

# Rural development perceptions between farmers and policy executors in the Tequendama Province (Cundinamarca, Colombia)

Percepciones sobre el desarrollo rural entre campesinos y ejecutores de políticas en la provincia del Tequendama (Cundinamarca, Colombia)

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## ABSTRACT

This paper presents the results of the perceptions of rural development between farmers who are part of the Nuclei of Rural Entrepreneurs in the Tequendama Province of the department of Cundinamarca (Colombia), as well as between public and private personnel who execute rural policies in this region. The results show that among respondents there is confusion between the concept of rural development and agrarian development, given their answers are oriented to privileging productivity, modernization, and technology aspects, above those who place the inhabitants of the rural sector as first. This confusion could be explained in that during the 1950s it was thought that rural development had to be oriented toward issues that claim the rural sector economic activity, regardless of its inhabitants and their cultural aspects, values and dignity. This aspect shows the need to reassess the meaning of the rural environment and its importance for the nation's development.

**Key words:** reassessment of the rural sector, multi-functionality, multiple activities, rural public policies.

## RESUMEN

Este trabajo muestra los resultados de las percepciones sobre el desarrollo rural que existen entre los campesinos que hacen parte de los Núcleos de Emprendedores Rurales de la provincia del Tequendama en el departamento de Cundinamarca (Colombia), al igual que entre los funcionarios públicos y privados que ejecutan la política rural en esta región. Los resultados muestran que los encuestados confunden lo que significa desarrollo rural y desarrollo agrícola, puesto que sus respuestas privilegian aspectos productivistas, modernizantes y tecnológicos, por encima de aquellos que priorizan a los habitantes del sector rural. Ello se explica por cuanto a mediados del siglo pasado se pensaba que el desarrollo rural debía orientarse hacia aquellos aspectos que reivindicaban la actividad económica del campo, sin tener en cuenta a los habitantes y sus aspectos culturales, valores y dignidad. Este aspecto señala la necesidad de revalorar el significado del medio rural y su importancia para el desarrollo del país.

**Palabras clave:** revaloración del sector rural, multifuncionalidad, pluriactividad, políticas públicas rurales.

## Introduction

This work shows the most recent results of research started in 2005, dealing with the perceptions of different players who are part of the rural sector on conceptual aspects related with *rural development* (RD). Some of the progress has been shown in other publications (Pachón, 2005, 2006, 2007). These have revealed the strong influence of the idea of development associated to economic growth, both on conceptual aspects on rural development (RD) and which is confused with *agricultural development* (AD), as well as on those referring to the execution of public policies on rural development. To hold a conceptual discussion on that issue, we will show some orientations on RD, along with an alternative view of what the rural setting would mean, which becomes the basis to redirect RD.

The confusion between RD and AD exists, given that—as previously mentioned—RD has historically had an orientation quite close to development; in this regard, Plaza argues that: “We usually tend to confuse rural development [...] with all the actions or proposals seeking to improve production conditions and the income of peasant farmers to achieve better standards of living and participation, and overcome their poverty” (Plaza, 1998). Other authors offer elements to the discussion:

Traditionally, it has been considered that rural development exists when acceptable levels of production and productivity have been achieved in peasant agriculture, besides a certain well-being of the rural population. This vision is limited to economic aspects and to some indicators of well being. (Chiriboga and Plaza, 1998)

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These statements show the ongoing tendency to confuse two aspects, which although they are similar, they are not the same: RD is not the same as AD. The latter refers to the economic activity, seeking to increase productivity and increase the income of rural producers. Undoubtedly, it is very close to the traditional notion of *development* associated to economic growth, increased productivity, and improvement of activities closely related to agricultural production, inherent of the rural sector. On the other hand, RD refers to the cultural aspects within an environment where its economic activities take place, the rural sector, inhabited by individuals with a culture, values, and idiosyncrasies, which are, for obvious reasons, connected to their economic activity.

These conceptions, which are manifested in direction of the professional training, inquiring on the perceptions of rural development of different players involved in the training; specifically, for the case of Universidad Nacional de Colombia in Bogotá (Pachón, 2006). Under this perception of rural development combined with that of agricultural development, different programs have been proposed for the rural sector; thus, the objective of the development has traditionally concentrated

[...] on promoting the transformation of agricultural production in the farm, through a package that traditionally included technical assistance, credit support, and training. Whatever was outside the farm and which was not strictly complementary to it, like commercialization of products or the construction of roads and irrigation infrastructure, was considered an activity foreign to rural development. This had to do with a vision that reduced rural development to economic and productive aspects and which did not consider issues related to public participation, the need for new organizations and institutions, and the role of local bodies elected by the population like the municipalities. (Chiriboga, 1999)

