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The quest for gender equality and women's empowerment in least developed countries: Policy and strategy implications for achieving millennium development goals in Ethiopia

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This paper critically reviewed the gender equality and women's empowerment endeavors in least developed countries (LDCs) and proposed policy and strategy measures for achieving millennium development goals (MDGs) in Ethiopia. Ethiopian women are economically, socially, culturally and politically disadvantaged in the enjoyment of equal rights, in accessing opportunities, decision-making processes, and basic resources. In other words, although a number of policies are emerging that support and encourage women's participation in development, women's access to and control of productive resources, information, training and education, employment and in decision-making are limited. The general objective of this paper is to assess the quest for gender equality and women's empowerment in least developed countries to achieve MDGs and identify policy and strategy implications for Ethiopia. This paper adapts a human ecological approach and a comprehensive review and analysis of the existing literature was made in order to obtain both theoretical insights and secondary data on the review themes. The collected secondary data and information were qualitatively analyzed through narration and description and presented under relevant themes. The findings of the study reveal that promising efforts are being made by the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia to address gender equality and women's empowerment issues in the process of achieving millennium development goals. Nevertheless, a lot has to be done for more effective gender equality and women's empowerment thereby the millennium development goals (MDGs) and sustainable development objectives will be achieved in Ethiopia. Adaptation of the good practices of gender equality and women's empowerment from different successful countries, proper implementation of the ratified international conventions on gender equality and women's empowerment, and development and implementation of appropriate national gender policy will improve the condition of Ethiopian women in the years to come.

Key words: Development, empowerment, equality, ethiopia, gender, women.

INTRODUCTION

Women's empowerment may be defined as "a bottom-up process of transforming gender power relations, through individuals or groups developing awareness of women's subordination and building their capacity to challenge it

(Baden and Oxaal 1997; Baden and Reeves, 2000; Dejene, 2003; Ogato, 2013). Women's empowerment does not imply women taking over control previously held by men, but rather the need to transform the nature

of power relations (Baden and Reeves, 2000).

Many United Nations (UN) conferences have advocated that women's empowerment is central to sustainable development. The Copenhagen Declaration of the World Summit on Social Development (WSSD) is a case in point. WSSD called for the recognition that empowering people, particularly women, to strengthen their own capacities is a main objective of development, and that empowerment requires the full participation of people in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of decisions determining the functioning and well-being of societies. The report of the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women is another good example to mention. It called its platform for action on agenda for women's empowerment (Baden and Oxaal, 1997).

Ethiopia has been taking policy measures towards empowering women in sustainable development and poverty reduction endeavors. Gender equality and women's empowerment is one of the priority goals towards which many least developed countries like Ethiopia are working for in poverty reduction and sustainable development efforts. In other words, women's empowerment and gender equality is recognized as one of the building blocks in combating poverty and achieving sustainable improvement of livelihoods of a community. The government of Ethiopia has taken remarkable measure towards alleviating gender issues since 1993 (United Nations, 2002). Kabeer (2005) contends that closing the gender gap in education at all levels, increasing women's share of wage employment in the non-agricultural sector, and increasing the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments are the three main indicators towards achieving the goal of gender equality and women's empowerment. Moreover, Dejene (2003) affirms that the emergency and establishment of local and community organizations and reducing the work burden of women in key tasks and improving their decision-making ability in natural resources management and overall status in rural society are the two critical preconditions for true women's empowerment and gender equality in rural areas of least developed countries like Ethiopia.

It is traditionally accepted that women's societal roles are restricted to domestic activities like cooking, and raising children (Mollel and Mtenga, 2000; World Bank, 2007). Changing traditional structures against women in a community requires institutional reform. In other words, influencing the behaviors of local people and protecting their interests can be realized in a community only by reforming institutions which provide incentives and regulatory mechanisms (Mollel and Mtenga, 2000; Tiruneh et al., 2001; Dejene, 2003; Baden and Oxaal 1997).

Ethiopian women are economically, socially, culturally and politically disadvantaged in the enjoyment of equal rights, in accessing opportunities, decision-making processes, and basic resources/services (JICA; 1999;

Teferi and Endashew, 2006). Although a number of policies are emerging that support and encourage women's participation in development, women's access to and control of productive resources, information, training and education, employment and in decision-making is limited (Zewdu, 2002; Ogato, 2009; Ogato, 2013).

The Ethiopian Prime Minister Office/ Women's Affairs Sub Sector reported that women in Ethiopia as anywhere else in least developed countries occupy the law status in the society. The same report further concluded that women represent 49.8% of the population and contribute mainly to food production and other though they have not shared the fruits of development equally with their male counterpart. Rights such as, access to land, credit and other productive resources are difficult for women to attain. They also experience multiple forms of other deprivations such as longer working days, women specific ill health, low levels of education relative to men, and lack of adequate representation in leadership and decision making positions (United Nations 2002; Prime Minister Office/Women's Affairs Sub Sector 2004; Ogato, 2009; Ogato, 2013).

This paper proposes to review the gender equality and women's empowerment efforts, practices and performances in least developed countries taking Ethiopia as a case study. Moreover, it presents good practices and lessons for future participatory gender equality and women's empowerment (Gender) policy formulation, implementation and evaluation in Ethiopia. In a nutshell, the paper is motivated by the international conventions on gender equality and women's empowerment, gender equality and women's empowerment policy development efforts by the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the desire to learn more about the link between women's empowerment and gender equality and sustainable development in least developed countries.

The general objective of this paper is to assess the quest for gender equality and women's empowerment in least developed countries to achieve millennium development goals (MGDs) and identify policy and strategy implications for Ethiopia. The specific objectives are: to overview the global state of gender equality, women's empowerment, and sustainable development; to identify policy practices of economic, social, legal, and political empowerment of women in Ethiopia; to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of gender equality and women's empowerment efforts in Ethiopia; and identify policy and strategy implications for achieving millennium development goals in Ethiopia. The key research questions of this paper are: are there policy measures for economic, political, social, and legal empowerment of women in Ethiopia? Do gender equality and women's empowerment policy measures have significant contribution for achieving millennium development goals in Ethiopia? Is there legal framework which promotes

economic, social, and political empowerment of women in Ethiopia?

