



Adult Basic Learning and Education (ABLE)

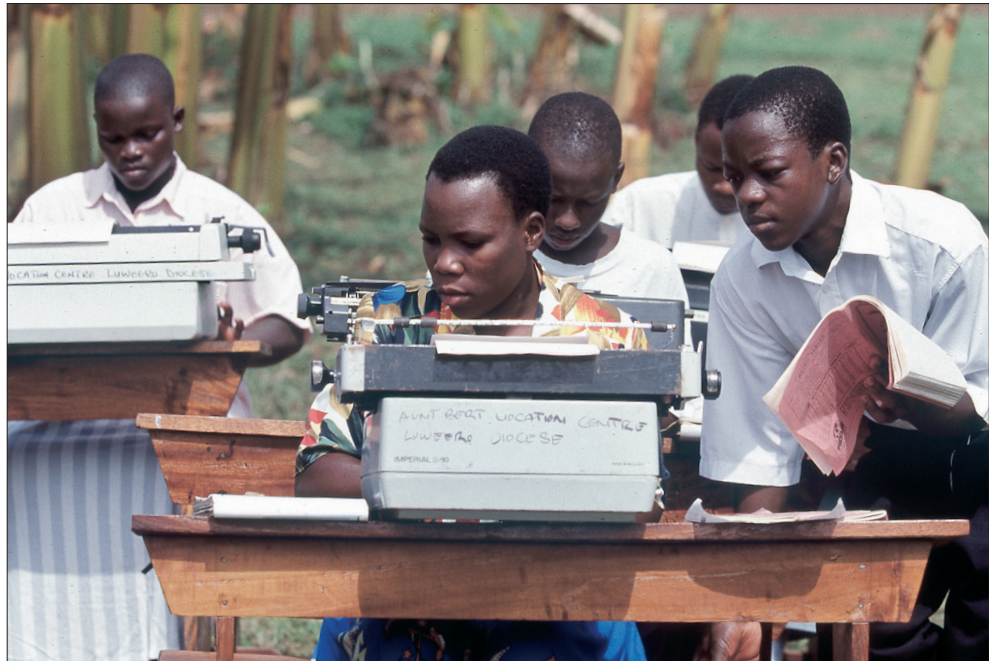


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Main areas of Sida's development cooperation

Sida has developed action programmes in the following areas

- Poverty reduction
- Justice and peace
- Equality between women and men
- Environmental care

The action programmes can be ordered through www.sida.se

Introduction

This reference paper on Adult Basic Learning and Education (ABLE) supplements Sida's overall policy for development cooperation in the education sector:

"Education for All: a Human Right and Basic Need", published in 2001. The paper is a further development of the above-mentioned policy with the aim to present more specific considerations in relation to ABLE in general, and in countries in the South in particular. Based on research, practical experience gained and lessons learned during the last three decades, the purpose is to arrive at conclusions and implications for Swedish support to various initiatives and for Sida's position on related issues¹. The paper is also linked to the Position Paper "Education, Democracy and Human Rights in Swedish Development

Cooperation", published by the Education Division in 2001.

This reference paper builds not only on Sida-supported research and on-the-ground experience, but also on a number of other sources. Sida has commissioned a specific state-of-the-art study on the topic. The study was carried out in 2001–2002 by Rosa Maria Torres. The draft report was discussed in an international on-line forum in May–June 2002, moderated by Rosa Maria Torres.² The final report, "*Lifelong Learning: A New Momentum and a New Opportunity for Adult Basic Learning and Education (ABLE) in the South*", is published in Sida's New Education Division Documents series. Reading the report and visiting the website of the forum are recommended for those who wish to acquire a deeper understanding and broader knowledge of developments in the field.³

¹ For considerations on youth and adult learning and education above basic level, reference is made to a study recently carried out by Sida, "Review of Sida support to post-basic education in the partner countries".

² See: www.bellatnet.org/adult-learning.

³ For definitions of basic concepts in the reference paper, see glossary at the end of the paper.

