

# Role of Adult Education in Enhancing Women's Socio-Economic Status in Kenema City, Eastern Sierra Leone

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**Abstract:** Adult education is an integral part of lifelong education. It provides learning programmes which assist in the recovery of lost models and traditions, to raise misrepresented aspects to conscious levels and transform them into reputable aspects and change methods of dealing with the aspects. This study investigated the “Role of adult education in enhancing women’s socio-economic status in Kenema city, Kenema District, Eastern Sierra Leone. The objectives of the study were to identify the specific training programmes of the adult education institutions studied and to determine how the training provided, enhances women’s socio-economic status. The population was estimated at 1027 subjects. The sample size was 62, selected from all target adult education institutions at the time of the investigation. The significant findings were that more women than men were enrolled in the five adult education institutions in Kenema city. Conclusively, the inferior socio-economic status of women in Kenema City and beyond can be reversed by adult education which has the potential to expiate their earlier academic inadequacies and to empower them to break the endemic cycle of poverty. It is recommended that: budgetary allocation for adult education be increased and ensured to be used for the intended purpose; more adult education institutions should be built to increase access; start of kits should be provided for trainees who successfully complete the training; loan schemes should be introduced for adult learners who may not be able to pay their fees; adult education facilitators should be given the requisite motivation and teaching and learning materials should be provided in adult education institutions in the city.

**Keywords:** Adult, Education, Adult Education, Women, Socio-Economic, Status, Kenema City.

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## Introduction

Adult education may refer to the institutionalised system which provides the programmes, administrative structures, processes, settings, resources and the like that facilitate learning (Brundage and Mackeracher, 1980). The 1976 UNESCO recommendation defines adult education as the entire body of organised educational processes, whatever the content, level and methods, whether they prolong or replace initial education in schools, colleges or universities as well as apprenticeship where by persons regarded as adults by the society to

which they belong develop their abilities, technical or professional qualifications and bring about changes in their attitudes or behaviours in the two fold perspective of full personal development and participation in balanced and independent social, economic and political development.

Mwalima Julius K. Nyerere, an erstwhile president of Tanzania and a renowned adult educator in his 1969 and 1970 New Year's Eve address to the nation defined adult education in response to his own question "but what is adult education?" as "learning about anything at all that helps us to understand the environment we live in and the manner in which we can use and change this environment in order to improve ourselves". Adult education is an integral part of lifelong education. It contributes decisively to economic and cultural development, social progress and world peace as well as to the development of educational systems. In Sierra Leone, the large number of people living in abject poverty is partly caused by the lack of meaningful education especially for the adult cadre of the society, the bulk of who are jobless. This was one of the causes of the decade long civil war in the country. It is said that an "idle mind is the devil's workshop." When a society has a large number of illiterate and jobless people, it becomes a breeding place for many social vices including, but not limited to burglary, prostitution, street begging, violence against women and children and the like. These threaten and undermine the peace of society. Adult education which embraces training in diverse fields can be a panacea to the economic, social and political problems faced there in (Pant, 2002).

Report from the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) conducted by Statistics Sierra Leone in 2004 showed that of the females in the country only 29% were literate. The dismal literacy rate among women renders them more vulnerable and susceptible to many ills. Some women find it difficult to have permanent partners because many men nowadays look for women who cannot be absolute liabilities in a relationship. Those who may be fortunate to find partners sometimes become victims of violence other than beneficiaries of a good relationship. This happens because when some men realise that their partners are wholly and solely dependent on them, they may not hesitate to perpetrate acts of violence against them simply because the women cannot do otherwise. The women may not take legal actions (even where opportunities for such exist) against their wicked husbands for fear that they may lose the relationship and may not easily find another especially if they are advanced in age and have had children. This creates a gap between them and their counterparts who possess employable skills in that they can do a lot for themselves and for others.

