

Full Length Research

Challenges of Exercising Gender Mainstreaming: The Case of Bale Zone Public Institutions

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This article examines the challenges of implementing gender mainstreaming in Oromiya regional state of Ethiopia with particular emphasis on Bale zone public institutions. The objectives are: to analyze the challenges of human resources mobilizations on gender mainstreaming, the dominations of females by the males in public institutions (patriarchy ideology) and the tendency of equating gender issues as only women issues. Even though Ethiopian women constitute half of the Ethiopian population and are known to perform social, economic and political roles but still their roles are underestimated and less recognized. The target populations were employees and bureaus leaders in the education bureau, finance and economic development bureau and women affairs office of Bale zone. The finding revealed that: Lack of commitment on the part of decision-making bodies, inadequate training and poor communication linkages between gender focal persons and Women's Affairs Office were the major challenges identified in this study. The study therefore concluded that the implementation of gender mainstreaming still faces major challenges and action was needed. Major recommendations were that; the institutions should equip their employees with knowledge and skills on gender mainstreaming, adequate financial and human resources should be allocated to gender mainstreaming for the realization of gender mainstreaming and thereby gender equality.

Key words: Gender, Gender Inequality Gender Mainstreaming, Challenges, Staff Awareness, and Patriarchic Influences

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INTRODUCTION

Gender equality, usually considered a basic human right, has not been absolutely achieved in any country (Newman, 2006). Achieving gender equality between men and women will require change in various levels including change in perception, change in relationship, and change in economic and political aspects. Thus, one of the strategies for achieving gender equality is through

gender mainstreaming. Different scholars and organizations define the term gender mainstreaming in different ways (Tsfayenesh, L, 2008; UNESCO, 2011). However, the central agenda of all definitions are the same: gender mainstreaming is the reorganization, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes so that gender equality perspectives

incorporated in all policies at all level and stages by the actors involved in decision making. The United Nations Economic and Social Council defined gender mainstreaming as the process of assessing the implication for women and men of any planned action including legislation, policies or programs, in any areas and at all levels (UN, 2002.)

It is true that Ethiopia is the state in which the male domination is long aged with its history and culture. Other sources (OECD and MoFED,2010; UNDAF, 2011; UNICEF, 2012) also show that gender parity in all spheres, including the political and economic empowerment of women and girls in Ethiopia is still very low while the magnitude and scope of gender-based disparities is very high. The contributory factors for these are poverty and dependence, home burden tasks, and gender inequality and socio-cultural practices associated with unhealthy awareness towards women (Alebachew, 2001). As a result, there is unequal power and economic relation between women and men. The root causes of gender inequality lies in the social structures, institutions, values and beliefs which create and perpetuate the imbalance between women and men. Failure to close the gaps between men and has negatively impacted the process of gender mainstreaming.

METHODS

This study was conducted using qualitative interviews, and focus groups discussions. In both the interviews and the focus groups discussions, interactive conversations were guided and left open-ended.

Bale zone; Education Bureau, Finance and Economic Development bureau and women Affairs Office employees who were currently working in the respective bureaus were interviewed and participated for Focus group discussions. Thus, from the total population one hundred one (101) of the three bureaus fifty two (52) participants were purposely selected for in depth interview. These were gender experts of each bureau, women affairs bureaus head, deputy head of the three bureaus and other fourthly five (45) staffs from both sex were purposely selected based on their level educational qualifications and their work experiences for in-depth interview and three separate focus group discussions were conducting each having eight (8) members at the three bureaus .

Both the in-depth interview and focus groups discussions are not based on random selection and therefore are not representative, because the purpose of these groups is to explore an issue rather than explain it (Babbie, 2005). For this reason, members of the focus groups discussions and in depth interview did not need to be randomly selected for the data to be reliable. Participants who have direct relations with the issue were

asked to participate in the study either as an interviewee or a member of the focus group discussions. Interviews and focus group discussions with the participants were conducted in Afan Oromo because it is the working languages of the bureaus under studies and all the participants use this languages medium of communications at their work place.

The data analysis involved thematic analysis of documents, interviews and focus group discussions. The data analysis involved thematic analysis of documents, interviews and checklists. For the purpose of effective and successful analysis, the data collected from the field were tailed, structured, organized and systematically framed. Tables are used to interpret the research findings when and where necessary. After reading the transcripts, the main concepts were categorized and an index constructed which containing broad themes like; gender mainstreaming, patriarchal influences on gender mainstreaming and effect of resources mobilization on exercising gender mainstreaming. Generally, the qualitative data accessed using the in-depth interviews and FGD were presented and analyzed qualitatively. The results were examined in relation with existing literature reviewed and the set objectives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Participants' Gender

In studying about gender mainstreaming, it is essential to look at whether there is a gender balance in the institutions or not. The findings are presented in the following table 1, which shows gender imbalances in the bureaus under investigation: Bureau of Education (BOE), Bureau of finance and economic development (BOFED) and women's affair office (WAO).

