

ABSTRACT

The study was about women's experiences of Functional Adult Literacy (FAL) and their potentials to socio-economic development in Northern Uganda. The main objective of this study was to explore whether and how women participants in Apac District derived socio-economic benefits from skills acquired from FAL training. The study was informed by agency theory from Kabeer's socio-economic viewpoint and Freire's literacy perspective which argue on the element of conscientisation or awareness by making marginalised non-literate's agents of socio-economic development. These perspectives helped to unravel socio-economic changes experienced by women as a result of their participation in FAL training. These changes were captured by comparing the beneficiaries of FAL with their non-literate counterparts, in terms of participating in communities, health promotion behaviours, children's education and income generating activities.

The study largely employed qualitative case study research design focusing on the experiences of 52 women and men both in the rural and urban setting. Using individual in-depth and key informant interviews, the study pointed out situations before and after women's involvement in FAL training.

The findings revealed that women who trained in FAL acquired skills that greatly changed their lives. The FAL women beneficiaries acquired improved reading, writing, simple arithmetic skills; and ably participated in community meetings. They also experienced improved hygiene and health promotion; contribution and influence on children's performance, persistence and success in school; and substantive engagement in income generating activities. However, the benefits were punctuated by challenges such as uncertainty triggered by FAL training, belittlement of FAL trained women and delayed certificates which the graduates craved for. The study concludes that to some extent, non-literacy contributed to women's limited skills in maintaining the home hygiene and health of their families, limited ability and confidence to guide their children on the importance of education and loss in business due to limited skills.

Therefore, the study recommends a policy review and action plan on designing FAL training to be in such a way that it is more specific to the needs of the community, and adopts a hands-on and flexible approach of learning which is relevant in building specialised capacity of respective communities. In addition, an action plan on compulsory FAL training programme that would support inclusion of adult women in FAL training needs to be undertaken. The MoGLSD which coordinates FAL programme in Uganda should ensure that support and implementation of FAL programme takes priority. Stakeholders should also sensitise the community on FAL benefits as well as ensure that FAL trainees are part of the general planning. Given that keeping a commitment is a way to shared accomplishment, there is need for an evident political will and guarantee that supports the programme throughout its stages: launching of FAL programme and graduation ceremony of FAL trained graduates should be presided over by a designated senior official.