Sierra Leone has a long historical development of formal education, but women who are in the majority have not directly benefited much from it as compared to their male counterparts because of social, economic, religious and economic reasons. Adult education offers a second chance to compensate for what was lost. However, even as many women are exploiting the opportunity as seen by the large enrollment in adult education programmes, there are still others who are yet to the line. Women and men are partners in development and so no society can easily develop without the maximum participation of both sexes. The means of ensuring maximum participation is education. The bulk of Sierra Leonean women are engulfed by domestic shackles which either keep them away or reduce their full involvement in the educational activities and therefore community development. This similarly affects their socio-economic status. The involvement of women in adult education offers a second chance for educational advancement and skills acquisition. This research might serve as a torch bearer to highlight the tremendous role of adult education in raising women's socio-economic status in the Kenema City.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The aim of this study was to investigate the role of adult education in enhancing women's socio-economic status in Kenema City.

### **The objectives were to:**

- Identify the specific training programmes provided by each of the adult education institutions investigated.
- Determine how the training provided enhances women's socio-economic status
- Identify the problems faced by the institutions studied
- Highlight the problems or factors that hinder women's participation in adult education programmes in Kenema City.

### **Methodology**

#### **Study Area**

The study was conducted in Kenema City, Nongowa Chiefdom, Kenema District, Eastern Sierra Leone between March and September, 2012. Kenema City is the Chiefdom, District and Regional headquarters of Nongowa Chiefdom, Kenema District and Eastern Region respectively. It started as a small settlement a century or more ago. Diamond mining and other commercial activities have over the years immensely contributed to the rise to prominence of the settlement. It is one of the settlements in the Eastern Region that survived the decade long civil war though it intermittently changed hands between the fighting forces. Today, the City is expanding on all sides and very shortly, it will be a city of two chiefdoms, Nongowa and Small Bo. Kenema City is divided into two main sections—Gbo-Kakajama and Gbo-Lambayama. The provisional result of the 2004 National Population and Housing Census showed that the City had a population of 137,696, the highest in the region of which 96,940 were females. Educational facilities galore in Kenema City. There are pre- primary, Primary, Junior and Senior Secondary Schools, (both private and public) and adult education institutions including the Eastern Polytechnic, the highest institution of learning in the region.

#### **Design of the study**

The study design used was descriptive. It explains how adult education can rebrand the socio-economic status of women who successfully engage in it.

#### **Population, Sampling Procedure and Sample Size**

The population was estimated at 1027 subjects. The sample size was 62. The sample population was a composition of staff and learners who were training in the five institutions studied. The sample size was selected to ensure easy management of that number, (62); five were heads and 10 tutors selected in the ratio 1:2.

The 47 learners were exclusively females because they were the focus of the research. The learners' sample was also approximately selected in the ratio 1:2 among past and continuing learners respectively. The only exception was MUWODA where an equal number (one each of past and continuing learners) was selected because of the small enrollment in the institution. More continuing than past learners were included in the sample because they were easy to reach.

#### **Instrumentation and Data Collection procedure**

Questionnaires, interview guides and desk survey were the instruments used to collect the research data. Questionnaires were administered among the administrators and tutors of the adult education institutions studied because of their appreciable literacy level. Interview

guides were used among the learners because of their low literacy level. The Desk survey was used to select past and continuing learners who were interviewed. The selection was done from documents obtained from the institutions under investigation. A research assistant was hired and the questionnaire and interview guide discussed with him to ensure understanding. The assistant contacted the heads of the adult education institutions researched and informed them that their centers were selected for a study. A detail explanation was given to the heads of the target institutions and informed that their cooperation was required. The heads showed signs of good will and helped in the identification of staff and learners to help in the collection of the research data. The questionnaires and interview guides were pre-tested among learners in other adult education institutions not included in the simple. They were modified before final administration.

Data collected from the investigation were analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Data from the questionnaire were analysed quantitatively in tables, frequencies, percentages and charts. On the contrary data obtained from the interviews were analysed in narrative form.

### Results and Discussions

#### Enrolment of Adult learners in five Adult Education Institutions in Kenema City

Enrolment figures in each of the four years show a higher enrolment of females than males. Male enrolment increased between 2009 and 2010 by 3.0% but dropped in the succeeding two years by 1.4% and 1.3% respectively. On the average, female enrolment in the institutions over the four years was 72.7% while male enrolment was a dismal 27.1%. The findings show that more females were enrolled in the adult education institutions captured in this study than males. This shows a change in trend in high male enrollment, retention and completion rates especially in formal education institutions. It is an action in the right direction as it bridges the gap between male and female in the education sector.

