

## **Good Practices in Pursuit of Sustainable Rural Transformation**

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### **Abstract**

Responding to the world's instability in the economy, society, and in the environment, initiatives such as the EFA goals and MDGs acknowledge that the developing world is in crisis. For the rural people, who are the majority of the poor worldwide, economic, social, and environmental instability is a daily reality. Rural people are among the most vulnerable, the most marginalized, and the most oppressed groups and they make up the majority of the poor in most countries. With education as a catalyst for transformation, providing the rural people with the knowledge, skills, and tools they need to improve their lives, and taking into account the context and reality of rural people, sustainability has to be a part of this transformation process. Sustainable rural transformation as a holistic perspective takes into account rural needs, the context, and the process of transformation. This paper identifies the challenges that rural populations are facing, and argues how the concept and practice of education for rural transformation should work towards a sustainable development, envisioning a 'sustainable rural transformation'. This paper illustrates and examines the concept of sustainable rural transformation and why education and good practices are important to promote an equitable sustainable rural transformation and human well-being.

**Keywords:** Good practices, rural transformation, sustainable development

### **Introduction**

Responding to the world's instability in the economy, society, and in the environment, initiatives such as the Education For All (EFA) goals and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) acknowledge that the developing world is in crisis. For the rural people, who are the majority of the poor worldwide, economic, social, and environmental instability is a daily reality. Poverty remains largely a rural problem and it is estimated that by 2050 the population of developing countries who will live in rural areas and will depend on the rural economy will add up to 2.6 billion. Furthermore, rural people are among the most vulnerable, the most marginalized, and the most oppressed groups, and they make up the

majority of the poor in most countries. They also find it difficult to manage the risks (natural and human-made) they face and they cannot seize the opportunities that may exist due to lack of relevant and appropriate education and learning opportunities, be these of formal, non-formal or informal educational nature and scope. This also means severe poverty deprives human rights of mankind, whoever, whenever, and wherever we are.

The context of rural populations illustrates the current crisis, and demands us to re-address the world's increasing inequity, poverty and widening human development gap through access to relevant, equitable and effective education of the rural population. Although resources and services are typically scarcer in rural areas, education has taken new forms, referred to as non-formal and informal education. By means of these approaches, practices of education for rural transformation (ERT) can contribute to the wellbeing of the rural people in addressing food security, health, employment, gender inequality, protection of the environment, and the management of rural resources by building skills, knowledge and empowerment to make a change in their lives and in the community, with the long term goal of achieving equity, inclusion, sustainability, and economic growth for all.

ERT requires good practices that highlight successful cases and are measured to be 'good' through indicators and set frameworks. These practices must also be sustainable and should be envisioned as a pursuit towards sustainable rural transformation, reminding us that rural transformation needs to account for all the components and values that sustainability stands for, without which the transformation that rural people desperately need cannot occur.

This paper starts from identifying the challenges that rural populations are facing to defining the concept of sustainable rural transformation and the role of education in it. It continues by identifying and describing the indicators of good practice, and finally, to describing what good practices for education for sustainable rural transformation require. This paper illustrates and examines the concept of sustainable rural transformation and good practices and explains why education and good practices are important to promote an equitable sustainable rural transformation and human well-being. Additionally, the example of the Lake Tana Project in Ethiopia as a good practice further illustrates the potential for sustainable rural transformation.

### **Rural Populations in Context and Crisis**

The World Bank (2013) refers to a rural population as "people living in rural areas... calculated as the difference between total population and urban population" (para. 1). By definition, rural areas are determined by their small population size. While the livelihoods of the rural poor are diverse across regions and countries, and within countries (Department for International Development [DFID], 2011), the context of rural areas and populations have much in common due to the characteristics they share that separate them from the rest.

The staggering changes in the world economy, the fast pace of globalization, increasing population growth and the world's escalating resource consumption have magnified the level of inequality between and within nations (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2012); the 1.2 billion poorest people today account for 1% of the world's consumption while the richest consume 72% of the world's resources, attesting to the claim that the global utilization of resources and their related impacts have already surpassed sustainable levels under which humanity can operate (United Nations [UN], 2013; United Nations Environment Programme [UNEP], 2014). This has therefore intensified the barriers to meet basic food, shelter, health and sanitation needs, for many of the world's human inhabitants, a concern expressed by the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development (see UN, 1995). Unequal distribution of wealth, resources, and power directly impacts the lives of the poor; the situations of 'chronic poverty' or the 'chronically poor', described as "poor people who have lived during a long period of their lives below the poverty line", are usually defined by structural and social inequalities influenced by multiple discriminations (Ortiz, Moreira Daniels, & Engilbertsdóttir, 2012, p. 49). Further, 'chronic poverty', and poverty in general, is mainly a rural phenomenon that needs to be urgently addressed.

