

## **Summary Report: New Module on Rural Teachers for the Teacher Task Force's *Teacher Policy Development Guide***

**Note:** This summary report was drafted based on presentations given by the following colleagues during a consultation meeting, which provides background information, rationales, and initial ideas for the new module

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### **Main Topics**

- Overview of the Teacher Policy Development Guide (TPDG)
- Rationale for a Dedicated Rural Teachers Module
- Outline of the New Rural Teachers Module for the TPDG

## **Overview of the Teacher Task Force's *Teacher Policy Development Guide***

### **1. Background of the Teacher Task Force and its *Teacher Policy Development Guide***

The International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030 (TTF), established in 2008, functions as a global partnership alliance aimed at addressing the global teacher shortage. The TTF brings together various stakeholders and organizations committed to ensuring that every classroom has a sufficient number of well-qualified teachers. In 2013, the TTF steering committee initiated the development of the TPDG to provide guidance on forming holistic teacher policies aligned with national education sector plans.

### **2. Purpose of the Teacher Policy Development Guide**

The TPDG has its roots in the normative instruments developed by ILO and UNESCO - the *Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers*, as well as other instruments implemented by the United Nations and its Member States. It serves as a comprehensive framework designed to assist member states in developing coherent and effective national teacher policies that align with the overall national vision and education sector plans. This guide is also integrated with other key sector plans (e.g., ICT, STEM, health, finance, public governance).

The TPDG outlines clear steps in preparing a national teacher policy, including assigning clear roles and responsibilities, budgeting for each identified action, establishing timeframe, and drafting an implementation plan. It is intended to be adapted at the country level to address challenges related to teacher recruitment, career development, training, and more. It is designed for public education authorities, ministries, private education providers, and other national stakeholders.

Importantly, the guide does not aim to create additional policies that fragment the education sector. Rather, it seeks to strengthen national education sector plans and the governance of Ministries of Education by providing clearer guidance on recruiting, managing, and training teachers.

### **3. Guiding Principles for Developing Effective Teacher Policies**

- 1) Setting clear vision or mission statement and objectives
- 2) Establishing targets, benchmarks and timelines
- 3) Having comprehensive coverage of the nine dimension proposed by TPDG
- 4) Assessing the environment: difficulties, challenges, and gaps
- 5) Requiring relevant data and management
- 6) Having adequate funding for activities outlined in the national teacher policy implementation plan
- 7) Building on the widest participation and commitment of different stakeholders
- 8) Evaluation and revision

### **4. The Nine Dimensions of Teacher Policy**

- 1) Teacher recruitment and retention

- 2) Teacher education (both pre-service and in-service)
- 3) Deployment
- 4) Career structure/path
- 5) Teachers' employment and working conditions
- 6) Teacher reward and remuneration
- 7) Teacher standards
- 8) Teacher accountability

Note: According to the TTF's *Global Report on Teachers*, accountability can be a double-edged sword. While it provides clear standards, it can also contribute to teacher attrition in certain contexts if not managed well.

- 9) School governance

These nine dimensions are described in detail in the TPDG. The guide recommends addressing all dimensions when developing national teacher policies. Depending on the national context, some dimensions may be merged or approached differently, but all aspects are recommended to be considered to ensure a realistic approach to teacher policies.

## 5. The Five Phases of Teacher Policy Development

- 1) Issue identification and agenda-setting
- 2) Policy formulation – analysis, principles and options/choices  
Note: This phase, which includes analysis, setting principles, identifying activities, options, and results, and drafting the policy, is often the most complex and time-consuming.
- 3) Adoption/decision  
Note: This phase can involve technical and political negotiations. While governments lead policy development, the adoption phase often requires complex discussions, including financial considerations.
- 4) Implementation – communication and dissemination
- 5) Monitoring and evaluation  
Note: Monitoring begins during the implementation phase and continues throughout the policy lifecycle, culminating in evaluation. The outcome may lead to updates or the formulation of a new policy, depending on the government's decision.

## 6. Lessons from Implementation

Feedback from countries that have used the TPDG reveals that while the guide is useful, some nations feel the need to complement it with additional resources. Another lesson is the importance of detailed implementation plans, which are sometimes integrated into national policies or developed as separate documents. The TPDG remains a flexible global framework, allowing for country-specific adaptations in its implementation.

