstreaming of rural policy into sector specific policy rather than the development of stand alone sectoral rural policies, i.e. rural issues should be dealt with equitably in all policy and not as a stand alone issue
- The development of a clear set of overarching rural indicators and targets against which performance will be measured
- Policy development and implementation should be a bottom-up process with local level and contextual issues and priorities informing processes at intermediate and national levels
- Budgets must be rural-proofed and clearly articulate how much money is allocated to policy priorities and interventions. This should not involve a separate rural budget, but rather, the integration of rural factors into all government budgets

These lessons are particularly relevant for the South African context where the historical neglect and deliberate marginalization of rural areas and populations (38% of the total population) has resulted remaining the most deprived segment of the population with the highest levels of unemployment, lowest levels of education and the worst health outcomes.

Despite the evidence that shows the continued service delivery and development neglect of rural areas and peoples, the government has failed to develop and implement policy that promotes equity and fosters the progressive realization of basic rights contained within the Constitution. South Africa's approach to rural policy has been uncoordinated, far too narrow and is ultimately wholly inadequate to deal the complexities of service delivery in rural settings. Historically rural issues have been tucked away in poorly developed rural policy strategies that have been the responsibilities of under-resourced government rural development department's that have approached rural development almost exclusively from the position of agricultural development and land reform. Other service delivery departments such as education, health, social development and economic development have traditionally ignored rural issues in policy, treating them as 'small urban' areas.

For rural areas and communities to receive the kind of attention and services needed to promote both greater equity and the realization of basic rights, the governments approach to rural policy must change. We recommend that at a minimum it should include:

- Making rural-proofing a legal requirement in all social and economic policy development processes
- The establishment of a statutory body with representation from all social sector, economic and infrastructure departments that will coordinate and oversee the development of a comprehensive rural policy strategy
- This rural strategy should be focused on the mainstreaming of rural into all policies and not the development of stand-alone rural policies within each sector
- The government must develop a clear set of rural indicators and targets against which performance will be measured
- The government should develop guidelines and toolkits that will be used by government departments to rural-proof all policy under development/revision
- The development and implementation of policies should be a bottom up process with local government and rural districts taking responsibility for the development of priorities
- Budgets should be developed that demonstrate what is being allocated to rural services and priorities. These budgets should promote equity and provide an additional indicator rural service delivery performance

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1. Purpose of the review

Established in September 2009, the Rural Health Advocacy Project (RHAP) is a

not for profit, public interest organisation which advocates for the constitutional right of rural and remote communities to have equitable access to comprehensive, quality health care.

A critical component of the RHAP's work is to advocate for health policy that systematically considers the rural health context, the needs of rural communities, and the factors that determine access in these areas. The RHAP maintains that in addition to sector specific health policy such as those relating to human resourcing, health infrastructure, and the service delivery platform, consideration must also be given to how other government policy, such as transport, sanitation and municipal services, could be developed and revised to improve access to services in rural settings.

The RHAP aims to base all of its policy positions on sound evidence on what is not currently working in terms of policy and its implementation as well as what are possible opportunities and methods for ensuring all new policy and policy under review meaningfully accounts for service delivery and access in the rural context.

The purpose of this review is to consider international evidenced of what works and what does not work when it comes to systematically accounting for rurality in the development of critical social and economic policy. It will also critically assess how South Africa has approached rurality in its approach to policy and what can be taken from international experience. Ultimately, this review will help to not only inform the RHAP's advocacy positions but also provide the basis for the development of guidelines and tools that could be used by policymakers to ensure that sufficient consideration is given to the rural context and the needs of rural communities.

This review will not assess the substance of rural policies but rather the treatment of rurality within government institutions and policy-making processes. Its purpose is to understand how some governments have approached the integration of a rural focus into the business of government rather than the substance and efficacy of particularly rural health policy initiatives.

For this reason the review has been limited to examples of where governments have undertaken reforms that bring 'rural' to the fore in policy making processes and where there have been concerted and often legislated commitments to ensuring rural areas and communities get a fair deal in all policy. The RHAP has, however, developed a review of international best practice and rural-proofing health policy that looks at how policy across four broad areas can be developed to improve access. These areas include:

One of the limitations of this review is that it focuses largely on rural policy approaches from developed nations, with the only exceptions being that of China and Mexico. In fact, our literature review revealed that much of the work in this area focuses on member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). As will be discussed in more detail below, this is because the OECD has been leading on developing a clear understanding of what works and what does not work with regard to rural policy and development. It has also been active in prompting reforms in the policy approaches of member countries that ensure that these become increasingly rural friendly.

2. Rural disadvantage and the need for a rural policy focus

Amongst all the diversity that shapes the rural landscape globally there are certain underlying characteristics that are, to varying degrees, common to most rural settings. Rural populations, when compared to their urban counterparts, tend to be poorer and have unequal access to the health care, education, electricity, water, adequate nutrition and the economic opportunities necessary to overcome their material deprivation and provide them with the opportunities to realize their full potential.

According to the United Nations' Rural Poverty Report 2011 (2012:16), despite some progress in lifting rural people out of poverty over the last few decades, at least 70% of people living on less than US\$ 1.25 live in rural settings.

Rural populations tend to carry a disproportionate burden of both communicable and non-communicable diseases and across almost all indicators experience worse health outcomes (Smith *et al.*, 2008)

The high burden of disease and poor health outcomes experienced in rural settings is in no small way driven by inadequate access to basic social determinants of health such as adequate nutrition, clean water and sanitation. According to recent data published by the WHO in 2010 less than 50% of rural households in the developing world have access to adequate drinking water. The same data reveals that only 28% of rural people in the developing world have access to proper sanitation (WHO, 2012).

