

## **Gender Issues! Sounds that Reverberate in the High Lands of Ethiopia!!**

**Dr. R. Dayanandan**

Assóciate Professor, Hawassa University.

afianand@gmail.com

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### **ABSTRACT**

*God created woman from one of the ribs of man. Therefore does it mean that only due to this original issue women should always be under the shadow of men? Does it mean that a woman can never be independent? Does it mean that women should always be inferior to the male counterparts? Here are many queries arising from the feminists around the globe. But one thing is crystal clear that to develop any society, there needs the support from the hands that 'lull the brood'. There is no doubt in the saying that "behind any man's victory there is a woman". There are infinite examples for women taking the lead of the society. There is hardly any field in this world where a female has not stepped on her tiny feet. Ethiopia is a land famous for the historical figure, Queen Sheba who has proven the female strength from time immemorial. From the hither to experiences, it is affirmed that here exists a society that gives due importance to the female population. Here is a folk who considers the needs of the females and it is also here, where there is a throng who remain as the most neglected, unwanted and are struggling all their lives not to die and just to sustain. This paper made an attempt to analyze the gender issues prevailing in the high land regions of Ethiopia, with special reference to their livelihood status, socio-economic status, evil practices, work burden, discrimination at household level and in society at large and health aspects. Also it tries to explore the obstacles in empowering women based on different cohort studies among the women folk. Finally possible solutions are forwarded to overcome such issues.*

**Key Words:** Gender, Isolation, Intimidation, Violence, Stress, Feminization, Chunk

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### **Introduction**

God has created all living things in duplicates as male and female and both should have harmony in life with out which one can not sustain alone in this World. As it is cited in the 'Holy Bible' God created woman from the rib of man and an unwritten rule prevail in most part of the world that women should be submissive to men.

Therefore does it mean that only due to this original issue women should always be under the shadow of men? Does it mean that a woman can never be independent? Does it mean that women should always be inferior to the male counterparts? Here are many queries arising from the feminists around the globe. But one thing is crystal clear that to develop any society there needs the support from the hands that 'lull the brood'. There is

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no doubt in the saying that “behind any man’s victory there is a woman”. There are infinite examples for women taking the lead of the society. Women play a vital role in the community by taking care of all social activities. However, they do not enjoy the fruits of their labor and suffer from political, economical, social and cultural marginalization. Gender discrimination, unequal access to resources and opportunities, violence, lack of basic services, women’s trivial representation in politics and business, and the power imbalances that characterize personal relationships between men and women hamper the progress of not just women but of society at large. Because of this unequal treatment, women are still behind their partners and are still suffering and marginalizing from economical, social, political and other activities; through religious dogmas and ideologies dominations though they are half of the world population.

According to the World Bank’s much cited “dollar-a-day” international poverty line, which was revised in 2008 to \$1.25 a day in 2005 prices, there are still 1.4 billion people living in poverty, although this represents a decline from the 1.9 billion in 1981. This figure is higher than the 2004 estimate of 984 million made with the old measure of \$1-a-day. The report of CARE (2005) also mentioned that among the 1.3 billion people who live in absolute poverty around the globe, 70 percent are women. Besides, women work two-thirds of the world’s working hours but they earn only 10 percent of the world’s income, own less than one percent of the world’s property, and make up two-thirds of the estimated 876 million adults worldwide who cannot read or write. To address the stated problems above and other serious issues of the globe, in the year 2000 the member countries of the

United Nations pledged to reduce worldwide poverty by fifty percent by the year of 2015. To solve this poverty, women’s empowerment was one of the major agenda mentioned by the Millennium Development Goals and put in the third goal “Promote gender equality and empower women” side by side to different policy measures like improving living condition, materiality problem and education (Mayoux, 2002).

According to “Manusmrithi” there is always a man to protect a woman through out her life time! So she need not be worried about any issues on this earth because she is always safeguarded by men!! But in the present millennium a woman does not wait for a man to come and help her. She has learned to stand on her own by the changed social attitudes. She has raised her voice at the work places; she has proved her efficiency globally in all the spheres. There is hardly any field in this world where a female has not stepped on her tiny feet. The society has transformed from the day of “Manusmrithi” to this day where one can see a single woman, giving employment and protecting the lives of thousands of men, especially in the business world. The women of millennium have created a saga of many successful stories.

Gender and sex are two terms which are used untimely at different places. The UNESCO defines “Gender” as the social roles, responsibilities, and behaviors that are believed to belong to men and women. Gender roles are created by a society and are learned from one generation to the next. Since these roles are socially learned, they can be changed to achieve equity and equality for women and men. Gender discrimination is there in all spokes of life, in the office, in politics, in society, why to go far; even at home females are considerably suppressed by the male dominance. Whether

it is due to the intelligence difference, difference in decision making capacity or due to the difference in biological features is a difficult thing to find out.

“Without progress in the situation of women, there can be no true social development. Human rights are not worthy of the name if they exclude the female half of humanity. The struggle for women’s equality is part of the struggle for a better world for all human beings and all societies” – Boutros Boutros – Ghali, Former United Nations Secretary-General.

### **Gender Issues - A Global Perspectives**

Since 1970s there has been concern expressed regarding the gap between women’s actual economic participation and public perception of it. Gender issues in the workplace are abundant, significant and noteworthy but difficult to address. A woman knows that her workplace is not perfect. Nor is an ideal setting in which the majority of her active hours are spent. The perfect work situation is usually a fantasy or a myth. Nice, but not real. Women know that the reality is a far cry from perfect. Some times it is a night mare. In the workplace, millions of women (and men) face millions of chaos. Some are self-created, some are passed on by assumptions by both work and gender generations, and some are forced. These conditions are considered as ‘Gender Traps’. Gender Traps are situations, conditions or tactics that will inhibit, encumber or catch women in their workplaces. Sometimes, they are blatant and bold; other times, they are subtle and seductive. They range from miscommunications, to sabotage, to management chaos to being “changeophobic”. Identifying and exposing these toxic conditions and behaviors are the first steps in dealing with the gender issues in

the workplace.

