

Women Beneficiaries of Functional Adult Literacy Speak Out: Opportunities and Challenges for Socio-Economic Development in Apac District, Northern Uganda

Judith Abal Akello^{1,2*} Peace Musiimenta¹ Evelyn Lutwama-Rukundo¹

1.School of Women and Gender Studies, Makerere University, P. O box 7062, Kampala, Uganda

2.Department of Business Administration, Lira University, P.O box 1035, Lira, Uganda

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Abstract

Women's literacy is critical to addressing gender inequality, though, globally, only 88 adult women are considered literate for every 100 adult men. This article is an analysis of challenges faced by Ugandan women based in the Northern part of the country who attempt to acquire and use skills attained from training in Functional Adult Literacy (FAL) to improve their socio-economic conditions. Qualitative data was collected from 45 participants (literate and non-literate) selected purposively. The study was informed by Freire's literacy and agency theories which argues on the element of awareness by making marginalised non-literates see the reality of the world by using their agency to recognise their impediment to development. Findings indicate that women FAL graduates faced challenges ranging from lack of acknowledgement, belittlement to negative perceptions. It would be helpful for Government, International development partners, NGO's and civil society to ensure strong support and inclusive planning with FAL trainees to enable them not only to benefit from their training but also to contribute to achievement of sustainable development.

Keywords: Practical Learning, Challenge, Socio-economic progress

1. Introduction

While a literate person is one that can both read and write a short simple statement, a functionally literate individual is able to improve on his/her quality of life, make informed decisions, and continue learning in all those activities for which literacy skills are required (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2006). It is therefore necessary to understand the difference between a literate and FAL person because functional literacy lay emphasis on the practise of literacy skills, for instance, FAL focuses on skills for learners to effectively participate in the community. Similarly, studies in Uganda have found that many women FAL graduates reported being much more involved in social activities, for example, local governance and decision making, informed improvements in hygiene, agricultural practices and dietary habits (UNESCO, 2008).

Practical learning, numeracy proficiency levels and the skills obtained are important for men, women, girls and boy's significant progress. Research, policy agendas and discourses, have for a considerable length of time provided different effects between a literate and functionally literate person. Incheon Declaration and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, training 2030 system for Action asserts that the youth and adults, especially girls and women, ought to be empowered to learn and keep learning through various adaptable learning methods and entry points (Declaration, 2015).

Globally, scholars and governments in both developed¹ and and less developed² countries, have shown interest in the link between functional literacy and the socio-economic conditions of their population as well as the implications these have for development.

UNESCO accomplished an Experimental World Literacy Programme (EWLP) in 1966 for the purpose of investigating and validating the economic and social returns of literacy (UNESCO, 1974). In addition, UNESCO's prospects of the experimental programme were to provide valuable information on the relationship between literacy and economic development as well as impact on economic development in the respective countries.

In Uganda, the re-introduction of Functional Adult Literacy programme is greatly attributed to UNESCO whose role was mainly holding planning workshops particularly in 1983, 1987 and 1989 as well as financial support (Hasaba, 2012; Okech & Carr-Hill, 2001). UNESCO further coordinated the United Nations Literacy Decade, 2003-2012. This recognised literacy as fundamental to the attainment of essential life skills for the adults that enable them to remedy the challenges they face in life (MoGLSD, 2011).

However, literacy is disproportionately attained between women and men. Wong, (2012) asserted that women in developing countries have lower educational attainments than men and because of gender inequalities

¹ Economically developed countries, such as Europe, North America, Australia, Israel and South Africa.

² Economically less developed countries of Africa, India, China, Brazil and Mexico.

