

CHALLENGES *and* RESPONSES

INTRODUCTION



After seven years of experience with the ERP partnership, the most important results have been the establishment of a partnership network, the generation of knowledge, the identification of innovations, the lessons learned by ERP partners related to policy and practices, and the capacity development among policy makers of ministries of education and agriculture in a number of countries. The ERP partnership has established a network bridging policies, programmes, competencies and cooperation among organizations and individuals from the education, agriculture and rural development sectors, including relevant ministries, academia and civil society.

The partnership knowledge products were identified through consultations at regional conferences and through research studies. The following section draws on these knowledge products to present an analysis of the challenges faced by rural people with respect to education, training and capacity development. The section provides innovative responses for policy makers, managers and practitioners seeking to meet these challenges, drawing on experience gained by ERP partners worldwide. Ten challenges are presented accompanied by several case studies that provide options for policy responses. This publication expands the work published in the ERP series and aims to share the richness of examples available from a wide range of stakeholders regardless of affiliation.





CHALLENGE 1

Access to education and training

According to education leaders who deal with rural development programmes, the greatest challenge in serving rural populations is providing ready access to quality education and training for all age groups, at all levels of the education system. Senior government representatives from 11 African countries reiterated the need “to address the gross inequities that marginalize rural people, and in particular access to education by girls and women, working children, people in inaccessible and remote areas, nomadic and pastoral communities, ethnic minorities, the disabled, refugees and displaced persons” (FAO/UNESCO-IIEP, 2006b, p. 12).

The *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2009* indicates that, in 2006, over four out of five out of school children are rural. Given that today’s children are the adults of the future, four out of five illiterate adults will be rural. In a knowledge economy, given the direct relation between levels of education and income and productivity, this situation will

have implications for sustainable development and food security. Progress on sustainable development and food security depends on rural people developing the competencies and capacities to face the current challenges such as food price fluctuations, climate change, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, avian flu, and others.

While overall access to education in the formal and non-formal education sector depends mainly on government political will to build democratic, inclusive, non-elitist modern societies, access to education is also dependent on several other factors. Hereafter are some of the main factors that differentiate rural and urban access to education.

In accessing non-formal education, population density can impact the efficiency of travel for teachers, trainers and extension staff assigned to rural areas. For youth and adult learners, distance to training centres and literacy or adult education programmes can be a barrier because of the costs in time and money required to travel to the learning site and the opportunity cost deriving from lost working hours. In rural areas, telecommunications, another option suitable for delivering teacher training and technical training, are commonly less developed than in urban areas. Funds designated to ERP may be insufficient to overcome these challenges because policy makers may choose to invest in programmes for which the ratio of trainers to learners is more adequate, the delivery of education and training services is easier and costs are lower also owing to communication infrastructure, and the immediate visibility and political return are higher.

Programmes promoting access to appropriate education and training through non-formal delivery systems for youth and adults have not benefited from the same pace of financing and progress enjoyed by formal education. However, there is a critical need for a growing number of rural youth (well over 50 percent of the total rural population in many developing countries) and adults to benefit from education and training to develop their capacities to address changes and crises and contribute to local and national socio-economic and cultural development. "... education is a key asset determining household ability to access higher return activities (whether in agriculture or outside) and escape poverty" (FAO, 2007b).

From the perspective of formal education, ERP practitioners now have a better understanding of the barriers that prevent children from attending school. For a more detailed analysis of this topic, see FAO/UNESCO-IIEP (2003). Among these barriers is the distance of schools from the residence of school-aged children. Free school transport programmes proved to be successful in contributing to increase access to and retention in school and training programmes of rural people. In sparsely populated rural areas, multi-grade classrooms closer to the residence of students can help make formal education more affordable while reducing travel times and gender imbalances (UNESCO-IIEP, 2003). Hunger also poses a significant barrier to regular school attendance. An effective mechanism for improving access, retention and completion rates and readiness to learn is the provision of meals for learners. School feeding programmes can have a dramatic effect. According to a joint report of the World Food Programme (WFP) and the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) on a programme in Bangladesh, school feeding significantly increases rates of enrolment and attendance, and reduces drop-out. School feeding has raised school enrolment by 14.2 percent and increased school attendance by 1.3 days per month. It has also reduced the probability of dropping out of school by 7.5 percent (IFPRI, 2004).

Other important barriers to formal primary school attendance of rural people have been lowered through the removal or the reduction of school fees, free access to learning materials and school uniforms and, to a lesser extent, school construction in rural areas. According to UNESCO (2008), from 1999 to 2004, Sub-Saharan Africa raised its average net enrolment ratio by 26 percent for an annual increase six times higher than during the decade before Dakar. The increase in South and West Asia was also impressive, rising by 11 percent. However, there is still much work to be done. There are still countries where net enrolment rates of primary school age children are below 60 percent. Children from poor households often do not attend school or face major obstacles in access to good quality education (UNESCO, 2008; UN Millennium Project, 2005). The ADEA (Association for the Development of Education in Africa) 2008 Biennale on post-primary education highlighted the lack of opportunities for rural people to continue their studies at further levels of education, and the need for policy makers to address such gap was recommended.

An example from India: private sector-government partnership to provide millions of school meals

Organizations: Government of India, Deshpande Foundation, Akshaya Patra Foundation

Source: http://commitments.clintonlobalinitiative.org/projects.htm?status=1&category=50&sort_order=DESC&sort_by=lastactivity&start=24

In January 2008, an innovative school feeding programme was launched in India with the goal of providing meals to over 200 million school children every year. The objective is to develop a long-term sustainable programme supported by government, private donors and individuals so that Indian school children from kindergarten to grade 10 will receive at least one nutritious meal every day. The programme is currently operating in Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Orissa and Gujarat.

The programme is made possible through a partnership between the Deshpande Foundation of Andover, Massachusetts, United States of America (USA), the Akshaya Patra Foundation in India and the Government of India's Midday Meal Programme. The Deshpande Foundation, a fairly young organization established in the United States in 1996, supports work in the areas of innovation, entrepreneurship and international development. The Deshpande Foundation made a grant to fund the construction of the largest kitchen for the programme and provides other support to the Akshaya Patra Foundation, considered "a new model for NGOs in India". Akshaya Patra currently runs the world's largest school feeding programme.

