

Rural society in Algeria between socio-economic transformations and development challenges.

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Rural society in Algeria has witnessed major and profound transformations, and these transformations have affected its social and economic fabric in recent years, and the most prominent of these transformations are the changes that have occurred at the level of social relations through changing the behavior of individuals and groups and changing their lifestyles, and the shift from traditional agricultural activities to the use of modern methods of farming, as well as the use of modern methods in agriculture. In addition, these transformations also included the value and cultural aspect for them as well, and based on the fact that the economic system expresses a basic component of rural society, it was also subjected to many changes and transformations, especially with regard to the use of technology, changing occupations, and the development of infrastructure, which contributed to improving the income and living standards of the population on the one hand and exacerbating the socio-economic disparities for them on the other hand. In this research paper, we will try to review these changes and the mutual influence between them and rural development.

Keywords: Rural society, rural development, government policies, social change, rural areas.

Introduction

Rural society is that part of society in which there is a group of people in a specific geographical area, and the concepts associated with it have multiplied and varied according to several criteria, whether related to the quantitative aspect through the size of the population density, the percentage of agricultural activity and administrative divisions within the region and others, or what is associated with the qualitative aspect such as high rates of familiarity and informal personal relationships. Historical and anthropological studies have proven that human societies were mainly rural societies, and after being exposed to the factors of change and development, they went in two different directions, rural and urban societies. Perhaps the many changes discussed in anthropological studies from the transition of humans from the stage of searching for food through hunting operations to production and the formation of stable communities in villages and then moving to a more luxurious life in industrialized cities is the biggest evidence that human societies have a rural origin. There has been a succession of studies and research that tried to

distinguish between rural and urban and identify the main features and characteristics of rural societies. Ibn Khaldun's attempts were one of these sober sociological studies when he distinguished between rural and urban according to the idea of binaries by addressing livelihoods, sources of production, and type of occupation, which he came to associate agriculture with the Bedouin and industry with the urban.

Rural society in Algeria has undergone profound socio-economic transformations that require a rethinking of traditional development methods. This is due to many factors, such as the development in the fields of education, health, infrastructure, demographic changes, government policies and other transformations that have affected the daily lives of the population in rural areas and created serious opportunities and challenges at the same time, such as lifestyle, income levels and livelihoods, in addition to social change in its various dimensions, especially women's access to the world of work. In addition to social change in its various dimensions, especially the access of women to the world of work, all this has had an impact on the positive side of development, and these societies have become more developed.

In the same context, although some believe that rural society is more resistant to the stakes of change in the level of relations, values and modes of production, the time factor and the effects of globalization and its consequences reveal chapters of the profound transformations that Algerian rural society has witnessed in many fields and areas, as it has witnessed major milestones on the path of transformation from independence to the present day (change in the economic system from socialist to capitalist, change in the cultural and political field (experiences of modernization and democracy), etc.). The basic structures of rural society, especially those related to forms of solidarity and prevailing social values, have undergone profound transformations, in addition to the knot of the city inherent in the behaviors of rural people and their minds to join the city, and perhaps one of the reasons for this knot is the basic needs and services provided by the city, which are absent or lacking in rural areas (electricity, water, paved roads, service and health centers, etc.).

Accordingly, the topic of socio-economic transformations in rural society is an important topic that reflects the changes that rural areas in Algeria have undergone since independence, and these transformations are influenced by many factors, including economic, social and technological factors. In recent decades, rural society in Algeria has witnessed remarkable developments as a result of increasing urbanization, increasing rates of migration to cities, and developments in many sectors and fields, especially health, education, and transportation. These changes have not only affected the pattern of living in

these areas, but also transformed social values, customs, traditions, family roles, the degree of social relations, and other basic features that used to characterize these rural communities and distinguish them from the urban population.

Based on the fact that rural development in its simple concept constitutes those qualitative and quantitative improvements to the various economic activities practiced in the rural area, and is an important and vital topic that seeks to achieve a balance between improving the standard of living of the population of rural areas on the one hand and reducing the development gap between them and urban areas, and rural development includes a set of policies and initiatives aimed at promoting economic growth, improving various basic services and enhancing community participation through associations and neighborhood committees. In light of the various socio-economic transformations mentioned above, it becomes necessary to study the interrelationship between rural development and these transformations, as this research paper aims to review the most prominent socio-economic transformations witnessed by rural society in Algeria. We examine their causes and effects on rural development, especially with the government's recent efforts to modernize rural society and achieve its economic and social development, based on the adoption of a strategy to develop these areas, lift the injustice from them and improve the living conditions of the citizens of the shadow areas or rural areas in particular, through which it sought to modernize rural society and achieve its economic and social development. The government has programmed many development projects aimed at achieving this, especially the construction of roads, the provision of electricity and gas, the delivery of potable water, the granting of assistance for the construction of rural housing and other basic services, in addition to improving facilities related to education and health as well as recreational facilities for young people from these areas, and encouraging investment in the agricultural and agricultural sector to achieve self-sufficiency, which was largely materialized by the beginning of 2024 and the impressive success achieved by investment operations in Saharan agriculture, where Algeria is on the verge of achieving self-sufficiency in wheat.

