

Review

Current Status of Gender Equality and Governance in Ethiopia

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Ethiopia not only has signed international conventions related to the rights of women, but it is also taking positive and affirmative actions to facilitate legal grounds for their active involvement in various sectors. However, the number of women in parliament was increased when fourth election was held in the country, but their number was not equal with men. But, post 2018, more than any other time, the government of Ethiopia is exerting the maximum effort to realize the equality of men and women. Currently, under reformist prime minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed, Ethiopia government announced new cabinets that are 50% females, in an unprecedented push for gender parity in Africa's second-most-populous nation. Ethiopian Parliament recently approved first female president not for Ethiopia, for the East African country's history.

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INTRODUCTION

Gender is a set of characteristics, roles, and behavior patterns that distinguish women from men socially and culturally and relations of power between them (Women Information Centre, 2005). These characteristics, roles, behavior patterns and power relations are dynamic; they vary over time and between different cultural groups because of the constant shifting and variation of cultural and subjective meanings of gender (Hirut, 2004).

Although the specific nature and degree of these differences vary from one society to the next, they typically favor men, creating an imbalance in power and a gender inequality that exists in most societies worldwide (Reeves and Baden, 2000). These gender ideologies often reinforce male power and the idea of women's inferiority; and culture is sometimes interpreted narrowly as custom or tradition and assumed to be natural and unchangeable (*ibid*).

Despite these assumptions, culture is fluid and enduring and the defense of 'culture' and 'tradition' is

often used by men to justify practices that constrain women's life chances and outcomes. Gender discrimination is the systematic, unfavorable treatment of individuals on the basis of their gender, which denies their rights, opportunities or resources (UNFPA, 2005). Across the world, women are treated unequally and less value is placed on their lives because of their gender. Women's differential access to power and control of resources is central to this discrimination in all institutional spheres, i.e. the household, community, and state women's lack of representation and voice in decision making bodies in the community (*ibid*).

Conceptual frame work of Gender Equality

Gender Equality is the similarity of treatment of women and men. This derives from human rights provisions (all born equal) as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1979). It means that women and men have equal

conditions for realizing their full human rights and potential to contribute to political, economic, social and cultural development and benefit equally from the results. In Africa, the gender gap is even wider and the situation is more complex due to the cultural and traditional context which is anchored in beliefs, norms and practices which breed discrimination and feminized poverty. There is growing evidence that the number of women in Africa living in poverty has increased disproportionately to that of men. The Africa region is committed to socio-economic development which takes into account the diversity in social, cultural, and traditional setting, and is making efforts to address cultures and practices which militate against the enjoyment of freedom and rights by women and girls (CEDAW) (1979). The Africa Union, Gender Policy commitments are used to provide the basis that will eliminate barriers to gender equality in the continent. Africa governments committed to adapt these global agreements at regional and national levels and to be held accountable for their achievements. Various regional frameworks in support for gender equality and women's empowerment were adopted by the African Union to guide the development of sub-regional and national frameworks, policies and programs.

These included: The Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa in 2003; The Maputo Plan of Action on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in 2006 to take the continent forward towards the goal of universal access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services in Africa by 2015 including the reduction of gender-based violence; The declaration of 2010-2020 as the African Women's Decade in 2008 to advance gender equality by accelerating the implementation of Dakar, Beijing, and African Union Assembly Decisions on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, through dual top-down and bottom-up approach; and the Framework for Action and Recommendations on Harmful Traditional Practices in 2011 which identifies priorities for action in combating harmful traditional practice.

At the sub-regional level, the Southern African Development Community adopted a Protocol on Gender Equality, while the Economic Community of West African States has instituted a gender policy focused on mainstreaming gender in policy design and implementation. By 2010, a significant number of countries had enacted laws combating various forms of violence against women, including domestic violence (14 countries) and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)/C (25 countries), and ensuring equal access to employment opportunities and social protection services (21 countries). National plans and programs were also in place in some countries to combat the various forms of violence against women. In addition, most countries had in place laws and policies on maternity protection.