Points of departure and guiding principles

Education for All

It is estimated that about 880 million adults in the world are illiterate, of whom 60 per cent are women. At the World Conference on Education for All (EFA) held in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990, youth and adult education were included in the six EFA goals agreed upon. These goals were also ratified at the World Education Forum in Dakar in 2000, which postponed the deadline for accomplishing the EFA goals. Two of the goals refer specifically to youth and adult education:

Goal 3: Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes.

Goal 4: Achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults.

Two goals cut across the entire EFA agenda: eliminating gender disparities (goal 5) and ensuring educational quality (goal 6).

To achieve the EFA goals, it is Sida's conviction that a two-pronged strategy must be applied: investing in quality education for all children and at the same time investing in quality education for youth and adults. One cannot succeed without the other. Parents with education stimulate and support their children's attendance and work in school to greater extent than parents without education; this is especially true of educated mothers.

Human Rights conventions

Basic education is a human right for all – children, youth and adults. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), of 1976, states that basic education shall be encouraged and intensified as far as possible for all those persons who have not received or completed the whole period of their primary education.

The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), of 1981, states that women shall have the same opportunities for access to programmes of continuing education, including adult and functional literacy programmes⁴, particularly those aimed at reducing any gap in education that exists between men and women.

Adult basic learning and education

The central concept of this paper, Adult Basic Learning and Education (ABLE) stresses the importance of ensuring effective *learning*, whether through formal, non-formal or informal education, within a lifelong learning framework. As education is an important means for learning, essential for personal, family, community, social and economic development, it is a public and social responsibility.

Adult basic learning needs go far beyond literacy. However, literacy is at the heart of basic education and of any economic and human development effort. The UN Literacy Decade (2003–2012) promises an expanded vision and a renewed emphasis on the importance of literacy for youth and adults (as well as for children) in and through all available means: the family, the school, the community, the mass media, the workplace, the library, etc. Literacy is about learning to read and write (text and numbers), and also about reading, writing and counting to learn, and developing these skills and using them effectively for meeting basic needs.

Role of governments

The main responsibility for providing free basic education of good quality to its citizens lies with the state/government. A democracy and rights-based approach implies not only the right to have access to education; human rights and democracy must also be applied *in* education and promoted *through* education. This means that education must respond to learners' needs, include knowledge about human rights, promote a democratic and participatory process in classrooms and schools, and

⁴ Regarding the expression "functional literacy", see Literacy under Definitions at the end of this paper.

prepare learners for participation in community development and transformation.⁵

Education in general, and adult education in particular, becomes more meaningful and effective if linked to broader development aims. Priority should be given to programmes that are based on holistic development initiatives at local, regional and/or national level, for example when included in poverty reduction strategies. Education programmes should be integrated as part of economic and social mobilisation processes aimed at addressing the causes of poverty, illiteracy and the deprivation of other human rights. When ABLE is integrated in broader development efforts, e.g. through churches, development associations, cooperatives etc., the results tend to be better than in programmes of a more isolated nature.

Adult education programmes could be run by governments, as well as by non-governmental organisations, and in partnership between both. In any case, the government has the responsibility for providing a conducive policy framework that enables multi-sector work and stimulates partnerships among stakeholders.

Civil society organisations

Civil Society Organisations, (CSOs)⁶ have an important role in enhancing ABLE programmes and opportunities as they are often run by people committed to the task, and responsive to demand, context and culture. The limited scope of such programmes and the greater flexibility of such organisations often allow innovation and experimentation. However, the dimension of the educational challenge demands scale and nation-wide policies that require the involvement of the state/government.

Language of instruction

In literacy training, learners should have the right to use their mother tongue, or a language that is familiar to them. This is important not only as a cultural right, but also as a pedagogical requirement, since it enables

understanding, participation and ownership in the learning process when introducing the basic codes in reading, writing and counting. Progressive transition to an official language should be included to enable communication in a wider context.

Literate environment

Basic literacy skills are not enough; literacy must be developed, sustained and used meaningfully in daily life and serve the purpose of enhancing the quality of life of individuals, families and communities. Thus, there is a need for an environment that is conducive to lifelong learning, literacy and continuing education for youth and adults (as well as for children). Governments and civil society are co-responsible and must work together in the building of an environment of this type, which includes library services, production and distribution of printed materials (leaflets, magazines, books, etc.) – especially where reading and writing materials are not easily accessible.

