

Women's Adult Education

A fundamental tool for empowerment

by Agnes Nansubuga

Being a woman is something to be proud of, but it includes many challenges, particularly when it comes to education. Social, economic, and cultural systems throughout almost the entire world often do not support women's literacy. However, adult educators can help women overcome barriers and empower themselves and their communities.

Often, it is women's responsibility to look after the children, their husbands, and at times the extended family. Because of the overwhelming workload at home, women do not have time to train for high-paying jobs. Employers are sometimes hesitant to hire women because they worry about having to provide maternity leave and they assume that women will have difficulties with childcare. Taking low-paying jobs means that women have to work extra hours to catch up with the bills. With all these pressures, it is hard for women to find the time to engage in educational programs and, anyway, they are often too tired to take on additional class work.

Traditionally, many cultures push women away from education. Some countries emphasize literacy and education for boys more than for girls. Consequently, there have not been many women to mentor other women in higher educational programs. Secondly, in some cultures, a female may be considered less marriageable if she is highly educated, so her family will pressure her not to go to school. Also, many cultures condone or do not do enough to prevent violence against women. Being the victim of violence can lead to shame and isolation, which has a profound impact on women's ability to learn and meaningfully participate in literacy programs.

Educators need to support women to overcome the barriers that hinder us from getting educated. It is important for educators to ask women what they need, to respect voices from all cultures, to make connections with diverse learners, and to link educational programs with what is happening in communities. Specific approaches should include: women's participation in curriculum development, using real life issues in lesson plans, and helping women increase their participation in politics. Women's literacy calls for a grassroots effort to combat the negative images about women through education and action. Through education, we shall move from self-empowerment as women to community empowerment.

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