METHODOLOGY

This paper adapts a human ecological approach. Human ecology generally refers to the study of the dynamic interrelationships between human population and the physical, cultural and social characteristics of the environment and biosphere (Lawrence, 2003; Ogato, 2013).

Gender study by its nature is an interdisciplinary study. In other words, gender analysis draws on social science tools, especially from anthropology, sociology, geography, and economics (Poats, 1991; Ogato, 2009; Ogato, 2013). In other words, gender perspective of development encompasses a whole range of areas, starting with the way we, as development agents, perceive the needs of those we seek to assist. Moreover, knowing the practical and strategic gender needs of women, their differences and the importance of participation in identifying and meeting these needs by those concerned are paramount to the success of development interventions (Fetenu, 1997). Hence, adaptation of human ecological approach in the review process really matters for holistic understanding and interdisciplinary analysis of the issue under investigation. A comprehensive review and analysis of the existing literature was made in order to obtain both theoretical insights and secondary data on the review and analysis themes. The secondary sources or existing literatures in reference to the review and analysis themes conceptualized in the study were carefully selected and consulted for secondary data collection. In other words, robust secondary sources on the review and analysis themes in the context of least developed countries were identified for the purpose of the study. Ethiopia was chosen as a case study due to the fact that the country has recently made promising progresses with regard to promoting gender equality and women's empowerment for achieving millennium development goals. Moreover, the study aims at identifying policy implications for the country to develop participatory national gender policy which may support the country in achieving MDGs and sustainable development objectives in the years to come. Finally the collected secondary data and information were qualitatively analyzed through narration and description and presented under relevant themes.

DISCUSSION

This section of the paper discusses overview of gender equality, women's empowerment, and sustainable development in least developed countries, overview of gender equality and women's empowerment efforts in Ethiopia, policy practices on economic, legal, political, and social empowerment of women in Ethiopia, strengths and weaknesses of gender equality and women's empowerment efforts in Ethiopia, and policy and strategy implications for achieving millennium development goals in Ethiopia.

Overview of gender equality, women's empowerment, and sustainable development in least developed countries

Sustainable human development (SHD) may be defined

as 'a human development process that meets today's needs without compromising the lives of future generations' (Bhatta, 2001). Sustainable human development is concerned about gender equality and women's empowerment as one dimension. For Kabeer (2003), gender related constraints reflect gender inequalities in resources and opportunities; though class, poverty, ethnicity and physical location may also create inequalities, gender tends to make them more severe. According to World Bank (2003), gender related constraints are found in, for example, workloads, returns to labour efforts, health and education and access to productive assets. They also reflect the uneven distribution of resources and opportunities between women and men in the household. Moreover, food production and other activities that provide income and sustenance to households have been undermined.

The alternatives that would benefit poor women should include four components (Bhatta, 2001): (a) economic growth with social equity (including addressing the pattern and rate of growth and who benefits from this); (b) sustainable livelihoods; (c) social justice (which takes into account people's basic needs and political participation); and (d) ecological sustainability (that is how the stock of natural resources is being used and who is bearing the burden of environmental change). Many scholars of sustainable human development contend that sustainable human development policy formulation must be able to address the women's agenda. For instance, Bhatta (2001) recommends eight agenda of women which must be considered by policy makers to address the felt needs of women in sustainable human development process (Table 1).

According to UNDP (2003), gender equality is at the core of whether the millennium development goals (MDGs) will be achieved-from improving health and fighting disease, to reducing poverty and mitigating hunger, to expanding education to lowering child mortality, to increasing access to safe water, to ensuring environmental sustainability. In other words, gender equality and women's empowerment matters for achieving MDGs in least developed countries like Ethiopia (Figure1).

Without promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in sustainable development efforts, it is hardly possible for least developed countries like Ethiopia to achieve the millennium development goals. In other words, Women's advancement and empowerment in decision-making, including women's participation in national and international ecosystem management and control of environmental degradation is a key area for sustainable development (Saito and Spurling, 1992; Baden and Oxaal, 1997 World Bank. 2001; Torkelsson, 2003; Upadhyay, 2005; Wahaj and Hartl, 2007). According to United Nations (2003), wage differentials, occupational segregation, higher unemployment rates and their disproportionate representation in the informal and subsistence sectors are the major limiting factors for females' economic advancement in least developed

Table 1. Women's agenda for sustainable human development.

Agenda item	Components
Rights	Including legal rights
Entitlement	Access to and control over productive resources
Investment	Elimination of gender gaps in human development
Voice	Women's vision of alternative development agenda
Poverty	Policy interventions, focus on female-headed household
Reproductive labour	Including males sharing child-rearing responsibilities
Security	From domestic violence and abuse
Empowerment	Assertion of self

Source: Bhatta (2001).

