



Rural proofing – the importance of evidence-based policies creation

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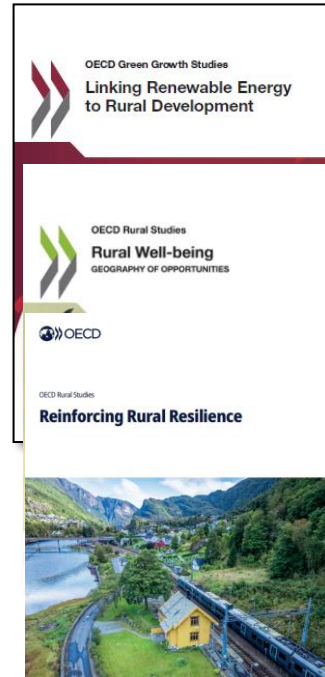
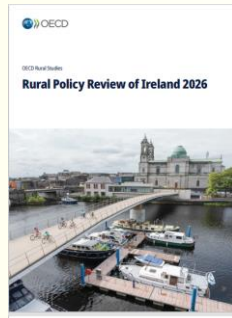
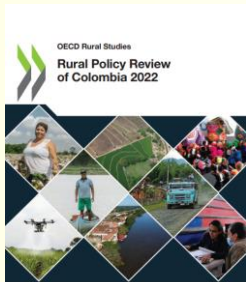
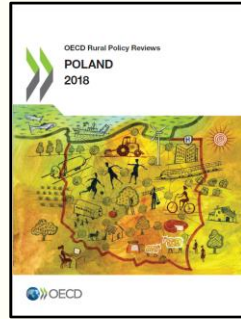
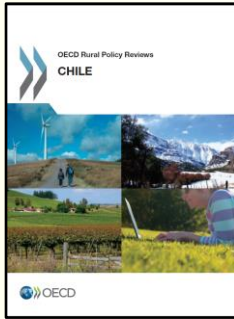
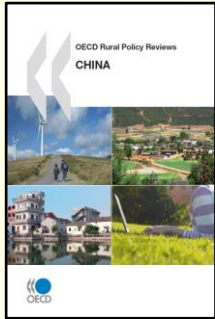
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OECD's Work on Rural Policy

Rural Policy Reviews



Rural Well-being

Rural Agenda for
Climate Action

Thematic Studies

Service delivery in rural
regions

Indigenous Communities

Rural-Urban
Partnerships

Mining Regions and
Cities

Island economies

Rural Manufacturing

Rural Innovation



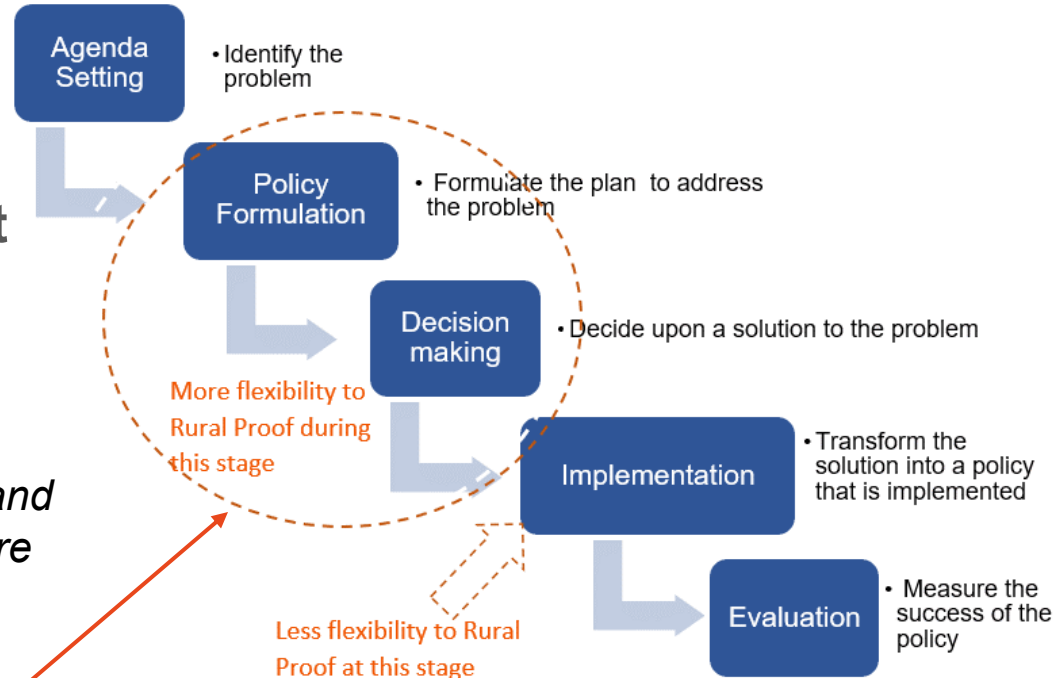
Policies without a rural lens can cause unintended consequences