The challenge and the vision of ABLE is to create *learning communities* where learning for all becomes a reality through partnership between various stakeholders, taking advantage of all resources, knowledge, skills and teaching-learning capacities available in the community.

When feasible, Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)⁷ should be taken advantage of. The use of ICT could have a great potential for ABLE provision, development, and the teaching/learning process.

Certification

Many young people and adults are interested in obtaining a certificate when they complete their education courses and programmes. Certificates and diplomas have social and economic value in society, and allow learners to pursue further studies if they wish to. Thus, there is need to ensure that educational provision, whether formal or non-formal, includes equivalence and

⁵ Sida's Education Division further develops this perspective in a position paper, "Education, Democracy and Human Rights (2001).

⁶ CSO is a broader concept than NGOs, including grassroots organisations, labour unions, civic associations, the academic community, NGOs, professional organisations, religious, volunteer and philanthropic entities, action groups and virtual networks and communities.

⁷ The concept includes computers, telephone, radio, TV and other audio-visual means.

certification of the level of knowledge and skills achieved

Strategy for Swedish support to ABLE

Sida is determined to continue to support the EFA agenda, which emphasises basic learning for all people – children, youth and adults. Within this framework, there is a need to give increased attention to youth and adults since they tend to be left out of, or not given due consideration in, strategies and policies for education, democratisation, human rights, alleviation of poverty and development in general. In the dialogue at international, regional and national levels, the issue needs to be constantly brought up⁸.

Sector programme support

Swedish support in the education sector is increasingly provided in the form of Sector Programme Support (SPS)⁹ for which a policy and guidelines have been developed (see references). In assessing support of this type, Sida will take into consideration the ways and extent to which adult basic learning needs are being addressed and integrated within a strategic education sector plan and the resources set aside for such components. Since, in such cases, non-earmarked support is provided to the sector as a whole, it is important to include adult education components in the assessment and monitoring of the strategic sector plan. When assessing such plans, the criteria mentioned below should be part of the analysis.

Specific support

Where sector programme support is not feasible, Swedish support could be considered for specific adult education/learning components. In such cases, support will primarily be provided when there are clearly demonstrated political will and national undertakings. Sida support would supplement internal financial and human resources, including supportive structures in place or under development. Plans should be based on local needs and take into consideration

different motivations, for example between men and women. On a basis of this type, and provided there is a Swedish country strategy prioritising support to education, Sida could provide support to government ABLE programmes, as well as to programmes run by national or international CSOs.

Cooperation with CSOs

Sida's Department for Co-operation with NGOs and Humanitarian Assistance, SEKA, might also contribute to finance support through Swedish NGOs involved in development cooperation in partner countries.

CSO programmes may be supported through special Adult Education Funds to promote a variation of small and large learning projects based on local initiatives. Where an option of this type is feasible, it could build on experience gained from models for popular education in the South as well as in the North, including the Nordic countries.

For countries in special situations, for example in transition, in post-conflict or emergency situations, support may be considered to non-governmental organisations working with democratic aims, with ABLE as one of their means and objectives.

Bilingual strategy

Programmes building on a bilingual strategy, using mother tongues in literacy classes and adult basic education, with progressive transition to an official language, should be stimulated and supported.

Attention should be given to improvement of learning conditions, e.g. through training of trainers, provision of teaching and learning materials, equipping libraries, etc.

Research

Research on ABLE is scarce and needs to be enhanced. It is important that research is carried out in order to learn from practice, to stimulate development of quality education in the field, and to monitor the undertakings to achieve the EFA goals. For monitoring of literacy development joint efforts are needed to enhance methodology and capacity.

⁸ As part of the work on this reference paper, a three-page background paper was prepared containing more information on previous Swedish support to ABLE and on international experiences; it is available from Sida's Education Division.

⁹ The concept of Sector Programme Support (SPS) used by Sida is close to the more widely used concept of Sector-Wide Approach Programmes (SWAPs).

