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Education for Rural People to achieve EFA and the MDGs

Background paper

by

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Introduction: Rural People, a hidden EFA and MDGs constituency

In many parts of the world growing up in a rural region is most likely to mean facing poverty, illiteracy and hunger. There are about 850 million people in the world that are undernourished, 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 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Illiteracy often coincides with poverty and hunger, with problems of child and maternal health and with greater exposure to HIV/AIDS. It 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 (ERP) flagship partnership during the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in 2002 in Johannesburg. 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. There is, however, a low level of awareness among decision makers of the impact of rural people illiteracy on development. Moreover, weaknesses of basic education services in rural areas are related to the fact that countries lack knowledge, trained people, experience, resources and infrastructure to plan and deliver effective basic education services to rural people. In addition, weaknesses in the coordination mechanisms between Ministries of Education, Ministries of Agriculture and civil society are yet 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 was to address at the same time 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.

1. To achieve EFA, a better understanding of the diverse needs and specificities of rural people is needed.

Because rural people often do not have a strong political voice and leadership, priorities for the allocation for public expenditures are heavily skewed to the urban sector. As a consequence poverty, including food insecurity, low educational participation and attainment, and gender inequity are among the critical issues affecting rural people. Therefore, addressing MDGs and EFA goals requires a stronger and specific focus on rural people, i.e. understanding who rural people are, why they are neglected, what their needs are and how to address them. The Education for Rural People flagship partnership takes a people-centered approach which contrasts with some others that are semantically synthesized by the expression “rural education” and focus on geography or institutions.

Despite the emphasis given to urbanization processes in the international discourse, 53% of the world population is still rural and according to FAO projections this situation is not going to change drastically for the next 20 years. About 80% of the population in developing countries is rural. However, the strongest rationale for a focus on rural people is that 70% of the world's poor live in rural areas. Given that, globally, rural people are the majority of the population, the urbanization trend

cannot be an excuse not to address their basic needs and rights. In order to achieve all the MDGs and also EFA goals, it is important to focus on ways of including *all rural people*. It is with the purpose of contributing to address this challenge that the ERP partnership, launched as part of the agenda of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, was also included among the EFA flagships.

Who are rural people? Rural people are those people living in small settlements¹, and in a geographical space often dominated by farms, forests, mountains, coastal zones and/or deserts. Agriculture² is their main occupation, and frequently their labor is cheap, they incur high transaction costs for services received, they have limited if any political voice and the basic social services provided to them are inadequate and of less quality to those provided in urban areas. Typically, they are farmers, nomads and pastoralists or fishermen; they deal with animal production, transformation and marketing of land and forest products and services. Because of the prevailing western models of development – giving more priority to the industrial and services sectors as the engine of national economic development - rural people are often an overlooked majority of the world population, often neglected or marginalized. This happens despite their critical role in determining food security (MDG1) and environmental sustainability (MDG7), for agriculture is the primary interface between humanity and the environment. To address their needs and meet those of rising populations which translate into more food production per capita, we, the international community, must not only chart a technologically effective way of producing additional food from limited land and water resources, we must also consider the social, environmental and cultural components of the equation. Education is the most effective way to empower the rural poor - who are denied access to abundant food resources, productive resources - such as land, water, forest - credit, knowledge, health and sanitation - to free them selves from want and to ensure that the MDGs and EFA targets are met.

The Dakar Framework for Action outlines a number of goals in order to meet the EFA challenges, each with special relevance to Education for Rural People. 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 responding 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 people (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. In order to reach this goal, the disparities in quality between rural and urban areas must be addressed.

¹ Definition of the number of inhabitants varies from country to country but the average is below 10.000.

² A broad class of resource uses which includes all forms of land use for the production of biotic crops – whether animal or plant. The term “agriculture” is to be understood in a broad sense, to include production and processing of crops, livestock, fisheries, marine products, as well as forestry, and primary forest products.