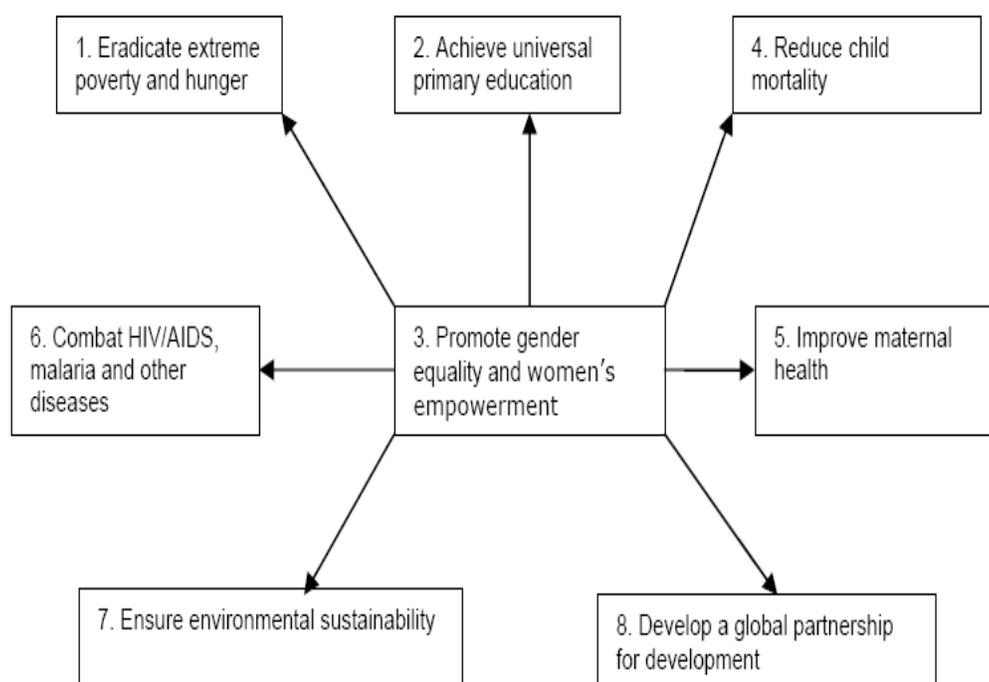


Figure 1. Model Depicting Gender Equality and Gender Empowerment at the hub for other . MDGs [Source: Ogato, 20011].

countries. Moreover, socio-cultural attitudes, employment policies and lack of options for balancing work and family responsibilities or for controlling the timing and spacing of births contribute further to inequality in the labour market (United Nations, 2003). Scholars of gender and sustainable development assert that gender equality and women's empowerment can be achieved in least developed countries. For instance, Kabeer (2005) claims that closing the gender gap in education at all levels, increasing women's share of wage employment in the non-agricultural sector, and increasing the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments are the three main indicators towards achieving the goal of gender equality and women's empowerment.

According to WEDO (2001), gender equality is not only a goal in its own right, but an essential ingredient for achieving all the MDGs, be it poverty eradication, protecting the environment, or access to healthcare. Attempting to meet the MDGs without incorporating gender equality will both increase the costs and minimize success. Because the MDGs are mutually reinforcing, success in meeting the goals will have positive impacts on gender equality, just as progress toward gender equality in any one area will help to further each of the other goals (IIRR-Ethiopia, 2000; WEDO, 2001; Heyzer, 2005; Ogato, 2011).

There is strong need for economic empowerment of women in least developed countries. The basic reason

why women must be economically empowered is the fact that they constitute the majority of the world's poor. The situation is more practical in Sub-Saharan Africa. Moreover, economic empowerment of women significantly impacts livelihood at the household, community and national levels (Singh, 2006; Africa Partnership Forum and New Partnership for Africa's Development, 2007; Ogato, 2013). In other words, improving access of small scale rural male and female farmers to productive resources is one of the best mechanisms for ensuring sustainable human development (Bhatta, 2001; Singh et al., 2006; Ogato, 2009). Moreover, legal reforms can be a powerful strategy for empowering women and girls and safeguarding their rights (United Nations Children's Fund, 2006; Baden and Reeves, 2000). Besides, scholars of gender and sustainable human development assert that an effective participation of women in formal politics, support for broad programmes of democratization and good governance with a strong focus on developing civil society are important strategies for women's empowerment and gender equality (Baden and Oxaal, 1997; United Nations Children's Fund, 2006).

The convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW) established in 1979 marked an important step towards explicit prohibition of discrimination against women (Baden and Reeves, 2000). Moreover, the 1993 Vienna Conference on Human Rights was a watershed as it marked the first international recognition of violence against women as a human rights violation (Baden and Reeves, 2000).

Overview of gender equality and women's empowerment efforts in Ethiopia

FAO (1997) affirms that a national policy on Ethiopian women has been formulated to address women's strategic gender needs through improving their access to resources and their decision-making power. Rural women's affairs departments have been set up in the relevant line ministries as well as in the prime minister's office. The Federal Democratic Government of Ethiopia has declared its unequivocal commitment to the development of women with the announcement of the National Policy on Women in 1993 (referred to as women's policy), and the promulgation of the new constitution in 1995. In other words, Ethiopia has demonstrated its firm commitment to the equitable socio-economic development of women. The women's policy primarily aims to institutionalize the political, economical 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 (United Nations, 2003; Cherinet and Mulugeta, 2003; Ogato, 2009; Ogato, 2011; Ogato, 2013).

Ethiopia has developed national constitution to protect the fundamental rights of women and their interest of access and control over resource. Accordingly, Ethiopian women are entitled to remedial and affirmative measures to enable them to compete and participate on the basis of equality with men in political, economic and social life. New policies and programmes have been formulated and adopted with increased gender consideration and equity. As regards property and land rights, the constitution states that women shall acquire, administer, control, use and transfer property. With respect to use, transfer, administration and control of land women have as equal access as men to benefit this (United Nations, 2003; Ogato, 2011; Ogato, 2013).

According to MOWA (2006), following the Beijing conference of 1995, Ethiopia had identified the following seven priority areas that need to be tackled in order to ensure gender-equitable development: Poverty and Economic Empowerment of Women and Girls; Education and Training of Women and Girls; Reproductive Rights, Health and HIV/AIDS; Human Rights and Violence against Women and Girls; Empowering Women in Decision Making; Women and The Environment; and Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women (MOWA) (Figure 1).

The government of Ethiopia is committed to the implementation of Agenda 21 in relation to gender empowerment for sustainable development (Table 1). It has been making significant efforts in empowering women in decision-making processes. The establishment of the Women's Affairs Office and issuance of a National Policy on Ethiopian Women which entitles and ensures a woman's rights to property, employment and a pension could be mentioned as important milestones for the commitment of the current regime towards the realization of gender issue and mitigation measures in Ethiopia (United Nations, 2002; Ogato, 2011; Ogato, 2013).