Despite consistently high levels of deprivation amongst rural populations and almost universal socioeconomic inequity between urban and rural settings, even in the developed world, until the late 1990's approaches to rural policy and rural development have been uncoordinated and have tended to treat rural development as being synonymous with agricultural development

Until the mid 1990's approaches to rural policy have tended to be highly fractured, with social and economic sectors operating in silos and often competing for limited government resources (Ellis & Biggs, 2001).

This narrow sector specific approach to rural policy was particularly prevalent during the 1980's as the implementation of structural adjustment programmes in much of the developing world saw the slashing of state social sector budgets and the imposition of the market as the engine for development (Pezzini, 2001). During this period rural policy was very much focused on the commercialization of agriculture and the modernization of the rural economy rather than on improving the material and social conditions of rural residents and communities.

One of the major problems with sector specific policy is that unless there is a mechanism, and willingness, to make sure that these policies 'speak' to each other, they are implemented in isolation and fail to account for the interconnectedness of the various aspects of rural development and service delivery (Pezzini, 2001). Uncoordinated rural policy becomes highly inefficient, ineffective and difficult to

implement in an environment where there is competition for scarce resources.

3. The 'New rural paradigm'

Recognising the many weaknesses of uncoordinated rural policy approaches, there has been a shift internationally since the early 1990's, particularly within countries that make up the OECD, towards re-thinking how rural regions and communities are approached in terms of both policy and governance. This has been driven largely by the recognition that rural is not synonymous with agriculture and that single sector policy is wholly inadequate to deal with the complexity and heterogeneity of rural areas (OECD, 2006: 56).

As part of its 'New Rural Paradigm' the OECD has advocated for cross-sectorial approaches to rural development that focus on infrastructure, economic development, public service provision and the "valorization of rural amenities" (natural and cultural) (OECD, 2006).

A number of countries within the OECD have sought to introduce new rural policy approaches that seek to promote equity and sustainable rural development that are in-line with the OECD's general approach. Broadly speaking there have been two broad approaches to achieving these goals.

The first has been to develop and implement a "grand plan" where all policies are integrated into a single coherent rural strategy that covers all developmental areas (OECD, 2006:78-79). The problem with such approaches has been that they are implemented in addition to and often in competition with existing sectoral policies. This has often resulted in these rural strategies being neglected in favour of sector specific policy that generally tends to benefit urban settings and communities.

The second has been to develop "niche" rural policies that seek to address specific rural issues within sectors (OECD, 2006: 79). These policies are then either implemented in conjunction with other sector specific policy or as *the* sector policy for rural areas. The problem here has been that while various sectors have sought to address barriers to service delivery and development specific to rural contexts these efforts have not been coordinated with policies in other sectors and may be hindered by the lack of rural policy in other critical areas (such as social as infrastructure) or may result in duplication and inefficiency in implementation.

The OECD (2006) suggests a compromise between these two broad approaches that makes use of both a broad overarching rural policy strategy and the 'rural-proofing' of key sectorial policies. The overarching rural policy strategy, with relevant statutory bodies and powers, would provide the basis for how factors of rurality should be included in sectoral policy making processes and how this should foster cooperation and coordination between government sectors.

There are a number of examples internationally where this 'compromise' has, to varying degrees and in different ways, been put into practice. Evidence of the success of these approaches in advancing greater equity in policy development tends to be limited in many instances. This is largely due to the fact that many of these approaches are still developing through a process of trial and error. What is

more certain though is that all of the examples discussed below have invaluable lessons for South Africa and how the government's approach to policy development could be enhanced by implementing processes that integrate rural considerations on an equal basis to any other priority.

3.1 England's (UK's) approach to 'rural-proofing'

According to the UK's Statistics Digest for Rural England approximately (2012) 19% of England's population live in rural areas. Rural population trends in England differ from most other countries in that it is actually growing in real terms with net internal migration to rural areas from urban centres. Primarily retirees and commuters who live in rural villages but commute to urban centres drive this immigration (OECD, 2011: 15).

England's rural profile also differs in that the socioeconomic indicators for rural England are generally better than those of urban England. Only about 14% of households in rural England are at or below the poverty line compared to 19% in urban centres. As a percentage of the working age population, employment rates are also higher in rural areas (78%) than in urban areas (71%) (DEFRA, 2012).

People living in rural areas in England also tend to be better educated and have better health than their urban counterparts. Combined life expectancy in rural areas is more than 2 years higher than in urban settings, while infant mortality is lower (3.8 versus 4.9 deaths per 1000 live births) (ibid).

It proves difficult to say the extent to which England's comparatively well off rural population, both socially and economically, is as a result of a well developed rural policy approach or if England's rural policy approach is as a result of having a relatively well of and influential rural population. Either way, England is recognised as a leader in implementing one of the most developed and clearly formulated approaches to rural policy development in practice globally (OECD, 2011).

This approach has developed substantially since early iterations in the 1940's, which at that time focused very much on agricultural security and development. With the publication of the White Paper "Rural England: a nation committed to a living country side" in 1995 that government signalled its commitment to "give a fair deal in public services, to support a diverse and successful rural economy, and to protect and enhance the environment" (DETR, 2000: 5).

The five years following the publication of this White Paper saw a plethora of new agencies and processes related to rural policy. Even though the establishment of the Countryside Agency (CA) to coordinate the implementation of this White Paper, it still resulted in a cumbersome and largely unfocused approach to rural policy development (OECD, 2011: 21).

The publication of a second White Paper for Rural England in 2000 was aimed at more clearly identifying key priority areas that were in need of attention. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) was established as a statutory body soon after to take the lead in implementing the White paper.

DEFRA has become England's "rural champion" and has taken responsibility for ensuring that rural is considered in all relevant policy processes (OECD: 2011: 22). In 2004 DEFRA published England's Rural Strategy to articulate the practical policy implications of the governments approach to rural policy development.

