

Globalization, Urbanization and Rural Transformation

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We are living in an era of globalization marked by increased connectivity through human migration, trade of goods, and widespread information exchange worldwide. This significant shift has profoundly reshaped the global economic landscape and social structures. While existing studies on globalization predominantly focus on its effects on cities, there has been limited exploration of the changes occurring in rural areas during this global integration. Yet, according to the World Bank's data, as of the end of 2022, approximately 3.4 billion people, which accounts for over forty percent of the world's population, still lived in rural areas [1]. Notably, rural areas are increasingly intertwined in the process of globalization, evident from the growing involvement of various global entities in the process of rural transformation.

The dynamics of rural transformation have shifted significantly due to the profound alterations brought by globalization, diverging notably from historical trends. Consequently, the lack of attention in scholarly research toward understanding the relationship between globalization and rural restructuring has negative consequences. This gap in research hampers the recognition of emerging characteristics and trends associated with the transformation of rural areas. The concept of “planetary urbanization,” often used to illustrate the growing dominance of urban areas within the context of globalization [2], offers valuable insights for rural studies. However, some scholars contest this concept, arguing that it subordinates rural areas to urban ones. They propose the concept of “planetary rural geographies” to counteract urban-centric perspectives, emphasizing the need for a balanced recognition of the significance of rural areas alongside urban spaces [3,4].

In the realm of rural transformation, adopting a planetary perspective has become increasingly essential due to the growing direct influence of globalization on rural areas. As noted by Holmes [5], the shift toward multifunctionality in rural areas is primarily steered by three key drivers: surplus agricultural production, the rise of market-driven comfort goods, and widespread social concerns for sustainable development and environmental protection issues. These drivers are closely intertwined with global trends stemming from globalization: advancements in agricultural technology and global agricultural trade generating surpluses, easy global travel enabling the consumption of rural comfort goods on a global scale, and communication technologies accelerating the global spread of information [6]. Consequently, the global trend of rural transformation towards multifunctionality has become increasingly evident in the new century, accentuated by the escalating influence of globalization.

Nevertheless, it's crucial not to perceive rural areas as entirely detached from urban ones when considering the influence of globalization. Globalization can also indirectly impact rural areas through the process of urbanization. Urbanization is a process encompassing the shift of regional economic, social, and spatial structures from rural to urban forms. It stands as a pivotal expression and integral reflection of the structural changes within the urban-rural system. The influence of urbanization on the rural transformation process is embodied by reshaping the relationships and interconnections between urban and rural areas within a given region. This involves the reconfiguration of essential components like population, capital, and land between urban and rural domains. Under the influence of urbanization, traditional rural areas, once predominantly focused on agricultural production, have undergone diverse transformations. Some rural areas have integrated with urban areas, while others located on the outskirts of cities exhibit a blend of rural and urban characteristics. The impact of globalization is not restricted solely to urban or rural areas; rather, it extends across the entire urban-rural system. The external trade of agricultural products from rural areas, the unrestricted movement of people, and the seamless exchange of information inherently rely on the extension of urban infrastructure into rural territories and the ripple effects of associated urban services. Urbanization remains a crucial element in the processes of rural transformation. It significantly shapes the interplay between urban and rural areas, impacting how globalization influences and interacts with both spheres within the broader urban-rural framework.

Given the aforementioned contexts, the study of rural transformation encounters several emerging research topics and challenges, especially within the global South undergoing rapid globalization and urbanization. Three of these are outlined here to underscore their significance. Firstly, there is a growing need to focus on the interactions between rural and urban areas in the era of globalization. In most developed countries, rural areas historically relied on urban centers, resulting in a one-way flow of rural population, capital, and resources toward urban locales, thereby fostering urban-centric perspectives. However, in the current era of globalization, the interplay between urban and rural areas in many developing countries has become more intricate and diverse [7]. For instance, rural areas equipped with certain amenities or tourist attractions can draw people and investments from across the globe, subsequently contributing to the development of adjacent urban regions. It's crucial to explore how this phenomenon contributes to the development of urban and rural transformation theories.

The second pertinent issue lies in understanding the transformation of rural livelihoods, which demands increased attention. The diverse impact of globalization on the economic transformation of different rural areas has led to distinct changes in household livelihood strategies. In regions where non-agricultural work opportunities abound, rural laborers can readily shift their livelihood strategies toward non-agricultural activities. Examples such as industrial development in rural Vietnam and export-oriented horticultural cultivation enterprises in the Senegal River Delta region highlight this transformation [8,9]. Conversely, in rural areas where non-agricultural job prospects are limited and significant foreign capital involvement exists in agricultural production—particularly in Latin America and Africa—the livelihoods of small-scale farmers often face considerable threats [10–12]. Exploring ways to achieve an inclusive and sustainable rural transformation under neoliberal globalization emerges as a critical topic. Understanding how to ensure that the transformations benefit all sections of rural communities and promote long-term sustainability is imperative.

The third critical aspect centers on the environmental spatial transformation occurring in rural areas, which is attracting growing attention. Developed countries, wielding significant influence in global trade, frequently relocate environmentally harmful, polluting, water-intensive, and low value-added agricultural production activities to developing countries. This practice bears negative implications for the ecological integrity of rural areas in the global South [13,14]. Additionally, outdated technologies and polluting industries often get shifted from the global North to the South, from urban to rural areas, further exacerbating pollution and degradation of rural ecological spaces [15]. Rural areas play a pivotal role in global environmental preservation, serving as primary providers of ecosystem services. Understanding the environmental impacts of globalization and urbanization on rural areas and striving for global environmental justice emerge as crucial concerns in rural transformation. Addressing these issues involves not only recognizing the environmental consequences of global economic activities on rural areas but also ensuring equitable and sustainable solutions that safeguard rural ecological spaces within the broader context of global environmental conservation efforts.

This paper has contextualized rural transformation within the dynamics of globalization and urbanization, emphasizing three significant research areas. Numerous other topics merit consideration as well, including the transformation of the rural economy, rural culture, and rural governance. These areas present crucial dimensions in understanding the comprehensive changes occurring in rural settings. Further empirical investigations, particularly in the global South, are essential to enhance our comprehension of rural transformation within evolving contexts. Delving deeper into these topics through empirical studies can provide valuable insights into the nuanced dynamics of rural transformation, shedding light on how globalization and urbanization intersect with and impact various facets of rural life. By exploring these aspects in greater depth, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted changes taking place in rural areas and develop strategies that promote sustainable development and well-being in these regions.

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