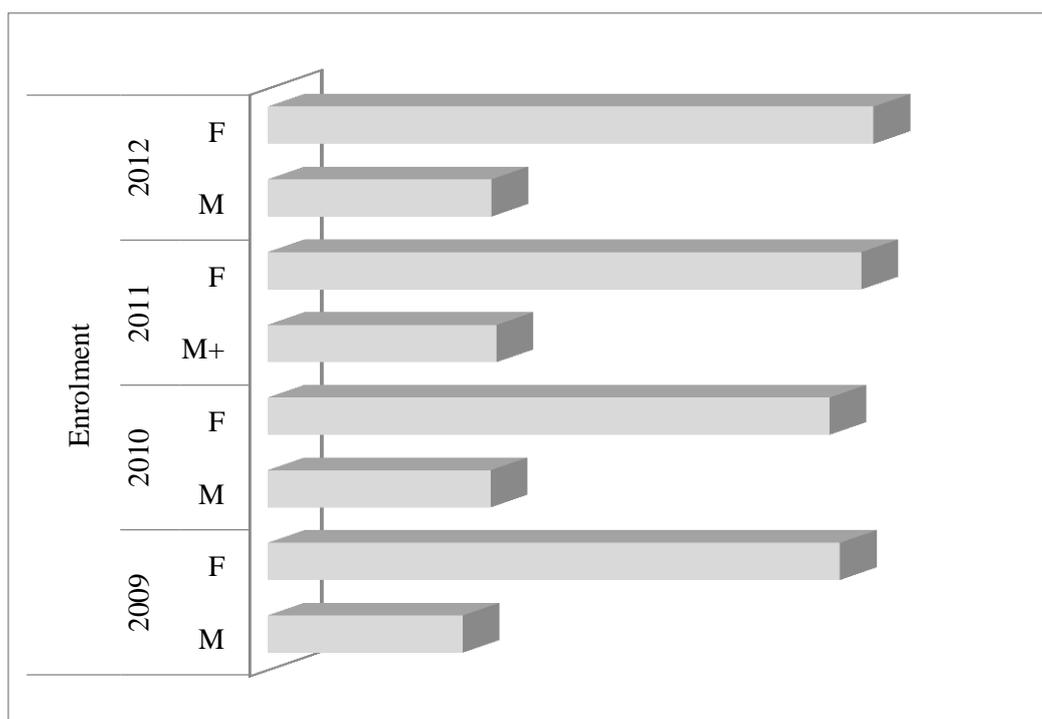


Figure 1. Enrolment of Adult Learners in Five Adult Education Institutions in Kenema City

### Types of Training Provided in the Institutions

Figure II shows that the predominant training provided by the five adult education institutions were hair dressing, tailoring and catering each accounting for 12% of skills provided. Next in the queue were carpentry, brick lying and agriculture each accounting for 8% of the skills provided. This is in consonance with an earlier statement that the selection of skills in the institutions was on gender lines. The adult learners being mainly females chose more of skills that were less physically demanding.