2. Education for all rural people: possible strategies

2.1 Access to knowledge and skills

The opportunities that rural people have to access and complete basic education in low income countries is still much lower than in better served urban areas. If not addressed, this situation will become even worse in the coming decades. According to the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2003/4, a mere 1 percent of girls and 1.6 per cent of boys in rural Ethiopia completed the eight-year primary cycle in 2000. A UNICEF survey showed that, of forty one countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America, covering the period 1990-95, almost half of the countries recorded a rural-urban gap of 20 percentage points or more. For example in Burkina Faso, 75 per cent of primary school age children in urban areas attend school, whereas only 26 percent in rural areas do so. A number of countries have recognized the importance of education for rural people and adopted policies to increase access showing positive results. For example the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh pledged to build a primary school within 90 days for any rural community that provided space and hired a qualified teacher. Today all children of primary school age in the state are enrolled in school. In Cuba, which has implemented strategies for reaching children living in isolated rural areas, there are no significant differences in achievement between rural and urban areas.

Expanding the school network in rural areas

The “school under a tree” is still a very common situation in many developing countries and symbolizes the unequal distribution of school buildings among urban and rural citizens. Often, while urban people find a school for their children in their own neighbourhoods, rural communities are asked to share the costs of school construction.

Constructing more primary schools and classrooms in rural areas is an obvious priority for many countries. A parallel strategy to increase school capacity is to seek ways to use existing facilities and teachers more efficiently to accommodate more pupils. Where feasible, for instance, multigrade classrooms and teaching pupils in shifts (e.g. one set of pupils in the morning, another set in the afternoon) can effectively expand the school system's capacity.

While the physical expansion of the primary school system is needed to enable more children to have access to schooling, meeting the basic learning needs of rural people and marginalized and neglected groups and categories of learners requires additional, special efforts, most notably for girls

Promoting gender equity

The gender gap in rural areas in many low income countries is often two to three times higher than in urban areas. Addressing gender equity in rural areas requires consideration of more than just the number of girls versus boys enrolled in school, as was often the approach. Parity constitutes a first step, but true equity required equal opportunities to attend school, equality in the learning process, of learning outcomes and of job opportunities and earnings. In no country is this yet the case, yet, increasing the school enrolment of girls is a priority aim for many governments.

Experience has shown that increasing the proportion of girls enrolled, as well as their numbers – thereby moving toward better male/female equity in schooling – often requires special measures to induce parents to enrol their daughters and keep them in school. Some relatively simple changes can often make a big difference. These are for example related to physical facilities such as school latrines, dormitories, or transportation for remote communities and changes in the school calendar, to adapt to the crop calendar.

However, more ambitious measures are often needed. Teaching is still a male dominated profession in many low-income countries and in some societies, rural families are reluctant to entrust

their daughters to a male teacher. Several countries have succeeded in boosting the enrolment and retention of rural girls in school by recruiting more women teachers for rural assignments. Recruiting young women to serve as teachers in their own village or area is sometimes a viable solution and offers positive role models with which the local girls can more easily identify.

Some adjustments to the curriculum can also help attract and retain girls in school. Eliminating negative gender stereotypes is an obvious first step, but which is not so easy to do quickly. Textbooks and other learning materials must be revised and replaced, eventually. Seemingly neutral content may also need to be revised or supplemented with material more relevant to rural girls' lives and concerns.

Overcoming cultural resistance to girls' education and compensating families for the opportunity costs they incur when girls attend school generally require even more demanding solutions. Information campaigns to sensitize parents to the benefits of girls' education may achieve some positive results, but these are more effective if they are accompanied by incentive schemes such as offering cash 'scholarships' to families who enroll their daughters in school. Scholarships and other financial incentives such as the waiving of school fees and providing free textbooks for girls can encourage poor families to allow at least one daughter to attend school – an important first step in opening a rural school to girls. When such incentive schemes are planned and conducted in consultation with local families, the positive effects on girls' participation in schooling are more likely to carry on even when the financial incentives finally end.

Linking food security and access to learning

Food security is essential if schools are to be effective, and education is necessary for food security to be realized. In many countries, governments, often with support from WFP, have been implementing programs bringing food into the classroom, such as school feeding programs and take-home ration programs. These interventions have three main objectives:

- getting children, especially girls, into school and keeping them there, by providing snacks and take-home rations;
- ensuring that health and nutrition education are included in the school curriculum; involving local health service providers; working with mothers;
- providing training to health and school staff (capacity building).

