

The difference in the levels of knowledge and education between rural and urban areas is called the urban-rural education divide. It is the main barrier to achieving universal primary education by 2015. It is also a key obstacle to eradicating poverty and hunger, promoting gender equality and empowering women.

The 2009 UNESCO Global Monitoring Report indicates that over 80 percent of the at least 72 million out-of-school children live in rural areas. As a consequence, the majority of the 774 million illiterate youth and adults in the world are rural. The FAO publication *Education for rural people and food security: a cross country analysis* (2007) indicates that food security and universal primary education of rural children are directly connected. Therefore, the two issues need to be tackled together and as a priority.

The majority of the world's poor are rural, illiterate and engaged in subsistence agriculture. Illiteracy excludes them from learning new farming skills that could increase their productivity, incomes and food security. Illiteracy isolates them and prevents them from participating in democracy. At the same time, rural children's ability to learn is compromised by hunger and malnutrition, undermining opportunities eventually to become effective farmers and contribute to efforts to overcome poverty and hunger.

WHAT FAO IS DOING

FAO is the lead UN agency for the Education for Rural People (ERP) initiative (<http://www.fao.org/erp/en/>), in partnership with the United Nations Commission for Sustainable Development.

In cooperation with UNESCO, ERP was launched in 2002 during the World Summit on Sustainable Development. It is one of nine flagship initiatives of the Education For All programme led by UNESCO. Since 2002, ERP has developed a network of about 370 partners from the agriculture and education sectors, including government ministries, international agencies, civil society, academia, the media and the private sector.

ERP is a research-based approach promoting multisectoral alliances between ministries of education and agriculture and related stakeholders.

ERP identifies political, institutional, organizational and individual opportunities and constraints that poor people face in accessing education and training services. The initiative seeks to empower the rural poor to become fully integrated actors of the development process. It does this by promoting collaboration among the education, agriculture and rural development sectors. The strategy covers research, knowledge generation and sharing, advocacy, policy

work and capacity development, as well as standards, guidelines and field work.

The initiative disseminates knowledge, innovations and lessons learned by ERP partners including in areas such as quality of and access to education, gender-responsive learning environments, parent and community engagement, and accommodation of non-traditional learners. *Education for rural people: The role of education, training and capacity development in poverty reduction and food security* (2009), presents a synthesis of lessons learned and outputs achieved since the launch of the ERP partnership.

Key facts

Over 80 percent of the at least 72 million children of primary school age who are not in school live in rural areas.

An estimated 774 million adults – two-thirds of whom are women – lack basic literacy skills and the majority of them are rural.

The majority of illiterate children, youth and adults live in rural areas and are involved in ensuring food security for themselves and the wider community while lacking equitable access to quality basic education.

Those children most likely to drop out of school or to not attend at all are often girls and those from poorer households living in rural areas.

Examples of outputs

Policy and strategy

- The Beijing Education for All High Level Group (2005) recommended that ERP be one of the three world priorities to achieve universal primary education and EFA at international and national levels.
- A strategy for education for rural people in Kosovo, developed in 2004 by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development and the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology with FAO technical assistance, assists policy-makers on a range of rural education issues [<http://www.fao.org/sd/erp/ERPkosovoenglish.PDF>].

Knowledge generation and exchange

- A joint FAO-UNESCO ERP Web site is available in six languages at <http://www.fao.org/erp/en/>
- An ERP publication series, most of which can be downloaded, has been developed since 2003 and now includes more than 20 titles: http://www.fao.org/sd/erp/ERPpublications_en.htm
- The ERP Tool Kit contains teaching materials including videos on agriculture and rural development for use by teachers, extension staff and students. The kit, which also covers good practices, is available at <http://www.fao.org/erp/en/>

Field work

FAO provides technical assistance to member countries implementing school gardens and school-feeding programmes, which can encourage school attendance and bring direct nutritional benefits to children. The main objective of school gardens is active learning, often transmitting to parents and other interested community members innovative gardening techniques. When school gardens produce enough to complement

children's diets, they are sometimes linked to school feeding programmes.

In most cases, the school garden is an area of land within the school grounds or nearby. Vegetables, flowers, medicinal plants, trees, bushes and other plants are usually grown. Occasionally, small animals such as ducks, rabbits, chickens, goats and fish are kept in the school garden. In

cities where schools have limited space or lack open earth, the school garden can consist of plants growing in containers.

FAO has produced a manual for teachers, parents and communities on *Setting up and running a school garden* [http://www.fao.org/schoolgarden/sqlibrary_en.htm].



A school garden in Central America.
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Children in primary school in West Africa.
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School attendance by age and residence



Source UIS/UNICEF 2005 Adaption from the graphic at:
<http://www.fao.org/erp/erp-activities-en/erp-2006/e2006-8/en/>