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Impact of State and Legal Regulation on the Sustainable Development of Agricultural Territories and Improving the Standard of Living of the Population

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Abstract

The presented study assesses the impact of state regulation on the processes of sustainable development of rural areas in the EAEU countries. Sustainable rural development today is one of the strategic tasks of the state related to ensuring its economic, environmental, and food security. The authors aim to identify the opportunities for sustainable development of rural areas in the EAEU countries in comparison with international trends. The paper analyzes the main theoretical concepts and methodological approaches to assessing the sustainability of rural development developed by researchers. The authors review the legislation regulating the processes of sustainable rural development. They consider examples of world experience in the application of state regulation measures to ensure sustainable development of rural areas. The main principles on which the management of sustainable rural development is based, according to the authors, are consistency, an integrated approach, strategic planning, and inclusiveness. It is concluded that it is the state that is the main interest and actor in ensuring sustainable rural development. The lines of action for the improvement of state regulation of rural areas' for EAEU countries' sustainable development are proposed. According to the authors, in order to ensure the sustainable development of rural areas, the support program should be focused on small producers, private households, and farmers.

Keywords: sustainable development; strategic planning; systematic approach; innovation; support for agricultural producers.

JEL Classification: Q01; Q56; O13; R58.

Introduction

Today, the most important functions in the socio-economic development of country, mainly related to ensuring its food security, are performed by rural territories, whose role and importance in this area are likely to only increase in the future (Chernysheva *et al.* 2021, 15). Thus, agricultural enterprises in the EAEU countries produce 3.8% of the gross domestic product, the value of which exceeds 120 billion US dollars (2020), and employ about 7.8% of the working population (Eurasian Economic Commission 2020b). Largely due to this, EAEU countries in the production of several types of agricultural products, such as grain, sunflower, potatoes, and others, fully meet not only domestic needs but also actively export these products to foreign markets. Thus, preserving the potential and creating conditions for the further development of rural areas are among the priorities of modern state policy to ensure food security, as well as improve the level and quality of life of the population (Zotov and Golovanov 2018, 57).

The concept of sustainable development, which became widespread in the 1960s, is now actively used in rural areas. The state policy carried out in rural areas aimed at preserving the rural population, improving the quality of life, is associated mainly with sustainable development. Sustainable development of rural territories is usually understood as the realization of its goals, such as ensuring stable socio-economic development of rural settlements, increasing agricultural production, improving the efficiency of agriculture, achieving full employment for the rural population, and improving the standard of living of the rural population, rational use of land, etc. (Nardin and Nardina 2021, 1242; Petrina and Stadolin 2021, 164; Tsenina *et al.* 2022, 63).

The development of rural areas in EAEU countries is complicated by several problems. Countries' rural population is shrinking. Wages in rural areas are still one of the lowest in the country, and this trend has continued over the past 20 years. Thus, wages in agriculture in 2019 were 259 US dollars in Armenia, 309 US dollars in Kazakhstan, and 146 US dollars in Kyrgyzstan (Eurasian Economic Commission 2020a).

Today, the sustainable development of rural areas is the object of close attention not only from the political leadership of EAEU countries but also from many researchers. There are several approaches to this phenomenon in research. Some researchers consider sustainable rural development as purposeful, requiring optimal state intervention (Polushkin 2017, 191), and dynamic process of positive changes (Shumakova and Rybkanova 2014, 1643). L.V. Pakush and A.G. Efimenko (2019, 391) understand the sustainable development of rural areas as the process of using the potential of each territory "to ensure a high standard of living for the population". There is also a scientific approach where sustainable rural development is defined as a system. S.A. Molchanenko (2014) considers the sustainable development of rural areas as a system where the constant evolutionary change of individual geographically and functionally interconnected system elements happens. The definition of Belarusian scientists Z.M. Ilyina and G.V. Mirenkova (2014, 21) is formulated as "a multilevel system of integrated components, their relationships, and connections". Some scientists focus on the vector of rural development (Rosenko 2021, 23). The paper by O.A. Moskaleva and O.V. Telegina (2015) focuses on the stable socio-economic development of rural areas based on the rational use of land resources, increasing the efficiency of agriculture as a whole, as well as achieving full employment of the population living in rural areas and improving their standard of living. Much attention in academia is paid to the development of methods for assessing the sustainability of rural areas, considering various factors (Agibalov *et al.* 2020, 54; Arzumanyan 2020, 45). The analysis of scientific approaches to the definition of the concept under study has shown that the authors strive to harmoniously cover not only socio-economic factors but also environmental, institutional, and political.

