

Quality Adult Education (QAE) Benchmarking for Women's Education and Political Participation

Prepared as a Discussion Paper for ASPBAE

May 2012

Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education

Written by **Subhalakshmi Nandi**, Nirantar, India. Nirantar is a resource group for gender and education and works in the areas of women's literacy, education and empowerment. The Paper compiles discussions and inputs on Quality Adult Education Benchmarks for Indigenous Education from the Core Group amongst ASPBAE membership that attended the Workshop on Building a Shared Understanding on Benchmarks for Quality Adult Education in the Asia Pacific, held at Jakarta from November 20-22, 2010

Discussion Paper on Quality Adult Education (QAE) Benchmarking for Women's Education for Political Participation and Citizenship¹

Introduction

According to the UNESCO,

"Education is a fundamental human right and essential for the exercise of all other human rights. It promotes individual freedom and empowerment and yields important development benefits... Education is a powerful tool by which economically and socially marginalized adults and children can lift themselves out of poverty and participate fully as citizens."

This is the spirit with which the Education for All (EFA) goals from the Jomtien World Conference (1990) were set, and subsequently reiterated at the Dakar World Economic Forum (2000) which set the deadline for meeting the EFA goals by 2015. Yet at the level of converting the rhetoric into action it is very clear that the goals that pertain to gender parity and equality, adult literacy and life skills for young people and adults are the ones which are treated with less seriousness, in which the least investments have been made, progress almost negligible, and the targets unlikely to be met by 2015. The other dominant discourse for policy and programmes are the Millennium Development Goals which are sadly silent on the agenda of adult education, while we do see a thrust on universalisation of primary education and early childhood care and education (ECCE).

These are indications of the fact that even within the larger community of the education sector, education and literacy for women is a marginalised area. The priorities set by the MDG and EFA have meant that not only are governments not doing enough for providing empowering educational opportunities for women's political participation and citizenship-building, but that even civil society efforts at demanding rights and accountability sometimes tend to leave out the concerns of adult education.

Moreover, the discourse is limited to promoting access and outcomes, with very little emphasis on 'quality' issues. To start with, adult education, particularly women's education, is on the periphery of current discourses. On top of that, there is almost no debate and discussion on values, principles, methodologies, or curriculum that should be the foundation for quality adult education programmes.

¹ This paper is an outcome of the presentations and discussions from the Quality Adult Education (QAE) Benchmarking Workshop held in Jakarta in November'10, as well as a subsequent meeting of the core group for finalizing the paper (this meeting was held in New Delhi in March'11).

The Aims and Objectives of Women's Education

For the purpose of writing this paper on quality benchmarking, the interventions that have been examined, are those that implement and promote women's education with two specific goals. One is to encourage women's political participation in various spheres, and the second is for citizenship-building. Below we define what we mean by these terms.

Women's Education – Education is broadly defined as learning that enables women to take control over their lives. It can be a medium through which women can access information, critically examine their situation, and participate in decision-making. Within these processes, literacy plays an important role in enabling women to express themselves and communicate within their immediate context as well as the larger world, with less dependence on those who have the word. Literacy also allows for women to enter into new roles in decentralized forums that they are part of.

Political participation – Women's active participation in public and private domains is a critical aspect and outcome of quality adult education programmes. Starting from where the women are at, opportunities have to be created for them to advance their knowledge and skills in order to help them engage better within and outside social institutions, so they can participate in the various domains affecting their lives, in a fulfilling way.

Citizenship – While women's citizenship-building is one of the cornerstones of quality women's education interventions, it is important to note that the conception of 'universal rights' and 'citizenship' has focused on the issue that giving everyone equal rights does not guarantee equality because women's position within social relations is different and subordinate to men and their life experiences are therefore different. So while there may be 'formal equality', it is important to see whether this further becomes 'substantive equality'. This has been the feminist critique of the conception of 'citizenship', and this critique informs this paper.

Approach to Benchmarking

Benchmarks are the parameters that help to define what some of the desirable aspects of programmes should be. This paper seeks to lay out some of the benchmarks of quality adult education interventions for women's political participation and citizenship. The benchmarks highlighted in this discussion paper are the outcomes of a few workshops organised by ASPBAE, attended by some of its member organisations. This is not an exhaustive or complete list of benchmarks. The purpose of this paper is to start the discussion on benchmarks, based on some practices and experiences. It is work in progress and it is hoped that over a period of discussion and validation, the paper will become richer and more inclusive.

Moreover, it is well recognised that effective practices in one context are not necessarily suitable for another context. There are diversities in the social, cultural, economic and political realities within which adult education programmes are run. Keeping this in mind, it is important to consider these benchmarks as 'evolving' and to be mindful of the fact that these are indeed dynamic, ever-changing, flexible and context-specific.

The Framework for Benchmarking: Core Principles

Given this context, we would like to make the case that there is a need to focus on adult education initiatives for women in particular. We believe that all women have a right to education that is empowering for them, that helps them to understand the existing structures that perpetuate inequality, discrimination and powerlessness, and provides them with ways towards transforming these unequal power relations. Therefore, not only is education a right for women, the agenda of social transformation and the journey of empowerment is also at the core of our framework.

We believe that women are citizens and should be active participants in political life, whether it is in formal and electoral processes or whether it pertains to decision-making and leadership within informal institutions. Historically and socially, this is not an opportunity that women have got. Therefore, adult education interventions for women's active political participation and citizenship must ensure that women are individually and collectively equipped to deal with the structures and institutions that hamper this.

