This publication addresses one of the overwhelming problems of the 21st century, to which the answer is not yet found: the relationship between poverty and education. As the human population increases, problems of food security and rural poverty in particular are present everywhere and for large numbers access to basic necessities of nutrition, employment, infrastructure, communications and above all education is very difficult.

Education and training are the only way out of this situation. The funding for these activities is, however, not easy to obtain, and agricultural education in particular has suffered from the lack of interest of major donor agencies for more than 30 years. The need to revitalize and renew the approach to this important discipline within the context of the ‘global village’ in which all of us are now living forms the background to this book.

Examples of a modern approach to education and development are found in countries such as India, where in the fifty years since independence, the country has advanced technologically to become a major force in the global market. This achievement could not have been possible without the proliferation of education at every level.

Many countries similarly continue their efforts to expand the basic education opportunities and to improve the quality of what is offered. The publication at hand offers many good examples in support of these efforts.

Following the introductory remarks by the coordinating team, offered in the first chapter, rural areas are defined in the complex global environment and an overview of past experiences is presented with emphases on relevancy, productivity and importance of basic education with examples drawn from diverse countries, such as Botswana, Cuba, Burkina Faso, etc.

Despite many encouraging examples from all over the world where education has been able to overcome bias of rural-urban distinction, or to remain available to the marginalized society groups, there is much work to be carried out in this respect.

The second chapter deals with issues of status and prospects of basic education in rural areas, in light of the current situation. Special emphases are given to topics such as the education of female children, HIV/AIDS...
and its effect on rural education, armed conflicts, and availability of early childhood development programmes to rural pupils.

Basic education is seen as the key tool for socio-economic transformation of rural areas, and therefore should be given much more attention than it currently enjoys.

Recent experiences with relevant learning approaches are presented in the third chapter, with examples from many developing countries, while the fourth chapter discusses strategies and institutions for promoting skills for rural development. The emphases in education, according to the authors, is changing from the concept of Agricultural Education and Training to a broader one of Skills for Rural Development, which is more suited to current trends in the global economy.

Higher Education has been given full attention in the fifth chapter, where current trends of transformation and diversification are discussed, together with suggestions for reform in the Higher Education sector.

The final, sixth chapter of this publication is devoted to recapture of all the relevant issues discussed previously and possible responses to the problems encountered. The area specifically targeted for intervention and improvement is funding, where the way forward is seen in the formation of funding partnerships and other innovative schemes which would offer a sustainable way of training the poor.

The mission of higher education is also to be expanded to cover the entire area of rural development and to establish creative alliances with business enterprises. In this way, many stakeholders will be involved in the development of relevant training for rural communities.

This relevant and important publication does not offer solutions to the problems of education at all levels in developing communities, but it certainly offers a new way of thinking about the crucial issues affecting it. Many good examples scattered throughout the book give ideas about what is happening and where, what works and what should not be tried anymore, because of new factors evolving at the local and global levels.

Policies and practices that work are given much recognition and the combination of local initiatives, donor support, and national ownership is considered as a new way forward to improved training and education for all.

The relevance and timeliness of this book cannot be overemphasized: it will certainly serve as an important reference for all those interested in the future and relevance of education for the next generation.

References

Development Education Association (DEA)/DFID, 2001, Measuring Effectiveness in Development Education, 28 pp., UK.