The Human Development Index (HDI) and the Ecological Footprint confirm that rural regions and developing countries are far behind in the scope of human, social, and environmental development. Yet, these challenges are becoming widespread, affecting regions worldwide. According to the Living Planet Report (2012), humans are using fifty percent more resources than the Earth can provide, and unless we adopt radical changes, by 2030, even two planets will not be enough to sustain our life on this planet. The Earth's ecological footprint is currently at an ecological overshoot, taking one and a half years for the Earth to fully generate the renewable resources that people are using in a single year (World Wide Fund for Nature [WWF], 2012). Although high income and developed countries are using up the most natural resources and have the highest ecological footprints, "the world's poorest people feel the impact of environmental degradation most directly... without access to land, clean water, adequate food, fuel and materials, vulnerable people cannot break out of the poverty trap and prosper" (WWF, 2012, p. 11). Thus, the context of the rural poor is verified to be in a critical condition, facing challenges of economic, environmental, and social sustainability. These three dimensions of sustainable development must be integrated. One cannot be sustainable without the sustainability of the other, and we cannot have holistic sustainable development without responding to all three, in balance. According to a UN report, *the High Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda*, this integration has not been achieved by any country. The panel therefore argues that "the moment is right to merge the social, economic, and environmental dimensions of sustainability guiding international development" (2013, p. 5).

### **Economic Sustainability**

Within the reality of our present world, rural populations are in crisis. With a world population of just over 7 billion, almost fifty percent (47.4%) of the world's population lives in rural areas (World Bank, 2013); rural people make up the majority of the world's poor (at least 70%) and 34% of the total population of developing countries is classified as 'extremely poor' with South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa being the regions worst affected by poverty and hunger (International Fund for Agricultural Development [IFAD], 2010), and have the highest rural populations. Despite considerable progress made in reducing poverty in some parts of the world, there are still about 1.4 billion people living on less than US\$1.25 a day, and almost 1 billion people suffering from hunger (DFID, 2011).

### **Social Sustainability**

War and inequalities exist within and between countries. There are currently twenty one countries that have experienced armed conflict since 2000 and many others where criminal violence is common, claiming 7.9 million lives each year (UN, 2013). Gender disparity is also a key issue in the discourse on social sustainability in rural areas. In rural areas, young women are more disadvantaged than young men. The gender gap is most evident in education, where women living in rural poverty face this disadvantage in the early years of schooling. Girls continue to face high barriers to schooling in North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Western Asia. In many countries they are still being denied their right to education, particularly at the primary and secondary level (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2011a). Women and girls also face abuse and violence; depending on the country, from 40 to 80% of women are victims of different forms of violence (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2010). Inequalities are especially unjust when particular groups are systematically disadvantaged, whether it be because of gender, disabilities, race or birthplace.

### **Environmental Sustainability**

Environmental sustainability was the topic of discourse long before the concept of 'sustainable development' was formed. Two declarations signify major achievements that provided grounding for sustainable development; the Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (Stockholm, 1972), and the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro, 1992). In an agenda to eradicate poverty, hunger and disease, the United Nations commissioned the MDGs, with goal number seven set to 'ensure environmental sustainability'. It is integral to discuss environmental sustainability in the context of rural transformation when we are acknowledging the environmental reality of rural populations; there are 1 billion people who are slum dwellers, lacking clean water and sanitation; every year 2 million people globally die prematurely due to indoor and outdoor air pollution; and 1.6 billion people are without access to

modern energy (UN, 2010). The 2011 Human Development Report had warned, according to a UNDP (2011b) article that ‘environmental trends threaten progress for the poor,’ explaining that health and income advancement in developing countries are jeopardized by the failure to act on climate change and habitat destruction, and that wealth and gender disparities are linked to environmental hazards. Yet another reason for rural transformation to be concerned with the environment is that agriculture is the predominant source of livelihood for the rural people. According to UNESCO-INRULED (2012), agriculture will continue to play a central role in tackling the problem of food insecurity, and is the primary means for the poor to earn an income and to have adequate access to food. However, due to scarcer natural resources, energy shortages and climate change, agricultural production is becoming more problematic.