that position women as the poorest of the poor and the unemployed. Subsequently, adult women's potentials to meet their most essential needs have been locked as a result of non-literacy which prevents them from fully realising their rights and contributing to national development of their respective countries. Stromquist, (2016) argues that adult non-literates include a group whose previous social marginalisation prevented them from accessing formal educational system. Stromquist adds that, non-literate women remain poor and earn low salaries and usually engage in long hours of harsh manual work in challenging situations of taking care of spouses and children and majorly doing housework. These challenging situations are attributed to the gender biases where in some cases women's learning is influenced by cultural stereotypes which segregate and deny them the opportunity of accessing formal education, for instance, in the times of poverty as well as parental discretion (Akyeampong, 2009; Kabeta & Gebremeskel, 2013; Somerset, 2009). A study by McPerson, (2013) indicated that gender bias in Africa stems largely from the exclusion of women from traditional and patrimonial networks of economic and political influence and their links. Besides, McPerson's views are grounded on the proclamation that social exclusion and economic vulnerability of African women stem from their weakly defined property rights to major productive assets, for instance, land is the roots of their poverty. Similarly, Boserup, (1970, 1989), an activist researcher raised the issue of women's lower educational attainments relative to men and their role in economic development. Boserup adds that, the result from policy neglect of women's role, for instance, in agricultural production particularly in sub-Saharan Africa increases their productivity gap.

Globally, adult literacy stands at 89% for men and 81% for women making a total of 757 million non-literate adults (UNESCO Institute for Statistics [UIS], 2015). In Uganda, national literacy rates for women in rural areas are at 68%, much lower than that of men at 77%. Literacy rates also show similar trends in urban area standing at 88.7% for men and 83.6% for women (Uganda Bureau of Statistics [UBOS], 2016). Whereas huge amounts of funds have been committed to improving literacy among women and men, not much has achieved. A report on Apac district, Northern Uganda, revealed that, despite interventions by the district to increase enrollment of adult learners, gender differences still exist. More women are affected in terms of gender compared to men, for instance, negative cultural practices, limited access to educational facilities and low income (Government, 2011).

The last two decades have witnessed increased national and international debates on the status of women and their high non-literacy levels. These debates have compelled development practitioners to consider integrating women into development processes of nations highlighting that, a considerable development potential is locked up in the 757 million non-literate women indicated in this section (Olaleye, 2008). Given that development is a process of economic, social, political and cultural change engineered in a given society, efforts of all stakeholders both internal and external is critical (Oyitso & Olomukoro, 2012). Hence, women's potential needs to be unlocked in order to reduce an immense loss of socio-economic opportunity for humanity. Immensely, the provision and enabling accessibility of quality literacy to non-literate women that missed formal education are a major way of empowering them. Overall, literacy has been realized as a gateway to sustainable social and economic development not only for the non-literate women but also for entire nations (Oyitso & Olomukoro, 2012). However, the unanswered question is, does FAL training provide a remedy to the challenges women face in life and contribute to a better world for them and their communities? This article therefore focuses on the socio-economic development challenges faced by women before, during and after FAL training programme in pursuit of finding answers or the above question.

The study was informed by the Freirean literacy theory and Kabeer's perspective of agency. Freirean literacy theory discusses and emphasises the element of consciousness that attempts to make marginalised non-literates see the reality of the world by using their agency to recognise their obstacle to development (Freire, 1985; Freire & Macedo, 1987). Freire states that, literacy should not only impart the skills to read, write and do arithmetic, but also contribute to effective functioning and development of an individual, a group and the community (UNESCO, 2006). Freirean literacy theory provides a framework through which women's stories and experiences of having been trained in FAL and also to question the contribution of the actual training to a better world for them and their communities.

The theoretical perspective

Men and women are beings with choices as agents of change. This is what Kabeer calls agency that represents a person's ability to define his/her strategic life choices and act upon them even if there are others that oppose (Kabeer, 2005). Kabeer's conceptualisation of agency aligns with the Freirean literacy theory and brings on board the affirmation of women's engagement on transformative development as active not passive participants or agents. In many societies, however, institutional bias and customary cultural and ideological norms and values can restrict people's ability to make such choices. Kabeer categorizes agency as 'passive' and 'active' agency. She defines the former as "action taken when there is little choice" and the latter as "purposeful behaviour" (Kabeer 2005, p. 15). Agency theory therefore helped this study to investigate how women FAL beneficiaries of a participatory development perspective became or failed to become agents of their socio-economic development. Kabeer's argument is that women must be able to question, analyse and challenge the patriarchal structures that

reproduce constraints and inequalities in their lives (Kabeer, 1994, 2005). No concept therefore could have framed the focus on this study on the socio-economic development challenges faced by women before, during and after FAL training programme than the concept of agency.