Among the many tactics played at the work place there are some ugly tactics which some men use to exercise power and control over women. These include sexual abuse, economic abuse, emotional abuse, isolation (glass ceiling), intimidation, male privilege, threats, and the use of children. These forms of abuse contribute to the glass ceiling by creating glass walls between women and other employees. Misbehavior from the superior officers is not at all a new story. The physical and psychological consequences of the different violence will remain throughout their life. If any such thing happens and the woman has no access to justice will further complicate the problems. Such lives are then condemned by all for none of their fault.

The "F" word is one of the workplace's dirty secrets; a woman who is fat will be discriminated against more than if a man is fat in the same situation. Generally women who are not very good looking suffer more at the workplace when compared to the beautiful ones! This is not a serious problem with the men folk.

A study on ‘Workplace Gender Issues to Stress and Health Risks’ says that one among three Americans may be making themselves sick just by going to work each day (Petersen, 2004). It shows that differences in the way men and women are managed and fueled by the differences in what they value most at work. This puts both genders at risk for cardiovascular problems, depression and a higher susceptibility to infectious diseases. Gender-based differences in workplace values can create an organization culture of underlying stress and conflict that affects the physical and emotional health of both men and women. The study emphasizes that females are at a higher health risk from workplace stress than males.

Many women employees are the victims of daily workplace stresses. After a days mentally tiring work, its pressure and lack of appreciation and reaching back at home they virtually will be in a mood to rest the head at any place. There again no chance for that until she satisfies the needs of her husband and children. Moreover she may not be able to satisfy the needs of the family affairs. All these stresses naturally predispose to different kinds of psychiatric and health problems. In brief the work place stresses lead to health risks of not the women alone but her family members also.

In no society today do women enjoy the same opportunity as men. Gender bias is a worldwide phenomenon, exists in every country, at virtually every income level and in every stratum of society but is especially pervasive in the poorest parts of Africa. It ranges from the exclusion of women from development programs to wage discrimination and systematic violence against females. In its most generic form, such bias is tantamount to grossly unequal allocation of resources –whether of food, credit, education, jobs, information or training.

Women and girls in the urban poor population face particularly stark challenges. They are victims of even further marginalization, particularly a gender gap in education. Women in poor urban communities are also more likely to be exposed to gender-based violence. Research indicates that, in some countries, poor urban women are more likely to experience intimate-partner violence than rural or higher-income urban women. This fact has also been closely linked in some cases to a higher incidence of mental illness; for instance, a study by the World Health Organization showed that women who had

experienced intimate-partner violence were significantly more likely to report thoughts of suicide. This is consistent with some indicators that show a higher prevalence of poor mental health among poor urban women (Montgomery, 2009).

Women experiencing urban poverty are also particularly vulnerable to health risks associated with maternal care. Women living in slums were consistently found to have much lower access to prenatal and antenatal care than those in other urban areas with higher incomes. Furthermore, women and girls in urban poor populations also tend to be subject to a higher prevalence of HIV/AIDS than women living in rural and other urban areas, which is perhaps linked to the findings suggest that, for women in the urban poor population, forced or traded sex is often more prevalent than for their higher-income or rural counterparts. There are some indications that in some socioeconomic groups, such as adolescents and women, poverty may be linked to HIV prevalence owing to higher rates of early sexual initiation and reports of forced or traded sex (Chinsung Chung, 2012).

It is in the poorer strata of society that women not only eat last but often only what is left and ‘feminization of poverty’ becomes an issue of concern. Moreover, men from these poorer strata of society are more likely to be found indulging in physical violence against women, sexual abuse, alcoholism, gambling and indulging in prostitution although these evils are not necessarily restricted to this class of society alone. Sexual abuse not only in the form of incest and rape, but in social behavior designed to treat women as objects for male gratification poses a constant threat and social conditioning wherein women constantly live

in apprehension and in threat of sex based violence.

### **The ‘Chunk’ of Issues Specific to Ethiopia**

Ethiopia (Horn of Africa) is a land famous for the historical figure, ‘Queen Sheba’ who has proven the female strength from time immemorial. From the hither to experiences, it is affirmed that here exists a society that gives due importance to the female population. Here is a folk who considers the needs of the females and it is also here, where there is a throng who remain as the most neglected, unwanted and are struggling all their lives not to die and just to sustain.

The differences in the ways in which individuals are treated through the socialization process, due mainly to their sex status, leads to the development of real psychological and personality differences between males and females (Almaz, 1991). These socially induced differences between males and females result in discriminatory rewards, statuses, opportunities and roles. Women in Ethiopia as anywhere else occupy a low status in the society even though women work force constitutes 80% in the unorganized sector. They represent 49.8% of the population and contribute mainly to food production and other; they have not shared the fruits of development equally with their male counterpart (National report, 2004). They are highly marginalized and disfavored from political, social and economical benefits for centuries. Resources are under control of men, decision regarding social, economical and freedom of choice are dominated by male and women’s voice is very limited in all aspects in their daily life.

