

Women Empowerment: Policy Evidences from Ethiopia and Kenya

Tefera Assefa, Wendosen Haile¹

¹ Ambo University

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Abstract

This article has reviewed and presented women empowerment policies of Ethiopia and Kenya. It assessed the measures taken by governments to alleviate gender inequality and increase the role of women in the economic and social spheres in both countries. Therefore, different secondary data was collected from secondary sources such as books, articles, conventions, reports, policy papers, constitutions and other related legal provisions of the countries through document review. The collected data were presented using a descriptive research design. The article found that despite the measures taken in both countries, women are marginalized from economic, social and political life. This is particularly high in rural areas. Moreover, the substantive representation of women is critically questionable in both countries. Therefore, to ensure gender parity, in a substantive aspect, the governments should develop mechanisms in providing training to communities in both countries. Further, create an enabling environment to raise awareness of women in influencing the institutions in which they are represented and critically influencing public policy.

1. Tefera Assefa (Corresponding author)

Ambo University (Woliso Campus), School of Business and Economics,
Lecturer of Public Policy in department of Public Administration and development Management
P.O.Box: 217, Woliso, Ethiopia
Tel: +251 960 94 91 58 Email: teferaasefa@gmail.com

2. Wendosen Haile

Ambo University (Woliso Campus), School of Business and Economics,
Candidate of MA in Department of Public Administration and development Management at Ambo University
P.O.Box: 217, Woliso, Ethiopia
Tel: +251919618099, Email: wendosenhaile21@gmail.com

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1. Introduction

All over the world, in the past, women have enjoyed a little independence and equality in all dimensions. Be it economic, political or social, they are marginalized and even sometimes considered non-citizens. They experienced negative treatment from their family, community, administration and even from their similar sex partners (that is women).

Discrimination against women is even exacerbated in developing countries like Ethiopia and Kenya. In Ethiopia and Kenya women faced political, social and cultural challenges in their overall participation. They suffered from economic poverty, social discrimination, political disenfranchisement, and cultural subjugation. (League of Kenya Women Voters (LKWV), 2005; Haregewoin, & Emebet, 2003 & 2002)

Despite women's numerical significance and their remarkable contribution to economic development, they have been placed in disadvantaged positions with no or weak authority and decision-making power in the control and management of resources, and in social affairs. Such inequality emanated from the traditional norms and values adhered by the majority of the rural community. This is even more intensified with women's deprivation from equitable participation in the educational system because education is a key factor for the all-inclusive empowerment of women (Sundaram, Sekar & Subburaj, 2014; Sonali Channawar, 2016; Aslam, 2014; League of Kenya Women Voters (LKWV), 2005 & Rose, 2003).

Different studies indicated the low status of women in developing countries in general and in Ethiopia and Kenya in particular (Wamalwa Martin Erixon, 2007, Almaz, 1991; Hirut, 2004; Mukuria et al., 2005, Okello (n.d) cited in Ethiopian Society of Population Studies, 2008). Lack of access to productive resources such as land; lack of access to education, employment opportunities, basic health services, and protection of basic human rights; low decision making; violence and harmful traditional practices are some of the indicators of the socioeconomic marginalization of women in the countries (MOWCY, UNICEF Ethiopia and SPRI 2019, Haregewoin, & Emebet, 2003 & 2002, Ministry Of Women's Affairs (MOWA), 2006; Opoku, Anyango, & Alupo, 2018; Kamau, 2010; Nzomo, 2013; Ponge, 2013).

Such a gender gap between men and women in socio-economic indicators has a negative impact on the overall development of the country in general and on the demographic and health outcomes of individuals in particular. According to Kishor (2005), gender differences in power, roles and rights affect health, fertility control, survival and nutrition through women's access to health care, lower control over their bodies and sexuality, and restrictions in material and non-material resources, (Ethiopian Society of Population Studies, 2008).

The process of correcting gender disparity in a society leads us to improve the condition and status of women in all spheres (household as well as community level) which is also termed as women's empowerment. By way of defining this concept, Kishor (2005), cited the works of Dixon (1978) and Mason (1986) who defined women's status operationally as the degree of women's access to and control over material resources (including food, income, land and other forms of wealth) and social resources (including knowledge, power and prestige) within the family, in the community, and in the society at large. It is a multidimensional concept, which purports to measure a woman's ability to control resources, her ability to choose and control different outcomes, and above all to enhance her self-esteem. It can be examined based on different indicators. (ibid)

The article emphasizes the women's empowerment experience of Ethiopia and Kenya by emphasizing national policy on gender empowerment, proclamation and acts regarding women's empowerment and protection at the workplace, constitutional provision and educational enrollment. These criteria were selected because they are appropriate and easy to identify and assess government efforts in ensuring gender parity. These government efforts can also serve as a basic indicator of empowerment and an instrument to enhance the status of women.

