



Education For All – a Human Right



Ten years of Swedish Support to Basic Education

Education for all — a living objective

Universal education may seem a utopian target in a world where nearly a billion adults are illiterate and over 100 million children have no chance of going to school. But the target cannot be set any lower. Education is a human right for every single person on earth, and also a precondition for poverty reduction and social development.

During the 1960s and '70s many former colonies became independent. Their new governments saw expanding the education sector as a self-evident task. Great progress was rapidly made, and literacy rose worldwide.

At the 1990 World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand, it was evident that progress had ground to a halt in the 1980s. Since the developing countries, often heavily in debt, were in economic crisis the resources they devoted to education had decreased. Higher education institutions also tended to have become a higher spending priority than primary schools.

Besides falling enrollment, it was clear that education quality had declined. Inadequate funds prompted many teachers to resign owing to their low pay. Schools fell into disrepair; textbooks were scarce. The pupils were simply learning less, and many dropped out after only a couple of years at school.

More children attending school

Ten years after the Jomtien conference, this downward trend appears to be bottoming out. The most encouraging sign is the expansion of primary schooling, enabling more children — including a rising proportion of girls — to attend school. But the situation varies from one country to another; in Ethiopia, for example, only a tenth of girls are at school. In many of the poorest countries, resources have been devoted mainly to building more schools, while the quality of education has remained very low. Nonetheless, fewer pupils from basic education are now dropping out than ten years ago.

In particular, over the past decade the drive to boost literacy and provide basic education for all has come to the fore again, after the obscurity into which these issues lapsed in the 1980s. And this is a vital point to emphasise for the decade ahead. The target stands fast: universal education — including girls, poor children and the many adults who never had the chance to learn how to read and write.

Democracy —



Bolivian girls doing their homework. The Bolivian school reform has meant that poor children

Swedish support to basic education began with support for school construction, continued with teacher training and textbooks, and is today channelled directly into developing countries' own budgets for their overall education programmes.

This is a simplified summary of how our support to basic education has changed. Its early form conferred many benefits, but the process of generalising the good examples was difficult, and the projects did not always survive when aid ceased.

To reach the poorest boys and girls, it is not enough to build schools in their areas. It is essential for teaching to be in the local languages, using methods based on

Sector programme support.

Jointly with other donors, Sida provides budget support to the whole Mozambican school sector. This cooperation was worked out in a dialogue between the Mozambican government and the donors, where needs were analysed and common objectives — such as giving priority to the poorest of the poor, and especially girls — adopted.

Union solidarity.

The Swedish Teachers' Union supports the formation of teachers' unions in several developing countries. Thanks to these inputs, 250,000 teachers around the world have received basic union training — one of many examples of support through Swedish NGOs. The Teachers' Union receives grants from Sida through the Council of International Trade Union Cooperation.

- a key to educational quality



PHOTO: CLAES HERRANDER/PHOENIX

Cooperation with education ministries and departments in other countries does not lead to rapid improvements. But it can bring about far reaching changes in the long run. In this process, nations' capacity to deal with their own problems is also boosted.

It is gratifying that ever more children are going to school and the share of girls is rising. But quality of education must also be addressed. Otherwise, basic literacy and numeracy skills may not be achieved.

It is the low-paid, hardworking teachers that must implement education reforms and fulfil the target of education for all. Meanwhile, teachers' working conditions have further deteriorated in many countries. The status formerly enjoyed by the profession is falling along with pay rates and the decision-makers' failure to provide adequate support. To reverse this negative spiral, Sida has supported teacher training in Ethiopia, Guinea-Bissau, Namibia, Sri Lanka and Tanzania, and is working for the situation of teachers to be addressed in education sector plans. Respect for teachers union rights is a vital precondition for improving their working conditions.

Democracy needs to be practised, in schools as elsewhere. Education is better and more appreciated where teachers, pupils and parents can join in, in shaping it. To assist democratisation in this sector Sida is, for example, supporting the reform of teacher training in Namibia. The aim is for teachers to be trained to listen to children and to stimulate their interest in seeking knowledge for themselves.

Universal basic education presupposes lifelong learning. Literacy and adult education will be priority tasks for a long time to come. Over the past few years, Sida has supported literacy programmes and adult education in Bangladesh, Eritrea and Namibia.

Children are taught in their own language, and also have a say in the teaching.

the pupils' own desire to learn, and to have competent teachers. In many cases, this requires reform of the entire teaching/learning system. In the past decade, Sida's development work has been increasingly characterised by support to reform work that gives priority to basic education.

Most of Sida's partners in education are Eastern and Southern African nations. In Asia, cooperation is now focused on Bangladesh, Laos, Cambodia and Sri Lanka; in Latin America, Bolivia is the main partner. Sida is also considering starting cooperation with more African countries. NGOs and universities also obtain Swedish aid for education in many more countries.

Lok Jumbish incentivates children to attend school. Sida has supported Lok Jumbish in 13 of the poorest districts in Rajasthan, India. Interested villagers form groups that compile lists of the children, mostly girls, who are not receiving any education, and then draw up an action plan to enable them to start school. The group also works to improve schools and teaching.

Literacy drive in Namibia. Over 100,000 Namibians have taken part in the national literacy programme conducted with Sida's support since 1990. Besides the basics of the 'three Rs', participants have also had the opportunity to learn English, which is essential for taking part in Namibian society.

