



Photo: World Bank

## Education and skills – crucial for rural development

The rural world is changing rapidly, and young people need to be prepared to rise to the new opportunities. Agriculture is also changing, with new technologies, products, markets, and business environments. And many rural people will need to become engaged in non-farm activities or migrate to urban areas. To seize these opportunities, all will need skills that differ from those of their parents.

Across the developing world, the challenge of providing appropriate education and relevant skills to rural youth needs to be met – it is necessary to provide a basic education that motivates them to study, training to

give them skills for the labour market, and opportunities for some to pursue higher education.

### ■ Improving the quality of basic education

Despite progress over the past decade in increasing access to schooling in the developing world, education levels measured by years of schooling are still

dismal in many countries. Low attainment in rural areas is often attributed to farm work; in those areas, children miss school or drop out to help with farm or household work. But studies of child labour show that of the 5- to 14-year-old children not in school, 37 percent do not work and an additional 32 percent do only domestic work (Edmonds and Pavcnink 2005). Other reasons for dropping out include the inability to meet costs of attend-

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"My situation is difficult; I can't go to school because I am the main breadwinner of my family. In rural areas, you do not have opportunities to learn after school hours ... I did not pass the university exam."

Source: World Development Report 2007: *Development and the next generation*, World Bank.

ance, distance to school, a curriculum or language incompatible with local conditions, beliefs that education is not necessary, and poor school quality. Improving basic education in rural areas, whether primary education in Africa or secondary in Latin America, is essential to energize the process of rural development.

The poor quality of rural schools diminishes their attractiveness and the benefits of schooling. The PROBE report of public schools in rural India showed that physical infrastructure was woefully inadequate, with 82 percent of schools needing repair (De and Dreze 1999). Books are often unavailable, and teacher absenteeism tends to be high. Teachers present are unprepared and poorly paid, and violence and harassment are common. Low quality of schooling means little learning – it is not uncommon to find fifth graders who cannot read and write – and low educational attainment reduces the possibilities for employment.

### ■ Enhancing employment skills

Finding and maintaining employment requires broad-based occupational skills or specific job-related skills, acquired in training institutions or

*In many countries – be it in Africa, Asia, or Latin America – the quality of schools in rural areas is very poor and teachers are badly paid. But without education there will be no rural development.*

on the job. In today's rapidly evolving and globally competitive economy, they increasingly include personal capabilities such as flexibility, resourcefulness, and communication. Vocational schools for instance aim to prepare students for entry into the labour market. In developing countries the vocational education sector tends to be smaller (22 percent of student enrolment) than in OECD countries and geared to lower educational levels such as lower secondary education (UNESCO 2006). Programmes that have private participation in managing institutions (Brazil's SENAR) and designing curricula (Namibia's Community Skills Development Centers) have been most effective in meeting labour market demands (see Box on page 16). Other good examples include the Tanzania Integrated Training for Entrepreneurship Promotion and the Ghana Opportunities Industrialization Council.

### ■ Second chances for school leavers

Many countries operate programmes to get out-of-school youth back into school or into informal training courses – and illiterate youth into

literacy programmes. Few countries, however, have a system of second chances that meets the diverse needs of young people who have left school at different stages and come from different socio-economic settings. Successful programmes are linked to the school system, informed by the demands of the labour market, and provided on a flexible and part-time basis that can accommodate work and family responsibilities. Morocco's second-chance schools target the 2.2 million children between 8 and 16 years old who have never entered school or have left before the end of the compulsory cycle. More than three-quarters of them live in rural areas and some 45 percent of them are girls. The Ministry of Education forms partnerships with non-governmental organisations; with the Ministry providing funding, training facilitators, and supplying educational materials; and with NGOs engaging young graduates as facilitators, enrolling pupils, seeking additional funding, and managing local programs.

### ■ Higher education

The transition to higher education, which is particularly difficult and expensive for rural youth, requires



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### Vocational training in Brazil and Namibia

SENAR – Brazil’s National Rural Training Center – is managed by an agricultural employers’ association, and members of agricultural cooperatives make up the board. The learning process is related to rural work and living conditions and rural women are given preference for social promotion programmes, including training in protection against toxic products used in agriculture.

In Namibia seven Community Skills Development Centres impart basic skills to enable youths to generate income through wage employment or self-employment. The centres are training institutions that vary their basic training courses as income generating opportunities change in the local economy. To align with market needs, experts conduct market assessments, covering the occupational interests of youth, local development plans, and the needs of employers and businesses in both the formal and informal sectors.

support. The Mexican *Jóvenes con Oportunidades* offers youth in school a savings account in which they accumulate points during grades 9 to 12. The money can be tapped upon the completion of 12th grade for further study, opening a business, improving housing, or buying health insurance. Another means to increase the number of graduates at post-secondary levels is to provide financial incentives to make agricultural disciplines more attractive for students, for example through lower tuition fees.

