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World Food Summit Five Years Later: The Challenge of feeding and educating all

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Challenges and progresses

Poverty is still a major cause of food insecurity and sustainable progress in poverty eradication is critical to improve access to food. These inter-related realities pose a global challenge that we are mandated to accept.

Consider the facts:

- 800 million people do not have access to enough food to meet their basic requirements¹ and about 166 million of them are children.
- Globally, 1.2 billion people are in extreme poverty. More than two-thirds of them are in Asia, with South Asia accounting for nearly half of these. About one fourth are in sub Saharan Africa. The rate of poverty reduction during the last decade was less than one third of that required to halve extreme poverty during the period 1990-2015.²
- Three fourths of the poor work and live in rural areas (involved in farm and non-farm activities³); significantly, more than half are expected to do so in 2025.
- Over half the world's extreme poor depend for their livelihoods for the most part on farming and farm labour.⁴
- The less developed countries (LDC) as a whole account for 97 per cent of the 130 million children out of school. Globally, the number of adult illiterates is about 880 million. Overall, in the millennium of globalisation illiteracy affects more than a billion people (children and adults). For them the global village is far from being a reality.
- Developing countries have achieved much in the areas of food and nutrition, health and education. Between 1980 and 1999 malnutrition, was reduced: the proportion of underweight children fell from 37 to 27%, but, still, a third of children under five suffer from malnutrition. Today, primary school enrolment in developing countries is about 86% and at secondary level about 60%, but still about 130 million children are out of primary school and 232 million out of secondary. If analysis based on percentages is encouraging, analysis based on absolute numbers indicate that several countries face the prospect of growing illiteracy since school enrolments in developing countries are lower than in 1989.⁵ These data represent a threat to food security since, most commonly, the chronically undernourished are also illiterates and out of school children are a category more at risk of being among the undernourished.

Moreover, big rural-urban gaps are not shrinking for, in 2025, most of the poor will be still be rural. The rural sector has largely remained neglected, despite its great concentration of poor people. The rural poor suffer an inequitably low share of schools, health care, roads, technology research and institutional and market access. Yet aid goes disproportionately to countries - and increasingly to non-rural sectors - where the majority of the poor do not live or work.⁶

Can education make a difference: renewed consensus ...

The right to food, health, education, - as rights to capacity building - were fundamental blocks of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) reiterated in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and among others, by the Convention of the Rights of the Child. These rights were also highlighted by international conferences such as the Health for All in Alma Ata (1978), the Education for All in Jomtien (1990), the Social Summit in Copenhagen (1995), and the World Food Summit in Rome (WFS, 1996). A renewed commitment to basic education not only for its intrinsic worth as a basic human right, but also for its positive impact on human development and human capital, productivity and on capacity for participation and social cohesion has thus characterised the last decade. The need to invest in education, and specifically in basic education, might seem obvious to us, today, as obvious as the need to promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies and programs aiming at the eradication of poverty. Or of promoting capacity building and facilitating access to and transfer of technologies and corresponding knowledge. All of these issues, however, were not recognized nor did they catalyze general consensus twenty or thirty years ago, when the prevailing discourse was mainly if not exclusively about "Growth"⁷.

Also, in addressing rural development, the international community has started placing basic education at the core of its agenda. It has moved from agricultural education for production, focusing almost exclusively on vocational education and training and higher education, to a systemic approach embracing a wide range and large number of stakeholders at all levels of the education system with priority given to basic education. This includes formal and informal education, including early childhood, primary education, literacy and basic skill training.

This new focus was based on evidence from research indicating, for example, that basic education affects the productivity of small landholders and subsistence farmers immediately and positively, and that a farmer with four years of elementary education is, on average, 8.7 per cent more productive than a farmer with no education. Moreover, farmers with more education get much higher gains in income from the use of new technologies and adjust more rapidly to technological changes⁸. The provision of more and better basic educational services in rural areas such as primary education, literacy and basic skills training can substantially improve productivity and livelihoods⁹. More and better health, education and nutrition normally stimulate each other, are complementary, and if acquired by parents, especially mothers, also benefit children. Moreover, many children will be the farmers of tomorrow, and educated children have a better chance of becoming more productive farmers.