### **Rural Transformation and Sustainable Development**

Rural transformation as a concept and practice is used to convey a vision of an active and positive process of change and development of rural communities (UNESCO-INRULED, 2012). Transformation does not mean only changing the outcome, but changing the context. Ginsburg, Moseley, and Pigozzi (2010) argue that in the process of transformation, education and learning need to be altered in order to effectively contribute to economic, political, and social/cultural transformation of local, national, and global communities.

A goal of rural transformation is to empower people and communities and to advance their agency. According to Amartya Sen’s Capability Approach, focusing on what individuals are able to do, human beings are at the centre of the development process. The Capability Approach is an important outlook on human development as it refers to empowerment and agency, and increasing a group’s or individual’s capacity to make effective choices which will then transform into desired actions and outcomes (Alsop et al., 2006, cited in Tiwari & Ibrahim, 2012). The latter explains that only by enhancing one’s capacity and capability, can one be empowered and act as agents, free to make their own choices.

Moreover, the concept of sustainable development is defined in the UN document *Our Common Future* as “meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Brundtland, 1987). Within the rural context, in developing countries in particular, there are too many needs that are not met; a challenge then, is for rural people to think about sustainability as part of the future even though they are desperate to fulfill their needs of the present. The concept of sustainable development can also be defined as a requirement to “meeting the basic needs of all and extending to all the opportunity to fulfill their aspirations for a better life” (Brundtland, 1987, p. 25) According to Tiwari and Ibrahim (2012), development that is sustainable has to address the problem of the large number of people who live in absolute

poverty and who are unable to satisfy even the most basic of their needs, otherwise there is no sustainable development.

Taking the rural context into focus, in order for rural transformation to be successful, it needs to be sustainable. Sustainable rural transformation is a holistic perspective, bringing the concept of (education for) sustainable development and rural transformation together. The objectives of these two concepts are aligned and have much in common, but most importantly, they both set to improve the livelihood of rural people.

In order to understand what sustainable rural transformation entails, it is worthwhile to identify the values and underlying assumptions that the international perspective of sustainability carries:

- a healthy environment is essential for sustainable development;
- sustainability is a global goal for the betterment of both humanity and the planet;
- sustainability should be achieved through democratic processes;
- sustainability depends on peace, justice, and equity;
- the individual has basic human rights;
- no nation or people should prosper through the explicit impoverishment of another nation;
- diversity, both biological and cultural, is intrinsically valuable;
- development is to be human-centred (i.e., for the betterment of humanity as a whole as opposed to empowerment of a few); and
- intergenerational respect and responsibility will safeguard the rights of future generations. (Hopkins & McKeown, 2002)

The above values and underlying assumptions of sustainable development and sustainability identify closely with the values and requirements of rural transformation: participation and community practices (democratic processes), gender equality (equity), basic services and needs such as healthcare and education (basic human rights), poverty alleviation (no nation should prosper through the impoverishment of another), inclusion (diversity), skills and training for improved agricultural practices and awareness of health issues and natural disasters (a healthy environment).

The Human Development Report 2011 argues that sustainability must be approached as matter of basic social justice, for current and future generations alike (UNDP, 2011a). Sustainability signifies that economic, social, cultural and environmental components of sustainable development must be integrated (UNESCO-UNECE, 2007). The world has seen drastic consequences when one component is ignored or is sacrificed for the other. A significant example is that of developing countries and their race for economic growth (catching up with developed countries in terms of per capita income) in the start of the twenty-first century. This 'catching up' phenomenon saw increase in production, exports and national income in developing countries, but from an ecological perspective, this economic growth has caused serious environmental degradation and increase in carbon

emissions, to name a few, and these continued growth patterns, as the OECD (2012) argues, are not sustainable, in terms of environment and equity. In many cases, it has been clear that growth has been accompanied by increased inequality. Thus, it is necessary for sustainable rural transformation to be equitable. Finding resilient solutions for environmental challenges while also promoting equity and human development must take place in the process of rural transformation, as progress in human development cannot continue without reducing environmental risks and inequality (UNDP, 2011). Figure 2 below illustrates the point, as practices that reach the greatest level of equity and sustainability (mutually reinforcing), allow for human capabilities to be supported equitably and sustainably. For example, we cannot disregard gender inequality (social sustainability) in order to increase environmental sustainability, and vice versa.