The core of the framework for this paper is grounded on ASPBAE's commitment to ***transformative and empowering education as a right***. ASPBAE's fundamental purpose is to advance and defend the right of all people to learn and have equitable access to relevant and quality education and learning opportunities throughout their lives, enabling them to cope, survive and transform their conditions and define their own destiny.

This paper attempts to identify and elaborate on some benchmarks for policy and programmes specifically on women's education for political participation and citizenship. Right at the outset, we would like to lay out some core principles and values that guide benchmark setting for interventions in this domain. These key values and principles are as below:

Gender justice – Our approach is based on an understanding of unequal power and gendered relations, and the goal is one of addressing these in order to ensure gender justice. And while gender relations pertain to men and women, in the current situation, gender inequality adversely affects women more and they experience the marginalisation more significantly, and therefore, the interventions, as well as the benchmarking initiative, involve direct work with women.

Equity – This is a cross-cutting principle in our quality benchmarking initiative. On one hand, this has implications for access, i.e. the reach of quality adult education programmes to women, especially to those from marginalised backgrounds and those who have not had access to educational opportunities. On the other hand, it also has implications for content and curriculum, and indeed the goals of the programmes. In other words, we believe that quality adult education interventions for women's political participation and citizenship-building must have an approach that is clearly pro-poor and pro-marginalised.

Participation – We believe that women's participation is a key principle of quality adult education programmes. But this participation should not be tokenistic or instrumentalist in nature. Women's participation in any space is influenced by the marginalisations they face, as well as the agencies they have shown in dealing with unequal power relations. This could be

within relationships in the family, in the community, or within formal institutions (for instance, elected women representatives in mainstream government). We believe that women's coming together as collectives and movements (formally and informally), and engaging, negotiating, critically analyzing and questioning for transformation is implied in women's political participation.

Diversity – Another principle of quality adult education programmes is the recognition of diversities in the lived realities of women, and diversities in their context and cultures. As an approach in a quality adult education programme, therefore, it is important to not only be open to these diversities, but also take an approach that rejects the view that 'one size fits all' or that only one strategy is the best for the multitude of contexts.

Dignity – Another value that underlies benchmarking of quality adult education programmes is 'dignity'. With dignity comes the acknowledgement of the adult education principle that learners and teachers both come with different kinds of experiences, and that there are specific contexts that shape what we learn, what we value in our learning and how we learn. A quality adult education programme should address this and strengthen components of mutual learning and mutual respect.

The Benchmarks

The elements that we have defined for quality adult education benchmarks aimed at women's political participation and citizenship are broadly grounded in two sets of concepts. The first is those related to power, political education and empowerment. The second set of elements is those related to issues of governance and leadership.

'Power' is defined as the degree of control over material, human, intellectual and financial resources exercised by different sections of society. We know well there are various axes – of gender, class, age, sexuality, caste, ethnicity, disability, etc – based on which unequal power relations exist in society. Empowerment is the process as well as result for changing this unequal distribution of power. Gender theory clearly states that for such empowerment to happen, the interventions have to be at three levels – public, private and intimate. Therefore, when we speak of adult education initiatives for increasing women's political participation and their roles as active citizens, we speak of all these domains.

The Benchmarks

1. Understanding of power and power relations
2. Skill-building
3. Literacy
4. Mentoring and accompaniment
5. Co-learning and co-sharing
6. Integration of local knowledge
7. Governance in the hands of women
8. Women's collectives and forums
9. Constituency and alliance building
10. Cadre-building and training of facilitators

So first and foremost, whether it is as an individual or as a collective, women need to be empowered. Their status needs to be leveraged to a point from where they can 'participate in political life', use their agency as active citizens, and negotiate with the powers that be. The experience shows that in order to help women get there, quality adult education interventions must have benchmarks with the following elements:

1. Understanding of power and power relations
2. Skill-building
3. Literacy
4. Mentoring and accompaniment
5. Co-learning and co-sharing
6. Integration of local knowledge

The next set of elements relate to issues of governance and leadership. Governance involves not only participation in political life (whether it is in the public or private, formal or informal domain), but also processes of managing the dynamics therein. Governance comprises all the mechanisms, processes and institutions involved in leadership, decision-making, management,

mediation, and negotiation. Key elements related to governance and leadership that form the basis of quality benchmarks in adult education programmes are listed below:

7. Governance in the hands of women
8. Women's collectives and forums
9. Constituency and alliance building
10. Cadre-building and training of facilitators

An overarching benchmark that emerged was the adequate and appropriate investments in terms of time, finances and human resources for quality adult education programmes. Quality programmes need to have long-term and sustained funding, people and institutional mechanisms in order to achieve its outcomes. Documentation of such programmes can be explored through the future validation processes.

Benchmark 1: Understanding of power and power relations

The first step in the educational process for women to strengthen and deepen their participation as citizens is developing consciousness about their own marginalisations and the structures that keep them on the margins. This consciousness can be developed by ensuring that these components find a place both in the curriculum of educational materials. A nuanced understanding of power and power relations should also be reflected in the implementation of adult education programmes; an example being the use of 'affirmative action' in the choice of adult educators, i.e. they be picked from communities that are marginalised. In short, the values of equality, equity and justice should find a place in the content and process of adult education programmes.

If 'understanding power and power relations' is the benchmark, then one of the indicators of a quality programme would be that women are able to understand and analyse the existence of power in their lives. At a later stage, they should also be able to use this understanding to reflect on the existing structures and be able to question the unequal power relations. This might sometimes mean challenging 'tradition' and 'culture'.