The government of Ethiopia has started empowering and strengthening women's participation in decision-making, guaranteeing their rights to access to credit schemes, and creating a conducive environment for civic societies. Victimization of Ethiopian women by gender-based oppression and exploitation in all spheres of life; lack of adequate recognition and economic valuation of their contribution; denial of their right to have access to and control over means of production and their major share of the category of the poorest of the poor are the basic reasons why the government of Ethiopia has given due consideration to the multi-faceted problems of Ethiopian women (United Nations, 2002; Cherinet and Mulugeta, 2003; Ogato, 2011; Ogato, 2013).

Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women; capacity-building by establishing an institutional development fund; giving special attention to women fuel wood carriers; provision of free higher education opportunities (master and PhD programmes) for some females; increasing the participation of women/girls in

school enrolment, in decision making, and in the election process; and the measures taken by the government to improve the employment situation of women are the major achievements of the government in promoting and supporting the role of women in sustainable development (United Nations, 2002; Cherinet and Mulugeta, 2003; Ogato, 2009; Ogato, 2011; Ogato, 2013).

The low level of consciousness in society of the role played by women in the development of the country; the deep-rooted cultural beliefs and traditional practices of society that prevent women playing their full role in the development process; lack of appropriate technology to reduce the workload of women at the household level; shortage of properly qualified female development agents to understand and help motivate and empower rural women are some of the major constraints hindering the progress of women's empowerment, gender equality, and sustainable development efforts in Ethiopia (United Nations, 2002; Cherinet and Mulugeta, 2003; Ogato, 2011; Ogato, 2013).

There are many international conventions ratified by Ethiopia and reflected in the Constitution though improvement in women's right is not fully realized. In other words, while the policies' formulation and ratification of conventions initiatives by the government of Ethiopia are commendable, there are many weaknesses and constraints in the implementation process, mainly due to limited capacity and unsatisfactory understanding of the policy by implementers, especially those on women. Moreover, attitudinal problem with regards to gender equality, and often competing priorities exacerbated gender issues in Ethiopia (Cherinet and Mulugeta, 2003; Ogato, 2011; Ogato, 2013).

The government's sustainable development and poverty reduction programme (SDPRP) calls for empowering local community and demand-driven approach to technology generation and dissemination. The Government seems committed to the devolution of authority from Federal to Regional governments. Moreover, it has made districts as the centre of economic development (Dejene, 2003).

Ethiopian women often face social, cultural and at times legal constraints that limit their decision-making capacity in farming and natural resources management. Moreover, the traditional role of women puts gender specific constraints in fuel wood and water collection, post-harvest activities, livestock management which increases the pressure on their time and increases the demand for large families reinforcing the nexus problem (Dejene, 2003; Ogato 2011; Ogato, 2013). Empowering rural women is a multi-faceted task and must include several components such as access land, credit, extension, training in agriculture and natural resources management, low cost technologies and practices that ease their work burden and income generating activities outside agriculture (Dejene, 2003; Ogato, 2009; Ogato, 2011; Ogato, 2013).

The current development plan, growth and transformation plan (GTP) envisage the country's GDP per capita to grow from 378 USD in 2010 to 1271 USD in 2025. It also projects that the contribution of agriculture will diminish from 42 to 29% indicating migration of jobs from the agriculture sector to industry and services, which are expected to contribute 32 and 39% of the GDP (FDRE, 2011). Moreover, the GTP explicitly recognizes that environment is a vital and important pillar of sustainable development, and states that "building a 'Green Economy' and ongoing implementation of environmental laws are among the key strategic directions to be pursued during the plan period" (MoFED, 2010; EPA, 2012).

Policy practices on economic empowerment of women in Ethiopia

Economic empowerment has to do with access to resources, and is key to women because their subordinate position is entrenchment in their level of access to and control over resources (Ogato, 2013). There is strong need for economic empowerment of women in least developed countries like Ethiopia. The basic reason why women must be economically empowered is the fact that they constitute the majority of the world's poor. The situation is more practical in Sub-Saharan Africa and Ethiopia. For instance, female-headed households in Sub-Saharan Africa are on the increase and are poorer than those headed by males and rural women face the most challenges. Overall, women lack education, access to resources such as land, time and capital, as well as financial services. Beyond farming, women are still mostly found in the resource-strapped informal sector where income is low and unstable and where government protection is minimal (Ruzvidzo, 2007; Ogato, 2009; Ogato, 2013). Hence, economic empowerment of women has significant contribution for the improvement of livelihood at household level, community level and national level (Rahman, 2000; Olumakaiye and Ajayi, 2006; Peter, 2006; Hussain, 2007; Ogato, 2013).

In rural areas, agricultural outputs are often affected by poor weather patterns, civil unrest and poor long-term planning. Moreover, macro-economic policies, aimed at poverty reduction in many African countries are often not gender-sensitive. Besides, globalization has mixed results for Africa and for women. Overall, the prices of African commodities (except oil and other minerals) have been falling. Further, the introduction of structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) has resulted in women spending much-needed income on health and other forms of care-taking due to the withdrawal of government funding and subsidies in the health sector (Ruzvidzo, 2007; Ogato, 2009). Generally in Sub-Saharan Africa and particularly in Ethiopia women's participation in the labour

force has overall been high compared to other regions of the world though it is in the agricultural and informal sector which are less protected by government regulations in terms of wages, benefits, and access to resources than the formal sector (Ruzvidzo, 2007; Ogato, 2013).

Ethiopia's long-term development strategy, deeply rooted in the economic policy is Agricultural Development Led Industrialization (ADLI) which stresses the important contribution of agriculture to economic and industrial development. The objective of ADLI is to bring about a structural transformation in the productivity of peasant agriculture and to streamline and construct the manufacturing sector, so that it makes extensive use of the country's natural resources and human power. The interdependent agricultural and industrial development strategy is expected to enhance overall economic development (Cherinet and Mulugeta, 2003; Ogato, 2011).

