

***Full Length Research***

# **A Role of Non-Governmental Organization for Women Empowerment through Decision Making in Ethiopia a Review**

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Empowerment of women through decision making has emerged as an important issue in recent times. Women have attained a great deal in the past few years but there are still areas of discrimination which exists. Non-governmental organizations are playing a significant role in the advantages of women empowerment, helping them stand on their own through different programs. It is believed that providing programs from NGOs to women has a multiplier effect for women empowerment through decision making. Thus this review is an attempt to study the role of NGO for women empowerment through decision making, the challenges of women empowerment, dimension of women empowerment and strategy of women empowerment. The review concludes that NGOs should increase working on women empowerment and decision making through different training since training helps women to bring a remarkable change in a given time as an intervention on its own.

**Keywords:** Women Empowerment, Decision Making, NGOs

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Women play an important role in the family and society, but in all essential areas of life women are generally at a significant disadvantage as compared with men, whether in terms of education, income, partner choice, inheritance laws, property rights, decision-making processes, community organization, or access to leadership positions in education, business, or politics. The need for the empowerment of women thus arises from this harsh social scenario. Women and their problems are being given much importance in our social milieu. Women have attained a great deal in the past few years but there are

still areas of discrimination which exists. Work with and for women in the interest of "women's empowerment" will continue to be one of the main tasks for a long time to come.

For the past twenty years empowering women in one country is widely considered as an engine of economic growth particularly the transition from low income to medium income economy (Arkebe, 2015). Even though women's contribution largely remains unrecognized and unnoticed in developing countries, they constitute 50 per cent of the world population and have been making substantial contribution to development. Besides, society gives little chance to women to enter into the fields of

various economic activities; NGOs are busy with programs like women empowerment in developing countries (Amirapu and Subramanian, 2015).

The government of Ethiopia launched Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) aiming to transform the economy towards an industrialized economy and to increase per capita income of its citizens by 2025 (World Bank, 2016). In this plan, it has been stated that the government works hard for strengthening active participation of women in building democratic system and good governance as well as in economic, social and cultural developments and benefit from the resultant outcomes by enhancing their overall capacity (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia- National planning Commission (FDRE-NPC, 2016).

The government of Ethiopia is making an effort to strengthen women's economic empowerment as well as their participation in formal economic, political and social affairs. Article 35 (3) of the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia states (1995:93):

*The historical legacy of inequality and discrimination suffered by women in Ethiopia taken into account, women, in order to remedy this legacy, are entitled to affirmative measures. The purpose of such measures shall be to provide attention to women so as to enable them to compete and participate on the basis of equality with men in political, social and economic life as well as in public and private institutions*

Furthermore, the government initiated provisions that protect and promote the wellbeing of women at workplace. For instance, the Labor Proclamation No. 377/2003 ensures women's rights upon the formation of employment contracts, prohibits sex-based discrimination in compensation and employment and grants women paid as maternity leave.

It is a general believe that NGOs are a backbone to support poor in the society. Contrary to this general believe that NGOs reinforce the existing discrimination and marginalization against women in the name of women empowerment while working closely with the institutions which encourage patriarchy and engender the gender in society. Women empowerment can be achieved through political power, education, employment, NGO. Among these, NGO dominates, and fruitful success of the women empowerment needs to occur along multiple dimensions including: economic, socio-cultural, familial/interpersonal, legal, political, and psychological. Since these dimensions cover a broad range of factors, women may be empowered within one of these sub-domains.

The above mentioned the role of NGOs very important for women empowerment. Women's supported by

different NGOs working in Ethiopia have gotten empowerment at different level such as; personal, social, economical are the most major empowerment that they get by working closely with NGOs. Yet, the reviewer believes studies on the role of NGOs for women empowerment still has challenges. There are challenges that hinder women empowerment due to gender inequality and by their biological difference; which this seminar paper gives a due attention to review. Therefore, this seminar try to assess the the role of NGOs for empowerment of women with women empowerment approach and strategy.

### **Objectives of the review**

The objective of the seminar is to review the role of NGOs for women empowerment through decision making, challenges women face in decision making and the strategies NGOs used to empower women through decision making in Ethiopia.

