

Female Literacy, Education and Empowerment: Risks and Potentials of Open and Distance Learning

Background and Purpose

Promoting female literacy and girls' education has been a high priority area at both national and international levels as revealed by various policy statements and declarations. Both Women's literacy and Girls' Education figure prominently in the Education for All and Millennium Development Goals, the two major international declarations of the commitments for social development.

Female literacy and education are critical goals for both intrinsic and instrumental value. Apart from helping individual girls and women secure better lives and livelihoods, female education is known to be leading to various social and economic benefits for the society as a whole. Education is an important vehicle for empowerment of women providing the tools and strength to question unequal practices and beliefs.

Open and distance education has emerged as an important means of reaching girls and women especially for remote areas. A number of examples from different countries show that females in most cases have outnumbered males in accessing education through open and distance means. However, there has also been some critique that the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) has contributed in shrinking the space that educational institutions provide for peer interaction and informal learning. It is especially significant for girls and women in conservative societies where schools and colleges are often the only spaces outside their homes where they get to interact with peer groups.

The proposed discussion intends to bring the debate to the forefront through sharing of experiences and researches from across different regions.

Outcomes

Outlining the conditions that make an ODL initiative transformative from the perspective of women's empowerment rather than merely providing some information and developing few basic skills.

Organisation

Invited presentations will make presentations and provide frame for discussion and debate. The presenters will include those having implemented ODL programme for literacy and education with a focus on women and girls, and those who have researched on the issue. Presenters as well as the participants will come from government as well as civil society organisations. The conclusions of the discussion will be culled out in the form of the outcomes as mentioned above.