	Policy intent (what was meant)	Rural reality (what happened)
Promoting Digital public services	Streamline access, cut costs, modernise administration	People in areas with poor broadband or low digital literacy struggle to apply, miss deadlines, or stop claiming entitlements
One-size housing and planning rules	Boost housing supply and affordability at national scale	Minimum project sizes, viability rules and funding models fit cities; small rural schemes and village homes become hard to deliver
Hospital closures	Improve efficiency and quality by concentrating services	Longer travel times for rural patients, higher travel costs, reduced use of preventive and follow-up care
Defining deprived areas using indicators and geographies that fit city conditions	Target regeneration funds to the most deprived neighbourhoods	Inner-city areas qualify, but scattered rural poverty and small villages are statistically invisible and receive little or no support
Fuel taxation assuming transport alternatives	Reduce emissions, raise revenue, nudge people to use public transport	Urban drivers can switch modes; rural households with no alternatives face sharply higher costs just to reach work and basic services



Rural proofing is a process that involves...

- Gathering evidence
- Involving stakeholders
- Delivering Information that is:
 - *clear*
 - *concise*
 - *Tailored to the “rural proofer” and context e.g. governance, culture etc.*



Within a dedicated “window for action”



It is will be useful in different scenarios...

These are established policies that are being reviewed, restructured, or reoriented.

e.g., Updating a national education strategy
Rural proofing to ensure digital access for rural schools.

Ongoing Policy Frameworks
(Continuing Policies):

Emerging Policy Issues
(New Problems):

A new issue has arisen that was not previously prioritised—such as climate adaptation,

e.g., Rural proofing to develop green transition policies that consider and engage rural communities

Crisis or Shock Response
(Disruptions):

A crisis—natural disaster, pandemic, economic shock—triggers urgent policy action. e.g., Rural proofing to ensure disaster response mechanisms account for the specific needs of rural areas.

Rural Proofing context



But it is important to understand (a) who it is for...

Rural Proofer



The focus of rural proofing



Government departments that do not think rural



Underinformed

Limited knowledge of rural realities

Under-convincd

Not persuaded rural matters to them

Negative narrative

See rural as a burden or problem

Overworked

Stretched with competing priorities

Under-resourced

Limited capacity to engage

Urban-focused

Default lens is urban-centric



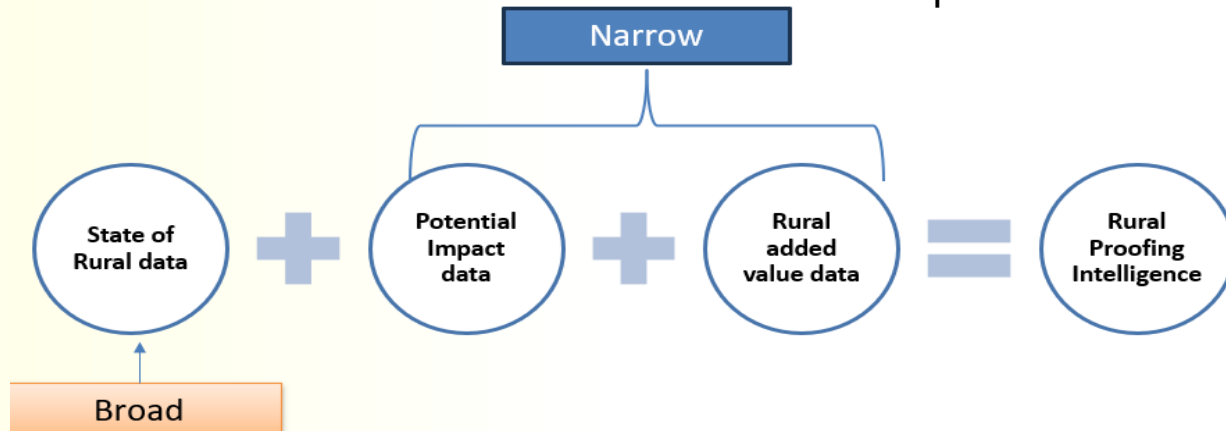
(b) It relies on evidence so the type of information that is needed to support the process is important...