2. Statement of problem

Despite the existence of policy instruments and legislative and institutional commitment to women, in actuality, a vast majority of Kenyan and Ethiopian women, particularly in rural areas, are far from being well-off, independent and direct beneficiaries of development initiatives at the national level. Their status in the socio-political, economic and cultural context is far behind the expected level. Even today, the extent of their problems and issues remains critical. The main reasons for persistently experiencing such a situation, inter alia, are the socio-cultural portrait of women and girls and their assigned role; existing practices of resource distribution; the division of labor; and the distribution of opportunities (Bekana, 2020; MOWCY, UNICEF Ethiopia and SPRI, 2019, Haregewoin, & Emebet, 2003 & 2002, Ministry Of Women's Affairs (MOWA), 2006; Opoku, Anyango, & Alupo, 2018; Kamau, 2010; Nzomo, 2013; Ponge, 2013).

The combination of all these factors results in a situation that undermines women's participation in all spheres of their life. The existing societal practices and institutions, which favor men's interests mainly, have a negative impact on initiatives and efforts towards women are all inclusive participation. Because of the socio-cultural constructions and practices, which are patriarchal in its nature, women are considered to be subordinate to men and second-class political actors both in the family and in society. This is greatly influenced by the existing societal institutions, whether cultural, educational or media-related. In other words, societal institutions have validated such practices, which, in the view of women, amount to sheer discrimination against them. This is a patriarchal system in which male authority and power exclude or oppress women through its social, political and economic institutions (Maseno & Kilonzo, 2011). Therefore, a prolonged and systemic approach is required to eradicate such deep-rooted problems.

In general, the paper tried to answer the question "what are the government responses and efforts to solve the issues of gender disparity in the countries? In answering the question, the paper assessed the national policy of women empowerment, Constitutional provision on women's protection and Educational enrolment of women.

3. Objectives

3.1. General objective

The general objective of the paper is to describe the measures taken by the governments of the two countries to bring gender parity and empower women.

3.2. Specific objectives

The specific objectives of the paper are:

- To investigate the constitutional provision on women's empowerment and protection
- To identify national policy and its objectives for empowering women
- To assess the participation of women in education and educational policy favoring the participation of women

4. Methodology

This article presents policy-related efforts of governments to ensure women's empowerment in Ethiopia and Kenya. In doing so, the article presents what has been done by the government of the two countries and some of their policy experiences. As it was previously indicated, different policy provisions were identified to assess the measures taken by governments to alleviate gender inequality and raise the role of women in social and economic spheres in both countries. So, the article applied a Qualitative Approach to research as it engaged in policy analysis and indicated the attempts of the two countries. A descriptive research design was used to present the available facts and figures. In completing the article, data were collected from different secondary sources of data such as books, journals, articles, conventions, reports, policy papers, constitutions and other legal provisions of the countries.

5. Data Presentation and Analysis

5.1. Introduction

In this part, an attempt was made to provide clear and precise empirical data and its interpretation. Some data are taken from different empirical literature which shows the status of women in the community and the improvement of women's participation from time to time. Despite the difference in some respects, both countries had been attempted to remove gender disparity within the community. They provide due emphasis to issues of gender equality and have become members and ratified different international institutions and agreements that enforce the implementation of women's empowerment in all aspects. Both of them ratify the CEDAW, BPFA, UNDAW etc.

