

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation : **Gender and Educational Policies in Senegal: Impact
and Prospects for Girls' Education and Women's
Literacy**

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ABSTRACT

The issue of gender in education has received increased international attention in the late 1980s in light of the gender gap in the education systems of many countries. In policy-making circles, education is often associated with economic "development" and women's access to schooling is promoted as the route to economic progress for many of these countries. Due to pressure from international financial and non-governmental organizations, some women's advocacy organizations and academic researchers, countries such as Senegal have pledged to adjust their educational policies in order to achieve gender parity in basic education by 2005 and universal primary education by 2015. However, it appears that gender disparities in school enrollment, achievement and attainment persist throughout the country. Wide gender gaps are also noted for adult literacy.

To better understand this situation, this dissertation evaluates gender issues in the educational policies of Senegal, specifically their impact on girls' and women's education. It seeks to depart from the economic and positivistic rationale that has dominated research and practice in the area of female education in countries of the South. Using dependency and world systems theories, I assess how the power relationships between multilateral funding institutions and the Senegalese government affect educational policy making in that country. I analyze the assumptions, principles and processes that shape gender-based educational policies, especially those targeting girls and women. I establish the links between these national policies and the international economic system that spearheaded the 'female education for development' movement. Through gender analysis, I evaluate the qualitative impact of educational policies from the perspective of Senegalese girls and women who are

beneficiaries of projects and programs. To apply the advocacy and consciousness-raising principles of critical theory, I use critical ethnography for data collection. Overall, a combination of structured elite interviews, in-depth ethnographic interviews, participant-observation, and policy documents analysis provide a more comprehensive understanding of women's education issues in Senegal.

Findings from interviews and document reviews showed inconsistencies and contradictions between the rhetoric of educational and gender equity and the actual strategies adopted to make that a reality. The analysis revealed that gender issues in education do not seem to be a priority for the government of Senegal. They are sporadically and superficially incorporated in the policy process and there seems to even be some resistance to gender-based transformations in bureaucratic policy circles. Furthermore, the ethnographic fieldwork about the impact of initiatives undertaken by an NGO showed that women and girls who participated in the programs gained significant life skills and increased awareness about their human rights. However, there was much variability in their literacy proficiency and the skills they gained tended to reinforce their domestic care-taker roles. This contrasts with the aspirations of the majority of participants who yearned to develop skills that would lead them to paid work outside the informal sector. The impact of the non-formal education projects were limited because of their short length but also because of their efficiency approach to women's education. The research concludes by identifying successful gender-based education initiatives which may contribute to new policy directions and which may result into gender equity in Senegal' education system.