The main lines of research on sustainable development of rural areas are presented below in the following table (Table 1).

Table 1. Concepts of sustainable rural development

Concepts	Representatives
Sustainable rural development as a process	N.A. Polushkin, O.V. Shumakova, M.A. Rybkanova
Sustainable rural development as a system	S.A. Molchanenko, Z.M. Ilyina, G.V. Mirenkova
Sustainable rural development as a line of action	O.A. Moskaleva, O.V. Telegina
Sustainable development as a combination of various factors (for the formation of assessment methods)	A.V. Agibalov, M.S. Arzumanyan

Despite a large number of studies on the subject, in our opinion, not enough attention is paid to the influence and role of the state on the sustainability of rural development. The purpose of the presented study is to analyze the measures taken by the authorities to ensure sustainable development and to assess the results and

prospects for further application of the most effective of those measures. To achieve this goal, one needs to reach the following objectives: to investigate the regulatory and legal framework, study the world experience, and evaluate the possible result of the application of certain measures.

The hypothesis of the study: the most promising measures in ensuring sustainable development of rural areas today are those aimed at improving the quality of life of the rural population.

1. Methods

The study was conducted based on systematic, quantitative, and qualitative approaches. In combination with these approaches, various theoretical and empirical research methods were used. Theoretical methods (analysis, synthesis, comparison, generalization) were used for the study of literary sources related to the problem of the study and to determine the strategic lines of action of state policy to ensure sustainable development of rural areas. Using the abstract-logical method, we formulated the intermediate and final conclusions and proposals. The reliability of the obtained results and conclusions was confirmed by calculations using the statistical method.

Empirical methods (the method of interviewing experts), and numerical methods (the method of mathematical processing of respondents' answers, the ranking method) were also used to obtain the data necessary for conducting this study. The sources for proving the hypothesis were regulatory acts, theoretical and applied research publications, and information on the state of rural development presented on trusted information resources of states.

The study was carried out based on the Kazakh Scientific Research Institute of Water Economy, Turan University, Alikhan Bokeikhan University, Narxoz University, and Al-Faraby Kazakh National University in two languages (Russian and English).

Thirty-three people from EAEU countries (Kazakhstan, Armenia, Belarus, Russia, and Kyrgyzstan) were involved as experts: 12 representatives of universities, 10 representatives of ministries and departments of agriculture, and 11 representatives of large agricultural holdings. The criterion for inclusion in the expert group was the availability of publications on the topic or the work experience over 5 years in a managerial position in the field of agriculture and territory management. The indicators of publication activity of experts' from universities in journals included in the Scopus or Web of Science citation databases were taken into account if they had at least three papers published on a similar topic. During the survey, experts were asked to answer the question: "According to you, which measures of state influence are most effective for ensuring sustainable development of rural areas?". The respondents were informed that the survey results would be used in this study in a general way. The answers offered by the respondents were combined into five semantic groups processed by us using mathematical calculation and ranking methods.

2. Results

The results of the expert survey are listed in the following table (Table 2), representing the distribution of opinions on the issue under consideration as a percentage.

Table 2. The effectiveness of state impact measures to ensure sustainable development of rural areas

State impact measures on the sustainable development of rural areas		Effectiveness of state measures according to expert assessment, %
1	Strategic planning, development, and implementation of various programs and subprograms	47
2	Development of industrial and social infrastructure in rural areas	23
3	Support (benefits, grants, subsidies) for agricultural enterprises	14
4	Creating optimal social conditions and improving the quality of life of the rural population	9
5	Other measures	7

Sustainable development of rural areas is a relatively new direction of the domestic policy of the EAEU countries. Thus, in recent years in Kazakhstan, to ensure effective employment of the labor force and improve the living standards in the countryside, several socio-economic programs have been developed, including "Strategy 'Kazakhstan-2050': New Political Course of an Established State" (The Message of the First President of the Republic of Kazakhstan 2012), Program for the Development of Productive Employment and Mass Entrepreneurship for 2017-2021 "Enbek" (Decree of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan 2018), as well as the "Employment Roadmap 2020" (Order of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan 2020) aimed to create new jobs and increase the incomes of the rural population. As a result, over the past 15 years,

there has been a decrease in the rural population in Kazakhstan who has incomes below the subsistence level from 34.2% to 4.5% (2019). The share of the rural population that has an income below the food basket in 2019 decreased to 0.3%. Program for the Development of Productive Employment and Mass Entrepreneurship for 2017-2021 "Enbek" is aimed at increasing the employment of the rural population in small and medium-sized businesses. The combination of the state program documents has helped expand the business initiatives of entrepreneurs in rural areas and also served as an incentive for the growth of jobs and demand for labor in rural areas (Kulakova 2021, 22).

