TRANSFORMATIVE SOCIAL COALITIONS AND INCLUSIVE RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Key Aspects of Territorial Development Series
This document is an overview of the research and capacity-building and policy-dialogue activities carried out within the context of the Rural Territorial Dynamics Program (Programa Dinamicas Territoriales Rurales, or DTR, in Spanish). The Program’s objective is to contribute to the design and implementation of public policies that encourage and support virtuous circles of economic growth, social inclusion and environmental sustainability in non-metropolitan areas of Latin America. It was coordinated by Rimisp and implemented in collaboration with 52 partner organizations in 11 Latin American countries. This initiative has received financial support from the International Development Research Center (IDRC, Canada), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the New Zealand Aid Programme.

Rimisp-Latin American Center for Rural Development is a non-profit organization operating since 1986. Its mission is to achieve rural development in the continent. Development is understood as strengthening the capabilities of rural social groups and as the expansion of the liberties of people in the region’s rural societies. Rimisp’s knowledge contribution supports institutional change, innovation and the strengthening of social actors, to revitalize and transform Latin American rural societies so they become more just and equitable.

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The presence of social coalitions in rural territories in Latin America is crucial for the establishment of local virtuous circles of economic growth, social inclusion and environmental sustainability. (Page. 2)

Over time, the development of social coalitions leads to the plans and impetus needed to propel territorial development in a new direction, enabling territories to escape a fate that is common in this region. Coalitions are key factors that help explain changes that occur in rural contexts strongly influenced by historical legacies and geography. These coalitions allow territories to escape the pressure of structures (economic, social and cultural) that determine development paths and prevent or hinder territories from achieving growth while reducing poverty and inequality.

A territorial coalition is a group of diverse actors engaged in activities that converge around territorial development over the medium to long term. (Page. 3)

Coalitions have a defined framework for action and are designed to bring about change in social dynamics; these characteristics distinguish them from other forms of collective action. Coalition stakeholders come together around overarching goals that transcend current events, and are committed to investing their long-term identities and interests. To achieve their goals, coalitions must engage in coordinated and collaborative action focusing on converging medium- and long-range interests, taking advantage of a variety of resources, assets and capital provided by the coalition stakeholders.

The way in which coalitions resolve the growth-equity dilemma is key to understanding their effect on territorial development dynamics. (Pages. 4 - 8)

Each coalition is different, addressing specific issues and offering a unique potential contribution to development processes. We can identify three empirical types of coalitions, based on an understanding of their characteristics and the conditions needed to affect institutional change that fosters inclusive economic growth. The first type of coalition primarily affects territorial economic growth and is frequently found in places where growth is based on extractive activities, although it can also exist where other economic activities, such as large-scale tourism and agriculture, are found. The second type pursues greater social inclusion and strengthens the local population’s capacity to participate in decision-making and resource allocation. The third type of coalition combines the objectives of the first two.

The coalition’s impact on socially inclusive growth results from a combination of and interaction between endogenous and exogenous forces for change. (Page. 9)

Territorial coalitions develop, act in and are part of a constantly changing national and regional scenario. These macro and meso scale processes determine the coalitions’ possibilities and limitations. In some cases, endogenous forces play a larger role, while in others, exogenous forces have a greater influence. To understand the logic of territorial dynamics and the coalition’s impact on development that is more or less inclusive, it is important to consider the interaction between these two types of forces.

If successful coalitions are those that seek to negotiate the effects of global dynamics on the territory, then public policies must consider the time frame for processes of change, as well as the density of social and economic relationships in the territory. (Pages. 10 - 11)

Few coalitions are always successful or succeed in achieving all their goals. The most successful coalitions are those that can implement strategies at various levels, setting goals not only at the territorial level, but also at the national and, eventually, international levels to manage the effects of global dynamics on the territory. In developing public policies, the time frame for processes of change must be considered, because these processes transcend government terms and tend not to coincide with electoral cycles. Other factors, such as the density of social and economic relationships among residents of the territory, must be considered to better understand how these relationships can contribute to socially inclusive growth.
The presence of social coalitions in rural territories in Latin America is crucial for the establishment of local virtuous circles of economic growth, social inclusion and environmental sustainability.