The programme now provides meals to over 800 000 children on a daily basis. Most of the food is prepared in 11 large, centralized kitchens. The kitchens are so efficient they can prepare over 100 000 meals in less than five hours with minimum labour and maximum sustained quality. The kitchen for the Hubli District of Karnataka, considered the largest in the world, has the capacity to cook almost 200 000 meals every day. The programme uses an innovative design for its kitchens and an efficient supply chain taking advantage of locally grown produce from village farmers. The food is delivered by trucks throughout the school districts, including rural areas. The food is packed in stainless steel containers and shipped in heat-insulated, dust-free special purpose vehicles.



CHALLENGE 1

The programme has also a special component for remote rural schools where groups of women are trained in hygiene and nutrition to cook lunches on a daily basis while maintaining the same high standards of quality that are required at the certified central kitchens. These smaller kitchens in rural areas are able to feed around 600 children a day.

School meals are an important link between education and a child's health. In India, more than 40 million children are affected by malnutrition and related ailments like anaemia and diarrhoea. For many children, lunch at school is the main meal of the day, providing up to 40 percent of the daily micronutrient needs. Studies in both the city of Bangalore and rural villages of Rajasthan have shown that school meals contribute to substantially higher school attendance, especially among girls, and improved learning ability.

An example from Bolivia: overcoming educational barriers for isolated rural communities

Organizations: People's Foundation, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, municipal governments

Source: <http://www.wkkf.org/default.aspx?tabid=94&CID=145&NID=85&ItemID=5001013&LanguageID=0>

Second place winner of the 2006/2007 cycle of the Experiences in Social Innovation Award organized by the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the Student Family Lodging Programme of the People's Foundation of Bolivia has demonstrated considerable success in enabling young people from extremely poor families living in isolated communities in the highlands of Bolivia to attend school on a regular basis.

Beginning as a fairly small project 10 years ago, now the programme has over 280 students from the municipal districts of Yanacachi, Llallagua, Pocoata and Colquecha. Sustainability for this model is assured by the financial support from municipal governments that have signed agreements with the People's Foundation, guaranteeing funding from their annual budgets.

The Andean Region of Bolivia is characterized by a low development index and a large number of isolated communities. School drop-out rates in the Andean Highlands are among the highest in the country. In northern Potosi, only 58.5 percent of the

schools have classes beyond grade 3. Distances between communities and schools that offer education up to the mandatory grade 8 are an average of 11 kilometres – a two-hour walk for children.

The programme consists of establishing educational centres in strategically located villages allowing youth from neighbouring communities easier access to school. The initiative has also an accommodation network of host families. During the week, young people focus on their studies and participate in regular capacity building seminars on nutrition, hygiene and health. On the weekends, they return to their homes. As an on-going part of the programme, teachers receive regular training to improve the quality of instruction.

Interestingly, the programme is based on an ancestral custom of the Aymara people, an indigenous group in Bolivia, referred to as *utawawa*. Families living far away from a school would send their children to live with relatives or godparents to study. The problem was that in exchange for room and board, the young person was expected to carry out significant domestic and agricultural chores. While providing some children with an education, this tradition contributed to child labour.

Under the current Student Family Lodging Programme, the quality of services provided by the host families is closely supervised by staff from each educational centre. The rights of the students include their own bed, proper meals and clean hygienic living conditions. The programme has clearly demonstrated that it has the capacity to help students improve their academic performance and raise the number of children enrolled in school. Without having to work to pay for their studies and having their basic needs met, most students have obtained good academic results.

The ECLAC Award Programme Judging Committee said that the Student Family Lodging Programme stands out for the scale of its accomplishments: a significant improvement in school access, attendance and completion of primary education, promotion of school attendance by girls and contribution to the Millennium Development Goals of universal primary education and gender equality in primary and secondary education.



CHALLENGE 2

Quality of education and training

The quality of education and training available in rural areas lags behind the quality of urban areas. Yet, quality remains a critical foundational aspect of any advance in ERP. The quality of education and training depends on many factors like the quality of existing facilities such as schools, boarding schools and training centres; the qualifications of extension workers and teachers and their proficiency; the quality of teaching and training materials; and the use of formative evaluation for continuous improvement. Other factors include leadership to ensure that resources are provided on a long-term basis and that motivation is maintained, a curriculum developed for the specific audience, and strong links to community for support. Relevance of education and training is vital to increasing the appeal and utility for rural people. Contextualized learning allows learners of all ages to study, solve real-life problems and acquire life skills (FAO/UNESCO-IIEP, 2003). When curriculum, learning materials and learning methods are designed to be relevant to rural realities, the perceived quality and utility of education improves among parents and students.

Non-formal education is seldom compulsory. Thus, relevance of non-formal education and training is of paramount importance for young and adult rural learners. Rural citizens “vote with their feet” and may simply choose not to return for follow-up education and training sessions if the perceived quality and relevance of the service delivered are low.

In some cases, flexibility is foreseen to allow local content in education and training. Programmes that utilize participatory curriculum development at local levels (districts and regions) combined with central national curriculum planning can have far greater appeal than purely centrally backed programmes (FAO, 2002b).

Education and training that allow rural citizens to adjust to new realities and trends, such as health and market challenges, climate change and sustainable natural resource management will serve the best interests of the learners. One challenge associated with new realities and trends is that learners may not immediately appreciate the relevance of training and education on such topics.

EFA National Plans have been successful in bringing millions of additional students into classrooms when compared to a decade ago. Aggressive action will need to be taken to ensure rural students greater inclusion, retention and completion of basic education as well as their continuation at the different levels of the education system. Maintaining high quality education is certainly part of the formula for retaining students in school. Educational innovations are also crucial to maintaining quality. For example, school gardening programmes have been used effectively to increase relevance and quality while teaching language, mathematics, science, agriculture and entrepreneurship.