In general, the recent changing paradigm in education for agriculture, rural development and food security was also a consequence of changing of international policies for education and development. Some of the main features of such policies were (i) a new concern for the poor and the disadvantaged; (ii) the priority given since Jomtien (1990) to basic education; (iii) the move away from training for the elites of developing countries in the north, to in-country capacity development embracing a wide range and large numbers of stakeholders at all levels of the education system; (iv) new support to long term strengthening of national systems of education, research and training (Sector Wide Reforms¹⁰) aiming at facilitating local ownership of national policies and programs, with a systemic approach, versus traditional isolated projects addressing very limited stakeholders in vocational training institutes or universities; and (v) the shift from supply driven projects and knowledge transfer to demand driven initiatives based on mutual learning and exchange of experiences.

The new priority given to education in promoting agriculture, rural development and food security is reflected in the policy of several important international events and organisations. For example:

- the World Food Summit (WFS) in 1996 stressed the importance of education, and specifically basic education, for empowering the poor, promoting sustainable development and achieving food security.¹¹
- The World Bank prepared a study on basic education¹² and is acknowledging the role of basic education in the updated version of its rural strategy.
- IFAD's "Rural poverty Report 2001" identifies basic education in rural areas as a key ingredient for ending rural poverty.
- The World Food Program made meaningful investments in primary school feeding programs.
- FAO's "State of Food and Agriculture 2000" states that "the provision of basic education constitutes the best long-term investment, favouring the most disadvantaged groups in particular" and that training and skill development are essential in allowing farmers to better benefit from new technology and market opportunities and react to risk¹³.

...and ongoing dilemmas

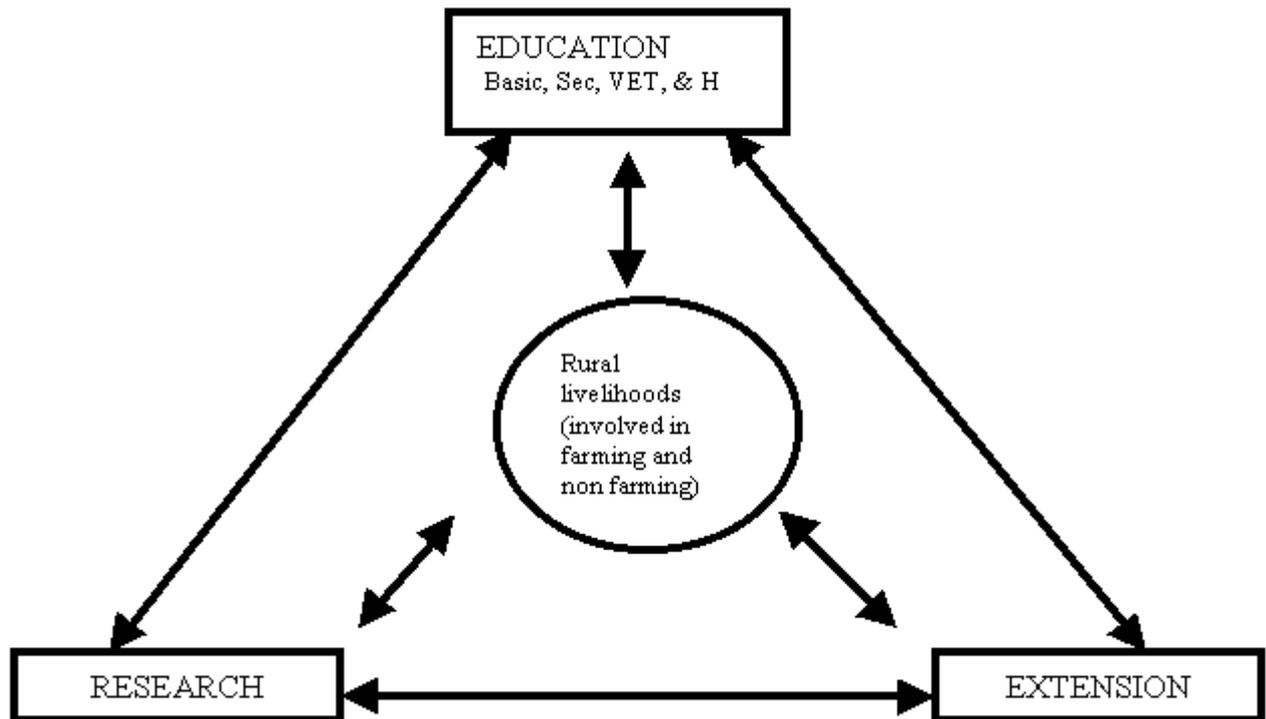
Education issues are addressed differently by different agencies. One of them is the approach to basic education as a basic public good, which is shared by agencies such as IFAD, UNICEF, or UNESCO but not the World Bank. According to IFAD most human assets, notably primary schooling and health care, must be financed mainly by the public sector. These are seen as a public good, a basic need, and a basic human right. User fees in primary health and education are not considered the answer. IFAD claims that they have proved almost impossible to target correctly; have saved little public money and have discouraged use of services by the rural poor and therefore did little to increase their income¹⁴. In the era of fast developing profit making e-knowledge, free distribution of basic knowledge versus profit-making knowledge management and dissemination also concerns a growing number in the scientific community¹⁵.

