

ERP  
BACKGROUND  
*and*  
RATIONALE

## THE PURPOSE OF ERP



Hunger and illiteracy strike approximately one billion of the world's current population of 6.5 billion people. Within the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) framework, ERP is a policy approach that aims at contributing to reduce the 963 million food insecure people (Diouf, 2009), the 776 million illiterate adults and the 75 million illiterate children (UNESCO, 2008). The essential assets enabling rural households to escape poverty are education, labour, land, livestock and infrastructure (FAO, 2007b), and ERP is one of the most powerful interventions to overcome hunger (Burchi and De Muro, 2007).

ERP is a people-centred approach that bridges the efforts of the agriculture and education sectors in bringing about transformation of rural communities by developing the capacity of rural people to feed themselves, to overcome poverty, hunger and illiteracy, and to enjoy long, healthy and creative lives (UNDP, 1999). The ERP policy approach broadens the agriculture production focus of traditional rural development approaches to encompass all those who live and work in the rural space and not only people directly involved in agriculture.

The research foundations of the ERP policy were laid in the FAO and UNESCO publication *Education for rural development: towards new policy responses* (2003). Education and skills training are seen as preparing rural citizens to succeed in part-time and full-time on-farm and off-farm employment and providing them economic and social competencies, mobility and resilience needed to live in a space that includes both farming and other economic and social activities. What is clear is that providing ERP is a complex challenge given the heterogeneous nature of the main stakeholders, the number of people involved in the world, and the particular physical, cultural, and resource endowments of rural space.



## A PARTNERSHIP

ERP is also a global partnership promoted to accelerate progress towards the MDGs. The partnership – launched in September 2002 during the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) - is a worldwide *call to action* for educating all rural children, youth and adults (Diouf, 2002; UN, 2002). The partnership aims to remove barriers that prevent poor people from using their capacity, including the urban-rural knowledge and education gap. ERP is a member of the Partnership for Sustainable Development of the United Nations Commission for Sustainable Development (CSD) launched jointly by FAO and UNESCO Directors-General.

ERP works through the identification of political, institutional, organizational and individual opportunities and constraints that poor people face in accessing education and training services at all levels of education, in both formal and non-formal settings. ERP seeks to empower the rural poor to become fully integrated actors of the development process by promoting collaboration among the education, agriculture and rural development sectors to ensure education and skills training for all rural people (<http://www.fao.org/sd/erp/>). The strategy addresses research, knowledge generation and sharing, advocacy, policy and capacity development, as well as normative and field work.

Developing countries often face challenges in effectively delivering basic education services in rural areas because of the lack of trained personnel as well as an incomplete knowledge of policy alternatives. Weak coordination in addressing education in rural areas between ministries of education and agriculture, and with civil society is also a common constraint. Both FAO and UNESCO have been aware of these gaps, hence the launching of the ERP as a multi-partner, intersectoral and interdisciplinary capacity development initiative. ERP bridges the Earth Summit (1992), the World Food Summit (2006 and 2002), the WSSD (1992) and the EFA (1990 and 2000) policies and programmes. It also builds on the MDGs holistic policy approach that addresses economic growth and international competitiveness of the agriculture sector as part of the sustainable development and poverty reduction strategies, and includes education, health and social (also gender) equity and sustainable environment as key endeavours.

ERP is also one of the nine EFA flagships. The EFA flagships are multi-partner initiatives that focus on specific EFA-related areas and problems requiring special attention to implement the EFA Dakar Framework for Action. The ERP flagship is implemented under FAO leadership in collaboration with UNESCO and more than 350 partners.

## WHAT DO WE MEAN BY RURAL?

Rural people live in human settlements with small populations and in geographical spaces often dominated by farms, forests, water, coastal zones, mountains, and/or deserts (FAO/UNESCO-IIEP, 2005a).

*“Most rural dwellers work in agriculture, often for low rates of compensation. They face high transaction costs and have little political clout. The government services to which they have access are generally inappropriate and of poor quality. Rural people are generally farmers, stockbreeders, fishermen and, in some cases, nomads”* (FAO/UNESCO-IIEP, 2007b, p. 15).

Rural people also deal with transformation and marketing of land and forest products and services (FAO/UNESCO-IIEP, 2005a).