An example from Honduras: alternative education reaching youth and adults in rural areas

Organizations: *Educatodos*, USAID, Government of Honduras, municipalities, NGOs, private sector

Source: <http://www.educatodos.hn/> and <http://www.comminit.com/en/node/149305>

Created in 1996, *Educatodos* was a response by the Secretary of Education of Honduras to find a way to reach out of school youth and ensure that both young people and adults complete at least grade 6 as part of the country's EFA goals. Surveys indicate that there were approximately 540 000 students who had dropped out of school and an additional 1.1 million young adults aged between 19 and 30 who failed to complete nine years of basic education. There were also indications that many adults were interested in seeking an alternative means of acquiring a basic education. The overall goal of the programme was to increase economic participation and income of the poor by expanding access to high quality basic education for out of school youth and adults.

With the assistance of USAID and additional support provided by municipal governments, private voluntary organizations and businesses, *Educatodos* was designed to cost-effectively respond to the demand for basic education in a significantly shorter time frame than the traditional education system. The programme started as an opportunity for youth and adults in isolated rural areas to complete grades 1 through 6 in only three years. In 2000, the programme expanded to include grades 7 to 9 and now enrolls annually about 80 000 young people and adults with two periods of instruction each year.

Educadores classes meet in existing public and private buildings at the community level, like factories, businesses, schools, churches and community centres. The curriculum is presented through interactive radio in an integrated way incorporating both printed and audio materials. Over 4 000 volunteer facilitators with different academic backgrounds implement the programme at the learning centres. The educational content is based on the National Curriculum for Basic Education.

In 2001, a study carried out by researchers from the Universidad Pedagógica Nacional Francisco Morozán measured learning, comparing *Educadores* students and pupils from the traditional national education system. The findings indicated that students from *Educadores* demonstrated similar and, in some cases, better performance in subjects such as Spanish and mathematics than students in the regular public school system. It indicated that these results were achieved even though they had fewer resources, spent less time in school and had volunteer facilitators instead of teachers.

Through documentation, the programme has been able to estimate that the additional years of schooling have increased earnings of all *Educadores* graduates over the years by more than US\$ 250 millions. Other benefits obtained from the participation in *Educadores* included: improvements in family health; increased acceptance and use of family planning; reduction in primary school drop-out and grade repetition rates for the children of *Educadores* participants; and increased civic participation.

**An example from India:
mobile laboratories bring exciting science education to the doorstep of
classrooms across rural areas**

Organizations: Agastya International Foundation, Give2Asia, Government of India

Source: <http://www.agastya.org/aboutus.htm> and <http://www.give2asia.org/page12021.cfm>

Agastya International is an NGO led by entrepreneurs, educators, scientists, teachers and children with the purpose of transforming and revitalizing primary and secondary education in India, including rural villages. They have developed a model for science education that is affordable and can be replicated anywhere in the world.

So far, Agastya has reached over 70 000 teachers and 2 million children with the programme.

In India, especially in rural villages, uninspiring, rote-based learning is still the prevailing educational methodology, which does not equip poor rural children with the necessary tools to overcome poverty. As a global IT power, the Government of India continues to focus educational resources on the relatively small group of urban-based engineers and scientists, largely ignoring the biggest population component – rural communities that lack adequate primary and secondary education. Among children under the age of 15, it is estimated that still 13 millions are not enrolled in school; most of them are girls and live in rural areas.

With the financial support of Give2Asia, the Agastya International Foundation created and implemented an innovative educational programme using mobile science laboratories. The mobile science lab units have covered thousands of kilometres to reach even remote schools throughout the southern states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. Each mobile lab reaches around 30 000 students a year.

The programme has 30 minibuses equipped with folding tables, projection screens and experimental models. The sessions are carried out in the villages in school buildings, under the trees or in the open air during good weather. Not only does the programme attract school children and their teachers, but also parents, day labourers and other villagers often participate. The mobile science labs visit most schools on a weekly basis over a period of several weeks to maintain some level of continuity.

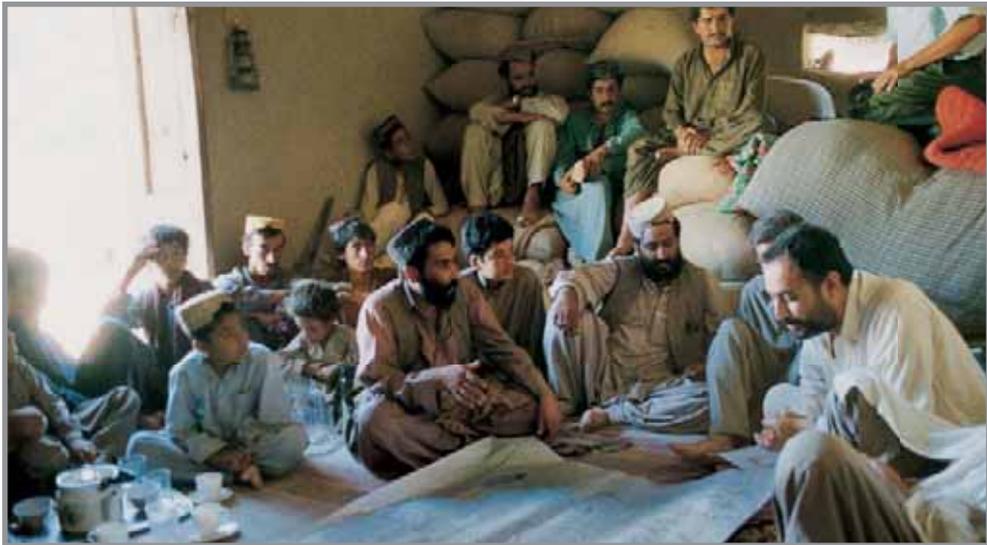
Over 120 fun and simple experiments have been developed to explain and demonstrate varied scientific principles. The experiments often use easily found low-cost everyday materials and supplies. The learning is hands-on and deductive, encouraging creative thinking and problem solving.

As an example, in one experiment, each child is blindfolded and given a small cup of water to taste and distinguish a plain, salty and sweet liquid. In this way, children learn about the link between the brain and the senses. Another experiment uses a rolled-up newspaper to simulate a makeshift telescope and demonstrate the concept of refraction, while a shoebox is used to explain how a camera works.