In this context food is conceived as an "enabler". Food enables families to send their children to school and keep them going. Programmes that address simultaneously the lack of education and malnutrition have achieved notable gains in several countries. In the Bangladesh Food for Education programme, families receive food if they send their children to school instead of putting them to work. After eight years, an evaluation by the International Food Policy Research Institute found gains in both education and nutrition. Primary school attendance had increased, especially for girls. School absence and drop-out rates had declined. And calorie and protein consumption among participating families had risen significantly. Also Mexico's Programa de Educación, Salud y alimentación provided cash transfers to more than 2.6 million poor, rural families as long as they send their children to school. After its first three years in operation, enrolment for the critical transition year from primary to secondary school increased by 20 per cent for girls and 10 per cent for boys.

Strengthening rural learning communities

The concern about improving access to learning for rural people includes the concept of a learning community as a tool to foster community development and raise the quality of local life through life-long learning, helping to make more inclusive the 'all' in Education for All. In spite of disparities in achievements both within and between countries, Community Learning Centers (CLC) can be an important source of education in remote and disadvantaged communities. The holistic, integrated approach of CLC activities is a crucial aspect of their relevance to rural people. Learning

subjects offered through CLCs may include: basic education and literacy; agriculture and other skills for income generation; re-skilling to adjust to changed economies; environmental education; population and gender issues; health and HIV/AIDS; peace and civic rights; culture; and science and technology. Once communities become involved in learning, the awareness of and respect for the right to education is also enhanced. While in poor remote rural areas the implementation of the CLCs concept remain challenging, a multi-level approach that includes centralized policy organization, state- and district-level backstopping and external support can help to off-set these challenges.

2.2 *Quality and relevance to contribute to sustainable development*

For rural people, issues of relevance and quality of education are closely related to cultural, social, economic and environmental aspects of sustainable agriculture and rural development. The effects of schooling on food security, sustainable rural development and poverty reduction for present and future generations depend not only on the number of years of exposure to the school system, but also on the quality and relevance of the education received.

Given the high opportunity costs - especially in the form of field labor - of education, most rural parents are particularly concerned with the relevance of education to their children and to their livelihoods. The type of schooling offered, thus, sometimes affects parental willingness to incur the costs of education. Parents are more willing to educate their children if they find the curriculum relevant and the quality of schooling adequate to local conditions.

Making curricula relevant to rural people

Therefore, relevance of the curricula used in primary schooling and other basic education programmes in rural areas determines their appeal to learners and their effectiveness at meeting basic learning needs. Defining what is 'basic' and what are true 'needs' is not always straightforward. Most learners, whether children young people or adults, want and expect to learn to read and write and manipulate numbers, but their expectations regarding other content and skills can vary.

Experience suggests at least four guidelines for designing basic education content for learners in rural areas. First, the curriculum should combine the core national content with local content, taking into account context, customs, livelihoods and rural development activities. Second, it should take due account of the teachers' qualifications and training (although ideally these should be in accord with the curriculum). Third, it should, as much as possible, make use of locally available skills, knowledge and other resources including teachers. Fourth, multilingual approach, which utilize local languages and mother tongues as languages of instruction, should be taken into consideration as much as possible since education in an unfamiliar language is a major barrier to learning particularly to ethnic minorities and remote populations. Fifth it should respond to the expressed wishes of the rural communities (i.e. be demand-driven), determined through consultation and negotiation with the community, or the adult learners. An interesting example is Argentina's Third Cycle of Basic Education for Rural Schools that combines national basic content with specific learning materials for rural schools. These were distributed to rural teachers who also received training. Almost half of the rural schools in Colombia have adopted the "Escuela Nueva"(The New School") model, which emphasizes participatory curriculum formulation that combines core national content with local modules relevant to the cultures and needs of rural people.

The inclusion of skills enabling rural people to diversify their livelihoods – such as basic literacy and numeracy, agricultural skills, skills for off-farm activities as well as for micro- business management- contributes to reduce vulnerability and poverty In many rural communities other subjects such as human rights, non-violent resolution of conflicts, HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment and other health topics were valued and introduced. Whatever the configuration of content may be, basic education should equip rural learners to continue learning, apply critical thinking and cope with the changes they will encounter in life even if needing to migrate. However, the primary school curriculum is usually determined at the national level and designed for urban pupils. Often it is packed

with subjects, each useful in itself but constituting together a heavy load for even the cleverest pupil. Non-formal programmes often achieve better learning results by focusing on a few core subjects. The margin for adaptation of the curriculum to fit local learning needs is often limited, but school heads and other supervisors can be encouraged to seek and allow more flexibility in achieving a balance in the basic education curriculum that respects national criteria and responds to local rural conditions. Supplementary contents are based on the local culture and economy, often making use of local artisans, story-tellers, and other human resources in the community, and require integrated learning.

