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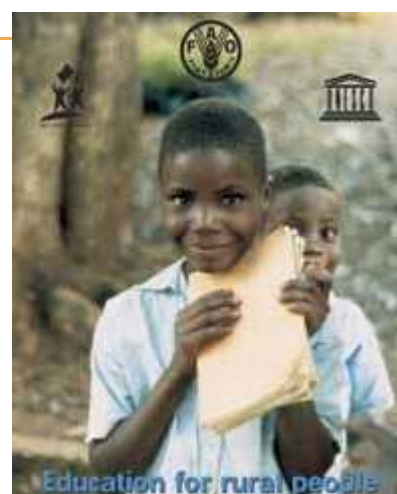
## The MDGs and Sustainable Rural Development in sub-Saharan Africa

### Challenges and Implications for Education for Rural People (ERP)

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**The vast majority of the population in sub-Saharan Africa is rural.** In order to achieve the [Millennium Development Goals \(MDGs\)](#), a special effort must be devoted to promoting rural development and fostering better living conditions for the rural poor. This paper emphasizes the need for a strong specific focus on rural people and argues that education is the most effective way to empower the rural poor to get out of poverty and to ensure that the MDG targets are met in sub-Saharan Africa. The paper provides empirical data on the human development situation and trends for rural peoples of the region, explains the critical roles of agriculture, food security and nutrition for the achievement of the MDGs, identifies key potentials and strategic challenges of sustainable agriculture and rural development, and highlights the important contribution of education for rural people (ERP) to sustainable rural development and to achieve the MDGs. The ERP key contribution to poverty alleviation was also acknowledged by the African Union Extra-ordinary Summit of Heads of State and Government on Employment and Poverty Alleviation in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso (2004).



In many parts of the world, being a child in a rural region most likely means facing poverty, illiteracy and hunger. Some 850 million people in the world are undernourished, and there are about 860 million illiterate adults and 130 million out-of-school children. A majority of people within each of these groups – which overlap – live in rural areas; about 70 per cent of the world's poor live in rural areas. The rural-urban education gap is increasing and is threatening efforts to achieve sustainable development and the MDGs.

Illiteracy, which often coincides with poverty and hunger, problems of child and maternal health and greater exposure to HIV/AIDS, is mainly a rural phenomenon, with implications for the achievement of sustainable development, participatory democracy, social cohesion, equity (including gender equity) and peace.

Therefore FAO and UNESCO launched the global Education for Rural People flagship partnership during the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 in Johannesburg, South Africa. FAO is the ERP lead agency, and the partnership coordination unit is hosted by the FAO Sustainable Development Department.

Ensuring that education for all (EFA) includes also all rural people is an urgent task for the international community at large if the world is to achieve sustainable development as well as the MDGs. Pursuing ERP is crucial to achieve all the MDGs and particularly MDG1, aiming at eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, MDG2 focusing on achieving universal primary education, and MDG3 on gender equality and empowering women. Among decision-makers, however, there is only a low level of awareness of the impact of rural people illiteracy on development. Moreover, many of the weaknesses in basic education services in rural areas exist because countries lack knowledge, trained people, experience, resources and infrastructure to plan and deliver effective basic education services to rural people. In addition, a lack of coordination mechanisms between Ministries of Education, Ministries of Agriculture and civil society remains to be addressed in most developing countries.

ERP seeks to empower the rural poor to become fully integrated actors in the sustainable development process. The strategy adopted by the ERP partnership simultaneously addresses knowledge generation, advocacy work, technical assistance for policy and capacity building, and support for field projects in order to ensure the interaction between normative activities and pilot field projects.

*(in English)*

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