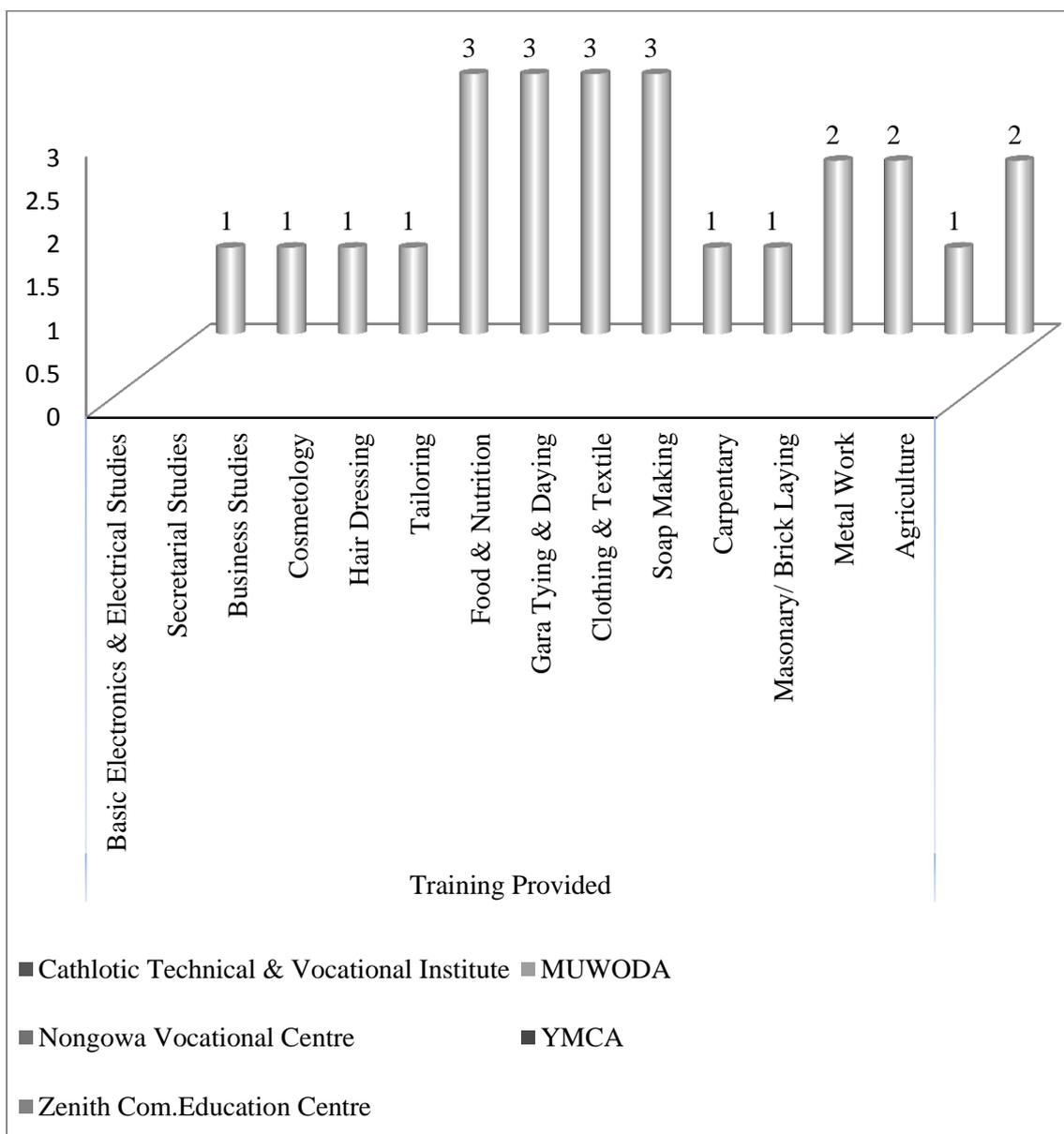


Figure 2. Types of Training provided for Adult Learners

### Courses Chosen by Female Learners

Table I shows the various courses that were chosen by the female learners in the adult education institutions captured in the study. About 29.7% of the learners chose tailoring, 21.2% chose Business Studies and Hair Dressing each while 14.85%, 6.3%, 4.2% and 2.1% chose food and Nutrition, Gara Tying and Dying, Cosmetology and Clothing and Textile respectively. Skills like Basic Electronics, Electrical Studies, Carpentry, Metal Work, Brick Laying/ Masonry and Agriculture were out rightly ignored by the female learners in all the

adult education institutions because of the demand of the skills on the learners. Except for gradual changes now emanating from the yearnings for gender equality, women generally opt for courses or jobs that are less physically or mentally demanding. This attitude to learning and work is still maintained by many women and girls in both the formal and non-formal sectors as shown in table 1.