Rural people are an overlooked majority of the world’s poor population because of the prevailing western and industrial models of development that give more priority to the urban industrial and services sectors as the engine of national economic development. This urban bias leads to disregard the critical role of rural people in determining food security (MDG 1 – Reduce extreme poverty and hunger) and environmental sustainability (MDG 7 – Ensure environmental sustainability). This bias also leads policy makers to overlook the fact that rural people constitute the majority of out of school children and illiterate adults, and therefore investments in ensuring universal primary education (UPE), adult literacy and life-long education should mainly be directed to rural populations.

Rural people cannot be assumed to be a homogenous group. “Rural is plural”, meaning that there is a wide variation in the needs of different groups throughout the world. Research points out a large degree of heterogeneity both within and across countries in terms of access by rural households to essential assets and services, including



education (FAO, 2007b). A new rurality is affirming itself: here, agriculture continues to be a very important component but it is not the only component that needs to receive attention in an effort to develop a comprehensive rural society (FAO/UNESCO-IIEP, 2006c). The majority of rural poor are illiterate and are engaged in subsistence agriculture. As illiterates, they are excluded from the knowledge that would improve their capacity and productivity, increase their income and food security, connect them to the market from which they are largely marginalized and enhance their livelihoods and citizenship (Burchi and De Muro, 2007).





## **RURAL PEOPLE ARE STILL A (NEGLECTED) MAJORITY IN LESS DEVELOPED REGIONS**

While rural people are still the demographic majority in less developed regions of the world, they are a political minority and an often-neglected demographic majority. According to the United Nations, “during 2008, ... the proportion of the population living in urban areas will reach 50 percent ... in the less developed regions the 50 percent level will likely be reached around 2019” (UN-DESA, 2008, p. 2). These data indicate that while from an overall global demographic perspective urban people have now equalled the rural population, in less developed regions the percentage and the absolute number of rural people (estimated to reach 3 104 196 000 in 2010 and 3 107 486 000 in 2030) are such that this demographic group cannot be ignored. Between 2010 and 2030, the rural population will decrease worldwide less than sixty thousand units.

Moreover, in less developed regions despite the emphasis given to urbanization, the United Nations data indicate that, at least for the next ten years, if current trends are maintained, the majority of the population will continue to be rural and that the absolute numbers of rural people will not change drastically for the next 20 years. This means that urbanization trends cannot be an alibi for not addressing rural people’s basic needs and rights, including education and training. This is even truer in Sub-Saharan Africa where, in 2002, 70.6 percent of the population was rural. The rural population of Sub-Saharan Africa will continue to be predominantly rural: in 2015, it will be 60.2 percent and in 2030, 54.8 percent (UN-DESA, 2008). Overall demographic trends indicate that specific policies, efforts and further investments are needed to promote the wealth of rural people including greater distribution of educational opportunities within nations and globally in the world. Poverty reduction and food security cannot improve rapidly unless rural citizens are targeted for development assistance, including education, training and capacity development. Often, rural people move to urban areas looking for better living conditions and, in some cases, end up in illegal settlements or worse living conditions than in rural areas. ERP contributes to enhancing rural people livelihoods wherever they might choose to live.

## RURAL PEOPLE ARE THE MAJORITY OF THE WORLD'S POOR

The majority of the world's poor – about 75 percent – including food insecure, illiterate adults and out of school children, live in rural areas and suffer from inequitable access to food, schools, health care, roads, technology, institutional support and markets (World Bank, 2007b; World Bank, 2007c). Urban citizens represent 25 percent of global poor. Owing to the fact that rural people lack a strong political voice, they are often at a disadvantage because of urban biased policies that lead to inequitable resource distribution favouring urban over rural people, including access to markets, infrastructure, health care and education (FAO ERP home page; IFAD, 2001).

## WHY FOCUS ON EDUCATION FOR RURAL PEOPLE?

Illiteracy is strongly correlated with hunger and mainly a rural phenomenon hindering rural development and the wealth of each nation, threatens productivity and health, and limits opportunities to improve livelihoods. The evidence of the contribution of education to economic growth, the return to investment in schooling and the effects of education on unemployment and income distribution has long since been providing the research base for advocating for greater investments in education and especially in basic education (World Bank, 1988).

Research focusing specifically on education and rural development indicates that increased access to relevant and quality basic educational services for rural people contributes directly and positively to improved productivity, food security and livelihoods (Moock, 1981; Burchi and De Muro, 2007). A review conducted for the World Bank examined 18 studies that measure the relationship in low-income countries between farmers' education and their agricultural efficiency (as measured by crop production). The review concluded that the level of education of farmers was related to the level of their farm productivity, with four years of education contributing, on average, an 8.7 percent productivity gain over those with no formal education. The review also found that the effect of education is even greater (13 percent increase in productivity) where complementary inputs, such as fertilizers, new seeds or farm machinery are available (UNICEF, 1992).





