



December 2002

## The Dakar Framework for Action - Education for All: Meeting our Collective Commitments by focusing on Education for rural people

by Sheldon Shaeffer  
Director  
UNESCO Regional office, Bangkok

---

*This Keynote speech was presented at the FAO-UNESCO "Seminar on Education for Rural Development in Asia: Experiences and Policy Lessons" in Bangkok, Thailand, 5-7 November 2002*

---

The Dakar Framework for Action was adopted at the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, in April 2000. This forum was organised as follow-up to the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990. One thousand five hundred participants from 181 countries attended the Dakar World Education Forum, including 150 NGOs/CSOs and numerous bilateral and multi-lateral agencies and development banks.

World Education Forum participants endorsed a "Framework for Action" with an expanded commentary and six regional frameworks for action. The Framework for Action called for new or revised national plans of action developed through wide consultation and in the context of ongoing sector-wide reforms and poverty reduction strategies.

The Framework for Action is based on national Education for All assessments. These assessments led to several conclusions: 113 million primary school-aged children - most of whom are girls - are out of school; there are 880 million illiterate adults in the world - most of whom are women; education quality is often unacceptable; and there is an increasing impact on education from poverty, child labour, violence and conflict, and HIV/AIDS.

The Dakar Framework outlines a number of goals in order to meet these challenges, each with special relevance to Education for Rural Development. The first goal is the expansion and improvement of **comprehensive early childhood care and education** especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged. This requires a special focus on expansion in underserved rural areas where the needs for childcare and pre-school are often greatest. Continuing on, the Framework calls for ensuring that, by 2015, all children, with a special emphasis on girls and children in difficult circumstances, have access to and complete **free and compulsory primary education of good quality**. This goal compels governments to educate ALL children, including those most difficult to reach such as children living in remote and rural areas. Therefore, there is a need to seek them out and find ways to keep them in school or in alternative but equivalent programmes.

Furthermore, the Framework includes the goal to ensure that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to **appropriate learning and life skills programmes**. This requires that such programmes are appropriate also to the learning and working needs of youth and adults in rural areas. Another target has been set for a 50 per cent improvement in levels of **adult literacy** by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to **basic and continuing education for all adults**. The implication here is the need for special efforts in rural areas where most illiterates (especially women) live.

Additional goals of the Framework include the elimination of **gender disparities** in primary and secondary education by 2005 and the achievement of **gender quality** in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality. This requires immediate and urgent attention to the 2005 goal and longer-term focus on the special problems of achieving gender equality in rural areas. Finally, the Framework calls for the improvement of all aspects of **the quality of education**, so that recognised and measurable learning outcomes, especially in literacy, numeracy,

and essential life skills, are achieved by all. This goal specifically addresses the disparities in quality between rural and urban areas.

The Dakar World Education Forum highlighted selected strategies relevant to meeting the goals and objectives for Education for Rural Development. These strategies include:

- Promoting Education for All policies within a **sustainable and well-integrated sector framework** clearly linked to poverty elimination and development strategies;
- Ensuring the engagement and participation of **civil society** in the formulation, implementation, and monitoring of strategies for educational development and the development of responsive, participatory, and accountable systems of **educational governance and management**;
- Meeting the needs of education systems affected by **conflict, natural disasters, and instability**;
- Conducting educational programmes in ways that promote **mutual understanding, peace and tolerance** and help to prevent violence;
- Implementing integrated strategies for **gender equality** in education recognising the needs for changes in attitudes, values, and practices;
- Urgently implementing education programmes and actions to combat **HIV/AIDS**;
- Harnessing new information and communication technologies to help achieve Education for All goals; and
- Creating safe, healthy, inclusive, and equitably resourced **educational environments**. This includes adequate **water and sanitation facilities**; access to or linkages with **health and nutrition services; policies and codes of conduct** which enhance physical, psycho-social and emotional health of teachers and learners; and **education content and practices** leading to knowledge, attitudes, values, and life skills needed for self-esteem, good health, and personal safety.

The Education for All Framework for Action does not deal systematically and explicitly with Education for Rural Development, although it does say that,

"a key challenge is to ensure that the broad vision of Education for All as an inclusive concept is reflected in national government and funding agency policies...Using both formal and non-formal approaches, it must take account of the needs of the poor and the most disadvantaged, including working children, remote rural dwellers and nomads, and ethnic and linguistic minorities, children, young people and adults affected by conflict, HIV/AIDS, hunger and poor health; and those with special learning needs." (para. 19 - Expanded Commentary)

In order to strengthen the Education for Rural Development (ERD) components in Education for All (EFA) plans, it is necessary to build awareness and capacity of Ministries of Education staff around a concern for ERD in EFA planning and implementation, by asking questions such as: Why do it? What is it? And how can it be implemented? Furthermore, it is necessary to promote better analyses of the education contexts and needs of rural people and clarify the most critical issues and components to be addressed in EFA plans, including guidelines or a checklist. Finally, ERD components in EFA plans can be strengthened through the exchange of best practices on how to provide quality education to those most excluded and difficult to reach, in a cost-effective manner, and by enlisting Ministries of Agriculture to help Ministries of Education achieve their EFA goals.

Available on [http://www.fao.org/sd/2002/KN1201a\\_en.htm](http://www.fao.org/sd/2002/KN1201a_en.htm) December 2013