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## A joint 2005 FAO - ADEA – UNESCO Africa Regional Meeting on Education for Rural People, a key issue for increased access to quality basic education, for poverty reduction and food security

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by Lavinia Gasperini

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*Also available in [French](#)*

Despite unprecedented improvement in global standards of living over the last decades, there are still:

860 million illiterate adults, more than half of whom are women,  
840 million undernourished people,  
130 million children out of school.

Within each of these groups - which often overlap – the majority live in rural areas. In other words, our challenge is mainly related to rural conditions of life. It is estimated that 75 percent of the world poor live in rural areas (IFAD, 2001). Furthermore by 2020, despite urbanization, 60 percent of the world poor are still expected to be rural people. While overall the world population is still in its majority (53 percent) rural, this phenomenon becomes especially striking in developing countries where rural population is on average 80 percent of total population. It is also estimated that for the next three decades the majority of the population living in developing countries will continue to be rural. This is even more the case for the least developed countries where the people living in rural areas will still represent over 55 per cent of the total population in 2030. This means that rural people are there to stay and that the majority of the poor will still be found among them for a long period of time. This data trend indicates that there is a need for public policies and investments targeting rural people since the urbanization phenomena can not justify disengagement from rural areas. This is particularly true in Africa where rural poverty is much more widespread than urban poverty<sup>1</sup>. In these circumstances, sustained growth can be achieved only by increased productivity and outputs of poor groups, and mainly poor farmers. Poverty can be decisively reduced if rural areas contribute to economic development throughout the continent. For this to happen there has to be more investments to enable the rural poor to take control over their own destinies and for this, investment in education is crucial. Although education is not the only factor in poverty alleviation, the education level of the household head is an indicator for the income-earning potential of the household and poverty incidence is highest among household where the head had no education<sup>2</sup>. Research indicates that school attendance in Africa is lower in rural than in urban areas. Gender imbalances are also stronger in rural areas<sup>3</sup>.

Consequently, achieving the targets set by the Millennium Development Goals for the year 2015, including poverty reduction and food security and universal primary education, will require particular emphasis on rural areas. If this is true in general, it is even more so in Africa. This implies that we need to address “the poor” or the “disadvantaged” with policies and actions that focus specifically on rural people.

Because rural people are the majority of the world poor, of the illiterate and undernourished, the **Education for Rural People** partnership initiative targets these people. This is why a “*Flagship partnership initiative on Education for rural people*” (ERP) was launched in September 2002 during the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) by FAO and UNESCO Directors General.

The flagship aims at building awareness on the importance of ERP to achieve Education for All (EFA) and reflects the sustainable development policies promoted by the 1996 Rome based World Food Summit. Article 3 of the EFA Declaration stressed that an active commitment must be made to remove educational disparities by focusing on underserved groups and specifically among them, the poor, working children and rural and remote populations. Article 5 of the same Declaration focused on the need for broadening the means and scope of Basic education by also addressing on basic skills training for youth and adults including agriculture techniques. Several of the commitments of the World Food Summit Plan of Action also focus on education. Commitment one is on the need to ensure an enabling environment conducive to poverty eradication, durable peace and food security and engages governments in collaboration with civil society to support investments in human resources such as education, literacy, and other skills training, which are essential to sustainable development. (objective 1.4). Commitment two refers to policies aimed at eradicating poverty and inequality and improving physical and economic access by all, at all times, to sufficient, nutritionally adequate and safe food and its effective utilization. It thus indicates - in objective 2.1 - the need to develop human skills and capacities through basic education and pre and on-the-job training. Objective 2.4 of commitment two stresses the need for **“promoting access for all, especially the poor and members of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups to basic education”** in order to “strengthen their capacity for self-reliance”. To this end governments, in partnership with all actors of civil society are called to **“promote access and support for complete primary education” with particular attention to “children in rural areas and to girls”**. Monitoring the accomplishment of these commitments will be a task to be undertaken by the international community within the follow up of both the Jomtien and the Rome Plans of action.

