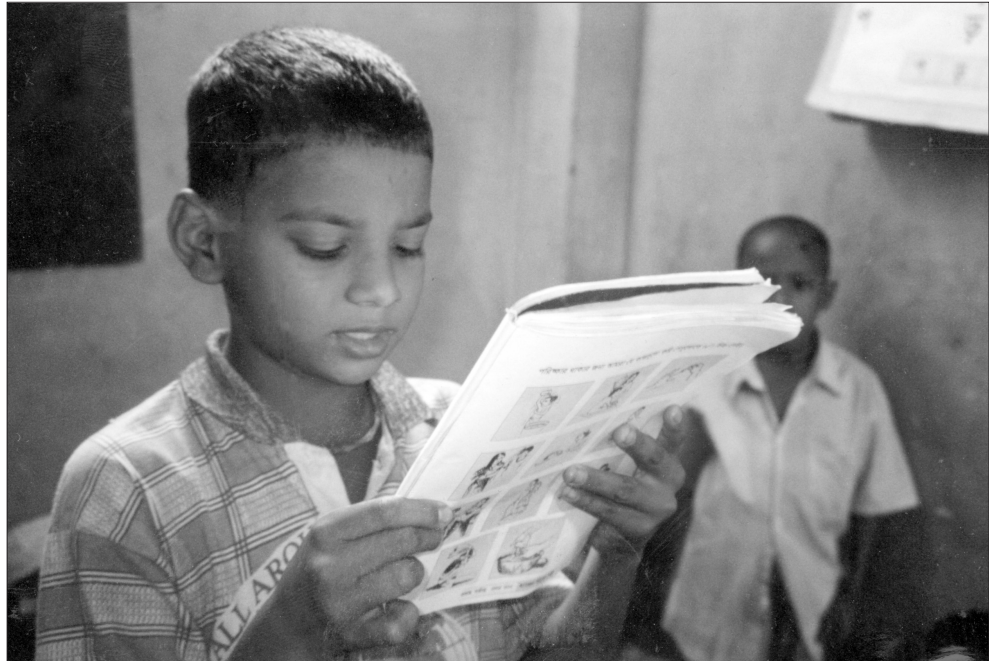


Educational materials



Background

Most countries with centralised, planned economies liberalised their economies during the 1990s. State and donor subsidies for educational materials have shifted from production at central level to purchases at school or district level. The commercialisation/privatisation of publishing companies is expected to be accompanied by a shift to a multi-textbook system. The question of generating working capital from sales income is a crucial problem which has to be resolved if commercial/private publishing is to succeed.

The growing role of the private sector in many countries is giving a new impetus to book development in general and textbooks in particular. However, the private sector is not a solution in itself and the state still has an important role to ensure that its curricular needs are met and that students and parents are protected from unregulated private sector practice. The private sector, in turn, is often reluctant to invest in the textbook sector due to the lack of a clear policy and/or the lack of a necessary enhancing

business environment. One important role of the state in this liberalised context is to develop national book policies and guidelines, and to monitor and evaluate.

The educational environment and literacy improved during the 1990s as governments committed themselves to basic education for all. Consequently, the markets for publishers have grown. However, with the policy of Education for All and the relatively high rates of population growth, the demand for school textbooks has exceeded the capacity of the systems. In many countries there is a severe shortage of school textbooks and learning materials. Where they are available, students have to share, often in a ratio of one textbook to ten students.

APNET (African Publishers Network) was formed in 1992 to encourage the establishment of associations of national publishers. As the main part of African publishing consists of school textbooks, partnership with governments and the development of Book Policies are important points on APNET's agenda. The Working Group on Books and Learning Materials at ADEA

(Association for the Development of African Education) has played a key role in encouraging and supporting governments to develop national book policies.

“It is frequently said that publishing is a cultural industry. The point is that it is an industry. In terms of policy formulation, the need is for industrial development policies. The formulation of a national book policy, which recognises the entire publishing industry as strategic, is an important first step that all countries should take, with the support of the international financial institutions and international donors”.

Dina Newton in: Educational Publishing in Global Perspective. World Bank 1997.

Hitherto, the Internet and its role in education in developing countries have only been discussed to a small extent. While some argue that children have a “right to technology”, educational motivation rather than technological motivation should guide decision-makers when selecting an appropriate mix of printed and electronic media for students to use in the classroom, as well as for the purpose of training teachers.

Experience gained

Economic and infrastructure problems are the most serious constraints to the supply of school textbooks and the development of domestic publishing in Africa. The prices of imported materials are high and rise as inflation increases. It is often difficult for small domestic publishers to obtain loans from banks and assistance from governments is rare. Small domestic publishing companies often lack capital and cash flow is a problem as the book industry has a low, long-term rate of return. This puts local domestic publishers at a serious disadvantage compared to their multinational counterparts who receive capitalisation from their well-established parent companies in Europe or America.

“A different understanding of how culture and economy are intertwined and the role of culture as part of the development process is needed. When societies depend almost completely on imports for their book resources they

obtain not only material goods but also a different language, and all the cultural, historical, and ideological burden that is embodied in books and language. Such an almost complete dependency on foreign cultural goods cannot contribute to development”.