- To bring about change or maintain the status quo, all societies require coordinated action. Social coalitions are an example of a collective, coordinated action that encourages territories to shift away from a predetermined path.

- Unlike other forms of collective action (such as social movements and interest groups), coalitions have greater potential capacity to redirect processes of change to achieve economic growth while reducing poverty and inequality (greater social inclusion) and promoting environmental sustainability.

- Under certain circumstances, coalitions allow interests from less-advantaged sectors of rural society to also be considered in the decision-making process.

- Social coalitions make it possible to build bridges between the different levels (local, regional, national and international) of economic, social and political dynamics that shape development processes in the rural world.
A territorial coalition is a group of diverse actors engaged in activities that converge around territorial development over the medium to long term.

• A “territorial coalition” takes a territory as its frame of reference, acting within a particular geographic and social space with a specific network of social relationships and institutional agreements. Although it may share some aspects with neighboring territories, it possesses specific characteristics.

• We have identified five key characteristics that distinguish a coalition from other forms of collective action: i) It must consist of a variety of actors; ii) Those actors must identify with a set of common goals (although members may have diverging interests); iii) It must have resources (capital and other assets); iv) Its capacity for action must stem from the interconnection of actors and their resources; and, v) It must have a medium- to long-range time frame for action. These five elements are not always present in the same form, because stakeholders vary depending on the territory’s social structure. It is also important to consider the degree of intervention by external actors and the presence of government and/or international cooperation agencies.

• Coalitions consisting of only one stakeholder are unable to obtain the support necessary to achieve their objectives and need the backing of other actors. Coalitions do not result from altruistic actions by the stakeholders involved, but respond to a need. For the stakeholders involved, coalitions represent calculations and risks, as well as advantages.

• Coalition members can share a common goal, but for different reasons, which means that a coalition is not necessarily explicit. Analysis may reveal the presence of a coalition even when its members are not aware of its existence. This is because, although some coalitions have clearly defined their goals in a plan or manifesto, others result from synergies among special interests that have not crystallized in a single plan.

• Coalitions are social constructs that change over time. Some coalitions can exist over decades, with varying degrees of intensity. There may be times when coalition members are closely connected, followed by periods when the bond is not as strong because of a lack of defined goals or because the original objectives have been achieved. We therefore see coalitions that recreate themselves over their lifespan to adapt to changing situations.

• The variety of resources, capital and assets available to coalition stakeholders define the type of action that can be implemented in each situation.

“Transformative territorial coalitions” are an ideal theoretical construct; the term refers to their ability to change in territorial dynamics, leading to inclusive processes of rural territorial development. Their actions are directed toward altering economic, social and political dynamics in the territory, either through institutional changes or by developing new approaches that will form the basis of future transformation in the medium to long term.
The way in which coalitions resolve the growth/equity dilemma is key to understanding their effect on territorial development dynamics.

- Some coalitions have a fundamental impact on territorial economic growth. They offer the best example of the effect coalitions can have on territorial dynamics. Their actions have a transformative influence on the territory’s economic development and a profound impact on social relationships and political equilibrium.

- These coalitions are characterized by their great capacity to mobilize resources (mainly economic, but also political) and by the presence of a dominant actor. This actor makes it possible to engage in simple deliberative processes and take advantage of favorable economic conditions in the territory. The dominant actor is also able to negotiate with political powers, so they can encourage or tolerate key institutional changes, and engages in discourse that emphasizes economic growth as the main legitimizing argument.

- Case studies (Chiloe in Chile and Ostua-Guija in Guatemala) show coalitions that encourage profound changes in territorial dynamics within a short time, but with contradictory impacts on local living conditions. Although they result in strong growth and higher average income, there are also changes in local residents’ customs, values and livelihood strategies.

While many coalitions in Latin America focus on growth based on extractive activities, they can also concentrate on other economic activities, such as tourism and agribusiness. One example of this is a coalition that promotes salmon farming for export on Chile’s southern coast.
Other coalitions focus on strengthening local people’s ability to participate in decision-making and resource allocation. These are usually large coalitions that include public and private stakeholders, as well as NGOs or civil society organizations. Their impact on growth and poverty reduction is often limited, and their deliberative processes are more complex. They can be defined as “pro-inclusion coalitions.”

