

# INTRODUCTION

**I**n *The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2006* (SOFI), the FAO Director-General, Dr Jacques Diouf, stated that “the concentration of hunger in rural areas suggests that no sustained reduction in hunger is possible without special emphasis on agricultural and rural development” (FAO, 2006, p. 6). This was reiterated by Dr Diouf in *The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2008*, with the added urgency brought on by high food prices. In June 2008, FAO hosted the *High-Level Conference on World Food Security: the Challenges of Climate Change and Bioenergy*. Rising food prices were a central theme of this important gathering.

In designing responses to these challenges, rural people will play a crucial role. Education, training and capacity development to foster rural people capacity to deal with these changing circumstances will be critical ingredients for the success of the campaign to reduce food insecurity and related shocks for the most vulnerable populations. With demand for food expected to rise by approximately 50 percent by 2030, it is essential to move aggressively to improve education, training and capacity development so that a knowledge-based response can be mounted in the face of this significant challenge. “Public investment in infrastructure, agricultural research, education and extension is indispensable for promoting agricultural growth” (FAO, 2006, p. 29).

However, several existing conditions will make progress in this area exceedingly challenging.

- >> “Some 70 percent of the poor in developing countries live in rural areas and depend on agriculture for their livelihoods ...” (FAO, 2006, p. 28).
- >> “... the world is now estimated to have 963 million malnourished people” (Diouf, 2009).
- >> In the world, some 75 million children of primary school age are not in school.
- >> Over four out of five of these 75 million children live in rural areas (UNESCO, 2008).
- >> An estimated 776 million adults – two thirds of whom are women – lack basic literacy skills (UNESCO, 2008) and the majority of them are rural.

Inequity pushes substantial segments of society into exclusion and, in doing so, gives rise to discrimination and handicaps of all kinds, allowing an enormous potential in terms of factors and forces for development to wither away (FAO, 2006).





The rural-urban education gap has been addressed and overcome by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries as a key constraint to overall development. Inequity in education is directly related to the overall Gini coefficient of inequality of income distribution. Overcoming the knowledge and education gap in developing countries is not only crucial to economic growth but also to global and national democracy, peace and social cohesion, and generally to sustainable development.

The purpose of this book is to present a synthesis of lessons learned since the launch of the ERP partnership in 2002, under the leadership of FAO, as part of the implementation process for the Millennium Development Goals and the goals of the World Summit for Sustainable Development. This book was developed to assist policy makers in dealing with rural poverty, food insecurity and education challenges confronting rural people. It is also designed to assist adult and youth education professionals, extension managers and academics interested in



changing strategies for an increasingly knowledge-based economy. Lastly, it is intended for use by members of the ERP partnership and other practitioners throughout the world.

This book draws on the contributions of ERP partners throughout the world. It also builds on two previous articles by the authors:

- >> Acker, D.G. & Gasperini, L. 2008. Education for rural people: what have we learned. *Journal of International Agricultural and Extension Education*, 15(1) Spring.
- >> Acker, D.G. & Gasperini, L. 2003. Launching a new flagship on education for rural people: an initiative agricultural and extension educators can get behind. *Journal of International Agricultural and Extension Education*, 10(3) Fall.

The book starts with the background and rationale for the ERP initiative and the relationship with the mission of FAO and other partners. This context-setting section is followed by the analysis of the challenges faced by rural people and some innovative responses that are already in place identified through research. The ERP partnership is described to provide the reader with a full understanding of the variety and number of actors involved in implementing ERP. The book ends with a chapter recommending priority actions for future policy and field work.

This book was prepared as a contribution to the 2009 G8 and the UNESCO World Conferences on Education, as well as for the ERP future capacity development initiatives.