According to the 2015 MDG report, Sub-Saharan Africa also registered the most impressive progress in women's access to paid employment in the non-agricultural sector,

increasing from 24 percent to 34 percent from 1990 to 2015. However, the region still lags behind the average for developing countries (35 percent), the world (40 percent), and developed countries (48 percent).

The 2015 MDG report also found that women in the region are gaining more power in politics. The proportion of seats held by women in single or lower houses of national parliament increased from 13 percent in 2000 to 23 percent in 2015, which is not far behind the developed regions (25 percent). Rwanda made the biggest gains in women's representation during the last 20 years, with an increase of 60 percentage points. However, as noted earlier women in governance and politics face disparate and harsher treatment and judgement relative to their male counterparts though this is not unique to Africa.

Overview of Gender Equality and governance in Ethiopia

Ethiopia is a patriarchal society that keeps women in a subordinate position (Haregewoin and Emebet, 2003). There is a belief that women are docile, submissive, patient, and tolerant of monotonous work and violence, for which culture is used as a justification (Hirut, 2004).

During Haile Selassie's regime it was the revised constitution of 1955 that initiated the first merely female parliamentarian. When the first parliament was introduced, no woman had allowed to be nominated as a member of parliament until 1957, though two women in 1965 and five women in 1969 have joined the emperor's parliament; similarly, though the Derg regime 1987 constitution and the subsequently proclaimed electoral laws had ensured the equality of citizens and their right to elect and to be elected (in principles); the regime had also realized the establishment of the Revolutionary Ethiopian Women's Association (REWA) on July 17, 1980.

It was a large state organization having almost 5 million members on paper, in practice these constitutions and electoral laws were far from increasing the participation of women in governance and decision-making activities (Nigist, 2019). From this view we can understand that Women during the Derg period were not participated or no impact on government policies, laws and regulations practically.

Post 1991, after overthrow of military junta, Ethiopia has prioritized the advancement of gender equality through the development and implementation of several national plans and frameworks which include the first National Policy on Women in 1993 and the Federal Democratic Republic Of Ethiopia Constitution, adopted in 1995, assures women of equal rights with men in every sphere and emphasizes affirmative action to remedy the past inequalities suffered by women (art, 35 of constitution). It also reiterates the rights of women to own and administer property as well as access to reproductive

health services. Furthermore, based on the constitutional rights of women, the pension benefits of female civil servants are given to their survivors, maternity leave has been extended from 45 days to 3 months, and the family law has been revised.

The Ethiopian government is a signatory to most international instruments, conventions and declarations, and adopted international instruments such as; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women/CEDAW (1979), the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women/DEVAW (1993), the Beijing Platform for Action/BPA (1995) including the domestication of the international instruments. (Haregewoin Cherinet and Emebet Mulugeta, 2008)

Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women in Ethiopia

The National Women Policy of 1993 underscored the need to move towards an institutionalized strategy for women's empowerment through policy frameworks and gender equality structures within government. The policy called for the establishment of women's machineries at all levels: federal, regional and sub-regional. This resulted in the establishment of the Women's Affairs Office (WAO, 1993) within the Prime Minister's Office and its subsidiary structures i.e. the Women's Affairs Departments (WADs) in all government ministries and public organizations and Women's Affairs Bureaus (WABs) in all regional government offices.

The structure was replicated to the sub-regional levels where Women's Affairs Departments and Women's Affairs Divisions were formed at the Zonal and Woreda level respectively as well as Women's Affairs Units at the Kebele level. The policy stipulates coordination mechanisms and linkages amongst these structures and clearly outlines the roles and responsibilities of these machineries. Initial institutional structures for the advancement of women have evolved over time in terms of coordination, capacity and leadership, (UNFPA, 2008).