2. Literature review

Literacy training and socio-economic development challenges

Despite UNESCO's, (2006), emphasis on the importance of women's literacy in addressing gender inequality, the same report postulates that, globally, only 88 adult women is considered literate for every 100 adult men. Although literacy is vital for the populace to participate society, the goal of halving global non-literacy rates by 2015 has been missed (UNESCO, 2015). The outcome is that, men are more literate than women in every country in the world. Relatively low Gender Parity Indices (GPIs) in adult literacy has been recorded in South and West Asia (0.66), the Arab States (0.69), and sub-Saharan Africa (0.76).

The 2009/10 Uganda National Household Survey indicates that in Uganda, men were more literate than women with literacy rates of 79 % and 66% percent respectively (UBOS, 2013). A trend analysis by UBOS further demonstrated that the current literacy rates especially in the rural areas of Uganda for women are still much lower than men at 68% and 77% respectively (UBOS, 2016).

Literacy is considered important in various ways. Both international and national NGOs have recognised that education eradicates poverty and agreed on the need to eradicate non-literacy by promoting ways to help individuals, especially women acquire a basic set of skills (UNESCO, 2006, 2013). Despite the above concerted efforts, non-literacy which is the inability to read and write a simple sentence in any language is still associated with extreme poverty. Literacy is considered vital for example in doing business, easing communication and it is difficult for one to function well in the community if she/he is non-literate (Hasaba, 2012). Richmond, Robinson, & Sachs-Israel's, (2008) have argued that literacy skills can help to open new windows of opportunities and enable people gain knowledge, information and confidence essential for empowerment and transformative change. However, studies indicate that the conventional way of life that emphasised patriarchal values and women's subordination contributed to girl children missing out on many opportunities. For example, parents used to prioritise in educating boys compared to girls that translated into their access to occupations outside the household for the men and subsequently widening the gender gaps between literacy. Such, restraint women's capacity to attend literacy trainings and participate in social activities in the community compared to the men. Sundaram & Vanneman, (2008) also explains women's low level of literacy that further impedes their abilities to develop relevant analytical and critical skills to challenge discriminatory and oppressive patriarchal structures of their communities. Under these circumstances, disparities in literacy levels therefore, increase discrimination against women and in turn affect their personal lives, families and communities.

Despite women's continued marginalization and exclusion, they still have differences due to dissimilarities in historical, cultural and social contexts (Takayanagi, 2013). Literate and non-literate women, who are marginalised in different ways, community can challenge their position by developing a sense of agency and contributing to community development from within (Takayanagi, 2011). It has been argued that when women are literate, the entire society gains because women's acquired skills are translated into a voice in their families and on the world stage. This is a first step towards personal freedom and broader prosperity (Bokova, 2010).

Even though literacy programs might have the development potentials as elucidated by the literature in this section, these programs might not necessarily have the same development effect on women beneficiaries of literacy programs. Okech & Carr-Hill's, (2001) evaluated two literacy programmes in Uganda and found that, there were less difference between literates and non-literates in relation to questions about modern versus traditional attitudes. These studies demonstrated that even though literacy programs might be able to bring some positive changes in the lives of women, such programs might not be adequate for transformative life changes.

2.1 The gaps in literature

Analysis of the above literature on the area of women and FAL has clearly shown that most studies on women mainly focus on their ability to read, write and do basic calculations. This study contributes to the understanding of the constraints experienced women by FAL trained women. Additionally, the information generated presents new insights into women's agency and ability to inquire, explore and challenge the patriarchal structures that reproduce constraints and inequalities in their lives.

3. Methodology

This article is based on study that employed the qualitative interpretive approach to investigate the social and economic challenges experienced by FAL trained women in case study research design. Primary data was collected using the field-based inquiry while a desk review was done to collect secondary data onto relevant

documents.

3.1 Method

The case study design and interpretivism perspective were considered the most applicable and adequate to explore women's experiences as beneficiaries of the FAL programme.

Data Collection Methods

Desk Review: I reviewed relevant books, journals, theses, and published materials, including government and NGOs documents, such as, UBOS statistical abstracts (2009-2016) and UNESCO reports to understand the challenges that women beneficiaries of FAL face because they are women.