The integrated learning concept is based on the notion that effective learning is not limited to the classroom, but that, through use of community resources, curricula can be made to “come alive.” As students move out of the classroom to study concrete community problems, the process of involving villagers contributes to the education process, as well as to the process of community development. Learning through integrated techniques in the rural environment occurs in a variety of settings, involving both students and community members, and necessitates strong linkages between educational organizations and agricultural services.

In several countries, FAO supported Integrated Pest Management and Farmer Field Schools programmes provide the framework for such pedagogy. But while adults use the field observations as a basis for making decisions about crop production and protection practices, school students use these observations as a starting point for learning about a wide range of topics: food chains and life cycles; water pollution, soil erosion, biodiversity and pesticide use. Rather than being textbook concepts, the subjects become tangible and are not only used to educate about the environment, but carry over to other academic subjects: science projects, math exercises, art and even essay writing and poetry. Exhibitions are organized to share this work with the community.

There is a need to shape national strategies that intelligently combine and integrate rural development and basic education. Such cases are still rare, and this shortcoming is often due to a division of responsibility, with one ministry having responsibility for basic education, and several other ministries (rural development, agriculture, forestry, water, health, etc.) addressing their own projects. Many donors have to work through a particular ministry, and hence, donor support tends to be fragmented as well. In Kosovo, ministries of education and agriculture, with OSCE support, are now reviewing the curriculum to make it more relevant to rural people needs. This is one of the steps Kosovo identified within its National Strategy on Education for Rural People, formulated in 2004 through a participatory approach involving a wide range of stakeholders in rural areas.

2.3 Planning and monitoring ERP

Adopting an inter-sectoral participatory and gender sensitive approach

Eliminating urban/rural disparities in basic education requires comprehensive planning within the overall education and training system, so that basic education in rural areas can offer relevant learning opportunities equivalent in quality to those accessible in urban areas. Its formal and non-formal components should be designed and managed to be complementary and, insofar as possible, they should be integrated with other rural development initiatives (e.g. to improve health, food security, agricultural production, protection of the environment, local autonomy, access to credit, etc.).

Mechanisms for periodic consultation and joint planning among key actors should help achieve this harmonization. School mapping, for example, should take into account the analyses and plans of various rural development specialists, who in turn could be called upon to help with the in-service training of education personnel employed in formal and non-formal programmes in rural areas. Conversely, rural extension workers could be sensitized to identify unmet basic learning needs and to dialogue with teachers and administrators of education and training activities. Further synergies can be fostered at community level by using the school as a centre for social activities relating to rural development.

Involving and empowering rural people

An education for rural people strategy is not only simply providing or improving more of the same, but about how to reach non-achieved targets, neglected groups and improve quality. It must be based on acceptance of the high marginal costs of education for presently inaccessible populations and recognition that what may be a standard formula for “success” in an urban area, would not be effective in certain “non-standard” rural environments. Targeting funding where it is most needed is clearly essential, but often difficult to do because of bureaucratic constraints and vested interests. Rural people, that have generally received fewer resources than urban people, may actually need more resources to achieve the same educational outcomes.

Pushing such choices to lower administrative levels by decentralizing responsibility for basic education may make funding decisions more sensitive to local needs, but it may also open the door for abuses that would be more difficult to conceal at higher levels. Another controversial measure deserves mention here. Appropriate funding schemes might be devised both to raise additional local resources and to give priority to schools or communities most in need, for example by using school enrolment, survival or adult illiteracy rates, and other indicators of need. Formula funding has been used in many school systems to determine resource allocations. The physical location of the school is sometimes taken into consideration for the provision of extra resources – staff or budget – to isolated schools. Within the state budget for primary schooling, some rethinking of allocations could help rectify current urban/rural disparities. For example, incentives in the form of salary differentials, subsidized housing, food and transportation allowances and opportunities for professional advancement could be introduced to make rural teaching assignments more attractive.