Indicators:

- *Women are able to identify different forms of power that control their lives.*
- *Women's capacity to challenge oppressive and unequal power relations is strengthened through negotiations, strategizing and agency.*
- *Changes are seen in power relations between men and women.*

Elements of this benchmark with respect to the content of quality adult education are best understood by the example of a training module that PESADA (Indonesia) uses for doing power analysis with women learners, and has used for trainings of 'Young Feminists'. They use several methods to generate discussions on this. The salient features of this module are as follows:

- Understanding the concept of gender and the various forms of gender based discrimination and violence as experienced by the women. This includes building an understanding of roles, responsibilities, division of labour, etc.
- Facilitators then help the participants analyse the sources and reasons for gender inequality, and the ways in which such relations are reproduced and reinforced by various institutions and practices
- From this participants are made to understand the key concept of 'power', which underlies unequal gender relations
- At an advanced level, this module helps the learners to discuss strategies of challenging the visible, invisible and hidden sources of power, which includes building critical awareness, organising women, lobbying for women's rights, etc.

Benchmark 2: Skill-building

For women to be able to leverage their position as equal citizens, one of the key elements is investing in opportunities for lifelong learning, enhancing women's existing capabilities as well as skill-building for newer capacities. This nurturing and building of the human resource is a feature of quality adult education interventions, and skill-building a crucial benchmark. With skill-building and training comes power, confidence and a sense of self-worth which is critical for women to overcome their internalized notions of marginalisation and oppression.

Indicators:

- *Women and marginalised groups use specific skills independently.*
- *They are skilled in the use of technology.*
- *There is an increase in their self-confidence.*

Since 2003, the Institute for International Cooperation of German Adult Education Association (DVV) has been working on skill training with women in prisons, among the most marginalised citizens, in Uzbekistan. The specific vocations chosen for the women were those that could help them in self-employment after they completed their sentence, like sewing, decorative and applied arts, batik technique, carpet weaving, knitting, hairdressing and confectionery skills.

The example of the knitting shop which was opened during this project with the women prisoners illustrates the potential of a vocational training programme for their empowerment. The enthusiasm during the creative process in the knitting shop paved the way for an emotionally open atmosphere during classes. Through the opportunity to use creative energies, women got a sense of freedom, even while serving sentences. Engaging in the activities of the knitting shop also created favourable conditions for communication on topics not relating to life in prison. It helped to distract the women, and indirectly enhanced psychological well-being. This in turn would go a long way in encouraging their participation in any forum.

In all these aspects, not only did the interventions work on the women's personal wellbeing and development, and strengthening of existing skills, but the women prisoners were also introduced to modern technologies and skills, which gave them a renewed sense of confidence, productivity and life.

Benchmark 3: Literacy

Another key element of quality interventions for women's political participation and citizenship is literacy. Literacy is a right that forms an important part of the education continuum which women and socio-economically disadvantaged communities have been denied. It is a critical aspect that helps women confront daily changes when it comes to political participation or being active citizens.

Therefore, the focus of literacy interventions should be a vision for women's empowerment and social transformation; not limited to 'skill training' or 'functional literacy'. There is no one universal definition of literacy. The meanings one ascribes to literacy and numeracy often depend on contextual specificities and the approach to literacy one is adopting. But the four main approaches that inform quality literacy programmes are – literacy as skills (of coding and decoding), as tasks ('functional literacy'), as social practices (embedded in social and cultural structures) and as critical reflection (a transformative tool that includes critical analysis, and reflection, linked to action and change processes).

Indicators

- *Literacy to have a component of critical thinking.*
- *Functional use of literacy*
- *Literacy to promote women's engagement and participation with respect to social institutions*
- *Literacy that is contextualised.*

Nirantar's literacy and empowerment programme called Sahajani Shiksha Kendra (SSK) in northern India is one such illustration where women and girls from most marginalised communities are empowered through literacy and education that makes connections with their lived realities and rights, and enables them to develop analytical skills on gender, development and other issues. Socioeconomically, these communities are at the bottommost rung, literacy rate as low as 20%, and many of them are landless labourers who are dependent on casual and seasonal labour opportunities, or they migrate to nearby cities and village areas in search of employment.

When a landmark legislation called the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA)² was passed, Nirantar began a programme on “NREGA-literacy”. In a region where large

² <http://nrega.nic.in/netnrega/home.aspx>

numbers of people are landless wage labourers and the wage rate was less than half a dollar a day, Nirantar decided to increase women's participation in NREGA at all levels – whether it was by creating demand as labourers, or looking at implementation and monitoring issues, and use this opportunity as for citizenship-building and demanding accountability from the State.

This law is significant for women labourers that Nirantar works with, who belong to the most socioeconomically marginalised communities, and who had no information or access to just employment opportunities. The NREGA would guarantee 100 days of employment to all adult citizens in their villages (or within a range of five kilometers), based on the written or spoken demand by villagers. It would ensure them the minimum wage and guarantee worksite entitlements. It also has a provision for social audit of its implementation.

Linkages were made between women's literacy and awareness on NREGA, to enable women to access information and to help them grow in confidence to demand and get their rightful entitlements vis-à-vis NREGA. Begun in 2007, the NREGA-literacy work has now covered about 112 villages of Lalitpur district, reaching out to over two thousand women. A number of strategies have been used in the NREGA-literacy programme, like:

- Awareness generation campaigns on NREGA
- Thematic literacy camps – including sessions on 'women and work', 'caste and work', and information about NREGA entitlements. Nirantar has developed a literacy/numeracy curriculum and materials for such camps
- Functional use of literacy/numeracy skills for demanding and getting NREGA entitlements – like filling of 'demand-for-work' forms, reading Job Cards, reading bank pass books (since wage payments are made through banks) and doing wall writings on NREGA entitlements
- Actual submission of applications, and engaging with local government officials and follow-up action
- Monthly production of a neo-literate broadsheet "Jani Patrika" in the local language Bundeli, for sustaining literacy skills of newly literate women as well as wider dissemination of information, success stories and challenges related to NREGA in the area
- Solidarity events for bringing women from the entire district together in a show of strength, to share common concerns and pressurise local administration for getting entitlements
- Women's collectives engaging with local self-government and local administration on issues related to the 'right to work'
- Providing technical inputs to newly literate women to become ' worksite supervisors' (also called 'mates' under NREGA), to ensure better implementation and monitoring of the scheme

Over one thousand women have used their literacy skills beyond the domain of the literacy centres to make applications and demand accountability in real life from the local administration.