“Literacy and formal schooling are linked with reduced fertility rates, improved health and sanitation practices and an increased ability to access information and participate in various social and economic processes” (FAO/UNESCO-IIEP, 2002, p. 25). ERP African partners noted that “... success in realizing the potentials of African agriculture will depend largely on that crucial factor of education” (FAO/UNESCO-IIEP, 2006b, p. 27). They questioned whether rural farmers are prepared to participate in an increasingly knowledge-based economy and smallholders can “compete in local and international markets in an increasingly globalized world, and in markets with stringent consumer demands, food safety and health requirements” (FAO/UNESCO-IIEP, 2006b, p. 26).

Knowledge and capacity development not only serve to increase productivity but also build people’s identity and enable them to participate fully in social and political life (SIDA, 2000). As globalization moves the world from technology-based to knowledge-based economies (K-Economies), education and training will become even more crucial. Access to quality education and training for all will be the yardstick that will differentiate and govern the gap between rich and poor (UNICEF, 1992).

According to the *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2009* (UNESCO, 2008), an estimated 776 million adults – or 16 percent of the world’s adult population – lack basic literacy skills. About two thirds of them are women. Among the 75 million out of school children, over four out of five live in rural areas, mostly in South and West Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. The majority of them are rural girls. In Africa, the challenge is greater than in other regions. A report from the British Department for International Development (2007) stated that more than US\$ 11 billions are needed annually for education if Africa is to have any hope of getting all children into primary school by 2015. These rural illiterate children add every year to the number of illiterate adults, determining that the majority of illiterate adults are also rural people, and prevalently rural women. Given the two-sided relation between hunger and education, progress on MDG 1 and MDG 2 (Achieve universal primary education) are closely interconnected and ERP is crucial to achieving both. Progress in these areas is also vital to the achievement of other MDGs, especially those for which FAO and UNESCO have the lead role (MDGs 1 and 7 for FAO, MDG 2 for UNESCO).



Ensuring access to and completion of quality education for this “neglected majority” of the world’s poor living in rural areas is a major challenge to the achievement of the EFA targets. Specifically, the need to include rural people in the education system is crucial to ensuring that, by 2015, all children have access to free and compulsory primary education of good quality; achieving a 50 percent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015; and ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes (UNESCO, 2000). The lack of learning opportunities is both a cause and an effect of rural poverty. Hence, education and training strategies for rural people need to be integrated within all aspects of sustainable rural development and EFA, through plans of action that are multisectoral and interdisciplinary (FAO/UNESCO-IIEP, 2006b; FAO/UNESCO-IIEP, 2006c).

## Message of UN Secretary-General on EFA 25 September 2008

Secretary-General, in message says education can drive economic, social progress; failure to provide education for all puts entire generation at risk

Following is UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's message, as delivered by Ann Veneman, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund, for the event on Education for All, today, in New York:

*"I am grateful to the Global Campaign for Education for bringing this diverse group together. We need a genuine spirit of solidarity in order to reach all of the Millennium Development Goals, and it is heartening that leaders from the private sector, academia, the faith community and Governments are coming together here.*

*If we forge a broad partnership, we can achieve the Millennium Development Goals by the target date of 2015. We have already seen great progress in the area of education. More children are in school than ever before. More girls are getting the equal education that they deserve.*

*We have to build on this momentum based on the conviction that education can drive economic and social progress.*

*One of the best investments that any country can make is to educate girls and women – so they can earn more income, improve their family's well being, and show their daughters, in turn, what is possible once you can read and write.*

*We have ample evidence that education improves individual incomes, economic growth, child and maternal health, resistance to disease and environmental practices. With an education, people flourish. Without it, they remain trapped in poverty.*

*This has never been more important. Rising food and oil prices and the effects of climate change are hurting the poor most.*

*We need a holistic approach that promotes education along with health care. Children who are malnourished or sick need food and treatment to succeed at school.*





*Globally, we need a commitment to equity. Right now, children from poor communities, rural areas and minority groups are almost always struggling to learn under worse conditions than others in society.*

*If we do not close this gap, we put a whole generation at risk, and we allow problems to fester. But if we ensure that all children get the education they deserve, we put both individuals and countries on a sure footing towards a stable future.*

*Let us renew our commitment to Education for All as an essential component of human rights, development, justice and peace.”*

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