Other forms of basic education need to be considered too, in targeting funding to meet the most urgent needs. A strong case can be made for a substantial increase of funding for ECD programmes in rural areas. Because of the vital importance of a child’s early years, both for its healthy physical and cognitive development, funding for well-managed ECD programmes should be considered a strategic investment with a very high return for the individual and for society. In communities where formal schooling is not yet feasible or where there is a pool of out-of-school children and illiterate adolescents and adults, non-formal basic education programmes are the obvious alternative.

Monitoring ERP

Monitoring basic education activities targeting rural people is a prerequisite for planning and implementing reforms or improvements. Basic statistics on the school-age population, enrolments, attendance, completion and promotion are essential for good management of the school system, but are often incomplete and flawed for rural areas. These and other quantitative and qualitative data, broken down by gender, community, type of schooling, administrative area and other appropriate categories, are useful in detecting disparities and malfunctions that require corrective action. Analysis of these data can reveal urban/rural disparities, but also identify the differences and diversity among rural areas that need to inform planning and management decisions at sub-national level. The results of such analyses, can inform the allocation and use of resources for basic education in rural areas.

Monitoring non-formal education activities in rural areas is particularly problematic; especially those activities operated by NGOs and local community associations. Where government provides funding or other support, providers can be required to file periodic reports including data items, such as numbers of beneficiaries by age and gender, that are useful for planning and management purposes. Another option is conducting sample surveys to obtain illustrative data on the nature, scope, organization and outcomes of non-formal basic education activities in selected rural areas.

Standardized testing of learning achievement can provide important information on the performance of schools. Senior managers of the school system may use test results as one criterion in

determining the allocation of human and material resources. With equity in educational opportunity now a key policy objective, disparities in test results that favour urban areas should incite compensatory investments in rural schooling.

In situations where the reporting of statistics and test results for rural schools is not yet systematic or reliable, sample surveys may be an affordable option to obtain useful information both on school and classroom conditions and on learning achievement.³

3. Further mobilising the international community for ERP as a key pillar of ESD

3.1 The ERP partnership: where do we stand?

ERP has helped catalyze collaboration among sectors that traditionally have worked in isolation from each other such as agriculture, rural development and education. Two years after the official launching, ERP has more than 200 members from the education, agriculture and rural development sectors, including governments, international organizations, civil society, media, private sector and academic and research institutions. A web site <http://www.fao.org/sd/erp/> was launched to serve as a tool for advocacy, networking and knowledge-sharing on ERP. The initiative has gone through three stages:

- (i) During the preparatory stage (2000-2001) before the launching of ERP, the work focused on revisiting the interaction among education, agriculture and rural development through research. An assessment study was conducted on the state of public policies on education for rural people and the concepts that inspired them. Interaction between specialized institutions was promoted, relevant data was collected, analyzed, and synthesized. The findings were co-published by FAO and UNESCO/IIEP in the book titled “Education for Rural Development: Towards New Policy Responses”;
- (ii) During the second stage (2002-2003) ERP initiated a policy dialogue with FAO Member Countries to promote new partnerships among Ministries of Education and Ministries of Agriculture as well as with donors and civil society. The objective here was two-fold, to find out whether countries are addressing the educational needs of rural populations in national plans of action, for example Education for All National Action Plans and Rural Development Plans, and to build a network that will consolidate the ERP partnership. Four regional consultations and many capacity building workshops on Education for Rural People were held (two in Asia and two in Latin America) targeting decision-makers from Ministries of Agriculture and Ministries of Education were organized in collaboration with ERP members such as UNESCO Regional Offices, the Directorate General for Development Cooperation of Italy (DGCS), the Global Development Learning Network (GDLN) of the World Bank, the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation in Agriculture (IICA), and NGOs and academic institutions. These activities were complemented by the launch of a series of ERP co-publications with by FAO and UNESCO-IIEP and eight titles published in 2 years on ERP key issues;
- (iii) The third stage (started in 2003 and currently in progress) focuses on building national capacity to promote ERP projects at country and regional levels and the development of training materials for policy makers and practitioners to support the process. For example, publications published or under preparation include guidelines on how to plan and monitor the implementation of ERP; lessons learnt in the development of ERP strategies, such as a medium-term Strategy for Education for Rural People

³ For more on the topic see: FAO and UNESCO 2005. *Des indicateurs pour la planification de l'éducation pour la population rurale*. Rome and Paris.

