

Lessons, challenges, and successes while working on the “Triangle” of education, gender, and sexual and reproductive health - Article Summary

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The article by Sawade (2014) argues how combining gender justice, education and sexual and reproductive health (SRH), referred to as the Triangle of issues, is the most effective approach to achieving meaningful results. An interesting component to the article is its focus on how young people need to achieve their dreams by having access to quality education but being unaware of one's SRH rights can impact their achievements. The author makes a unique point in which gender justice can be achieved when girls and boys are able to control their own bodies and sexuality, all while receiving quality education. Although this article is not revolutionary in its insights, it may be useful for policy makers and practitioners to consider these issues and lessons when working on the Triangle, in order to avoid falling into certain traps.

Components to the Sustainability of Projects

The article argues that establishing concrete relationships between the state and civil society proves to be fundamental as CSOs can lobby and pressure governments into cooperating with the objectives of the project goals. In Ethiopia and Niger, the CSOs built schools under the financial assistance of Oxfam, yet it was established with the government and the Ministry of Education that the future of the schools were the responsibility of the state who were to fund and supply its operations. However, for these programs to be successful, organizations need to measure the program's impact on dealing with the Triangle, thus monitoring and evaluation systems need to be built. Yet in many programs, these systems are only put in place to satisfy the needs of the funding agency by just reporting statistics but not the impact of the activities. In Niger, Mali and Senegal, One World UK started using questionnaires that examined behavioral changes in conjunction with existing surveys to track changes over time. Thus, garnering support from organizations can attract more funding or participation in regards to problem solving if the community does not have the resources but actors within the programs also need to be monitoring and evaluating program activities to ensure that they are actually impacting the lives of the participants in the program and can thus continue to implement the project in the future and ensure sustainability.

The article explains that in order to have sustainable programs within developing societies, the community must be highly involved in program planning. Involving the community allows them to understand the importance of the project, and take ownership of it. With ownership comes accountability, and with education comes a greater chance of the programs being sustainable. The article mentions that people of all walks of life should be included in the discussions, this ranging from men and women to youth, unions, governments, and leaders as well. With that being said, the Triangle focusses on the issues of young people, so the Innovation Fund needs to allow them to address these issues and be involved with the project planning. With the purpose of involving young people, My Right My Voice (MRMV) was created with the goal of engaging marginalized girls and women and supporting them to become active citizens and claiming their health and education rights. In the end, the idea is to improve the thought and design of these programs by having both young people and the community (government and local) become a part of the program process in order for these programs to be sustainable.

Cultural Taboos addressed rather than ignored

To begin, this article had a central focus on addressing cultural taboos rather than ignoring them, implying that as long as the taboos remain unchanged so will the development of the society. The author highlights that many "barriers" are linked to norms and traditional values of these societies and that they are impacting the implementation of programs. For instance, religious texts is considered a taboo as it impacts gender equality and contraceptive programs as certain texts condone contraception or normalize

and encourages gender inequality. The article offered some options to overcome these “barriers” such as using art, media and other entertainment activities in order to educate in ways that are interactive and engaging for the community or educating adult populations on what the youth are learning. Thus, leaders and those associated with these cultural norms should think critically about the conclusions they have come up with and think about other solutions that would be correct in specific contexts. The author also talks about using cultural taboos to their advantage in order to implement the programs more efficiently. For instance, these barriers were overcome in Pakistan where citizens were involved with creating a national soap opera addressing SRH issues.

Attaining Gender Justice

The central theme on the Triangle concept is the fact that gender justice connects the three issues and is key to ensuring that education is attainable by children and youth regardless of their sex and boys and girls are aware of their sexual and reproductive health rights. To attain gender justice, the article suggests that development programs must take into consideration several factors; that it depends on far more than women and men participating equally in development interventions, gender relations must be transformed, young women must be empowered in schools and in their communities and that all rights are enforced. Men and boys need to be educated and be a part of female empowerment, otherwise norms of masculinity will be reinforced. Sustained wide-scale change requires an attitudinal change where girls and women can learn how to challenge the negative patriarchal traditions, but also where families and communities (including marginalized and minority groups) must participate in outreach programs that educates them on the importance of girl’s empowerment and the benefits of having strong female leaders. As mentioned, the MRMV encourages youth to connect with the MRMV team and their peers to become active citizens, allowing them to be a part of the design and planning process. Focusing on youth rather than adults allows for transformation, since adults usually over impose their beliefs and values so often embedded in suppressive cultural norms.

Weaknesses, Strengths and Relevancy

The article’s relevance resides in the fact that it reflects the concerns of the Millennium Development Goals 2, 3, 5, and 6 focusing on achieving universal access to primary education; promoting gender equality and empowering women; improving maternal health; and combating HIV and AIDS. With more organizations and civil society organizations (CSOs) focusing on these goals and doing so within a multidimensional approach that encapsulates all of them, this allows for greater developed goals to be achieved while also raising awareness on a community and global scale. Some weaknesses that we found with the content of the article was that there was plenty of hegemonic undertone in the writing of the author. For example the author seems to assume that the Western culture takes precedence over all other cultures and as a result the “traditional” gender inequalities and education pertaining to SRH must be challenged to one that is more implicitly relaxed like the West. Some highlighted strengths about the article is that the approach and methodology of the development initiatives include community (religious and government leaders) and the target participants involvement and strives to attain sustainability by ensuring stakeholder accountability and multi-sectoral support.

References

Sawade, O. (2014). Lessons, challenges, and successes while working on the 'Triangle' of education, gender, and sexual and reproductive health. *Gender & Development*, 22(1), 127-140.