Books for all. After Mozambique's liberation the old textbooks, with their pictures of white children in European settings, were discarded. With Sida's support the country has set up its own textbook production and distribution system. Schoolbooks on every subject are now available to virtually all pupils.

Bolivian school reform. Growing numbers of poor children in the mountain villages are now being taught both in Spanish and in the local Indian languages. The pupils can also influence the teaching, and therefore learn and enjoy school more. Sida and other donors have supported reform of Bolivia's education system in collaboration with the World Bank.

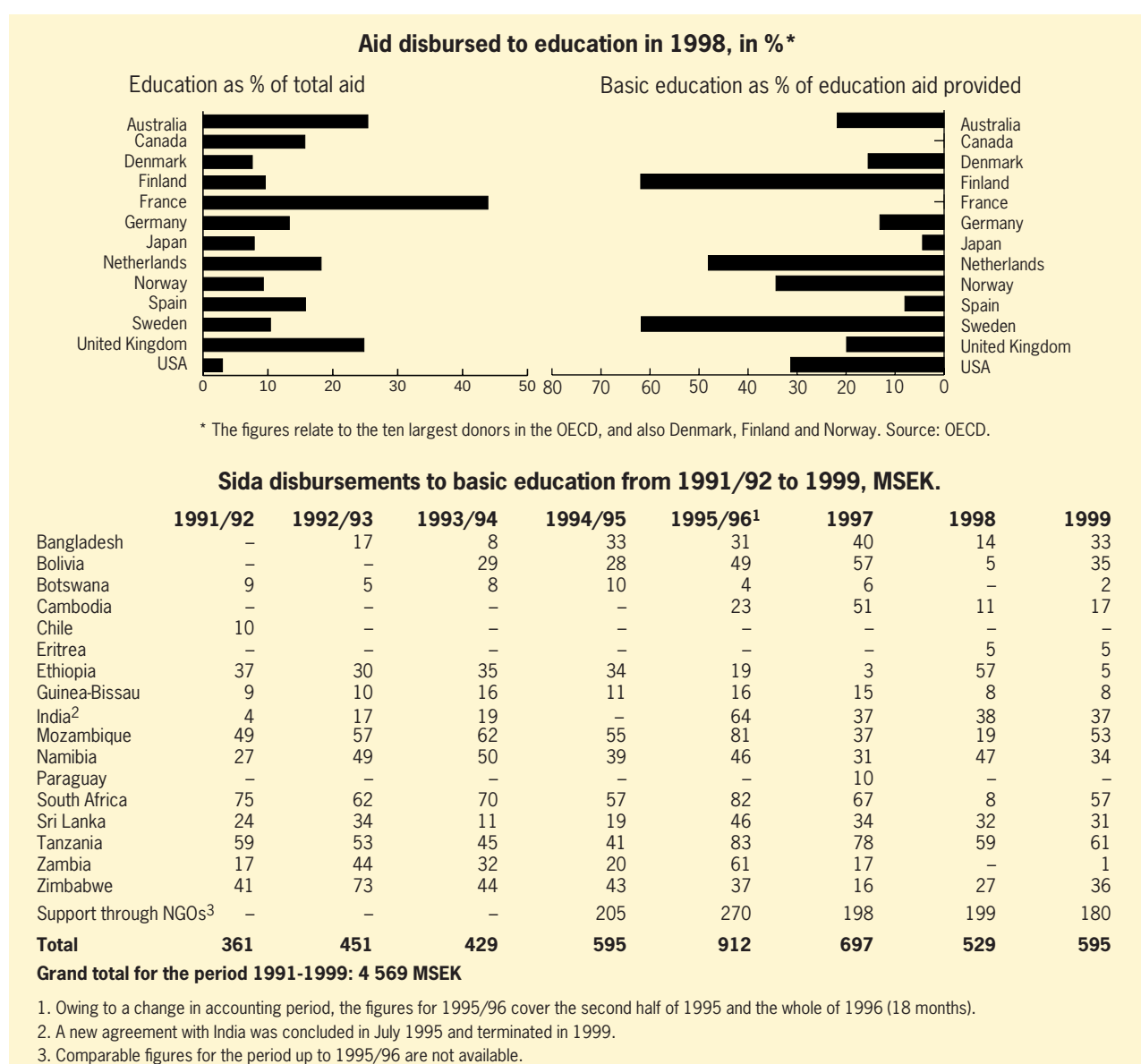
Development cooperation changes constantly. From its early experience, Sida has drawn the conclusion that we must concentrate inputs in the areas where they yield the greatest benefit.

There are many international aid organisations that, like Sida, support primary education and cooperate with developing countries' governments. It has often been difficult to coordinate the plethora of aid projects, and this fragmentation has often been a disadvantage to the recipient country itself.

Simultaneously, developing countries' debt burdens have bedevilled their national budgets. Debt relief and other donor support have cost vast sums, with no guarantees that the poorest segment of the population would gain from these measures. With other international

donors, Sida plans to embark on 'sector programme support' for education in Ethiopia, Tanzania, Mozambique and elsewhere. This form of support entails Sida and the other donors making a joint contribution to improve the financing of the whole education sector. At the same time, in a dialogue with the recipient country, the aid organisations influence how the funds can best be used.

Sida has thus devised a sector programme support policy for dealing with the many issues raised by this new form of cooperation. It includes principles for verifying that the funds provided are being used properly and not being dissipated by corruption or into purposes other than those originally envisaged.



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