Field-based methods: Field data was collected using focus group discussions to examine FAL beneficiaries' experiences, while semi-structured interviews were employed with individual women beneficiaries, as well as key informant interviews with a District Community Development Officer, assistant Community Development Officer and a nurse midwife based in a government hospital and also FAL trainer at a Sub-county.

3.2 Sampling and sample size

A total of 45 women (25 who graduated from FAL training and 17 considered non-literate and 3 Key Informants) were purposively selected to constitute the sample.

3.3 Data collection and analysis

Data was collected from Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), in-depth interviews, non-participant observations and document reviews. A total of 3 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and two 2 FGDs were conducted. FGDs were conducted to provide an opportunity for open discussions on the challenges faced by women before, during and after FAL training programme. Interviews were also conducted using open ended questions on an interview guide. Observation method furthermore made it possible to observe how both the literate and non-literate participants shared the socio-economic challenges they have experienced from FAL programmes. Collecting data onto multiple methods ensured triangulation in order to boost the richness of information generated. Selection of the key informants was guided by the information needed. The 3 key informants including District Community Development Officer (CDOs), Assistant Community Development Officers (ACDOs) and a nurse midwife were selected and interviewed on the basis of their knowledge and experience on the socio-economic development challenges faced by women before, during and after FAL programme.

For the individual interviews participants were selected purposively based on their literacy status. The participants were women beneficiaries who had completed FAL in the period 2011- 2013. This was meant to enable the researcher capture up to date information on the social and economic challenges experienced by FAL trained women. Besides, the literacy status would allow participants to express their views more freely based on similar backgrounds.

To ensure deeper analysis of qualitative data, the process of data collection and report writing goes together (Creswell, 2007). The data analysis was guided by Creswell's suggestions for different phases of analysis of generative, interpretive, and representing and theorizing phases. Primary data was analysed through coding, categorizing and developing relevant themes. During the generative and interpretive phase, qualitative data was coded using Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) for FGDs, key informant and in-depth interviews. The process mainly involved reading the whole transcripts numerous times to get logic of the whole data. The data generated four themes, that is, delayed certificates for FAL trained women; uncertainty as opposed to the benefits of FAL training; women's costly opportunity in the process of FAL training and how gendered relations impacts on women's participation in the FAL training programme.

4. Findings and discussion

Findings are presented and discussed under the following sections; delayed certificates for FAL trained women which the graduates crave for; uncertainty as opposed to the benefits of FAL training; women's costly opportunity in the process of FAL training and how gendered relations impacts on women's participation in the FAL training programme.

Delayed certificates for FAL Trained Women: The incomplete the story

Introduction

Certificates that are given at the end of the training are seen as evidence that a trainee has completed the course. Completing the training without certificates therefore raises many challenges and does not complete the whole story. One of the key challenges experienced by FAL trained women is the lack of acknowledgment of their success in the learning. A key informant validated women's complaints by confirming that "*those who have completed level III are supposed to be awarded certificate of participation in graduation ceremony, but sometimes there is a delay*". His statements validated that:

Yah, we have taken long, we have not given them certificates. We are waiting for it from the

government. A certificate is very important, example; it is recognised in the clan leadership. However, for sustainability, while the FAL graduates wait for certificates, the District Community Development Office (DCDO) coordinate in organising the participants to meet and work in group projects. After giving them certificates, what next? That is why we are trying to maintain them.

According to the key informant's response, major concern "*after giving them certificates, what next?*" indicate that a certificate is one of the tools which can be used to integrate women into the development process, for example, participating in leadership in community development projects. The statement that "*a certificate is very important*" confirms that without an award after the training, there is a possibility of the women missing the opportunity for being integrated to participate in activities that lead to socio-economic progresses. Absence of certificates also means that majority of FAL graduates have nothing to show to their families and the community as evidence that they completed FAL training. Acknowledgement is in line with Freire's drive that emphasised that recognition should be incorporated in training and teaching programmes in order to raise people's consciousness (Stromquist, 2014).

