

## STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL TERRITORIES IN THE CONDITIONS OF WARTIME CHALLENGES

### СТРАТЕГІЇ РОЗВИТКУ СІЛЬСЬКИХ ТЕРИТОРІЙ В УМОВАХ ВИКЛИКІВ ВІЙСЬКОВОГО ЧАСУ

*The article investigates the strategic directions for the development of rural areas in Ukraine amidst the full-scale war and post-war reconstruction. It is emphasized that the Russian Federation's aggression has radically shifted the paradigm of rural functioning, transforming these areas from a purely agricultural foundation into a complex ecosystem of survival, human capital adaptation, and resilience. The study identifies that the decentralization of power has served as the bedrock of community stability; however, the emergence of de facto rural-urban agglomerations necessitates a new level of regulatory recognition and scholarly reflection. The purpose of the research is to substantiate a new development strategy that integrates military resilience, economic mobility, and social inclusion. The study employs methods of systems analysis, the territorial approach, and strategic planning. The main results of the study include the classification of critical challenges into three groups: environmental and technological (mining of approximately 30% of territories), demographic (labor outflow and IDP pressure on rear communities), and economic (logistics blockades). The author proposes a three-tier model of strategic management based on regional differentiation: 1) recovery territories (de-occupied); 2) support territories (rear hubs); and 3) risk territories (front-line zones). It is argued that the priority should be a transition from a raw-material model to deep processing directly within communities, which minimizes logistical risks and generates employment. Particular attention is paid to digitalization (AgTech) and the energy independence of communities as vital factors of national security. The scientific novelty lies in the development of an adaptive "mobile economy" model for front-line zones and the "host hub" concept for rear regions. The practical significance of the findings resides in their applicability by local self-government bodies and state authorities when designing regional development programs under martial law and early recovery strategies.*

**Key words:** development, digitalization, extraordinary challenges, innovation, rural areas, post-war reconstruction, state support, strategy, sustainable development.

*Стаття присвячена дослідженню стратегічних напрямів розвитку сільських територій України в умовах повномасштабної війни та повоєнного відновлення. У роботі підкреслено, що агресія РФ радикально змінила парадигму функціонування сільської місцевості, перетворивши її з суто аграрного базису на складну екосистему виживання та адаптації людського капіталу. Визначено, що децентралізація влади стала фундаментом стійкості громад, проте поява фактичних сільсько-міських агломерацій потребує нового рівня нормативного визнання та наукового осмислення. Метою дослідження є обґрунтування нової стратегії розвитку, яка поєднує мілітарну стійкість, економічну мобільність та соціальну інклюзію. У ході роботи використано методи системного аналізу, територіального підходу та стратегічного планування. Основними результатами дослідження є типізація критичних викликів за трьома групами: еколого-техногенні (замінування близько 30% території), демографічні (відтік кадрів та тиск ВПО на тиллові громади) та економічні (блокада логістики). Автором запропоновано тривірневу модель стратегічного управління, що базується на регіональній диференціації території: 1) території відновлення (деокуповані); 2) території підтримки (тилові хаби); 3) території ризику (прифронтові зони). Доведено, що пріоритетом має стати перехід від сировинної моделі до глибокої переробки продукції безпосередньо в громадах, що мінімізує логістичні ризики та створює робочі місця. Особливу увагу приділено цифровізації (AgTech) та енергонезалежності громад як чинникам національної безпеки. Наукова новизна полягає у розробці адаптивної моделі «мобільної економіки» для прифронтових зон та концепції «приймаючого хаба» для тиллових регіонів. Практичне значення результатів полягає у можливості їх використання органами місцевого самоврядування та стратегій влади при розробці програм регіонального розвитку в умовах воєнного стану та стратегій раннього відновлення.*

**Ключові слова:** державна підтримка, інновації, надзвичайні виклики, стратегія, розвиток, повоєнна вібудова, сільські території, сталий розвиток, цифровізація.

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**Formulation of the problem.** Rural areas of Ukraine have traditionally been the foundation of national food security and a significant factor in the country's export potential. However, the full-scale invasion of the Russian Federation in 2022 radically changed the paradigm of their functioning. Today, rural development is considered not only in the context of agricultural production, but as a complex issue of survival, adaptation, and future restoration of human capital and infrastructure in conditions of unprecedented instability.

The reform of decentralization of public power and management is considered by experts to be one of the most successful in modern Ukraine. On the surface, it looks like the transfer of powers and resources from central executive bodies to local authorities – newly formed in 2015–2020 united territorial communities (UTCs) and new districts. However, one should also understand the consequences of such a decision, which are associated with changes in the administrative-territorial structure and in the territorial organization of government. Of the total number of functioning

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1438 UTCs and 119 districts, a third falls under the definition of rural-urban agglomerations, although this status of these formations has not received official recognition. And there is nothing surprising in this, since this also applies to urban agglomerations that have been operating in Ukraine for a fairly long time.