5.2. Education and women

Education is a very important and primary determinant in the overall life of human beings. It is a key to the social, political, economic and physical wellbeing of a community. It is a means of fighting poverty, especially in developing countries. As it was stated, women were highly marginalized in socio-political and economic aspects for a long period of time in the past. Education is one aspect that women were denied for a long period of time in society because of different negative attitudes/social norms that had been prevalent within the community. This, in turn, intensifies the gender gap in all aspects; health, income, decision-making, self-esteem, access to information, etc. Education and training facilitate the

attainment of overall socio-economic advancement of the people, improvement of their literacy levels, and enhancement of their earning capacity and lower their incidence of poverty. One of the fundamental prerequisites for women's empowerment is the acquisition of the necessary skills and knowledge required. While males have few problems in access to education, females experience many problems in pursuit of education, especially at the lower levels. This leads to gender inequalities in opportunities (republic of Kenya, 2004; Prime Minister Office, 2004; Sundaram, Sekar, & Subburaj, 2014; Sonali Channawar. 2016; Aslam, 2014, League of Kenya Women Voters (LKWV), 2005; Rose, 2003).

Kenya Education Sector Support Programme (KESSP, 2005-2010) is one measure that the Kenyan government undertakes to enhance women's education enrolment (GoK, 2005a). The programme fits within the broader framework of Sessional Paper No. 1 (2005) on a Policy Framework for Education, Training and Research (GoK, 2005b). Education Sector strategies and policies are very well gender mainstreamed. The goals of KESSP are based on the rationale of the overall policy goal of achieving Education for All (EFA) and the attainment of the MDGs. The broad objective is to give every Kenyan the right to quality education and training, no matter his/her socio-economic status. Some important strategies are in place to support the overall policy's goal. The Government has also made a decision in 2004 that young women who become pregnant or were subjected to early marriage should be readmitted to school to finish their studies. Moreover, in line with this regulation the marriage of school-going girls is punishable by law and steps have been taken to promote resources for the poor and marginalized groups. The provision of basic education for nomadic and pastoralist communities has been another concern. Children are gathered together in the manyattas (Kraals) for teaching purposes. Both teachers and children migrate together with the community as and when geographical conditions dictate. These efforts have facilitated access to education for nomadic communities and particularly for girls (Geisler, et al. 2007)

In Ethiopia, the new education and training policy declared in 1994 has addressed the importance of girls' education and among others, it clearly stated that the government gives financial support to raise the participation of women in education. It further stated that special attention should be given to the participation, recruitment, training and assignment of female teachers. Following the Education Policy, the Education Sector Development Program (ESDP) (1997/98-2001/03) was devised with the intention of translating the policy statement into action (Prime Minister Office, 2004; CEDAW, 2002 and FDRE, 2006). ESDP aimed at addressing the problem of equity by improving the girl's share of enrollment in primary education from 38 percent to 45 percent and reforming the curricula to make them relevant and gender sensitive. In order to realize the Education Policy and the Sector Development Program, a girls' education strategy has also been devised and as per the decentralization policy of the country, regions have made their own action plans to promote girls' education. (ibid)

In 1994 girls' enrolment in primary education in Kenya was 49.3 percent and even declined to 48.6 in 2003. In Ethiopia, the rate of female participation in primary education increased from 40.7% in 1999/2000 to 53.8% in 2002/2003. The general enrolment of girls in primary education increased from 40.8% in 2000/01 to 43.3 % in 2004/05. This shows that there is some improvement in female enrolment in primary education in both countries. However, the representation of females in primary education is still undermined and this is higher in Ethiopia. Regarding the enrolment of females in secondary education in Kenya and Ethiopia, there is a greater improvement since 1994. The rate of enrolment in

secondary education in Kenya increased from 45.7% in 1994 to 48.2% in 2003. The gross enrolment rate in secondary education in Ethiopia for females has been increasing from 8.5% in 1999/2000 to 14.3% in 2002/03. (Republic of Kenya, 2004; Prime Minister Office, 2004)

Regarding female enrolment in university, there is some improvement. As reported in the final report on the implementation of the Beijing platform for action in 2004, both countries show sorts of improvement in higher education enrolment of females. The report shows that in Kenya the enrolment of women in university increased from 27.8 % in 1995/96 to 30.8 % in 2003/04 while in Ethiopia it increased from 13.9 % in 1995/96 to 24.4 % in 2005/06. In Ethiopia, the enrollment of women in higher education is very low in comparison to Kenya. For instance, the 2007/08(29%) women's enrolment in Ethiopia is less than the 2003/04(30.8) enrolment of females in Kenya.