Put simply, England's approach to rural policy development is one of 'mainstreaming', which means the implementation of "rural policy that does not depend on rural specific interventions" (OECD, 2011: 115). In other words, factors of rurality are given the same weight and attention in policy development and revision processes as any other variable and is not included as an additional factor or a separate consideration.

More specifically mainstreaming rural policy means that:

- Mainstreaming means that the needs and interests of rural people, business and communities should be *equitably* addressed through all *mainstream* policies and programmes
- Under mainstreaming equitable does not mean equal or uniform or imply uniform approach to the delivery of services
- Mainstream policies and programmes are typically those that apply universally. They are generally developed at the national level, interpreted at the regional level and implemented at the local level.
- Under mainstreaming those designing the policy or delivering the programmes will determine the best delivery method (OECD, 2009 b)

Mainstreaming as a rural policy approach includes a number of important and interrelated components that, in principle, guarantee that rural communities enjoy equitable access to services and economic opportunities. These components include:

1. Clearly defined **national performance indicators** that are used to benchmark the successes and failures in the mainstreaming of rural in policy
2. **Evidence based decision-making** that includes both assessments of what works and what does not
3. **Rural proofing** of all new policy and policy under review to ensure that all relevant policy addresses rural need and contextual factors
4. **Partnerships** between service delivery agencies and departments to maximise impact and prevent duplication

Rural-proofing is a particularly important, and largely novel, approach to mainstreaming. It is a systematic approach to assess the impact new policy, and the revision of existing policy, would have on rural areas (Swindlehurst *et al.*, 2005: 2). Interestingly, rural-proofing was first introduced by the Countryside Agency in 2002. It included 'rural-proofing checklist for policymakers' that was to be used as a toolkit for policymakers when mainstreaming 'rural' into whatever policy they were working on.

Rural-proofing is therefore a systematic approach to ensuring that rural areas get a

'fair deal' in policymaking and implementation. The UK's Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), which is actively involved in the UK's rural-proofing efforts, provides what is arguably the best definition:

"Rural proofing may be defined as a process which ensures that all relevant executive policies are examined carefully and objectively to determine whether or not they have a different impact in rural areas from that elsewhere, because of the particular characteristics of rural areas: and where necessary, what policy adjustments might be made to reflect rural needs and in particular to ensure that as far as is possible public services are accessible on a fair basis to the rural community." (DEFRA, 2002: 2)

Since the publication of the 'White Paper for Rural England' in 2000 rural-proofing as process has taken hold in the UK. It is now mandatory for all significant new policy and policy being reviewed to be rural-proofed. There are now also sector specific rural-proofing checklists and toolkits which are available to policy-makers at all levels of government.

Even though England's approach to mainstreaming rural into general policy development approaches has been quite successful, it is not without its own challenges.

While England's approach to mainstreaming is well defined and seemingly simple to implement it has proven more difficult to put it into action in practice. The complexity of policy development processes in England across all levels of government has meant that specialist rural policy input is needed. Without this technical support many policymakers have taken mainstreaming to mean that rural and urban areas should be treated the same, when this is certainly not the case.

Competing priorities such as climate change and environmental protection, have drawn attention away from social and economic elements within rural policy approaches. Even where rural has been mainstreamed into policy, urban remains a priority for many government departments and there is little incentive from them to shift this focus (OECD, 2011).

Rural-proofing while successful in many instances has been difficult to implement in many others because of a poor understanding of the "rural dimension" (ibid: 25). In some instances rural-proofing has been used as an impact assessment tool rather than a tool to shape policy before implementation.

That said, despite some difficulties in implementation support for rural-proofing continues to grow in the UK and tools and processes continue to be developed and refined.

3.2 Canada's "rural lens" approach

Approximately 95% of Canada's land mass is considered rural with nearly a third of the country's population living in rural areas (OECD, 2010: 42). Rural populations in Canada have, on average, far lower incomes, poorer health and less access to education than those living in urban settings (Alasia, 2004)

Until the mid 1990's, the only policy that dealt with the rural context was agricultural policy that viewed rural development as a process of expanding and commercializing agricultural production. Recognising the need to address large-scale inequities and deprivation that existed in rural communities the Canadian government, spurred by new rural policy developments in the OECD, started critically reassess its approach to rural development (OECD, 2010).

In 1996 Canada's Standing Committee on Natural Resources undertook a study into Rural Development and in 1997 published what it referred to as "a blueprint for the revitalization of rural economies in rural Canada" titled 'Think Rural!' The report outlined a plan to increase economic activity, improving job opportunities, and provide better access to a full range of services in rural Canada (Canada and Mitchell, 1997). The committee recommended that the federal government develop a comprehensive regionally focused rural policy for Canada that coordinated the efforts of all three levels of government (national, provincial and local) with the aim of:

"Ensuring quality access to education, training, infrastructure, communications, capital, research and development and other important tools is a vital precondition for rural Canadians to meet their economic development needs. To achieve such a "level playing field", it is not necessary to sharply increase government spending; instead, existing government funding programs can and should be proactively targeted at rural Canada." (Canada and Mitchell, 1997: np)

In response to the committee's recommendations Canada's Federal government established a Rural Secretariat within its Ministry of Agriculture and Agri-Food in 1998 and tasked it with coordinating the development and implementation of rural friendly policy and strategies.