Ethiopia's long-term commitment to poverty reduction and its ultimate eradication in all its dimensions has animated government strategies well before the MDG needs assessment process was initiated. This is most evident in the formulation of its PRSP of 2002 entitled the "Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Program -SDPRP", which was then updated by a five year plan entitled "Ethiopia: A Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty -PASDEP". Aiming to reach the MDGs represents a logical step to achieve this overarching objective, and an important goal around which to focus attention of the Government's and its development partners' efforts (MOFED, 2005; Ogato, 2011).

An estimated 60 and 80% of the total labour expended on farming activities in Africa is contributed by women. This is particularly true for Ethiopia. Despite the significant contribution of women in agricultural production, the agricultural development efforts have been gender-neutral in Ethiopia (MOWA, 2006). MOWA (2006) confirmed that the Ethiopian women are poor often lacking productive assets particularly land, and are underserved with agricultural extension, credit, labour, oxen and farm implements. A Central Agricultural Census Study (2003 quoted in MOWA, 2006) indicates that out of the total landholders, only 18.6% were women. Other studies, in different parts of the country, all showed significantly fewer female landholders than men; and smaller size holdings among women (MOWA, 2006). Marginalization and vulnerability is tougher for women in pastoralist areas. That was reported to be characterized by severer poverty. Gender-specific division of labour was reported to be even sharper forcing women to shoulder much heavier work responsibilities. Moreover, customary rules and norms were reported to place women at a disadvantageous position in terms of access to and control over resources (MOWA, 2006). Ethiopia has a great potential for increasing agricultural production

and productivity and thereby ensuring food security. The country is well endowed with potentially cultivable land resources, has an immense untapped irrigation and hydroelectric potential, has diverse climatic features to grow a large variety of crops and sustain pastoral activities, and has large livestock population (Demeke et al., 2006).

In Ethiopia, women's employment in industries and the Civil Service is lower than men. Moreover, women operate about 65% of micro-enterprises and 26% of small scale manufacturing enterprises (MOWA, 2006). According to MOWA (2006) low level education and training, lack of exposure to the business world, meager financial and human capital; and problems related to ownership rights for collateral purposes are the major reasons for low participation of women in manufacturing. In the Civil Service, women were reported to represent 32% of permanent employees with wide regional variation (MOWA, 2006).

Ethiopian women are highly concentrated in jobs such as clerical and fiscal (63.35%) and custodial and manual (48.07%). Low education and training, traditional attitudes, lack of role models, non-assertiveness and limited access to information were reported as possible reasons for concentration of women in non-professional and low paying jobs (Cherinet and Mulugeta, 2003; MOWA; 2006). The Federal Government of Ethiopia has been taking remarkable policy measures to empower women through access to basic education since 1991 (Cherinet and Mulugeta, 2003; Rose, 2003; Ogato, 2013).

The National Policy for Ethiopian women specified strategies to ensure that women received vocational guidance at all institutions of education, had access to the same curricula as men, and were free to choose their field of study (Cherinet and Mulugeta, 2003; Rose, 2003; Ogato, 2013). Strategies included like encouraging women to take up jobs in the civil service and to perform public functions, and including participation in decision-making at both community and national levels, and informing communities about the harm done by some traditional practices, such as circumcision and marriage of girls before they reach puberty. In support of this, the government's Population and Social Policy aim to increase the minimum age at marriage for girls from the age of 15 to 18 years (equal to that of boys). These policy measures have been producing remarkable effects (Rose, 2003; Ogato, 2011; Ogato, 2013).

The Ethiopian government has been making remarkable efforts in empowering women and girls through Education. According to the findings of Rose (2003) building on the Education and Training Strategy, the Ethiopian Education Sector Development Programme (ESDP I 1997/98-2002/03) provided an important example of a sector-wide approach that has attempted to integrate gender issues across all aspects of the education system. It was also confirmed by the same

study that as a result of efforts made, the ESDP I target of increasing the primary GER from 30 percent in 1995/96 to 50 percent by 2002/03 was already exceeded by 1999/00. However, Rose (2003) was gravely concerned for the programme not to achieve the target of increasing the proportion of girls enrolled to 45 percent of the total (with girls only comprising 40.8 percent of total primary enrolment by 2001/02). This can partly be attributed to factors constraining full implementation of gender strategies in regional and national plans - including diminishing political commitment to reform at lower levels of the decentralized system; lack of commitment of resources to support the strategies; and limited capacity of women's affairs officers, who are responsible for their implementation, particularly at regional and district levels (Cherinet and Mulugeta, 2003; Rose, 2003; Ogato, 2013).

Rose (2003) confirmed that ESDP II proposes a modest, but perhaps realistic, target of increasing the primary GER from 57 percent in 2000/01 to 65 percent by 2004/05, and increasing the proportion of girls enrolled from 40.8 percent to 43.3 percent of total enrolment. Rose (2003) further confirmed that training teachers to introduce them to gender-sensitive learning approaches, and introducing village schools with multi-grade teaching to improve access for children, especially girls, who are unable to attend primary schools because of distance were used as strategies to address the gender gap. However, Rose (2003) was gravely concerned for a vague proposal at secondary level to increase the participation rate of girls in secondary school without any suggestion of how this might be achieved, other than introduction of counseling and educational support systems for female students. At the technical and vocational level, it is suggested that special attention will be given to increase the participation of girls and disadvantaged groups by improving the content and structure of the curriculum to meet their special needs, although there is no elaboration of what these needs might be (Cherinet and Mulugeta, 2003; Rose, 2003; Ogato, 2013).