Upon retaking this concept, it turns out interesting to highlight the findings from a work by Pachón (2005), which permits perceiving a certain influence of the tendency that has just been mentioned. For example, most students of Agricultural Engineering conceive rural development as a process of technical automation of rural activities through which a change is begun of the social conditions of its inhabitants. Students of Agronomy Engineering consider rural development as the possibilities the inhabitants of the rural sector have of carrying out change to improve their living and economic conditions by implementing new and improved technologies. For their part, students of Veterinary Medicine think rural development is a pro-

cess of change and technical modernization of productive activities in the rural sector to improve the living conditions of its inhabitants. Finally, students of Animal Sciences conceive rural development as a process of technical modernization of productive activities in the rural sector to improve the living conditions of its inhabitants, but they also bear in mind aspects of political participation and of its internal relationships.

These findings confirm the affirmation made by Pérez (2001): “[...] the study of the curricula shows a close relationship among the models and conceptions of development in general and rural development in particular, with the thematic content and the objectives of the programs”. This phenomenon is manifested, for example, in that for students, RD consists of increased income for farm families through the technical modernization of their production systems.

Within this conception, new players come into the scene aside from the peasant farmers, which could open the door for new views of the rural sector and the role the different players have therein.

Based on this discussion, it is necessary to reassess the rural setting to understand its multi-functionality and multiple activities, as previously mentioned, to avoid confusing RD with AD. It is necessary to see the rural setting in a different manner and transcend to that traditional perception that merely associates it with agricultural production. Therein new views arrive to open the spectrum of the multi-functionality of the rural sector, as well as the multiple activities that take place in the sector. A vision of the rural setting frame worked within a territory opens a new way of perceiving it and its development.

This discussion centers on what Amtmann states as:

[...] before, the concept of rural setting was mainly related to agricultural production activities and to the way of life resulting from these work forms. This conception is not currently satisfactory, given the important influence from other areas and activities and the rural question must be addressed comprehensively. (Amtmann, 2001)

On the other hand, Guiberteau contributes to the discussion by saying:

[...] the rural environment is the non-urban social setting marked by the traditional economic activity, agriculture with its own culture, apparently defined, although not so much in reality. Rural is not the same as agrarian. The first is a culture; the latter is an economic activity —certainly by far the eco-

conomic activity of the rural world— which has contributed to the rural much of its values and singularities, even though it has not been the only activity. (Guibertau, 2002)

Based on these conceptual differentiations, we now find profound distinctions between RD and AD, which must necessarily be manifested in how we try to conduct RD.

Likewise, Pérez states that in: “[...] developing countries reassessment of the rural setting is also being promoted, trying to overcome the dichotomy between agricultural and rural sectors and the marginal role assigned to the rural sector in the development” (Pérez, 2001). Also, for Márquez “[...] the rural setting nowadays has different meanings, which are linked to the landscape, the environment, the space, the territory, development, etc”. And continues by arguing that “[...] the rural setting is today a polyvalent term, analyzed in different areas of knowledge, Geography, Anthropology, Sociology, Agronomics, Economics, and Environmental Planning among others” (Márquez, 2002).

Thus, the discussion opens on the multidimensional and multiple-activity role of the rural sector. Said multiple activities are represented in the ways rural producers adapt to new conditions of rural work, seeking to diversify their activities to manage to survive in a globalized world (Schneider, 2003). Upon reassessing the rural sector, it is no longer a productive problem what is related with the rural setting; hence, other areas of knowledge must come into play and contribute in the search, from their own areas, to solutions to the different problems arising there. Thus, Atchoarena and Gasperini define the rural area as:

A space where human settlements and infrastructure occupy only a small part of the landscape; a natural environment dominated by pastures, forests, mountains, and deserts; a low-density settlement (between 5,000 and 10,000 inhabitants); a place where most of the people work on agricultural exploitation; the availability of land at relatively low cost; and a place where activities are affected by high transaction costs, associated with great distances from the cities and poor availability of infrastructure. (Atchoarena and Gasperini, 2004)

For the World Bank (2002), in its publication *Reaching the rural poor: new strategy for rural development* “[...] it uses the rural areas in the sense that includes small and medium sized towns, according to national definitions”.