In addition to the establishment of statutory structures such as the Rural Secretariat, the Canadian Government designed and started to implement its 'Rural Lens' strategy, which provided both a mechanism to coordinate activities across sectors and a checklist that could be used to 'rural-proof' policy (OECD, 2010). Questions contained within the checklist include:

- How is this initiative relevant to rural and remote Canada?
- Is the impact specific to a selected rural or remote environment or region?
- Have the most likely positive and negative effects on rural Canadians been identified and, where relevant, addressed?
- Is the initiative designed to respond to the priorities identified by rural Canadians?
- Have rural Canadians been consulted during the development or modification of the initiative?
- How is the benefit to rural Canadians maximized? (e.g. cooperation with other partners, development of local solutions for local challenges, flexibility for decision making)

There are a number of good signs of progress. By 2010, all but one of Canada's

provinces had developed their own rural policies or strategies (OECD, 2010). Canada's federal government has also developed and is implementing strategies, such as the Community Futures Programme, which are aimed at rural economic development. There are also a number of sector specific strategies aimed at developing rural economies and the infrastructure necessary to drive rural development (ibid).

While Canada has made strides in implementing strategies that address the rural context these efforts have not been without critics. Partridge *et al* (2009) have argued that the absence of a single overarching rural policy in Canada has made it difficult to meaningfully assess the impact rural strategies have had in overcoming rural disadvantage.

They go on to argue that Canada's approach to rural policy has been based on "fads" with little coordinated and sustainable approach that can adequately cater for vast differences between rural areas themselves (p.111).

In its assessment of progress made in achieving the goals outlined in its 'Think Rural' report the Canadian senate (2008: ix) has been critical of the government's approach to rural development and rural policy. They argued that,

"The federal government's Rural Secretariat for example is tucked away in Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, creating the misleading impression that "rural" is synonymous with "agriculture" and effectively undermining the Secretariat's relevance and viability"

As with much of the other criticism of the Canadian government's approach to rural policy, the Canadian senate (2008) has recommended that a Department of Rural Affairs be established to develop and coordinate a comprehensive rural strategy that could appropriately account for the complexity of rurality and rural development beyond just economic development. To date there is no clear indication of how far along this process or what the next step will be in fostering more consistent implementation of the 'Rural Lens' approach.

3.3 Finland's Rural Policy Committee

Approximately 90% of the landmass in Finland is considered rural (OECD, 2008) where, according to World Bank (2010) data, approximately 37% of Finland's population lives. While these populations are still economically less well off than their urban counterparts, rural populations in Finland are comparatively well off when compared to other countries within the OECD region (ibid: 15).

Starting in the mid to late 1980's Finland was one of the first countries in the world to recognize the need for a clearly defined cross-sectorial approach to rural policy and by the mid 1990's had developed and was implementing an overarching rural policy and had established a Rural Policy Committee to oversee its implementation and the coordination of activities across government sectors (Vihinen, 2009).

Housed in the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, the Finnish Policy Committee consists of 21 members from 9 ministries and 8 other organisations. Amongst other

things, the responsibilities of the committee include:

- Promote co-operation in rural policy within government and with the private sector
- Design and implement rural policy programmes
- Prepare actions to improve rural entrepreneurship
- Promote the creation of network projects which cross thematic and regional boundaries in key sectors
- Develop joint services for rural areas; and
- Develop and implement programmes and activities that increase interaction between urban and rural areas (OECD, 2006)

In terms of rural policy and policy development, Finland takes both a broad and narrow approach. The broad approach focuses on ensuring that all government sectorial policy that could have an impact on rural areas is developed or adapted in ways that advance rural economies and service delivery (rural-proofing). The narrow approach focuses rural specific policy and programmes with the aim of supporting implementation and the coordination are various stakeholders (Vihinen, 2009: 86).

Finland's approach has focused on three broad policy areas:

1. *Ensuring equity and efficiency in the delivery of public services:*
2. *Strengthening the operational environment and competitiveness of rural firms by bridging existing business support to rural SMEs*
3. *Improving the business environment in rural areas by focusing on a number of strategic enablers including: improving transport infrastructure; improvements to IT infrastructure; improving access to financing; and promoting rural natural resources as mechanisms to increase tourism*

An OECD (2008: 19) assessment of the progress made in implementing effective rural policy in Finland argued that the Finnish example demonstrates three important elements necessary for success:

1. The involvement of civil society and academia fills critical technical gaps in priority setting within policy
2. Active promotion of multi-stakeholder ownership of the process has ensured greater sustainability of policy and programmes and alignment between sectors
3. Clearly defined roles and responsibilities within government structures and regular monitoring and evaluation of implementation and outcomes.

While Finland has what is arguably one of the most successful rural policy processes globally it is not without its own challenges. Various political and resource pressures have resulted in the narrow approach being favoured in more recent government planning processes. Sectoral departments have been reluctant to favour rural regions at the expense of other competing priorities. This seems to

suggest that coordination and cooperation between and within government departments should be strengthened in an effort to ensure a sustained focus on rural policy.

3.4 Mexican micro-regions strategy

About 80% of Mexico's territory is defined as rural (OECD, 2007). According to statistics provided by the World Bank, in 2010 approximately 26 million people, or 23% of Mexico's population, were defined as rural. Of this population approximately 60% are living in extreme poverty.

Like other developing countries there are large rural-urban disparities in Mexico with access to water, sanitation, education and health care all significantly poorer for rural populations (Ferri, 2012).

In 2001 Mexico enacted the Law on Sustainable Rural Development (LSRD) with the aim of developing an institutional framework that would shift Mexico's rural policy from an "interventionist agricultural policy" to a multi-sector approach that seeks to decentralize decision making to the regional level (OECD, 2007: 82). This decentralization should then provide for bottom-up and context specific social and economic programmes and interventions (OECD, 2007).

Critically the LSRD mandated the formation of a body that would coordinate and oversee the development and implementation of programmes and policies that would operationalize the basic tenets of the law. In 2002 the Inter-ministerial Commission for Sustainable Rural Development (ICSRD) was established within the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Rural Development, Fisheries and Alimentation (SAGARPA) to perform this role.

The LSRD then also requires the establishment of similar inter-ministerial coordinating bodies at the state level to coordinate the development of state specific rural development policies.