Such a systematic approach in the field of regulation of sustainable development of rural areas seems to be quite developed and sufficient. However, according to many indicators, primarily in the social sphere, the goals set by state programs have not been achieved. It has been noted that the measures taken by several EAEU countries to develop rural areas and the results achieved are insufficient for the expected increase in the quality of life of the rural population, the preservation of the potential of rural areas, and the fulfillment of national functions, such as the production, demographic, labor, communication and historical and cultural one by rural territories (Shevtsov 2022, 130).

In rural areas, the provision of residents with basic social benefits remains extremely low: the quantity and quality of housing, the quality of educational facilities, the availability of healthcare, the availability of a road network, the quality of drinking water, and even the Internet. About half of the rural population is unemployed at the moment. Salaries in rural areas are about 30% lower than the average across EAEU countries (Eurasian Economic Commission 2020a).

Meanwhile, local communities living in rural areas cannot overcome existing problems on their own, without state intervention. This can be done only with the full participation of the state, which should not only ensure strategic planning and programming of rural development but also achieve its programmed targets.

In this regard, the world practice of supporting rural areas, which is part of the state policy of many developed countries, is relevant. Considering the pan-European approach (the policy of the European Union), the measures taken are aimed at supporting rural municipalities in the transition to new energy sources and combating the effects of climate change, assuming (Golovina and Mikolaichik 2021, 1261) the implementation of best practices in rural areas, support-based practices and opportunities for rural municipalities to access financing under the EU Green Deal program (Matthews 2018, 306), using the investment opportunities of the territorial instruments of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Rural Development Fund (EAFRD), and such projects as Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI's), Community-Led Local Development (CLLD), and LEADER, (Konecný 2019, 1) involving rural territories in the implementation of the newest project New European Bauhaus, an interdisciplinary initiative developed at the intersection of social integration, art, culture, science, and new technologies, promoting the green course and presenting a sustainable, inclusive and harmonious future (Maes *et al.* 2015, 517).

In the UK, many elderly people in rural areas have housing that is not sufficiently adapted for their needs, but at the same time, elderly people do not want to move, even to more comfortable housing. The non-profit organization Care &Repair has been helping to solve the problems of this category of residents of the country for several decades (Shevtsov 2022, 130). The financial assistance provided by the organization allows the elderly of Great Britain to better adapt their housing for the needs of the elderly and, thereby, contribute to the further development of rural areas. In Ireland, the national non-profit organization Active Retirement Ireland, which unites more than 500 organizations, organizes active leisure for elderly people living in rural areas (Shevtsov 2022, 130). The Rezo Pouce social taxi project is being implemented in more than 1,500 municipalities of France, which helps to reduce the inequality in the mobility of residents of cities and rural areas. In Northern Hesse (Germany), a mobility model was successfully applied for rural areas with a priority for the development of transport services based on the sharing (rental) of on-demand transport (Shevtsov 2022, 130).

The US experience shows that an increase in housing construction in rural areas provides economic growth and improved demography. In Australia, the requirements for the design of the village of Flinders include provisions that protect and enhance the specifics of the village, such as the preservation of single-story buildings, the special design of the ground floors, and the creation of a rural environment at the expense of the landscape. A harmonious combination of modern technologies and the revival of identity was used in the Chinese Zaiwan village, which formed a unified approach to the improvement of public spaces based on aesthetics, the revival of the identity of public spaces, and economical efficiency (Shevtsov 2022, 130).

The comparative table below presents some of the measures taken in global practice to ensure the sustainable development of rural areas (Table 3).