They have informed themselves, made other women aware, and engaged with various players in the community to demand and get their entitlements under NREGA as women wage labourers.

In Lalitpur district, where a feudal and caste-based oppressive system still operates, women have been able to negotiate a better wage rate in the local rural economy, and have also managed to get equal wages as the men. They have begun working towards applying for Job Cards where their names appear as 'heads of families', and have also begun discussing opening bank accounts in their own names, in order to be recognised as individual rights bearers (not just subsumed within the 'household'), and to have greater autonomy in access, control and decision-making about their own wages. Around forty newly literate women supervisors ('mates') have been trained and are beginning their struggles on worksites.

Benchmark 4: Mentoring and accompaniment

Besides training and capacity-building within 'classroom' session, an element of quality educational processes is ensuring that the learnings actually lead to transformation, which can be facilitated through mentoring and accompaniment provided to the women in situations in their own environment beyond the 'class'. The metaphor used by one of the participants in the workshop to explain this was the concept of 'transplantation'. He said that in the same way that the paddy saplings are transplanted from the protected nursery to the larger field where they are tended to, in the same way the women learners also require support even after they have undergone sessions at adult education centres and at training programmes.

This accompaniment process is not only critical for seeing changes in the real world. It is also critical for giving women the space and opportunity to use the skills and perspectives that they have learnt. It is also a stepping stone for further learning opportunities.

Indicators:

- *Long-term, sustained, hands-on mentoring support and accompaniment to learners in their own environment*
- *Providing opportunities for continuing education (eg. bulletins, learning journeys, refresher courses etc)*

An example of this is the Aagaz Academy's Transformation Leadership initiative in India. As part of this initiative, a twenty-one days' structured residential Course, spread over eight months, on Women's Transformative Leadership was organized in three phases of seven days each, for the newly elected women representatives of the village councils (Panchayats). Each inter-phase period was around 6 to 8 weeks.

The two inter-phase periods were the most significant investment in the Women's Transformative Leadership Course. For one, it afforded the participants the time & space to apply their learnings to their real life situations in their role as elected leaders of their Panchayats. For the faculty team the inter-phase time was a period of learning as well. The design of the Women's Transformative Leadership Course demanded that every member of the faculty team made a visit to each individual participant's home/village. This visit was to be a

friendly visit with no program related agenda. The faculty member was expected to informally meet and experience the participant in her real life context of her family & community. Getting introduced to the participant's family & neighbours, alleviating their concerns related to the participant's involvement in the training through informal conversation was the main purpose of these visits.

The experience of all the faculty members was surprisingly common. The faculty members shared that their visits during the inter-phase served a dual purpose. One, it built trust between the faculty member and the participant & her family. The family members got an opportunity to 'see & interact' with the 'teacher' who was also the 'care-taker' of the participant when she was away for training of a long duration in a distant place. For the community, the visit and interaction with a responsible faculty person (whom they had only heard of or seen a photo), elevated the authenticity and importance of the training in which their elected women representative was invited & participating.

The second purpose that the inter-phase visits served was that it offered an opportunity to the faculty members to gain a first-hand experience and understanding of the context of the learners. The faculty members confessed that they were better able to pitch and focus their inputs in the consecutive phases and the learning process was enriched as they were able to contextualize it to the given realities of their learners. The enhanced trust between the participant group and the faculty also contributed richly to the learning environment.

The learning process initiated through the Women's Transformative Leadership Course continued by way of concerted efforts of the Aagaz Academy. Quarterly newsletters (which were four pages long) in the vernacular language providing information & knowledge, related to the local governance issues, also became a forum to share experiences of the elected women leaders. The feeling of being connected was strengthened through this newsletter which gradually became a visibility instrument for the women leader to express their work & experience all over their districts.

Benchmark 5: Co-learning and co-sharing

The relationship between 'educator' and 'learner' is often defined by some kind of power relations. These can be positive as well as negative and there is a need to acknowledge and recognise these power relations which are inherent in all education programmes. The learner is mostly seen as the 'receiver' and the educator is typically seen as the person 'giving' or 'delivering'. This dynamic can impact interactions as well as learnings. It is not only in the process of teaching-learning but also at the level of knowledge creation, and curriculum and materials development that these power relations can have an impact. It is therefore very important to recognise this, and institute processes within the programme that acknowledge, facilitate and strengthen the co-creation of knowledge and exchange.

Indicators:

- *Respect for adult learning principles and acknowledgment that all people are rich in experiences.*

- *Learning flow to be dynamic, not one-way, or linear.*
- *Scope for 'educators' and 'learners' to be in interchangeable roles, since each one has something to teach and something to learn.*
- *Content, process, delivery and resources developed by educators and learners in partnership.*

An example of co-learning and co-sharing in adult education programmes is the participatory curriculum development process adopted by the Aagaz Academy. The Anchors of this initiative, along with the core staff of the Aagaz Foundation agreed to work together to work on a curriculum for building transformative leadership practice amongst the elected women leaders from the Panchayats (village councils). The Aagaz Foundation organized round tables with various stake-holders, including officials from the Ministries, bureaucracy, leaders of civil society organizations and elected women representatives to ascertain the domains of learning essential and relevant to building the leadership capacities of elected women representatives from institutions of local self-governance in India.