In addition to the ICSRD the LSRD requires the establishment of advisory Council's for Sustainable Rural Development at the federal, state, district and municipal levels. These councils should then be made up of representatives from the ICSRD, various government departments involved in rural policy implementation as well as civil society.

A unique innovation that forms part of the Mexican rural policy strategy is the Special Concerted Rural Development Programme (SCRDP), which forms part of Mexico's National Development Plan and outlines all rural development policy and programmes and details the plan coordinate activates between relevant ministries responsible for implementation (OECD, 2007).

An essential, and what appears to be a highly effective component of this SCRDP, is the development of a 'rural budget' each year that groups the allocations of each ministry that are directed to activities that are related to rural policy implementation. The budget is then aggregated into two broad components, including allocations to economic development and those clustered into social sector development (e.g.

education and health).

This budget is an important part of Mexico's rural policy planning and implementation processes because it provides a mechanism to measure how substantive prioritization of rural policy is changing.

3.5 China's approach to rural policy

With a rural population of more than 600 million China, after India, has the second highest number of people living in rural areas (World Bank, 2012). Even though rapid urbanization has seen a consistent outflow of people from rural villages and towns into large cities in search of employment in the formal economy for well over half a century this number still constitutes about 50% of China's total population.

As with most other countries, China's rural populations are, on average, poorer than their urban counterparts and have less access to basic services. Even though China has made significant strides in reducing rural poverty to below 11% of the rural population, income inequity between urban and rural populations is growing with the average urban income more than three times higher than the average rural income (World Bank, 2012).

Rural populations also have less access to basic services:

- More than a third of people in rural China still do not have access to safe drinking water.
- Literacy rates are still three times higher in urban centers than they are in rural areas.
- Health care expenditure in urban areas is 3 times higher than in rural settings

With such a large rural population and clear and sustained inequities between urban and rural populations, there has always been a need for a clear and well-formulated approach to rural policy in China.

Since the mid 1950's China's approach to rural policy been developing and changed a number of times. Initially China's approach to rural policy was centrist and collectivist with separate approaches to development in urban and rural settings. Rural policy at that time was aimed primarily ensuring the collective ownership and use of land for agricultural production. The implementation of the *hoku* system also placed restrictions on the movement of rural people to urban centers in an effort to prevent mass migration into large towns and cities.

In the late 1970's China began a process of economic and governance reform that saw the "dismanteling" of the centrist and collectivist system and the relaxing of the *hoku* system. This meant that local authorities were given greater autonomy and control over policy, planning and implementation. It also meant that rural households were given greater control over land use as well as greater access to economic opportunities outside of agriculture.

Until the early 2000s the focus of rural policy was still very much agriculture with the locus of rural development on food production and the marketization of its

distribution and sale. But with greater demand for labour in a rapidly expanding industrial sector and widening inequities between urban and rural areas, the Chinese government sought to develop a more comprehensive approach to rural policy and development.

In 2004 the Chinese government introduced the New Socialist Countryside (NSC) as its “macro-policy” approach to rural development in China (Ahlers and Schubert, 2010: 36). The NSC is a macro-policy in that it is a broad approach that provides guidelines for formulation and implementation of sector specific rural policy but delegates implementation to the local level (ibid). Importantly, the NSC was developed based on concerns that China’s rapid economic development was widening the economic and social gap between urban and rural populations (OECD, 2009).

The NSC is fairly comprehensive in its approach and targets four broad policy areas for attention, including:

1. Agriculture—policy is aimed at modernizing agriculture and increasing production and output
2. Land use—policy that is aimed at protecting land tenure rights for rural residents’
3. Rural income—policies aimed at ensuring that average income in rural areas is doubled between 2008 and 2020
4. Public service delivery—policies that improve and increase access to infrastructure, health care, social security, education, training and financial services

The NSC itself does not propose any new projects but rather is implemented as a process of coordinating, enhancing and re-prioritizing existing rural policy at the local level (ibid). In this regard the NSC was a political commitment to ensuring a more coordinated and focused approach to rural development where local governments were now required to ensure that interdepartmental integration on all rural policy development and implementation was non-negotiable.

So while the NSC set the broad agenda for rural policy and its priority areas, local governments are required to develop the details of these rural policy priorities based on their local contexts and development needs (ibid).

The practical effects of this commitment were demonstrated fairly early on by substantial increases in total government expenditure in rural areas. According to OECD figures, between 2004 and 2007 expenditure in rural areas doubled in nominal terms, which represented a real increase of 75% in real terms. While significant portion of this increase (55%) went to agricultural policy measures, expenditure on rural infrastructure and social development have also seen substantial increases (OECD, 2009: 108).

A significant criticism of China’s approach is that there is no coordinating agency that has the responsibility of overseeing the integration of NSC policies across levels of government and sectors (ibid).

Even though China's National Development and Reform Commission, and the Ministries of Finance and Agriculture take a lead in the work of integrating and coordinating key NSC policy, there are more than a dozen departments at the National level alone that are involved in NSC processes.

This institutional complexity is then mirrored down through five-layers of administration down to the local level where each ministry or government agency has its own entities involved in implementation (OECD, 2009: 113).

The absence of a coordinating agency also means that it has been difficult to overcome conflicting objectives and priorities between the various ministries and agencies. In an attempt to facilitate greater coordination an annual Central Conference on Rural Work that sets out priorities and is aimed at ensuring these are included in rural policy work and planning.

Questions have also been raised around progress made in entrenching local autonomy in planning and implementation of rural initiatives. Even though the aim of the NSC has been greater local control, the central government still has a great deal of control over the allocation of resources. Through earmarked allocations for specific projects and programmes, which often exceed 50% of the expenditure in poor rural localities, higher levels of government maintain control over the development and implementation of rural policy (ibid).

