

E-Discussion: On Skills for Rural Employment

Hosted on the Global Skills for Employment Knowledge Sharing Platform (Global KSP)

From 6 to 17 June 2016. Visit: www.skillsforemployment.org

Rural areas contribute significantly to employment and economic growth in many countries. Of the developing world's 5.98 billion people, close to 3.4 billion live in rural areas, and a significant number depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. Yet poverty is more extensive and severe in rural than urban areas, and providing productive employment and decent work for rural workers has become an increasingly important development challenge¹ at the national and international levels.

Decent work remains out of reach for billions of rural workers. Most of them work in the informal economy and are often vulnerable to low-income, poor-quality jobs that are unrecognized or unprotected by law. They struggle with widespread underemployment, lack of rights at work, inadequate social protection, and little or no representative voice. What's more, rural areas are more likely than urban areas to have inadequate transport, access to sanitation and health services, or a consumer base that can support small and medium enterprises. They also face a paucity of economic opportunities, underinvestment, poor infrastructure and public services, including education, and, in many cases, weak governance and underdeveloped markets.



With 80 per cent of the world's working poor living in rural areas and 97 per cent of the world's rural population living in developing countries, creating more and better jobs is crucial to sustainable rural development, poverty reduction and helping more women and youth become successful workers, producers, and entrepreneurs. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the scale of the challenge is particularly enormous with some 10 million young people entering the labour market each year².

Improving the efficiency and functionality of labour markets can increase the quantity and quality of employment in rural areas. Yet, in terms of skills development, people in rural areas are often less likely than people in urban areas to have access to education and training. Often, training is concentrated in urban and semi-urban areas with limited outreach to rural communities. In addition, trainers may be unqualified, equipment and technology outdated, and teaching and training methods ill-suited to rural contexts. Further, the training offered may not provide the skills rural workers need to improve productivity and competitiveness.

The importance of “ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning”, and “promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all” has been enshrined in Goals 4 and 8 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by the international community in September 2015. To meet these objectives, broad and multi-stakeholder based social dialogue between governments, employers and workers will be needed to formulate and implement long-term, integrated rural development policies, strategies and programmes as part of national employment and skills development policies.

The main challenge in rural areas will be equipping workers with the skills they will need to benefit from investment and technological change in rural areas and agriculture, such as sustainable farming practices, and access to non-agricultural work. Promoting technological change in rural areas will also be vital for enhancing food security and protecting the environment (Sustainable Development Goal 2). Equally important is to expand rural employment opportunities to ensure that working in rural areas, whether in agriculture or non-agricultural work, can help stem the tide of rural-urban migration and reduce poverty.

¹ International Labour Office (ILO). 2008. Promotion of rural employment for poverty reduction, Report IV, International Labour Conference, 97th Session, Geneva, 2008 (Geneva), http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_norm/@relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_091721.pdf, accessed on 9 May 2016.

² CTA Policy Brief No. 4. February 2012. Increasing rural employment in sub-Saharan Africa, http://www.cta.int/images/docman-files/policy_papers/4_Increasing_rural_employment_in_sub_Saharan_Africa.pdf, accessed on 10 May 2016.

Effective skills strategies may include a number of interventions such as linking formal with non-formal training; entrepreneurship training; upgrading and promoting traditional and informal apprenticeship systems; linking financial and non-financial services; and, developing labour-based approaches to improving rural infrastructure as a way of transferring skills and knowledge among rural populations³.

Improving access to good education and training is equally important and may include expanding the outreach of schools and training institutions to under-served rural areas; reducing financial barriers to affordable technical and vocational training; promoting a gender-responsive learning environment; encouraging the training of women and men in trades not stereotypically associated with one gender; enhancing mobile or distance learning through information and communication technologies (ICT); and providing career guidance and practical labour market information.

Over the years, the ILO has promoted rural skills development primarily through community-based training initiatives. The Training for Rural Economic Empowerment (TREE) programme has promoted local economic and employment opportunities for rural women and men, and in particular disadvantaged groups in more than 20 African and Asian countries. The ILO's Small Enterprise Programme's Start and Improve Your Business (SIYB) has also contributed to reducing poverty and strengthening livelihoods in rural areas through entrepreneurship development aimed at women and youth and building the capacity of individual enterprises.

The Global Skills for Employment Knowledge Sharing Platform (Global KSP) would like to focus this E-Discussion on rural skills development. Over the next two weeks, the E-Discussion will take place in two parts: during the first week, the Global KSP welcomes your views and opinions on the current situation and challenges facing people living in rural areas. During the final week, the dialogue will explore what works in promoting and sustaining skills development in rural areas.

Week one questions for E-Discussion:

Current skills situation and challenges

1. What kinds of skills do people living in rural communities need most to increase productivity, generate income and strengthen local economies?
2. What are the main challenges faced by the people living in rural areas in accessing quality and relevant education and training? What particular challenges do women living in rural areas face in this area?
3. What challenges have you encountered in delivering training to rural populations?
4. To what extent are national skill development/TVET strategies addressing the needs of women and men living in rural areas? And, what are some of the challenges to financing training in these areas?

Week two questions for E-Discussion:

Initiatives and what works

5. Which measures have been introduced to boost employment in rural areas in both agricultural and non-agricultural sectors, and which types of skills are foreseen to be in high demand as part of an integrated rural strategy?

³ ILO.2014. Policy brief: Skills for rural employment and development. ILO Geneva.

http://www.skillsforemployment.org/KSP/es/Details/index.htm?dn=WCMSTEST4_155053, accessed on 10 May 2016.

6. What works best in delivering skills development to a significant number of people who live in rural areas in a cost efficient way? And what is the best way to sustain the delivery of skill development in rural areas over the long term?
7. What are the examples of skills initiatives and programmes that have improved gender equality and social inclusion in rural areas?
8. What are the examples of skills initiatives and programmes that have improved the outcome of training, i.e. earnings and decent work in rural areas?
9. How do we ensure private sector participation in skills development in rural areas?
10. How can modern information and communication technology (mobile phones, internet, interactive CDs and DVDs) be effectively harnessed to deliver skills to people in rural areas?

END

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