

Education for rural people: a crucial factor for sustainable development

Let us summarize two different situations in education for rural children. One exists currently in northern Mozambique on the shores of Lake Nyasa, the other existed in mid-Norway in the mid-twentieth century. In Mozambique, extreme deprivation reigns: the village is poor – its population lives mainly by subsistence agriculture and fishing – with just one shop, which stocks no soap, salt, sugar or even matches. Its primary school has only one teacher, who himself had completed just four grades of primary school. The teacher is trying to conduct a multigrade school without any books or other teaching materials. His pupils chant drills after him and practise their writing in the sand. As most of the adult community are unschooled, there seems to be no interaction between the daily life of the village and what goes on in the school.

In mid-Norway, the primary school was also in a fairly isolated agricultural

and forestry community. It, too, was multigrade and met only every other day. But its teacher was well-qualified and its pupils were well-equipped with reading and writing materials. In addition, they undertook a range of practical activities – gardening, carpentry, sewing, knitting – that required them to put their reading, writing, counting and measuring skills to work. From time to time, the school was closed, not for holidays, but to release its pupils to work in the fields with and under the guidance of their parents and other adults. There was much learning-by-doing and much interaction between the daily life of the village and the routines of the school.

The two schools illustrate, respectively, what basic education for rural children all too often consists of and what it could be – if only the right policies, resources and community support were in place and properly applied. The fact is that in too many countries the right policies, resources and community support are not yet in place.

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Broad situation

For decades, governments have recognized that rural people, despite comprising the majority of the population, are severely disadvantaged when it comes to educational opportunities and provisions. Despite this recognition, the broad picture remains as outlined below.

- First, just over half of the world's population is rural. Despite strong trends towards urbanization, this will

school. This may be because there is a lack of available schools or because those that are available are badly run. It could be because families cannot afford the costs of schooling, or they need their children's labour to keep the family going. Some families cannot see the usefulness of schooling for their children. Most of these children are in rural families.

- Fourth, drop-out rates from the rural primary schools of many countries

governments, they also signal the frustration of investments. One of the main reasons why public money is spent on schools and educational programmes is in the expectation that investing in human capital will promote and accelerate the economic, social, cultural and political development of a country. People who have not been able to gain a proper schooling are unable to take advantage of the information and opportunities it provides for improving

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continue to be the case for at least three more decades. These three billion or so people live mainly in the less industrialized countries of the world, that is, in countries with relatively low per capita incomes and high rates of poverty and malnutrition. Most of these people earn small incomes from small-scale agriculture and various types of casual, family or self-employment. Many need their children's assistance in sustaining their households.

- Second, nearly a billion people – two-thirds of them women – are uneducated, illiterate and unable to access the information that could help transform their lives and the lives of their children. Most of these people live in rural communities. Most have no opportunity even for adult basic education. Not surprisingly, the gap between rural and urban illiteracy rates is widening, to the extent that in several countries illiteracy in rural populations is two to three times higher than in the urban centres.
- Third, it is estimated that 130 million school-age children do not attend

remain high. Indeed, in some countries most children drop out by the age when they should be starting the fifth grade. High proportions of these children will not have mastered the skills of reading, writing and counting sufficiently to retain and use them during their lifetime.

- Fifth, 211 million children and adolescents need to earn money by working on cocoa, tobacco, banana or other plantations, which are all rural undertakings. However, unlike the pupils in Norway, their “doing” is not combined or alternated with learning. On the contrary, many are forced to undertake mind-numbing tasks for more than 12 hours per day under oppressive conditions. No educational opportunities are organized for them either at work or afterwards. Large proportions of these young people will join the ranks of the next generation of illiterate adults.

The above facts demonstrate how hundreds of millions of rural people are unable to access one of their fundamental human rights – the right to education. From the point of view of resource-poor

their standards of living. Education, then, is not only a human right; it is also a social necessity.