1- Conceptual framework of rural community and development:

1.1 - Rural community: There are many concepts that have dealt with the topic of rural society and different criteria on the basis of which the rural population can be distinguished from the urban population.

Where there are those who see it as that part of society in which the population resides in a specific geographical area, which is defined as rural areas, and this population has developed social relations between them, through which they

have established groups, organizations, rural social institutions and various facilities through which they follow their social, economic and psychological needs (Rashwan, 2005, p. 69).

Among the bodies that have taken quantitative criteria into account when distinguishing between rural and urban, the United Nations Organization as well as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, which defined quantitative criteria that can be used to distinguish and classify profit areas in (Alia, 2009, p. 78).

- Proportion of agricultural activity in the labor force.
- Population density.
- Administrative divisions within the region.
- The size of the population in the population centers.

In conclusion, it can be said that the rural community expresses a group of individuals living in areas with low population density and relying heavily on agriculture and some related economic activities as their main source of livelihood, and is characterized by many features, especially strong social relations and well-established traditions and customs.

1-2- The social concept of the rural areas: The countryside is defined as the areas defined by the state in its administrative division, which are the villages and their dependencies scattered throughout the country, which are the areas inhabited by the homogeneous, cooperative and interdependent peasant class that prevails among them face-to-face relations, who take farming as their main work and pay basic agricultural taxes and who constitute a large population density in their areas (Ben Baatouche, 2013-2014, pp. 206-207).

1.3 - Social change: Gerth and Mills argue that social change is the transformation that occurs in the social roles played by individuals and all that changes in social systems and social control rules in a certain period of time, and Ginsberg agrees with this proposal, as he believes that social change is every change that occurs in the social structure in the whole and the part and in the form of the social system, and therefore individuals practice different social roles from those they practiced during a period of time (Eidi, 2017, pp. 66-67). From this concept, it is clear that social change constitutes a shift in social structures, systems, social relations, and the functions of systems, as well as a set of differences that occur over a specific period of time within an entity that continues to exist.

1-4- Social Transformations: Social transformations are defined as any transformation that occurs in the social organization, whether in its structure or functions during a period of time, which is any change in the demographics of society, class structure, social systems, patterns of social relations or in various social institutions (Jarrah, 2022, p. 21).

1.5 - Rural Development: Rural development is defined as a set of dynamic and integrated processes that occur in the rural community through joint civil and governmental efforts through democratic methods, according to a specific social policy and a realistic plan drawn up (Al-Tadhimi, 2007, p. 56), the World Bank defined it in 1975 as a strategy designed to improve the social and economic life of a group of people, the rural poor, which consists of extending the benefits of development to the poorest among those seeking their livelihoods in rural areas, and this group includes small-scale farmers, tenants and the landless. It is also a process that includes a series of measures and actions to improve the rural environment that relate to the physical configuration that raises the standard of living and job security of the rural population (Ben Ayyad, 2018, p. 246).

Rural development aims to improve the living conditions of the rural population by improving infrastructure such as roads, water and electricity, enhancing economic opportunities by supporting agriculture and small and medium-sized industries, creating jobs and reducing poverty.

2- Social transformations of rural society:

In recent decades, rural society in Algeria has witnessed major and radical social transformations that have clearly affected the daily life of individuals and the social relations between them, in addition to a change in values, customs and traditions as a result of many factors:

2.1 - Change in the demographic structure:

With the increase in educational opportunities and the significant development of health services through the spread of health centers in rural areas, the demographic structure in the countryside began to change, as the rate of educated youth increased and those who began to have opportunities to enter the world of work in job positions outside rural areas, which led to a decrease in the population in many rural areas due to migration and large displacements of this class in search of job opportunities in cities or outside the country.