In 2005, following the proclamation 471/2005 which called for the establishment of the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA), the Women Affairs Office (WAO) was elevated to Ministry level, headed by a Minister and thus a member of the Council of Ministers, the Cabinet. The heads of regional and woreda offices of Women's, Children and Youth Affairs Bureaus, also became members of the Cabinets at their respective levels. MoWA was entrusted with the responsibility of coordinating and following up on the implementation of the country's Women Policy, thus taking over the function of its predecessor. It was further mandated to create a favorable environment to ensure women's participation in political, economic and social arenas. The Ministry of Women's Affairs also developed and launched the

National Action Plan for Gender Equality (NAP-GE), 2006-10 to promote the implementation of Ethiopia's commitment to the Beijing Platform for Action.

The NAP-GE was later included in the Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP), the government's five year development program. The Ministry also introduced the Women's Change and Development Package in 2007, a principal strategy for the empowerment of women. In 2010, the Ministry of Women's Affairs went through another restructuring under Proclamation 691/2010 which resulted in the establishment of the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs (MoWCYA). The establishment also included an expansion of the mandate which now includes youth and children issues.

MoWCYA's new mandate thus required a more holistic approach to address the constraints and opportunities for women, children and youth issues and to ensure the creation of opportunities for the participation of women and youth in political, economic, and social affairs of the country (Frew, 2010).

In recent years, MoWCYA has embarked on building the capacity on gender equality at all levels. It in 2011 developed National Gender Mainstreaming (GM) Guidelines to be adopted by all sectors in line with their respective mandates. Inspired by these guidelines about 21 Gender Directorates in the line Ministries have developed their respective GM guidelines with both technical and financial support by MoWCYA. The GM guidelines have been developed to incorporate gender sensitivity and awareness from the onset of policy and program formulation to its implementation, monitoring and evaluation. This resulted in the creation of Gender Directorates in all Sector Ministries which, with support from the MoWCYA, have conducted gender audits to assess the level of gender sensitivity of their respective ministries (MoA, 2010).

The Gender Directorate of the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (MOFED) went further, by initiating Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB), which intends to make national budgets gender responsive. This resulted in the development of National Gender Responsive Budgeting Guidelines, in partnership with European Commission and UN Women, in order to mainstream gender at all levels of the national budgeting process. Significant progress was reported and GRB has been instrumental in ensuring the integration of "gender equity" as a parameter in the budget approval process.

In an attempt to build the sectors' capacity on gender mainstreaming, MoWCYA in 2012 developed and popularized a national gender training manual. On the basis of this manual, training of trainers (TOT) trainings was provided to Gender Directorates of Line Ministries and Regional Bureaus of Women, Children and Youth Affairs (BoWCYA). According to MoWCYA, efforts were made to make sure that these trainings extended their reach to the regional level.

Overall, a key strength of Ethiopia's gender equality mechanisms is the integration of gender in all sector ministries and government institutions, which include Commission, Agencies and democratic institutions at all levels. The fact that these mechanisms are also established in all the regions, sub-regions and at the lowest administrative unit, Kebele, indicates Government's commitment to implementing the women's policy and attaining gender parity, (Report of Women's Affairs Bureaus and Departments in Regions 2010).

In legislative bodies, standing committees for women's affairs now exist at the Federal and regional levels to oversee policy implementation and to facilitate processes involved. At the grassroots level, women's associations have been established in almost all the regions. The government facilitated the establishment of the Women Development Army (WDA) among women living in the same neighborhoods. WDAs are groups of about 25 to 30 women, who create an environment where women solve their socio-economic problems on the basis of the priorities they identify (*ibid*). Group members are engaged in discussions with their communities on a wide range of issues, for example, society and economy, income generation schemes, natural resource management, promotion and use of energy saving technology, HTPs, hygiene, and following up on girls' school attendance. The number of women participating in WDAs is estimated to be 3,673,395 women in Oromia Region, 2,643,920 in Amhara Region, 823,352 in Tigray Region and 1,021,072 women in SNNPR (FDRE, 2014).

On the other hand, the constitutional guarantee of freedom of association, multi-party and electoral politics are all important developments that in one way or another define the context for the political involvement and empowerment of women in Ethiopia. Though women in the country have constitutional rights of participation in decision making process, their involvement is limited at all levels, especially the involvement of women in politics is limited all levels government (Haregewoin and Emebet, 2003).