Another voice came from Ayuru, a 65 year FAL trained woman who also shared her experience in delayed award of certificates. She said, "*We need something that will recognise us when we complete level III. We are not given certificates that would make people know that we are literate*". The women wished that something can be done to bring out their invisibility to the community. Similarly, Arao, a 41 year old woman that completed the training without getting a certificate expressed her sentiment with a proposal that:

Graduation ceremony would help to sensitise the community on the benefits of FAL. Other people see that the training is of no value because when we complete, there is nothing that will make the community to recognize you apart from the knowledge and skills we have attained.

The statements by Ayuru and Arao are very vital because it indicates that certification is avenue for the community access information and sensitisation. For example, during the award ceremony, the officials take advantage to expound on the benefits of FAL and raise the consciousness of the non-literate women to desire a change in their lives by enrolling into the course, so that they gain skills to read, write and calculate. Such an opportunity enables the women to reflect on how non-literacy impacts negatively on their socio-economic live and thus have the agency to participate in FAL training. Hence, obtaining a basic education certificate for women that have just completed FAL training to enable them to participate in socio-economic progress a result of personal and social transformation process (Yeste, Ferrada, & Ruiz, 2011).

Men also reaffirmed women's voices to lack of award as a challenge faced by FAL graduates and likely to impede those interested in enrolling into FAL training course. Mystica, a 34 year old man and a FAL coordinator narrated that:

After level III, you are supposed to graduate and then be passed out, but this has not been happening. So, it is something that has been discouraging the learners because after finishing three levels, you are supposed to be graduated and given certificates. But you find that, at the end of it all, you are not graduated and the certificate is not there. Certificate is something that you carry home to show that I was able to do something, but when after finishing, you go back empty handed, there is nothing to show that, you attended the programme... To the FAL graduates, there is no difference between them and the non-literates of no certificates.

This statement "*but when after finishing, you go back empty handed, there is nothing to show that, you attended the programme*" indicates that an award ceremony would be one of the major areas for visibility of the status of women that had acquired live skills that can enable them to change their social and economic condition. The statement "*there is no difference between them and the non-literates*" because of no certificates indicate that the FAL graduates has a low self-esteem and self-worth to make their family and community members do not understand what is happening with their socio-economic lives. According to Ozoemena, (2013), research thus show that, the test certificates issued to graduates of non-formal training could be used to seek out employment in either the private or public sector.

Uncertainty versus Benefits of FAL Training

Whereas the trained women expected enormous benefits, there were negative perception has contributed to some FAL trained women in having less interest to participate in FAL training. The women argued that, "*There is no difference between me and the one that is non-literate*". A male key informant expressed his perception of the FAL training participants' expectation that:

People who go for FAL training, they just go to pass time because after all, after completing those cycles, where else would they go? Most of them have a misconception that the training is not relevant because people only study to get employed. They don't understand that they are trained so that informed on issues that may also improve on their well-being.

This statement reflects either the KII's biased view of women's desire to participate in FAL training or perhaps some of the women lacked clear understanding of why they up took the opportunity for FAL training. Perhaps this is explained by the common perception that a person is only trained to be employed. Notably, women also

yearn for employment whether in private or public sector and yet most of the job opportunities require a higher qualification. These narratives reveal the passive form of agency postulated by Kabeer, (1999), considering that women were not able to identify and create opportunities like being a local entrepreneur and participating in lower level leadership even after acquiring FAL skills. On the other hand, these narratives could also reveal the negative perceptions of actual benefits of FAL. Adule explained that the challenges to negative perceptions can be overcome. She said:

There is a great need to sensitise the community on the benefits of knowing how to read and write. Even if you I am old and I have shown the community that FAL training is not only meant for getting a job, but instead to improve on my status of living. I am now self-employed and an entrepreneur from the skills I have acquired and that is how I earn a living.

Corina, a 43 year FAL-trained woman further supplemented Adule's narrative by sharing her experience. She said:

I got married to an uneducated man. Whenever it was time for trainings, he could confiscate my book that I am going for adultery and the training was a waste of time. After all you will not be employed by anybody because of only knowing how to read and write. But now as I talk I am self-employed from the skills I acquired. I make energy stoves and make money. I bought 3 goats, 1 cow worth Shs. 300,000¹. I now get milk and I have another calf. I now want to be a trainer. His attitude towards me has changed and is now supporting me in buying and selling produce like beans, maize and sunflower.