The programme usually involves from 50 to 100 children per session. The teams of specialists spend from two to three hours at each location and the lessons usually take 45 minutes to an hour. A travelling team can visit two to three schools a day depending on the distances between schools. The mobile teams also periodically bring science fairs to the countryside where they recruit 14 to 16 year old student volunteers to lead science experiments with younger children.

Evaluations of the programme have indicated there has been a great deal of change in the attitudes students have about learning. Children and parents seem to take a new interest in school and education in general. Teachers have become more motivated and are applying new ways of teaching as a result of observing the more interactive learning approaches used by the mobile science labs.



CHALLENGE 3

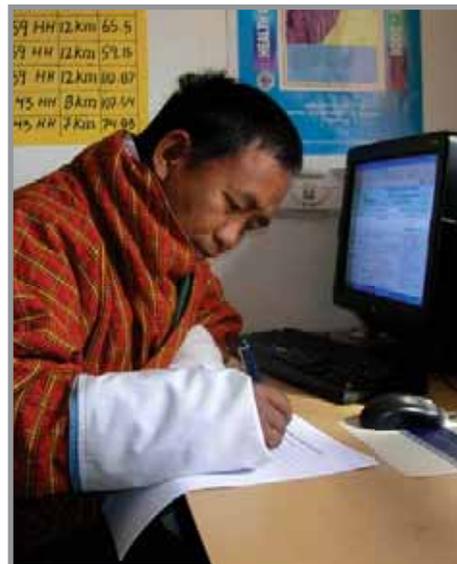
Decentralization and community involvement

Governments embrace varying degrees of decentralization in decision-making and resource distribution. In some cases, decentralization is viewed as a cost-saving measure and a way to reduce the size of central bureaucracies. In other cases, it is considered as a way to make services more effective as the decision-making chain is shortened and actions are increasingly relevant to local circumstances. The same applies to education, training, and capacity development.

Decentralization is one response to more traditional, centrally controlled national education systems. When decentralization is combined with greater flexibility in formal and non-formal curricula and local control over content, the results have been promising. An increased level of community engagement with education and training programmes is one benefit of locally controlled education decision-making. Education and training systems that combine centrally planned curricula with some local content determined through community input have proven successful in several tests. In Thailand, for example, as much as 40 percent of the curriculum was allowed to be based on community and local needs (FAO/UNESCO-IIEP, 2002).

Other forms of flexibility play a role in increasing access to training and education. For example, non-formal training and school schedules may need to be flexible to accommodate weather, cropping patterns and the movement of nomads (Acker and Gasperini, 2008; ADB/UNESCO-IIEP, 2005). Some local control of formal education processes may allow such accommodations as local languages to be used as the medium of instruction through the middle primary grades. It may also permit flexibility in terms of modest delays in the entry age of children who live in remote areas and must travel long distances to attend school. Engagement of communities may also lead to the engagement of other community resource people to teach skills that extension staff and teachers may not know.

Decentralization can be a first step to greater community involvement. Participatory and community-based approaches to school management and curriculum development have increased community ownership of schools, which is one factor leading to increased



enrolments (FAO/UNESCO-IIEP, 2006b). Rural families need to see that the education their children receive is relevant, that the school is a safe environment, and that proper supervision of the institution is provided. The development of parent-teacher organizations can have a significant impact on resources available to the school, as well as on improved monitoring of quality, relevance, and such critically important supporting elements as school feeding programmes. With better school and community cooperation come opportunities for integrating learning that combines classroom and community-based learning (FAO/UNESCO-IIEP, 2005a).

School gardens or school-based rural radio can be used as two different ways of promoting community involvement.

Local involvement in and control over the learning enterprise is critical to success. At an ERP workshop held in Bangkok in 2002, this process of community empowerment was referred to as moving from “donorship to ownership”.



Decentralization also has a darker side. It has been used by central governments as an excuse for shifting funds away from ERP into education services that favour the elite by providing free education to urban dwellers while simultaneously offering education on a cost-sharing basis to rural people. Cost-sharing policies, frequently recommended by structural adjustment interventions, have resulted in decreased access to education and training by poor communities. In 2000, the World Bank, acknowledging the perverse effect of cost-sharing policies in increasing access to basic education services, reconsidered its own policies and withdrew from recommending cost-sharing in basic education.

With regard to non-formal education, community learning centres in remote communities can provide basic education including skills training, environmental education, and health and HIV/AIDS education (FAO/UNESCO-IIIEP, 2005a). Such centres can be as simple as a primary school used as an adult education facility after hours.

An example from Cambodia: community involvement key to quality education in rural areas

Organizations: World Education, EQUIP1, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports

Source: http://www.worlded.org/WEIInternet/features/cambodia_rural_communities.cfm

Although the Cambodian constitution guarantees the right to basic education for all children in the country, there is a gap between policy and reality. Barriers to quality basic education, especially in remote rural areas, include low educational relevance, teacher shortages, limited financial resources, long distances to available schools and a low perceived importance of education among parents and the community in general.

In some rural areas, there are inadequate school facilities and it is difficult to recruit teachers because of the poor living and working conditions in the villages. Most families cannot afford school fees and the cost of supplies. Cambodian families in rural areas prefer to keep their children at home, especially girls, to help take care of younger siblings and do house chores.

The Educational Support for Children of Underserved Populations (ESCUP) programme was designed to increase the access and improve the quality of basic education in rural communities. ESCUP is being implemented in the provinces of Kampong, Cham, Kratie, and Monduliri with technical support from World Education, the American Institute for Research and EQUIP1 in a cooperative agreement with USAID and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. The areas of intervention include: teacher education, educational access and quality, and school-community partnerships.

In the village of Chour Krang, in the northeast province of Kratie, children from the Steang minority group had to walk almost four kilometres every day through dense bush and forest to reach their school. The education of younger children was delayed because of the long distances to school. There was a similar access problem for the children of Beoung Char, an island in the middle of the Mekong River along the border of Kratie Province. Families are spread out over the 15-kilometre island that lacked proper roads. Although there were three schools on the island, they were too far away for most of the children to attend.



To help solve some of the problems, World Education and its partners started to form school committees made up of teachers, parents and village leaders. With support from the ESCUP project, community members worked together to find solutions and take the necessary action. In Chour Krang, community members worked together to build a temporary school building closer to the village. ESCUP provided the funds for materials and the community provided labour. As a result of this activity, parents and village leaders are more involved and engaged in keeping their children in school. More than 113 children are now attending the school. Children are able to enrol at the age of six because of the reduced walk to go to school. The community and teachers now work together to identify out of school youth and help them go back to school.

