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Rural Transformation, Rural Opportunity Space and Food System Index: an Age- and Gender-differentiated Synthesis

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Abstract

Agricultural food systems include multiple dimensions that vary along several dimensions, including levels of rural and structural transformation and urbanisation, creating different opportunities across and within countries. Identifying these differences is pivotal to address challenges and explore opportunities to address food insecurity, increase systems resilience and improve livelihoods. Especially identifying opportunities for women and youth hold the potential to address some of the biggest global challenges and plays a key role in reaching the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). We use a dataset of 85 low and middle-income countries and two interlinked typologies created by the Rural development Report (RDR) 2019 to assess the global food system with a focus on spatial distributions of rural youth and their opportunities. The country typology assesses global population by grouping countries by the level of rural and structural transformation (RT-ST); the second, the spatial typology places the world's population on a rural opportunity space (ROS) defined by the agricultural production and commercialisation potential of the spaces they live in. We overlay these typologies with the Food Systems Index (FSI), developed by the Wageningen University and Research, which is based on six dimensions, to highlight major differences in food systems organisation and performance. By combining these existing but delinked frameworks for studying rural transformation and food systems we: (i) identify whether and how the country typology correlates with the FSI; (ii) assess the distribution of world population by gender and age across various combinations of transformation (ST-RT), food systems (FSI) and the ROS; (iii) investigate trends and correlations in a descriptive analysis. The cross-correlations of the FSI and with the rurality/urbanicity of each country and the spaces within can provide insights to guide investments towards the SDGs. Although this type of analysis cannot establish causality, rigorous descriptive analysis of patterns in the FSI, rural and structural transformation as well as population distributions over the ROS can help tailor policies and design projects to ensure inclusive food systems transitions during rural transformation.

Keywords: Food system index, gender, rural opportunity space, rural transformation, youth

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