Progress

While it is clear from the above that much progress is still needed, this should not detract from the educational achievements of the past half-century. Since the declaration of the right to free, universal and compulsory education, the number of children who enter primary school every year has tripled, the number entering secondary school has increased tenfold, while the number who enter higher education has grown by an even greater factor. Rural populations have certainly benefited from the efforts that have made these achievements possible. Nevertheless, the tasks remaining are formidable. As the Education for All (EFA) fora at Jomtien (Thailand) in 1990 and Dakar (Senegal) in 2000 underlined all too clearly, these tasks demand renewed, stronger and persevering efforts if the goals of universal primary education and a 50 percent improvement in levels of adult literacy are to be attained.

The *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2002* (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2002) has highlighted the urgency of this situation by pointing out that as many as 28 countries are at serious risk of failing to achieve the required net enrolments and levels of adult literacy and gender parity by the dates set at Dakar. Further, as the efforts to serve rural people have so far fallen short of what is needed, a special focus or “flagship”

sustain the interests of rural people of all ages and concerned with all levels of education. Moreover, this kind of partnership between “education” and “agriculture” serves to promote holistic thinking and interdisciplinary exchange and to mitigate the all too frequent tendencies to compartmentalization. The Directors-General of FAO and UNESCO recognized this when they jointly launched the ninth flagship in the EFA initiative, “Education for Rural People”,

flagship. The first was a regional workshop on Education for Rural Development in Asia for policy-makers in agriculture and education from nine Asian governments (Bangkok, 5–7 November 2002). The second was a donors’ workshop on Education for Rural People (Rome, 12–13 December 2002). In 2003, the outcome of a set of collaborative studies was published under the title, *Education for rural development: towards new policy responses* (FAO/UNESCO,

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programme must strive to ensure that rural boys, girls, adolescents, men and women secure their due place in development and education plans.

The flagship “Education for Rural People”

FAO is the United Nations agency most concerned with rural people – as is suggested by its name. Promoting better agriculture, better food security, better nutrition and better natural resources and environmental management is not limited to promoting the relevant supporting institutions and infrastructure. It also means, perhaps more importantly, organizing appropriate education for all the people involved. FAO has engaged in educating boys and girls through school gardens and men and women through cooperatives, farmer field schools and broader extension programmes. It has long cooperated with UNESCO and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) in promoting functional literacy for agricultural and other rural groups.

FAO is a natural partner for UNESCO in leading a flagship programme to

during the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in September 2002 (FAO, 2002).

Activities

Within less than one year of the launch, more than 50 organizations – governmental, non-governmental and international – had pledged themselves to work with FAO and UNESCO in pushing forward the flagship programme. Two workshops were held as initiatives of the



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2003). All these initiatives were the results of joint efforts among FAO, UNESCO and the latter’s International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP).

Next steps

The Director-General of FAO has emphasized four priorities for the new flagship.

- The first is to ensure that national plans for EFA have the education of rural people at their core and that institutional capacities to plan and manage effectively are strengthened.
- The second is to promote and support initiatives both to expand rural people’s access to education and to increase their attendance and completion rates through enhanced quality and ranges of measures appropriate to particular communities.
- The third is to improve the relevance of educational programmes to rural interests and livelihoods in ways that both enable people to understand the immediate usefulness of what is to be learned and simultaneously keep open the avenues to other forms of advancement.

- The fourth priority is for international aid agencies to work together and forge closer and more effective partnerships with national authorities and other bodies in enabling rural people to obtain the kinds of education that will improve their lives.

To implement these priorities, the partners in the flagship will operate at two levels: national and international. At the national level, they will offer governments and other bodies technical support in reaching out to rural people to ascertain their educational needs and aspirations. They will also offer help in drawing up appropriate plans of action as part of the overall national plans for achieving EFA. Work is already under way in several countries: Bosnia, Croatia, Egypt, Kosovo, Serbia and Montenegro.