On the contrary, Mora and Sumpsi propose that

The concept of rural space must abandon the census definitions from which a distinction is made between rural and

urban, given that they lack sense for rural development because they define it as urban, merely because they are capital cities, some agglomerations lacking population density, infrastructure and intensity of significant links to remote areas. (Mora and Sumpsi, 2004)

When using demographic definitions, or those associating the rural setting as backward, inhabited by individuals who do not know how to use available technology to improve their productive processes, we immediately bring to mind the guidelines that during the 1940s and early 1950s originated the idea of development, and in whose name we analyzed in the previous chapter the consequences these have brought to humanity.

An idea of what the rural setting can be is framed in that: “The rural space is a space intertwined with the urban. Because of this, it is necessary to break the dichotomy between rural and urban development, *i.e.*, break from the general idea that the rural setting is backward and the urban setting is developed” (Pérez, 1998). Regarding the activities carried out in the rural areas, these

[...] are involved with the use of natural resources: mining, fishery, agriculture, small-scale forest resource extraction, etc. When defined in these terms, we see how the rural setting is strongly involved with environmental aspects and the administration of natural resources; hence, and this is another conclusion from the point of view of rural development, the rural setting is strongly related to the development of natural resources or to the use we make of these. (Llambi, 2001)

As evidenced, now we have the possibility of a multi-functional of the rural sector and of its close relationship with the greatest concern of our days, environmental aspects.

Just as the rural setting is multi-functional, it is *pluri-active*; that is, different activities are conducted therein: “The rural area is understood as the set of regions or areas with diverse activities (agriculture, handicrafts, small and medium industries, trade, services) and where towns, villages, small towns and regional centers are settled, along with natural and cultivated areas” (Pérez, 1998). Besides the activities cited,

[...] there is also livestock, fisheries, mining, natural resource extraction and tourism.” The rural environment is, then, a socio-economic entity within a geographic space, with four basic components: 1) A territory functioning as a source of resources. 2) A population that based on its culture, practices different economic activities that make up an intricate framework. 3) A number of settlements related

amongst themselves and with the external environment exchanging goods, individuals, and information. 4) A set of public and private institutions that articulate the system amid a legal framework (Pérez, 1998)

Effectively, the rural sector is multi-functional and pluri-active. This is how we must understand it to comprehend its immense complexity and, thus, get closer to its reality to propose real solutions to real problems, overcoming the traditional view. "The rural transcends the agrarian. In the rural environment develops, besides merely agricultural activities, activities involving crafts, forestry, industry, agribusiness, and tourism; thereby, programs and projects of rural development cannot only be of agricultural nature, but must involve all the rural activities." (Pérez, 1998)

Evidently, there are differences between the rural and agricultural settings as has been shown. Nevertheless, for the discussion we must add an additional element that turns out to be the center of all this, the objective that guides the processes started for the rural sector, and without a doubt it is the people living there, its inhabitants, who different authors identify as those who have traditionally regarded as last in rural development.

## Materials and methods

Data was collected through a survey conducted with peasant farmers who were part of the Nuclei of Entrepreneurs with which the Research Group on Rural Development and Management at Universidad Nacional de Colombia has been working with for five years. In total, information was gathered from 98 peasants from 15 Nuclei of Entrepreneurs from the Province. A total of 54 individuals were also surveyed; these were employed by the public institutions called *Umatas* (acronym for *Unidades Municipales de Asistencia Técnica Agropecuaria*, Municipal Units of Agricultural Technical Support) at the municipalities of the province, as well as other types of institutions present in the province like the Colombia International Corporation, the National Federation of Panela (brown sugar) Producers (Fedepanela), and the National Federation of Coffee Growers, among others.

The survey revolved around a central open question: "for you, what is rural development?" To which the respondents answered what RD meant for them, how to conduct RD, why conduct this development, and who should engage in it. Nevertheless, on some occasions, they mentioned several aspects in each category; for this reason, sometimes the number of answers can surpass the total number of respondents from each population group. All the questions were

computed and the frequency of responses was analyzed to infer the inclination the respondents had toward topic being asked, mainly if there was confusion between RD and AD, previously mentioned.

## Results and discussion

Hereinafter, we will show the most important findings of the surveys conducted with the personnel and with the peasant farmers. Regarding professional training of the groups surveyed, among the personnel there were different careers in their professional training: 7.4% were agricultural engineers, 24.1% were agronomy engineers, 20.4% were veterinarians, 9.8% were from other careers, and a vast 38.9% were not professionals. Among the peasants, only 2 of them, corresponding to 2% had studied economics; the remaining 98% did not have higher education. Concerning having benefited from some RD program, 57% manifested they had benefited at some opportunity, and mentioned mainly food security programs and delivery of inputs (raw materials).