Research should be an integral part of the work to build capacity in ABLE. Constantly, new knowledge and new experience is available, that should guide the continued development of institutions working in the field. The role of higher education institutions in capacity building, research and evaluation in ABLE should be enhanced.

Institutional development

Support to capacity and institutional development and to advocacy for ABLE can also be extended to networks and organisations at national, regional and international level. Training of educators and other staff, research in relevant fields, as well as the exchange of information and experience between organisations and individuals, are among the tasks for networks of this type. They can act as watchdogs and promoters of ABLE within the framework of the overall EFA agenda and goals. Among such specialised international networks and organisations are the UNESCO Institute for Education (UIE), the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE) and ADEA's Working Group for Non-Formal Education.¹⁰

In Summary:

Provided that a specific country strategy prioritises education Sida would consider:

1. Promoting ABLE programmes within the framework of Sector Programme Support.
2. Supporting ABLE programmes in partner countries within the Education for All framework.
3. Supporting capacity building, incl. training of adult educators, to strengthen ABLE.
4. Supporting Civil Society Organisations' ABLE programmes.

In addition, *Sida would consider:*

5. Supporting international networks and organisations in ABLE advocacy work.
6. Promoting and supporting research in the field of ABLE.

Basic Glossary:

Adult Basic Education in this context is defined as foundational education for persons aged 15 and above, thus including what sometimes is referred to as "youth and adult education". Most of the available education statistics refer to "adults" beyond this age. This paper deals with adult basic education and learning in which literacy has a central role, while not excluding other forms of basic learning.

Literacy refers to the process through which people (children, youth and adults) learn to read and write, whether in school or out of school. Often numeracy is included in the concept of literacy. This paper refers fundamentally to literacy in relation to out-of-school youth and adults.

Functional literacy: The term "functional literacy" is often used and/or interpreted in two distinct ways: (a) "functional" meaning a sufficient and sustainable level of literacy that enables people to use reading and writing in a meaningful and purposeful way in everyday life and activities; and (b) "functional" often meaning supplementing literacy instruction with practical/useful programme contents related to issues such as livelihoods, human rights, citizenship, health, childcare, arts, culture, etc. This paper assumes the need to ensure both a) and b) in any literacy and adult basic education effort. It also acknowledges that contexts and needs of individuals and groups differ substantially, and thus the kind of "functions" that are relevant in each case.

Non-formal education (NFE) is organised education that is not carried out within the framework of formal schooling. Thus, the concept comprises quite diverse educative activities. It does not relate only to adults since children and youth also learn outside the formal school system. On the other hand, while basic adult education is often organised in a non-formal way, it is also offered in the formal system, e.g. evening classes to attain primary education or a certain level of formal schooling, or specific skills in certain fields (languages, book-keeping skills, computer skills, etc). Both governments and non-governmental organisations are providers of NFE.

Informal education refers to the learning that takes place in everyday activities and interactions, in the family, the community, the workplace, with friends and colleagues, while reading newspapers and books, listening to radio or watching television, through civic participation, etc.

Lifelong learning (LLL) should be understood as learning that takes place throughout life. It is not synonymous with "adult education", even if the latter is an important part of LLL.

Continuing education refers to training in specific skills related to the world of work.

¹⁰ ADEA: Association for Development of Education in Africa

Selected References for further reading:

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Sida, Education Division (2001). Education, Democracy and Human Rights in Swedish Development Co-operation (position paper)

UNESCO/CONFITEA V (1997). Adult Education: The Hamburg Declaration; the Agenda for the Future

World Education Forum (2000). The Dakar Framework for Action

Selected websites:

ALADIN – Adult Learning Documentation and Information Network:
www.unesco.org/education/aladin/

APPEAL: www.unescobkk.org/education/appeal/index.htm

ICAE: www.web.net/icae/index.html

IIZ/DVV: www.iiz-dvv.de

ILI: International Literacy Institute: <http://literacy.org/index.html>

Sida: www.sida.se

UIE - UNESCO Institute for Education:
www.unesco.org/education/ui/

UNESCO: www.unesco.org

World Bank/Adult Outreach Education:
[www.worldbank.org/education/adult outreach/](http://www.worldbank.org/education/adult_outreach/)