The participation of women in qualified jobs and related fields is at its lowest level. For instance, the National Labor Force

Survey (CSA, 2006) indicates that women account for only 23.9 per cent in technical and professional fields. The majority of women perform tiresome, low paid and even unpaid jobs. According to Federal Civil Service Agency data on federal government employees, women make up 42.2% only they occupy less than 30% of all professional, scientific and administrative positions, indicating that upper and middle level positions are still overwhelmingly dominated by men (United Nations Country Team, 2011). There is also lack of equivalent participation in higher positions of government decision making. Only 152 (27.79%) women are represented out of a total 547 members of the House of People’s Representatives (Ethiopian Election Board Report, 2010). In Ethiopia, promoting gender equality and women empowerment is one of the millennium development goals (MDG). Even if this is the aim going to address, women participation in different leadership positions is low. It is evident from ministerial position in the present Government; out of 25 appointed ministers, only 2(8%) are women. From this data one can clearly see the participation of women at various decision making positions being very insignificant compared to their number.

Ethiopian women’s access to mass media is one of the lowest. In their Demographic Health Survey (DHS), comparative report, (Mukuria et al., 2005) show that, among 25 Sub-Saharan African countries, Ethiopia was the last with respect to percentage of women who have access to newspaper. In the same report it was indicated that in 2000, among women aged 15-49 in Ethiopia, only 1.7 per cent read newspaper at least once a week, compared with 15 per cent in Uganda, 36 per cent in Gabon and 37 per cent in Namibia. Regarding women’s access to television, among the 25 countries, Ethiopia was the

second from the last with only 4.4 per cent of women aged 15-49 watching television at least once a week, surpassing only Malawi (3.8%). Women's access to radio was relatively better than access to newspaper and television, with 11 per cent of the women listening to radio at least once a week. It is, however, the lowest compared to other sub-Saharan African countries; 72 per cent for Gabon, 53 per cent for Uganda, 52 per cent for Malawi and 39 per cent for Rwanda (DHS, 2005).

The major empowerment criteria defined by the United Nations; 'women's sense of self-worth; their right to have and to determine choices; their right to have access to opportunities and resources; their right to have the power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home; and their ability to influence the direction of social change in the local and international arena are under the male or husbands dominations. Rights such as, access to land, credit and other productive resources are difficult for women to attain. They also experience multiple forms of other deprivations such as longer working days, women specific ill health, low levels of education relative to men, and lack of adequate representation in leadership and decision making positions. Poverty has a feminine gender in Ethiopia, She is a She!

There was a cry for the emancipation of women in this area which has been almost outdated at this time. When the year's long war has devastated the highland region leaving fatherless children and husbandless wives, women were forced to take the lead. Now more than 40% of the house holds are led by women. They are in the fore front of different farming activities be it agriculture or animal husbandry, in the trading activities, be it small scale or whole sale, in nursing and

care, be it in private or government hospitals, in secretarial assistance, be it financial enterprises or educational institutions. Since the fall of Dergue regime, the current Ethiopian government is trying to address the multi dimension women's problems taking different special considerations like the application of 'affirmative action' and other policy that favoured women. Similar to the government, non governmental organizations and other civil societies, are also contributing in various activities that helps to solve he existing problems.

**Economic Issues:** "Gender equality is not only a matter of social justice but also a good economics"(World Bank, 1995). Despite the economic development, a significant proportion of the Ethiopian population has been suffering from poverty and poverty related problems like malnutrition and disease for a very long period of time. The proportion of people who are absolutely poor (unable to meet their basic needs) during the year 2011/12 was 29.2 percent. In 2010/11, while the proportion of the population below the poverty line stood at 30.4% in rural areas, it is estimated to be 25.7% in urban areas. The poverty gap index is estimated to be 7.8% while it is 8.0% for rural areas and 6.9% for urban areas. Similarly, the national level poverty severity index stood at 0.031 with rural poverty severity index (0.032) being slightly higher than that of urban areas (0.027). Between 2004/05 and 2010/11, income (consumption) inequality measured by Gini Coefficient has shown a slight decline from 0.3 in 2004/05 to 0.298 in 2010/11. Inequality as measured by the coefficient has declined in urban areas from 0.44 to 0.37, while rural inequality increased from 0.26 to 0.27 though inequality is still higher in urban than in rural areas.

**Gender and poverty:** In Ethiopia the burden of poverty is disproportionately borne by women. The poverty situation of women is graver than that of men, which is also explained in terms of the increasing feminization of poverty. By and large, many studies reveal that poverty is notably higher in households with a high proportion of women among active house hold members especially where the house hold head is female. As have been noted above, Ethiopian women, like other women in most of the developing world, constitute the majority of the unemployed segment of the population. What's more, they are among the most disadvantaged groups in society as evidenced by the adult literacy rate, which is 20% for women against 40% for men according to Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP).

Poverty in Ethiopia is a manifestation of complex factors such as high population growth, environmental degradation, high rate of unemployment, drought, low level of literacy, limited access to resources, health and educational services, etc. The major factor that hinders a sustained economic growth and poverty reduction in Ethiopia is the poor performance of the agricultural sector which provides employment, income and food for the majority of the population. Rain-fed agriculture has continuously suffered from high population pressure, uncertain weather conditions and declining labor productivity. Poverty has also induced the cultivation of marginal and degraded lands that contributes to low land and labor productivity. On the other hand, the non-farm sector has been unable to expand at a faster rate to provide employment and income for excess labor existing in the agricultural sector.

**Preference in Education:** "It pays to invest in women – not just for them, but for children and men as well" (Bruntland in

UNDP, 1995). Female education in Ethiopia is hampered mainly by the sexual division of labour which confines girls to household activities, by early marriage, by the unfavourable societal attitude towards the education of girls and by the restriction on their physical movement in relation to the distance of the school from their homes.

Parents with limited resources or income are forced to make choices as to which of their children should go to school. They would rather invest in their sons, because boys are perceived as bread winners and support for old parents no longer able to fend for themselves, while girls are preferably employed in the household or are send out to work – as helpers or maids – to supplement the family income.

