



The Role of Literacy in Enhancing Women's Agency and Well-being: A qualitative inquiry of the effects of the Tostan educational program on the lives of women in a rural community in Senegal

Maimouna Barro

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Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's) are often viewed as the indisputable new actors in providing educational programs for women in developing countries. However, there is a paucity of research showing how successful these programs prove to be in catering to women's needs and in bringing about meaningful changes in their lives. More importantly, there is paucity of field-based research using the voices of women as prime data to explore the extent to which these literacy programs have effects on their lives. This study examines the effects of the NGO Tostan's educational program on the lives of women in a rural community in Senegal, and ways in which it affects their agency and well-being. The study progressed on the assumption that any literacy program that seeks to be successful in improving people's lives should develop greater sensitivity to local kinds of knowledge and culture. The findings suggest that it is not literacy per se, but the overall empowering education process in which women gained access to skills, knowledge, and greater awareness, that allowed them to critically reflect on their social reality and take collective action to transform it.

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