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Promoting girls' schooling

The impact of EFA policies



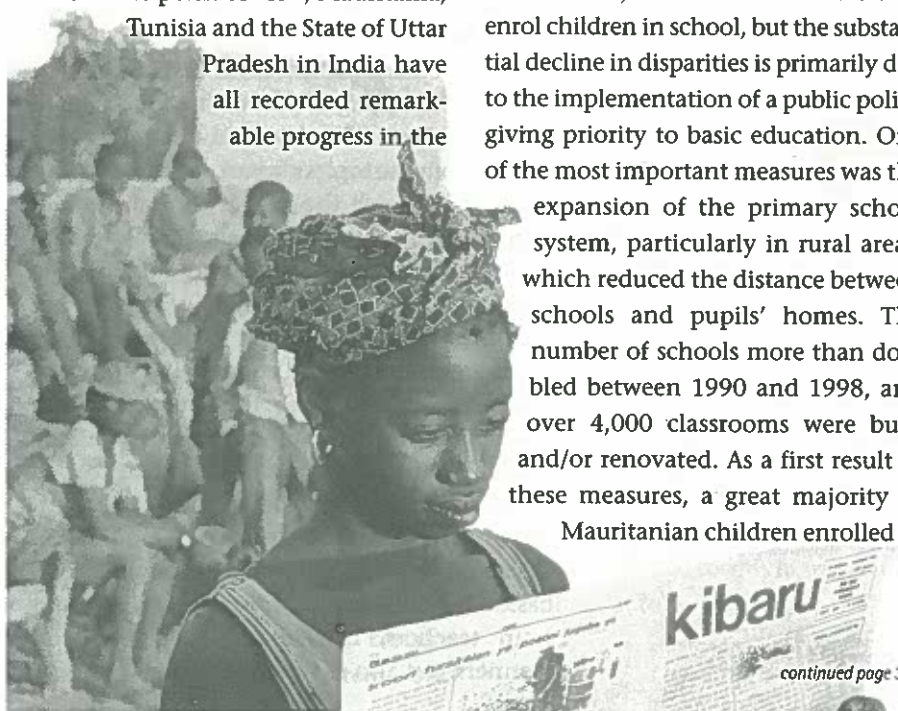
Eliminating gender disparities in schools is one of the main goals of the Dakar 'Framework for Action'. While extensive research on policies to promote the schooling for girls has been done, little is known of their impact on the enrolment and retention of girls in school. The article below analyzes why some EFA strategies have proved successful in three developing countries.

A first indication of the effects of policies to enrol girls in school, and keep them there, is provided by enrolment and retention rates. If a relationship can be established between an increase in enrolment rates and the measures implemented, it may be inferred, at least in principle, that these policies are effective.

From this point of view, Mauritania, Tunisia and the State of Uttar Pradesh in India have all recorded remarkable progress in the

enrolment and retention of girls in school over recent years. In all three cases, the application of a series of policies benefiting girls and disadvantaged groups in general was followed by an increase in access to schooling and/or in retention rates.

In **Mauritania**, between 1990 and 1998 Gross Rates of Admission to primary school rose from 50 to 84 per cent for girls and from 62 to 88 per cent for boys, while Gross Enrolment Rates rose from 41 to 84 per cent for girls and from 53 to 88 per cent for boys (see *Figure 1* p.3). The settling of nomadic peoples (who constitute 12 per cent of the overall population in 1988, as against 73 per cent in 1965) has made it much easier to enrol children in school, but the substantial decline in disparities is primarily due to the implementation of a public policy giving priority to basic education. One of the most important measures was the expansion of the primary school system, particularly in rural areas, which reduced the distance between schools and pupils' homes. The number of schools more than doubled between 1990 and 1998, and over 4,000 classrooms were built and/or renovated. As a first result of these measures, a great majority of Mauritanian children enrolled in



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Basic education and rural development



Women learning about micro-credits in the FAO Bay of Bengal Programme

THE rural world, which is often at a standstill in terms of economic development, also suffers from underdeveloped education systems. Despite the efforts invested since the 1960s, and the mobilization of the international community declared at the Jomtien Conference in 1990, the rural areas of many developing countries are still a 'poor relation' where education is concerned. The fact that the slow pace of progress towards universal basic education is largely due to the persistence of low enrolment rates in rural areas is often overlooked. The issue of social inequities, and subsequently that of gender disparities, seem to have obscured the persistent lag in rural dwellers' access to and participation in the education system.

At the Dakar Forum in 2000, the international community reaffirmed the need to guarantee quality basic education for all. The issue of educational development in rural areas cannot be properly addressed, however, without mentioning the upheavals that have occurred in the agricultural milieu. The fact is that this milieu has undergone radical changes, reflected in particular by a shift in rural labour markets towards non-farm employment and by the persistence – or deepening – of rural poverty.

It is often forgotten that the problem of poverty is first of all a problem of rural

poverty and food security. In many poor countries, rural areas have seen little or no economic development, and population pressure now constitutes a threat to agricultural resources and the natural environment.

Moreover, globalization is posing new challenges to the improvement of the living conditions of rural dwellers, especially the poorest. This situation has a profound impact on agricultural incomes, and hence on the living conditions of rural populations and on rural poverty.

The current situation and the trends connected with globalization and the changing rural environment call for new responses. The strategy of focusing rural education policies on the expansion of agricultural education at the secondary and higher levels is now viewed as largely obsolete. To meet the challenges facing the rural world today, a more holistic view of education is required, centred on access to quality basic education for all. The goals of food security, poverty reduction and meeting the needs of the rural labour market require that rural development policies give more consideration to basic education and that Education for All strategies fully recognize the special nature of the rural environment.

With a view to advancing this line of thought and drawing operational lessons from it to guide countries in the reform

In rural areas of low-income countries the problem of access is acute and, in order to take on the enormous challenges involved in providing education for all, a more holistic view of education is needed.

of their education, training and rural development policies, the FAO has joined forces with UNESCO's International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) to conduct an international study on the topic 'education, food security and rural development'. The first aim of the study is to review the status of this issue from the standpoint of public policies and the conceptual frameworks on which they are based. It will also attempt to shed light on what may be called 'good practice'.

The results of the study will serve not as models but rather as points of reference for all those who are seeking ways of developing education in rural areas and contributing more effectively to rural development. They will be disseminated widely in the international arena and will lead to consultations with the countries concerned, at the regional and in some cases national levels, and with the donor community, in order to ensure not only that the rural dimension is truly taken into account in education aid policies, but also that education is given a central place in rural development strategies.

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