What is Rural Proofing intelligence

Evidence a combination of qualitative and quantitative information that is arranged in a way that is clear, translatable and digestible for policymakers/rural proofer.

It should at minimum include information on:

What is happening in rural areas? How will this policy affect rural areas? Demonstrate the *value added* of working with rural areas to solve the problem?



[OECD What is Rural Intelligence - Workshop](#)



Rural Proofing - managing expectations & measuring success





(c) how to manage expectations & measure success

How do we measure rural proofing success?





managing expectations & measuring success



Rural proofing **cannot force** a policymaker to act.



A closer look at the evidence: State of Rural



Broad/baseline: What's happening in rural? establishing the state of the countryside.

Example: A country proposes a new gasoline tax to reduce emissions and fund green infrastructure.

The baseline data could reveal:

- Rural residents drive 3x more miles annually than urban residents
- Rural areas have limited or no public transit options
- Rural employment often requires long commutes (lack of local jobs)
- Rural per capita income is 30% lower than urban average
- Rural connectivity to alternative fuel infrastructure is minimal



Rural Proofing Intelligence: Potential impact data

Potential
Impact
data

Policy-specific impact: What will this policy do to rural? assessing potential harm or unintended consequences

Example: A country proposes a new gasoline tax to reduce emissions and fund green infrastructure.

Impact analysis could show:

- The tax will cost rural households €XXX/year MORE than urban households
- XX% of rural households will face energy poverty (>XX% income on fuel)
- Rural businesses with delivery fleets will face significant cost increases
- This creates a disproportionate burden on lower-income rural residents
- Could undermine rural economic viability and deepen rural-urban inequality




Why does value added data matter?

- It responds to ***so what***:
 - when potential impact reveals unintended consequences, the non-rural actor's response can simply be "so what?" They don't yet see why they need to engage with rural.
- It will help to ***change the rural narrative***
 - from negative, rural as burden or in need, to positive
- It shows rural can be ***a key partner in realising a goal***
 - working with rural helps achieve the policy goal itself, while also avoiding harm.



Rural Proofing Intelligence: Value added data



Rural
added
value data

This data reframes rural as a contributor by showing how working with rural can help a department respond to a particular issue

Example: A country proposes a new gasoline tax to reduce emissions and fund green infrastructure.

Value-added data could show:

- Rural communities in [County X] piloted electric vehicle car-sharing cooperatives → reduced emissions XX% while maintaining mobility
- Rural businesses in [Region Y] developed logistics coordination systems → cut delivery emissions by XX% through route optimisation
- Rural areas served as testing grounds for innovative green mobility solutions that then scaled to urban areas
- Working with rural communities generated policy buy-in instead of resentment and resistance



When thinking about the evidence...

- **Recognise: you do not need to start from scratch**
 - Data exists e.g. Territorial data, regional statistics, sectoral analysis, research studies, local innovation case studies
- **Organise**
 - It is scattered across departments and other institutions.
 - It is just not organised for rural proofing purposes.
- **Translate: Intelligence is only as good as it is understandable.**
 - Keep the rural proofer in mind.
 - Is the information translated into language non-rural actors can quickly grasp and use.
- **Don't wait**
 - If you wait until a policy is announced to gather rural data, you've probably already missed your window to rural proof effectively



Other factors that could increase the effectiveness of rural proofing

1. Develop clear objectives and tailored supporting tools
2. Adopt a “pilot study” approach – learn from sub-optimal short-term results
3. Build a model that is less dependent on political commitment over time
4. Change the rural narrative – from negative “*rural needs help*” to positive “” *rural is a place of untapped opportunities*”



• *Rural Proofing: Lessons from OECD countries and potential application to health*

5. Consider the context, if rural proofing is new maybe a targeted issue is more suitable than an all of government approach
6. Design the rural proofing model with the public servant “end user” in mind
7. Encourage the collection of different types of data to support rural proofing
8. Be flexible – there is no one size fits all rural proofing model
9. Measure success but set realistic expectations

Thank you!



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