

**GOAL 2: ACHIEVE UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION**

**The difference in the levels of knowledge and education between rural and urban areas is called the urban-rural education divide. It is the main barrier to achieving universal primary education by 2015. It is also a key obstacle to eradicating poverty and hunger, promoting gender equality and empowering women.**

The 2009 UNESCO Global Monitoring Report indicates that over 80 percent of the at least 72 million out-of-school children live in rural areas. As a consequence, the majority of the 774 million illiterate youth and adults in the world are rural. The FAO publication *Education for rural people and food security: a cross country analysis (2007)* indicates that food security and universal primary education of rural children are directly connected. Therefore, the two issues need to be tackled together and as a priority.

The majority of the world's poor are rural, illiterate and engaged in subsistence agriculture. Illiteracy excludes them from learning new farming skills that could increase their productivity, incomes and food security. Illiteracy isolates them and prevents them from participating in democracy. At the same time, rural children's ability to learn is compromised by hunger and malnutrition, undermining opportunities eventually to become effective farmers and contribute to efforts to overcome poverty and hunger.

**WHAT FAO IS DOING**

FAO is the lead UN agency for the Education for Rural People (ERP) initiative (<http://www.fao.org/erp/en/>), in partnership with the United Nations Commission for Sustainable Development. In cooperation with UNESCO, ERP was launched in 2002 during the World Summit on Sustainable Development. It is one of nine flagship initiatives of the Education For All programme led by UNESCO. Since 2002, ERP has developed a network of about 370 partners from the agriculture and education sectors, including government ministries, international agencies, civil society, academia, the media and the private sector.

ERP is a research-based approach promoting multisectoral alliances between ministries of education and agriculture and related stakeholders.

ERP identifies political, institutional, organizational and individual opportunities and constraints that poor people face in accessing education and training services. The initiative seeks to empower the rural poor to become fully integrated actors of the development process. It does this by promoting collaboration among the education, agriculture and rural development sectors. The strategy covers research, knowledge generation and sharing, advocacy, policy

work and capacity development, as well as standards, guidelines and field work.

The initiative disseminates knowledge, innovations and lessons learned by ERP partners including in areas such as quality of and access to education, gender-responsive learning environments, parent and community engagement, and accommodation of non-traditional learners. *Education for rural people: The role of education, training and capacity development in poverty reduction and food security (2009)*, presents a synthesis of lessons learned and outputs achieved since the launch of the ERP partnership.

**Key facts**

Over 80 percent of the at least 72 million children of primary school age who are not in school live in rural areas.

An estimated 774 million adults – two-thirds of whom are women – lack basic literacy skills and the majority of them are rural.

The majority of illiterate children, youth and adults live in rural areas and are involved in ensuring food security for themselves and the wider community while lacking equitable access to quality basic education.

Those children most likely to drop out of school or to not attend at all are often girls and those from poorer households living in rural areas.

**Examples of outputs**

Policy and strategy

- The Beijing Education for All High Level Group (2005) recommended that ERP be one of the three world priorities to achieve universal primary education and EFA at international and national levels.
- A strategy for education for rural people in Kosovo, developed in 2004 by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development and the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology with FAO technical assistance, assists policy-makers on a range of rural education issues (<http://www.fao.org/sd/erp/ERPkosovoenglish.PDF>).

Knowledge generation and exchange

- A joint FAO-UNESCO ERP Web site is available in six languages at <http://www.fao.org/erp/en/>
- An ERP publication series, most of which can be downloaded, has been developed since 2003 and now includes more than 20 titles: [http://www.fao.org/sd/erp/ERPpublications\\_en.htm](http://www.fao.org/sd/erp/ERPpublications_en.htm)
- The ERP Tool Kit contains teaching materials including videos on agriculture and rural development for use by teachers, extension staff and students. The kit, which also covers good practices, is available at <http://www.fao.org/erp/en/>



## Field work

FAO provides technical assistance to member countries implementing school gardens and school-feeding programmes, which can encourage school attendance and bring direct nutritional benefits to children. The main objective of school gardens is active learning, often transmitting to parents and other interested community members innovative gardening techniques. When school gardens produce enough to complement

children's diets, they are sometimes linked to school feeding programmes.

In most cases, the school garden is an area of land within the school grounds or nearby. Vegetables, flowers, medicinal plants, trees, bushes and other plants are usually grown. Occasionally, small animals such as ducks, rabbits, chickens, goats and fish are kept in the school garden. In

cities where schools have limited space or lack open earth, the school garden can consist of plants growing in containers.

FAO has produced a manual for teachers, parents and communities on *Setting up and running a school garden* [[http://www.fao.org/schoolgarden/sglibrary\\_en.htm](http://www.fao.org/schoolgarden/sglibrary_en.htm)].