Corina's proclamation that *whenever it was time for trainings, he could confiscate my book* indicates that despite the fact that women have opportunities to learn how to read and write and apply acquired skills in their daily lives, they are still constrained by their husbands especially those who are non-literate. In such a situation, for mutual understanding and empowerment of the women, both couples should be encouraged to participate in the FAL-training programme, for instance through family dialogue meetings. In addition, Adule and Corina's stories about negative perceptions demonstrate the need for deliberation because this is a strong factor that impedes women's participation in development programmes such as FAL. Corina's expression that *now as I talk I am self-employed from the skills I acquired* points in the importance of promoting women's involvement in all social and economic areas by empowering them through learning.

Double edged Sword: Costly Opportunity

Some women FAL participants expressed one of the challenges as mockery from the community which makes them feel less important. Findings show that the opportunity to participate in FAL training also comes with costs. It was revealed that the community continues to criticise and make degrading statements of FAL-trained women. Although most women said they had witnessed the benefits of FAL training, those with negative attitude perceptions saw no benefits of it and continued to mock the beneficiaries. Several FAL trained women shared their experiences on how they are being mocked and ridiculed. Abeja Dege, a 46 year old woman said, *Whenever I would go for training, it would be alleged that I am going for "adal" [adultery]*. Apio, a 47 year old woman supplemented Abeja's experience that:

The community members humiliate me. I am always told that, you failed to study before when you were you young, what are you up to now? However, in my opinion, I propose sensitisation of the community on FAL benefits and bringing those that are non-literate women for training, thus needing role models and visibility in the community.

Onyeko, a 40 year old woman also expressed similar sentiments in support of Apio's experience. She said that:

People would mock at me saying that, now that you are old like this and pretend to be studying, you mean you did not study from your home before getting married? The worst things, most of them are non-literate women and men. Many of them do not understand the skills acquired from FAL training. I am preparing to invite the non-literate people so that I can sensitise them on the skills I have acquired and how I am utilising the skills.

The experiences shared by trio above reveal how FAL training can become a double edged sword and the category of people that complicate the FAL participants' lives. The above voices also demonstrate that the non-literate participants are the major actors on belittlement. These circumstances lower the self-esteem and potentials for the FAL trained women. Above all, the negative agency by especially non-literate women makes the literate women to feel less important in their community. The participants' proposal of sensitising both the non-literate people and the general community demonstrate lack of awareness or invisibility of the benefits of FAL skills. This validates Freire & Macedo's, (1987) argument that lack of consciousness of the real world, limits social awareness and critical inquiry, as well as social change especially for the non-literate women.

Furthermore, some non-literate women's proclamations confirmed that, they also contributed to belittling their fellow women claiming that there is no difference between those who attended or not attended the FAL training. Nansier, aged 44 years, a woman farmer argued that, *I see very slight difference between the*

¹ This is equivalent to United States Dollars (USD) 85.

literate and non-literate women". Comparing what she said and my observation, she seemed to harbor some bitterness with low self-esteem. This might also mean that she was talking out of jealousy as illustrated with our conversation below:

Author: What makes you feel that there is no difference between the literate and non-literate women?

Nansier: Farming, because you find that we all practice it very well and the only thing the literate women defeat me with is only reading and writing. It is the only thing which makes me so bitter.

Author: why do feel bitter about reading and writing?

Nansier: I feel that my brain alone does not help me. In a meeting of farmers, if we are given brochures, my friends tell me to give them that copy because after all, I don't know how to read and write. I am greatly in need of acquiring the skills to read and write and when I see a person holding a book and a pen writing something; it is the only thing which makes me feel so bitter.

Author: What do you think you can do well better than the literate women?

Nansier: there are things that sometimes I hear, although I have not seen it with my own eyes. You hear that, the wife if so and so who claim to now be literate after the FAL training even does not know how to socialize, for instance they don't know how to welcome people and they also communicate in case of a problem. Instead they use vulgar language. I, who is not literate is far much better than the women who claim they know how to read write.