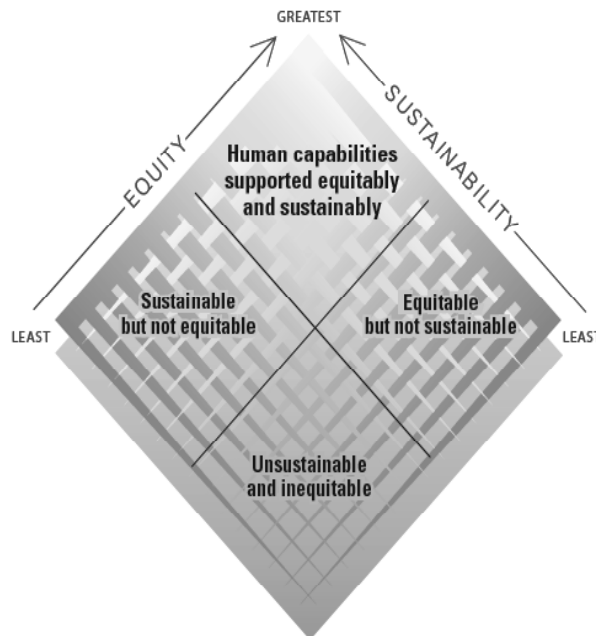


Figure 2. Sustainability and equity in practices (UNDP, 2011a).

### Education for *Sustainable Rural Transformation*

Education in all its forms (formal, non-formal, informal) has gained recognition worldwide as a basic human right and as an instrument used to bring about a transformation in rural people with a vision of improved livelihood, raised self-confidence, and improved values and attitudes which will ensure them a development that is sustainable and increased participation in social and economic change (Chinapah, 2011; Chinapah & Blom, 2012). Nobel laureate, Amartya Sen has, in his essay in the book “Poverty and Inequality,” cogently argued that education, in all its types and forms, can provide tremendous

opportunities for change and development for rural people (Sen, 2006). The role of education has therefore to be brought into sharper focus not just in its instrumental role in alleviating poverty, but also as a core constituent of development and human wellbeing. Education and learning should serve as major avenues for equitable sustainable development with an aim of confronting growing concerns such as poverty, gender inequality, food security, health, employment, protection of the environment, and the management of rural resources by building skills, knowledge and empowerment to make a change in their lives and in the community, with the long term goal of achieving equity, inclusion, sustainability, and economic growth for all. In fact, education's unique power as a catalyst for wider development goals can only be fully realized if it is equitable (UNESCO, 2012). Yet, as education proves to be a necessary catalyst for change, research shows that education is not reaching the poorest and most marginalized people. According to UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS) data, in 2011 there were approximately 57 million out-of-school children of primary school age, with highest numbers in South and West Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa (UIS, 2013). There are 900 million people living on less than US \$1.25 per day, and the majority of them, living in rural Sub-Saharan Africa, India and China, are socially and educationally excluded (UNESCO-INRULED, 2012).

Seeing as agriculture is an important source of livelihood for rural people and has the greatest potential in alleviating rural poverty in developing countries, The Rural Poverty Report 2011 reveals that the agricultural sector has received little attention in order to make it effective in reducing poverty (IFAD, 2010). This is disturbing news considering the trend of urbanization and changing demography as urbanization demands destruction of nature and the reduction of arable land. Along with climate change, these challenges affect mostly the rural poor, as they are the greatest sufferers of environmental degradation (UNESCO-INRULED, 2012). Moreover, these challenges as well as keeping pace with the changing global population (demand for agricultural products is growing) requires more skills, knowledge, and innovation to rethink and apply new strategies, and to adopt new technologies. The 2012 EFA Global Monitoring Report emphasized education as the ladder to build up young people with effective and practical knowledge, "*giving them opportunities to find decent work, earn a living, contribute to their communities and societies, and fulfill their potential*" (UNESCO, 2012, p.3). Education, skills and training are the most hopeful instruments to aid in alleviating rural poverty and provide the tools that rural people need to strengthen sustainability to survive.