In Beoung Char, the school committee that was formed worked together to build several small schools in areas far from the existing government schools. It was then difficult to find teachers who were willing to live and work in these remote areas. ESCUP worked with the community to identify local community members and train them as teachers. This resulted in a success, as the teachers coming from the local communities better understand the children and their situation. In Cambodia, ESCUP has facilitated better communication and collaboration between the communities, the schools and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and has strengthened the role of the community in promoting quality education for their children.

**An example from China:
community-based environmental education curriculum created to
complement primary education in rural areas**

Organizations: Rural China Education Foundation, Green Watershed, Brooks,
Lashi Hai Nature Reserve, Bureau of Education

Source: http://www.ruralchina.org/site/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=72&Itemid=113

Working with local schools, the Native Soil Education Project represents an effort by the Rural China Education Foundation to enrich the national curriculum with a non-formal education lesson plan adapted to local interests and needs.

The project took place in the Lashi Township of Yunnan Province, in southern China, an environmentally important area called the Lashi Hai Watershed where the Yangtze and the Lancang Rivers merge at Lashi Lake. The water flows out of the lake and forms the Mekong River that goes through five countries, eventually entering the South China Sea.

The watershed includes one of the few highland wetlands in the country and has a rich biological and cultural diversity. Most of the people belong to one of the two ethnic minority groups – the Naxi and the Yi. Traditional work activities include fishing the waters of Lashi Lake, farming and employment as government loggers.



In the 1990s, a series of ineffective government policies and the construction of a dam left communities in the area stricken by poverty, and ethnic minorities were even more disadvantaged. The dam severely damaged the local ecosystem and destroyed farmland. The government then declared Lake Lashi a protected wetland preserve and allowed no fishing. In 1998, the government banned logging in the Province – good for the environment, but devastating to the local economy and to the loggers who depended on this income.

Thanks to the government and two NGOs – Green Watershed and Brooks – the situation is improving. Communities in the watershed are becoming involved and take greater responsibility in managing the natural resources of the area. To support this effort, the Native Soil Education Project was designed to foster children’s appreciation of their home, their culture and the surrounding natural environment. It helps them

understand the drastic changes that recently took place in their area, and gives them the skills and knowledge to contribute to the sustainable development of their community both now and in the future.

The curriculum development process started in November 2006. Community members participated, and most content of the curriculum comes from the local community like for example indigenous literature and art, life stories from community members, and familiar places and scenes from students' everyday lives. After extensive community consultations, the project team and local teachers spent months writing the textbook and accompanying activities.

The text, *I Love Lashi Hai*, is being used in the classes of grades 3 and 4 and encourages enquiry and exploration. The project promotes learning methods that encourage students to learn about and contribute to the development of their local communities. Lessons include simulations and enquiry activities that facilitate experiential learning and give the students the tools to take action. During summer vacation, teachers from the school are invited to a local camp where they learn and practice participatory activities based on the curriculum. The curriculum is new, but the initial feedback from the school is very positive.

An example from Nepal: community-managed school in rural areas

Organizations: World Bank, Centre for Community Development and Research (CCODER), UNDP, World Food Programme, UNICEF

Source: <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=28862> and http://www.ccoder.org/com_school.htm

Over the years, there have been serious problems with ERP in Nepal. Nepal's literacy rate is one of the lowest in the world, while the school drop-out rate for children has been one of the highest (70 percent). Schools are generally inadequate with poorly maintained facilities and teachers who are not qualified or committed. The Maoist insurgency, that is pervasive throughout the country, has been particularly disruptive to education, especially in rural areas.



As a way to improve quality and access to education and make progress toward the Millennium Development Goals, the government, with the encouragement of the international development and donor community, charted a course of action to gradually transfer responsibility for education to local communities. The legal groundwork for community-managed schools was laid out in the 1999 Local Self-Governance Act. The first transfers took place in 2002 when 95 schools were handed over to community management. By 2006, over 2 200 previously government-run schools in 62 of the 75 districts in the country had been turned over to local communities.

To be successful, this large-scale reform requires the assistance of international development organizations and agencies, as well as national and local NGOs. There are several initiatives supported by the various development agencies and NGOs, including the Community School Support Programme (CSSP), funded by the World Bank; the Community-Owned Primary School (COPE) assisted by UNDP-supported projects, World Food Programme, UNICEF and UNFPA; and the Community Schools supported by

the Centre for Community Development and Research (CCODER). In most cases, the government provides a one-time grant of US\$ 1 500 to schools that are to be managed by the local community. After this initial grant, schools are completely independent with no further influence from the government.

The management arrangements are somewhat different depending on the supporting organization or agency. For example, the CSSP schools are jointly managed by teachers, parents, community leaders and a regional organization, the Regional Community Development Committee (RCDC). The regional organization is a federation of several village-level organizations called Community Development Committees (CDC). Each CDC sends representatives to the regional Community Education Committee (CEC). The CEC, along with teachers and parents, is responsible for the organization, supervision and control of all school matters. In this way, the schools are managed with maximum community participation and ownership. For example, the CEC has the power to hire and dismiss teachers who fail to reach the required standards.

The educational reform has met with many challenges and controversies. The Nepal National Teachers Association, with its 80 000 members, is against the reform. Teachers are concerned about giving responsibility for their supervision, hiring and firing to local communities. The Maoists want the government to take back the education system, accusing the state of running away from its responsibilities.

All indications are that, considering the extremely poor performance of schools under government administration, the community-based school reform is working. In 2007, the Nepalese news portal Katiput reported that in the 500 community schools in Ilam District more girls than boys were enrolled. Evaluations from the World Bank's International Development Association found in a survey of 30 selected community schools covering 10 000 households that the number of out of school children (5 to 9 years of age) decreased from 41 to 15 percent and out of school girls from 42 to 15 percent. Other findings were that there was increased community ownership and participation indicated by a higher number of School Management Committee meetings, increased resource generation and more frequent parent visits to schools. There were also many transfers of children from private schools to community schools, reduced teacher absenteeism and an improved learning environment.