The finding revealed that about, 73% of the staff populations in education bureau of Bale Zone are male; while female constitute only 27% of the total staff. Similarly, in bureau of finance and economic development, males are 67% and females are 37%. It is only in women affairs office that number of female exceeds the number of male out of the three bureaus under the study. This was clearly an indication that there was huge gender disparity since the number of males exceeded that of females by far. The number of female is twice the number of males in women affairs office. This clearly implies that there is a tendency of looking gender issues as only women issues. According to the existing sources not only in Bale Zone public institutions but also in the country data the numbers of female are by far below the number of male except in women affairs office.

Participants' Levels of Educational Qualifications

Establishing the level of education helped to assessing

Table 1. Participants' Gender

Gender	BOE	%	BO FED	%	WAO	%
Male	22	73%	39	67 %	3	33%
Female	8	27%	23	37%	6	66%
Total	30	100	62	100	9	100

Source: (Bale Zone, BOE, BOEFD WAO, 2017).

Table 2. The participants' Levels of Educational Qualifications

Educational level	No	BOE		WAO		BOFED	
		Male	Female	male	Female	Male	Female
2 nd School		-	2	-	-	3	1
10+2/diploma		-	-	-	3	12	9
First degree		19	4	3	3	24	13
Masters		3	2	-	-	-	-
PhD		-	-	-	-	-	-
Total		22	8	3	6	39	23

Source: (Bale Zone, BOE, BOEFD WAO, 2017).

how the participants understood and interpreted what they were asked and interviewed during interview and focus group discussion. The following Table 2 presents the participants' levels of educational qualifications

This data revealed the existence of high gender gap between men and women employees of the three bureaus on the basis of academic level. According to this data, in the total labor forces of the bureaus, there are high and far-reaching total percentages of male than female in both bureau of education and bureau of finance and economic development concerning the level of educational qualifications; as indicated by 74.4% and 62.9 % for male and 26.6% and 37.1% for female respectively in the stated bureaus. The exception is that the total percentage of female's level of education is higher than that of male in the bureau of women's affairs figured as 66.7% and 33% for female and male respectively.

The gender gap in the academic level has differential impacts on the life condition of men and women. Other things remain constant, in public institutions of the country higher academic rank implies higher amount of salary. Hence, relative to men, women employees are earning low salary because of their low academic level. This in turn has negative impacts on the satisfaction of, let alone other, their basic needs such as food, shelter and clothing.

Insufficient Training and Ongoing Support on Gender Mainstreaming

It is true that the development of people in a specialized area and function is one of the fundamental operating functions of human resource management. It is increasingly realized that men and women employees are the human resource in an organization and expenditure on training in various fields in general and in the area of gender in particular is an investment in human capital. With regard to this, interviews and discussions were made with both the participants and discussants of the study bureaus.

In all focused group discussions (FGD's) conducted with the respective bureaus and the staff interviews, there was no doubt that they equated gender issues to women's issues. There was a lot of focus on women's involvement and participation in all activities by the name of women and a general observation was that gender was almost all the time equated to having a special concern for women.

The Influence of Patriarchal Ideology

Patriarchy is a system whereby women are kept subordinate in a number of ways. The subordination that we experience at a daily level, regardless of the class we might belong to, takes various forms – discrimination, disregard, insult, control, exploitation, oppression,

violence, in society. For instance, a few examples are illustrated here to represent a specific form of discrimination and a particular aspect of patriarchy. Such as, son preference, discrimination against girls in food distribution, burden of household work on women and young girls, lack of educational opportunities for girls, lack of freedom and mobility for girls, sexual harassment at workplace, lack of property rights for women, male control over women's bodies and sexuality, (Learner, 1989).

According to an interview made with women affairs Office head of Bale Zone:

"The norms and practices that define women as inferior to men impose controls on them, are present everywhere in our families, social relations, and in government offices. Thus, patriarchy is called the sum of the kind of male domination we see around women all the time. In this ideology, men are superior to women and women are part of men's property, so women should be controlled by men and this produces women's subordination. Thus, dismantling this ideology from the mind of both men and women is not only the mandate of women affairs offices but it also needs the collaboration of all of us."