2.2 - Change in values and outlook on life:

The intensity of internal and external social relations resulting mainly from the factors of social change leads to a noticeable change in rural values and outlook on life. In fact, values at all stages of change are functionally linked to other

social patterns, and therefore any change in these patterns leads to a concomitant change in values. In essence, values are the ideology that depicts the main trends that emanate from the stability and balance of the system, and they determine the visible dimensions in social relations, and technological and demographic changes led to the emergence of secondary groups that are characterized by their more complex formal nature than primary groups with close personal relationships, and thus the dependence that prevailed before in the satisfaction of human social needs, and on primary groups (such as the family and neighbors), is retreating to give way to the social independence created by modern technology, especially cars, media devices, various means of rapid movement and rapid communication, and thus close personal relationships between neighbors or between members of the same family become less deep and warm, and the more the individual is freed from the group, the more he is able to choose the company he wants from the huge number of people he deals with (Al-Aqab, 2019, p. 184).

In light of this, it can be said that the traditional values of the rural community were characterized by cohesive relationships and cooperation, as well as a strong commitment to family traditions and customs. However, with the social and economic transformations of the rural community, this model changed and nuclear families spread and people moved away from rural areas in search of job opportunities and a more comfortable lifestyle, and thus individual values became more prominent and prevalent than collective values.

2.3 - The functional transformation of the rural family and the change in social roles:

The rural family is no longer the same as in traditional Algerian society, where it was an extended family characterized by simplicity and forming a homogeneous unit, in which the father controls the material and spiritual aspects and has a central authority on the basis of which he controls all decisions related to it (marriage, residence, work, buying and selling etc.), but this simple form that characterized it also reproduces its social existence and conscious forms and maintains the harmony and homogeneity of its components, but this situation changed and was exposed to many factors such as rapid demographic growth and great technological development, which affected the traditional family by being affected by the elements of modernity, and this change also affected the function and role of rural women, and their status evolved accordingly. Their status has evolved according to their competence and visibility in the public sphere, and they have become more involved and represented in economic and political life and have become decision makers within the family and within society.

2.4 - Internal migration:

In recent years, rural areas have witnessed the migration of a large part of their population to cities, especially among the youth in search of better job opportunities, as most rural areas lack the opportunities available in cities, especially since most industrial investments and major companies are settled in cities, which leads to a reduction in the labor force in rural areas and a decline in economic growth. This negative view is matched by another optimistic view, as the great technological development and the change in the development reality of the countryside through government policies in recent years have served as a factor in attracting investments, especially in the farming and agricultural field.

2.5 - Changing social values of the rural family:

Social values are considered the soul of the rural family and society as a whole, they are like the life of the rural family, they arise within it, they are strengthened and weakened, they acquire their qualities, and from them they infer their existence as rural families vary according to place and time and according to the way of producing the means of life, even within one community such as the large Algerian community (Eurasian family, Chaouia, tribal, Zayani, Tarikia, Mezabia, etc.) They share common components, determinants and functions as the origin and differ in some details related to values, customs, traditions, rituals, traditional legacies and popular cultures as the branch, and social values vary because it is a characteristic of the rural family, what the city son desires may not suit the rural son, and their desires differ from the son of the desert (Ben Baatouch, 2013-2014, pp. 206-207).

The changes associated with the social values of the rural family in Algeria today are numerous, especially through the desire for independence from extended families, or moving to other areas for children, in addition to women acquiring new roles related to power, participating with men in the economic aspect, entering the world of work, and proving themselves within the family and society.

2.6 - Education and health:

Health is one of the most important basic factors affecting the social transformations of rural society, as health care plays a major role in improving the quality of life of the rural population and achieving rural development, as the health of individuals makes them able to work effectively, which contributes to enhancing agricultural and craft productivity, especially since these professions require great muscular effort, and the improvement of the health field and the

availability of infrastructure promotes the development of other infrastructure such as roads and transportation.

It is worth noting that health care does not mean establishing hospitals and treatment rooms or providing medical staff only, but it means identifying the state of these rural areas in terms of the health status of the population, their sources of food and drink, the diseases that can infect them from the rural environment, etc. and providing guidance and advice to the population so that the use of natural resources is rational and healthy, and health care requires fighting issues such as malnutrition, maintaining clean air, controlling waste disposal, or water treatment, etc.(Kawahi, 2021, p. 74).

Considering that education is the basis for the development of societies and the key to their advancement, Algeria has paid attention to it since independence by building schools and educational institutions and enacting laws that emphasize free and compulsory education. Rural areas were among those covered by this policy, and the development of education in these areas contributed to achieving positive social transformations that contributed to raising the standard of living and improving the quality of life for the population, in addition to promoting the development of individuals in these areas.