It is worth mentioning that for the Colombian rural sector, one of the programs that has been implemented in recent years and which has had greater coverage is that of food safety; thus, it is normal that response tendencies are aimed in that direction, and it is very likely that others that were carried out be forgotten like one of the most important programs in Colombia: the Integrated Rural Development (IRD) program, which was an aspect that turned out to be more relevant if we bear in mind that 47% of the peasant farmers surveyed have been living and producing in the same place for over 21 years.

Regarding the main question of the survey form: "for you, what is rural development?" respondents answered in four different categories. The first of these refers to the concrete aspect of "what is rural development?" to which they responded as shown in (Fig. 1). The personnel mostly responded by 37% (20 responses / 54 total responses) relating RD to technical modernization processes of productive activities, followed by 29.6% (16 responses / 54 total responses) with an orientation toward the dignity of what the rural setting means, of its activities and the rural life. For their part, the farmers privileged dignity by 25.5% (25 responses / 98 total responses), followed by 21.4% (21 responses / 98 total responses) for the comprehensive support to the rural sector, not only its activities, and with the same percentage going for the technical modernization of productive activities.

Based on the answers found, we may state that among the personnel, there is confusion between RD and AD, and

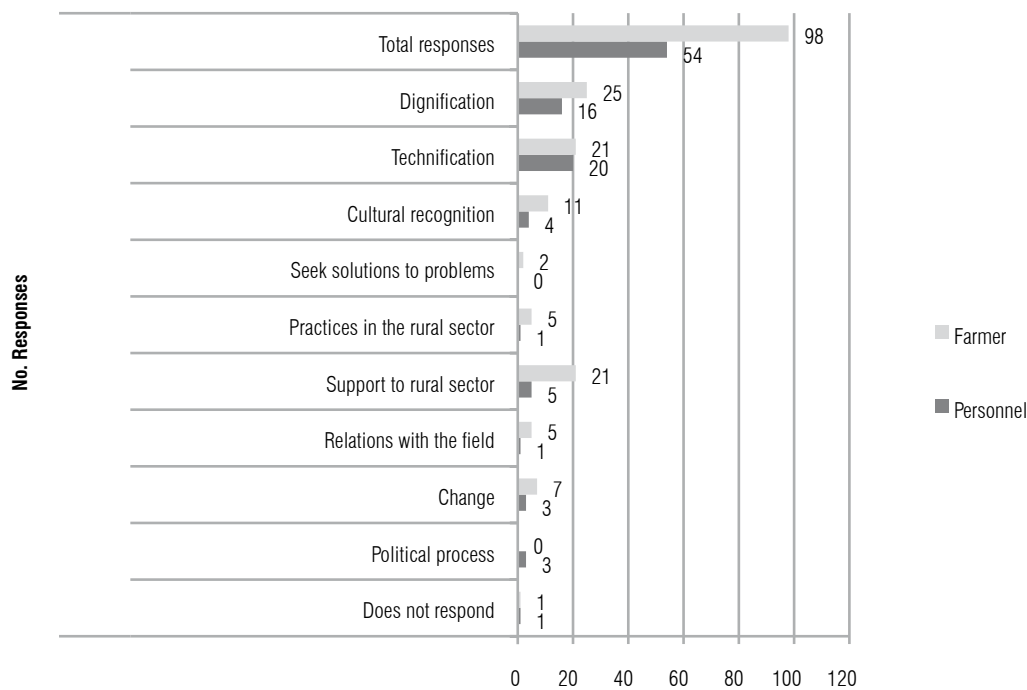


FIGURE 1. What is rural development?