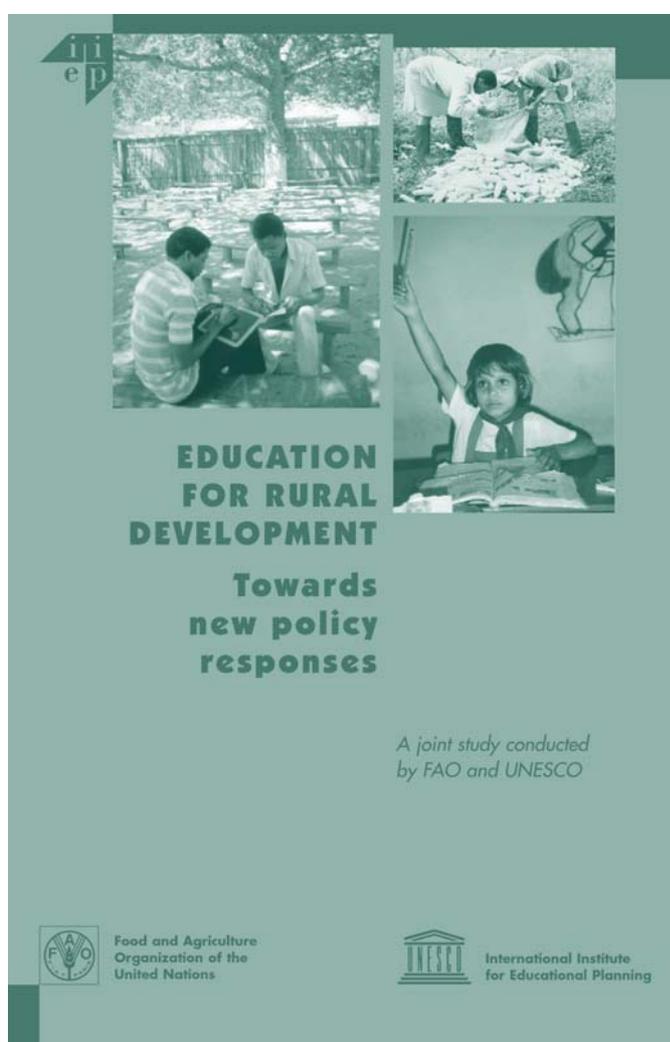
At the international level, the flagship will advocate Education for Rural People (ERP) by convening workshops, seminars, conferences and Internet fora to analyse and clarify the issues and to keep members abreast of progress and obstacles. It will also promote and facilitate the exchange of good practices through all the available media. Further, the flagship will identify the existing and potential capacity for different components of ERP within partner institutions, and will work to make this available to the countries that need it.

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Education for rural people: a crucial factor for sustainable development

For decades, governments have recognized that rural people are severely disadvantaged when it comes to education. Yet, in too many countries the necessary policies, resources and community support to improve the situation are not yet in place. Over half of the world's population is rural and most of these people earn small incomes from agriculture; many need their children's assistance in sustaining their households. Nearly a billion people – two-thirds of them women – are unschooled, illiterate and unable to access the information that could transform their lives. Around 130 million school-age children do not attend school; most of these children are in rural families. Thus, hundreds of millions of rural people are unable to access one of their fundamental human rights – the right to education.

Spending public money on education is an investment that will promote and accelerate the economic, social, cultural and political development of a country. Education is not only a human right; it is also a social necessity. While rural populations have benefited since the declaration of the right to free, universal and compulsory education, the tasks remaining are formidable and demand renewed, stronger and persevering efforts.

FAO is engaged in educating boys and girls through school gardens and men and women through cooperatives, farmer field schools and broader extension programmes. The Directors-General of FAO and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) jointly launched the ninth flagship in the Education for All initiative, "Education for Rural People", during the World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg in September 2002. Governmental, non-governmental and international organizations have pledged to work with FAO and UNESCO in pushing forward the programmes of the flagship.

