

Women's Empowerment through Formal and Non-Formal Education: A Panel-Workshop Combo - conducted at Women's World Congress, 17-22nd August, 2014, Hyderabad, India.

Panel Presenters and Workshop Facilitators:

Chair: Dr Shirley Gillett

Coordinator: Dr Meera Bondre

Discussants: Yeabu Tholley and Fiona Bakas

- This Panel/Workshop looked at Women's Empowerment from a number of perspectives with a connecting theme of education (taking education in a broad sense), starting with the following presentations.
- ***Empowerment for women and girls through involvement in sport (Shirley):*** This paper examines images of females in sporting scenarios identifying empowerment for women and girls through involvement in sport and physical activity and also the contradictions these represent. Sport allows girls to occupy alternative gender spaces as perceptions of sport are synonymous with masculine attributes and characteristics such as competitiveness, independence, and roughness and feminine negatives defined by "to throw like a girl". One example is the Kibera Girls Soccer Academy established as a grassroots organization to help focus efforts on the education and development of women and girls in addressing gender inequalities within the slums of Kenya. This supports the Beijing Platform for Action (2007) which called for gender equality in sporting contexts.
- ***Towards Empowerment and Entrepreneurship (Meera):*** Over two decades ago I started a project for the benefit of girls and women from lower income groups, with a view to linking education to employability. We teach skills and crafts like sewing, knitting, crochet, embroidery, ceramic work, making toys, artificial flowers, greeting cards, candles, jewellery, and cooking health food. They 'EARN while they LEARN' which is a great motivation. Some participants take up jobs, or start small businesses from their homes which is significant considering that today 73 million people are unemployed across the world (ILO 2013). This project is affordable, repeatable, and sustainable. It is an effective step towards poverty alleviation, which is an important issue in the Post 2015 Development Agenda. Two case studies were presented.
- ***Empowerment through entrepreneurship-related non-formal education: The dynamism of time (Fiona)***

This presentation examines women's empowerment through non-formal education, looking at how women, educated through their engagement in tourism entrepreneurship in business skills, are empowered. Recent ethnographic research completed during a six-month period in 2012 on female micro-entrepreneurs who make handicrafts to sell as souvenirs in rural areas in Crete and in Epirus in Greece, provides the empirical backdrop for this analysis. Using feminist economics, Fiona suggests that transformations in gender roles due to the alterations in the time-related value of tourism micro-

entrepreneurs' social reproductive activities, can be used as a novel way of indicating that empowerment is occurring, on more levels than just the economic.

- ***Empowerment of women through secondary education – the Sierra Leone case (Yeabu)***

Yeabu's presentation focused on the empowerment of women through secondary education in Sierra Leone. It looked at: what is empowerment; how are women empowered; the statistically indicators used to measure women's empowerment; and the educational system in Sierra Leone. It further examined the current educational status of women, the importance of quality secondary education in the empowerment of women, the challenges in girls' secondary education, and the benefits of secondary education for women in Sierra Leone. Yeabu included some women's views on the importance of acquiring secondary education and policy questions for going forward.

- **The workshop** was based on the World Café style. Attendees were split into groups around tables. They were given a theme emerging from the panel presentations to discuss, elaborating on their personal experiences, with discussions being facilitated by panel members.

- **The themes for table discussions** were: Images of empowerment; negotiating the division of household tasks as a sign of empowerment; and ensuring women are educated and combining education with the teaching of income-generating skills.

(i) Specifically characteristics of empowerment from discussion of sporting images were: increasing control over one's own life; gaining confidence; the power to negotiate; communicate better; work for success in a team (effective team work); and identifying one's own body strength.

(ii) From tourism activities: That putting a time-value on social reproductive activities like household tasks can be significant as a transformation in gender roles, indicated by a change in the allocation of gendered social reproductive activities. Time distribution can be used as an indicator of empowerment along with economic indicators

(iii) From craft activities and education: gaining money earning skills; becoming employable; developing entrepreneurial urge; and developing the urge to prove oneself; whilst basic education is an important tool for empowerment, in some places in the world (particularly African countries and elsewhere) girls are denied this. Adult education is equally important. Equality in education from birth for both boys and girls is necessary for building up a balanced society. Many times extra submissiveness is inculcated in girls alone, by parents and teachers of very young children, so the mindsets of both the parents and also the teachers have to be changed.

- **Results & Conclusion:** Participants were in agreement that gender roles were changing because of financial empowerment, as increasing numbers of women in India are becoming financially independent. Most importantly, the evidence

that empowerment is happening in India, where the conference was held, is that women were more free to talk about change in gender roles.

A strong point which concerned both genders was that for the male, his role is achieved, whereas for the female her role is prescribed. Therefore we cannot leave out the male population (and other sections in the societies like the physically, mentally, or financially handicapped) while considering the subject of empowerment. If women are to be empowered, the process has to start from the childhood of every individual irrespective of the gender.

Words used to describe non-empowerment in the workshop were the following: prohibit, bar, forbid, disallow, inhibit, hinder, closed mindsets (non-receptive to new/ different ideas and views), sometimes cultural barriers.

We have demonstrated that empowerment comes in many different ways. It is not simple but complex and varied incorporating different components. The converse, which is represented by persisting with social systems that disempower women as described, is negative and restricting.

Dr Meera Bondre, Ecologist, Hydrobiologist, CIR- IFUWA; Immediate Past President, and Initiator of the ongoing project 'Hobby- Hues' at UWA Pune(an affiliate of IFUWA).

Dr Shirley Gillett, NZFGW; University of Otago College of Education(UOCE), New Zealand.

Fiona Bakas, Research Fellow, Aveiro University, Portugal; PhD Candidate at the University of Otago, New Zealand. Affiliated to NZFGW.

Yeabu Tholley, SLAUW; Statistician attached to the Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Affairs, Sierra Leone.