**Table 1. Courses done By Female Learners**

Institutions	No. of Respondents																	
	Past	Present	Total	Basic Electronics	Sceretaryl Studies	Business Studies	Cosmetology	Hair Dressing	Food & Nutrition	Gara Tying & Dying	Clothing & Textile	Soap Making	Carpentary	Masonary	Metal Work	Agriculture	Tailoring	
Catho/Tech/ Vo	3	7	10		10													
MUWODA	1	1	2															2
Nongowa Voc	6	11	17					7	4	2								4
YMCA	2	5	7							1								6
Zenith Co.Edu.	4	7	11				2	3	3		1							2
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>47</b>		<b>10</b>		<b>2</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>							<b>14</b>

**Age Bracket of Learners**

Table 2 shows the age bracket of learners in the study. The table shows that 98% of the learners were youth. Only 2% of the learners were above the youth age. This is an indication that adult education can help in dealing with the problem of youth unemployment in the country if given the attention it deserves. As stated inter alia, adult education accommodates all categories of learners. However, the age of learners determines the type of training and skills they can acquire.

**Table 2. Age Bracket of Learners**

Institution	Age Bracket		Total
	18-35	36	
Catholic Tech/ Vocational Institute	9	1	9
MUWODA	2	0	2
Nongowa Vocational Institute	17	0	17
YMCA	7	0	7
Zenith Community Education Centre	11	0	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>47</b>

**Marital Status and Number of Children Born by Adult Learners**

Table III shows the marital status and number of children born by female learners in this study. The table shows that 57% of the learners were single while the remaining was married. The table further reveals that 34% of the learners had no child while the others had between 1-4 children. Marriage and child bearing have both positive and negative influences on adult education.

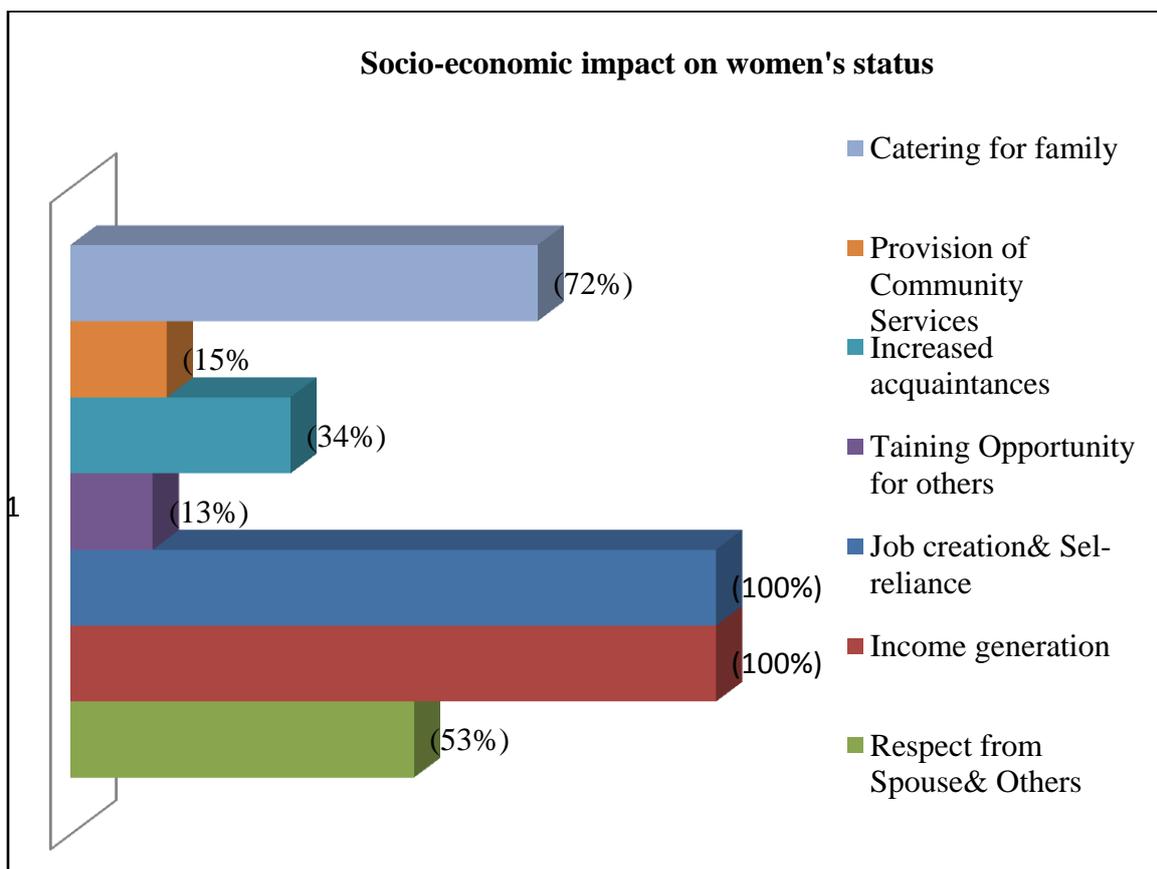
**Table 3. Marital Status and Numbers of Children Born by Adult Learners**