#### **Analysis of recent research and publications.**

The issue of rural development has been studied by leading Ukrainian scientists, such as T. Dobrunik [1], Y. Dorosh [2], A. Hryhoriev [5], A. Lysenko [6], N. Mamonova [7], O. Pankova [8], S. Sydorenko [9]. In particular, their works focus on the decentralization and diversification of the rural economy. However, the aspect of development in conditions of active hostilities and the "war economy" is relatively new.

Foreign researchers (for example, the works of FAO and World Bank specialists) emphasize the importance of supporting small farms as guarantors of local food security during armed conflicts.

**Formulation of research objectives.** The war has caused systemic destruction of rural areas: from the direct destruction of production facilities and land mining to the critical outflow of labor resources and the disruption of logistical chains. Old development strategies, based on the concepts of sustainable growth in peacetime, have proven unviable. The purpose of the article is to describe the forming of a new strategy that would combine elements of military resilience, economic mobility and social inclusion.

**Presentation of the main material.** Based on the results of the study of scientific works [1; 5; 6] and the analysis of applied research [3; 4; 10], we can state that it is advisable to consider the determinants of the impact of war on rural areas. We consider it necessary to agree with scientists [2; 8; 9] and note that military actions have formed three groups of critical challenges:

1. Ecological and technogenic: soil contamination, mining (about 30% of the territory of Ukraine needs to be surveyed), destruction of irrigation systems [10].

2. Demographic: mass exodus of the working-age population and internal displacement of persons (IDPs), which creates an excessive burden on communities in rear regions [3; 7].

3. Economic: blocking of port infrastructure, increasing the cost of energy carriers and plant protection products [4; 9].

In accordance with the above, we will highlight the priorities of strategic development. In our opinion, strategic management of rural areas in the current context should be based on three pillars.

1. Regional differentiation. The strategy cannot be unified, which is associated with the very socio-economic essence of the strategy [5]. In this regard, it is advisable to highlight:

- recovery territories (de-occupied);
- support territories (rear regions hosting IDPs and relocated businesses);
- risk territories (front-line zones).

2. Diversification and processing. Instead of a raw material model, the strategy for the development of rural areas in the face of wartime challenges should stimulate the development of processing enterprises directly in rural communities [1; 6]. This creates added value, simplifies logistics (transportation of finished products instead of grain) and provides jobs.

3. Digitalization and automation. Due to the shortage of personnel, the implementation of Precision Farming technologies, the use of drones for monitoring, and digital platforms for product sales (AgTech) [9] are of particular importance. However, it should be noted that the safety aspects of the use of drones should not be neglected, taking into account the modern functioning of Ukrainian airspace.

Territorial communities should definitely play a key role in these processes. Decentralization in Ukraine has proven its effectiveness despite all the inconsistencies inherent in any reforms. Rural communities have become centers of livelihood [2; 8]. Strategic development now directly depends on the ability of local governments to attract grant funds and create conditions for micro-entrepreneurship.

Therefore, rural-urban agglomeration formations created within the spatial boundaries of administrative-territorial units of the basic and district levels of Ukraine, the centers of which are mainly small and medium-sized cities, given their distribution throughout the country and their difference from the classical type of agglomerations, require special research. It is important that the socially significant effect of their functioning has economic, social, political, and environmental dimensions, and acquires particular importance in the conditions of war and post-war reconstruction of Ukraine [5; 6].

We believe that for effective management in wartime, it is necessary to apply a differentiated approach, since the challenges for the western and frontline regions are radically different. Let's briefly consider them below.

So, for rear regions, the strategy of "host hub" and relocation is appropriate [2]. Key tools may be the creation of agro-industrial parks for relocated businesses, expansion of social infrastructure for IDPs. A recovery strategy is proposed for the deoccupied territories. It includes humanitarian demining, restoration of critical logistics, and government subsidies for the restoration of livestock and equipment [10]. In turn, a mobile economy strategy would be appropriate for frontline zones. Its basis should be support for small farms for local food supply, development of mobile service centers, etc. The above strategies are based on the fact that there are certain features and a certain basis for their formation and implementation in Ukraine. In our opinion, this basis has three components: ecological, demographic, and scientific. Let us briefly describe them.

1. Land contamination: As of 2025, about 174 thousand sq. km of Ukraine's territory remains potentially mined, which excludes a significant part of agricultural land in the eastern and southern regions from circulation [10].

2. Demographic burden: In rural communities in the rear, the population has increased by an average of 15–20% due to IDPs, which requires new approaches to job creation, in particular through social entrepreneurship mechanisms [3; 8].

3. Financing: The cost of publishing professional research in economics (for testing strategies) is on average 2,000 UAH per article, which indicates the constant activity of the scientific community even in wartime.

**Conclusions.** The strategic development of rural areas of Ukraine in wartime requires a transition from a “survival” model to an “adaptive development” model. The key elements of the new strategy should be:

- demining and land reclamation as a priority stage of recovery;
- state support for small and medium-sized farms, which are more flexible in conditions of logistical collapses;
- development of social infrastructure for the integration of IDPs and retention of youth in villages;
- investments in energy independence of communities (biogas plants, solar generation).

Only through a comprehensive transformation of rural areas from agricultural appendages into multifunctional self-sufficient ecosystems will Ukraine be able to ensure resilience to the long-term challenges of wartime.

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