### **Review and Discussion**

Non-Government Organization (NGO) is any non-profit, voluntary citizens' group which is organized on a local, national or international level. Task-oriented and driven by people with a common interest, NGOs perform a variety of service and humanitarian functions, bring citizen concerns to Governments, advocate and monitor policies and encourage political participation through provision of information. Some are organized around specific issues, such as human rights, environment or health. They provide analysis and expertise, serve as early warning mechanisms and help monitor and implement international agreements. Their relationship with offices and agencies of the United Nations system differs depending on their goals, their venue and the mandate of a particular institution. Promoting employment is of particular interest to some NGOs working with poor woman. Nonprofit organization, term is usually applied only to organizations that pursue wider social aims that have political aspects, but are not openly political organizations such as political parties.

### **Women Empowerment**

#### **Empowerment**

Women are often disadvantaged compared to men in access to employment opportunities and conditions of work; furthermore, many women forego or curtail employment because of family responsibility (United Nations, 2010).

In most of the developing countries women are the

major economically disadvantaged and faced different kinds of problems. They are treated differently than their men counterpart and lagging behind in many domains. For instance, in labour market opportunities, they are less likely to work and earn less than men for similar work and are more likely to be in poverty. In the political participation, women are underrepresented in which globally they constituted 19.4 per cent of the members of parliament (Inter-parliamentary Union, 2011). Furthermore, women in many countries still lack independent rights to own land, manage property, conduct business, or even travel without their husbands consent. All this continuing discrimination against women and their low status in the economic and political aspects is argued that it can hinder development.

The removal of the different barriers and obstacles that women face in the social and economic aspects is a step towards realizing women's potential in the economy and enhancing their contribution to economic and social development (Sida, 2009). Empowering women can best seen as one of the single most important factor in contributing driving down the inequality between men and women and it accelerates development of a country.

Empowerment in its broadest sense is the expansion of freedom of choices and action. It means increasing one's authority and control over the resources and decisions that affects one's life. As people exercise real choices, they gain increased control over their life. Poor people's choices are extremely limited; both by their lack of assets and by their powerlessness to influence with or negotiate better terms for themselves with range of institutions, both formal and informal.

Empowerment is the process of gaining access and developing one's capacities with a view to participating actively in shaping one's own life and that of one's community in economic, social and political terms (Austrian Development Cooperation, 2006). Empowerment is also an approach to social change and constitutes a bottom-up perspectives where women themselves identify problem to be solved, how to solve it, and act accordingly (Strandberg, 2001).

### **Dimensions of Empowerment**

Empowerment is relevant at the individual and collective level and it has a social, economic and political dimensions.

#### **Socio-cultural empowerment:**

Empowerment as a multi-dimensional social process helps people gain control over their own lives. It brings about women literacy and access to a broad-range of educational options, participation in extra-familial group and social networks.

Social empowerment is a process that fosters power (that is, the capacity to implement) in people, for use in their own lives, their communities and their society, by being able to act on issues that they define as important (Cecilia and Sitna, 2009). Social empowerment is understood as taking steps to change society so that one's own place within is respected and recognized on the terms on which the person themselves want to live, not on terms dictated by others (Eyben *et al.*, 2008). Social empowerment doesn't mean that bringing individuals in the society, they are already there, but changing the power relations affirming an individual's freedom of choices and enhancing their capacity to make decisions by themselves. Despite the incidental evidence of women leadership growth in the developed countries, biases toward women in decision making positions persist (Garcia-Retamero, Lopez-Zafra, & Eagly, 2009). They "do not enjoy the same opportunities as men due to a number of deep-rooted discriminatory socio-cultural values and traditions" (Roomi & Parrott, 2008).

### **Economic empowerment**

Economic empowerment is the capacity of poor people to participate in, contribute to and benefit from growth process on terms of which recognize the value of their contribution, respect their dignity and make it possible for them to negotiate a fairer distribution of the benefits of growth (Eyben *et al.*, 2008). The economic empowerment requires that women be able to engage in activity that will allow them some degree of autonomy. Women's economic empowerment as the process increase women's real power over economic decisions that influence their lives and priorities in society. Women economic empowerment can be achieved through equal access to and control over critical economic resources and opportunities and the elimination of structural gender inequalities in the labour market, including a better sharing of unpaid care work (Sida, 2009).

Increasing women's presence in quantitative terms is important not only for lowering the disproportionate levels of poverty among women, but also an important step towards raising household income and encouraging economic development in countries as a whole (World Economic Forum, 2005).