No. of Respondents	Marital Status			No. of Children				
	Single	Married	Widowed	0	1	2	3	4
47	27	20	0	16	12	13	4	2
<b>Percentage</b>	57	43	0	34%	25.5%	27.7%	8.5%	4.3%

**Role of adult education in enhancing women’s socio-economic status in Kenema City**

Figure 3 shows how adult education enhances women’s socio-economic status in Kenema City. Hundred percent (100 %) of the respondents stated that it creates a source of generating income while 72% stated that it makes them employable and therefore enables them to cater for their families. In addition, 53% of them expressed that it makes them command respect from their spouses and other people.

The figure shows that adult education has positive impact on women’s socio-economic status; that it creates jobs and therefore sources of income. Also public perception about some women has changed after going through adult education courses. In a close interface with one of the women, it was revealed that those who referred to her as a "kolonko" ( prostitute) because she initially had nothing meaningful to engage in had changed their perception about her after graduating from an adult education institution that has made her employable. Adult education is purposeful. Learners go into it voluntarily knowing the benefits it can accord them.



**Figure 3. Role of adult education in enhancing women’s socio-economic status in Kenema City**

### Problems Faced by Adult Learners and Staff in Vocational institutions in Kenema City

Every human endeavour is bound to be faced with challenges. The problems faced by adult learners in the institutions studied are catalogued in Figure IV. Adult learners faced diverse problems. Key among the problems faced were cost of practical sessions followed by fee payment, the lack of external support and poor water supply expressed by 77% of the respondents each. Other challenges included inconvenient posting for job training (68%), delay in graduation and cost of transportation as indicated by 60% of the respondents.

