



Project “The new face of rural poverty in Brazil: transformations, profile and public policy challenges”

CARLOS MIRANDA, BRENO TIBURCIO¹

Summary

The objective of the project was to formulate proposed policies for combating rural poverty in Brazil, taking into consideration the structural changes that have taken place in the economy and society of Brazil, and their impact on the most vulnerable sectors of the rural population. As a basis for formulating the proposals, studies were conducted in nine thematic areas, in two stages. The first was concluded in December 2010 with the Fifth International Forum: territorial development strategies aimed at combating poverty, and the second in June 2011.

¹ Rural development specialists, IICA Brazil, carlos.miranda@ica.int and breno.tiburcio@ica.int

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INTRODUCTION

This project was implemented by the IICA Office in Brazil, together with the Ministries of Agricultural Development, Social Development and Education, the Institute for Applied Economic Research and the National Council on Sustainable Rural Development, and received academic support from the Economics Institute of the Campinas State University, the Federal University of Uberlandia and the Federal Rural University of Rio de Janeiro. This project was aimed at formulating proposed policies for combating rural poverty in Brazil which take into account the specific nature and the potential of different segments of the rural population who are poor, adopting an approach more suited to actions intended to involve more people in production activities.

THE CURRENT CONTEXT OF RURAL POVERTY IN BRAZIL

The economy and society of Brazil have undergone important structural transformations over the last two decades, which include changes in institutions in general, in the production structure, in the way technology is organized and in demographics, as well as in the definition and redefinition of spaces and territories, as defined naturally and socially. In this process, the nature and meaning of rural life have changed as a result of increased economic, geographic and cultural interaction between rural and urban areas.

In addition, the expansion of transportation infrastructure has furthered these transformations and has been conducive to population movements and the increased flow of information throughout Brazil.

The economy and society of Brazil have undergone important structural transformations over the last two decades.

Public social policies aimed at generating income have enabled millions of people from rural areas to join the domestic market, which for long had been the role of the urban sector. Policies on health, electrification and education have also had an important impact on the living conditions of the rural population.

The growth of small cities with large rural populations has been one result of the closer interaction between rural and urban areas, as well as the relations established between them, which have had important impacts on the living and working conditions and way of life of the rural population.

These transformations and their consequences in rural areas point to the need to gain a greater understanding of the magnitude and nature of the changes related

to rural poverty, considering that in Brazil a large proportion of the rural population is poor. Therefore, the project called for a number of studies to be conducted and policies proposed, based on the following explicit hypotheses:

- Recent analyses reveal a decline in both poverty levels and in economic inequality in the countryside. In addition to this reduction, everything seems to indicate that the face of rural poverty is changing, as is the way in which it spreads. Given the social importance of these changes, more information is needed on the transformation processes underway in rural areas, which are essential to consolidating existing policies and formulating new ones capable of reinforcing the recent positive trend in social transformation in the countryside.
- The regional and socio-cultural diversity of the rural milieu, specifically traditional communities (indigenous, afro-descendants, forest tribes, fisherfolk, artisans, etc.) must be considered. In this context of diversity, the families of salaried rural workers who fall below the poverty line must be taken into account. It is also important to study the socioeconomic impacts on the populations that surround the territories, following the imple-



mentation of large-scale governmental and private initiatives.

- Historically, the rural milieu has been home to the greatest number and percentage of poor persons. This situation changed in the 1990s when the number of poor living in cities, especially the large ones, began to outnumber the poor in rural areas. The most recent studies reveal a significant reduction in poverty overall; however, poverty in rural areas has not been measured. The availability of statistics would be helpful in determining whether or not it will be possible to overcome extreme poverty in the not too distant future, but this will depend on the continuation and sound management of social policies.

THE PROJECT VIS-À-VIS PUBLIC POLICIES

Regardless of the controversy surrounding the methodologies used to define urban and rural areas and the criteria used to measure poverty in Brazil, the analysis of the “new rural poverty in Brazil” is justified because:

- a. the reduction in poverty varies from urban to rural to peri-urban areas;
- b. the profile of poverty has also undergone profound changes in recent decades, and varies between spaces and territories;
- c. the very meaning of poverty has changed radically, which

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- a. has important consequences for public policies;
- b. the spread of rural poverty had also undergone profound changes that have affected policies and the development of rural and urban areas;
- c. the uprooting of poverty will depend even more on sustained growth, resulting from the strengthening of the rural labor market and the continuation of the income distribution processes; and
- d. the continuation of the process will depend not only on the formulation and sound management of specific public policies aimed at combating poverty, but also of other social and economic policies.