The dialogue with Nansier's reveals how the benefits of FAL training are invisible to the community and the element of lack of critical consciousness of the non-FAL beneficiaries. It should also be noted that majority of the individuals especially in the rural community think that people are only trained to get formal employment and therefore see no value of the older people especially women attaining literacy skills. Many women's standpoint appointed to a conclusion that FAL graduates should be role models so as to bring the literate and non-literate women together. In turn, the non-literate women will learn the values and benefits of reading, writing and arithmetic.

Gender relations and Women's Participation in FAL Training

This section presents women's experiences of how gender relations affect women's decisions to participate in FAL training. Cultural beliefs and traditional roles interact to affect their participation in the FAL training programme. Traditionally, women's primary responsibilities rested on domestic chores. In majority the women I talked to emphasised that household burden poses a major constraint on their continuity or dropping out and/or irregularities in FAL training.

Based on a personal experience, knowledge of community development department and coordination of FAL programme, one key informant pointed out that:

Even if she has the will of going to FAL training, but once the man refuses, then automatically, that woman would also give up. I have seen that in my interaction with the community, like you may organize a meeting, where you want to support the women. When you call for women to come, their men normally come and take them away to go back and look after the children at home.

The key informant's concern is that women are underprivileged within their cultures, and families due to traditional way of life which positions women to dominate the domestic work. Thus when women enroll for FAL training, they cannot run away from their domestic roles. However, they require FAL skills and agency to balance these ascribed roles and the process of training. Similarly, Nampa, a female peasant farmer in her 50s confirmed key informant's view of the issue of the women's culturally defined roles in their communities. She narrated that:

My husband used to say that attending FAL training was time wasting for domestic work. At times he would conflict with me that the role of a woman is to stay at home to cook, do house chores and keep the children. I persevered with FAL training in difficulties I went through. There reached a time that he left me alone to study because he realised that something good had come out of it.

Positioning herself in her culture, Nampa pointed out continuous stereotyping of women limits their opportunity for acquiring FAL skills, personal development and improvement of their well-being. Her statements are in line with Kabeer, (2005) that inability to meet the basic needs may impede a person's ability to make choices. Nampa's story of perseverance despite difficulties is indicative of agency and consciousness that the women have taken. Her statements "*he would conflict with me that the role of a woman is to stay at home to cook, do house chores and keep the children*" point clearly how culture affects changes in women's lives, for example self-confidence and participatory development.

There was a consensus among most women that cultural stereotyping, lack of freedom and enjoyment in terms of having some level of control over decision making limits women's opportunity for FAL training. In comparison, with the non-literate women's views, Ketorine, in her 60s, argued that women who had missed the opportunity in formal education were now literate due to FAL training. She justified her claim that:

The time my colleagues was going for training, I was busy doing domestic work. I am not free to go for training because I was not allowed or else I lose the marriage. I even know that being non-literate

has affected my life in terms of reading and writing. My level of intelligence is also low for instance, to get employment that would help support the family like educating other siblings of the family, medical bills, and providing family needs like soap and clothing among other things.

These voices to women were validated by men's perspective. In an interview, one key informant asserted that, *"the constraint that affects women from attending this FAL training is the kind of work women are engaged in"*. He further attributed this situation lack of support from men.

I just want to give you an example I have experienced. At this time, when people are harvesting simsim, I have seen that woman would take the whole day in the garden even if the classes were scheduled for today, she would not come. Okay..., so the nature of working our women does affect their attendance and yet men just sit and relax at beer parties.

As far as women are concerned, stereotyping, denying them the opportunity for a training programme and the burden of work locks their opportunity for socio-economic progress. To the key informant, his proposal and endorsement of what can be done to overcome these challenges is as follows:

This still call for a dialogue meeting with these women which we have already done. We have also encouraged individuals that have never had the opportunity to go through formal education to at least enroll for FAL training... We know with time, the community especially non-literate women will be able to understand that FAL training is a very good programme for people who had no opportunity to for formal education.

The key informant's argument explains how the benefits FAL programme can be made to be visible to the entire community. Hence, to understand the benefits, it requires a longer time although it is a challenge. Besides, it is important to literate and non-literate women within a community to develop a sense of agency to share their voices on issues that affect their individual lives and within the community.