These coalitions often develop a strong legitimizing discourse that appeals to social values or other issues of great public impact (the environment, gender, etc.), which also creates suspicion among other sectors of society that feel threatened by the discourse or by the coalition’s militant or activist image.

A third group of coalitions combines goals related to both economic growth and equity. These are long-term coalitions that develop over extended periods of time, sometimes even decades. Unlike the cases mentioned above, they are highly diffuse social constructs. They bring together a large number of stakeholders and usually lack an institutional structure.

Pro-inclusion coalitions exist in Cerron Grande in Chalatenango, El Salvador, and in Valle de Jiquirica in Bahia, Brazil. In both cases, a group of actors with a shared territorial plan and long-term ties increased their influence and agency and were able to convince authorities to take their views into consideration.

Coalitions that combine growth and social-inclusion goals can be found in Tungurahua, a province in Ecuador’s central highlands, and in Valle Sur-Ocongate, in the highlands of Cuzco, Peru. In both, the partnership between stakeholders within and outside of the territory contributes to a stronger legitimizing discourse that is more rooted in the territory. Their key to success is their ability to promote changes in production and commercialization that benefit small and medium-size producers. These changes have increased the producers’ capacity for agency, allowing them to become political actors in the territory.
Chiloe Chile. Salmon farming began on Chile’s southern coast in the mid-1980s. The key players are a group of national and foreign businesses and certain sectors of the Chilean government. Chiloe quickly became a global example of salmon production, and many rural residents began working in the industry, radically transforming their livelihoods. Between 1992 and 2003, household income increased more than the national average, reaching a relatively high level. Poverty rates also dropped faster than the national average, although the Gini coefficient worsened and the decrease in the gender gap was greater than the national average. In 2008, a virus killed most of the salmon. Chiloe’s industry suffered a major decline, and it became obvious that it had not put down roots in the territory. Local actors watched the situation, but did not become directly involved in seeking solutions, while opponents of the industry (another coalition) took advantage of the situation to gain ground in local and regional negotiations. This marked the start of a new phase for the salmon-industry coalition.

Chiloe is an example of how a coalition focused on a specific productive activity can promote radical transformation in a territory in a relatively short time.

Ostua-Guija Guatemala: Four municipalities in the Ostua river basin in Guatemala (Asuncion Mita, Santa Catarina Mita, El Progreso and Monjas) have been part of a coalition since the late 1990s, when free trade agreements led to economic change in the rural areas of eastern Guatemala. The territory, which once had a relatively diversified economy, became almost exclusively agricultural, with one coalition of powerful actors predominating in the region. That coalition consisted of three types of actors: export-oriented medium- and large-scale farmers, professionals providing services to farmers (hardware suppliers, agribusiness enterprises and cooperatives), and middlemen connecting local producers with wholesale markets in Guatemala City and San Salvador. These stakeholders took advantage of the situation to establish institutional arrangements favorable to their interests, setting conditions on the territory’s productive activities and its social and economic life. Their plan revolved around a dynamic land market that included the sale and lease of rural land. The coalition gained strength because the government refused to intervene in the sale of agricultural products and because of a vibrant urban and rural labor market. In a short time, farmers began specializing in commercially dynamic horticultural products, which led to significant poverty reduction. Between 2000 and 2006, family income increased, poverty rates dropped and income distribution became more equitable, as measured by the Gini coefficient, but small rural producers suffered a loss of autonomy.

The Ostua-Guija coalition demonstrates that endogenous coalitions (dominated by local actors) do not necessarily result in inclusive development for all residents of a territory.
The case of Cerron Grande reflects the difficulties of evaluating the success or failure of territorial coalitions and demonstrates the importance of external allies, which can help implement actions at various levels.

