

Education for all - XIII Adult Education Conference (Volkshochschultag)

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Gender and Adult Education: the current challenges in Latin America

After the transcendental Women conference in Beijing in 1995, the international community made a compromise to achieve gender equality in education. Five years later, the World Declaration of Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium (ODM) Development Goals reaffirmed that education is a fundamental human right. The countries recognized that the girls' education is the first important and necessary stage for the attainment of this goal. Gender parity in primary and secondary education was included as part of the EFA goals and the Millennium (ODM) Development Goals to achieve girls school enrollments equivalent to the number of boys enrollment

Women education situation in Latin America

- According to UNESCO recent data, in 2008, more than half the countries in the region (22 of 36) succeeded to achieve gender parity in primary education. At secondary level some countries have achieved parity. For tertiary education, we see a gradual admission of women to higher education establishments.
- Education levels in Latin America are polarized and there are groups that still have high levels of illiteracy, along with other social groups that have significantly increased their level of education in recent decades. There are large discrepancies, especially when the difference are measure between poor-not poor. This situation constitutes a serious problem in relation to economic development and a sign of social injustice.

This is reflected especially in the rural sector which directly affects the access of rural women to employment

From very broad analysis REPEM considers that the main constrains of adult education and gender in Latin America are :

- Most Government do not consider in their education country programs, non formal adult education, or lifelong learning. This is a concept that is not often included when planning adult education. More emphasis is put on out of school educations or continuing educations oriented towards a tertiary education. In this frame, and due to the urgent women educational needs, CSO are the main group that are implementing youth and adult education activities addressed to women and young girls, like is the case of REPEM, but very often they lack the necessary financial support to broaden its activities to address women practical and strategic needs.
- Adult education activities addressed to women and usually do not taken into consideration the needs of rural, indigenous, afro descendant and urban women. The scarce adult education activities that are planned and implemented tend to maintain women reproductive roles offering very traditional training such as cooking, ("nutrition") knitting, family care. **Seldom** addresses women strategic needs. Women are agent of change therefore the scope of Adult Education with a gender perspective

must support women empowerment, enhance their citizenship and include activities ease their access to non-traditional employment and develop entrepreneurship skill towards their economic autonomy.

- One constant problem is the lack of adult education training offered to indigenous and afro descendent population, and when they are available, many times the educational content do not always meet their needs couple with language constrains because they are not always consider their mother tongue.
- Illiteracy is a constant concern in the region and although Women adult literacy is 90% and 92% of men, illiteracy still persists in rural areas, especially in areas with a large representation of indigenous peoples. Few literacy courses are organized that consider indigenous women mother tongue and that follow women needs .
- In general governments and donors seldom support research on adult education and gender that contribute to an inclusive, non-discriminatory education for democracy, for peace, for human right.

But one of the main problems that women face to participate in adult education activities is time constrains. Their reproductive, productive and community roles restrict them to active enroll into adult education activities, especially if they are implemented during the hours that they perform their main roles. Women are overloaded with work and if adult education activities are to be successfully attended by women and make a change in their lives, these activities must be implement during the time when they are available and include schemes to alleviate women work . e.g. Child care during training activities.

Challenges

Adult education with a gender perspective in the Latin American region faces several challenges that must be considered:

- Contents must contribute to women economic autonomy, cultural transformation and to foster peace, human rights, and social justice. Adult educational curricula do not cover these issues , they tend to be very traditional and as refer before , they often concentrate around women reproductive roles.
- The contents and actions must be linked to new societal challenges: climate change, AIDS, urban and domestic violence, citizenship, democracy, on the job training. It is urgent to provide women with the necessary skills to access the needs of the current labor market.
- Improve social and human capital in rural and peri-urban areas is key to better job alternatives and decent work . It is urgent that governments and donors invest in a adult education of quality and develop lifelong learning programs so poor urban and rural women can exercise their citizenship, be agents of change and contribute to sustainable development.