Using the data generated from these discussions, the Anchors of the Aagaz Academies set forth to work together to design and develop the curriculum of the proposed Women's Transformative Leadership Course. The process of curriculum building was intensive and spread out over two years. Each Academy retained its autonomy in evolving its curriculum while seeking a common vocabulary to describe its philosophy. The Anchors of all the Academies agreed on a common framework of the Women's Transformative Leadership Course and developed the specific curriculum for their respective Academies, integrating the local context and lending local flavor to the curriculum of their own Academy. The draft curricula of all the Academies were peer-reviewed by the Anchors and experts prior to finalization.

The common strand in the curricula of all the Aagaz Academies is the emphasis on creating an enabling, non-threatening and participative learning environment. The approach entailed valuing, acknowledging and enhancing the dignity of the learners. Co-learning was understood as the sharing of power and the ability to influence the learning processes towards the shared learning outcomes. This was made possible through the inclusion of an understanding and appreciation of pluralism, tolerance and dissent in the curriculum.

Benchmark 6: Integrating local knowledge

Each context has its specificities and it is important that the adult education intervention takes into account the local context, and the existing local knowledge and values, in the curriculum, content and processes within the programme. The experience of quality interventions is that while it is important to acknowledge, respect and strengthen local knowledge, it is equally significant to create the bridge for women to help them engage with what is called the 'mainstream'.

Indicators:

- *Local knowledge to be reflected and incorporated in the curriculum, content and process.*

- *Women's ways and expressions encouraged.*
- *Acknowledgement of existing knowledge, as well as prior experience and skills.*
- *Needs addressed in the local context.*

The following case story from New Zealand illustrates how these are achieved through adult education programmes. Literacy Aotearoa was established in 1982, originally as the Adult Reading and Learning Assistance (ARLA) Federation. It is the largest and most cohesive nationwide network of adult literacy providers in Aotearoa New Zealand. The organisation develops accessible, quality literacy services that ensure the people of Aotearoa are critically literate. The organisation defines literacy as listening, speaking, reading, writing, numeracy and critical thinking interwoven with the knowledge of social and cultural practices. Literacy Aotearoa is an organisation that supports and promotes student-centred learning in a range of contexts and learning environments.

The power to define what literacy is determines what knowledge and communication processes are regarded as valid and central, and therefore determines what knowledge and communication processes are considered unimportant. Language in particular plays central part to the student determining identity individually and within communities. Language is instrumental in being the cornerstone of culture, shaping worldview, defining cultural context, passing on concepts, knowledge and beliefs. Each person has their own particular culture and context, awareness of recognising and valuing the cultural context of a learner in turn assists to inform the best possible learning environment and pedagogy.

The state of adult learning in Aotearoa New Zealand is intrinsically linked to success rates in adult literacy. Around one in five New Zealanders has low literacy skills. Poorer literacy was also found to be concentrated with indigenous (Māori) and Pacific Island populations, as well as other ethnic minorities. The results reflected the relatively poor English literacy skills for those who had English as a minimum second language and cultural context – foreign to their own and reflective of a colonial form of education.

Colonisation in Aotearoa New Zealand has seen use of the Roman alphabet to create orthography for the indigenous, occur early nineteenth century through a relationship between the Church of England missionaries and Māori. Print was introduced via religion leading to a spread of a new form of literature that transposed and developed an oral language to a written form. In 1867 the teaching of English became the central task of the education system, forcing many indigenous to speak English at school and their native language at home. With urban migration of indigenous people there was a growing alienation from cultural roots and erosion of indigenous knowledge for many of the urban-born generations. The effects of the mono-cultural education system compounded this.

From the 1960s, a renaissance has gained momentum to initiate and educate an approach that supports a return to use of the learner-centred model that recognises and uses the learner cultural

capital to identify and utilise existing knowledge and experience as a central part of the learning process.

The Kainga Literacy Programme was developed for a group of Tongan woman from the Pacific Island of Tonga, who had migrated to Aotearoa New Zealand. The programme was established to create a model of family learning where the women were learning and improving their literacy skills alongside their children, funded by Literacy Aotearoa. A key emphasis in the programme was to ensure that the social, political, religious contexts were identified and considered in design and implementation of the learning process. The process of assessing existing knowledge and experiences helped to provide a descriptive context and content for developing the learning programme. It was vital to learn about (and from) the student so that knowledge could be constructed in ways that were meaningful and appropriate to the student.

The Pacific Women's Group (PWG) was established in 1998 by Maile Uluave. As the Manager for PWG, Maile proved instrumental in initiating the approach to seek assistance in working collaboratively with the local Community House and He Waka Matauranga (member of Literacy Aotearoa national organisation). Maile, a fully qualified school teacher in her native Tonga and mother of seven children at the time, provided model leadership among the other women who had attached themselves to the group as a means of developing their skills to integrate into this new society. With a strong intergenerational make up, Maile was consistently guided and directed through instruction by her mother who contributed to the group dynamic in her role as an 'elder'. It was not uncommon for other families to be represented in a likewise manner where there were at least two even three generations participating at one time. There were six families that made up the group, ranging from a family of four (mother, father, two children) to thirteen (grandmother, mother, father, ten children). Many of the women in the group identified themselves solely as grandmother, mothers, wives and humble servants to their church and congregation.