New strategies have been implemented in order to provide the learning of skills and knowledge in rural regions as quality of education and technical and vocational training opportunities for rural youth and women have been taken as the pathway to create a skilled labor force, who can prepare themselves to combat poverty and find sufficient employment. This requires that education and learning move outside of the traditional and formal education methods, and implement new ways of learning and teaching. Education for rural



transformation thus requires moving away from the ‘schooling perspective’ towards the ‘learning perspective’ (Chinapah & Blom, 2013). The instrumental use of education and learning has been modified into formal, non-formal and informal practices that can help rural people build capacity, raise self-confidence and increase agency. Each system is practical for a particular population and context. For many marginalized and oppressed rural populations, non-formal and informal educations are the dominant systems that exist in their communities. Both are important in the process of lifelong learning.

Education and learning are thus necessary instruments in good practice, enabling people to gain the knowledge, skills, and tools they need to improve and transform their lives. Those who do not have the opportunities for formal education can enhance their capabilities through non-formal learning and training, such as apprenticeships and farm-based training or informal education. Thus, any kind of education that can bring sustainability in the lives of rural people is crucial to bring rural transformation.

### **Identifying Good Practices**

Although there is no one definition of good practice, the FAO (2013) includes the elemental characteristics in its definition:

A good practice is not only a practice that is good, but a practice that has been proven to work well and produce good results, and is therefore recommended as a model. It is a successful experience, which has been tested and validated, in the broad sense, which has been repeated and deserves to be shared so that a greater number of people can adopt it. (p. 1)

Cases of good practices have managed the risks and reduced errors in order to advance rural growth strategies. In order for these errors to be reduced, rural communities tend to adopt development or transformative strategies that are already implemented elsewhere proven to be reliable, effective and cost efficient (Paveliuc-Olariu, 2009). These cases and strategies can be improved through identifying, communicating and facilitating the transfer of practices that appear to be working successfully elsewhere and have demonstrated to be more successful compared to formulating abstract ideas of the ideal approach. Accordingly, this approach of good practice research necessitates that cases be studied carefully, while identifying and communicating “what works” and identify specific ways to attain them. Furthermore, it is important to identify what conditions are present that contribute to making a practice successful in one location, sometimes referred to as the ‘source site’, so that it can be replicated in another location, referred to as the ‘target site’ (Vesely, 2011).

Vesely (2011) describes good practice as it specifically relates to transformation as follows:

- Good practices are innovative and create opportunities to introduce new procedures and approaches.
- Good practices are associated with successful projects.

- Good practice can be turned into new practices, where it includes elements needed in problem solving, which can be transformed to suit different contexts.

It is important to identify good practices that can properly address the needs of rural people. Yet at present, all efforts or practices to bring about rural transformation in the poorest countries are not effective enough to leave sustainable impact on rural life. Still, there have been remarkable initiatives that have embarked on many of the challenges that rural people are living with (see examples in the following section). These initiatives or good practices have the potential to achieve sustainable rural transformation.

While most studies can identify and describe successful practices, the final step of analyzing practices in terms of their replicability appears to be lacking in many studies of “good practice”. In the critique of transferability and replicability, the context is an important issue. Copying a practice from one context and applying it to another is inefficient and counterproductive. Each context is unique and deserves isolated analysis, and should be the basis of creating a framework/strategy/action plan of the practices and activities. As there may be many factors that affect the success of a particular practice in one location (e.g. contextual factors such as social capital), it is very important to identify all possible factors that contribute to the success of a practice in one location that may or may not be transferable to a target site. Thus, indicators of a good practice can be highly specific and dependent on contextual factors.

### **Good Practices in Education for Sustainable Development and Rural Transformation**

Practices which are effective in improving and changing society and quality of life and which are socially, economically and environmentally sustainable are defined as ‘good practices’ (Chinapah & Blom, 2012). In any initiatives for rural transformation and as a criterion, a ‘good practice’ must consider whether the practice is environmentally, economically and socially sustainable; “A ‘good practice’ meets current needs, in particular the essential needs of the world’s poorest, without compromising the ability to address future needs” (FAO, 2014). A good practice, in addition, must meet the criterion that: equity and sustainability be mutually reinforcing, while supporting human capabilities; the transformative process of rural life and people to be in the path towards empowerment and agency; and ultimately, to overcome poverty and improve the quality of life and environment.