Rose (2003) confirmed that ESDP II also highlights the need not only to ensure that girls enroll in school, but also that they are able to learn in a safe, supportive and appropriate learning environment. According to Rose (2003), ESDP II suggests the need for greater gender sensitive curricula, textbooks and teachers, as well as gender awareness campaigns and training for parents, teachers, education managers and students, with the establishment of girls' education enhancement committees. Moreover, girl-friendly facilities are promoted, including separate latrines for girls and boys. It also mentions that the curricula and textbooks should be reviewed for gender bias. Furthermore, it suggests that role models are important so measures will be taken to increase the number of female teachers, head teachers and managers in the system. Moreover, girls are

encouraged to take non-traditional subjects in technical and vocational schools, with support packages of tutorial support, guidance and counseling, and assertive training made available (Rose, 2003; Ogato, 2011; Ogato, 2013).

Enrolment in Ethiopia has increased dramatically for both boys and girls since the early 1990s. Education is considered to be an important means to social mobility on an individual level, and the driving force behind economic, social, and cultural development at the national level (Cherinet and Mulugeta, 2003; Ogato, 2013). The interesting aspect of reducing gender inequality in Ethiopia is its implication for economic growth. As an illustration, if Ethiopia undertakes a reduction in the rate of gender inequality at the level of primary education, then there is a positive impact on the economy. Even though enrolment has increased dramatically, gender gaps still remain substantial, particularly at higher education level (MOFED, 2005; Ogato, 2013). In other words, gender gap in education prevails at all levels of the system; the gap more visible as one goes up higher the educational ladder (MOWA, 2006; Ogato, 2013).

A number of economic, social, and cultural problems were reported to constrain women from attending and succeeding in education (Cherinet and Mulugeta, 2003; MOWA, 2006; Ogato, 2011; Ogato, 2013). The economic problems relate to parents' inability to send girl children to school especially if schools are far, or dropout due to lack of finances (MOWA, 2006; Ogato, 2013). Moreover, the problem is more serious in rural areas; particularly in pastoralist regions. The traditional division of labour in homes, and parental unequal treatment of sons and daughters in task assignment and study time constrain girls' success in education. Moreover, school distance and harassment, shyness and feeling of discomfort to participate equally with men were reported as stumbling blocks for female students. In addition, dropout in high school was reported to be fuelled by the practice of early marriage and marriage by abduction (MOWA; 2006; Ogato 2011; Ogato, 2013).

Though women's and girls' education is constrained by different multi-faceted factors, it is still possible to empower them through policy measures that focus on creating favorable social environment. On top of that focusing on inculcating values and traits that help women and girls become strong to overcome or go around the problems is very important (Cherinet and Mulugeta, 2003; Ogato, 2011; Ogato, 2013). However, remarkable progresses are being registered in education sector and there is a hope to achieve education related MDGs in Ethiopia.

In line with promoting gender equality and women's empowerment for achieving Millenium Development Goals (MDGs), the following priority actions are effected in Ethiopia (MOFED, 2005): Addressing institutional weakness such as the weak capacity at all levels and the unclear institutional framework; Mainstreaming gender

planning by creating gender disaggregated socio-economic and demographic data; Additional health interventions; Additional education interventions; Address Harmful Traditional Practices (HTP) through social marketing campaigns, working through community groups, training health promoters, teachers, extension workers and social workers; and Targeted programs to alleviate Female Headed Households (FHHs) vulnerability by helping them build up their assets through access to micro-credit and skills training, by facilitating access to land and by prioritization of the type of infrastructure that mostly helps women (water, roads, marketing centers).

According to the findings of MOWA (2006), maternal health care services do not reach the majority of Ethiopian women, who are constrained by distance, lack of financial resources and decision-making on use of family planning, mismatch between demand and supply, particularly contraception of choice, heavy workload; and cultural attitudes. Moreover, the situation is worse in pastoral areas particularly Afar and Somali. Besides, delivery with trained personnel or at health facilities is low across all regions (Cherinet and Mulugeta, 2003; MOWA, 2006; Ogato, 2013). Moreover, the general health Services are also insufficient in many rural areas, with some health facilities in regions like Afar lacking equipment, supplies or staff. Furthermore, workload, inability to pay for the services, cultural influences and limited awareness are among the key factors limiting women's access to available health services (MOWA, 2006; Ogato, 2011; Ogato, 2013). Even though improved health care provision was reported in many countries, the overall profile is poor and declining. For instance, high level of pregnancy related mortality, compounded by the HIV/AIDS and other STIs is a major challenge by a few countries including Ethiopia (MOWA, 2006). However, remarkable progresses are being registered in health sector and there is a hope to achieve health related MDGs in Ethiopia.

Policy practices of legal empowerment of women in Ethiopia

According to Ogato (2013), on a macro-political level, most governing bodies are dominated by men and legislative and judicial decisions often lack a gendered perspective and do not represent women's interests. Legal reform can be a powerful strategy for empowering women and girls and safeguarding their rights (UNICEF, 2006; Ogato, 2013). Ruzvidzo (2007) encourages governments to strengthen legal frameworks that promote the rights of women and to domesticate all international and regional instruments on women's rights. That is to mean after ratification, all conventions are supposed to be implemented. For Sub-Saharan Africa and Ethiopia, this means ratifying and implementing

CEDAW, the Protocol to the African Charter for Human and People's Rights and the Rights of Women and the many sub regional or national declarations (Ruzvidzo, 2007; Ogato, 2013).

Tang (2000) attests that the 1979 convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (often called the 'Women's Convention') is the first and most comprehensive international agreement dealing with the human rights of women. According to Tang (2000), adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, the Women's Convention was the result of campaigning and lobbying by women's organizations. The basic goal of the Women's Convention was to prohibit all forms of discrimination against women. This cannot be achieved merely by the enactment of gender-neutral laws (Tang, 2000; Ogato, 2013). Baden and Reeves (2000) affirm that the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) established in 1979 marked an important step towards explicit prohibition of discrimination against women. Moreover, the 1993 Vienna Conference on Human Rights was a watershed as it marked the first international recognition of violence against women as a human rights violation (Baden and Reeves, 2000). In other words, the current conventions, their ratification and implementation are the fruit of the struggle of different women groups. Women's right was fought for as human right broadening the conception of rights to include social, economic, cultural rights, and reproductive and sexual rights (Baden and Reeves, 2000; Ogato, 2011; Ogato, 2013).

