

Women's Participation for Rural Educational Development in Iran

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Abstract: This research set out to explore the participation of women in rural educational development in Iran. In developed countries women have important role in the processes of rural educational development. But, in Third World countries there are some important barriers in face of women's participation in rural educational development. This paper looks at the barriers of women's participation in educational development in rural areas of Iran. The findings indicated that there are some barriers in women's participation towards rural educational development. This research draws from our scientific experience in a variety of disciplines namely; anthropology and education and psychology [Abrisham Aref & Khadijeh Aref, **Women's Participation for Rural Educational Development**, Journal of American Science 2011; 7(12):73-75]. (ISSN: 1545-1003). <http://www.americanscience.org>.

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1. Introduction

Rural Education as a commonly recognized need can provide a focal point around which rural communities can positively engage. Rural educational needs cannot be addressed in isolation, so rural structures engaging with education should be empowered through women's participation in rural educational development (UNESCO, 2009). Women can play a variety of roles in the provision and management of education and learning processes. Women's participation can contribute to promoting rural education (UNICEF 1992). Participation is a concept that attempts to bring different stakeholders together for problem solving and decision making (Talbot and Verrinder 2005). It plays an essential and long-standing role in promoting quality of life (Putnam 2000). Women's participation in rural educational development can support and uphold local culture, tradition, knowledge and skill, and create pride in rural heritage (Lacy et al. 2002).

Women's participation is one of the mechanisms to empower rural areas to take part in educational development. It was launched as a key concept of rural development. Increased women's participation is a means to achieve development to resolve the educational problems (Aref et al, 2009; Lasker, Weiss, and Miller 2001). This article looks at the barriers and potential of women's participation in rural educational development in Iran.

2. Literature review

The term "participation" can be interpreted in various ways, depending on the context.

Participation is a familiar concept in the development, humanitarian and education sectors, and increasingly a standard feature of program design. Participation refers to both the processes and activities that allow members of an affected population to be heard, empowering them to be part of decision-making processes and enabling them to take direct action on education issues (UNESCO, 2009). Shaeffer (1994) clarifies different degrees or levels of participation, including:

- 1- Involvement through the contribution of money, materials, and labor;
2. Involvement through 'attendance' (e.g. at parents' meetings at school), implying passive acceptance of decisions made by others;
3. Involvement through consultation on a particular issue;
4. Participation in the delivery of a service, often as a partner with other actors;
5. Participation as implementers of delegated powers; and participation "in real decision making at every stage," including identification of problems, the stay of planning, implementation, and evaluation (Uemura 1999).

In other definition participation is concerned with human development and increases people's sense of control over issues which affect their lives, helps them to learn how to plan and implement and, on a broader front, prepares them for participation at regional or even national level (Oakley 1991; Warburton 1997).

Without participation, there is obviously no partnership, no development and no program (Aref, 2011). Hence the lack of women's participation in decision making to implement

rural educational development can lead to failure in the rural development (Miranda 2007). Meanwhile, some scholars provided a typology of participation, but they do not directly deal with educational development (Leksakundilok 2006). Table 1 showed six broad categories or levels of participation, which had been formulated.

Table 1: Types of women's participation for educational development

| Types | Characteristics |
|--------------|--|
| Empowerment | women have control over all development without influence (Choguill 1996; Dewar 1999). |
| Partnership | There are some degrees of local influence in educational development (Arnstein 1969). |
| Interaction | People have greater involvement in this level (Pretty 1995). |
| Consultation | Women are consulted in several ways, e.g. being involved in community's meeting or even public hearings. |
| Informing | The projects run without listening to local people's opinions. |
| Manipulation | Development is generally developed by some powerful individuals without any discussion with the women. |

Source: Leksakundilok (2006) & Aref et al. (2009)

3. Methodology

The research was performed as a qualitative library in which the researchers had to refer to relevant and related sources. We have used a number of articles and official websites of the various Iran known organizations.

4. Barriers of rural educational development

Understanding barriers of women's participation is important when a rural community is getting organized for involvement in educational development. This understanding can help community and organizations more effectively impact the educational policy-making process. Further, it is important for government to understand that educational system also face barriers that can hinder its progress in responding and recognizing the priorities of local communities in Iran. Overcoming the barriers to education will serve to facilitate the policy making process. There are several literatures that directly deal with the barriers of women's participation in rural communities particularly in Third World countries towards educational development.

Rural educational development in Iran has several barriers that cannot develop. Following are the main barriers:

1. Inability to analyze the changing socio-cultural dimensions of educational system
2. Lack of understanding of the policy process
3. Lack of access to information (Steven and Jennifer 2002).

Involving rural women in the educational planning requires facing and tackling a number of challenges. In general, as Crewe and Harrison (1998) articulate, participatory approaches tend to overlook complexities and questions of power and conflict within rural communities. Bushell and Esgles (2007) also states education as a phenomenon of affluent contemporary societies is a particularly difficult concept in rural communities in developing countries to grasp (Bushell & Eagles, 2007, p. 154). As consequence, women's participation may be unacceptable for rural educational development.

In attempts to understand factors that prevent rural communities from being involved in formal education, Shaeffer (1992) found that the degree of women's participation is particularly low in socially and economically marginal regions. This is because such regions tend to have the following elements: (a) a lack of appreciation of the overall objectives of education; (b) a mismatch between what parents expect of education and what the school is seen as providing; (c) the belief that education is essentially the task of the State; (d) the length of time required to realize the benefits of better schooling; and (e) ignorance of the structure, functions, and constraints of the school (Uemura 1999).

5. Conclusion

In any effort to promote women's participation for rural educational development, it is necessary to assess the rural capacity to carry out what they are expected to achieve in a long run. Participation itself is not a goal in rural educational development, or a panacea to solve complicated issues contributing to poor educational quality in both developing and developed countries. It is a process that facilitates the realization of improving educational quality and the promotion of democracy within society. In completion this study explored the notion of community participation in processes of educational development. The study also showed the women's participation can contribute to rural educational development through making decisions about school schedules; monitoring and following up on teacher attendance and performance; helping children with studying; and

-providing security for teachers by preparing adequate housing for them (Uemura 1999). In sum the indirect benefits of women's participation in rural educational development programs can be great, particularly when working with displaced communities that need to restore relationships (UNESCO, 2009).

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