2.7 - Community participation (associations and neighborhood committees):

One of the most important social transformations of rural society is the expansion of the fabric of civil society organizations in Algeria, as their role has increased in recent years as a propositional force and as a reliable social partner by local authorities, especially with the central directives to decision-makers to adopt participatory democracy in proposing and implementing various development programs through the involvement of associations and neighborhood committees. In this regard, it must be stressed that the success of rural development programs depends to a large extent on the effectiveness of grassroots organizations such as associations and institutions as a way to mobilize and organize human efforts to benefit from development plans and programs. The establishment of these organizations of all kinds, especially agricultural associations, community development associations, and agricultural workers' unions, with emphasis on the popularity and democracy of these organizations in their components from the bottom to the top and giving them their role in developing and implementing rural development plans and programs and state assistance to them without affecting their independence with their movement (Ben Ayyad, 2018, p. 255). Community participation through these committees and associations is manifested in many forms and

manifestations, especially their contribution to spreading awareness of modern farming methods, encouraging residents to establish small projects and expand their craft activities, and through their interventions at the level of officials to promote the participation of rural women and enhance their economic role within these areas.

3- Economic transformations of the rural community:

Rural society in Algeria has witnessed widespread economic transformations, influenced by local and global economic developments due to the spread of technology and communications, which contributed to changes at multiple levels, which in turn affected rural development in various aspects.

3.1 - Changes in lifestyle and the use of modern technologies in agriculture:

Agriculture in rural areas is no longer the only economic activity, as multiple economic activities have begun to emerge, such as small industries, traditional crafts, and some projects related to the manufacturing industry. This diversity has greatly contributed to providing jobs and attracting labor from outside these areas, and the Algerian countryside has become a fertile field for many investments, and the use of technology in agricultural operations and the use of modern agricultural equipment. The use of technology in agricultural operations and the use of modern agricultural equipment has contributed to the development of agricultural products and the achievement of increased productivity and improved yields, while reducing and minimizing costs, especially with the use of artificial intelligence tools and techniques, especially drones, to monitor crops remotely and know their needs.

In the same context, many rural areas have witnessed a trend for their inhabitants to reduce their reliance on agriculture as a main source of income, and have focused on developing many service sectors and small and medium-sized industries, which are characterized by ease of practice and high financial returns compared to traditional agriculture, which has contributed to economic diversification in these areas and added significant developmental dynamism.

3.2 - Government funding and rural support policies:

Since independence, Algeria has realized that the goal of achieving sustainable development cannot be realized on the ground without paying attention to rural areas and achieving the principle of equality among the population. The government's major programs in the last five years to promote the shadow areas

and grant loans and tax and financial facilities for investment in these areas are perhaps the best evidence of this.

In this context, it can be noted that Algeria has adopted many development policies to promote the Algerian countryside, especially after the security crisis that led to the displacement of a large number of people to the cities. Whereas, the rural renewal policy is one of the economic and social policies aimed at revitalizing social and agricultural activity in rural areas. After the security crisis that the country witnessed, rural areas witnessed a wave of migration towards urban areas, but after 2000, life began to return to these areas, especially in light of the difficulties that migrants found in adapting to the urban pattern and the link between their livelihoods and the land they left. This realization, which was supported by incentive programs for citizens to return to the countryside and revive various agricultural activities, made the rural renewal policy in Algeria one of the most important development models pursued in rural areas with its economic and social projects, as this policy came with the aim of transforming the agricultural sector into a real engine for comprehensive economic growth, while intensifying production in the agri-food branches, and this by adopting a strategy to promote integrated development for all regions (Kouahi, 2021, pp. 153-154).

From the above, it is clear that the changes that have occurred in rural society have forced governments to adopt new development policies that meet the needs of the population and support economic diversification in the Algerian rural areas by providing funding for small and medium-sized enterprises, providing support for rural craftsmen and improving infrastructure.

3-3- Technological development and improvement of infrastructure:

Technology with its various digital tools has become an integral part of rural life, as evidenced by the spread of smart phones and connecting villages to the Internet, which allowed the rapid spread of information and easy access to it, all of which contributed to linking these communities to the outside world and influencing it. Infrastructure has been developed and improved significantly in Algeria, and most rural areas are connected to electricity networks, roads and communications, which has contributed significantly to the development of these areas and the contribution of all these basic services in attracting investments and promoting economic growth.

3.4 - Evolution of rural tourism:

Thinking about rural tourism began after the prevalence of approaches to rural development based mainly on the central role of the agricultural sector in achieving development based on the assumption that an improvement in

agricultural production would translate into an improvement in the level of income and rural living conditions.