5.3 Constitutional provision

Constitutional provisions of both countries are paying greater emphasis on women empowerment, equality of women with men, and protection of fundamental rights of peoples. Article 25 of the Ethiopian constitution put that all persons are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law. In this respect, the law shall guarantee to all persons equal and effective protection without discrimination on grounds of race, nation, nationality, other social origins, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinions, property, birth or other status. This shows the important place given to women in the constitution. In addition to this, the constitution provides women with general protection from male domination and equality in terms of various engagements. Article 34(1) of the Ethiopian constitution reads as men and women, without any distinction as to race, nation, nationality or religion, who have attained marriageable age as defined by law, have the right to marry and found a family. They have equal rights while entering into, during marriage and at the time of divorce (FDRE. 1995). The constitution also provides the details of law regarding these issues that shall be enacted by various government bodies. This entails that the constitution does not provide the details of the rule, regulation, proclamation and law by which women empowerment can be enforced.

In addition to the above provision, there is also another provision with particular emphasis on women. Article 35 of the Ethiopian constitution provides rights to women and this article put more specific provisions than that of the above provision. According to this provision, proclamations, laws, rules and regulations that specifically explain and provide the details of women's entitlement were formulated and functional. Family law regarding inheritance and property rights for women, civil service proclamation regarding women's employment in a government institution, maternity leave, affirmative action in recruitment, and equal payment, labor proclamation regarding females' employment in private organizations and protection of females from any maladministration and threats at workplace are some of the detail provision regarding women's empowerment.

In Kenya also, there are such constitutional provisions that protect women from maltreatment in politics, and social and economic engagement. We can find different constitutional provisions that spell the equality of women with men. For instance, Article 27(3 and 4) reads as women and men have the right to equal treatment, including the right to equal opportunities in political, economic, cultural and social spheres. The State shall not discriminate directly or indirectly

against any person on any ground, including race, sex, pregnancy, marital status, health status, ethnic or social origin, color, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, dress, language or birth (The Republic of Kenya, 2010).

Another provision of the Kenyan constitution with regards to the protection of women's rights is Article 56. But this article does not explicitly state the rights of women rather it provides the protection of minorities and marginalized groups of the communities. According to this article, the state shall put in place affirmative action programs designed to ensure the protection of minorities and marginalized groups. Article 59 of the Kenyan constitution, states that a commission for the respect of human rights shall be established. This is Kenya National Human Rights and Equality Commission and one of its functions, as stated under this article sub-article 2(b), is to promote gender equality, and to coordinate and facilitate gender mainstreaming in national development (The Republic of Kenya, 2010).

It can be said that the 2010 Kenyan constitution, alongside the August 2012 elections in Kenya, created a conducive environment for substantial political participation of women for the first time ever. According to article 81 (b) of the Kenyan constitution, no more than two-thirds of the members of elective public bodies should be of the same gender. This provision resolved the problems of women's under-representation in key government bodies. In light with article 100 (a) of the constitution of the country, provide the requirement for parliament to enact legislation to promote the participation of marginalized groups including women (The Republic of Kenya, 2010)

When we compare the provision of constitutions of the two counties regarding women's empowerment, the Ethiopian constitution provides more direct entitlement on more broad bases as well as more detail of women's power in terms of political, social and economic spheres. This does not mean that the Kenyan constitution pays less emphasis on gender parity; rather it means the constitution does not provide clear and more detailed provisions. For instance, from the above provision, if we compare article 56 of the Kenyan constitution with article 35 of the Ethiopian constitution, the Kenyan constitution provides a general statement of the minorities and marginalized groups while the Ethiopian constitution directly provides rights for women and separately for other minorities and marginalized groups. This is the major difference between the two constitutions regarding women's empowerment.

5.4. National policy of women

Both countries have been accepting and ratifying international conventions and agreements held on gender issues at different times and become members of international organizations. In order to apply the requirements of these agreements and organizations, the countries formulated and have been implementing national policies and instruments by which women are protected and empowered.