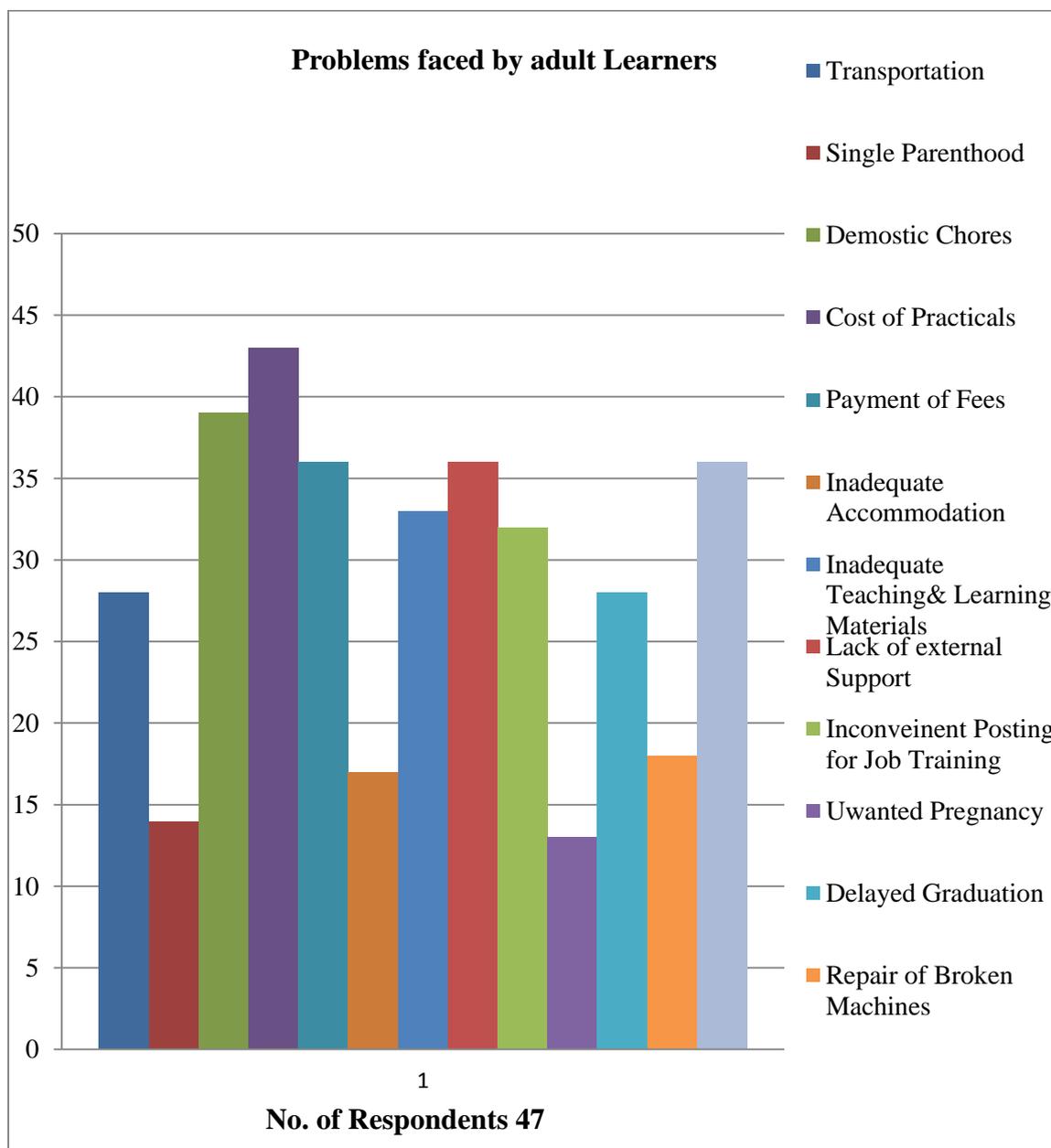


Figure 4. Showing Problems faced by adult Learners

### Problems faced by staff in adult education institutions in Kenema City

Problems were not only encountered by adult learners. Staff of adult education institutions in Kenema City also faced numerous problems. Prominent among the problems faced by staff were; low and delayed payment of salaries indicated by 87% of the respondents, inadequate teaching and learning materials (80%), high running cost (67%), learners irregularity (67%) and transportation to and from the training centers(53%) since the settlement is big and many

tutors like learners stay far away from the centers.