**Rights to property/inheritance:** Women, given their relatively low educational status and lack of skills, normally find that their best access to economic resources is through the household. They may inherit resources upon birth, receive gifts upon marriage or acquire control of household property as wives or daughters or through division of property up on divorce. However, women's access to economic resources in rural Ethiopia is complex: de-jure laws have little or no impact on the majority of rural households that continue to apply customary, religious and traditional practices in personal relationships.

A study indicates that customary laws particularly as they pertain to two rural resources – land and livestock – are still practiced across the regions. In the communities studied, large livestock belong to men and women, notwithstanding differences in degree, are permitted to own goats, sheep, and/or poultry. In the south, women do not own any animals. In Oromiya region, women do not own property in their

own right. In Amhara region, de-jure, wives are entitled to half of the common property but in practice this is not so. In Gembella region, women own trinkets and small animals only. In fact a woman may herself be inherited by her brother-in-law or next of kin if the husband dies, otherwise her parents must return the bride price received at her wedding. In Affar region, a woman may receive livestock as a wedding gift (nikah), which is the produce she controls, but cannot sell the animals. If the husband dies or she is divorced, the clan elders decide on the inheritance because under Abukrate law women have no inheritance rights. Under Sharia law, one-eighth of the property is divided among spouses.

Most often women work as part of family labor on plots owned/leased by male members of the house hold, although they are also significant among wage laborers. Women receive a disproportionately small share of credit from formal banking institutions despite working much harder than men and often being more credit worthy. They are assumed to have no collateral to offer.

**Unemployment:** Women are marginalized not by joblessness, but by the type of work and working conditions that condemn them to low wages and low productivity occupations which involve greater pressure and more drudgery (BASICS, 1997). Women's economic activity rate (63%) is much lower than men's (82%) even more so in urban areas (39% for women and 62% for men). According to key findings of the 2012 urban unemployment survey by Central Statistical Agency of Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia reveals that the total urban population of the country was estimated to be 14,011,269 of which 11,110,653 persons (79.3%) were aged ten years and above in March 2012.

The economically active population comprises employed and unemployed persons aged ten years and above was 6,944,691 (62.5%) out of the total population. The economically not active persons who were neither engaged in productive activities nor available to furnish their labor due to homemaking activities, attending school, old age/pensioned, illness, too young to work...etc account 4,165,962 persons (37.5%). The proportion of not active female is significantly higher (62.2%) than male (37.8%). The employment to population ratio shows an increasing trend from the survey periods (May 2009 to March 2012). The differential by sex also depict that the ratio of males (61.7%) is significantly higher than females (42.6%). The proportion of employed persons who have been working in the informal sector declined from 36.5 percent in May 2009 to 31.7 percent in March 2012. Females who work in this sector is significantly higher than males during the four survey periods. The differentials of unemployment rate by sex show that female unemployment rate (24.2 percent) is more than double as compared to male (11.4%) (CSA, 2012).

Women are also underrepresented in the formal sector of employment. The survey conducted by the Central Statistical Authority (CSA, 2007) showed that women account for less than half (46%) of the total employees in the country. Considering the percentage of female employees from the total number of employees by employment type, the highest was in domestic activities (78%). In other types of formal employment (e.g. government, NGOs, private organizations), the percentage of female workers is less than 38 per cent. On the other hand, the survey showed overrepresentation of female workers in the informal sector. About 55 per cent of working women work



in the informal sector whereas the percentage of working men in the informal sector was 34 per cent (CSA, 2007). Women are thus engaged in the informal sector as crafts workers, small traders (gullit), service workers (maids in bars and restaurants), and shop and market sales workers. By occupational groups also indicated gender disparity. From federal government employees 65 per cent are men and 35 per cent are women. Among those earnings 3500 Birr and above, 92 per cent was men and only 8 per cent was women and those upper and middle level positions are overwhelmingly dominated by men (Federal Civil Service Agency, 2007).

This shows that women are being ignored from the economic domain. The severe unemployment situation has forced the majority of the women in both rural and urban areas to seek employment in the informal sector which is characterized by low productivity, minimal income, and lack of economic and social security. A worrisome trend is the increasing informality of women's employment in all sectors and most regions. These women are engaged in activities such as collection and selling of firewood, preparation and selling of home made food items and drinks such as Injera and Tella (home made brewery), and street vending of a variety of consumer items. Women play a greater role than men in foraging for food, fetching water, gathering fuel wood and fodder. They work 14-17 hours a day, still remain impoverished due to their labour, physique and share of property are exploited by patriarchal and class repression.

**Violence against women:** The violence and discrimination against women are global problems, which require everyone's concern. Most of these abuses are perpetrated by very close, intimately related

people, often the husband. Although a nationwide study on the prevalence of violence against women has not been conducted in Ethiopia and the magnitude of the problem nationwide is not really known, some studies, police and media reports indicate that its prevalence is quite high and is on the rise. Due to the existing socio economic position of women and cultural and religious barriers, a large number of crimes of violence against women still go unreported.

There are two milieus where gender-based violence takes place. Physical, sexual abuse of female children in the household, virginity-related violence, female genital mutilation, child preference, access to social services, food prohibitions, and violence related to exploitation. The second milieu is violence occurring within the general community. In Ethiopia, gender-based violence occurs under the pretext of tradition and culture and is thus condoned by the society. It appears to be accepted as a normal aspect of daily life, and the existing laws and policies have done little to address the matter. Sexual abuse, rape, marriage by abduction, early marriage, widow inheritance and bride price, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions, in police stations and the judiciary system, are common forms of violence faced by women. Ethiopia has one of the highest reports in the world of physical assault by male partners.

**Social issues:** Their low participation in education also the cause that women have little or no power of making decisions on matters related to their own households. Their decision making power is limited regarding land use in rural areas (Human Development Report, 2007/08) and even on sexual interactions. Mostly women in the country have the power to make decisions on

issues related to the daily life of their family, but decisions about large household purchases, degree of participation of a woman in social activities, and reproductive health issues are dominated by men.