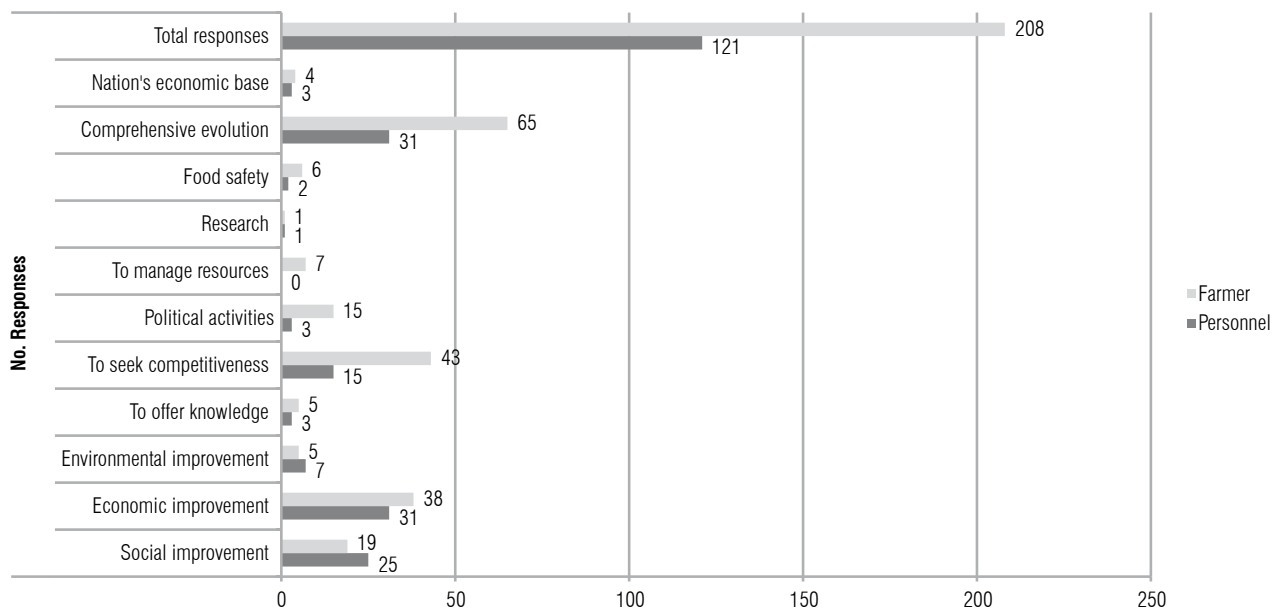


FIGURE 2. Why engage in rural development?

the peasants guide their answers towards a vision of RD understood not so much toward the economic activity, but toward aspects placing people first, *i.e.*, themselves as peasant farmers.

The following category of answers is oriented towards “why engage in rural development?” Regarding the farmers, 31.25% (65 responses / 208 total responses) refers about comprehensive evolution of rural conditions, 20.7% (43

responses / 208 total responses) mentioned that RD must be conducted to seek competitiveness in which their products are paid better in the market, followed by 18.3% (38 responses / 208 total responses) who are oriented toward improving economic activities. For their part, the personnel highlight by 25.6% the aspects related, both, to economic improvement and comprehensive evolution of rural conditions (31 responses / 121 total responses), improving revenue, followed by improving the social aspects (20.66%,

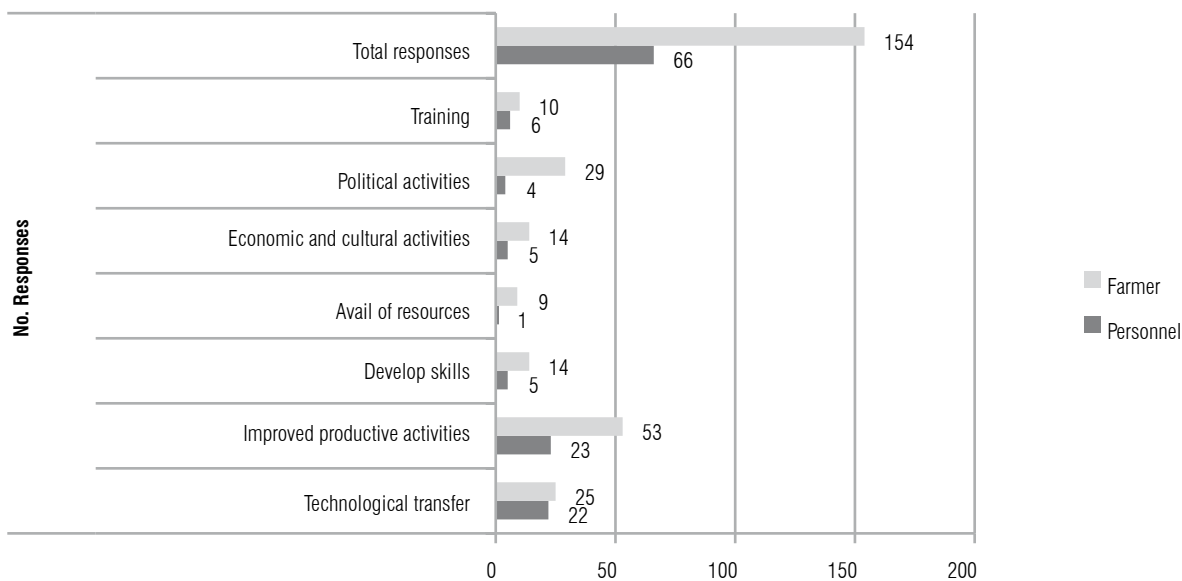


FIGURE 3. How to conduct rural development?