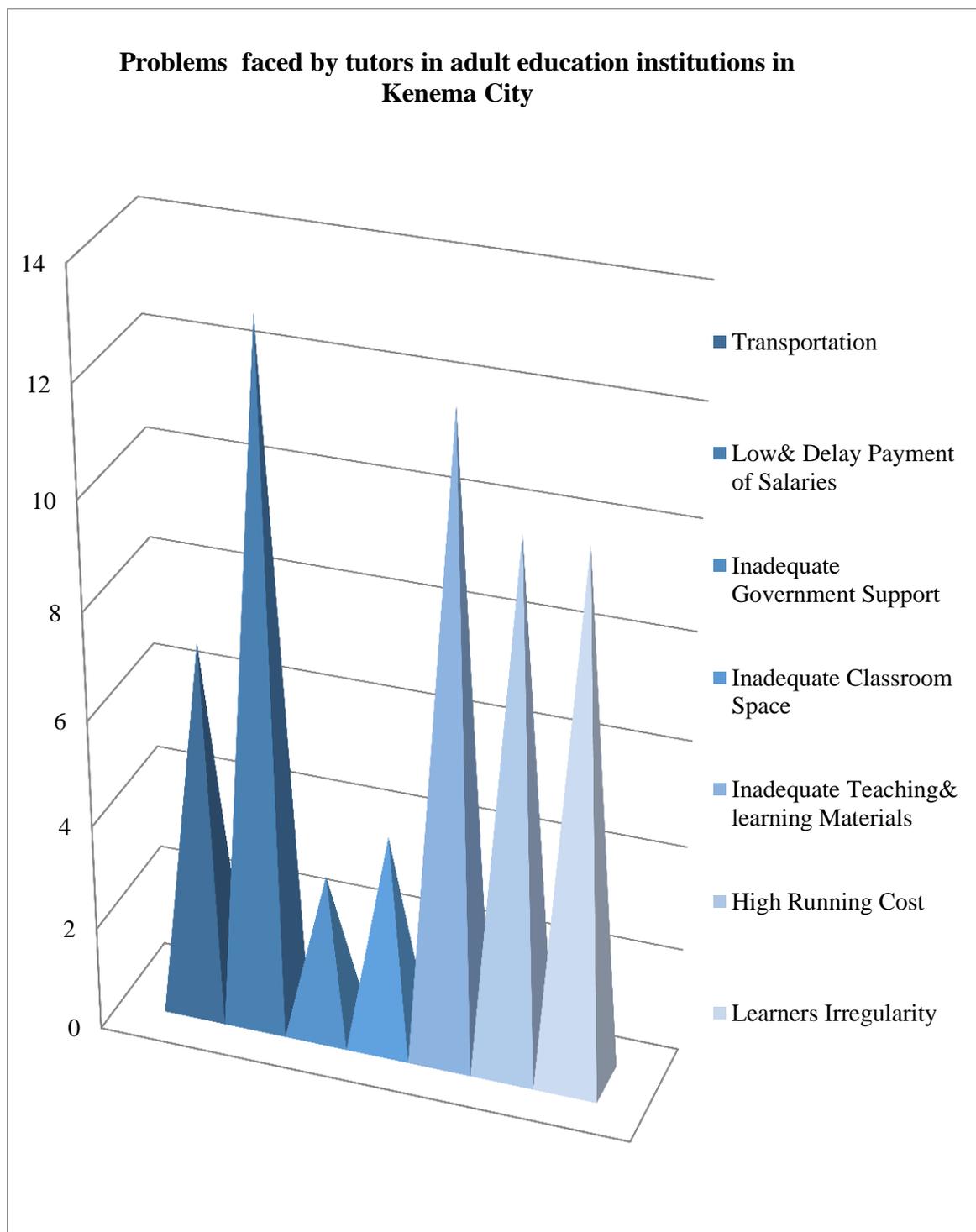


Figure 5. Showing Problems Faced by Tutors in Adult Education Institution in Kenema City

### Conclusion and Recommendations

From the findings of the study, it is concluded that the inferior socio-economic status of women in Kenema City and beyond can be reversed by adult education which has the potential to expiate their earlier academic inadequacies and to empower them to break the endemic cycle of poverty. Adult education offers the most durable solution to poverty.

### Recommendations

Stemming from the conclusion made from the research findings, the following recommendations are put forward:

1. Government of Sierra Leone and its development partners should double their efforts to support adult education. The Government of Sierra Leone should increase budgetary allocation for adult education and ensure that the resources are used for their desired purpose.
2. More adult education centers should be established in different parts of the City to increase access
3. Feeding programmes should be instituted in adult education institutions for very poor adult learners who cannot eke a living for themselves.
4. Start off kits should be provided for adult learners who successfully complete the training. Where possible, some bursary allocation should be made to adult education institutions.
5. Loan scheme should be introduced to aid adult learners who cannot afford to pay their fees.
6. The adult education facilitators should be given the necessary motivation to put their best into the training of the adult learners
7. Teaching and learning materials should be provided for adult education institutions
8. Awareness raising campaigns should be launched to let perspective adult learners know the significance of adult education.
9. Various institutions providing adult education and their sponsors should collaborate their efforts to improve on their activities.
10. Much consideration should be given when posting adult learners on job training or internship. They should be, if possible made to go where they can be comfortable.
11. Since it is observed that adult education needs are community specific, the Kenema City Council (KCC) should bear hands in the provision of the facility
12. Appropriate technology that has the advantage of reducing women's workload should be introduced so that they have time to attend adult education classes. Such technology may include the use of rice mills, cassava leaf and groundnut grinding machines, the provision of pipe-borne water and a host of others.
13. Credit facilities at low interest rates should be provided for tutors of adult education institutions.
14. Women should be encouraged to pick up the challenge to go in for skills that are mentally and physically demanding.

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