

Position Paper for
Environmental Education

Education for Sustainability



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Author: Education Division

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1. Background

This position paper has been established by the Education Division at Sida in 1999, with the assistance of a Consultative Group which was appointed with the aim of developing and improving environmental education activities within Sida. This position paper shall form the basis of Sida's environmental education activities and, in the long term, shall be integrated into Sida's overall education support policy.

Education is one of the cornerstones of the work of alleviating poverty which is one of Sida's overall development objectives. Environmental aspects are an integrated part of development, and consequently, of development assistance. Investment in education which will create awareness and knowledge about the environment and sustainable development will provide opportunities for both individuals and society to increase their understanding of the interrelationship of human beings and the environment. This knowledge can be decisive for the ability of people to survive and also forms the basis for development towards a sustainable society.

In spite of the fact that environmental education has been emphasised as a vital development area, in practice it has been operated mainly on a small scale, often isolated from mainstream development cooperation operations. Such limited efforts seldom achieve results meaningful to development generally. Sida's policy is based on the assumption that it is through education that the majority of people can be reached and influenced in order to implement UN's basic values concerning democracy and justice. A well-functioning education system is one of the cornerstones on which a country's development rests, both in the short and the long term. For this reason Sida is now following UN's recommendations and is continuing to develop the concept of "Education for Sustainability" as it is currently accepted and understood within the development assistance field.

In most global environmental contexts during the last few years, the need for environmental education has been emphasised. This need was mentioned at UN's first international conference on the environment in Stockholm in 1972, at UNESCO's international environmental education conference at Tbilisi in 1977 when guidelines for such education were established and at UN's international conference on the environment and development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. At this

meeting Agenda 21, a practical environmental action plan for the next century, was adopted unanimously. An entire chapter of this document, Chapter 36, is devoted to the importance of promoting education and increasing general awareness of environmental issues. During the Agenda 21 follow up at the UN extra general assembly UNGASS in June 1997, the importance of environmental education was again emphasised. The Commission for Sustainable Development (CSD), part of the UN which is assigned the task of following up the undertakings of the Rio Conference, has established a special plan of operations for the development of environmental education. In December 1997, an international conference was held in Thessaloniki - *"Educating for a Sustainable Future"* organised by UNESCO.

Recommendations for the promotion of environmental education and the increase of public awareness of environmental issues can be found in several action plans and documents from international conferences dealing with, for example, population issues (Cairo, 1994), social development (Copenhagen, 1995), gender issues (Beijing, 1995) and housing issues (Istanbul, 1996). In addition, environmental education is included in several international conventions such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Deserts Convention and the Convention on World Climate. In addition, several nations have, during the last few years, established national strategies and action plans for environmental education.

Sida's Programme for Sustainable Development names environmental education as a prioritised areas for Sida's planned operations. This Programme specifies that environmental aspects shall be integrated into all activities supported by Sida. Environmental education shall be integrated into all educational programmes.

2. Approach

Sida now wishes to move forward on this issue and, in practice, demonstrate the power present within environmental education when connected to other vital and decisive development issues such as health care, poverty alleviation, gender equality, democracy and peace. The concept 'environmental education' is burdened with limitations connected to education dealing only with the scientific aspects of environmental issues. Internationally the term "Education for Sustainability" (EfS) is increasingly used as a logical development of the previous concept "Environmental Education". The concept EfS emphasises that environment and development are two sides of the same coin. Issues concerning alleviation of poverty, sustainable development, peace, democracy and human rights and gender equality may be said to form the contents of EfS.

The aim is not merely to teach about sustainability, education on the environment and EfS is a process in itself in which people, through their own observations and discussions, learn to discover the effects of their own actions on the natural world surrounding them, i.e. the environment. The process helps people to identify tools, resources and concrete alternatives in their way of life and how they affect their surroundings. This requires skills such as communicative ability, problem formulation and conflict management, support and organisation. If this process - this learning and development of the skills mentioned above – leads to people becoming involved to such a degree that they begin to take measures for more sustainable development, then EfS has become successful and sustainable. Sida supports development towards EfS but will also continue to supply assistance to the somewhat more limited environmental education.

3. Objectives

The objective of Sida's education support is the promotion of basic education of good quality for all through support to wide-ranging reform processes. The principles expressed in Sida's four established action programmes; democracy and human rights, gender equality, poverty alleviation and sustainable development shall permeate all activities supported by Sida.