4. South Africa's approach to rural policy

Apartheid policies of separate development and the creation of so-called homelands based on artificial boundaries of race and ethnicity has left deep rifts in South Africa's socioeconomic and spatial landscapes that persist nearly twenty years into democracy. South Africa continues to be divided along lines of race and class with whites, on average, continuing to enjoy higher incomes, greater economic opportunities, and better access to good quality education and healthcare than other historically disadvantaged 'race groups'. While the shape of these inequities are slowly starting to shift in the country's urban centres, albeit far too slowly, little has changed for South Africa's rural populations.

By 2013, more than 38% of South Africa's population reside in rural areas (World Bank, 2012). This rural population is not spread evenly across the country and there are five Provinces where more than half of the population is rural: Limpopo (88%), Mpumalanga (59%), Eastern Cape (58%), North West (55%) and KwaZulu-Natal (53%) (STATSSA, 2009)

While this number is steadily on the decline, largely due to urbanisation, the rate at which this is happening is difficult to determine due to the effects of circular migration with many internal migrants returning to rural areas to retire or when they are too old or too sick to work. What is clear though is that rural areas remain underdeveloped and impoverished. Insufficient attention has been paid within the social, economic and development sectors to implementing strategies that overcome historical neglect in ways that will deal with high levels of deprivation in rural areas.

According to the District Health Barometer (2011), the ten most deprived districts (quintile 1) in South Africa are all rural while the ten least deprived (quintile 5) are all urban. This means that these rural districts have the lowest levels of access to piped water, adequate sanitation, electricity, education, healthcare and the highest levels of unemployment and dependency ratios.

4.1 Rural policy approach: 1994-2000

Apartheid policies of separate development and the formation of 'homelands', largely by design, resulted in wholesale neglect and underdevelopment of rural areas. It was therefore essential that at the dawn of democracy in 1994 rural development should become a core component of government reforms and policies aimed at redress, equity and development.

In 1994 South Africa's government of national unity introduced the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) as its socioeconomic policy framework. The aim of the RDP was to both promote economic development and foster redress through the redistribution of land and addressing shortfalls in social services such as housing, social welfare, health and education. The RDP depicted a strong commitment to rural development with each component of the programme identifying rural redress and development as key indicators of success.

In 1995 the government published the National Rural Development Strategy (NRDS) as its policy strategy aimed at giving substance to key rural issues identified in the RDP and strategies to overcome them. The NRDS was published as a 'green paper' that outlined the government's approach to rural development and to provide an opportunity for consultation and comment.

With the closure of the RDP office in 1996 the revision of the RDS was handed to the Department of Land Affairs (DLA) for finalization. In 1997 the DLA published the Rural Development Framework (RDF) after consultation and comment from stakeholders. The RDF was ostensibly a more comprehensive rural strategy than the NRDS in that it extended beyond economic redress and development and more clearly articulated approaches to infrastructure development and social service provision. The framework also spoke about greater integration and coordination between sectors, although it did not provide clear guidance on how this should be done.

The RDF focused on 5 core policy areas that together would ensure a comprehensive and sustainable approach. These included:

1. **Building local democracy and development-** the focus here was on the development and capacitation of local structures (government, community and private sector) to influence and develop rural development strategies
2. **Local Economic Development and livelihoods-** the focus here was on developing policy and strategies around a more comprehensive rural economic development approach that included the traditional rural economy (agriculture and tourism) as well as developing alternatives such

- as the promotion of Small, Medium and Micro enterprises
3. **Rural infrastructure development-** this area sought to develop policy around addressing infrastructure backlogs (roads, water, sanitation, energy and housing) that were seen as obstacles to other areas of development.
 4. **Social sustainability-** the purpose of this area was to ensure that the governments approach to rural development included issues such as rural health, education, social welfare and access to basic rights.
 5. **Building capacity to plan and implement-** the purpose of this area sought to develop strategies that would ensure that policy makers and administrators were provided with the training and support to develop plans and programmes that would result in the implantation of the framework

The RDF was, however, developed at a time when the government's macroeconomic strategy was being liberalized through the development of the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy. GEAR was detrimental to the development and implementation of rural policy. Its focus on cost containment (austerity for the purpose of slashing the budget deficit), a market driven economy, and urban areas as the locus of development resulted in rural areas being treated as reservoirs for labour in urban areas rather than important sites for development in their own right (Perret, 2002).

This urban bias meant that in reality the focus of rural development at this time was largely on poverty alleviation rather than any coordinated and comprehensive strategy to develop rural areas and communities.

Government's failure to prioritize rural development at the time was clearly articulated by the fact that RDF, as the government's comprehensive rural development policy, was never given any legal status and there was no binding obligations to deliver on any of its components. Rural development

4.2 1999-2009

During his State of the Nation Address in 1999, former president Thabo Mbeki announced that a new strategy on rural development would be introduced based on the following key elements:

- Integration: The co-ordination of efforts at local government level through Integrated Development Plans (IDPs).
- Rural development: Multi-dimensional, including an improvement in the provision of services and enhanced local economic growth.
- Sustainability: This contributes to local growth and features local participation and ownership.
- The existence of growth dynamics in rural areas.
- The existence of rural safety nets as an integral part of the ISRDS (The Presidency,2000).

Responsibility for the development of this strategy was handed to the Department of Provincial and Local Government (DPLG). In 2001 the DPLG launched the Integrated Sustainable Rural Development Programme (ISRDP). The programme

was established with six primary objectives:

- **Co-ordination and integration:** To achieve integrated service delivery through co-coordinated planning, resource allocation and implementation by government and other stakeholders.
- **Efficient and effective local government:** To strengthen the capacities of local government entities so as to facilitate the inputs of various stakeholders in order to deliver integrated services responsive to community priorities.
- **Participation and empowerment:** To enhance the capacities of communities to articulate their priorities and participate in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of their Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) and the ISRDP.
- **Sustainable economic growth:** All ISRDP nodes achieve economic growth (including job and income creation and increased productivity) and equity, based on redistribution and empowerment.
- **Sustainable social development:** Supporting social change that promotes the well-being and access to social services of rural communities.
- **Environmental sustainability:** Access and benefit sharing occurs in ISRDP nodes where programmes are implemented that protect, conserve and ensure sustainable use of natural resources.