Ruzvidzo (2007) affirms that the practice of FGM is now classified as a violation of women's human rights. According to the findings of the same study it is still widely practiced in Africa, but its form varies from country to country (excision, cliterodectomy, and infibulations). Prevalence varies widely from about 5% in the Democratic Republic of Congo to 98% in Somalia. Governments are now involved in outreach programmes and/or funding to discourage the activity. NGOs have invested a lot of resources in advocating for the elimination of the practice. In many countries progress is being made on this front through joint NGO and government effort (Ruzvidzo, 2007; Ogato, 2013).

Ruzvidzo(2007) attests that cultural, religious, and other resistance to the implementation of human rights as the main obstacles for implementing ratified conventions of any kinds of violation against women. For instance, FGM was mentioned as purely a cultural tradition without legal, social or health justification. According to Ruzvidzo (2007) budgets are not developed to educate, conduct research, or implement new policies. Ethiopia, Tanzania, Mozambique and Uganda were mentioned as cases in point (Ruzvidzo, 2007). Baden and Reeves (2007) contend that many countries have failed to ratify CEDAW, and some that have ratified it have failed to uphold it. They also assert that even when international and

national laws recognize women's human rights, they may be undermined by patriarchal customary laws or social practices. Furthermore, human rights advocates, including those promoting women's rights, face challenges from those who regard human rights discourse as a western, imperialist imposition on other cultures.

Baden and Reeves (2000) assert that mobilization of women to claim their rights is essential in order to press for reforms, and for the implementation and enforcement of human rights and national legal instruments. The same study expressed its grave concern for the requirement of strategies of capacity-building in terms of literacy, legal knowledge, and political participation in order to mobilize women to claim their rights. Gender-awareness training for the judiciary and the police, in addition to strengthening women's participation in these fields, is also crucial (Baden and Reeves, 2000; Ogato, 2011; Ogato, 2013).

Gopa (1999) contends that there is a need for simultaneous enhancement of legal literacy and increased awareness as much as possible about how the law can protect women's rights. Gopa (1999) further encourages the establishment and implementation of suitable information, education, and communication (IEC) campaigns. According to the same scholar, this is especially true for countries in which women's participation in education is low and many are illiterate. The same study further encourages strengthening institutional capacity at the regional and sub-regional levels to provide a significant impetus to engendering participation, and needs to be carefully monitored.

According to Women's Affairs Office of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the World Bank (1998), legislation, and consequent regulations, are critical elements of the public policy framework of any government and an invaluable asset in the design and implementation of development interventions. The same report confirmed that admittedly, by itself, legislation cannot ensure women's access to, or control over, economic resources, but appropriate legal frameworks can catalyze the equitable economic and social development of women. The same report recommended that equitable and appropriate framework is essential for sustainable gender-sensitive interventions for both short-term and long-term positive impact. In other words, an equitable legal framework both reflects public policy and reiterates the government's commitment (Women's Affairs Office and World Bank, 1998; Ogato, 2013).

According to Women's Affairs Office and World Bank (1998), the constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, ratified on December 8, 1994, unequivocally guarantees gender equality in social and economic matters. The same study confirmed that the constitution also incorporates international agreements ratified by Ethiopia. According to the same study, article 13 of the constitution requires all government organs to comply with and interpret the provisions "in conformity"

with international human rights convention to which Ethiopia is a party. Regional governments also need to ensure that their laws conform to the constitution and do not discriminate on ground of gender (Women's Affairs Office and World Bank, 1998; Ogato, 2013).

MOWA (2006) affirms that inequalities prevailing in Ethiopia represent violations of women's human rights. MOWA (2006) further contend that women are subjected to violence unique to their sex that are widely prevalent; and which include female genital mutilation affecting many women and girls nationally.

Gopa (1999) contends that there is need for equitable policies that will increase opportunities for capacity-building, facilitate entry into informal labor markets, provide support through child-care centers, enhance access to credit and labor-saving technology, and encourage participation in informal and formal savings groups, go a long way toward elevating the economic status of women. The report by Division for Advancement of Women and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) encourages the human rights-based approach, applied across the life cycle of girls and women to be the overarching framework for all interventions aimed at eliminating discrimination and violence against girls. According to the same report such an approach is essential to ensure that during childhood, girls acquire the education, knowledge, skills and opportunities they need in order to realize their full potential and enjoy their rights as children and later as adults. Structures and systems are necessary to protect and promote girls' rights, while ensuring adequate provision for remedy and redress for rights violations when these occur (Division for Advancement of Women and UNICEF, 2006).

The millennium development goals report by Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (MOFED) and the United Nations Country Team (2004) confirmed that several studies and available data have shown that women in Ethiopia are disadvantaged due to their sex, most notably in rural areas. The report further indicated the need for promoting gender equality for Ethiopia not only in the best interest of the society at large, but also fundamentally to ensure the human and democratic rights of women. It was stated in the same report that the Ethiopian constitution sets clear foundation for this. Because women are less literate, discriminated against in productive activities, engaged in invisible labor services that are not taken into account in the national gross domestic product (GDP) statistics, and are paid less for the same work in the informal market, the cost to the economy is substantial (MOFED and UN country Team, 2004).

Policy practices of political empowerment of women in Ethiopia

Political empowerment involves the rights and abilities of people to participate as equals in decision making

processes (Ogato, 2013). One important approach to supporting women's empowerment is the promotion of the participation of women in formal politics, alongside support to broad programmes of democratization and good governance with a strong focus on developing civil society (Baden and Oxaal, 1997; Ogato, 2011; Ogato, 2013). Baden and Oxaal (1997) recommend the following possible best mechanisms/practices which have potential to increase women's participation in political life with varying degrees of success: Reform of political parties; quotas and other forms of affirmative action; training to develop women's skills and gender sensitivity; work with women's sections of political parties; and the development of women's political organizations.