Our proposal for systemic action

FAO considers that education can effectively serve the needs of rural livelihoods by fostering interdisciplinary and new partnerships¹⁶ in a strong relationship with research and extension. Education (formal and non-formal) needs thus to be addressed in a systemic manner, encompassing all levels of the education system and giving priority to basic education.

Agricultural and educational research would both focus on the specific needs of rural livelihoods in order to plan curricula, define education and training contents and methodologies, and prepare learning materials. These relationships are synthesised in the following figure (Figure 1), which is an adaptation of the Agriculture Knowledge and Information System (AKIS) concept¹⁷:

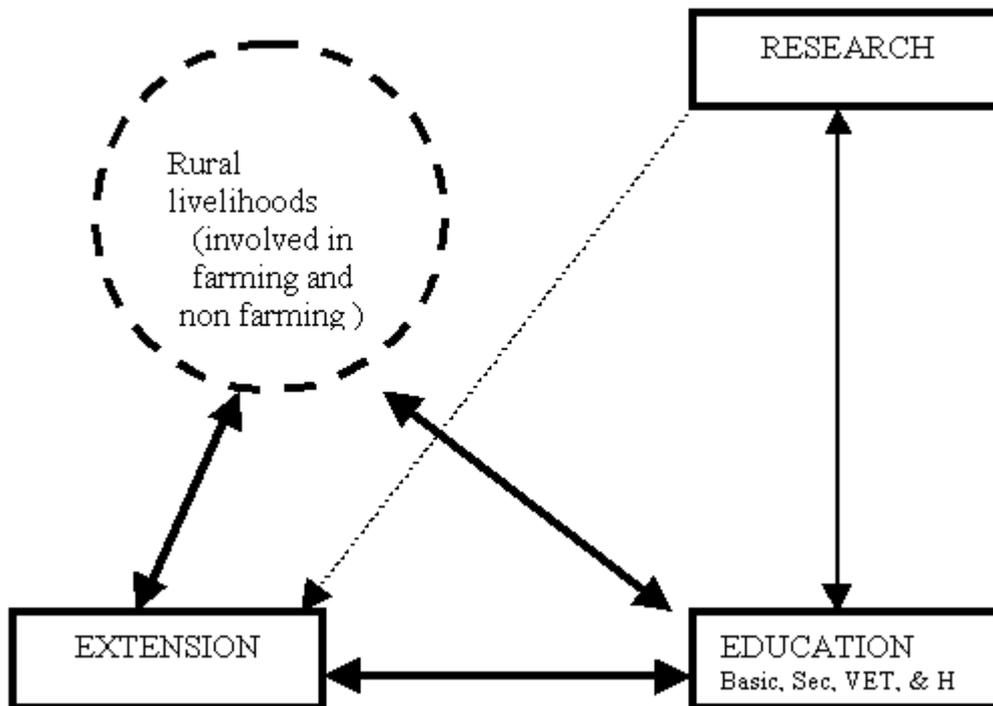
Figure 1:



Source : FAO 1999

In reality, often the interaction among extensionists, researchers and educators is not in a form of a triangle and farmers and rural livelihoods are not often the focal point of the relationship. Some times a stronger relationship is found between extension and the rural population, while less often such a relationship exists between agricultural researchers and educational researchers and rural population. The dotted line indicates that the links between research and extension are not always strong and that research findings are not being fed into the extension knowledge base. Research findings seldom benefit rural livelihoods through education and extension. This situation¹⁸ is diagrammed in Figure 2.

Figure 2



There is much work to be done in order to make the AKIS dynamic work. The FAO education group specifically sees among the following some priorities areas for systemic action:¹⁹

- **expanding access** to education among rural children, youth and adults (for example, by teaching students to provide food for themselves from school gardens and canteens, utilising distance education, focusing on education for rural girls and women and life- long education.) This will be done by targeting multiple stakeholders with a systemic and inclusive approach focusing on the poor as a priority.
- **improving the quality** of education (for example by enriching the curriculum with participatory curriculum planning methods, introducing environmental and nutrition education, basic financial literacy, and HIV/AIDS prevention; reforming technical and vocational education to face the new challenges in agriculture and rural development; improving the quality of both Technical and Vocational Education available to farmers and of higher education).
- **strengthening institutional links and capacity** of Ministries of Agriculture, Education and Finance, to plan and manage education for agriculture, rural development and food security, and to address the needs of the rural population in partnership with civil society and the private sector.

Within this general framework, new and enlarged partnerships are needed for addressing some of the main emergencies of the new millennium, and their specific impact in rural areas. Examples of these are:

- **HIV/AIDS.** At the end of 1999 nearly 34 million people were infected with HIV, 23 million in Sub- Saharan Africa alone²⁰. Life expectancy in many countries is expected to fall to levels last seen in 1960 and even earlier as a result of the disease, while health, education, and extension services are collapsing under the strain. There is already evidence of HIV/AIDS' strong negative economic impact, with agricultural production falling and a decline in the quality and quantity of food²¹. There are increasing numbers of AIDS orphans and most often their food consumption declines when an adult dies. In many areas, there is a loss of agricultural and off farm skills. In most rural areas, the usual way for children to learn needed farm and off farm skills is by working with their parents. Given the AIDS pandemic, this is often no longer possible. Education, training and the provision of survival skills are essential for orphans in order to protect them from hunger, exploitation and abuse. The only way to address this challenge is to

form new alliances among the ministries of health, of education (including universities), of agriculture, the private sector, civil society and International Organisations.²²