5. Conclusion

The article explored the challenges faced by women before and after FAL training. The findings identified a key challenge faced by FAL trainees as lack of community acknowledgement and appreciation of their achievement. Moreover, the majority of FAL graduates have no evidence to show to their families and the community as a token symbol that they participated and completed FAL training. Lack of a possibility for the women that missed an opportunity to participate in socio-economic development programmes was found to be common. Partially, this was contributed to lack of recognition of the value of the programme. Negative perception further fostered invisibilising immediate tangible differences in the socio-economic conditions of the FAL trainees compared to non-trainees. This also contributed to dampening women's interests in participating in training, with some even dropping out of the training. Hence, the impression that emerges is that FAL training is irrelevant as it does not aid them in improving their living conditions through opportunities such as employment. Although older women acknowledged the benefits FAL, those with negative attitude, particularly, the non-literates and some community members did not see the benefits of FAL training and continued to mock FAL trained women with degrading statements, such as, questioning why they failed to study while they were young. Consequently, taking on Paulo Freire's perspective on consciousness and Kabeer's assertion of women's engagement on transformation development as active not passive or agents; findings indicate that women cannot run way of their domestic roles, but they require FAL skills and agency to balance their roles and the training process.

6. Recommendation

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of the study:

- All concerned bodies, that is, MoGLSD, international development partners, NGO's and civil society need to help communities change the existing negative perceptions and myths about women, example, through media and learning centers.
- The attitude to looking at old persons as 'wasted beyond rejuvenation' is what is pushing our older persons to apathy, desolation and pessimism. Thus, to sensitise the community on FAL benefits, stakeholders should initiate or support a forum or movement to give older persons momentum of participating in Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which is hinged on inclusively rather than exclusively.
- There should be evident political will and commitment that supports the programme throughout its stages: launching of FAL programme and graduation ceremony should be presided over by a designated senior, political and technical officials, for instance, MoGLSD, Area Members of Parliament, District Chair Persons and District Education Officers. Districts and sub-counties should be awarded grades for FAL performances, for which certain advantages should accrue-such as matching grants. We further suggest that FAL qualification should be a condition for assumption of some positions. For instance, FAL certificates are made requirement for being elected Chairperson Local Council (LC) 1.
- FAL programme trainees deserve affirmative action. In view of the challenges FAL trainees face,

adopting affirmative action policies would be appropriate. For instance, provision of basic stipends could change the entire community attitude to FAL.

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Judith Abal Akello, born in Uganda, is a PhD Fellow, Makerere University Kampala, Uganda under DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service) and also lecturing at Lira University, Northern Uganda in the Faculty of Management Science, Business Administration Department. Judith received her Master of Arts in Education and International Development from University of London under Commonwealth Scholarship (2009), her MBA (2010) and BA in Education (2003) from Makerere University respectively. Her special research interest includes: women and adult literacy, women's socio-economic development, girls' education, school dropouts; quality of education; policy in education, micro-finance and women's poverty eradication.

Peace Musiimenta (PhD) is a lecturer and Undergraduate Programme Coordinator at the School of Women and Gender Studies, Makerere University Kampala, Uganda. She won a PhD scholarship to study at Makerere University in collaboration with the University of Tromso, Norway and the PhD was on "Redefined Subordination: Interrogating Educated Women's Lived Experiences in Contemporary Urban Uganda". Peace also coordinates Study Abroad Programmes Gender and Development elective at the School of International training (SIT), and represents the School of Women and Gender Studies on the Uganda Women's network (UWONET).

Evelyn Lutwama-Rukundo (PhD) is a lecturer and Coordinator (M.A and PhD Programmes) at the School of Women and Gender Studies, Makerere University Kampala, Uganda. Her research interest is gender and communication and has written an article "Dancing to Change: Gender in the Popular Music of Kampala", a book chapter –"Western Theatrical Performance in Africa and Gender Implications" and a book "Communication for Development: Community Theatre and Women's Rights in Buganda (Uganda)". Lutwama-Rukundo is also a screenwriter and director and her forthcoming films include: a documentary on the trajectory of gender studies in Ugandan Universities and one on outstanding women in Uganda.