It was obvious from the start that language and cultural difference would prove a barrier for these women to effectively access and participate in the New Zealand society including their children's school, government organisations, immigration departments, community groups and social settings. This barrier also identified the purpose of which the women were seeking assistance to improve their English literacy skills. Subsequently, both the PWG and He Waka Matauranga arranged to have a fono (meeting) in which they invited the wider community to attend. This first meeting with the Pacific Women's Group was largely facilitated through interpretation in an informal gathering at the Community House. The meeting allowed participants to openly discuss issues, the services of each respective organisation, and led to particular focus on how the development of self-determined goals would itself create a tailored programme of learning. Essentially the women were the primary focus of the programme, but through ongoing dialogue we identified that their children and men were also a key focus on accessing learning opportunities for themselves and to show their support of their women. It became a significant point to have the men attend, mostly through curiosity, albeit present in support. Many of the women commented on this observation and stated that it became a motivating factor.

Through the assessment process, Maile provided interpretation for each individual. These learner profiles highlighted vital information on the learner background, motivations, social and political interests, education and employment history, diagnostic measurement of reading, writing, speaking and listening, technological and numeracy abilities with identified areas of self-directed learning goals. More importantly it gave a framework to how each of these areas were applied, giving the educator information to begin development of a contextualised programme and pedagogical approach. Formative assessment was implemented throughout the programme to ensure a contextualised approach was incorporated in the methods of learning, teaching, content, assessment and evaluation.

Generally, Tongan women symbolically rank lower than their husbands, but are ranked higher than their brothers. A brother and all of his children are especially obligated to support his sister and her children. Tongan women spend much of their time in same-sex groups, providing child care, participating in sports and organizing church activities. Tongans living in New Zealand, often send money to family members still living in the islands. Kainga (families) participate in resource sharing characteristic of the traditional redistributive economy in Tonga. This economy is based on three core values: 'ofa (love), faka'apa'apa (respect) and fuakavenga (responsibility).

The Kainga Literacy programme designed a series of workshops developed in response to the identified needs of the assessment process and incorporating knowledge of their expressed cultural capital and core values. These workshops included a Homework Group for the women and their children, Driver Education, English Literacy in one-to-one and group mode with objective of improving individual literacy skills, and small business management that involved the women utilising their traditional arts and craft skills of tapa making (traditional bark cloth) and blankets made with substitute materials that were sold as an income generating scheme.

The increased learning and literacy saw diverse transformation for each participant. Ten of the women successfully passed the New Zealand Drivers Learner License test and later graduating to the Full Licence. This meant that some of these women became independent and were able to transport their children to school, move about society freely where previously they were isolated and dependent on their husbands to drive them. Most of the women became critically literate where they now have the confidence to question, participate, analyse and contribute to make informed decisions for themselves and their families. Maile went on to study full time and in 2007, she graduated with a Diploma in Not-for-profit Management.

It was imperative to their success, that the women could see their education and learning in their own world, in order to translate, transfer and transcend into another.

Benchmark 7: Governance in the hands of women

Transformatory adult education programmes aim at increasing women's role in leadership and governance. A key element that is an indicator for an increase in women's political participation and citizenship is the quantitative as well as qualitative increase in women's decision-making roles. Having more and more women are in leadership, at the helm of various governance

institutions, is a very significant benchmark for women's political participation and citizenship. Moreover, it is not only in numbers, but also the increase in the scope of women's influence in such institutions, that is an important indicator of quality adult education programmes.

Indicators:

- *Increased spread in formal and non-formal spheres and avenues for women to come into leadership roles and positions.*
- *Women to be in leadership positions in both formal and other institutions.*
- *Increased decision-making in the hands of women.*
- *Visibility and validation of women's leadership.*
- *Enhancement in women's access to and control over resources.*

The following story about the struggle of female-headed households from Pekka's adult education programme in Indonesia illustrates how the women underwent trainings that built their understanding of power, built their capacities to negotiate such power, and helped them to transform some of the customary practices, by coming into leadership within heretofore 'traditional' community institutions.

According to the 'Lamaholot' custom on the island of Adonara, East Flores, the role of women in customary meetings is limited to cooking, while men attend meetings and make decisions that affect the entire community. Over a period of time, Pekka trainings on gender and empowerment encouraged women to critically questions their role and participation in such forums. And gradually, these women began to demand greater involvement in these meetings.

One of the first points of negotiation was the simplification of a customary practice during weddings and funerals. Traditionally, people have to feed others on the occasion of a wedding or funeral, especially all those who give a contribution in the form of ingredients. This would become very difficult for women-headed households who would lose precious days of wage labour in the process. So the women lobbied for simplifying this custom and the time and labour spent on this customary practice got reduced.

Having understood the way that power operates through social customs, and seeing that this power can be transformed positively and the custom can be negotiated, Pekka groups tried to do so again. This time they tried to change the customary obligation for women to contribute woven fabric (kain tenun) and animals to the weddings and funerals of relatives of their male family members. The tradition weighs heavily on women, especially those who head households. One kain tenun can cost up to US \$45, a goat up to \$450, and a pig up to \$600.

Pekka groups decided that members would instead contribute money according to their ability. When relatives of two Pekka group leaders died, the leaders tried to follow the decision. The conflicts this created between them and their parents led to their leaving the parents' homes.

Luckily, they could stay in the Pekka centre in the village. Eventually after discussions with other Pekka members, the parents began to understand and welcomed their daughters back home.

The women got the confidence to be leaders in activities at the village to the district levels. For example, three women subsequently joined the formal village council (Badan Permusyawaratan Desa), two became village government office staff, eight became community health workers, and six became leaders in the formal village women's association (PKK). One Pekka member was chosen to be the village head. She is the first female village head in East Flores. As a part of the village leadership, she tries to apply the knowledge that she gained as a Pekka member to increase self-reliance, involve the community in decision making, and address corruption. Women are rarely permitted to participate in development planning consultations (musrenbang) at the district level. However, Pekka members insist on participating to ensure that proposals in line with the needs of village women are included in the district-level development plan.

