

ARDN WEBINAR 1.0 - INAUGURAL EDITION

Adapting Global Models for Rural Development: African Realities, Solutions, and Cross-Border Learning

Overview

The meeting opened with introductions and welcoming remarks for the inaugural webinar of the African Rural Development Network, which attracted about 200 registered participants and featured presentations from distinguished experts in rural development. The main speakers discussed various aspects of rural development in Africa, including the importance of adapting global models to local contexts, the role of extension systems in knowledge transfer, and the comparison of rural development approaches between the US and Africa. The session concluded with a panel discussion focusing on the need for context-specific solutions and the importance of repositioning rural development as an economic necessity rather than a charity issue, followed by an overview of the African Rural Development Network and its membership benefits.

Summary

African Rural Development Webinar Launch

The webinar began with the host, Damilola Olajubutu, introducing the inaugural webinar of the African Rural Development Network, welcoming the participants and emphasizing the importance of the discussion on rural development in Africa. The introduction highlighted the selected speaker and panelist lineup, with a focus on adapting global models to African realities.

Sustainable Development Approaches Evolution

Professor Janice Olawoye, a distinguished Rural Development Consultant and retired Professor of Rural Sociology, was introduced and celebrated for her pioneering contributions to Rural Development Scholarship and practice in Africa. The meeting then transitioned to Professor Janice's inaugural address, in which she presented key factors

for actualizing rural development in Africa, with a focus on gender relations, social inclusion, and sustainable rural livelihoods.

Prof. Olawoye discussed the evolution of development approaches, highlighting a shift from economic growth-focused models to sustainable development that considers social, environmental, and economic factors. She emphasized the importance of understanding locality-specific differences and avoiding common errors such as overgeneralization and assuming one-size-fits-all solutions. Prof. Olawoye also stressed the need for social inclusion in developmental efforts and the importance of considering both tangible and intangible costs and benefits of interventions.

Rural Community Development Knowledge Transfer

Dr. Marina Denny, Associate Vice Provost for Engagement at Oregon State University, USA, delivered a presentation on extension systems and knowledge transfer in rural community development. She shared her journey in Cooperative Extension, emphasizing the importance of reciprocal and bi-directional knowledge transfer. Dr. Denny introduced a public engagement framework that prioritizes understanding community needs, assets, and concerns before implementing development interventions. She highlighted the need for authentic community engagement, adaptive pedagogy, and inclusive instruction to effectively support rural communities.

Rural Economic Development Strategies

Dr. Denny discussed the role of Cooperative Extension in rural economic development, highlighting their focus on workforce skills, entrepreneurship, and broadband access. She emphasized the importance of community-based solutions and building capacity in rural areas. Dr. Denny also touched on the cultural characteristics of rural communities and the challenges of innovation adoption.

The session concluded with Ayodeji Oladimeji introducing the next speaker, Damilola Olajubutu, a rural development expert with extensive experience in policy and practice.

Rural Development Models: US-Africa Insights

Damilola Olajubutu's presentation focused on comparing rural development models between the US and Africa, highlighting successful strategies in the US that could be adapted for African contexts. She emphasized the importance of acknowledging current challenges in African rural communities while drawing lessons from global experiences.

Key recommendations included leveraging technology for leapfrogging development, establishing proper coordination mechanisms between government agencies, implementing rural inclusion policies, and fostering long-term commitments to rural development initiatives. The discussion also stressed the need for corruption-free governance and the active participation of communities in advocating for their development.

Rural Africa's Development Pathways

The panel discussions focused on rural development in Africa, with Omowumi Oludayo introducing the panelists. The panel includes Professor Olushola Fadairo, Jeremie Bouaffo, Dr. Theophilus Nkasa, and Bendjedid Rachad Sanoussi, each with expertise in sustainable rural development, local governance, and community development. The panelists shared their insights on the significance of rural areas, the challenges of rural-urban migration, and the need for inclusive development policies.

Adapting Development for Rural Contexts

The panel discussion focused on the importance of adapting rather than adopting development approaches to suit different contexts, particularly in rural areas. Professor Fadairo emphasized the need for systems thinking and context-specific solutions, while Bendjedid presented a mobile application using computer vision to help detect crop diseases in Benin. Dr. Theophilus highlighted the need for more extension officers in Ghana and addressed the disconnect between research and practice in agriculture. The panelists agreed that technology should be an enabler rather than a replacement for human expertise in rural development.

Rural Development: Economic Necessity

The panelists discussed the importance of repositioning rural development from charity to economic necessity in national policy discourse. Professor Fadairo emphasized that rural development is not a charity issue but a matter of necessity and rights, highlighting the interlinkages between rural and urban areas and the need for government and other stakeholders to invest in rural infrastructure and amenities. Dr. Nkansah advocated for a community-centered development approach, where local people take ownership and responsibility in their development processes. The panelists also discussed strategies for ensuring the sustainability of donor-funded rural development projects after donor

exit, with Professor Fadairo suggesting the need for a system thinking approach to address the interconnectedness of rural development issues.

Rural Development Through Community Empowerment

The panel discussed rural development strategies, with Dr. Nkansah advocating for cooperative structures to empower rural communities rather than providing handouts. Professor Fadairo confirmed that rural development is happening in Nigeria, citing examples like Akobo's transformation, though he noted challenges like corruption and inconsistent policies. The panel agreed that while integrated rural development is possible, it requires prioritization and community-driven action plans, with Dr. Nkansah emphasizing the importance of giving communities control over their development projects.

Rural Development Challenges and Solutions

The panel discussed unintended consequences of rural development projects, including a tragic stampede at a children's event and a road construction project that disrupted farmland. Bendjedid emphasized the importance of youth and women's involvement in project design, implementation, and evaluation, while Dr. Theophilus advocated for public-private partnerships as a policy change to enhance rural development in Ghana.

Damilola Olajubutu highlighted the importance of building Africa's rural future and encouraging participation through various channels. The session concluded with a brief overview of ARDN and the Rural Nurture Initiative (ARDN).

African Rural Development Network Overview

The conversation ended with a discussion about the African Rural Development Network (ARDN), led by Damilola Olajubutu, who explained its purpose as a community of practice connecting practitioners, researchers, policymakers, and community leaders dedicated to rural transformation in Africa. Damilola outlined various membership types and benefits, including access to webinars, discussion forums, a resource library, and discounted rates for events like the Rural Africa Development Conference (RADeC). She emphasized that while membership initially had no fee, financial contributions are now required to maintain the network's vibrancy, with different tiers of membership based on professional status and opportunities reserved for senior professionals. The conversation ended with an invitation for participants to join the network and spread awareness about its mission.