- **An Ageing Rural Population.** In many developing countries the proportion of elderly in rural areas is much higher than in urban setting. Increased mortality due to AIDS among younger adults, and rural-to-urban migration which relocates mainly adult people, greatly contribute to the fast ageing of rural population. This situation affects social organisation, cultural preservation and transmission, production patterns and productivity, and decreases capacity to adopt new technologies and adapt to change. Until now life-long education is a service provided mainly to urban population. A new approach to life-long education for rural populations, including adult education and extension for an ageing population is becoming a major need and a new challenge for policy makers and planners of human resources development. In this approach local knowledge needs to be protected and valued, enlarged upon and shared with the new generation.
- **Conflicts.** In the 1990s conflict remained a major cause of food insecurity in developing countries and many of the conflict-affected countries are low-income countries. FAO stresses that most conflict-prone countries include many of those where agriculture is a major component of the economy and where the majority of the population is rural. In these situations not only does the promotion of agricultural and rural development through inclusive economic and social policies foster development and food security but it is also a powerful way of reducing the risks of conflicts. Better and inclusive educational services for the rural population and the poor can thus contribute, together with other factors, to reducing the risks of conflicts and consolidating social cohesion. There is thus an urgent need to build the capacity of local and national governments to provide more and better services to rural communities and to address as a priority the needs of the food insecure households and the promotion of sustainable and healthy livelihoods.

The era of globalisation: the case for investing in education

As globalisation moves the world from technology based to knowledge based economies (K-Economies) education and training will become even more crucial and access to quality education for all will be the yardstick which will differentiate and govern the gap among rich and poor²⁶. The dramatic knowledge and food deficit of so many less developed countries calls for renewed efforts for building knowledge and capacity in the South, adopting strategies in which those most concerned are in charge. We consider, with others, that knowledge and capacity building are tools that not only serve to increase productivity but also build people's identity and enable them to participate fully in social and political life.²⁷ These are crucial pre-requisites for successful strategies to address poverty reduction, rural development, natural resource management and food security.

It is thus necessary to ensure the complementarity among short-term training related programs towards systematic and long-term support to national systems of education and research, as the necessary basis for knowledge capacity building. Learning is at the heart of knowledge capacity. Learning should be looked on more as an exchange process than a simple transfer of knowledge from those who have to those who have not. We need to start from what exists and strengthen it. We need to help the poor in rural areas help themselves and only then can individuals, institutions and countries benefit from international knowledge bases. Our role needs thus to shift from being providers of expertise to that of dialogue partners and facilitators of mutual learning and exchange of experience.²⁸

This conference has looked at the relationship between research and higher agricultural education and we believe that the global challenge outlined demands your attention. We firmly believe that without the support of higher agricultural education this critical challenge will go unanswered.

¹World Food Summit, Rome, 13-17 November 1996

²IFAD, *Rural Poverty Report 2001: the challenge of ending rural poverty*. Oxford University Press, New York, 2001, page 1

³Many rural farm families are also involved in non-farm economic activities. Non-farm income is becoming an increasingly important share of total rural income, averaging 42 % in Africa, 40% in Latin America and 32% in Asia. These types of enterprises include handicraft production, simple agro-processing operations, vending and marketing, rickshaw driving and, in some cases, the acquisition of improved farm inputs. (FAO, *The State of Food and Agriculture, lessons from the past 50 years*. FAO, Rome, 2000, page 52)

⁴IFAD 2001

⁵UNDP, *Human Development Report 2000*, UNDP, Oxford University Press, 2000, page 34-35

⁶IFAD 2000, page 2

⁷"There is no question that there is now broad agreement on education and health outcomes being on par with income in assessing poverty and the consequences of economic policy. This is now so common place that it is easy to forget that it was not always the case, that twenty-five years ago great intellectual and policy battles were fought in the World Bank on broadening the conception of development and poverty reduction. Perhaps today's new proposal that empowerment and participation should in their turn be treated on par with education and health and income, will equally become tomorrow's foundations" (in Tavi Kanbur, "Economic policy, Distribution and Poverty: the Nature of Disagreements" IFAD, 19th January 2001, Rome)

⁸Martin Carnoy: *The Case for Investing in Basic Education*. UNICEF, New York 1992, p. 26, 34 and 41

⁹Beatrice Edwards, *Rural Education and Communication Technology*, paper presented at the First Meeting on the Integration of Agricultural and Rural Education in the Americas; Washington D.C. August 25