For instance, the number of women in parliament increased when election was held in the country, but their number was not equal with men (Federal Civil Service Commission, 2005). In the first parliament (1995 election), 13 women (2.74%) were represented out of 547 seats while in the second parliament (2000 election) around 42 (7.7%) of the elected MPs were women. In the third parliament (2005-2010), the number of women holding seats rose to 116 (21.21%). Further progress has been achieved during the fourth parliament (2010 election) where women hold 152(27%) of the seats in the house of people's representatives (Hirut, 2004).

Ethiopia has now joined the very few countries in the world with a cabinet comprised of 50 percent of women along with a female head of State (National Report BPA, 2019). Women's representation in the Federal Parliament (the House of Peoples' Representatives-HPR) showed a

significant increase from 27.9 percent in 2010 to 38.8 percent in 2015(*ibid*).

Notably, the fifth parliament (2015 election) augmented the representation of women in the national legislative body, and their number was 212(38.8%). Beyond the increase in the number of women in parliament, female members of parliament (MPs) have increasingly occupied important positions within the parliamentary structures including equal number of chairperson positions out of the 10 Standing Committees of HPR and Female MPs were also elected as House Speakers and deputy speakers to both Houses of the Parliament (the House of Federation and the HPR, respectively) (National Report BPA, 2019).

Gender Equality Status and governance under Reformist Prime Minister of Ethiopia (Post 2018)

Today more than any other time, the government of Ethiopia is exerting the maximum effort to realize the equality of men and women. Ethiopia not only has signed international conventions related to the rights of women, but it is also taking positive and affirmative actions to facilitate legal grounds for their active involvement in various sectors. The establishment of Women's Affairs Bureau in the Prime Minister's Office, the incorporation of their issues in the country's policies and programs, ensuring of their rights in the constitution as well as the ratification of the family law are but some of the indicators that prove the government's willingness to the equality of women. (National Report BPA, 2019).

Recently Sahle-Work Zewde, Ethiopia's first female president. Ethiopia's Parliament approved the East African country's first female president. "In a patriarchal society such as ours, the appointment of a female head of state not only sets the standard for the future but also normalizes women as decision-makers in public life," tweeted by Fitsum Arega, the former prime minister'011s chief of staff and de facto government spokesman on October 2018.

In Ethiopia's latest move to empower women, the country's Parliament installed as Supreme Court president. Meaza Ashenafi was a judge on Ethiopia's High Court from 1989 to 1992 and then an adviser to a commission writing up its new constitution. She also founded the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association and helped start the first Enat bank in the country. Meaza Ashenafi was elected to head the national Supreme Court by Ethiopia's prime minister, Dr, Abiy Ahmed the reformist PM of Ethiopia who has taken measures to increase the role of women is widely described as a patriarchal society.

Therefore, under reformist prime minister Dr, Abiy Ahmed, Ethiopia government announced new cabinets that are 50% females, in an unprecedented push for gender parity in Africa's second-most-populous nation.

The reformist Abiy Ahmed reduces the number of ministerial positions of country from 28 to 20, and the women empowered in the top security posts for the first time in Ethiopia's government history. For instance, for first time Aisha Mohammed was the first women minister of defense in east Africa, but, later she changed to other minister position and Muferiat Kamil, a former parliamentary speaker, also assigned to head the newly formed Minister of Peace. This minister office oversees the federal police, the intelligence services and the information security agency. Although women have been in the cabinet before, they often held minor positions. In the new cabinet, in addition to defense and security, women were assigned to head the ministries of trade, transport and labor, as well as culture, science and revenue. (National Report BPA, 2019).

CONCLUSION REMARK

Today more than any other African countries, the government of Ethiopia is exerting the maximum effort to realize the equality of men and women under Dr, Abiy Ahmed regime. As Ethiopia signed international conventions related to the rights of women, the Prime Minister taken positive and affirmative actions to facilitate legal grounds for their active involvement in governance. Currently, under leadership of Prime Minister Dr, Abiy Ahmed the gender equality is lauded through empowerment of women at top level government official more than any before.

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