# UNESCO INRULED's Rationale for a Dedicated Rural Teachers Module

## 1. Background

In many low- and middle-income countries, rural populations still account for half or more of the total population. Achieving equity and quality education for rural communities is essential to fulfilling the goals of Education 2030. The rural teaching force plays a critical role in ensuring that equitable education is provided, leaving no one behind.

## 2. INRULED's Work on Rural Teachers

For three decades, since its establishment in 1994, UNESCO's International Research and Training Centre for Rural Education (INRULED) has focused on advancing rural education and development. In 2011, INRULED began addressing issues related to teachers, particularly those in rural areas, by launching research initiatives and developing support systems for rural teachers. These efforts have produced valuable reports, including:

- *Developing Support Systems for Rural Teachers' Continuing Professional Development*
- *Improving Quality of Education by Supporting Rural Teachers: Practice in Africa and China*
- *A Guide to Developing a Support System for Rural Teachers*

### **3. Proposal for Developing a Rural Teacher Module within the TPDG**

While these publications emphasize professional development, teacher-related issues must be addressed comprehensively. This includes not only professional development but also teacher preparation, deployment, retention, well-being and more. These broader considerations need to develop a comprehensive rural teacher policy guide.

Moreover, although the Teacher Policy Development Guide (TPDG) is comprehensive, it offers limited focus on the unique needs of rural teachers. Given the large number of teachers working in rural contexts, tailored support from governments or public institutions. A unique support system is required, encompassing teacher preparation, deployment, and retention, to better serve rural teaching needs.

## **TTF's Rationale for a Dedicated Rural Teachers Module**

### **1. Background**

While there are already several modules in place within the TPDG, a dedicated module on rural teachers is essential due to the unique challenges they face. Rural teachers often experience distinct circumstances, requiring tailored solutions. Globally, there is increasing recognition of the need for greater policy support for rural teachers, particularly concerning their working conditions. The United Nations Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on the Teaching Profession, convened in 2022, acknowledged these varying conditions by location, emphasising the vulnerabilities of teachers in rural settings regarding safety and living conditions. This highlights the need for long-term investment in supporting rural teachers.

### **2. Challenges Facing Rural Teachers**

Several challenges rural teachers face include:

- A shortage of qualified teachers in rural areas, especially in STEM subjects.
- A lack of female teachers in many rural contexts.
- Insufficient resources, such as devices and connectivity, especially highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic.

One key recommendation from the High-Level Panel, under Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, is the provision of bonuses and incentives—such as transport and housing—to encourage experienced teachers to serve in rural, indigenous, and tribal remote settings.

### **3. Historical Precedence and International Recommendations**

The need for specialised attention to rural teachers is not new. The *ILO/UNESCO Recommendation Concerning the Status of Teachers*, established decades ago, includes special provisions for teachers in remote areas. These recommendations set standards regarding working conditions, such as:

- Decent housing, preferably free or subsidised, for teachers and their families.
- Travel allowances and paid removal expenses for teachers transferred to remote areas.
- Hardship allowances to compensate teachers facing challenging living conditions.
- Ensuring that professional standards are not compromised due to rural assignments.

### **4. Addressing TPDG Dimensions in Rural Contexts**

The TPDG includes nine key dimensions. All nine dimensions are relevant for rural teachers:

- 1) Recruitment and Retention: Recruitment is hindered by a lack of data on rural communities and teacher attrition rates, making it difficult to project future needs accurately. There are issues around contractual teachers.
- 2) Teacher Education: Qualifications of rural teachers tend to be lower than their urban counterparts. This highlights the need for policies aimed at improving the level of teacher training. Strategies to mitigate these gaps should include developing rural networks, establishing communities of practice, providing allowances for travel and training, and leveraging online and blended learning approaches. Additionally, specialised training for multi-grade classrooms, which are common in rural settings, is crucial.
- 3) Deployment: Rural areas frequently suffer from a shortage of teachers, resulting in large class sizes and high pupil-teacher ratios. There is a need for strategies that attract teachers to rural regions, including better deployment systems that provide housing (especially for women). Local recruitment combined with ongoing in-service training can ensure stability and equitable distribution of teachers across the country.