Table 3. Measures taken to ensure sustainable development of rural areas

Country	Subjects of support for sustainable rural development	Examples of measures used to ensure sustainable rural development
The European Union as a whole	EU governing bodies, specialized funds for rural development and regional development under the authority of the European Union	Financing of social integration based on green development, provision of ecosystem restoration services, living conditions, training and development opportunities for rural residents, and ensuring their physical and mental health.
Great Britain, Ireland, France, Germany	Government, local municipalities, non-profit organizations	Financial assistance in improving housing conditions, organization of transport mobility, active leisure
USA, Australia, China	Government, local municipalities	Preservation of the rural environment, rural aesthetics, and landscaping in combination with economical efficiency, through the use of modern technologies
Russia	Federal and regional governments	Implementation of strategic planning, development of programs to support agribusiness, employment, etc.
Kazakhstan	Authorities, development institutions, and funds to support small and medium-sized businesses	Development of pivotal settlements within the framework of a unified regional development program with the development of individual comprehensive plans for the development of pivotal rural settlements

As can be seen from the analysis presented above, measures to support the rural areas, ensuring their sustainable development, taken from the examples of global experience, in contrast to EAEU countries' practice, take into account the human and social components to a greater extent, which ultimately affects sustainable development.

3. Discussion

Conclusions of many researchers, for example, M.I. Rosenko (2021) and V.V. Shevtsov (2022), indicate that the measures taken by governments of EAEU countries to develop rural areas, following the achieved indicators, do not correspond to the expected increase in the quality of life of the rural population, which downplays the potential of rural areas and prevents rural territories from performing, as noted above, the production, demographic, labor, communication, historical, and cultural functions. It is indicated that the central authorities and the regions are not consistently implementing a comprehensive (socio-economic) joint policy concerning rural areas, as a result, the attractiveness of rural areas continues to decline, which hinders their socio-economic development (Glebova *et al.* 2022, 182; Shevtsov 2022, 130).

In the fair opinion of V.V. Shevtsov (2022), in the measures proclaimed by the Russian state for the development of rural territories, there is a significant desire to expand state regulation of the development of rural territories, but insufficient attention is paid to the issues of increasing the business activity of rural residents. According to this researcher, the development of agricultural holdings, largely due to priority state support, is going too fast, which is especially noticeable against the background of degradation of rural areas. For this reason, V.V. Shevtsov deems it advisable to freeze the development of agricultural holdings, especially those that do not show an active interest in building high-quality infrastructure and fulfilling social obligations for residents of specific rural areas (Dokholyan *et al.* 2022, 597; Shevtsov 2022, 130). S.G. Golovina holds a similar opinion, also observing the lack of direct interest of business structures in the sustainable development of the village: "short-term competition for resources and a long preparatory stage (before income generation) prevent the introduction of useful changes by commercial structures, therefore, the solution of many of the above problems (sustainable development of the village) is the task of the state, with which it can cope with the support of agricultural producers and rural communities" (Golovina and Mikolaichik 2021, 1261).

In this aspect, the paradigm of rural development proposed by T.M. Polushkina (2022), where sustainability is combined with the principle of inclusiveness, deserves attention. This is the principle of universality, which makes it possible to ensure justice and equal opportunities for all, which is an integral part of any successful strategy in the field of rural development. Financial flows for the development of rural areas should, among other things, contribute to improving the well-being of low-income groups of the rural population,

promote development, and create working opportunities for their integration into the field of economic activity. It is proposed to supplement state programs with an inclusive component, which in turn will require adjustments to funding mechanisms.

Considering the specifics of agriculture in individual EAEU countries, for example, in Kazakhstan, it is proposed to single out micro-regions within the boundaries of administrative regions and rural districts that have high investment attractiveness. Micro-regions are proposed to be called innovation-active territories (IAT), the sustainable socio-economic development of which largely depends on the validity of their functional use. This will allow, based on a complex system of criterion factors, assessing the ability of a particular territory to effectively locate investment objects (Akimov *et al.* 2018, 61).

For the mountainous conditions of the Republic of Armenia, as a measure to ensure sustainable development, it is proposed to enlarge small villages in mountainous and border areas. The liquidation of such villages is unacceptable, as this will lead to a reduction in populated areas, prevent the intensive use of territorial resources and agricultural land, and ultimately lead to a weakening of the country's defense capability. It is necessary not only to preserve the existing network of rural areas but also to take measures to restore and repopulate dozens of abandoned villages (Podosyan 2016, 193).

Thus, the main measures proposed by researchers to ensure the sustainable development of rural areas are those that directly or indirectly affect the living conditions of the population, considering the characteristics of agriculture and rural traditions of EAEU countries.