Strictly speaking the ISRDP remained a strategy rather than a stand-alone programme (Oliver *et al.*, 2010). It was unfunded, had no legal status, and was aimed at coordinating, integrating and supporting existing rural development policy and interventions.

The ISRDP was aimed at ensuring that the focus of rural development took place at the local level rather than as a top-down process where the national and provincial governments set the agenda. To achieve this the programme focused on the country's 15 poorest rural districts as nodes of development. The Integrated Development Plans (IDP) of each of these districts were then to form the basis of the integrated approach with participating government departments providing input, project support and budget to activities (PSC, 2010).

It was envisioned that the ISRDP's implementation framework would comprise of the following broad areas:

- Co-ordinating delivery of all elements of rural development from all sectors
- Designing institutional arrangements that ensure the local sphere drives development and providing capacity building as required
- Stakeholder mobilisation to develop partnerships, source expertise and resources and help attain sustainability
- Effective knowledge management
- Long-range planning to embed the ISRDP throughout rural South Africa
- Political and technical championship at local, provincial and national levels
- Budget alignment across the three spheres
- Medium Term Strategic Framework ensures that policy drives budgetary

decisions and implementation is a focal point for all spheres to assess their ISRDP-related performance

On paper the ISRDP was an improvement on previous rural development and rural policy initiatives in that it sought to shift control of the processes to the local level by integrating national and provincial sectoral planning and, importantly, budgeting into the IDP process within rural districts and not the coordination of the IDP process with a multitude of higher level sectoral processes.

In practice the ISRDP failed to deliver on its promise because of a number of shortcomings in structure and implementation. Oliver *et al* (2010) argue that from the start the programme was beset by delays due to the fact that implementation started at the same time as municipal boundaries were being reorganized. This meant that the first two years of the programme were spent developing local capacity rather than implementation.

Even though relevant sectoral departments had committed to co-ordinated planning there was no legal obligation placed on sectoral departments to do so (Madaka, 2009).

This problem was then compounded by the fact that local government did not have the authority or capacity to drive integration and coordination with provincial and national sectoral departments (PSC, 2010). This lack of authority and power in their relationships with the provincial and national spheres meant that the project of locally led development failed.

The ISRDP has also been criticized for being too broad and lacking in concrete and clearly defined activities. This resulted in other more concrete provincial and sectoral strategies being favoured because there was more clarity on what actually needed to be done in practice (PSC, 2010)

The ISRDP also failed to consider rural policy initiatives in provinces such as the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal, which had developed their own rural development strategies. This resulted in the processes operating in parallel rather than being integrated in implementation (Madaka, 2009)

Overall, despite its promise, the ISRDP has failed for many of the same reasons earlier rural policy initiatives had been ineffective. It was a rural development strategy rather than a programme and lacked clarity on what should be done. It also lacked legal standing so there was no obligation on the part of any stakeholders, particularly sectoral departments to integrate and coordinate their activities with those of local government.

4.3 2009-present

During its 52nd National Conference the ANC recommitted itself to rural development and with decent work and sustainable livelihoods, education, health, agrarian change and land reform identified it as one of its top five priorities.

After South Africa's general elections in 2009 there were promising signs that, at

the institutional level, rural policy and rural development would finally receive the attention it deserves. As part of a process of reorganizing government departments to better reflect its priorities, the president established the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform (DRDLR) to lead on the revitalization of policy, programmes and projects related to the development and service delivery within rural areas.

Shortly after it was established the DRDLR developed and launched the Comprehensive Rural Development Programme (CRDP). As with the ISRDP the CRDP is not a programme strictly speaking and is rather a rural policy strategy which is embodied in the CRDP Framework. The difference though is that the responsibility for overseeing and facilitating the implementation of the CRDP falls to the DRDLR.

The CRDP is, in many respects, actually fairly regressive in its approach to rural development policy. In the CRDP Framework rural development is described as being,

“...about enabling rural people to take control of their destiny, thereby dealing effectively with rural poverty through the optimal use and management of natural resources. It is a participatory process through which rural people learn over time, through their own experiences and initiatives, how to adapt their indigenous knowledge to a changing world” (p. 4)

Rather than establishing the basis for wholesale changes to how rural development and service provision is dealt with in government processes across all sectors, the policy actually takes a narrow approach that focuses on development projects largely aimed at poverty alleviation through small scale infrastructure development and economic activity based on the better use of natural resources through farming and tourism.

One of the most striking features of the CRDP is that there is no clear strategy to ensure that rural development and service provision is prioritized across all government sectors and agencies at all three levels. While the CRDP Framework does make mention of critical stakeholders, which includes various sectoral departments within both national and provincial government, like social development, health, education and housing they are framed as stakeholders in the implementation of small scale projects in specific localities.

Again, while these projects are important they do not—perhaps with the exception of land reform processes—result in the kind of structural transformation so necessary to overcome historical neglect and inequities that keep rural communities in poverty.

Like all its predecessors, the CRDP has no legal status and there are no legally binding obligations placed on stakeholders to coordinate with the work of the DRDLR. While the CRDP framework makes reference to the Intergovernmental Relations Framework Act (13 of 2005) as the legislative basis for the DRDLR's responsibility to coordinate the implementation of the programme, this legislation is not binding on government departments or agencies to coordinate or integrate the

CRDP into their own strategic planning, budgets or in the implementation of their own programmes.

