



A Strategy to Deal with the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Opinion

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Territorial development is a multidimensional process, which based on the potential of rural territories promotes their social, economic and institutional transformation. Some authors such as Albuquerque, Vázquez and Boisier [1-4] conceive it as a process that supports the reactivation of the economic structure and energizes local society, whose objective is to promote economic growth and improve the living conditions of the population in a sustainable context.

For his part, Vázquez [3] affirms that all territories have a potential for development (economic, human, institutional and cultural resources). Each territory is characterized by a set of features that constitute the basis for the design of territorial development programs, among these are: a) the productive dynamics, b) the labor market, c) the capacity for innovation of the business fabric, d) the availability of infrastructure to support production, e) institutional development and, f) the culture and local identity.

Other authors such as Shjetman and Berdegú [5] define territorial development as a process of transformation of the productive and institutional structure of rural territories, whose objective is to reduce poverty levels. In this definition, the process is based on two key and interrelated aspects:

- The transformation of the productive structure, which induces the competitive and sustainable insertion of the territory in the national and international markets, from the introduction of innovations and ventures that contribute to the improvement of production systems, the increase of the levels of productivity and profitability, as well as with the diversification and the added value of the products. These aspects are key to poverty reduction,

as they promote the generation of new sources of employment and the improvement of rural income.

- Institutional development, which implies both consultation between local actors, as well as between them and external actors, to formulate development programs based on territorial potentialities.
- However, more recent studies such as that of Albuquerque and Pérez [6] warn that, in the academic community, there is no single definition of widely accepted the meaning of territorial development; the proposed conceptions have conceived it as a process that promotes an improvement of income, as well as of the conditions and quality of life of the rural population. All this, based on a set of strategies based on the participation of public and private actors who interact in the territory, as well as society in general.

In this sense, territorial development is configured as an appropriate approach for the analysis of the various dimensions that interrelate in the formation of rural territories (economic, social, institutional, environmental and cultural), whose characteristics provide the basis for revaluing the contributions of these territories in some fundamental issues, related to the supply of food that guarantee the food security of the population and environmental sustainability.

Under the described approach, the territory is conceived as a socio historical construction, formed by an institutional, political, social, economic, environmental, technological and cultural capital, which are based on the dimensions on which the processes of rural territorial development are structured. It includes social relations, market structures, forms of social regulation that determine the organization of

productive dynamics, the use of endogenous resources, the introduction of innovations, and technological development. Such elements provide relevant information for the design of these programs.

From this perspective, the territorial development approach broadens the bases for the analysis of the rural, in so far as it allows: a) to understand the dynamics of rural territories in an integral way considering all their dimensions; b) to explain the interrelations and chains that are manifested between the primary sector and the rest of the sectors of the economy, as a result of the flow of income and resources between urban centers and rural environments, and; c) to formulate policies that address in an integral way both the production, transformation, distribution and consumption of food, as well as the institutional, social and cultural aspects configured as a limitation to raise the quality of life of the population.

On the other hand, the COVID-19 health crisis, which subsequently transformed into an economic and social crisis, has demonstrated the role of agricultural activities in the development of rural territories. The pandemic, coupled with the risk of a huge food crisis, has revealed that “agriculture is an essential activity, because it produces essential goods”. Consequently, the above-mentioned activities should be the basis of territorial development programmers [7-9].

In this regard, it highlights that the rural territories have also been strongly impacted by the aforementioned crisis, whose effects have had an impact on the various dimensions of rural development and, in particular, on the activities of primary production and transformation to agro industrial, since they have generated closure of companies, decrease in the levels of production and productivity and dismissal of workers, among other aspects, which has had a negative impact on the social welfare of the rural population.

In this sense, a broad and in-depth reflection is imminent both in the academic sectors and in the institutions promoting rural development, in order to formulate the strategies that will base the reconstruction and rethinking of the role of rural territories in economic and social development with a perspective of sustainability.

In general, these strategies should be oriented towards the reactivation of agricultural and agro-industrial activities, the protection of existing jobs, support the processes of

agro-industrial transformation through innovation and the development of technologies with low environmental impact, investment in the training of human resources and the promotion of rural enterprises. In addition, during the immediate recovery process, it is necessary to implement some targeted programs to guarantee food security, basic services and a fair level of income for the most vulnerable sectors of the population.

Finally, the arguments presented demonstrate the importance of strengthening rural development through the implementation of public policies with a territorial focus. Allthis, in order to create new areas of action and concertation between public and private actors, to promote sustainable rural development with the capacity to respond to the needs of society in general.

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