With more women in decision-making roles, and positively influencing the nature of decisions in favour of women, women leaders have got greater visibility. And through all of this, the community has also changed how it views female heads of households.

Benchmark 8: Women's collectives and forums

A critical link in citizenship and active participation for women is having forums to come together as collectives and engage with various institutions. On the one hand, adult education programmes are aimed at empowering women as individuals, with skills, knowledge and perspectives that they can use to demand their rights and transform their lives. On the other hand, in order to address structural and systemic issues which define marginalisation, women also require spaces and forums for coming together as a larger mass to act as a political pressure group; a benchmark of quality adult education programmes is one which addresses this need. There is, after all, strength in individual struggles as well as in the collective.

Indicators:

- *Establishment of effective and active women's collectives/forums/committees at all levels.*
- *Attitudinal and behavioural change towards greater inclusion of women and their concerns within the community and other institutions.*

The Bangladesh story of the Lokokendra illustrates how building and strengthening of women's forums and organising them around it facilitates women's empowerment.

Maleka Begum (45) lives with her husband, two sons and a daughter in Kani Para village in Udakhali, a neglected and disaster-prone area of Gaibandha district. Her husband is a daily wage labourer and is in and out of work. Maleka and her family used to depend entirely upon her husband's income, struggling against poverty on a daily basis. This led to frequent quarrels between them. Maleka felt unable to work on her own, as she couldn't read or write. So, when

the *Reflect*³ Circle was set up at East Udakhali by a local NGO in cooperation with Action Aid Bangladesh, she joined immediately. She participated regularly in Circle activities and was eager to learn. During her time with the Circle, she learned about women's rights, human rights, power relations, family laws and communication skills and this has made her an influential campaigner on issues such as dowry, illegal divorce and child marriage. She was soon elected as Chair of the Circle.

Like Maleka, there are 11640 women in Bangladesh involve with 97 Lokokendras. They have started their journey with Reflect through learning basic literacy, numeracy and developed their leadership skills by participating numerous training, workshop, exchange visit and different committees during the Reflect Circle period. Presently, 10325 poor women are passing through this 24 months (basic and post circle) learning process under 413 Reflect Circles in all around Bangladesh. After being a Reflect graduate, all participants establish their own organisation at community level i.e. Lokokendra.

Lokokendra is a people's organization for learning and action. The objectives of the Lokokendra is to provide a platform for the Reflect graduates and the community people to lead all the advocacy related work, demand justice and negotiate their rights with the local authority and the existing power structures. It is an independent community based organisation facilitated and managed by the poor women. In general, 100-110 Reflect graduates along with community people (other members from the community cannot constitute more than 40% of the membership), establish a Lokokendra and they elect/select 11 members Executive Committee to run the organisation.

At the community level these poor women are recognised and respected by the other community members because of their leadership skills and gradually get involved with different committees like village development committees, school management committees, women's development forum, education watch group, 'stop violence against women' network etc.

To do advocacy and lobby at the union/ sub-district level Lokokendra members have established Area Based Lokokendra Forum at 13 areas. At the national level they formed a platform with 1975 people's organisations supported by different national and international development agencies and sent 4 representatives to the national Executive Committee.

The journey which starts with adult literacy using Reflect Approach has created platforms at different levels to promote women's political participation and empowerment.

³ *Reflect* is an innovative approach to adult learning and social change, which fuses the theories of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire with participatory methodologies. It was developed by Action Aid and partner organisations in the 1990s through pilot projects in Bangladesh, Uganda and El Salvador and is now used by over 500 organisations in over 70 countries worldwide. (www.reflect-action.org)

Benchmark 9: Constituency and alliance building

As mentioned in an earlier section, one of the goals of adult education programmes with women is 'empowerment'. In the journey of empowerment, women and women's collectives have to engage and negotiate with, inform and influence various other institutions and players. While building strength within women and women's collectives is significant, the agenda of constituency-building and making allies in the external world, in order to promote gender just and equitable paradigms, is equally critical for transformation in the long run. Therefore it is a significant benchmark of adult education programmes for women, for strengthening their participation and citizenship.

Indicators:

- *Build alliances with and engage with diverse players (government, educational institutions, media, etc)*
- *Creation of spaces for such engagement*

Didi Bahini is currently working for "Political Empowerment through Development Education" initiates and facilitates learning culture through concretization process. The approach adopted is based on mutual support, collective empowerment and participatory development in nature which mainly focuses on building capacity of women and youth to participate in, negotiate with, influence to, control over and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives. The process enables them developing critical analysis of state institutions and actors by practicing democratic political culture. Development education is the community learning to raise awareness and understanding of development issues and finding alternative means for a better future. It also seeks the change of attitude and morale to participate in solving developmental and gender issues.

Didi Bahini with its focus on building women's political empowerment through development education is working with women forum of 28 V.D.C (Village Development Committee) of four districts in Nepal. The agenda of constituency building begins in these groups as the members of the women's forums are from diverse community based organizations like saving and credit groups, mother's group, women ward representative, representative from different political parties, social activists, teacher groups, health volunteers, water user group, agricultural groups etc.

Didi Bahini has developed resource and learning centers in all working areas for the members and non-members of Didi Bahini Women Forum. It provides education through leaning to the learning forums which then fabricate the issues/need, programs, expertise, expansion and so on. For each V.D.C there is a Village Resource Learning Center and for each District: District Resource and Learning Center where, members meet as their collective action learning platform and conduct meetings, sharing, trainings and advocacy programs.