Until recently, environment and rural poverty were closely associated with agriculture. People associated the rural poor mostly with landless, underemployed and underpaid rural workers, and with small-scale rural farmers with no access to the factors of production required to generate the income needed to provide

their families with an acceptable standard of living. Poverty was identified, measured and analyzed in terms of the lack of sufficient income. Nonetheless, poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon that encompasses more than one specific need. In this regard, in defining poverty it is necessary to consider many factors that affect not only the present living conditions of a people, but also their future.

According to Sen (2011): “Poverty is the inability to pursue personal goals and or, simply, to develop as a human being while having the same opportunities available to others in the same society, and goes beyond the lack of material goods or human capacity...”

The evolution of information systems in Brazil has made it possible to analyze more thoroughly the many dimensions of poverty, as it relates to income or living conditions. Even though many studies have been conducted on the subject, reflection on the nature, dynamics and sense of rural poverty is still deficient. This has important implications for public policies, which in large part still reflect the “agrarian vision” of rural poverty and are implemented with little coordination between sectors. An example is the disconnect between the phenomenon of economic policies and education, which has yet to be incorporated or accepted fully as a means of eradicating the “hereditary poverty” (or vicious cycle of poverty) in Brazil and Latin America in general. This connection could become an instrument for intervening actively in the process of reducing poverty.

In sum, this possible lack of reflection on contemporary rural poverty is due, in part, to the increased interest in topics related to the urban environment, which are of greater concern to society and receive more coverage in the media. Even though there is often some point of convergence between urban problems and the situation of the population in rural areas, such as security or unemployment in the big cities, this has not been translated into lines of research and permanent policies aimed at understanding the effective relations between urban and rural areas, the factors that lead to the duplication of rural problems in the urban milieu and, much less, policies intended to stop negative flows of resources and intervene in their causes and forces.

DIMENSIONS OF THE PROJECT

The project focused on three principal dimensions:

- Methodological dimension. The principal methodologies used to conceptualize and measure rural poverty in Brazil were analyzed. This analysis of methodologies focused on: a) the conceptualization of rural poverty and the parameters used to qualify and quantify it; and b) the definition of what is rural in the current context, taking into account both the availability of information and socio-economic dynamics, which determine and re-define social life in territories.
- Empirical dimension. Studies were conducted to analyze the different dimen-





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sions of rural poverty in Brazil. The basic questions were: How has poverty changed? Has the nature of rural poverty changed in such a way recently that it could be considered a “new” or “different” poverty? What are the faces of poverty today? How do these faces manifest themselves in the different regions?

- Political dimension. This dimension is intended to:
 - a) determine whether current public policies aimed

at the rural poor are adequate and sufficient; and b) determine the political and institutional implications of efforts to adjust and add policies; in other words, to what extent is it necessary to establish differentiated policies for the rural poor and what institutional framework is required? How to coordinate the actions of the different institutions involved in combating all aspects of poverty?

Thematic focuses of the proposed policies for combating rural poverty in Brazil:

- a. Thoughts on the nature and limits of what is rural in contemporary Brazilian society, with a view to developing methodologies for identifying and measuring rural poverty.
- b. Theoretical and conceptual analysis of the dynamics of rural poverty in Brazil.
- c. Critical look at the principal methodologies used to measure poverty in Brazil and Latin America.
- d. Reviews of the latest developments in rural poverty in Brazil.
- e. Analysis of the regional dimensions of rural poverty, based on specific characteristics of the rural milieu in the regions, and sociocultural and working relations in each region.
- f. Theoretical-conceptual analysis of the meaning and con-

tent of poverty in contemporary Brazilian society.

- g. Analysis of the determining factors of rural poverty in Brazil.
- h. Analysis of current social development and poverty alleviation policies, their dynamic and how they relate to the sectoral policies.
- i. Studies to evaluate socio-economic impacts on populations surrounding the territories when large projects are implemented by the government and the private sector.

CURRENT STATE OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROJECT

The project was designed to be carried out in two stages:

- The first stage concluded in December 2010 with the Fifth International Forum:

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territorial development strategies aimed at combating poverty, the objective of which was to analyze the evolution and the current state of rural poverty and to gather technical and institutional information with a view to developing public policies for addressing the problem in Brazil. The agenda of the forum addressed: a) strategies for linking policies aimed at combating poverty and social inequality; b) mechanisms and instruments to

support poverty alleviation policies; and c) requirements for the creation of capacities and institutional arrangements for the participation and development of rural families and their organizations.

- The second stage concluded during the second half of 2011, and focused on the policy instruments for combating poverty proposed in the different discussions and social management models.

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