At the same time, agricultural education itself needs to be meaningful and respond to local and international needs. Efforts to revitalise agricultural education should concentrate on updating curricula and transforming teaching practices. Most agricultural education institutions offer curricula focused narrowly on the production of predominant crops and livestock. Curriculum reform should introduce greater institutional flexibility in the face of rapid change and greater responsiveness to employers and stakeholders. One effort to correct these deficiencies is the professional upgrading developed for extension workers by a dozen Anglophone and Francophone universities with assistance from the Sasakawa African Fund for Extension Education. Focusing on midcareer professionals, the programme offers a reformed interdisciplinary curriculum

leading to bachelor of science and master of science degrees, emphasizing technology transfer, participatory methods, and respect for local knowledge.

### ■ Business education for the entrepreneurs of the “new agriculture”

Entrepreneurs in the “new agriculture” need the skills and competencies to operate in open and demanding markets. Though advanced agronomic techniques remain essential, entrepreneurs also need a better understanding of the business side of their operations. They need more and better market information and greater understanding of their costs and revenues, the required investments, and the value chain they operate in. To help students get a foothold in the “new agriculture”, some African universities encourage business development. The University of Swaziland and the Botswana College of Agriculture offer practical entrepreneurial Projects. Business plans are put into practice using a revolving credit fund, with students retaining 75 percent of the profits. In Mali an agricultural research organisation, Institut d’Economie Rurale, and a higher education institution, Institut Polytechnique Rurale, have joined to establish the Mali Agribusiness Incubator to help agricultural entrepreneurs integrate

modern technologies into local agricultural systems.

### ■ Agricultural professionals and researchers

The “new agriculture” also requires more and better trained researchers. Sub-Saharan Africa’s human resource pool is severely depleted. Among the 27 African countries, half saw a decline in the number of agricultural researchers in the 1990s (IFPRI 2004). Only one in four African researchers currently possesses a doctorate. The huge potential for women professionals to upgrade farming systems remains largely untapped, with women making up just 18 percent of African agricultural scientists.

Therefore, priority should be given to a major staff development campaign. Aggressive human capital development programmes have paid long-term dividends for Brazil, India, Malaysia, and other countries. Is it not possible for Africa to follow a similar path? The Female Scholarship Initiative, initiated by Makerere University in Uganda and funded by the Carnegie Corporation, could be a model for this. Doctoral training can be carried out in existing African centres of strength in agricultural disciplines, such as the African Centre for Crop Improvement in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, the Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology in Kenya, and the Ecole Nationale Supérieure d’Agriculture in Senegal.

Where local training is not feasible in some disciplines, students can obtain doctoral training at cost-effective overseas sites or through “sandwich” programmes that combine locally relevant training with access to international knowledge resources, instruction in research methods, and exposure to a wider range of modern technologies. Because of the long time needed to prepare a new generation of agri-



Photo: J. Boethling

*To keep people in the agricultural sector they need the skills to operate in open, demanding markets: that means they must be trained in advanced agronomic technologies and in how to run a business.*

cultural scientists and professionals, urgent action is needed now to design, fund, and implement programmes that combine upgrading local universities, supporting regional centres of excellence in teaching and research, and

providing cost-effective higher-degree training outside the region.

### ■ Conclusion

Like adults, young people make decisions based on the incentives they face. Given the often modest opportunities for education and employment in rural areas, urban migration has become widespread. Removing bottlenecks and increasing relative returns in rural areas can help to make living

in the countryside a more attractive option than it currently is in many parts of the world.

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### Zusammenfassung

Die ländliche Welt verändert sich rapide, und junge Menschen müssen auf die neuen Herausforderungen und Chancen vorbereitet werden. Vor diesem Hintergrund spielt der Bildungssektor eine wesentliche Rolle, um den ländlichen Raum für junge Menschen attraktiver zu machen. Dazu gehören der Zugang zu einer schulischen Grundbildung, die Jugendliche zum Lernen motiviert, eine qualifizierte Berufsausbildung für den agrarischen und nicht-agrarischen Arbeitsmarkt sowie

Chancen auf weiterführende Bildungswege. Da Jugendliche in ländlichen Gegenden oft die Schule abbrechen, ist es besonders wichtig, Möglichkeiten zum Wiedereinstieg in die Schullaufbahn zu eröffnen.

### Resumen

El mundo rural está cambiando rápidamente y los jóvenes necesitan prepararse para hacer frente a los nuevos desafíos y oportunidades. En este contexto, el sector de la educación juega un papel

crucial para convertir las áreas rurales en zonas atractivas para los jóvenes. Esto implica proveerles una educación básica que los motive a estudiar, una formación técnico-profesional que les dé las destrezas necesarias para el mercado laboral agrícola y no agrícola, y oportunidades para seguir una educación superior. Adicionalmente, puesto que las personas jóvenes de las áreas rurales son particularmente vulnerables a la deserción escolar, resulta clave ofrecerles segundas oportunidades.