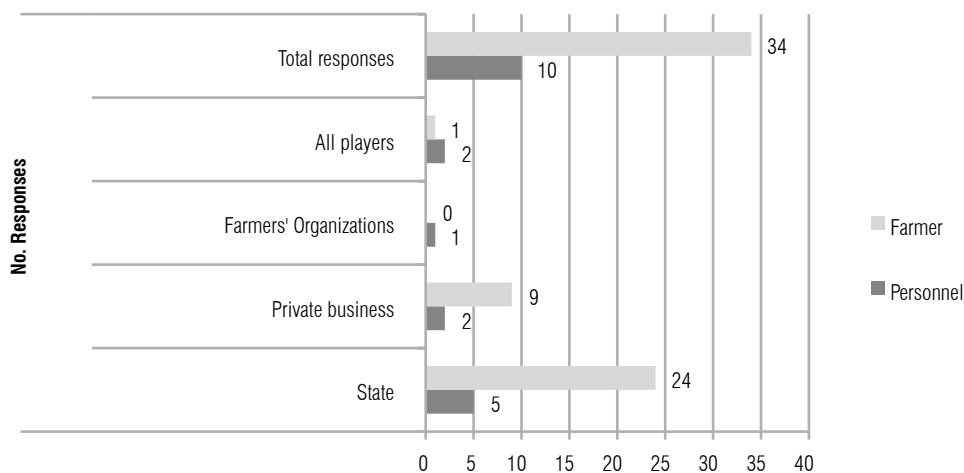


FIGURE 4. Who should conduct rural development?

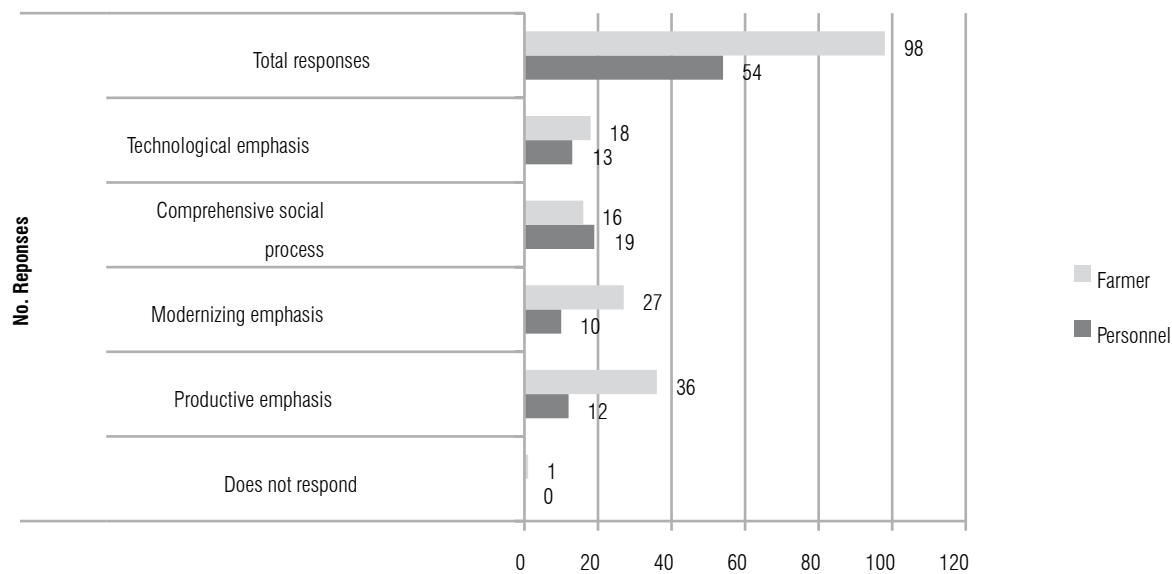
25 responses / 121 total responses) of the inhabitants of the rural area (Fig. 2).

Regarding these answers, contradictions are evident among those surveyed because if the previous answers are compared it would be expected that each of the groups surveyed would continue orienting their answers toward the first item featured, but their answers are removed from that previously mentioned.

The results from the third category answered: “how to conduct RD?” are shown in (Fig. 3). Some 34.8% (23 responses / 66 total responses) of the personnel highlight improving the productive activities as a way of conducting

RD, followed by 33.3% (22 responses / 66 total responses) say that it requires technology transfer. For their part, the farmers first highlight with 34.4% (53 responses / 154 total responses) improving the productive activities, followed by 18.8% (29 responses / 154 total responses) with an aspect that was not kept in mind by personnel like integration in political activities, along with technology transfer with 16.2% (25 responses / 154 total responses).