Ingrid Jung in: Educational Publishing in Global Perspective. World Bank 1997.

In this perspective the need for the development of books, school textbooks and children's books in local languages should be mentioned. Hitherto, in Africa, this has been very limited.

The World Bank is the largest buyer of school textbooks. The availability of textbooks is seen as a key to the improvement of the quality of education. The contracts are often awarded to multinational companies. Domestic publishers have had difficulties in competing. This means that profits earned are not reinvested in the domestic book industry, which could have contributed to the development of domestic publishing.

“It is imperative that the Bank shifts its focus from book provision schemes toward book development. Our children and our working people, who will repay the loans contracted for the purpose, would at least have the satisfaction of knowing that they are not paying to service and further develop the already well established publishing industries outside our country.”

Richard Crabbe in: Educational Publishing in Global Perspective. World Bank 1997.

Experience shows that if the political will exists, a great deal can be achieved as, for example, in Mozambique where almost all children in the first grades have school textbooks.

Teachers need to be trained in how to use school textbooks. Experience shows that, even if a school has school textbooks, they may not be used in the classrooms because the teachers do not know how to use them.

The teacher is the key to instruction and learning. School textbooks, as well as IT, are tools to be used by the teacher, but cannot replace a good teacher. However, the school textbook is also an important school symbol for the students.

Experience shows that publishers in general (national and multinational) have little awareness of gender stereotypes in school textbooks. ADEA's Working Group on Books and Learning Materials has recently published a manual on Gender-Sensitive Editing.

The Swedish resource base and experience

In Sweden, basic education has been decentralised to municipalities to a very high extent. There is a national curriculum for compulsory basic education that is common to all schools. It is based on four UN declarations/conventions/recommendations (human rights, rights of the child, international understanding and environmental sustainability) and defines the underlying values and the basic objectives and guidelines of the school system. In addition, there is a nationally defined syllabus for each individual subject. On the basis of the curriculum and syllabi, each municipality adopts an education plan and private publishers produce school textbooks. The school textbooks are of high quality and quite expensive. The school buys the books that suits the teachers and the school best. These books are lent to the students by the school. The Swedish school textbook system follows European standards to a great extent.

This far-reaching decentralisation has been possible in Sweden because of the nationally high level of education and the financially well-developed municipalities, a situation most developing countries are far from. Nevertheless, a multi-textbook system where purchases are made at school or district level is also the ultimate goal in developing countries. Schools in rural areas in developing countries have poor facilities for storing school textbooks and simple, cheap books of low quality are therefore preferable in most cases.

Sweden, together with a few other donors, has stressed the importance of locally produced school textbooks that reflect the cultural and socio-economic context of the children. Most donors support the publishing industry in their own

countries. To assist Sida's partner countries in building up publishing and distribution companies (and to commercialise and privatise these companies at a later date), experts from the Swedish publishing industry have been contracted in the past. Experience gained from this form of cooperation has been positive. Swedish financial and technical assistance for capacity building in local publishing has been highly appreciated by partner countries. It has made them less dependent on imports of school materials and has strengthened their cultural identity.

Today, the Swedish resource base is rather small. However, it covers a wide span of professional fields such as publishing, distribution, financing, privatisation and gender. Education Division also draws upon other resources, both from abroad and within Sida.

Strategy for Swedish development cooperation

Within the framework of Sector Programme Support (SPS), the main concern of Sida's Education Division in the field of educational materials is to make it possible to supply relevant, affordable educational materials to all children at the basic level of education.

In a wider context, Sida's view is that policies and programmes for educational materials, and more generally for publishing, should aim at supporting the development of a literate environment. The provision of textbooks needs to be considered in the context of a literate environment where both children and adults can learn from books and other written materials. While the Education Division mainly supports the publishing and provision of educational materials for primary schools, the Division for Culture and Media supports the development of domestic publishing in a wider context.

The objective of domestic publishing of school textbooks should be to safeguard the social and cultural dimensions of edu-

cation and facilitate the teaching-learning process. During the 1990s, Sida's support at production level aimed at transforming state-owned companies into independent commercial/private companies. Since then, support provided by the Education Division has been increasingly directed to consumer level, for example financial support to districts and schools to enable them to buy textbooks, or support to transparent national subsidy systems (as, for example, in Mozambique). Mechanisms that make it possible for all children to obtain books must be enhanced. The systems developed should build on what is already available and be relevant for the country concerned.

The textbooks need to be relevant and pedagogically appropriate if they are meant to enhance the learning process of the child. It should be possible for the child to identify with what is written in the textbooks. "Learning can only take place from the known to the unknown". This has led the Education Division to become more concerned with curriculum development issues and publishing in local languages.

Sida gives financial support to regional networks within the field of publishing. Education Division is active in providing support to APNET, African Publishers Network. Support to APNET is non earmarked programme support to APNET's five-year strategic plan. APNET's core donors have used the same approach as for SPS.

Sida has previously financed regional seminars and workshops on publishing. This role has been taken over by APNET and, to some extent, ADEA's Working Group for Books and Learning Materials.

Key Documents

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