- 4) **Career Structure:** Career opportunities for teachers in rural areas are often limited. It is essential to create flexible career pathways, including horizontal career advancements. This would enable teachers to become specialists or experts within their schools and communities, particularly in areas where vertical career progression may be constrained.
- 5) **Working Conditions:** Teachers in rural areas face high workloads due to larger class sizes and inadequate infrastructure. Developing special funds to improve school facilities, ICT access, and teaching resources is vital.
- 6) **Reward and Remuneration:** Incentives are crucial for attracting and retaining teachers in rural areas. Developing tailored reward systems—including allowances for housing, transport, and hardship—can help ensure that teachers, especially women, are supported in these challenging environments where safety and reliable housing may be concerns. Community teachers should also receive fair compensation.
- 7) **Teacher Standards:** Rural teachers often work under different conditions and play additional roles, such as community leaders and agents of socio-economic and sustainable development. Therefore, it is important to develop standards that reflect the unique circumstances of rural teachers. These should consider the diverse practices used in multi-grade classrooms and other community-driven educational settings.
- 8) **Teacher Accountability:** Accountability frameworks for rural teachers need to be more flexible to account for limited resources and the scarcity of qualified teachers.
- 9) **School Governance:** Governance structures in rural areas must be designed to cope with higher rates of isolation from district and sector offices.

## **5. Existing and Future Modules for TPDG**

Beyond the need for a rural teachers module, the TTF has already developed several relevant modules:

- The Crisis-Sensitive Teacher Policy Planning module, released in March 2022.
- The Costing Teacher Policies module, to be launched in January in 2025.

Additional upcoming modules will address gender, greening education, climate change, and information and communication technologies (ICT).

## **outline of the Module on Rural Teachers of TPDG**

### **1. Principle: Equity and Social Justice**

A key concept in this new module on rural teachers is equity and social justice. It goes beyond addressing rurality to tackling the broader issues of marginality and inequity that exist in society. Whether the focus is on gender, conflict zones, or rural teachers, these issues reflect wider societal disparities. Rural areas, in particular, expose inequities in both the distribution and work of teachers. This guide must address underserved schools and learners—whether they are in geographically rural areas, underserved urban schools, or remote regions like mountainous areas. It's crucial to recognize that "rural" is not a single definition. In some cases, rural refers to physical isolation, in others, to a lack of resources or socio-economic challenges. Therefore, equity and social justice must serve as the central guiding principles of the module.

### **2. Context**

The effectiveness of education is not solely determined by having qualified and motivated teachers, but by their ability to engage with specific classroom contexts. Equity and quality depend on how well teachers adapt their practices to their students' needs. Learning disparities often arise within individual classrooms, underscoring the importance of in-school differences as much as between-school variations. At the heart of equitable education is the translation of teacher practices into meaningful classroom interactions, while elements like professional development and school climate act as supportive factors.

#### **1) Defining "Rural" and Its Impact on Teachers**

The module must clearly define what constitutes "rural." Is it purely geospatial, defined by distance from urban centers? Or is rurality characterized by isolation from resources, a condition that could apply in both urban and rural settings? This must be contextualized based on country-specific conditions. Addressing cultural assumptions about rurality is crucial, as is ensuring that educational materials reflect the real experiences of rural learners. One key tension is the balance between broadening students' horizons and addressing local realities. For instance,

in South Africa's rural education policy, there was debate over whether to teach about airplanes to children who had no exposure to them. The module must navigate this balance between expanding perspectives and contextual relevance.

**2) Alignment with Broader Policies**

The rural teacher policy guide must align with other education policies, such as access to early childhood care and education, which is often lacking in rural areas. It should also consider broader macro policies, such as affirmative action for rural teachers, or even specific minority groups, to address societal inequalities.

**3) Guiding Principles**

A core component of the module is articulating guiding principles, beginning with a clear vision for what role teachers play in society. The policy must explicitly address equity as a core principle, with recruitment, retention, and preparation of teachers reflecting this. For example, multi-grade teaching, a common feature of rural schools, requires specific strategies that are backed by evidence and context-specific solutions.

**3. Dimensions of the Rural Teacher Module**

**1) Initial Teacher Education**

Research from 2015 suggested that initial teacher education should include a module on rural education, but it should be generic to all teachers, not just those intended for rural areas. This would provide all teachers with the tools to understand and support underserved groups, contributing to a more equitable education system.