However, the modest improvement in the agricultural sector did not allow the rural population to be lifted out of poverty, so it was necessary to search for complementary alternatives to it. In response to this endeavor, new approaches to rural development emerged, such as the multifunctional approach, which is based on several ideas, including avoiding adherence to the sectoral approach and searching for relationships, meeting points and complementarities between different sectors, agricultural and non-agricultural, commercial and non-commercial, and avoiding reliance on the agricultural sector as the only income generating sector in rural areas, in addition to the regional approach aimed at Exploring ways to provide job opportunities for the rural population to reduce rural poverty and minimize migration towards cities, by distributing various agricultural, industrial, tourism, etc. economic activities to the country's regions in a way that gives the rural poors the opportunity to obtain jobs (Dridi, 2017, p. 84).

The exploitation of the cultural and natural heritage of many rural areas has contributed to their development and attracting tourists to them, which has contributed to rural tourism being an important source of income for its residents, and provides job opportunities in this field, which provides an additional source of income for the population, in addition to promoting cultural interaction between the local population and those coming to it, which leads to increased cultural awareness and mutual appreciation between different cultures, and rural tourism preserves the cultural and environmental heritage by transforming it into tourism resources.

On the contrary, all these positive contributions of rural tourism to the conditions of the population in rural areas have also negatively affected the change in the social patterns prevailing in these areas through the friction that occurs between the local population and those arriving, especially on customs and traditions, and the rural population adopts new customs and becomes more open to other cultures, and leads to the erosion of values and traditions due to the influence of external cultures, in addition to some social and economic disparities between residents who make gains from tourism and those who do not, which leads to increased social disparities and tensions among the population.

4- Challenges facing rural society in Algeria:

The socio-economic transformations that the rural community has undergone, some of which have been referred to above, were not all positive transformations, but rather many obstacles and challenges, including:

- The issue of rural migration to the cities, where the rural community suffers from the migration of young people to the cities in search of job opportunities and a better life, which leads to a reduction in the qualified labor force and weakens the economic and social structure of rural areas.

- Despite the recognition of women's competence and their vital contribution to the development of rural society, the traditional view has continued to haunt them and reject their full participation in light of the traditional awareness that views rural women with a superior view, which has led to the limited participation of women in economic activity in rural areas.

- Despite all the resources that have been harnessed in Algeria for rural areas and the centralized will of decision-makers to promote the shadow regions, we still witness the population suffering from some basic services such as health care and the availability of infrastructure such as roads, water and electricity, which makes the daily life of the inhabitants of these areas more difficult.

- Despite the great benefits of rural tourism and its positive impact on rural development, it also poses challenges and risks, especially those related to the degradation of the local environment as a result of excessive pressure on natural resources, and it contributes to the high cost of living and the spread of cultural values alien to the rural community.

- The lack of investment in rural areas and the preference of industrial companies and capital owners for cities instead due to the lack of infrastructure.

- The lack of a clear-cut strategy to market the agricultural products of farmers and protect their rights, which made them hostage to the exploitation of traders and obtaining their products at the lowest prices, which incurs significant losses that lead to their reluctance to produce many agricultural commodities and products.

- One of the most prominent challenges facing the rural community in Algeria is the lack of job opportunities and high unemployment rates among them, which pushes them to migrate, which affects investment opportunities in the agricultural sectors, which calls for finding solutions to provide job opportunities that meet the needs of the population and contribute to rural development.

Conclusion:

The socio-economic transformation of rural society in Algeria is a complex phenomenon that requires an extensive and multifaceted study in order to understand its effects on the lives of individuals and achieve rural development in these areas. Through this research paper, we tried to shed light on the various demographic and technological changes and the various government policies for the development of the Algerian rural areas and their effects on the structure of rural society and socio-economic relations.

This research paper has emphasized that these changes can promote rural development and provide the population with promising opportunities by improving agricultural productivity and providing various infrastructure and services that will open new horizons for marketing agricultural products and developing the infrastructure of the rural community.

On the other hand, the research study found that there are a set of challenges and obstacles that rural society still suffers from and requires additional efforts to ensure that this development is sustainable and comprehensive, focusing on development policies based on improving infrastructure, promoting education and health care, encouraging rural women to assume a prominent position and enabling them to participate in rural development processes in light of the developments taking place at the global level.

At the conclusion of the research paper, the importance of integrating social and economic transformations in rural society and rural development strategies remains as a means of achieving a sustainable development leap capable of fulfilling the requirements.

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