Cerron Grande El Salvador: On the north bank of the Cerron Grande reservoir in El Salvador, a clearly defined, long-term coalition operates in a territory consisting of the Tejutla, El Paraíso, Santa Rita, Chalatenango, Azacualpa, San Luis del Carmen, San Rafael and San Francisco Lempa districts, in the department of Chalatenango. The uniting force is a “territorial plan” with three stakeholder groups: local NGOs that emerged during the reconstruction that followed the Chapultepec accords; external actors, such as public and private organizations, that have settled in the territory; and many grassroots groups resulting from intense international cooperation and local social activism. This coalition has been successful in many ways, and its activism has made it an example both inside and outside the territory. The coalition is a significant player in deliberations affecting the department, especially regarding policies related to natural resources. Its suggestions are taken into consideration by public officials and private actors in the territory. Other actors battling to defend their own interests are also involved, however, and their interests are not always aligned with those of the coalition. Chalatenango remains a scattered department, with strong environmental issues and scarce resources. There are ongoing tensions between landowners and landless farmers. The coalition has established common goals that are highly regarded in today’s world (especially environmental protection). The evolution of their argument, from the revolutionary tone of the 1990s to later environmental rhetoric, gave it legitimacy and created various opportunities in El Salvador and beyond. Networks are among the coalition’s key assets, increasing its symbolic and social capital.

Jiquirica Brazil: In the Jiquirica valley, in the state of Bahia, Brazil, there is a coalition consisting of a group of family farm labor unions affiliated with the National Federation of Family Farm Workers (Federação Nacional dos Trabalhadores e Trabalhadoras na Agricultura Familiar, FETRAF). These unions have joined with other groups of actors to achieve their objectives and have established partnerships with leftist political groups and government agencies, as well as with NGOs and environmental and Catholic organizations working in rural areas. The territory shows improvement in growth indicators, poverty reduction and economic equality. This development is driven by a combination of transfers and progressive policies, along with diversified agricultural markets into which family agriculture has been successfully integrated. The coalition influences territorial development through its ability to organize and mobilize resources to benefit family agriculture. It focuses on strengthening family farming and giving small farmers access to social benefits provided by the government.

The Jiquirica Valley’s coalition does not define territorial dynamics, but it has influenced the pace and form of the transformation in recent years. Its importance lies in the fact that it constitutes a change from traditional territorial power arrangements.
Transformative Social Coalitions and Inclusive Rural Development

The key to Tungurahua's coalition is its social capital, which consists of stakeholders who are similar to one another, but who are also able to establish horizontal and vertical alliances with a wide variety of other actors. Tungurahua, in Ecuador, is a territory that combines two key elements: a land-tenure structure that allows for diversified production and a strong market network centered in Ambato, the provincial capital. Along with its central geographic location and good connectivity, those factors have made it a hub for warehousing and commercialization that has gradually become one of the country's major markets. This is largely due to a tacit coalition driven mainly by medium-size rural producers and market vendors, who often share family or other ties. This is a long-standing partnership that can be traced back to the mid-19th Century. Its main characteristic is the early association between property owners and merchants, which stemmed from the fact that many families both farmed and sold products in markets. The negotiating capacity of small- and medium-size producers and sellers is due to both the land-tenure structure and extensive shared irrigation infrastructure. This has allowed producer organizations to play an important role in establishing rules and laws regulating the market system in Tungurahua. Another factor is government investment, especially in roads and electricity infrastructure, which tends to benefit commerce and which also responds, in large part, to the coalition's social demands.

Valle Sur-Ocongate Peru: Valle Sur-Ocongate, in the Cuzco sierra (Peru), is a culturally dense area with high poverty rates, a history of ups and downs, and a mostly indigenous, Quechua-speaking population. The coalition began forming in the 1970s, a key period for territorial dynamics and agricultural reforms. The coalition initially included small and medium-size farmers and development professionals (from NGOs and public programs) interested in promoting production. Over time, the profile changed; many of the professionals now come from local communities and have an urban education and professional experience. The profile of local authorities also changed, with the emergence of mayors who came from rural communities, but who had new political agendas and a different political style, more sensitive to the demands of rural producers and high Andean communities. These local authorities are key stakeholders in the coalition and promote new partnerships with other public and private institutions to attract more investment to the territory. The result is a series of institutional changes that have affected the production and commercialization of agricultural products, with better communication infrastructure and greater social inclusion of rural farmers who had lacked access to Cuzco's urban markets. This has been accompanied by a renewed appreciation for the value of Andean culture.