To achieve the goals of the EFA World Conference and of the World Food Summit new multisectoral and interdisciplinary alliances and partnerships among those working in agriculture and rural development and those working in education are needed. Accumulated evidence indicates a direct correlation among levels of education and Education for Rural People income, maternal health, child mortality and social cohesion. FAO is the UN lead agency of the flagship. For such reason the flagship is undertaking activities at international and national level. These activities are:

#### At the international level:

- Capacity building, advocacy, and mobilization of partnerships for *Education for rural people* by concentrating on strategic global, regional and international events, and encouraging the same within countries. Between 2002 and 2003 four regional events for policy makers of Ministries of Education and Agriculture and a Donors workshop were organized in collaboration among FAO, IIEP and with UNESCO Regional Offices in Asia and Latin America and proceedings were published. Specific care was given to strengthen partnership with Civil Society and joint activities were developed.
- Support the exchange of good practices and knowledge on *Education for rural people*. The Extension Education and Communication service of FAO (SDRE) and the International Institute of Education Planning of UNESCO (IIEP) have jointly launched a new series of studies providing the scientific background to the global partnership initiative on ERP. A joint study on "*Education for rural Development: towards new policy responses*" was issued in 2003 by FAO and IIEP to assist policy makers in Ministries of Education and of Agriculture and Rural Development to address change. About 14 more studies are in the pipeline two of which on Education for Rural People in Africa
- A web site on the ERP global initiative was established to promote information exchange under: [www.fao.org/sd/erp/](http://www.fao.org/sd/erp/)

#### At the national level:

Technical support is given to countries willing to address the basic educational needs of the rural people by formulating specific plans of action as part of the national plans on Education for All. An example of this is a project undertaken between 2003 and 2004 in Kosovo in support of the Government (Ministries of Agriculture and Education) to prepare a National plan to address the educational needs of the rural people. In 2003 nine ERP national case studies were undertaken, of which 3 in the Balkans and 6 in Latin America. An ERP project was formulated in 2003 in Mozambique.

*It is in this framework that the Education for Rural People flagship partnership initiative proposes to the ADEA steering committee to jointly convene a Regional workshop on Education for Rural People in Africa in 2005. Such initiative will build on the experience accumulated by previous similar events in Asia and Latin America in 2002-2003- 2004 and will contribute to build alliances among decision makers in the education and in the agriculture and rural development sectors to address the basic education needs of rural people.*

A lot has been done to promote ERP since the WSSD. A lot still remain to be done. Together we can run against time to go beyond the set goal of halving the number of hungry and illiterate people by the year 2015, and ensuring that all children, particularly those in rural areas – which are the majority of African children - particularly rural girls, are at school and can benefit from quality education, relevant to the needs of rural people. These are not maximum goals, but minimum goals. Together we can build a better world for all.

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>The IFAD Rural Poverty Report 2001. See also IFAD Rural Poverty in Eastern and Southern Africa: "Eastern and Southern Africa is made up of 21 countries with a total population of about 350 million, About 260 million live in rural areas(73) and more than half of them live in extreme poverty. About 145 million people in the region were living in poverty in 2000. In the majority of countries, 40-50% of the population is living below the national poverty line, with the exception of the small island countries for Seychelles and Mauritius. (IFAD, p.9)

<sup>2</sup>An analysis in Niger, where overall education levels are low compared to others Western and Central Africa Countries, shows that poverty incidence is highest (70%) among households where the head has no education; when she or he is literate the incidence is 65%; while a completed primary level further reduces the incidence to 56%. IFAD, "Assessment of Rural Poverty in Western and Central Africa"

<sup>3</sup>In Niger, for instance, enrolment is 6% for very poor girls in rural areas and is 13 times higher, at about 80%, for non –poor boys in urban areas. Within the rural area, there are important differences: in the poorest 20% of rural household, the primary enrolment of girls (7,3%) is about 40% lower than for boys, while the richest 20% of rural household it is 55%". Idem p. 18.

Available on [http://www.fao.org/sd/dim\\_kn2/kn2\\_040501a\\_en.htm](http://www.fao.org/sd/dim_kn2/kn2_040501a_en.htm) December 2013