The groups surveyed revealed their orientation toward the modernization paradigm and the technology transfer model from the 1950s (Kay, 2005). Nevertheless, it is important to mention that the peasants highlight the policy aspects as the way of conducting RD; this could be interpreted as that



**FIGURE 5.** Appreciation of rural development.

in addition to the economic activity ways must be sought to dignify the rural dweller, as they mentioned it in (Fig. 1).

The last category computed in the central question of the form was “who should conduct RD?” (Fig. 4). The farmer reported that RD should be mainly conducted by the state (70.6%) (24 responses / 34 total responses), followed by 26.5% (9 responses / 34 total responses) who said it should be conducted by private company. They do not distinguish the peasant organizations as those that should conduct RD. The personnel, for their part 50% (5 responses / 10 total responses) said the state should conduct RD, followed by 20% (2 responses / 10 total responses) who responded that private companies should conduct it and all the players; however, did not particularly suggest the peasant organizations as responsible for conducting RD. It is indicated, then, that RD is fundamentally a state function, more than from private initiatives.

The information collection instrument contained a categorized question as a control for the central question of the form, it requested those surveyed to select among four emphases that RD has had along recent years (appreciation of rural development, Fig. 5). In 36.7% (36 responses / 98 total responses) of the cases, the peasants selected the productive emphasis, followed by the modernizing emphasis with 27.6% (27 responses / 98 total responses). There is a notable contradiction within this population group, when mentioning that RD was the dignity of the rural dweller (Fig. 1), in these answers they were oriented toward productive aspects and not toward a comprehensive social emphasis, in which dignity was included. For

their part 35.2% (19 responses / 54 total responses) of the personnel responded toward a comprehensive social emphasis, followed by 24% (13 responses / 54 total responses) toward the technological emphasis. The personnel also showed a contradiction, given that in Fig. 1 they mentioned the aspects related toward productivity, and in this response, there is orientation toward the comprehensive social emphasis.

Finally, the survey inquired the peasant farmers on the future of RD in Colombia for the next decade. These responses were organized showing the differences between those who believe that it would be accomplished and those who did not, and the reasons to justify their answers, which could be because of any of the two aspects, *i.e.*, their arguments could be used affirmatively or negatively (Fig. 6).

The policies are mentioned by farmers as the reasons why there would or would not be RD with very similar percentages 30.8% (19 responses / 52 total affirmative responses) and 33.3% (13 responses / 39 total negative responses), this means that the orientation of the public policies during this century in the nation are seen by their beneficiaries as positive and as negative in similar percentages by the peasant farmers, although not benefiting from them, as previously mentioned. Nearly 19.2% (10 responses / 52 affirmative responses) of the peasant farmers who believe there will be RD think that currently good projects are being developed. Close to 12.8% (5 responses / 39 negative responses) of the peasant farmers claim the armed conflict is responsible for the negative future of RD in Colombia.