In the absence of legal status there is little chance that a more comprehensive rural policy strategy will be developed or implemented in the near future. The DRDLR itself has little authority or political clout to drive a broad based rural development and compared to departments such as education, health and finance.

The lack of priority given to rural development is clearly illustrated by the fact that the budget for the CRDP for the 2013/14 is only R1.1 billion or 12% of the DRDLR total budget for the year. This budget is then spread across a range of small-scale development projects relating to:

- Recapitalization and development support provided to land reform beneficiaries
- Profiled rural households enabled to improve their food security by 2014
- Socio-economic infrastructure facilitated to improve access to services
- Skills development and sustainable economic opportunities created by 2014 (DRDLR, 2013)

4.4 Rural Policy and the National Development Plan (NDP)

The NDP was published in 2011 as the government's multi sector strategy to "eliminate poverty and reduce inequality by 2030" (NDP, 2011: 13). It outlines the government's broad political and ideological approaches to a broad set of areas including:

- Economic development and employment;
- Environmental sustainability;
- Transforming human settlements;
- Education and training;
- Health care;
- Social protection;
- Safety and security; and
- An inclusive rural economy

A cursory reading of the NDP would suggest, as with previous macro-policies such as the RDP and GEAR, that rural people and rural development are central to all aspects of this strategy. Not only does the plan highlight rural poverty and neglect it alludes to a comprehensive multisectoral strategy in developing rural policy. For example the plan states that:

"South Africa's rural communities should have greater opportunities to participate fully in the economic, social and political life of the country, supported by good-quality education, health care, transport and other basic services." (NDP, 2011: 44)

The Chapter on "Integrated and Inclusive Rural Economy", does seem to open the door to a more comprehensive approach than we have seen in the past in that it

identifies both social sector interventions and intergovernmental relations as key aspects of an effective rural development strategy and extends past just agriculture and land reform as components of rural development

In reality though the NDP mirrors earlier rural strategies in that its focus on rural areas and communities stops short of demanding a clearly formulated and coordinated multisectoral approach to rural policy making that ensures that every aspect of the work of government is 'rural-proofed'.

There is no mention of strategies or institutions that will ensure all government policy meaningfully addresses the rural context or any legal duty that would ensure all policy making properly addresses the issues of rurality and urban/rural equity.

There is nothing to compel sectoral departments such as education, health, social development, finance or economic development to develop policy that actually deal with the realities of rural areas and not just treat them like small-impooverished urban settings.

5. Conclusion: Taking lessons for South Africa from the international example

In many respects South Africa is in the same position today as many of the countries included in this review were before the mid 1990's and pre-OECD push for a new rural paradigm. Rural areas and populations remain marginalised and suffer from levels of deprivation that are an antithesis to the fundamental Constitutional principles of equality, justice and the realisation of basic rights.

The progressive realisation of rights for rural populations demands comprehensive and systemic changes to how rural development and service delivery are approached in policy development and implementation across all sectors. As international examples have shown, it is not simply a matter of developing a rural policy or strategy and much more needs to be done to ensure that rural issues are an essential part of the core of all social and economic policies.

Currently, South Africa's approach to rural development and service delivery is uncoordinated and pushed to the periphery within service delivery departments. The countries rural strategy has traditionally been, and still is, tucked-away in policy documents such as the NRDS, ISRDP, CRDP, and now as a stand-alone chapter in the NDP.

While these strategies have to varying degrees provided a good framework for a comprehensive multisectoral approach to rural policy, there has not been sufficient buy-in from government departments and resources for implementation have been wholly inadequate.

This approach has clearly not worked and has been handed to under-resourced departments such as Provincial and Local Government and Land reform and Rural Development, which have little say, if any, over the work of large social and economic sector departments like Education, Health and the Treasury.

But as the international examples discussed earlier demonstrate, with political will there are reforms that can be made that would result in rural needs and issues being systematically included in all aspects of policy and government. Listed below are the key structural and process reforms necessary in achieving this:

- The formation of a stand-alone statutory body that is mandated to coordinate and oversee the development/revision of policy and its implementation that caters for the needs of rural communities and contexts. This includes the coordination of partnerships between implementing agencies and departments to ensure greater efficiency and impact
- A rural policy strategy that legally requires that all social and economic policy under development/review be rural-proofed, i.e. policies are examined objectively to determine if they have a different impact in rural areas to urban areas and that adjustments are made to account for rural need and contextual factors
- The development of guidelines and toolkits that should be used by policymakers to rural-proof policy
- The mainstreaming of rural policy into sector specific policy rather than the development of stand-alone sectoral rural policies, i.e. rural issues should be dealt with equitably in all policy and not as a stand alone issue
- The development of a clear set of overarching rural indicators and targets against which performance will be measured
- Policy development and implementation should be a bottom-up process with local level and contextual issues and priorities informing processes at intermediate and national levels
- Budgets must be rural-proofed and clearly articulate how much money is allocated to policy priorities and interventions. This should not involve a separate rural budget, but rather, the integration of rural factors into all government budgets

For South Africa this would necessitate substantive reforms that could require amongst other things:

- Making rural-proofing a legal requirement in all social and economic policy development processes
- The establishment of a statutory body with representation from all social sector, economic and infrastructure departments that will coordinate and oversee the development of a comprehensive rural policy strategy
- This rural strategy should be focused on the mainstreaming of rural into all policies and not the development of stand-alone rural policies within each sector
- The government must develop a clear set of rural indicators and targets against which performance will be measured
- The government should develop guidelines and toolkits that will be used by government departments to rural-proof all policy under development/revision
- The development and implementation of policies should be a bottom up process with local government and rural districts taking responsibility for

- the development of priorities
- All government budgets should be developed in a way that clearly demonstrates what is being allocated to rural services and priorities. These budgets should promote equity between urban and rural districts

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