¹⁰for "Sector Wide Approach" see, for example: Lars Rylander and Martin Schmidt: *SWAP Management, Experiences and Emerging Practices*, SIDA, Stockholm, 2000

¹¹See for example, the following excerpts from the Rome Declaration on Food Security, and the World Food Summit Plan of Action: "Our sustainable development policies will promote full participation and empowerment of people, (...) access to education and opportunities for youth"(...). **Commitment one**, objective 1.4 : "(...) Governments, in partnership with all actors of civil society will (...) support investment in human resource development such as health, education, literacy and other skills training, which are essential to sustainable development."(...). **Commitment two**, Objective 2.1 "(...) develop human skills and capacities through basic education and pre and on-the-job training"; objective 2.3 "encourage school gardens (...)"; objective 2.4: Promote access for all, especially the poor and members of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, to basic education (...) Promote access to, and support for, complete primary education, including, where appropriate, school feeding programmes, with particular attention to children in rural areas and to girls.(...). **Commitment three**, Objective 3.3 "(...) strengthen agricultural fisheries and forestry education, training, skills development and education systems (...)"; Objective 3.5 "Develop the technical and educational infrastructure in rural areas. Commitment six "give priority to people-centred investments in education (...)"

¹²Moulton, *Improving education in rural areas: Guidance for rural development specialists*, The World Bank 2001

¹³FAO, *The State of Food and Agriculture*, lessons from the past 50 years. FAO, Rome, 2000, page 311

¹⁴IFAD, page 6 and 111-114

¹⁵see, for example, M. Carton, *The rise of the knowledge management fashion: a consequence of the decline of the development ideology?* IUED, Geneva 2001; Kenneth King, *Towards Knowledge-based Aid: a new way of working or a new North-South divide?* Center for African Studies, University of Edinburgh, 2001. (papers presented at the DSE- NORAG Seminar on "Development Knowledge, National Research and International Cooperation", 3-5 April 2001, Bonn, Germany)

¹⁶Two basic principles of The Strategic Framework for FAO, 2000-2015. Paragraph 31. FAO, Rome, 1999

¹⁷AKIS/RD: Strategic Vision and Guiding Principles, FAO and The World Bank, Rome, 2001

¹⁸this is an adaptation of an FAO AKIS/SR report on Malaysia, yet unpublished

¹⁹[From agriculture education to education for rural development and food security: all for education and food for all](#). In SD Dimension, FAO web site, October 2000

²⁰UNDP, *Human Development Report 2000*, UNDP, Oxford University Press, 2000, page 35

²¹UNICEF, *The new plague: HIV/AIDS, Development and Child Welfare*, UNICEF, Florence, 2000

²²J. du Guerny, *AIDS and agriculture in Africa: can agricultural policy make a difference?* In "Food Nutrition and Agriculture. The challenges ahead." N. 25, FAO Rome, 1999, p15-16

²³Libor Stloukal, [Rural population ageing in poorer countries: possible implications for rural development](#). In FAO, SD Dimension Web site, May 2001

²⁴FAO 2000 pages 74 and 71

²⁵FAO 2000, page 91

²⁶"In this new millennium the creation and development of a "learning society" in which all children and adults are provided through basic education with the capacity of written and numeric communication, for people to be able to further learn ("trainability" and learnability") and make improvements in their own lives and sustain development in the information age is especially important in poor countries where relatively few jobs are available and development has to come from widespread ability in the population to improve their livelihoods". In Martin Carnoy: *The Case for Investing in Basic Education*. UNICEF, New York 1992

²⁷SIDA's Policy for Capacity Development as a Strategic question in Development Cooperation, SIDA Methods Development Unit, Stockholm, November 2000

²⁸This paragraph is inspired by Ingemar Gustafsson, *Building North-South knowledge capacity*, SIDA 2001, paper presented at the DSE- NORAG Seminar on "Development Knowledge, National Research and International Cooperation" , 3-5 April 2001, Bonn, Germany)