



Concept Note 3

Rural Development as a Guarantee of a Thriving Territory

GOAL

This session will examine how strengthening rural development is essential for building balanced, sustainable, and inclusive territories. Anchored in ORU Fogar’s long-standing commitment to rural revitalization and food sovereignty—as highlighted in the V Zero Hunger Summit—this discussion aims to place rural areas at the heart of territorial development strategies. Participants will explore how regional governments can transform rural spaces into dynamic engines of prosperity and resilience, reversing decades of neglect and addressing emerging global challenges.

CONCEPTUALISATION

In 2021, UN Secretary-General António Guterres stated at the Food Systems Summit that “future food security depends on rural prosperity.” This affirmation resonates with ORU Fogar’s consistent advocacy to revalue rural areas as fundamental pillars of regional balance, food sovereignty, and climate resilience. However, rural territories continue to be sidelined in global and national development strategies—frequently seen only through the lens of agriculture or resource extraction, rather than as dynamic, multidimensional spaces of opportunity and innovation.

Today, rural territories face multiple, interlinked crises. Demographic decline, youth exodus, ageing populations, and a lack of basic services have transformed large swathes of countryside into what some have called “empty territories.” Simultaneously, rural areas are disproportionately vulnerable to climate shocks, biodiversity loss, and volatile food systems. Yet these same areas hold untapped potential: as drivers of ecological transformation, as guardians of traditional knowledge, and as sites for inclusive, sustainable economic development.

Food insecurity has become increasingly acute in rural communities, with the FAO reporting that rural populations are more severely affected than urban ones. Ironically, many of the communities producing the world’s food suffer from malnutrition and precarious livelihoods. The industrialization and globalization of agriculture have reduced the autonomy of small producers and increased dependency on volatile global markets. In response, ORU Fogar has championed food sovereignty as a critical framework—emphasizing local control over food systems, protection of small farmers,



support for agroecological methods, and revitalization of local value chains.

Crucially, rural development must be seen not only as an economic issue but also as a matter of territorial justice and democratic participation. Local and regional governments (LRGs), given their proximity to rural populations, are uniquely positioned to implement tailored and participatory strategies. These include investing in digital infrastructure, improving education and healthcare, supporting young people and women in entrepreneurship, and ensuring intergenerational renewal in farming and land stewardship.

The green and digital transitions also present significant opportunities for rural revitalization. With proper investment, rural areas can lead the way in renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, circular economy practices, and ecosystem restoration. But this requires overcoming chronic underinvestment, fragmented governance, and the lack of fiscal and administrative capacity at the subnational level.

A coherent rural development strategy must integrate multi-level governance, align national frameworks with local realities, and promote cross-sectoral partnerships. Rural revitalization cannot be left to market forces alone; it requires strong public institutions, equitable policies, and social innovation.

This session builds upon ORU Fogar's work during the Zero Hunger Summit and our publication *Rural Development as a Guarantee of a Prosperous Territory*, and will serve as a platform to share experiences, identify enabling conditions, and promote collaborative action for truly thriving rural territories.

QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS

- How can rural development strategies effectively reverse rural exodus and demographic decline?
- What are the infrastructure and service investments required to create thriving rural territories?
- How can rural areas generate value and opportunities that match or exceed the appeal of urban centers?
- What roles do regional governments play in enhancing rural resilience, especially in the context of food sovereignty and climate adaptation?
- What inter-regional cooperation mechanisms can help disseminate successful models of rural revitalization?