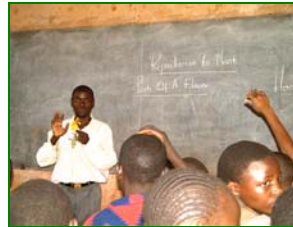


Policy Brief

Linking basic education, food security and rural development



This Policy Brief reports on the main findings in terms of policy recommendations resulting from the study on **“The role of relevant basic education in achieving food security and sustainable rural development”** commissioned by the European Community’s Poverty Reduction Effectiveness Programme (EC-PREP).

DISCLAIMER

This research project is one of 23 projects funded by EC-PREP, a programme of research sponsored by the UK Department for International Development. All EC-PREP research studies relate to one or more of the six focal areas of EC’s development policy in the context of their link to poverty eradication. EC-PREP produces findings and policy recommendations which aim to contribute to improving the effectiveness of the EC’s development assistance. For more information about EC-PREP and any of the other research studies produced under the programme, please visit the website www.ec-prep.org.

The views expressed in this Policy Brief are however those of the study team and do not engage either of these organisations.

Context

Many development policies – including the European Community’s development policy which is currently under review – encourage approaches which integrate multiple strategies for poverty reduction. These include food security and sustainable rural development, as well as promotion of equitable access to social services such as education.

Progress towards achieving the international development goals of ‘Food for All’ and ‘Education for All’ by the year 2015 has been too slow. Food insecurity, low school participation, high school dropout rates and under-education are still common in rural areas of the developing world.

The challenges in these fields are enormous, especially in rural areas where food insecurity, poverty and educational deprivation often create a vicious circle from which underprivileged households and communities are unable to escape. Climbing out of this ‘poverty trap’ can not be achieved by addressing one sector alone.

It is therefore timely and essential to explore feasible measures in which the interrelated issues of food security, sustainable rural development and relevant basic education can be tackled together, focusing on interventions which have the greatest effect on poverty reduction.

Objective

The main objective of this study is to contribute to improving the effectiveness and efficiency of development policies and cooperation of the European Community, the European Union and other development actors by understanding the ways by which relevant basic education can contribute to achieving food security and sustainable rural development.

Methodology

The study team gathered and summarised information about basic education initiatives in rural areas which have used agricultural or environmental experience as a means of making teaching and learning more relevant to the local situation, and assessed the potential impact of this kind of approach on food security and sustainable rural development.

The study started with a detailed literature review, looking at different policies, projects, programmes, and analyses from all over the world. The study then embarked on extensive field data collection and analysis using a wide range of participatory tools in 3 countries (Kenya, Zimbabwe and Mali). Based on these analyses we have come up with potential implications for policy and suggested areas for increased investment and donor support.

Main findings

Relevant basic education contributes to rural development

The centrality of basic education for rural development and for the general improvement of rural life is now widely accepted. The quality and relevance of schooling can positively influence productivity, both in agriculture and in off-farm employment.

The relevance of basic education is a major concern in rural areas of the developing world. Raising the quality and relevance of basic education seems to pay off in terms of food security and sustainable rural development. Relevant basic education in rural areas enables people to live more productive lives. When schools are relevant and educate many children well, the process of rural development can occur relatively quickly; when schools and

teachers are poorly equipped and educate few children well, education's impact on development is relatively slow.

The lack of basic learning opportunities which are of good quality and relevant to the local situation is both a contributing cause and an effect of rural poverty in many developing countries. Opportunities for relevant basic learning are generally inadequate to help rural people to break out of the vicious poverty cycle. Relevant basic education of good quality is unlikely to break this cycle by itself, but it should be a key part of rural poverty reduction strategies and approaches.

Relevant basic education can help imparting life skills which are useful in alleviating poverty in rural areas

The importance of basic skills – notably numeracy and literacy – is recognized in most countries as a foundation for further development. These skills are given a high priority in primary education.

Not all of the additional skills needed for agricultural production, food security and sustainable rural development will be addressed directly through primary education. The role of primary education is to lay a foundation which will allow for these skills to be developed through non-formal, informal and further education. Most of the skills are interlinked and are used simultaneously in practice. Relevant basic education can contribute to this skills development and help imparting life skills which are useful in alleviating poverty in rural areas. These skills include decision making and problem-solving skills, technical skills, planning skills, management skills, social, interpersonal and communication skills, negotiation skills, facilitation skills, critical thinking (necessary for fostering innovation and change), food preservation and processing skills, marketing skills, leadership skills, business skills, income-generating skills, entrepreneurial skills, and awareness about social, political and legal institutions (necessary for the development of skills for effective participation in civil society).

School curricula are often overloaded and leave little room for local interpretation

The curriculum, teaching approaches, teaching and learning support materials and sometimes the language of instruction are not always suited to the local context, customs, livelihoods and rural development activities. Therefore, learning in school may appear quite irrelevant to poor rural children in comparison with their more immediate survival needs.