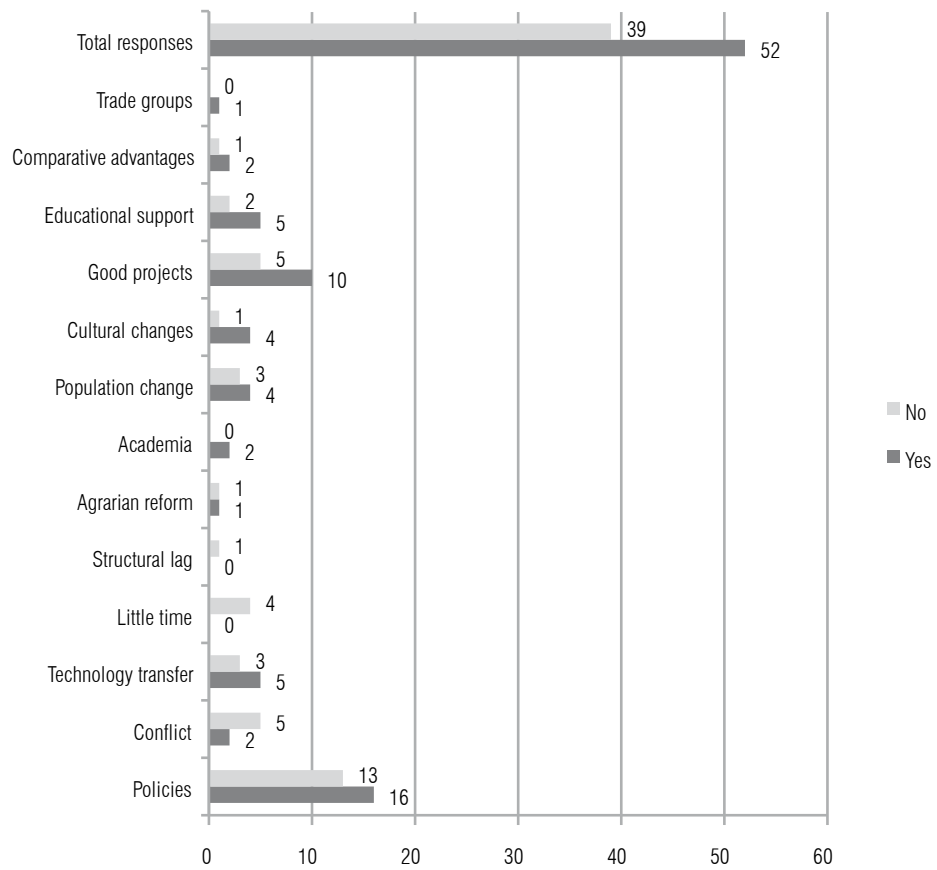


FIGURE 6. Reasons why the peasant farmers believe there will be rural development in Colombia in 10 years.

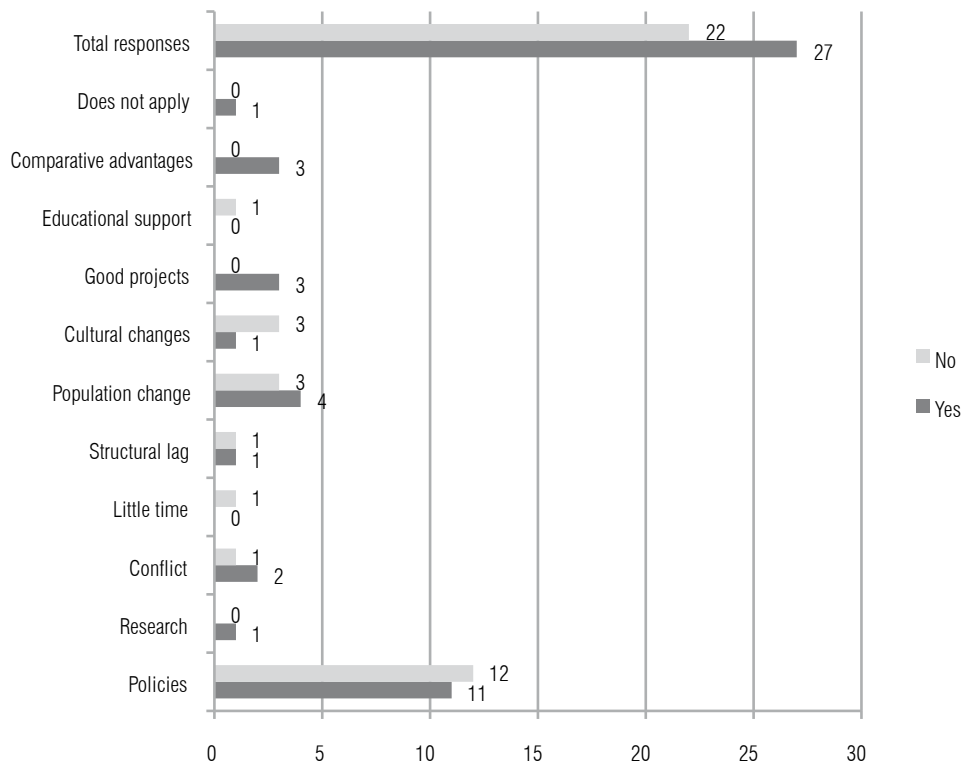


FIGURE 7. Reasons why personnel believe there will be rural development in Colombia in 10 years.



Finally, Fig. 7 shows the results to the same last question for the personnel. As with the peasant farmers, the policies were considered affirmatively and negatively (40.7%, 11 responses / 27 affirmative responses; and 54.5%, 12 responses / 22 negative responses, respectively), with the negative aspect being greater than the positive one.

As far as other aspects, 14.8% (4 responses / 27 affirmative responses) of the personnel felt there would be RD due to changes being undertaken by the rural population; although this same argument was used by a 13.6% (3 responses / 22 negative responses) response frequency to believe there would not be RD.

The findings in this work confirm that the confusion between two closely related but not identical concepts like RD and AD is still present among many of the individuals who have a close relationship with the rural sector, in this case peasants from a determined zone of the nation and the personnel working there. This means that academia needs to delve into the conceptual aspects related to RD, which can help to overcome the confusion that still prevails and does not deliver and value the rural sector its role in the nation's development.

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