Low educational level is one of the causes and consequences of females' low socio-economic status. In spite of the fact that significant progress has been realized in girls' education during the last decade, gender gap is still observed. According to various statistical abstracts of the Ministry of Education, the share of female students has increased from 34 per cent to 37 per cent between the years 2003/04 and 2007/08. Nevertheless, the sex disaggregated Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER), the ratio of total enrolment at primary or secondary education to the corresponding school age population, shows disparity between the two sexes. Though female GER in primary education has increased from 64 per cent in 2004/05 to 81 per cent in 2007/08, the respective figures for males are 73 per cent and 86 per cent. The gender gap is clearly observed when the Gender Parity Index (GPI), the ratio of female to male enrolment, is considered. In the year 2007/08, GPI was found to be 0.9, indicating that there were only 9 girls enrolled at primary schools for every 10 boys (Education Statistics Abstract, 2007/08). This gender gap increases with increasing level of education.

Many girls migrate to urban areas in search of jobs and send money to the family in villages by working hard. There is good number of examples in the high land towns where girls came as labour migrants from the outskirts. Forced marriages are also common in the villages. In rural Ethiopia, women are denied of movement with out the concern of their husbands or parents. Their views are not taken in to consideration especially while taking any decisions.

**Cultural Issues:** Ethiopia is a patriarchal society that keeps women in a subordinate position (Haregewoin and Emebet, 2003). There is a belief that women are obedient, submissive, patient, and tolerant of monotonous work and violence, for which culture is used as a justification (Hirut, 2004). Cultural values are conveyed during socialization in childhood. They encourage more males to develop traits that translate into leadership, political and economic and females into dependency and domesticity.

The socialization process, which determines gender roles, is partly responsible for the subjugation of women in the country. Ethiopian society is socialized in such a way that girls are held inferior to boys. In the process of upbringing, boys are expected to learn and become self-reliant, major bread winners, and responsible in different activities, while girls are brought up to conform, be obedient and dependent, and specialize in indoor activities like cooking, washing clothes, fetching water, caring for children, etc. (Haregewoin and Emebet, 2003; Hirut, 2004).

The differences in the ways in which individuals are treated through the socialization process, due mainly to their sex status, leads to the development of real psychological and personality differences between males and females (Almaz, 1991). These socially induced differences between males and females result in discriminatory rewards, statuses, opportunities and roles. In spite of the fact that significant progress has been realized in girls' education during the last decade, gender gap is still observed.

Furthermore, there are other practices that are degrading the women such as those related to 'women and blood'. A woman who is bleeding either as a result of her menstrual period or after child birth is considered

unclean or polluted and is not allowed to join in religious or social services such as entering the church (Orthodox Church) or carrying out the 'Solat' for Muslim women. Anyone entering a house where there is a woman who has given birth, and the woman herself, must undergo some cleansing ceremonies before they are accepted as clean. In some part of the country (e.g. Keficho) a woman in her menstrual period is kept isolated from every male including her own children. It is believed that they will die if she dares to look them in the eye. Many women deliver their babies unattended in an isolated hut built for the purpose. These practices affect their own self-esteem and could have fatal consequences.

Ethiopian culture emphasizes the important role for women in the society. They are the bread winners and go to the farm, prepare the field, sow the seeds, harvest the crop and sell the crop to buy "Injera" (staple food of the Ethiopian). They seldom go for any family control measures. At a very young age, girl has to rear her own child on her back. The fatherless children are only overload for the mother. She tries her level best to feed the six or seven mouths that are solely dependent on her income. During this struggle for life she naturally forgets about the letters in the book which will not give her children a piece of "Dabo" or "Bani" (Bread). They don't get the education beyond high school level which is the maximum a girl can attain in village. There is also some other 'endemic issues' in this country as described below.

**Health Related Issues:** Gender inequality and discrimination harm girls' and women's health directly and indirectly, throughout the life cycle and neglect of their health needs prevents many women from taking a full part in society. Unequal power relations between men and women often limit women's control

over sexual activity and their ability to protect themselves against unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS; adolescent girls are particularly vulnerable.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is a cultural ritual in many African countries. According to a study undertaken by the National Committee on Traditional Practices in Ethiopia (NCTPE), 73% of Ethiopian women have been circumcised. This causes serious health problems including loss of blood, blood contamination and even loss of mental balance. In addition to the severe physical pain and trauma caused by the actual procedure, the immediate health consequences include shock, hemorrhage, tetanus infection, urine retention as well as acute and chronic urinary track infection. In addition, possible complications often lead to geneto-urinary problems such as difficulties with menstruation and urination, pelvic inflammation, injury to adjacent organs, broken bones, ulceration and sometimes result in death. Long-term consequences include infertility, dermoid cysts and abscesses, scar formation, painful sexual intercourse and develop more complications especially at the time of delivery. Repeated cutting and stitching during labor results in higher incidence of wounds and abrasions during sexual intercourse and the possibility of anal inter-course when vaginal penetration is impossible or difficult, may increase the risk of transmission of HIV, hepatitis B or other blood – borne diseases. With all other hardships and responsibility of the family on the shoulder the female life expectancy is estimated to be 44 years only!

The poor young girls are forced to indulge in prostitution literally to fill their stomach. This predisposes them to different types of sexually transmitted diseases. This epidemic is a threat to socio-economic

advancement of most countries in the world. The issue goes beyond health problem and it becomes a cause for social disintegration and economic deterioration of many developing countries including Ethiopia. The problem is aggravated by the existence of gender discrimination, unrestricted prostitution and violence against women. About 1.4 million people live with HIV/AIDS in Ethiopia (UNAIDS, 2003). Out of this, women age 15-49 with HIV/AIDS are 770,000. There is also an unorganized group of women who are abandoned and ignored being orphans with out having any one to support, being pushed to the pits of undesired activities which make them sick for life long and also most of the time forced to bear unwanted children of an unknown guy who paid her just for a second of pleasure!