CHALLENGE 4

Gender-responsive learning environments

The barriers to full participation in education and training for rural adult women, female youth and primary school-aged girls are numerous and well documented. Labour requirements associated with agricultural and household tasks, cultural barriers, lack of well-supervised boarding facilities, sexual harassment and a range of gender equity issues constitute a few of the barriers to greater participation. Unfortunately, gender barriers to training and education in rural areas are typically more pronounced than those in urban areas (FAO/UNESCO-IIEP, 2006b).

At the same time, there is strong evidence that points to the very positive social returns on investments in education and training for girls and women. In *Higher agricultural education and opportunities in rural development for women* (FAO, 1997, preface) the following statement appeared:

“From a developmental perspective, investing in the education of females has the highest rate of return of any possible investment in developing countries”.

To attract and retain female learners requires some accommodations. Flexible timetables to accommodate peak labour demand for children, youth and adults have helped to increase attendance in some schools and at farmer training events. In situations where the training centres or schools are distant from the learners’ homes, secure and well-supervised boarding facilities have shown to be critical in safeguarding the well-being of participants and in inspiring confidence among family members who may control decisions about women’s participation. Security and privacy for girls, such as separate toilets, are also important factors (UN Millennium Project, 2005). Access to water for personal hygiene is also an important factor in the attendance of teenage girl students.

In formal school settings there are a number of innovations that have proven effective. Take-home rations for female children can compensate for the labour lost when they attend school (FAO/UNESCO-IIEP, 2006b). Direct conditional fund transfers to families to reward school attendance, such as *Bolsa Escola* (and later *Bolsa Familia*) in Brazil, demonstrated high rates of return. Use of female teachers helps to ensure a safer

school environment as well as providing a role model for female students (FAO/UNESCO-IIEP, 2002). Reduction in gender stereotyping in curricula can improve the classroom environment (UN Millennium Project 2005). While this applies in general, it is even more critical in addressing the stereotyped profiles of rural women and men, where inequality and inequity are reinforced. Legislation and/or school rules against sexual harassment and sexual violence help to send a clear message about behavioural expectations.

An example from Burkina Faso: girl-friendly schools see enrolments soar

Organizations: USAID, Plan International

Source: <http://www.plan-international.org/news/bright/>

Thousands of girls in Burkina Faso, who would not be going to school, are now receiving an education thanks to a project implemented by Plan International with financial support from the USAID-Millennium Challenge Corporation. The project called BRIGHT (Burkinabé Response to Improve Girls Chances to Succeed) has achieved high levels of school enrolment and graduation rates by creating supportive learning environments in 132 communities in 10 provinces.

In Burkina Faso, 73 percent of all girls never finish primary school. Many of them are forced to stay home to look after their younger brothers and sisters, and do chores around the house while their parents work in the fields. An important reason for girls not attending school is the lack of private latrines on school grounds. As part of a larger global study, Plan International estimates that Burkina Faso will experience a net growth loss valued at US\$ 75 millions by not improving education for girls in the country.

The BRIGHT project works with local governments and communities to support child-friendly classrooms. In Burkina Faso, school management committees are formed to empower young people and communities to have a greater say in what happens in their local school. The communities involved in the project have been able to acquire furniture and textbooks for classrooms and dig wells to provide safe drinking water for students and teachers.

An improvement that has probably led to the most significant increase in enrolment, retention and graduation rates among girls has been the construction of separate male and female latrine blocks. The new facilities also have arrangements for sanitary hand washing. As part of the project, students and community members are taught about sanitation and personal hygiene. An aspect of the project that has contributed to the successful recruitment and retention of good teachers has been the building of houses for teachers in the community. The facilities and buildings were built by the community using local materials.

The project provides a midday meal for all students and, as an additional incentive, girls who attend 90 percent or more of the time are given a take-home ration of food. Some of the schools also have child care centres that allow mothers to leave their youngest children under safe supervision so that their older daughters can go to school while they work in the fields. Plan International reports that in many communities where the project was implemented, enrolment has far exceeded original estimates and some classrooms now have more girls than boys.

An example from Cambodia: home counselling helps keep girls in school

Organizations: Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, UNICEF

Source: http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/cambodia_39364.html

As in many other countries, girls in Cambodia tend to drop out of school when they reach the upper grade levels of primary education. This is especially true for rural areas of the country. There is no gender gap in grade 1, but by grade 7, a significant percentage of girls have already left school.

Cambodia has come a long way in improving education since schools were abolished during the Khmer Rouge regime, but many parents do not appreciate the value of education. Especially in rural areas, it is difficult for them to see evidence of economic opportunities as a result of their children going to school. Parents often want their daughters to help with household chores, work beside them in the fields tending crops

or contribute to the family income by working in the garment factories, instead of going to school.

Although new schools are being built, teachers trained and enrolment has been increasing over the years, secondary school participation is low and the gender gap is wide. Only around 30 percent of the boys and 10 percent of the girls go on to secondary education.

Gender responsiveness is one of the key components of a comprehensive new programme called the Child-Friendly Schools Initiative carried out by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and supported by UNICEF. The overall purpose of the programme is to improve the quality of basic education and assure equitable access to schools.

Home counselling is combined with a community research component to identify gender-related barriers to education and determine how to increase awareness about gender equality. The child-friendly schools reach out to girls and their families who are at risk of dropping out of school.

In participating schools, female teachers and/or volunteer mothers are identified to serve as “girl counsellors”. The programme targets girls in grades 5 and 6. Classroom teachers inform a counsellor when a female student misses more than three days of school. The counsellor visits the home of the student to discuss the problem and to identify with the student and her parents the underlying causes for dropping out. Appropriate solutions are identified and agreed upon by the student and her parents.

The home counselling initiative is meeting with considerable success. Evaluation studies indicate that many girls return to school after having experienced home counselling with their parents. There is still considerable work to be done, as even after home counselling, some girls do not return to school and others drop out again.



CHALLENGE 5

Organizational and institutional efficiency

In situations where public resources are severely limited, ERP programmes need to find ways to optimize their organizational efficiency. No single institution is in the position to provide all the necessary educational services in rural areas. One logical approach is to think systemically about the array of rural actors that could be better coordinated to optimize education programme delivery.