The overall objective of Sida's support to environmental education and EfS is to increase the level of knowledge and awareness of environmental and development issues within all areas of society. The aim is not only to contribute to the recipient country's own ability to manage growing environmental and development problems, but also to encourage both recipient and donor countries to adopt a new approach to these problems. Sida's activities are primarily based on the recipient country's own priorities and aim to strengthen local initiatives within environmental education and EfS.

4. Methods

Sida's support to environmental education shall primarily be integrated into the education programmes which are supported by Sida's programme partner countries. Support can also be extended to institutional and competence development at all levels. Support may be allocated to regional or international NGOs or national NGOs via suitable channels such as regional umbrella organisations.

The reform processes underway in several recipient countries have resulted in environmental issues becoming integrated into curricula and teaching materials to an increasing extent. However, the pedagogical methods recommended within environmental education have not yet gained the desired foothold within teacher training courses. These methods encourage more student-oriented educational activities which emphasise independent action. Sida therefore considers the support of the development of environmental education, especially within teacher training courses and further professional education for teachers at all levels within both formal and non-formal education, to be highest priority.

5. Priorities

Primarily environmental education within the formal basic school systems of Sida's programme partner countries shall be prioritised. Awareness of environmental issues should be established at a very young age in order to achieve the desired effect as far as changes in attitudes and behaviour patterns are concerned. It is also generally easier to reach more children, including those belonging to poorer groups, through the general school system. Environmental education should become an integrated component of the educational reforms and further education activities supported by Sida. As each country has made different degrees of progress as concerns the development of environmental education, the nature of Sida's activities will primarily be guided by the various needs of the different recipient countries. Traditional knowledge, cultural aspects and local environmental issues in cooperation with relevant social groups should be specially considered within environmental education. Consideration must also be given to the fact that school education is most often held in the pupils' mother tongue which will make teaching of concepts and skills more difficult. The most explicit needs within environmental education in the formal school system lie within curriculum development, inclusion of environmental issues in the national examination system, teacher training and materials development and production.

Special environmental allocations shall be used as a complement to ordinary education support. Through the special environmental allocations, the following environmental education activities shall be prioritised

- Methodological development, experimental and pilot inputs plus strategically important environmental education activities which are not covered by the country budget. Priority shall be given to activities which are connected to and/or support Sida's overall education assistance in programme countries.
- Activities which aim at the promotion of exchange of information and experience can also be supported. These may take the form of regional or international activities and networks plus inputs aimed at increasing exchange of experience between North/South and South/South.

- The promotion of development and research within environmental education and, to an even greater degree, within "Education for Sustainability" should be supported. Specially important are the so-called "centres of excellence" whose task is to move ahead and lead the way through practical work with new methods and approaches.

As many children do not have access to formal education, activities aimed at children and young people within the non-formal education sector should be given priority. Within this sector, support should be given to the integration of environmental education into ongoing adult education programmes plus to NGOs who work with children and young people who have no access to formal education. In addition, support can be provided for the integration of environmental education issues within other programmes such as those dealing with literacy and post-literacy.

6. Relationship to other Actors

Sida shall cooperate with the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of the Environment, the Ministry of Education and other Swedish organisations and government agencies working to strengthen the role of environmental education both in Sweden and internationally. Sida's Education Division's Consultative Group shall keep the division up to date on research and development within the area and act as a link to the Swedish resource base. In addition, Sida should cooperate and network with leading international institutions, NGOs and donors who are active within the environmental education field.

7. Division of Responsibilities within Sida

The responsibility for applying this position paper to practical activities primarily lies with Sida's Education Division which reports to the Department for Democracy and Social Development (DESO). The Division's programme officers are responsible for integrating environmental education and EfS into the framework of Sida's support to the education sector in their respective countries. The Division's Manual on Environmental Education provides guidelines for the work of emphasising these issues in dialogues with recipient countries. Environmental education administrators and the Education Division's Consultative Group form a support network for the work of assessing and monitoring activities. Other units within Sida, such as Policy Division, Natural Resources Management Division, SAREC, Health Division, INEC/IKTS etc. are all important for the development of environmental education within Sida. For this reason activities connected with environmental education should, as far as possible, be carried out in cooperation with other Sida divisions and departments.

Halving poverty by 2015 is one of the greatest challenges of our time, requiring cooperation and sustainability. The partner countries are responsible for their own development. Sida provides resources and develops knowledge and expertise, making the world a richer place.



SWEDISH INTERNATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AGENCY

SE-105 25 Stockholm Sweden
Phone: +46 (0)8 698 50 00
Fax: +46 (0)8 698 56 15
sida@sida.se, www.sida.se