Sustainability is a major indicator for good practices in ERT, as indicated in the UNESCO document, *Good Practices for Education for Sustainable Development in the UNECE Region*. The descriptions that follow can be considered equally applicable to ERT. According to UNESCO-UNECE (2007), good practices in Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) “*are initiatives... that demonstrate good practice, generate ideas and contribute to policy development*” (p. 187) and do the following:

1. Focus on the educational and learning dimensions of sustainable development
2. Develop new and creative solutions to common problems, such as: ways to discover what the key local issues of sustainable development are; ways to adapt processes to relevant teaching and learning strategies; ways of fostering links between learning situations and the community; ways of integrating local knowledge and culture curriculum development processes enabling content to be decided as locally relevant
3. Make a difference. They demonstrate a positive and tangible impact on the living conditions, quality of life of the individuals, groups or communities concerned. They seek to bridge gaps between different societal actors/sectors and are inclusive, in order to allow new partners to join the implementing agents/bodies.
4. Have a sustainable effect. They contribute to sustained improvement of living conditions. They must integrate economic, social, cultural and environmental components of sustainable development and reflect their interaction/interdependency in their design and implementations.
5. Have the potential for replication. They provide effective methodologies for transdisciplinary and multi-sectoral cooperation. They serve as models for generating policies and initiatives elsewhere.
6. Offer some elements of evaluation. They have been and can be evaluated in terms of the criteria of innovation, success and sustainability by both experts and the people concerned.

Furthermore, good practice in sustainable rural transformation, according to Csaki (2001), should include the following elements:

- Multi-disciplinary and pluralist approaches to address poverty and social and gender equity objectives.
- Integrated approaches – integrating hardware (infrastructure and agricultural technologies) with software (institutions and capacity-building).
- Solutions that are based on community participation and empowerment, strengthening rural governance
- Replicability (scalability) needs to be a design objective.

More specifically, good practices in ESD should meet the following criteria:

- Be locally appropriate, contextually sensitive
- Involve the community
- Involve different stakeholders
- Include appropriate skills and learning
- Empower and advance agency
- Respect all life forms
- Create opportunities
- Promote gender equality

- Stress the need for social and human development along with economic and environmental development
- Recognize the critical importance of sustainable livelihoods
- Sustain the environment and natural resources
- Identify skills and learning as critical to achieving transformation and sustainable livelihoods
- Aim to create sustainable transformation that will be shared to one another and to generations to come. (Horton, 2005; UNESCO-INRULED, 2012; Csaki, 2001)

On the basis of the above definitions and criteria, it can be surmised that existing good practices have the potential to exemplify sustainable rural transformation. As long as strategies and frameworks troubleshoot the problems of the particular context and create practices that address sustainability and rural challenges, as well as include the elements above, there will be greater possibilities for transformation and resilience.

Below is an example of a good practice that has been identified as a successful case that reaches towards sustainable practices and has enabled rural transformation. This practice has aimed to improve environmental, social and economic sustainability of rural people.

### **Community-Based Integrated Natural Resources Management Project, Ethiopia**

The Community-based Integrated Natural Resources Management Project in Lake Tana Watershed, Ethiopia, led by IFAD, is a seven year project aimed to combat land degradation in the watershed to protect and restore ecosystems and their essential services – a key to reducing poverty. Lake Tana is important in economic and ecological terms, and it is renowned for its biodiversity. The project's objectives are to enhance the access of poor rural people to natural resources such as land and water, and to introduce improved technologies for agricultural production, mainly through sustainable land management.

#### **Context**

Ethiopia is one of the world's poorest countries, with nearly half of the population living under the poverty line, and more than 12 million people are chronically or periodically food insecure. Moreover, degradation of natural resources is a crucial issue in Ethiopia. The country loses some 2 billion tons of fertile soil annually as a result of land degradation. In particular, siltation of water bodies is a major threat to the development of irrigation. Although 90% of the area's rapidly growing population of over 2.5 million depends on subsistence agriculture for their livelihoods, agricultural performance has improved only a little over the past fifty years and food security has deteriorated – direct results of the ongoing degradation of natural resources.