developed in Kosovo; case studies in Mozambique, nine in Latin America and in Croatia; and projects are in the pipeline in different countries. Within the ERP website an “ERP Toolkit” assembles learning and teaching tools for different levels and types of education on issues relevant to the livelihoods of rural people. Also during this phase, ERP expanded work towards the contribution of higher tertiary agricultural education to enhancing the well being of rural people;

- (iv) Future plans include for example: a Regional Policy Making and Capacity Building Workshop for Africa, planned for 7-9 September 2005, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The event is organized by FAO, UNESCO-IIEP and the Association for the Development of Education in Africa, ADEA, with support from the Italian DGCS. The 2005 edition of the “Working Group for International Co-operation in Skills Development”, is to be held in FAO Rome during the second semester of 2005 on the topic “Skills Development for Rural People: a Renewed Challenge”. The meeting, hosted by FAO, is co-organized by ILO, the Geneva based University Institute for the Development and Education (IUED) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) also in collaboration with IIEP. The ERP flagship partnership will also be presented during the 5th Meeting of the High-level Group on EFA (Beijing, China, 28-30 November 2005).

3.2 *Towards new synergies: ERP and ESD*

In Rio de Janeiro, in 1992, during the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) declared sustainability a general guiding principle for the 21st century. Since poverty is one of the major reasons for the predatory exploitation of nature and for social strife, the UNCED placed the global fight against poverty at the core of its strategy while at the same time indicating that the integration of and a greater attention to environment and development concerns will lead to the fulfillment of basic needs, improved living standards for all, better protected and managed ecosystems and a safer and more prosperous future. Since the World Summit on Sustainable Development, also known as the “Rio + 10” follow up, the Rio goal of a global, sustainable development has been defined so that it goes beyond the mere maintenance of the ability of the ecological system to function. Much rather, the objective includes together with the environmental, also the social, ethical and economic dimensions and identifies human development as indispensable for addressing the basic needs of current and future generations. This leads to an interdisciplinary definition of sustainable development that brings together economic performance, social responsibility and environmental protection. Sustainable development problems and perspectives are not problems of the environment per se, but problems of people dealing with nature, with natural resources, and with social and economic development. In addressing sustainable development a great part of it concerns agriculture and rural people. Sustainable development requires an inclusive, holistic and lifelong learning process concerned with building and reinforcing a wide range of knowledge, skills and values and life styles that are key to achieve the Millennium Goals. Such approach needs to include rural people. This is why Education for Rural People is an important aspect of the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development.

Conclusions

The magnitude of the ERP endeavor indicates that the agenda cannot be addressed by any single organization or institution. On the contrary, the potential success of the ERP global initiative can be attributed to, among others:

- (i) the strong partnership developed between FAO and UNESCO including active participation of the field offices of both Organizations;

- (ii) new alliances and collaboration developed among Ministries of Agriculture, Ministries of Education, NGOs, research institutions and researchers in developing countries;
- (iii) the holistic approach linking normative and pilot field work of the partnership initiative;
- (iv) the strategic choice to focus the ERP programme on upstream policy and capacity building which ensures cost-effectiveness and a multiplier effect; and
- (v) political will to support national and international commitments.

This paper has indicated why ERP should be fully integrated into the strategies and plans of action to achieve the MDGs, the EFA goals as well as other important initiatives related to sustainable development and poverty reduction such as the Commission For Africa or the Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development (SARD) Initiative. This is the reason for the advocacy and mobilization role of the ERP flagship partnership initiative. Ensuring and monitoring the progress of ERP would be thus a common responsibility.

This WGEFA could discuss the main actions through which the international community could support ERP through policy and work programmes. Examples such as the support given by FAO to Kosovo to formulate its National ERP strategy, the policy and field work of the Nelson Mandela Foundation in South Africa, or the engagement of the Confederación de Cafeteiros de Colombia, as well as of other civil society and international organizations ERP advocacy and field work, are good practices that can provide inspiration to the Working group on how to further foster ERP.

It is our expectation that the international community can turn the spotlight on ERP and work with national authorities that are committed to improving the lives of large numbers of rural men, women and children.

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Key Websites

The Education for Rural People web site: <http://www.fao.org/sd/erp> and within it the link to Publications: http://www.fao.org/sd/erp/ERPPublications_en.htm.

The UNESCO-DESD Website refers to ERP in http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=27554&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html