Similarly, gender focal person of education bureau stated the influence of patriarchal ideology as follows:

"In schools, female teachers are not encouraged to be principal, vice principal, supervisors and department heads. Even in class rooms monitor and leaders of student are highly dominated by male students. These restrict female students to practice leader ship and decision making roles from the grass root levels and promote the old aged patriarchal dominance in the minds of females."

Hartmann (1981) argues that both house work and wage labour are important sites of women's exploitation by men. Within the field of paid work occupational segregation is used by organized men to keep access to the best paid jobs for themselves at the expense of women. Within the household, women do more labour than men, even if they also have paid employment. These two forms of expropriation also act to reinforce each other, since women's disadvantaged position in paid work makes them vulnerable in making marriage arrangements, and their position in the family disadvantages them in paid work.

Similarly, the data of three respective bureaus indicate that even though there are no legal occupational segregation for male and female but practically there is

clear occupational segregation/gender division of labour in the bureaus. This perpetuates the income difference between the two sexes within the organization in particular and gender inequality in which the country is aimed to reduce in general. Because female are concentrated in low paid occupation such as secretary, janitors and servant.

CONCLUSION

The results of the study demonstrate that gender mainstreaming needs to be implemented at all levels of public institutions. However, gender mainstreaming will not be effective without the appropriate environment and the right prerequisites. Given that gender mainstreaming is government policy concept, it would not cause a change in the culture, behavior or attitude without establishing the belief that its implementation and its goal (i.e. gender equality), which would benefit the society. Capacity building is envisaged in all public and private institutions for improving the knowledge, skills and attitudes of employees. This strategy includes activities such as conduct of training programmes on concepts gender and women empowerment.

Increased and more systematic formal and informal training is needed to increase the effectiveness of women's knowledge and skills, as well as their capacity to utilize the emerging gender equity knowledge base.

The wholehearted adoption of gender mainstreaming by Bale Zone Education Bureau, Women Affairs office and Finance and Economic Development Bureaus had occurred without having a clear understanding of the concepts and strategies for its implementation, lack of commitment to gender equality and absence of gender responsive leadership, limited human and financial resources mobilizations and patriarchal ideology are some of the difficulties facing the bureaus under study. It is also clear that gender issues are multifaceted and interlocked so it requires the staffs to adequately train to work with such complexity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study revealed that the challenges of exercising the implementation of gender mainstreaming in Bale Zone public institutions are: lack of staff awareness, poor resource allocation (both human and financial resources), patriarchy systems, absence of ongoing training, and lack of commitment. Addressing these problems is a very challenging task requiring multi-dimensional approaches.

Thus, in order to tackle these challenges:

- ✓ The study recommended that capacity building; education and dissemination strategies should be adopted and implemented in public institutions.
- ✓ In implementing gender strategies, active government facilitation in areas like awareness creation or rising through the provision of training; community sensitization; ownership; commitment; networking as well as monitoring and evaluation is extremely required so as to ensure gender equality via gender mainstreaming.
- ✓ Adequate financial and human resources should be allocated to all public institutions within the Zone for the implementation of gender mainstreaming, because no activity would yield any meaningful results without resource mobilization. The government together with other institutions should claim ownership of the gender mainstreaming process to ensure sustainable resource mobilization.
- ✓ Advocacy should be conducted among traditional institution leaders and authorities to integrate gender issues in their work so as to address all known cultural issues that hinder the implementation of gender mainstreaming at grassroots levels.
- ✓ The availability of aware and committed women in top management positions could be one of the conditions for promoting gender mainstreaming. This accepts the employment and promotion of women .In this regard, the efforts have to be made by all stakeholders to ensure that during recruitment, training and promotion, the affirmative action provisions for women are implemented as part of gender mainstreaming.
- ✓ The finding shows that gender equality measures are often treated as a separate concern, unrelated to mainstream activities, *ad hoc* in character and not firmly rooted in everyday operations. This needs meaningful consideration in all aspects of human life and everyday operations of every institution.
- ✓ There should be the compilation of sex-disaggregated, gender auditing and gender budget data as it is one of the important activities which lay the foundation for addressing gender gaps in the

institutions.

- ✓ Because the challenges are structural, addressing any one of them in isolation is unlikely to lead to the full gender mainstreaming. There is no one government department which can, on its own, improve the gender situation. Instead, joint action is required across many government departments if these barriers are to be addressed in a strategic rather than piecemeal manner.
- ✓ In general, the process of gender mainstreaming cannot be undertaken by women affairs bureaus alone- the misconception by many staffs/employees; but rather all institutions (NGOs and GOs) need to have the knowledge, skills and commitment to mainstream gender.

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