With the overall goal "Adult education contributes to poverty alleviation and sustainable development" it is working with the objective of making an efficient structure of adult education institutions and a national policy for adult education. To succeed its overall goal and objective it

has been working with different alliances, educational institutions and media simultaneously. It also has coordinated with the different educational institutions, such as Community Learning Centers, Universities and Colleges. It has been working with the alliances with different educational and development institutions since the beginning of its establishment with the belief that a woman alone cannot perform any activity because she have been born and brought up in subordination for generations but then group of woman can make some efforts and similarly two or more than two groups of woman can win the world. Because when they get united there forms a feeling of strength and motivation.

In collaboration with different national alliances such as WAPPDCA, Shantimalika and so on the forums are contributing to and participating in national level policy decisions as well. Recently, it Didi Bahini organized a 'Graduation Event' in collaboration with Ministry of Education and National Women Commission (government body) formally recognize and honor the non-formal but pragmatic knowledge, skills and learnings of women forum members of all working districts (Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, Lalitpur and Parsa).

So, we find that engagement with different players across the spectrum, and at different levels ranging from village, district and national-level, gives women the potential to bring about transformation. As an outcome of the work, women are now very well aware of politics. Some of the women came up as social leaders and some of them are engaged in the political parties and are elected as the member of all party mechanism of the village. Women Forum members believe that sharing and exchange contribute to higher multiplier effect and help to generate collective positive strength and motivation to move further.

Benchmark 10: Cadre-building and training of facilitators

Adult education is possible only if there are adult educators. Educators are one of the cornerstones of quality adult education programmes. In order to ensure empowerment, continuity and sustainability of the change that is brought about, and indeed to upscale interventions, one key element is building human resources that will take some of the ideas and interventions to the next level. This involves a strategy of cadre-building from amongst the learner community, and sustaining them over a long period of time. This is yet another crucial benchmark.

Indicators:

- *Building and skilling a cadre of educators from amongst the peer group of the learners.*
- *Generating appropriate content of the training for this cadre/facilitator-building.*
- *Adequate time and resources invested for such training.*

Following is the Aagaz experience of an effort in India that illustrates the above. The most significant aspect of the Aagaz Academy was in its vision to develop a competent team to hold the learning process of the elected women leaders through its various strategies. The core strategy of the Aagaz Academy – the Women's Transformative Leadership Course – the structured training of 21 days in three phases, spread over a period of 8 to 9 months demanded a resourceful faculty team. This was achieved through a planned intervention of identification of

individuals, with an institutional base to be the anchors of the proposed Academies, located in different parts of the country. The Anchors, so identified fulfilled the criteria of having relevant and rich experience in conceptualising, designing and organizing leadership trainings especially for women learners from varied backgrounds.

The close interactions between the Anchors, during the first two years as they developed the curriculum, contributed to building of close ties amongst the Anchors. Values, perspectives and political stands were clarified and shared during this period, resulting in the building the identity of the Aagaz Academies and its Anchors. This period also marked the evolution of the Anchors as a cohesive and effective team.

After the completion of the first two batches of the Women's Transformative Leadership Course, the Anchors reflected that one of the best ways of learning for the women learners was through other elected women leaders who were invited as resource persons to share their biographies and experiences as elected leaders. This triggered the need for creating a space for building capacities of elected women leaders (current as well as past) to become an integral part of the faculty team of the Aagaz Academies. Since none of the Anchors were elected representatives, the need for elected women leaders to become the future faculty of the Aagaz Academies was emphasized.

A 15 days Course for Educators was thus developed and organized for select women leaders who had successfully completed the Women's Transformative Leadership Course and had demonstrated ability and interest to function as faculty in the Aagaz Academies. This Course yielded positive results with over 35 women leaders having received intensive training to function as faculty of the Aagaz Academies.

Upon completion of the Educators' Course, a cadre of five elected women leaders trained as Educators from each of the Aagaz Academies was hand-held by the Anchors to host & hold a learning process for the elected women leaders of their district. A structured workshop entitled the Special Course on Women's Transformative Leadership, which was a concise version of the main 21 day Course was completely organized and facilitated by the newly trained Educators.

Conclusion

The benchmarks and illustrations presented in this paper are not an exhaustive list of possibilities in the domain of quality adult education for women's political participation and citizenship. While this discussion paper does lay out some of the basic principles and strategies on which such programmes function, it is merely a starting point for further engagement, discussion, debate and validation, with a wider community of adult educators.

References:

1. Guevara, J.R. (2010, November) – ASPBAE Quality Education Framework, paper presented at the Quality Education Workshop, Indonesia
2. Maria Khan (2009) – CONFINTEA, EFA and MDGs: Reviewing Promises and Performances to Date
3. ASPBAE 1993 study undertaken with FAO's Freedom from Hunger campaign as quoted in Women's Empowerment in South Asia -- Concepts and Practices, Srilatha Batliwala, ASPBAE/FAO (Draft), 1993
4. Nirantar (2000) – Action Research Study on Educational Opportunities for Women
5. Jurgen Habermans, "On the Internal Relation between the Rule of Law and Democracy", *European Journal of Philosophy* 3 (1995), 12-20
6. Martha Nussbaum, Amrita Basu, Yasmin Tambiah and Niraja Gopal Jayal (eds.) "Essays on Gender and Governace"
7. Maitrayee Mukhopadhyay and Shamin Meer (2004) – Creating Voice and Carving Space: Redefining Governance form a Gender Perspective
8. www.unesco.org
9. <http://www.dvv-international.de>