To attract and retain learners and to meet their requirements effectively, there must be a commitment to improve the quality and relevance of basic education – especially in rural areas. In several cases, this will involve designing and implementing basic education programmes in close harmony with other development efforts in rural areas (food security, agricultural production, health, environmental protection, access to credit, etc.) to ensure that learners can put their knowledge and skills to good use.

The education system in developing countries is often centralised and very demanding and leaves little time or opportunities for localised interpretation of the content.

Rural teachers are often poorly equipped

Teachers are the key to effective learning and relevant basic education of good quality. Successful educational innovation lies largely with the teacher, as the interpreter and deliverer of the curriculum. Unfortunately, teachers are often inadequately prepared, trained, supervised and supported in their work, especially in rural areas. Teaching is often far removed from the students experience at home and in the community.

The capacity of the teacher to interpret the curriculum and relate it to the local rural context will depend on a number of factors, including personal motivation, competence in a range of teaching and learning strategies and professional attitude, especially towards learners. Increased efforts to reorient teacher education courses and programmes towards relevant teaching and learning can empower teachers to play an important role in making basic education relevant.

Support from the headteacher, the school administration and the education system is

important for teachers. Teachers who are allowed and encouraged to participate in decision-making and to treat the curriculum with some flexibility and room for contextualisation are usually better motivated.

Teaching and learning support materials are in many cases inadequate

Even if teachers are competent and well trained, they often find it difficult to teach effectively because of the lack of adequate teaching and learning support materials that are relevant to the local situation.

Agricultural and environmental experiences can be used as a way of making basic education in rural areas more relevant to the local situation

New approaches to contextualisation of content and pedagogy using agricultural and environmental experiences offer encouraging options to improve the relevance of basic education.

School gardens and agricultural practices such as agroforestry can be used as media for contextualising teaching and learning in rural areas and have potential to enable children to cope more effectively with general subject matter in school. At the same time, contextualised teaching and learning can contribute to the skills formation process.

Community ownership is crucial for relevant and effective basic education

A major challenge is to promote community ownership of basic education programmes, which helps to ensure their relevance, sustainability and effectiveness both in terms of learning achievement and of contributing to other rural development activities.

School-community links exist in every school, but they come in different forms and are not always very strong. Successful interventions to make basic education more relevant empower local communities and use their expertise.

Policy implications

Orienting policies – including EC external assistance policy – towards poverty reduction is a complex issue, which requires an integrated and multi-sectoral approach which is based on research findings. Addressing

such complexity requires a flexible, but determined effort by governments and their partners.

Within this complex poverty reduction framework, our study focused on two areas, namely food security and sustainable rural development, and the role of relevant basic education. Suggested policy and donor support implications are therefore mainly targeting these two areas.

Human capital can be built up by providing more schooling, but policies that fail to consider the quality and relevance of education risk expanding quantity without truly expanding human capital.

Policy thrust and political will is an important variable for accelerating educational progress in rural areas. The problems of education quality and relevance in rural areas need to be recognized and addressed through coherent, explicit policies and strategies.

Policymakers and others – including schools and communities – have to seek ways to make the content and approaches of primary education more meaningful and effective within the context of food security and sustainable rural development.

A policy framework should place learners at the centre of the teaching and learning process, emphasizing that, from the outset, policy must acknowledge their diverse characteristics, circumstances and learning needs. Strategies to improve educational quality and relevance should draw on the strengths of learners and on their knowledge, interests and capacities.

Although poor-quality and irrelevant education exist at all levels, improvement must begin at the primary school level, where children develop their basic attitudes and approaches to learning. Improving the quality and relevance of education for learners in primary schools is a prerequisite for developing the human resource base required to meet the changing demands of rural labour markets. To initiate a deeply rooted and sustainable process of rural development, human capital strengthening must be broadly based and allow a progressively larger share of the

general population to participate in the process of economic transformation.

Education for All (EFA) action plans need to progressively address issues such as relevant education, food security and sustainable development in rural areas. Rural-sensitive approaches which are context specific are required.

Implications for donor support

Despite the shortcomings in the provision of quality basic education in rural areas today and despite the shortfall in resources allocated for it, progress is being made as many countries continue their efforts to expand its coverage and improve its quality and relevance.

Relevant basic education in rural areas could be funded as a component of food security and sustainable rural development strategies or as part of the education sector. Unfortunately, it has received inadequate donor attention either way.

A concerted multi-sectoral effort in rural areas of the developing world to develop basic education geared towards rural development is needed

Donors must offer more concerted and effective assistance to develop basic education geared to agriculture, rural development and food security, especially in the poorest countries.

The need for more coordinated approaches has been recognised, but has only recently begun to be addressed. The World Bank and other inter-governmental institutions, such as FAO and UNESCO, are now seeking to revive interest among donors in basic education in rural areas. The FAO/UNESCO flagship programme on 'Education for rural people' provides an illustration of this movement. This also fits in the global vision of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014) of "a world where everyone has the opportunity to benefit from quality education and learn the values, behaviour and lifestyles required for a sustainable future and for positive societal transformation".