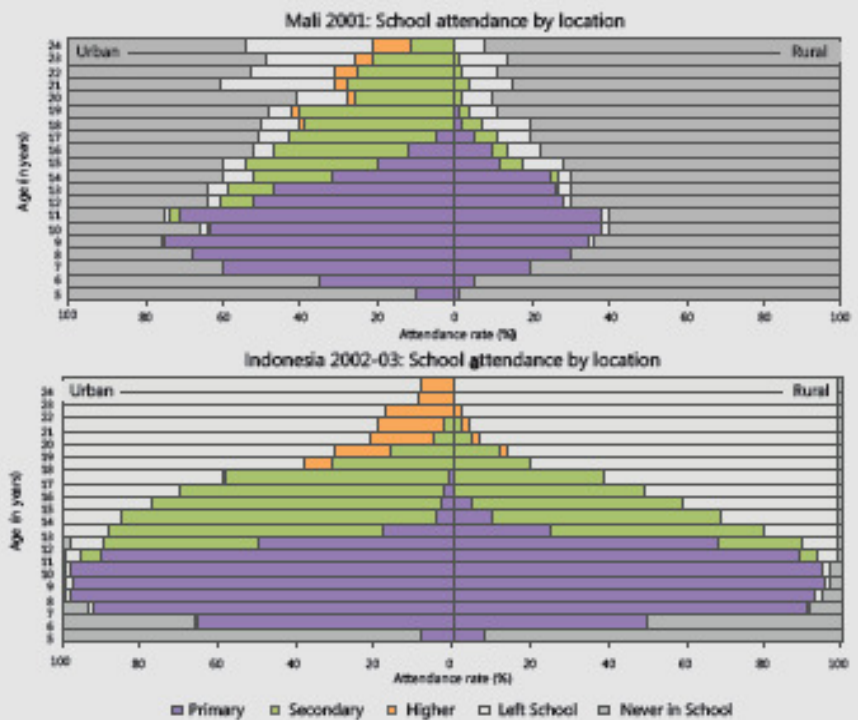


A school garden in Central America.  
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Children in primary school in West Africa.  
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## School attendance by age and residence



Source: UIS/UNICEF 2005. Adaptation from the graphic at:  
<http://www.fao.org/rep/rep-activities-en/rep-2006/a/2005-8/en/>



## MDG 2 ACHIEVE UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION

Education has long been acclaimed as a powerful engine for reducing hunger and poverty. Yet today, hunger and poverty not only persist, they stand in the way of the drive toward universal primary education because they contribute to poor health and compromise children's abilities to learn.

Lack of education and illiteracy of rural people undermines their potential to be productive and employable and affects their earning capacities. Rural areas lag far behind urban areas in attendance and completion of primary education, even though it is known that every year of schooling increases individual earning potential by about 10 percent. Farmers with just four years of education are 9 percent more productive than those with no education, and the number increases to 13 percent when combined with the availability of inputs such as fertilizers and farm machinery.

**Recognizing the needs of rural areas.** Current surveys indicate that of the 72 million children of primary school age who are not in school, 80 percent live in rural areas where poverty and hunger are most widespread. In addition, attendance and completion rates are lowest among rural children. The gender gap is present throughout, with girls being less likely to enroll, attend or complete their primary educations. Further, many poor rural families cannot afford school fees. They often depend on their children to handle menial tasks such as collecting fuelwood, weeding or caring for animals and thus are not inclined to send them to school.

**Educating children requires holistic approach.** While MDG 2's stated target is universal primary education, those involved in achieving the goal recognize the need for taking a holistic approach that also includes education for youth and adults. Ten years before the Millennium Summit, FAO was among participants in the World Conference on Education for All (EFA). EFA convened in Thailand to discuss issues of illiteracy and agreed to go beyond the primary education model that focuses only on children's reading, writing and arithmetic and add "skills for life" for all age groups. In other words, the goal was an educational curriculum that would introduce all – children, youth and adults – to topics such as agriculture, nutrition and health, providing the knowledge needed to live in dignity and to be productive. Skills for life give students the background to make informed life choices that can include issues such as how to grow crops, when to have children or how to survive a typhoon.

Today, with the progress in achieving universal primary education in many developing countries, it is necessary to be realistic as to what comes next. Children who complete primary education in rural areas most probably will never go to secondary or to higher education because those facilities simply do not exist in rural areas and the majority of rural families cannot afford to send their children to secondary schools in urban areas. This means that unless efforts are made to make Education for All a holistic exercise that includes all rural children, youths and adults, the chances are slim that the populations of poor rural areas will emerge as leaders or contribute to making the policy of their countries.

### FAO APPROACH TO MDG 2

FAO is involved in programmes and activities that aim to reduce childhood malnutrition, improve the access of rural children to primary education, and provide education and skills training to youth and adults in rural areas. Internationally, FAO facilitates formulation of policies to include rural people in education, and the exchange of good practices and knowledge on education for rural people. Nationally, it stimulates cooperation between education and agriculture ministries in formulating strategies that combine rural development with EFA goals. FAO provides the type of technical support that addresses the basic education needs of rural people, with assistance in areas such as setting up school garden programmes that educate children in horticulture while also providing fresh, nutritious foods for school feeding programmes, or formulating education programmes and distributing teachers' manuals and learning materials relevant to rural life that cover issues such as biodiversity, food safety and the future of the forests.

### ERP PARTNERSHIP AND TOOL KIT AVAILABLE TO ALL

Education for Rural People (ERP) is an FAO-led partnership of 60 countries, 200 NGOs, 30 universities and a host of on-the-ground programmes and local organizations as well as international organizations such as UNESCO. It offers education and skills training activities to all rural citizens, not just those involved directly in agriculture. In all, more than 350 partners participate in ERP activities that include research, policy, advocacy and field projects and bridge the efforts of those working in the education and agricultural sectors.

Under FAO's guidance, ERP has developed a tool kit – available to all online – that offers educational training materials for extensionists, rural teachers, instructors, trainers, parents and researchers in formal and non-formal education for rural people.

### LITERACY COURSE INCLUDES SKILLS FOR LIFE

"When a hurricane came, my friends were afraid. But I had taken a literacy course and they taught me what to do when a storm comes. I knew that I had to cover my chickens. When the storm was over, my chickens were safe but my friends who had not gone to the literacy course had lost their chickens. Because of the literacy course, I know that I am a person. If I lose everything tomorrow I can start again because I have knowledge inside."

*Female adult education student, Nicaragua*