**Prohibitions on food:** In addition to the general prohibitions, there are, to a varying degree, food restrictions specific to pregnant women in almost all communities in Ethiopia. The nutritional status of Ethiopian women is low and this has importance in their overall health status and the outcome of pregnancy both for themselves and for their children. The mean height of Ethiopian women is only 156 cm and about 4 per cent are under 145 cm (7% for those between 15-19 years old) indicating severe malnutrition and a very high risk at delivery. 30 per cent of women have body-mass-index (BMI, indicator of current under-nutrition) of less than 18.5 in non-pregnant women, indicating serious chronic energy deficiency. The husband and other adult males are served first and with the best food. Women often get only what is left over. Even when they eat together from the same maseb (traditional round straw table) the women makes sure that the man gets the lion's share.

**Access to Mass Media:** Ethiopian women's access to mass media is one of the lowest.

Demographic Health Survey (DHS, 2005) shows that, among 25 Sub-Saharan African countries, Ethiopia was the last with respect to percentage of women who have access to newspaper. In the same report it was indicated that in 2000, among women aged 15-49 in Ethiopia, only 1.7 per cent read newspaper at least once a week, compared with 15 per cent in Uganda, 36 per cent in Gabon and 37 per cent in Namibia. Regarding women's access to television, among the 25 countries, Ethiopia was the second from the last with only 4.4 per cent of women aged 15-49 watching television at least once a week, surpassing only Malawi (3.8%). Women's access to radio was relatively better than access to newspaper and television, with 11 per cent of the women listening to radio at least once a week. It is, however, the lowest compared to other sub-Saharan African countries; 72 per cent for Gabon, 53 per cent for Uganda, 52 per cent for Malawi and 39 per cent for Rwanda.

**Issues in Agriculture and Allied Sector:** In Ethiopia most of agricultural activities are carried out by women folk. Pesticide, dusting, spade work during field irrigation, ploughing, sowing, manure and fertilizer application, uprooting of seedlings and marketing of grains etc. are performed by women. In addition to this, transplanting and storage of grains and farm activities such as weeding, harvesting, carrying head load, threshing and winnowing were performed jointly but predominantly by women. The average work load of men and women of the lower socio-economic stratum is higher than those of high and medium socio-economic strata in farm operations. Among women from the low socio-economic strata women exclusively perform all the household tasks. On average a woman devotes about 7 hours and 25 minutes to household chores (FAO).

The multiple roles of women in agriculture especially in food storage are generally underestimated and undervalued. By and large, they have remained as “invisible hands”.

In all the ancient civilizations there are mentions on man-animal relationships. In general women take care of animals, breed them, get the animal products and make livelihood out of this. So when we consider the animal husbandry practices, the female gender has the supreme importance. The society has limited her activities in many fields simply based on certain taboo that predominate the society. But in animal husbandry field irrespective of the country, religion, cast or creed women play a major role from childhood till old age. In animal husbandry it needs full time attention in the care and management of livestock. They easily manage these animals may be because they understand the physiology as well as the psychology of animals much better than men do. The livestock needs more patience in their proper timely feeding which women follow just as directed. The maternal instinct of women helps them to identify any problem if the animals are suffering much earlier than men do. As and when they find animals falling sick women forget all other things and she will be looking after the sick animals till they recover. In many countries especially in Ethiopia the animal husbandry activities are not well organized and most of the activities are undertaken by women. Even with significant involvement in animal husbandry and agricultural works, women have not received appreciation and recognition of their extensive economic contribution.

### **How to overcome these Issues?**

The whole world is busy in preparing diversified programs to face the gender

issues in different fields. National and international agencies have been evolved for dealing this issue of the millennium. Gender equality and women’s empowerment are central to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – not only as just and desirable ends in themselves, but as vehicles for the achievement of all the other Goals. Effective mainstreaming of gender in the national MDGs reports can contribute to a range of actions for gender equality. Internal policy dialogues, strengthening of national capacities and statistical systems for data collection and reporting lead to more gender-responsive programming and resource allocation in various fields. The above facts also indicate a need for drudgery reduction in the lives of women. However, this cannot be generalized across the board as applicable to all women. Here are some tips to overcome the general issues.

**Women Participation:** Women participation in Ethiopia is largely at junior rather than senior levels. The adoption of special measures to implement women’s right to equal participation in public life, particularly in high-ranking positions such as the diplomatic service and the judiciary is essential. Training and access to information is much needed by rural women, who are often excluded from more formal information networks. Extension agents tend to focus on male farmers, within an essentially male-dominated extension system. For an extension service to effectively meet the needs of agriculture, it is essential that it serve farm women as well and focus towards their needs. Education should be encouraged by the Government, particularly through the use of a minimum percentage female allocation quota for university entrance. Women should have an important role in decision making in both workplaces and at home especially to

determine the family size. The effective decision should be given adequate appreciation which will give a moral boost to her in the over all activities.