Coordination is needed at the macro institutional level, between ministries of education, youth and agriculture, as well as at micro levels, in schools and training centres and courses, between the education and training providers and the communities and learners. An example of interministerial collaboration is the Kosovo Strategy for ERP (MEST/MAFRD/FAO, 2004), prepared with FAO technical assistance. The strategy was instrumental to leveraging donor funding such as OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) funding for improving the quality of education by enhancing curriculum relevance to rural people's needs.

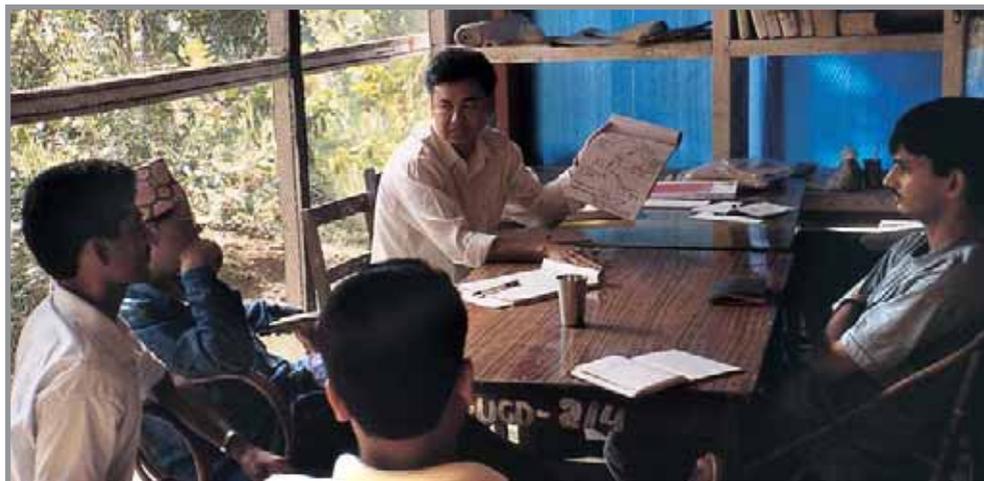
One particularly attractive area for identifying organizational efficiencies is that of coordination among education-oriented providers such as extension workers, schools, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector. For example, trained agricultural extension agents who are already located in rural areas are a valuable potential resource for making presentations in their subject area at local schools, for conducting adult basic education classes when farmers gather for technical training, and for organizing farmer field schools that involve both technical and basic education outcomes. Similarly teachers, if trained in specific technical subjects, can support extension programmes during non-teaching hours, if appropriate incentives are provided.

Extension is an important aspect of ERP. Yet, it is often neglected as an education programme because typically it is not managed by the ministry of education. Fundamentally, effective extension serves an education as well as a communication function in relaying user needs back to researchers and policy makers. A similar situation of neglect affects most rural youth and adult education and training activities such as literacy and skills training which are beyond the immediate responsibility of ministries of education. The lack



of institutionalized interministerial collaboration explains the slow path in achieving the EFA goals for reducing adult illiteracy and reaffirms the urgency for concerted intersectoral and interinstitutional programmes for rural youth and adults.

Farmers Field Schools (FFS) and school garden programmes are examples of interministerial collaboration by which governments, often with FAO technical assistance, are reaching out rural youth and adults in non-formal education and children at the primary school level. Such programmes contribute to prepare future farmers while teaching about language, mathematics, drawing, science, agriculture, environment, and in some cases, entrepreneurship. FFS and gardens are often a joint programme between teachers and extension workers.



Another approach is to look for greater financial efficiency in existing programmes. Reducing costs may be possible in the formal education sector through the use of low-cost school construction methods (UN Millennium Project, 2005). Promoting school networks or clusters can achieve efficiencies through the sharing of equipment and other specialized resources. Lastly, capacity development for head teachers and extension leaders can lay the foundation for improvements in education and training management efficiency in rural areas.

Education and training facilities represent a significant public investment in rural areas. Given the initial capital costs as well as the recurring maintenance costs of such infrastructure, it is only reasonable to explore options that optimize efficiency. Better utilization of limited school infrastructure can be achieved through such ideas as double-shift classes and/or utilization of the classrooms for after-hours adult education or extension workshops. Given that rural school transport is too costly to consider for many highly indebted poor countries, feeder or lower primary satellite schools can accommodate the youngest children in remote areas until they are strong enough to walk longer distances to a proper primary school.

An example from Bangladesh: Rural Advancement Committee non-formal primary education opens schooling to millions in rural villages

Organizations: BRAC and local NGOs

Source: <http://www.brac.net/>

BRAC, formally the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee, is the largest local non-governmental organization in the world. It has developed a non-formal primary education programme that in 1999 operated more than 35 000 schools in rural Bangladesh with over one million children enrolled. Over 66 percent of the students are girls and among the teachers, 97 percent are female. These schools serve the poorest of the rural poor who, for one reason or another, are not able to enter the formal government education system. BRAC provides financial and technical support to 284 small NGOs throughout the country to implement the programme.

Although academically comparable to the formal system, BRAC's schooling is considered non-formal because the schools are not permanent institutions and the teachers are not formally trained in the traditional sense. The schools, targeting children in rural villages between the ages of 8 and 10, are organized around a group of 30 students. These students advance together through the three to four-year programme. After that period, the school ceases to exist unless there is another group from the community of at least 30 students to enrol and form a new school. For the students and their families, there are no fees and BRAC assumes all the costs of supplies.

The one-room schools are in session for two-and-a-half to three hours a day, six days a week for 268 days per year. The typical school is a room in a house or store that is rented for three hours a day. Generally, the walls are made of bamboo and mud with packed dirt floors. Students sit in a circle on mats holding slate boards on their knees. The teacher has a metal stool and a metal truck that doubles as a desk and a place to store supplies.

Uniforms are not required and school hours vary according to home and agricultural cycle needs. Schools are located no more than two kilometres from students' homes.

Parents are required to attend monthly meetings and promise to send their children to school. Together, parents are encouraged, within the guidelines, to make recommendations related to the general operations of the school, including time of day for school sessions.