L'éducation en zones rurales: facteur déterminant du développement durable

Depuis des décennies, les gouvernements savent que les ruraux sont nettement désavantagés en matière d'éducation. Et pourtant, un nombre trop élevé de pays n'ont pas encore mis en place les politiques, les ressources et l'appui aux collectivités nécessaires pour améliorer la situation. Plus de la moitié de la population mondiale vit dans des zones rurales et le plus souvent tire de maigres revenus de l'agriculture; dans de nombreux cas, les enfants doivent aider leurs parents à faire vivre la famille. Près d'un milliard de personnes, dont deux tiers de femmes, ne sont pas scolarisées, sont illettrées et n'ont pas accès à l'information qui pourrait changer leur vie. Quelque 130 millions d'enfants d'âge scolaire ne sont pas scolarisés; la plupart d'entre eux vivent dans des zones rurales. Ainsi, dans ces zones, des centaines de millions de personnes sont privées d'un des droits fondamentaux de l'homme: le droit à l'éducation.

En allouant des fonds publics à l'éducation, les pays peuvent favoriser, voire accélérer, leur développement économique, social, culturel et politique. L'éducation n'est pas seulement un droit de l'homme: c'est une nécessité sociale. Certes, les populations rurales ont vu leur lot s'améliorer depuis la déclaration du droit à une éducation gratuite, universelle et obligatoire, mais il reste encore énormément à faire et il nous faudra pour cela redoubler d'efforts.

La FAO œuvre dans le domaine de l'éducation des garçons et des filles grâce aux jardins scolaires, et de l'éducation des adultes grâce aux coopératives, aux stages pratiques pour agriculteurs et à des programmes de vulgarisation à plus large spectre. A l'occasion du Sommet mondial sur le développement durable, qui s'est tenu à Johannesburg en septembre 2002, le Directeur général de la FAO et le Directeur général de l'Organisation des Nations Unies pour l'éducation, la science et la culture (UNESCO) ont lancé conjointement le neuvième programme-phare de l'initiative Education pour tous, intitulé «Education des populations rurales». Des organisations gouvernementales, non gouvernementales et internationales se sont engagées à collaborer avec la FAO et l'UNESCO en vue de mener à bien les différents volets du programme phare.

Educación para la población: un factor esencial del desarrollo sostenible

Desde hace decenios los gobiernos reconocen que la población rural se halla muy desfavorecida en la esfera de la educación. Sin embargo, en muchos países aún no se han establecido las políticas, los recursos y el apoyo a las comunidades que se necesitan para mejorar esta situación. Más de la mitad de la población mundial vive en zonas rurales, y la mayor parte de estas personas obtienen escasos ingresos de la agricultura; muchos necesitan la ayuda de los niños para sostener sus hogares. Casi 1 000 millones de personas, dos tercios de las cuales son mujeres, no han pasado por la escuela, son analfabetos e incapaces de acceder a la información que podría transformar su vida. En torno a 130 millones de niños en edad escolar no van a la escuela; la mayor parte de estos niños provienen de familias rurales. Por consiguiente, cientos de millones de personas que viven en zonas rurales no pueden disfrutar de uno de los derechos humanos fundamentales: el derecho a la educación.

El gasto de fondos públicos en la educación constituye una inversión que fomentará y acelerará el desarrollo económico, social, cultural y político de un país. La educación no sólo es un derecho humano, sino también una necesidad social. Aunque las poblaciones de las zonas rurales han obtenido beneficios desde la declaración del derecho a la educación libre, universal y obligatoria, aún falta una labor formidable que requerirá renovados esfuerzos, más firmes y duraderos.

La FAO ha adquirido el compromiso de proporcionar educación a los niños y niñas utilizando huertos escolares, y a los hombres y mujeres a través de cooperativas, escuelas de campo para agricultores y programas más amplios de extensión. Los Directores Generales de la FAO y la Organización de las Naciones Unidas para la Educación, la Ciencia y la Cultura (UNESCO) lanzaron conjuntamente la novena iniciativa de educación para todos, «Escolarización de la población rural», durante la Cumbre Mundial sobre el Desarrollo Sostenible, celebrada en Johannesburgo en septiembre de 2002. Organizaciones gubernamentales, no gubernamentales e internacionales han prometido colaborar con la FAO y la UNESCO a fin de dar impulso a los programas de esta iniciativa.