Ethiopia, in order to eliminate gender gap (discrimination) and to enhance women's participation in all spheres of life, has issued a national policy for women. Ethiopia also became a member of the numbers of global institutions that enforce the equality of women and men. To this end, different national policies are being formulated and implemented at different levels of government to integrate and implement these global agreements and conventions. These are the National Policy of Women, National Population Policy, Education Policy, Cultural Policy, and other legal documents (FDRE, 2006; Prime Minister Office/ women's affairs sub-sector, 2004 & 1993; Ethiopian Society of Population Studies, 2008)

Women's National Policy was formulated and adopted in 1993 in order to address gender inequality (Prime Minister Office, 1993). National institutional machineries were established at federal, regional and Woreda (district) levels to implement the policy. The Women's Affairs Office was reestablished as a full-fledged Ministry in October 2005 with the duties and responsibilities of ensuring the participation and empowerment of women in political, economic, social and cultural matters. The Women's Policy's primary aim is to institutionalize the political, economic, and social rights of women by creating an appropriate structure in government offices and institutions so that the public policies and interventions are gender-sensitive and can ensure equitable development for all Ethiopian men and women. (ibid)

There is also different national policy in favor of women in Kenya. Like the government of Ethiopia, Kenya's government also pays greater emphasis on gender equality and women's empowerment. Accordingly, Kenya as it is a member of different international institutions that advocates women's empowerment and as it accepts and ratifies different agreements, international law and convention, develops different national policies and other provisions to support the implementation of women's empowerment throughout the country.

The Government of Kenya developed a National Gender and Development Policy in 2000, which forms the framework for guiding different sectors and agencies. The policy guidelines address the following critical areas: (i) the economy; (ii) poverty and sustainable livelihoods; (iii) law; (iv) political participation and decision-making; (v) education and training, (vi) health and population; (vii) the media and (viii) policy implementation and resource mobilization (Republic of Kenya, 2000).

The National Policy on Gender and Development (2000) provides a framework for the state to reduce gender imbalance and inequality. The policy mandates the Government to address gender inequalities strategically through established institutional frameworks. The Sessional Paper No. 2, 2006 on Gender Equality and Development provides a framework for the operationalization of gender mainstreaming in policy, planning and programming in Kenya. (Republic of Kenya, 2000 & Republic of Kenya, 2006).

Both the National Policy and the Sessional Paper No. 2 recognize that it is the right of women, men, girls and boys to participate in and benefited equally from development initiatives. The policy framework recognizes that equality between women and men is a matter of human rights, development and a condition for social justice. The Sessional Paper seeks to link the Gender and Development Policy to other Government policies especially, the Economic Recovery Strategy for Wealth and Employment Creation (2003- 2007). It outlines strategies for implementing programmes in the macro-economic framework, law and administration of justice, education, health, agriculture, environment and information communication technology (Republic of Kenya, 2000 & Republic of Kenya, 2006).

6. Summary of major finding

Gender issues are becoming a world slogan. It attracts the attention of many international institutions and individual scholars. As a result of this, different international institutions and trends regarding women's empowerment have been developed. This international development has impacted not only at the global level but also at national level by

influencing national policies of countries over the world.

Both countries have become members of different international institutions and ratified different conventions and agreements which enforce gender parity. In doing so, they have attempted to fulfill the requirement of such conventions and agreements. They show remarkable improvement in attaining gender parity. Different policies at a national level have been developed which signify the commitment of the countries to the objectives and goals of international conventions.

The starting point in attaining gender parity is the constitutional provision. With the absence of a constitutional provision that provides equality in gender issues, it is impossible to devise a means to achieve women's empowerment. As provided in the preceding parts of the paper, both countries in the past had constitutions that provide male dominance in all spheres. It is only recently that the constitution provides equality for all men and women in front of the law. The 2010 revised constitution of Kenya and the 1995 new constitution of Ethiopia provide broader grounds for women's empowerment and protection.

There are also different other government measures to correct gender disparity. As the governments created a conducive environment in educational sectors in both countries, there have been greater improvements in female enrolment in the educational sector. Different educational policies, strategies, programs and projects are devised in the countries to enhance women's enrolment and to reduce the gender gap in education. Gender mainstream educational policy and programs, KESSP in Kenya and ESDP in Ethiopia, are an indicator of the government measure taken to bridge gender disparity in education. Despite these measures, it is true that the gender gap is high in the countries, especially in rural areas where the majorities of communities are illiterate and could not understand their rights and responsibility.

As accepted and ratified different conventions and agreements, both countries formulated national policies in protecting and empowering women. Ethiopia, in order to eliminate gender gap (discrimination) and to enhance women's participation in all spheres of life, has issued a national policy for women. Women's National Policy was formulated and adopted in 1993 in order to address gender inequality. National institutional machineries were established at federal, regional and Woreda (district) levels to implement the policy. The Government of Kenya developed a National Gender and Development Policy in 2000, which forms the framework for guiding different sectors and agencies. The National Policy on Gender and Development (2000) provides a framework for the state to reduce gender imbalance and inequality. The policy mandates the Government to address gender inequalities strategically through established institutional frameworks.

