

Interview with Ms. Lavinia Gasperini, Senior Officer of the Extension, Education and Communication Service (SDRE) at FAO



"The UN System Network on Rural Development and Food Security is crucial in promoting a wide recognition of the importance of supporting Education for rural people as a key to achieving poverty reduction, food security, rural development and education for all."- Lavinia Gasperini

Lavinia Gasperini, senior officer of the Extension, Education and Communication Service (SDRE) talks about the FAO-UNESCO partnership its achievements up to now and future challenges for the years to come.

What are the main objectives of the FAO-UNESCO partnership in support of Education for rural people?

Addressing poverty, enhancing agriculture productivity and technology, ensuring food security and sustainable management of natural resources and environment requires not only the support of institutions and the creation of an infrastructure, but also the organization of an appropriate education for the direct actors of the process. The Director-General of both [UNESCO](#) and FAO recognized this fact by jointly launching the ninth [flagship on "Education for Rural People"](#) (ERP) within the UNESCO led [Education For All \(EFA\)](#) initiative, during the [World Summit on Sustainable Development](#) in Johannesburg in September 2002.

The majority of the world's poorest people, illiterates and children not attending school, live in rural areas. Therefore to achieve EFA, poverty reduction and food security we need to target this population's specific learning needs with particular strategies according to their cultural background and socio economic reality. In this sense, the ERP flagship is a call for a collaborative effort to increase the coordination in targeting the educational needs of rural people. Up to now, the flagship is succeeding in bringing together government entities, academic expertise, policy makers, UN system agencies and bilateral agencies as well as grass root practitioners who are all committed in achieving the first three [Millennium Development Goals](#) (MDGs) in an integrated way.

First three Millennium Development Goals

- 1.** Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- 2.** Achieve universal primary education by increasing access to quality basic Education for rural people. Fostering national capacity to design and implement

basic education plans to address learning needs of rural people.
3. Promoting gender equality by encouraging access of girls to school

These activities have resulted in an increased commitment towards Education for rural people. The flagship will also help coordinate and increase technical support towards countries willing to address the basic educational needs for rural people within the overall effort of Poverty Reduction and Education For All strategies. At national level, the flagship advocates for more investments in ERP. At international level, the flagship reached, in less than a year, more than [60 members](#) of a vast range of constituencies among UN agencies, NGOs, foundations, academic institutes, and the private sector.

What are the most urgent demands that must be faced to address the needs of education in the rural world?

Rural people demand increased access to quality improved education. Some of the most common and urgent actions needed include:

- The expansion of a school network to provide education and address the insufficient distribution of school infrastructures in rural areas
- School feeding programmes to encourage attendance and ensure that learning of rural children is not affected by malnutrition and hunger
- Non formal education initiatives to reach rural school drop-outs, illiterate adults and working children among the rural population
- Gender focus to promote equity in schooling among rural girls and boys
- Specific measures for marginalized groups such as working children, remote populations (e.g. populations in mountain areas and small islands), nomadic populations, refugees and displaced people as well as disabled people. These measures can include the creation of specific school calendars according to the harvest period for working children and the creation of nomadic schools

On another important level, the quality of education in rural areas can be improved by promoting specific training initiatives and incentives for rural teachers, and ensuring that the relevance of the curriculum taught is in line with the needs of rural people. The availability of relevant teaching/learning materials and the promotion of community involvement are essential to fulfill educational needs.

What concrete objectives has the FAO-UNESCO partnership achieved up to now and what next steps will be taken?

A recent publication on a global study entitled "Education for rural development: towards new policy responses" undertaken in partnership by FAO and the [UNESCO Institute of Education Planning](#)(IIEP) was launched this year. The study's aim is to build awareness of the importance of Education for rural people as a crucial step to achieve the MDGs.

The book includes fifteen case studies from around the world regarding these topics. The study will soon be available on line and will be included in the [list of virtual publications](#) that the partnership has issued. This list includes a large number of articles and other publications produced on ERP in collaboration with UNESCO, Universities, NGOs.

Following two international seminars on Education for rural people held during late 2003 in Thailand and Italy (please read article published in the [December edition](#) of the Website), UNESCO and the [International Research and Training Centre for Rural Education](#) (INRULED) organized a third event under the theme International Symposium on Rural Education in Baodin, China on 20-23 January 2003. During this event, both FAO and IIEP organized two workshops.

A strong network is currently being built among flagship members. One of the communication instruments supporting the exchange of information is the ERP informal Newsletter. Two editions have already circulated via e-mail so far, among international organizations, NGOs, Universities and the private sector exchanging information on activities and good practices in the domain of Education for rural people.

In addition, an ERP Technical Cooperation pilot project (TCP) was started by FAO in Kosovo in support of the Ministry of Education and Agriculture, for the development of a participatory national strategy to address the learning needs of rural people. A launching workshop was held on 1 July, 2003 in Pristine and was attended by high level officials of Agriculture, Education and Labour Ministries as well as by UN Agency representatives from [ILO](#) and [UNICEF](#), bilateral donor agencies ([GTZ](#), Swiss and Danish cooperation), private sector representatives and members of the civil society (rural credit representatives, farmers and producers associations, rural cooperatives, rural women organizations, local NGOs, students organizations, representatives and parents from rural schools, among many others).

Studies on the educational needs of rural people were also undertaken in Serbia, Bosnia and Croatia and will be soon published on the FAO Website. A preliminary project formulation mission was recently undertaken in Mozambique.

During this year's second semester, ERP will be addressed by special sessions within the Regional Workshops organized by the UNESCO regional offices in Latin America (Santiago) and Asia (Bangkok) for Education for All national coordinators. By the beginning of 2004, a regional ERP workshop will be jointly organized by FAO and UNESCO regional offices and the UNESCO International Institute for Education Planning (IIEP) in Latin America and in Asia. This event will help Ministries of Education and Agriculture plan activities to address the learning needs of rural people. A country study will be undertaken in collaboration with local authorities by FAO, UNESCO Regional Offices and IIEP, in collaboration with CIDE -a regional NGO specialized in educational research - in Chile and other Latin America countries still to be defined.

Several new publications such as a guide on "Monitoring Education for rural people: indicators and approaches" or "Guidelines for planners: Education for rural people, a key to Education for All" will be useful to support policy makers in promoting Education for rural people. These publications are undertaken in close collaboration with UNESCO/IIEP.

How can the UN System Network on Rural Development and Food Security cooperate in the support of the Education for rural people initiative?

The Un System Network on Rural Development and Food Security is crucial in promoting a wide recognition of the importance of supporting Education for rural people as a key to achieving poverty reduction, food security, rural development and education for all. It can be an important advocacy and information sharing mechanism that can help better focusing on ERP in Rural Development and national

Education for All plans of action, and in the [United Nations Assistance Development Framework](#) (UNDAF) and the [Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers](#) (PRSP). It can also help by promoting improved coordination on ERP, sharing of experiences among the members of the UN System Network on Rural Development and Food Security and among the flagship members.

Available on http://www.rdfs.net/news/interviews/0308in/0308in_fao_Unesco_en.htm
December 2013