Conclusion

The study conducted in this work shows that only the state, represented by the central and regional governments, is simultaneously interested and can ensure the sustainable development of rural areas. The population of these territories cannot do this by itself, without fully possessing material and organizational resources. The interests of large agribusiness located in these territories, with the availability of resources, as studies conducted in several EAEU and other countries have shown, do not fully correspond to the interests of sustainable rural development. Thus, it is the state that is expected to develop and implement support measures aimed at ensuring sustainable development of rural areas. Today, state support is focused primarily on agricultural enterprises. There are reasonable proposals for authorities implementing a sustainable development policy to gradually reduce this support and focus on a set of measures directly aimed at improving the lives of the rural population. This should ensure positive results of sustainable development of rural areas. Thus, the hypothesis of the study appears to be proven. Further research on the topic of this study can involve the analysis of the possibilities of applying innovations for the sustainable development of rural areas.

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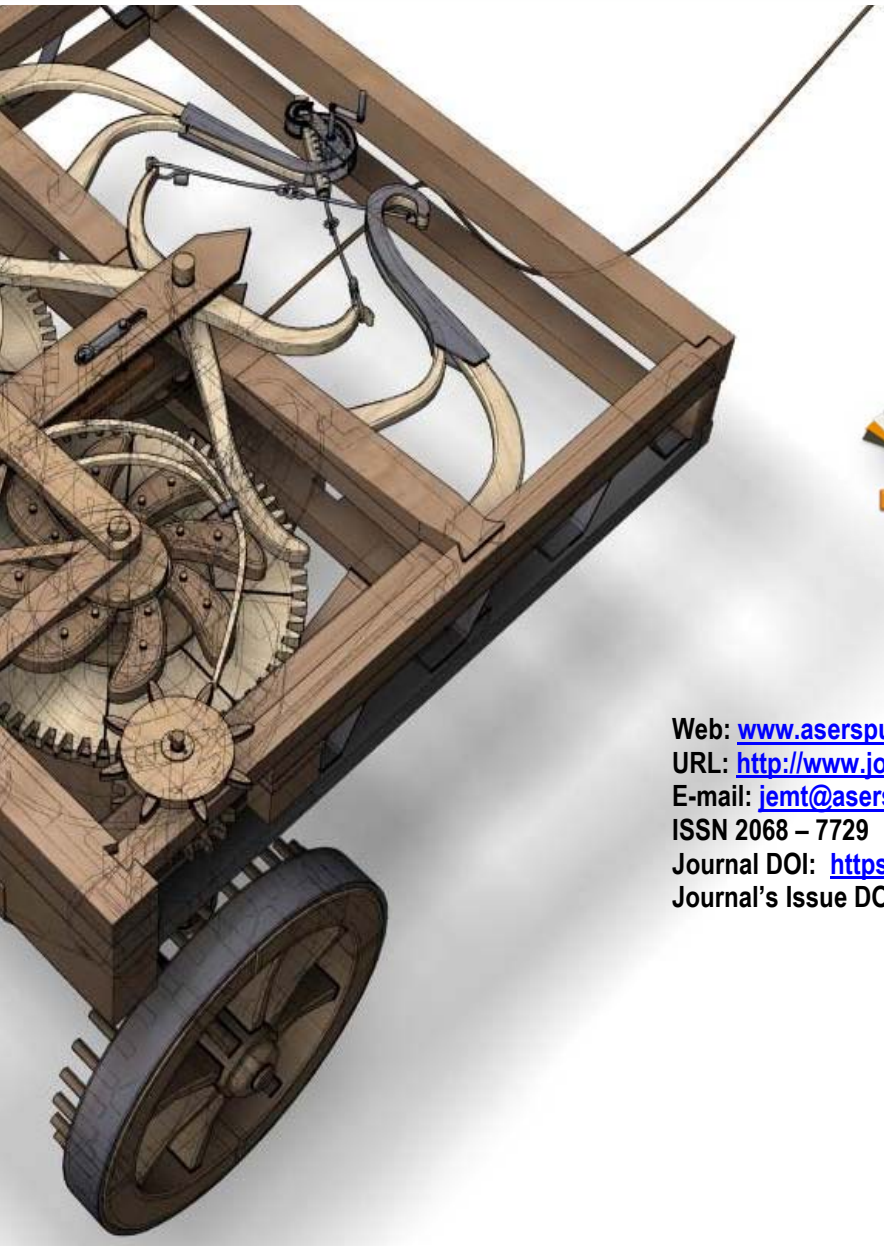

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