**2) Continuous Professional Development**

In rural areas, professional development often occurs through informal social networks that enable peer-to-peer learning.

**3) Deployment**

Deployment is not just about numbers; it's about balance. Schools in rural areas need a diverse range of teachers across subjects like STEM, the arts, and physical education. However, financial constraints often force governments to prioritize certain subjects, such as STEM. A classic issue in deployment involves assigning newly qualified teachers to rural areas. While this may seem like a good idea, posting teachers to poorly resourced rural schools can result in a negative experience, effectively turning these positions into hardship posts. This unintended consequence can discourage teachers from working in underserved areas for a long time.

**4) Working Conditions**

Financial incentives alone are not enough to retain teachers in rural areas. Adequate housing, healthcare, and infrastructure are crucial to making rural postings sustainable. For example, in Nigeria, when a 10% rural allowance was introduced, it had little impact. An increase of around 80% was needed to make the incentive meaningful, which might as well have been a salary increase. Therefore, working conditions must be viewed holistically, not just in financial terms.

**5) Rewards, Remuneration, and Incentives**

The module must focus on balancing financial and non-financial incentives. Governments should consider giving teachers a choice of incentives rather than imposing a one-size-fits-all solution. This approach could lead to a more flexible and effective incentive system.

**6) Career Structure**

It should explore whether working in a remote area allows for accelerated promotion and what this means for equity in career progression. Accelerating career advancement in these areas can conflict with the principle of equal opportunities for all teachers.

**7) Teachers Standards**

A key question is whether there should be specific standards for rural teachers or whether all teachers should adhere to universal standards. Balancing local specificity with universal requirements is a significant challenge.

**8) Accountability**

Teachers in remote areas are more accountable to their local communities than to the formal education system, which is often designed with urban schools in mind. The module must consider alternative accountability systems that reflect the realities of rural contexts.

**9) School Governance**

Effective leadership is crucial, but attracting subject advisors and school leaders to rural areas is challenging. The system must support leadership development in remote areas with the necessary resources and strategies.

#### **10) Community Engagement**

In rural and remote areas, the relationship between teachers and the community is much closer than in urban settings. Teachers often live within the communities they serve, and their personal and professional lives are deeply intertwined with those of the local population. This requires a different approach to community engagement.

### **4. Case Studies**

#### **1) The Importance of Context**

Case studies must be evidence-based and show a deep understanding of context because context is critical for successful implementation. While the guide may generalize lessons, it must always emphasize that context—political economy, culture, values, and belief systems—matters in policy development.

#### **2) Three Types of Case Studies**

- Individual Country Case Studies:

These studies offer a comprehensive analysis of a single country, exploring all or selected aspects of the rural TPDG guide. They focus on specific issues, policies, and practices related to rural development within that country.

- Regional Case Studies:

These studies investigate a group of countries within a defined geographic region. They can cover all or selected dimensions of the rural TPDG guide and examine common challenges and solutions in rural development across the region.

- Regional Case Studies with Selected Country Exemplars:

These studies combine a regional overview with detailed analyses of one or two specific countries within that region. They address all or selected dimensions of the rural TPDG guide, providing insights into regional trends while highlighting illustrative examples from the chosen countries.

The selection of regions or countries will focus on those experiencing significant challenges or demonstrating exemplary practices in providing qualified and motivated teachers in rural contexts. Case studies specifically addressing conflict and post-conflict situations in rural regions are particularly encouraged.

#### **3) Case Studies from the Global South and North**

We often focus on the Global South, but inequality is also rising in the Global North. This growing inequality in wealthy countries highlights the relevance of including case studies from rural schools in those places. While the primary focus remains on the Global South, these Global North examples provide useful insights.

### **5. Balancing Evidence with Policy Judgments**

While evidence should inform policy decisions, it's important to acknowledge that evidence is often mixed and does not provide definitive policy solutions. For instance, while research might suggest that multi-grade classrooms are effective, it doesn't mean they should be implemented universally. Similarly, data showing that small, single-teacher schools are inefficient must be weighed against the social consequences of closing them, particularly in rural communities. Policy decisions must balance social benefits with financial considerations, interpreting evidence within a broader societal context.