### **Political Empowerment**

Political empowerment refers to equitable representation of women in decision making structures, both formal and informal, and their voices in the formulation of policies affecting their societies (World Economic Forum, 2005). It increases equity of representation in political institutions and enhancing the voice of the least vocal so that they

can engage in making decisions that affect the lives of other like them-enhancing their ability to speak about, as well as speak for, themselves, gaining recognition as having a right to engage in the democratic Process (Eyben *et al.*, 2008).

### **Roles and Strategies of Women Empowerment NGOs**

Because gender discrimination and women's rights abuse are systemic, deep-rooted problems with various dimensions (religious, cultural, economic, etc.) across the country, solutions to address them also need to be multi-dimensional and holistic involving various sectors of the society. Women empowerment NGOs, due to their mission-focused nature, are in a unique position to play pivotal roles to link various players including the general public, communities, religious groups, governments, and businesses. They also highlight various issues of gender inequality and inequity in order to stimulate responses from them. Although the typology and scopes of NGOs with overall missions of women empowerment vary, four types of them have high impacts and are more visible than the others. They are: grassroots women self-help NGOs, women's rights advocacy NGOs, women's economic development NGOs, and international women empowerment NGOs.

Grassroots Women's Self-Help NGOs grow from within communities, initiated by women leaders or groups to promote the welfare and economic opportunities of women who are community residents. They focus on short term income generation projects, such as cottage industries for women in communities, so that long term empowerment can be achieved. Grassroots women's self-help group NGOs need little or no intervention from outsiders, although information and technical advice from other established women NGOs can help them greatly in their efforts and impacts. During the past few years, there is a tremendous growth of this type of grassroots NGOs around the country both in urban and rural areas.

Women Rights Advocacy NGOs are typically established by leaders with strong feminist ideology or group of people who desire to address one or more aspects of women's rights abuse. Strategies of advocacy environmental NGOs focus on raising public awareness on women rights abuse, their impacts, and other issues in order to prevent them. They advocate for gender equality through various measures including activism. They support women activists and organize public protests that are often the most effective methods to mobilize the public and get the attention of law-makers. They link people with the political processes, so that they can demand responses from governments based on their constitutional and other rights. They partner with local media to get the word out in order to increase awareness among the public about women's rights issues and the

needs to address them. They act as watch dog groups to protect the rights of women from abuse by social groups, caste groups and religious groups that methodically subjugate women to multiple forms of oppressions in the name of tradition, culture and religion.

Women Economic Development NGOs strive to promote financial self-sufficiency of women through economic development. They provide direct social service, with missions to address specific needs of women such as education, health care, and income generation within the broad development framework. Based on the needs, they design and implement projects that benefit women from underserved or unserved communities. Access to micro loans and other opportunities offered by development NGOs have truly transformed the status of women in communities across the nation, especially in rural areas where women have long been excluded in income generation and family financial management. They have also been instrumental in the impressive growth of women in the national workforce.

International Women Empowerment NGOs operate in a variety of areas that address various global-level gender injustice issues, especially such issues faced by women in developing nations. They often develop collaborative partnerships with local and national NGOs to address specific issues that affect women in societies. They also bring technical and financial resources to address issues of gender inequality and inequity.

### **Challenges of women empowerment**

Globally, despite much progress have been achieved in recent decades, gender inequalities remain one of the most challenging problems in many dimensions of life. While this disparity exists throughout the world, particularly it is well prevalent in the developing countries (World Development Report, 2010). Women's are mostly disadvantages in the allocation of resources like educations, health care, nutrition, in decision making and political voice.

Because of biological differences girls have a longer life expectancy than boys, but this biological advantage are overshadowed, however, by gender inequalities in nutrition and medical interventions and by inadequate care during pregnancy and delivery (*Ibid*). More importantly, having a child at an early age limits a girl's opportunities for better education, jobs and income as well as to participate in decision making.

It is well known that women's wage work play an important role for economic growth and the well-being of family, but they often face different obstacles as restricted access to education and vocational training, heavy work load at home and in unpaid domestic and market activities and labour market discrimination. These

obstacles limit participation of women in decision making, economic activities and cause them less productive and to get low remuneration.

One of the most hindering factors that challenge women for their low economic level is their lack of access to credit, capital land, training and education which is required to start business. Although there is some evidences of recent improvement, women's are largely underrepresented in their political participation (position in government). Gender parity in parliament representation is still far from being realized.