Given the perceived improvement, there are different impediments in implementing policies and different proclamations to fulfill gender parity in both countries. Deep-rooted traditional attitudes, cultural values in the community, low level of literacy, low commitments from concerned government bodies, etc are some of the factors that hinder full-fledged women's empowerment.

7. Conclusion and Recommendation

7.1 Conclusion

The above provisions are the indicators of the government's efforts and commitment of both countries in alleviating gender inequality and improving the livelihood of their community. It also shows the commitment of the governments of the countries to the international pressures imposed through conventions and agreements for which they are signatories.

This resulted in inconceivable improvement in both countries in empowering women and improving their status. Because of constitutional guarantees and some other government measures with increasing female literacy, there is a considerable increase in women's participation in politics and decision-making. There is a significant representation of women in parliament in both countries. Despite the numerical representation, women in parliaments in both countries have insignificant contributions in decision-making because of different factors

Despite such measures and improvements, women are still more marginalized in the countries. These measures are highly concentrated in the urban areas and at high-level administrative echelons in which a small portion of people are living. It was not deep-rooted in lower and rural communities. It is not accessible to the larger communities and is not advocated in such a way that it is not consistent with the social, political and economic status of the rural community.

The majority of the communities are living in rural areas where there is an acute shortage of institutions and institutional capacity to implement the government's policies in the countries. Effective and efficient institutions with effective leadership are very important to implement gender-related issues in rural areas.

The majority of the people in the countries lack literacy, especially in rural areas and this even exacerbates the situation of gender disparity. Without education and training, it is impossible for the communities to even understand their right and responsibility in implementing national policies. These in turn hinder the implementation of government measures on gender issues, particularly in rural areas.

Socio-cultural practices that are well established for a long period of time and deep-rooted in the heart and mind of the communities are also one of the impediments to the successful implementation of gender-related measures in the countries. It is not an easy task to change the attitudes of the communities which practiced for a long period of time. It needs greater commitment from both the government and the communities.

Generally, governments of the countries have to do more with women's empowerment in order to achieve a balanced representation of women in all aspects of their life. Moreover, women's representation needs not only numerical representation but also substantive representations which indicate the actual roles that should be played by empowered women.

7.2. Recommendation

In the preceding discussion, Kenya and Ethiopia developed various instruments to combat gender disparity in political, social and economic spheres. Thus, both countries showed important improvement in gender issues. Given these measures and improvements, there are considerable gender gaps that need the government of the countries to do more to further improve gender equality. Gender parity in the countries failed to attain as it was needed because of different

factors presented above. So, the government of both countries has to do more and the article forwards the following recommendations.

Most of the achievements of the two countries indicate numerical aspects of gender parity while the substantive aspect remains far behind and needs a strong government and concerned stakeholders' response to such substantive aspects. Moreover, training should be given to women to enhance their substantive representation in all aspects of their life. Government should also create an enabling environment that enhances women's capacity in influencing public policy and the institutions in which they are represented.

The governments of the countries need to develop effective means by which the rural community could be accessed and understand their right and responsibilities in protecting women from unnecessary traditional practices through the creation of:

- Rural community-based Media that creates awareness in the communities about the basic human rights of women, national policies on women, legal and criminal grounds for breaking the law and including the benefit gained from a successful implementation of the women.
- Strengthening the institutional structure and capacity at the grass root level of administration as they are directly in contact with the community at large. This could be achieved by recruiting a well-trained administrator to the grass root level.
- Providing training to community elders about women's empowerment and enabling the harmonization of local practice with national and international laws in resolving local problems in gender issues. Elders are an important alternative to conflict resolution, especially in local areas. For example, in divorce, they play the role of dividing wealth between husband and wife. Then their alternative role should not be contradicting the existing laws.
- Attitude is very important to implement national policy, strategies, programs and any other measures. So, the government should work hard to change the views and attitudes of both males and females and to create a common consensus on gender equality. Socially persisted and long lasted traditional attitudes have to be changed through training and different ceremonies (coffee ceremony). Community-based discussion should also be prepared at the grass root level.
- Different basic necessities, especially basic infrastructural provisions particularly at the rural level should be improved to enable the accessibility of basic service to the community as a whole and rural women in particular.

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