The project benefits:

- To benefit 450,000 households (through improved incomes and food security)
- Establishes and strengthens community based organizations
- Trains community members
- Using participatory approaches, project involves communities in the decision-making processes as to empower them, and builds on indigenous knowledge and institutions to promote sustainable land management, enhances collective action.
- Promotes off-farm employment opportunities
- Encourages farmers to invest in land improvement
- Promotes income-generating activities for the poorest members
- Empowers women to have a stake in conservation
- Objectives:
- Support implementation of about 650 watershed management plans
- Restore the productivity of a large area of degraded land (more than 32,000 hectares)
- Increase the productivity of agriculture, including forests and fisheries
- Improve food security and the incomes of people living within the Lake Tana watershed
- To increase carbon sequestration
- To foster an enabling environment for integrating sustainable land management best practices into regional policies, strategies and development programmes. (IFAD, 2009; 2013)

### **Good Practice of Sustainable Rural Transformation**

The elements of the Lake Tana Watershed project (*see* Box 1) reflect many of the components described of a good practice for sustainable rural transformation, namely:

**Solutions that are based on community participation and empowerment, strengthening rural governance.** The project places significance to the contextual and participatory/community-based approach, with commitment to community capacity building. Local communities are actively involved in planning the project and will take the lead role in a wide variety of activities.

**Models for generating policies and initiatives elsewhere.** The project aims to foster an enabling environment for integrating sustainable land management best practices into regional policies, strategies and development programmes. According to UNESCO-UNECE (2007), good practices have great potential for replication, which can in turn serve as models for developing policies and practices in other locations. The project intends to document and promote traditional and recent local innovations for replication throughout the region.

**Sustain the environment and natural resources.** The project aims to restore ecological balance in this globally significant ecosystem. Conserving, protecting and rehabilitating the natural resource base will result in invaluable long-term benefits.

**Identify skills and learning as critical to achieving transformation and sustainable livelihoods.** The project provides training at individual, community and government levels to help people gain the skills and knowledge they need to practice improved sustainable land management.

An aim most critical for sustainable rural transformation is to achieve sustainable livelihoods by meeting the needs for social and human development along with economic and environmental development. The Lake Tana Watershed Project has shown to be successful (see IFAD 2009; 2013) in integrating socio-economic and ecological issues, thus heightening the tension between livelihood and conservation aims; the effort to bridge productivity enhancement, environmental protection, and social well-being. Thus, such a good practice exemplifies the mutually reinforcing relationship between sustainability and equity (as described earlier).

According to German, Mowo, and Opondo (2012), integrated natural resources management initiatives are successful in that they consist elements, such as *Integration, Participation, Collective Action, and Institutional Innovations*, which enable the involvement of different stakeholders, community participation and decision-making, and innovative practices that will generate new policies and replicability. The Lake Tana Watershed Project is comprised of these elements, which drive to transform rural communities by empowering communities through community-based approaches and training at community level. Education and training, whether organizational or technical, should be seen as an integral component in rural initiatives in order for real transformation to take place. With an aim to empower communities and individuals as well as to encourage capacity building, initiatives with successful training programmes increase the chance for transformation that is resilient.

### Conclusion

This paper has identified rural challenges and accordingly underscored the need to emphasize the concept of sustainable development and sustainability within the framework of education for rural transformation. The facts reveal that we are living outside the capacity limits of our planet, and this is evident by the detrimental effects of environmental degradation and the lack of resources, particularly for the rural poor as they are most directly affected. This reality demands researchers, governments, NGO's, and community leaders to reflect on the practices that are currently being planned and implemented to understand if they are truly addressing the needs of the rural poor and their context, and if they are sustainable.

Sustainability is approached as a matter of basic social justice and equity. In order for practices to be equitable they must work towards the goals of sustainable development. Sustainable transformation as an active and positive process of change and development can be possible with education, a basic human right, as the catalyst to such a change. } Transformation through education can empower and advance agency, and create opportunities that may break the poverty cycle and improve the quality of life. In order for this to be possible, practices for rural transformation need to be contextual, and they require indicators and elements that can be used to identify good practices. The elements of what makes a good practice are described in this paper, with the example of the Lake Tana Project in Ethiopia, which exhibits an initiative towards sustainable rural transformation that can improve the life of rural people, their environment, and enhance resilience. The example of the Lake Tana Project has further demonstrated the potential for rural communities to participate in their own transformative process. Such good practices show the immense potential for sustainable rural transformation and for the replicability of such practices.

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