### **Strategies of Women Empowerment**

Gender equality remains one of the most serious issues in recent year across the world. Despite some progresses have seen, a clear disparities exist between genders in the social, economic and political aspects. Particularly the conditions of women are worse in the developing countries than the developed ones. Since the majority of women in the developing countries are informal economy workers, they remain uncovered by basic social protection as a result they face different livelihood risks and shocks (Development and cooperation, International Journal, Volume 40, 2013).

Without the full participation of women in the social, economic and political aspects development cannot be realized. Women empowerment through decision making can best be seen as most important in accelerating of growth and sustainable development. There are, however different methods in empowering of women in order to increase their role in decision making and benefited from their contribution. Among these methods are skill training, and small business development.

### **Skill Training**

To empower women economically and bring attitudinal changes in decision making and unleash and realize their potential skill training is one of the most important strategy. Thus, to bring the desired outcome and bring women in the economic arena and play their desired role in decision making persistent training is given. Education and training of girls and women is a human right and an essential element for the full enjoyment of all other social, economic, cultural and political rights. The Millennium development goals (2000), and the Beijing Platform have consistently placed emphasis on the importance of education in promoting gender equality and the advancement of women. Particularly for the new establishing goal setting, and planning are the main challenges they confronted, so the different training given on this issues will enable the groups to keep the record properly and enables them to have a clear vision, goal

and action plan. This helps them to bring a remarkable change in a given time.

### **Small Business Development**

The small business developments will enables them to professionalize and diversifies their business. This will be realized through the different training delivered that enables women to enhance their business ideas and enables them to prepare a business plan as well as to make effective decision. This action will transform women's from the informal to the formal sector.

Accordingly, the best and viable business development plans will be financially and materially supported (Pro Pride, 2012). The overall aim of these actions will lead to greater socio-economic stability in the target areas and will create a sense of empowerment among women's.

### **Importance of Women Empowerment Through Decision Making**

Women participation in decision making is important in various ways as explained below: Firstly, it improves women's confidence with which they can freely give their own ideas pertaining to various developmental aspects in their localities. Eliza *et al* (2010) contends that they become more concerned about various aspects in their local areas like knowing about what is being done with their taxes and how it is being done as well as questioning about various acts that pertain to corruption or extravagance. This means that they become part and parcel of the development process and hence they can contribute substantially and effectively to the decision making in their community.

Secondly, it improves sustainable use and conservation of local resources. This is due to the fact that women become more responsible and efficient in managing and protecting the resources at hand. Thirdly, it also enables women become independent and even be able to lead their own life by facing various intricate challenges resolutely and confidently.

Lastly, participation makes women able to create additional resources where they are scarce. For example, they can help in reclaiming the marginal land leading to the expansion of the arable land in their localities.

### **CONCLUSION**

This review paper has discussed the role of NGOs in Women Empowerment through Decision Making. Women's socio-economic and political empowerment as well as participation in decision making is beneficial to families and societies. It has been proven by the number

of researchers outcomes presented and discussed at global regional and national conferences. Women are less empowered than men in ways. But if development interventions focus on them it would create a critical solution to poverty alleviation, economic crisis, decision making and global sustainable development.

As it is explained shortly on the review, NGOs has a great role in empowering women in economic, social, and political issues as well through decision making. Women face challenges such as gender inequality and the most hindering factors that challenge women for their low economic level is their lack of access to credit, capital land, training and education which is required to start business as well as in participating in decision making. The Study concludes that by using different women empowerment approach and by applying the above mention strategies become very helpful in empowering women in different dimension.

In order to enhance women empowerment through decision making, NGOs need to play a great role in empowering women in all dimensions. First, NGOs should increase working on women empowerment and decision making through different training since training helps women to bring a remarkable change in a given time as an intervention on its own. Secondly, in order to empower women economically NGOs should increase the amount of credit facilities available to women can be engaged in income generating activities so that women can access credit ranging according to their needs and requirements. Thirdly, NGOs have to more focus on the political empowerment of women, as the study found that political empowerment in both the selected areas were found to be low. Finally, it is essential to say that women's empowerment remains disregarded areas, even if some efforts have been made recently. So that a great deal of research needs to be done in detail to provide necessary information to determine the factors influencing women's empowerment through decision making.

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