Girls'/women's access to education is much lower than men's even though all agree that the returns for society are greatest from the education of women because of their dominant role in social reproduction. Equal opportunity policies need to be an integral part of institutional strengthening. Evidence indicates a clear linkage between levels of female staff and women's access to microfinance. However, equal employment of female staff is not in itself sufficient to ensure empowerment outcomes for programmes. Women staff, like men, frequently lack expertise in gender analysis and may not have sufficient knowledge or experience of the situation of very poor women. There is, therefore, a need for gender training for both male and female staff. This training needs to identify priorities for gender policy at client level and how women's participation can be increased at all levels. It also needs to identify necessary changes in organizational culture, recruitment criteria and procedures to ensure equal opportunity becomes a reality at work. This would also enable female and male staff to overcome the many gender challenges they face in their lives outside work. Structures for implementation of gender policy need to go beyond appointment of a junior member of staff to the position of gender officer and/or allocating a small percentage of time from different staff to gender issues. There need to be clear lines of responsibility, adequate resources and formal forums for exchange of information and ideas. These in turn require clear guidelines and concrete incentives for implementation of empowerment policies if both female and

male staff is to feel confident about spending scarce time and resources on these issues.

There is also a need to rethink current orthodoxy on the separation of microfinance from other interventions. Providing that repayment incentives are built into credit delivery, integrating the role of credit officer and development worker improves staff-client understanding and decreases time spent chasing bad debts. On-going mentoring and counselling by staff both for enterprise and gender at savings and credit meetings is often more effective than one-off 'expert' training and decreases transport and other costs for both programmes and clients. A number of programmes to be integrating credit and savings delivery with human development and training activities. Creating incentives requires integration of empowerment indicators into programme monitoring and evaluation to assess the impacts of programmes on the lives of participants, and also to assess the potential contribution of programmes to empowerment. Small Enterprise Foundation has been looking at cost-effective ways of integrating poverty indicators (Mayoux and Simanowitz 2001). These methodologies could also be further developed to include empowerment indicators (Mayoux 1998b).

There is a range of microfinance models into which elements of this empowerment strategy could be implemented, from mainstream banks and financial service providers through large poverty-targeting banks to smaller microfinance programmes providing savings and credit to members of women's movements and labour organisations. An empowerment approach does, however, involve a significant change in attitude and work practices and the challenging of vested interests. Flexibility to women's needs and deciding the best ways of combining empowerment and

sustainability objectives can only be achieved on the basis of extensive consultation with women, research on their needs, strategies and constraints, and a process of negotiation between women and development agencies. It therefore inevitably requires a more comprehensive framework for women's participation at all levels, rather than imposition of particular models depending on the particular donor fashion extant at the time.

**Publicize and implement women's human rights:** "Women rights are human rights". Rural women are still not aware of her rights in the society. Government can formulate and implement programs to open their eyes to have a look into these weapons which they can use in the battle against gender issues. The powers and status of the national statistics organizations should assure the collection, presentation and compilation of gender disaggregated data relating to rural women under every area, comprehensive data relating to violence against women etc. Using this important tool government can plan accordingly to raise women from many deep gutters of the society.

Recognition of women's worth and equality with men must be complemented by various protections and policies. Legal rights can enhance women's living conditions by legislating against gender bias in employment discrimination in pay and incentives and violence and harassment. Moreover, legal rights can contribute towards increasing women's capabilities by giving them property and inheritance rights, better access to credit and other productive resources and increased political participation and representation. From a human rights perspective, sustainable human development efforts must work to eliminate discrimination against women through programmes and processes.

As a signatory to the instruments of the Human Rights Convention and others, the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, through its 1995 Constitution, has declared that 'women shall, in the employment of human rights and protections provided for by this constitution, have equal right with men' (Article 35). The constitution not only recognizes extensive women's rights, but also institutes affirmative actions to redress the lags due to generations of low status of women. However, over and above political good will, enforcement of the policy will require substantial effort.

**Health Care:** There is a need for the orientation programmes for women related to primary method of birth control, implementation of family planning programmes, reproductive health education, sexually transmitted diseases and wide access to contraceptives. This could be arranged for both men and women because ignorance of either side will ultimately affect the women only! According to Demographic Health Survey (DHS) 2005, the maternal mortality rate has also declined to 676/100,000 in 2011 from about 871/100,000 live births in 2001/02. The cover for Antenatal Care, Deliveries attended by skilled health personnel and Postnatal Care service, reached 59.4%, 20.3% and 25.1% respectively. In 2010/11 the national contraceptive prevalence rate reached 29% compared to only 8% in 2000. Women are increasingly empowered to use their preferred contraceptive method and over 5.6 million women of reproductive age are using contraception. Similarly the total fertility rate reduced from 5.9 in the year 2000 to 4.8 during 2011. Improvement in maternal mortality is closely correlated with access to and the quality of health facilities and professionals.

**Economic Empowerment:** Empowering women in this context, therefore, requires a complex set of actions related to the holistic vision and strategies. This can be achieved through organization of self help groups, focusing on credit and thrift activities, related to meeting social, financial needs and investments for initiating micro enterprises. The concept of economic empowerment does not only address poverty alleviation but it also reaches out to the empowerment of women by bringing incomes in their hands there by promoting decision making independent of men in incurring expenditures. The disparity in wages can be eliminated by instituting wage increases in female-dominated sectors of public employment and by applying temporary special measures to ensure that sufficient job opportunities are available in all fields. The Government should also ensure that women benefit fully from poverty alleviation schemes and programmes to support entrepreneurship. Labor laws exclusively for women can be enacted. In the process, acquisition of real economic resources by women should be promoted as their right, and also because of the high productive and reproductive return on such resources in the hands of women.

**Political Empowerment:** Engendering the development paradigm involves radical change in the long standing premises underlying social, economic and political life. The free workings of economic and political processes are unlikely to deliver equality of opportunity, because of the prevailing inequities in power structures. When such structural barriers exist, government intervention is necessary – both through comprehensive policy reforms and through a series of affirmative actions.