The coalition in Valle Sur-Ocongate, in Cuzco, developed a narrative that emphasized the territory's Inca history and values associated with Andean culture. Indigenous iconography came into official use, and Quechua became the primary language for everyday public administration.
The coalition’s impact on socially inclusive growth results from a combination of and interaction between endogenous and exogenous forces for change.

- It can take decades for a coalition’s outcomes and impact on territorial dynamics to become visible. Moreover, territories are not isolated entities; they are embedded in wider national and regional dynamics.

- Case studies show that reality is always more complex than theory, partly because territorial dynamics and coalitions are part of a constantly changing national and regional context. These macro- and meso-scale dynamics determine the possibilities and limitations of territorial coalitions.

- An external shock can thwart the local development process at any time, in the form of acute social conflict (as in many countries in Latin America in the past few decades), an abrupt change in public policies that changes the balance of power (such as agrarian reform or liberalization) or a natural disaster.

- For transformative territorial coalitions, the keys to success are as diverse as the coalitions themselves: control over a key resource, the interconnection of a variety of assets by a single stakeholder who serves as an axis, the convergence of assets held by different stakeholders, etc.

- Coalitions allow external factors of change to take root in a territory, while also allowing other actors to take ownership of changes that arise within the territory, so they can gain the momentum to come to fruition. The most successful coalitions are the ones that can take strategic action at various levels, expressing their demands not only at the territorial level, but also at the national and sometimes the international level.
If successful coalitions are those that seek to negotiate the effects of global dynamics on the territory, then public policies must consider the time frame for processes of change, as well as the density of social and economic relationships in the territory.

- Few coalitions are always successful or succeed in achieving all their goals. More commonly, there is a mix of successes and failures or a limited set of successes. Some coalitions do not define territorial dynamics, but do achieve significant changes in areas such as equity, agency and environmental sustainability. One key factor in this trend is that few coalitions are able to establish a long-term territorial project.

- Some coalitions experience strong growth, but have limited impact on inequality or are unable to increase capacity for agency. Others significantly improve agency, but with limited impact on growth and poverty reduction. The coalitions with the most successful outcomes are the ones that address change on the macro level – changes in economic and consumption trends, changes in the national political balance, etc.

- Coalitions are a tool for a territory’s residents to negotiate changes in economic and consumption trends, changes to the national political balance, etc., but their efforts do not always bring success. Even when there is broad-based consensus in the territory, it is difficult to escape economic and political determinants. When planning interventions to foster territorial development processes that can effectively overcome tradeoffs between growth and equity, it is important to look beyond the boundaries of the territory and act on a larger level.

- For a coalition to gain legitimacy, it must combine various types of capital and establish a discourse or argument that gives meaning to its actions. When these elements coexist, the coalition is more likely to have greater legitimacy, defined as having valid stakeholders participating in decision-making processes in the territory.
Social and economic relations that make coalition formation possible are not improvised or motivated only by current events. They result from ongoing medium- to long-range efforts that go beyond short-term political or electoral collaboration. Development processes must therefore be understood as long-term processes that do not always correspond to planning or budget cycles. Public policies can help to promote these processes, as long as they do not try to force outcomes in the short term.

Cases analyzed here demonstrate the need to create linkages between public authorities at the territorial and national levels. This is not easy. It is important to be very realistic when implementing interventions that strengthen coalitions that foster territorial development, considering the interests of all stakeholders and taking advantage of opportunities created by the implementation of their strategies. It may be more advantageous and feasible to modulate existing processes instead of trying to start an “ideal” coalition from scratch. When creating linkages among the various levels of government, it is important not to ignore other stakeholders that play important roles in shaping territorial dynamics. It is important to facilitate dialogue to improve the practical skills of less-advantaged stakeholders and their ability to set their own agenda when negotiating with more powerful actors.
Additional Readings


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