Almost all teacher-trainees are rural women who must have completed at least nine years of schooling. These paraprofessionals start teaching in a first grade, multi-age classroom with only 15 days of initial basic teacher training. They are supported by monthly refresher courses and continuous close supervision by BRAC staff. Weekly visits by BRAC field staff provide regular feedback. These teachers proved to deliver primary education that equals or exceeds primary education provided by government-funded formal system.

An example from Kosovo: national strategy for education for rural people developed by participatory action

Organizations: Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development, NGOs, municipalities, FAO

Source: Draft FAO document: Participatory Strategy Development for Education for Rural People in Kosovo

As a disputed territory, Kosovo suffered greatly during the 1990s when Serbia abolished its autonomy. With an already existing weak economy, the situation further deteriorated owing to a combination of poor economic policies, international sanctions, limited external commerce and ethnic conflict. During that time, education for the ethnic majority Albanians was abolished, forcing them to create a parallel education system that resulted in large inequalities, especially in rural areas characterized by high levels of illiteracy and large skills gaps and where 60 percent of the people live.

The new Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development (MAFRD) were established after parliamentary elections in 2002. The government set as one of its priorities the support of rural development and the promotion of employment and sustainable livelihoods for the rural population. Basic education and skills development are considered critical to the development of rural populations.

In 2003, MEST and MAFRD requested FAO technical assistance to develop a national strategy for Education of Rural People and at the same time develop capacities of government staff within the two ministries. To support the development of the national strategy in a participatory manner, MEST and MAFRD staff gained skills around three main stages of intervention: (1) planning, (2) needs assessment and (3) strategy formulation.

To facilitate the participatory development of the strategy, a broad base of local and central stakeholders was involved in the process, including the Project Team, a Strategy Formulation Team (SFT) and Local Task Teams (LTT). The Project Team, composed of one national and one international education planning specialist and one specialist in human resources development, guided the overall implementation of the project.

The SFT developed the methodology and overall work plan for the project. It included representation from various ministries of government, school directors and teachers, local NGOs; individual, groups and organizations from selected villages; and representatives from the LTTs.

The LTTs were formed from selected stakeholder groups at the village level including school personnel, farmers and women associations. Their tasks were to facilitate and assist with the assessment process at the local level thus contributing to the work of the SFT and to represent their stakeholder views at the various workshops.

The assessment process took six months and resulted in policy recommendations which formed the basis of the strategy formulation. Local and provincial workshops were organized to present and discuss the findings with a broader audience.

Strategy formulation included three steps: (1) definition of vision and strategic goals; (2) identification of objectives and necessary action; and (3) converting strategy into a programme of action. The resulting medium term strategy (2004-2009) included eight goals and subsequent lines of action for improving the quality of ERP in Kosovo. In addition to the strategic plan, 21 staff members of MEST and municipal personnel were trained in participatory planning and strategy development (MEST/MAFRD/FAO, 2004).

The ERP National Strategy was submitted to donors and drove government and international support to foster access to and quality of education and training for rural people.

**An example from Uganda:
trained community volunteers support agriculture and nutrition extension**

Organizations: Volunteer Efforts for Development Concerns, Makerere University and Iowa State University

Source: <http://www.srl.ag.iastate.edu/>

The Center for Sustainable Rural Livelihoods (CSRL) of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Iowa State University leads a rural development programme in central Uganda in partnership with a local non-governmental organization, Volunteers Efforts for Development Concerns (VEDCO), and the Faculty of Agriculture of Makerere University. The intended outcome of this programme is that rural people will have access to sufficient food, sustainable incomes and livelihoods that result in good health and well-being. To achieve these outcomes, the programme engages individuals, families and communities in participatory learning and collaboration to nurture civic responsibility, leadership and effective social institutions. The programme supports collaborative training and development activities that strengthen the capacities of rural people and their institutions to improve agriculture and natural resource management practices; build assets; diversify income sources; and achieve food security, nutrition and health. The partners use a blend of science-based and indigenous knowledge to promote learning and capacity development.

The approach adopted by the programme utilizes community volunteers to assist in delivering adult education in several areas identified as critical to achieving food security. Volunteers are carefully screened by VEDCO. They are then trained to serve either as rural development extensionists or community nutrition and health workers. After initial training, the volunteers are expected to host regular educational meetings at their residence and to demonstrate improved crop and livestock management or nutrition and health practices. The volunteers are supported by subject matter specialists working for VEDCO who provide training materials, ongoing training and follow-up support. The community health and nutrition volunteers are identifiable in their blue jackets supplied by the programme. Community nutrition and health workers also receive basic equipment such as weighing scales, measuring boards, gloves, overcoats and bicycles.



Rural development extensionists receive shirts that identify their affiliation with the programme. They also receive basic extension equipment such as wheelbarrows, watering cans and bicycles. Rural development extensionists are supplied with improved planting materials (e.g. disease-free cassava cuttings and disease-free banana suckers) and improved crop varieties (e.g. orange flesh sweet potatoes and grain amaranth). They are also engaged in livestock distribution schemes involving pigs and poultry. They utilize these materials in demonstrations on their farms and distribute them to neighbours in conjunction with training on improved practices. Monitoring and evaluation support and training of subject matter specialists are provided by Iowa State University and Makerere University.

Volunteers take pride in their role in the community and in the results they have achieved. By mid 2007, 77 percent of the 800 households (approximately 7 500 people) working with the programme reported they had achieved food security, compared to 9 percent in early 2005.



CHALLENGE 6

Accommodating non-traditional learners

Non-traditional learners may include out of school youth (including girls and women), retired child soldiers, refugees and displaced persons, people in inaccessible and remote areas, disabled persons, ethnic minorities, working children, the elderly, nomads and pastoral communities, people suffering from diseases, and others. Each of these groups has a unique set of circumstances that make provision of educational services particularly challenging. In instances where non-traditional learners are also rural, the level of complexity in providing educational services tends to be high.

An overarching global goal is to reach these marginalized groups with adequate educational and training services to allow them to achieve a secure livelihood and to expand their options. The variety of educational needs of these groups means that there is a necessity for multiple educational safety nets to maximize participation rates