

REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT

In the spirit of the Millennium Development Goals 1 and 2 that aim to eradicate extreme poverty and achieve universal primary education, the special committee recognizes the following challenges to rural development and recommends the ensuing suggestions. The committee affirms the importance of promoting an integrated approach to rural development in developing countries for poverty eradication and sustainable development (UN Press Release 26.06.03).

With 75% of the world's poor living in rural areas, the importance of a special focus on rural development is vital to sustainable development worldwide. Countries are confronted with problems such as urban migration, salinization of soils, inefficient farming practices and extremely low rural literacy rates. However it is important that rural communities are able to benefit from advancements in health, education and technology.

UNESCO and UNICEF, as existing developing programs, should consider the following suggestions as they have proven to be effective in several countries. A principle focus should be increased information sharing between NGOs. This would provide for more efficient work by eliminating duplicative efforts, which can be counter productive. This would also allow NGOs to benefit from one another's experiences. Another main concern expressed by the committee was the lack of infrastructure (i.e. roads, electricity, school buildings). With regards to building schools, school mapping (i.e. districts) is a method by which rural schools will be built throughout the country to ensure increased access to committees. This would be a shorter-term investment with great return for the rural areas. A final suggestion, by Guatemala, was a literacy program that has been started in sub-Saharan Africa called Educational Resource Centers. This literacy caravan would travel and organize educational material fairs around the country and bring education to outlying communities, as literacy is the first step in educational reform.

The committee also wanted to present suggestions for individual country policy. These are based on successful results in other countries. With regards to teachers, Cuba has comprehensive benefit programs, thus providing incentives to enter the profession. The committee recognizes that not all countries have the ability to accomplish this however, incremental measures could be taken toward this goal. Another suggestion by Nepal and Chile was to create, in partnership with NGOs, training centers for teachers within countries to empower citizens to teach in rural communities. The committee also recognizes that formal educational systems are not always productive in rural areas and therefore recommends that alternative solutions be explored. Distance learning and non-formal learning were both two approaches suggested by Ethiopia. Decentralization of curriculum authority is also a method of increasing rural outreach due to improved rapport with the community.

A final point of consideration is diversification of rural economies. While legislation to support farmers and increase education on farming technologies is needed as well as a moderated elimination of supply-side constraints, relying solely on agriculture leads to ecological vulnerability. Educational initiatives should focus on creative ways to diversify the economy.