It is necessary to locate support to education in poverty-stricken rural areas within the wider context of rural development and to promote multi-sectoral approaches designed and implemented with a high level of community involvement.

Basic education in rural areas should focus on learners' needs

Efforts to expand basic education programmes to reach more learners need to be accompanied by measures to ensure that the content, quality and delivery of those programmes effectively meet learners' needs.

This also means that learning needs to be child-centred, holistic, experiential, active and practical.

School curricula should be meaningful regarding the life situations of rural children and relevant to local needs and conditions

The relevance of the curriculum to the learner's needs and interests is essential. School curriculum should be meaningful regarding the life situations of rural children and relevant to local needs and conditions. Most developing countries have a centrally determined curriculum which is generally designed for pupils familiar with an urban environment and may contain elements that conflict with local practices.

Decentralized curricular interpretation and adaptation needs to be possible within prescribed national curricula. Initiatives which combine the national common core content and supplementary content based on the local culture and economy need more support.

Participatory curriculum development where relevant stakeholders and experts are involved can contribute to creating a more relevant curriculum.

While rural schools should not look like urban schools, they must offer the same opportunities as urban schools for children to advance through the school system to higher levels. Though the national curriculum is often poorly suited to rural schools, modifications must be acceptable to all stakeholders, including ministry officials and parents.

Improved pre-service and in-service teacher training should be supported

The teacher is a key actor in the provision of basic education. Teachers must strive to make education interesting and relevant for the rural poor through the use of appropriate teaching and learning methods and through interpretation of the prescribed curriculum in relation to the local context. In order to make basic education more relevant in rural areas, teachers need knowledge of substantive areas and content related to agriculture and the environment, as well as pedagogical skills to use a repertoire of appropriate teaching strategies.

Teachers therefore need adequate teacher-training and support, especially in innovative teaching and learning approaches including participatory techniques, both pre-service and in-service. Continuous improvement in the quality and relevance of basic education should entail continuous competence and skills upgrading for teachers.

Awareness raising and training for educational administrators and school inspectors in leadership, managerial, motivation and supervisory skills are equally important.

Professional development sessions should be arranged in such a way that teachers and educators come away with something that, if they implement it, will save them time and effort and not involve them in additional effort.

Recruitment and training of teaching staff in rural areas should be encouraged as this will allow relying more on available local skills and talent. Sound investment in human (and social) capital in rural areas is an essential part of any good economic strategy for broad-based and equitable rural development.

Adequate teaching and learning materials should be provided

Teachers need adequate teaching equipment and support such as reference materials and textbooks. Learning materials should be linked to the local environment and learners' experience. The school environment can be used as a learning resource and teaching and learning support materials can draw on agriculture and natural resource management as the local context for learning.

Teachers (as well as other stakeholders and experts) need to be involved in materials development from the very start, to build on existing good practices.

People and learning resources for teaching children about their rural environment, agricultural skills, and other practical skills and knowledge that complement the academic curriculum should be made available to schools.

More investment in providing relevant and adequate teaching aids and learning materials to rural schools would produce good returns in learning achievement.

Improved school-community linkages should be encouraged

Good practices in sustainable agriculture and rural development can be shared between the school and the community. Schools and school gardens can function as experimental grounds and agricultural development centres where both modern and local knowledge is exchanged through interaction and involvement of different actors.

Farmers and other local experts have a vast wealth of relevant knowledge and skills, can be invited as resource persons to schools and can help teachers and students learn about agriculture and the local environment.

Parents and community members can learn new ideas, methods and techniques from their children and teachers and from school demonstration plots.

Agricultural extension officers can assist teachers with technical knowledge, help with the establishment of demonstrations in the school garden and link the school to agricultural and rural development institutions.

Communities should be encouraged to use schools as centres for education and social activities beyond primary school. Schools should be hospitable for adult literacy classes, extension activities, women's groups, community functions, and other activities and events. This not only brings parents into the school, it also helps transform the school into a multi-function learning and meeting centre and puts it at the centre of the community.

More effective monitoring and sound scientific research and analysis of basic education in rural areas should be supported

Despite the growing consensus that poverty is multi-dimensional and complex, a lot of poverty research has been based on using approaches and methods that cannot capture a full picture. External funding can usefully help underwrite certain research and development costs relating to the improved provision of basic education in rural areas.

More effective monitoring of basic education activities in rural areas is needed. Too little is currently known about what education is needed, what is being offered and how knowledge and skills are being taught.

The many kinds of expertise and technical skills needed to analyse the provision and quality of education in rural areas may not be readily available in all countries. International partners can help by organizing in-country training workshop, study visits to countries with similar conditions and problems and other experience-sharing activities to enable national officials and specialist to acquire useful information and gain broader perspectives to deal with relevant basic education and rural development issues. Further support can be provided through technical documents, publications and Internet websites. Lessons learned and experiences need to be shared with donors, educators, policy makers and the wider community.

For further information

For further information regarding this Policy Brief or the study on "The role of relevant basic education in achieving food security and sustainable rural development", please contact:

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