Among the national development policies, the National Policy of Ethiopian

Women, the Health Policy, the Population Policy, the Education and Training Policy and the Social Policy address relevant issues which help improve the status of women in many respects. The National Policy on Ethiopian Women gives particular attention to their full development and advancement. The objectives of the policy are to facilitate conducive conditions that would help to bridge the existing gap between men and women in the national development framework, mainly in political, social and economic sections; to facilitate the necessary conditions whereby women and men have better access to basic social services including reproductive health services; to eliminate, step by step, prejudices, as well as customary and other practices, that are based on the idea of male supremacy; and to enable women to participate at all levels of development. In addition the gender issues can be addressed by enabling women to participate socially as equal to men especially in the decision making authorities. This implies that our focus necessarily address the issue of awareness building with regard to all governmental schemes, structure and function of rural governments, developmental programmes, legal provisions with implications on women's lives, be it related to the education of the girl child, child marriage, feminization of poverty, legal provisions for divorce and alimony and other gender issues.

**Social Empowerment:** By promoting not only reproductive and child health but by addressing the social issue of rights to the decisions made regarding the number of children, child spacing and rights over their own bodies, use of contraceptives, etc. The social biases, which result in preferences for male children, female infanticide/ foeticide etc., would be directed both to men and women. Organize women collectively



against HIV- AIDS, violence, sexual and physical abuse of children (rape, incest) and build awareness regarding the legal implications of it. There is a need to adopt specific legislation to combat violence against women.

The Government of Ethiopia has declared its commitment to gender equality, equity and the empowerment of women by stipulating the rights of women in its Constitution, by issuing the Women's Policy of Ethiopia and by revising the Family Law and the Criminal Law. In 2005, the Government upgraded the Office of Women's Affairs in the Prime Minister's office to the level of a full Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) with the mandate to ensure that due consideration was given to gender issues across all sectoral policies. Efforts continued to firmly establish gender as a cross-cutting issue through joint planning sessions between sectoral line ministries and MoWA.

#### **Creating Conducive Work Environment:**

A conducive 'work environment' is seen as an important aspect of retaining women staff. The desirable attributes in an organisation like safe and secure environment, open lines of communication, non-hierarchical structures, flexibility of work hours and changing nature of work especially for women having young children, working in teams can be adopted. Specific programmes can be directed at women to enhance their skills, resources and confidence, enabling and legitimising participation, capacity building, accessing and controlling resources by means of 'Women in Development' approach. Women-friendly personnel policies will also be drawn up to encourage women to participate effectively in the developmental process.

**Gender-Awareness Planning:** Gender analysis enables an understanding on the linkages between issues of gender, environment and development. Gender-aware planning is necessary for programmes at both organisation and village level. Each organisation has to customise and evolve a plan to suit the specific needs of women.

#### **Improving the Status of Women in Agriculture**

In view of the critical role of women in the agriculture and allied sectors, as producers, concentrated efforts should be made to ensure that benefits of training, extension and various programmes will reach them in proportion to their numbers. The programmes for training women in soil conservation, social forestry, dairy development and other occupations allied to agriculture like horticulture, livestock including small animal husbandry, apiculture, poultry, fisheries etc. will be expanded to benefit women workers in the agriculture sector. The client-oriented extension training project should be started with a participatory approach in both agricultural and animal husbandry sectors.

**Support Services for Women:** The provision of support services for women, like child care facilities, including crèches at work places and educational institutions, homes for the aged and the disabled will be expanded and improved to create an enabling environment and to ensure their full cooperation in social, political and economic life.

The Government has incorporated gender issues in different national policies including health, education and training, HIV/AIDS, population and other sector policies. The formulation of the National Action Plan (NAP) on Gender and Development ensures that gender is fully considered and

incorporated in all the annual work plans; and the establishment of a gender focal person in each of the regional bureaus is evidence of the Government's commitment to gender equality. Plan for Accelerated and Sustainable Development to End Poverty (PASDEP) has also recognized in addressing gender issues as one of its eight pillars. To this effect, PASDEP outlines the strategic measures: increasing girl's and women's access to education, improving water supply and sanitation as well as health services and adapting agricultural training to the needs of women.

### **Science and Technology for Women**

Programmes will be strengthened to bring about a greater involvement of women in science and technology. These will include measures to motivate girls to take up science and technology for higher education and also ensure that development projects with scientific and technical inputs involve women fully. Efforts to develop a scientific temper and awareness will also be stepped up. Special measures would be taken for their training in areas where they need special skills like communication and information technology. Efforts to develop appropriate technologies suited to women's needs as well as to reduce their drudgery can be given a special focus too.

### **Partnership with the Voluntary Organizations**

The involvement of voluntary organizations, associations, federations, trade unions, non-governmental organizations, women's organizations, as well as institutions dealing with education, training and research will be ensured in the formulation, implementation, monitoring and

review of all policies and programmes affecting women. Towards this end, they will be provided with appropriate support related to resources and capacity building and facilitated to participate actively in the process of empowering women.

Self Help Groups (SHGs) of women in developing nations have been recognized as an effective strategy for the empowerment of women in rural as well as urban areas: bringing women together from all spheres of life to fight for their rights or a cause. Since the overall empowerment of women is crucially dependent on economic empowerment, women through these SHGs work on a range of issues such as health, nutrition, agriculture, forestry, etc. besides income generation activities and seeking micro credit. Emphasis can be given in this field also.

### **Conclusion**

Gender issues are like birth pangs that nag the society every now and then in Ethiopia, India or America. There is no analgesic to alleviate these pangs except the favorable attitude of the people to these issues in the society. Everything rests on its shoulder to have or not to have problems on gender issues. We all live in this world for only once as a male or a female. But the various roles that we play and the society enforce us to play tell us exactly whether our lives have been fruitful or futile. Women empowerment is crucial in a war basis against gender issues in all spheres of life. After analyzing the multifarious issues we are optimistic and confident that the world is moving in the right direction to achieve the millennium development goals in spite of all those gender issues!!

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