UNICEF (2006) contends that women in politics advocate more often and more strongly for the rights of women, children and families. The same finding confirmed that at current rates of progress, the present world is still more than 60 years away from a world where women have an equal say in national parliaments. While formal barriers to entering national and local parliaments have been eliminated in virtually every country, this has been insufficient to address gender imbalances in governance. Discrimination, as well as women's significantly greater work burden, discourages and prevents women from entering politics and leaves them less time and energy for public life. Each of these issues needs to be addressed in its own right (UNICEF, 2006).

World Volunteer (2005) affirms that globally women's political participation has been increasing. Moreover, women have also been active in organizing themselves for economic literacy and access to resources through various means including micro-credit and other forms of poverty reduction initiatives. Examples of initiatives were provided where women have succeeded professionally and have gone on to help build women's organizations and promote leadership, particularly in rural areas (World Volunteer, 2005). Key measures for political empowerment of women include (UNICEF, 2006): improving girls access to education, the involvement and support of men, especially male parliamentarians and political leaders; the introduction of quotas for dramatic changes in women's political participation; party politics that actively promote the candidacies of women; participation of women in peace negotiations and post-conflict resolutions; better data and research on the impact of women on legislation and policy related to children; and creating an environment where women can make a difference.

According to the situation analysis report of MOWA (2006) for the National Action Plan for Gender Equality, women's status in the political and public sector is low in Ethiopia. In other words, they are still largely underrepresented in decision-making positions at all levels. They have also not made major progress in attaining political power in legislative bodies. In a nutshell, the political and decision making positions of

women in Ethiopia is characterized as follows (MOWA, 2006): No indication that a well thought policy, programme or action, to increase the number of women at decision-making and leadership positions exist; the constitutional commitment of the government to grant affirmative action has not been translated into concrete action at all levels; the number of elected women representatives is still low; more and more women are engaged in formal employment, but are underrepresented in middle and higher management positions; the number of women leaders and decision makers at the various level of the decentralized government structure is still very low; and the election law and electoral process is not gender responsive.

The basic reasons for inadequate representations of women in political and decision-making positions in Ethiopia are (MOWA, 2006; Ogato, 2013): Inadequate focus to the issue, due to lack of commitment and political will by the leadership; insufficient number of educated women; the few women who are in decision making position lack the commitment to fight for issues of gender equality; backward thinking among society, government leaders and civic leaders; the women affair offices not having power to challenge discriminatory policies; societal perception about leadership ability of women; women's low economic status; women's lack of assertiveness; and inadequate number of women in the current decision making positions.

Longwe (2000) contends that the Beijing Platform for Action, the outcome of the United Nations Fourth Conference on Women, held in 1995, has at its centre a call for women's increased political empowerment. According to the same scholar, women are grossly under-represented in parliaments in most countries worldwide, and in the political administrative levels of government despite increased international calls for women's political empowerment. For instance, in Africa, the proportion of women in decision-making positions is very low (Longwe, 2000; Ogato, 2013).

There is a need for giving more attention for political empowerment of women in Ethiopia. Without political empowerment of women or without increasing the number of women participating in parliamentary decision making processes about the conditions of Ethiopian women it is hardly possible for the Ethiopian government to fully empower women in other dimensions of women's empowerment. In line with this, Longwe (2000) claims that at the national level, women's empowerment means women controlling resources through their presence in government, and having the opportunities to allocate those resources so that women and men benefit equally. It means their participation in parliaments to vote for discriminatory laws to be removed from statute books, government regulations, administrative practice, and from all custom and tradition.

Economic Commission for Africa (2005) affirms that an aspect of governance where positive trends were

observed in Africa in the last decade is the proportion of women in representative decision-making bodies. In other words, there is significant increase in the proportion of women in parliaments in some African countries even surpassing the targets set in the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA). The increment in proportion of women participating in Ethiopian parliament is also very much encouraging. Nevertheless, the country should adapt some political women empowerment measures in order to increase the political empowerment of women in Ethiopia.

Policy practices on social empowerment of women in Ethiopia

Social empowerment is about challenging social and cultural structures (Ogato, 2013). UNICEF (2006) asserts that across the least developed countries, studies show that women's participation in community initiatives can have long-lasting benefits for women and children. Moreover, the same study affirms that women who are empowered to take action, whether through programmes led by governments, non-governmental organizations or those driven by the community, often have a positive influence on the lives of other women.

According to UNICEF (2006), one of the most important and effective avenues for women's empowerment is the dynamics of cooperation among women. The same study also confirmed that informal women's collectives organize around such issues as nutrition, food distribution, education and shelter, contributing to an improved standard of living for women, their families and communities. UNICEF (2006) contends that recognition of women's groups as important agents of empowerment and development really matters for achieving the MDGs in least developed countries like Ethiopia. In other words, governments and development agencies are highly encouraged to include women's group in poverty reduction strategies and nurture long-term partnerships (Longwe, 2000; UNICEF, 2006; Ogato, 2013). Moreover, international development agencies are encouraged to work with women's organizations at the community level and channel development resources through them in order to increase the likelihood that resources will reach the most vulnerable members of poor communities – women and children (UNICEF, 2006; Ogato, 2013).

Involving women in the early stages of policy development help ensure that programmes will be designed with the needs of women and children in mind. Grass-roots women's movements are vocal and active champions of women's equality and empowerment and have campaigned successfully for CEDAW and other conventions mandated to improve the situation of women and girls at the international level. The benefit of women's groups is even more evident at the local level, where they are working to improve the quality of life for their families

(Baden and Oxaal, 1997; MOWA, 2006; UNICEF, 2006; Ogato, 2011; Ogato, 2013).

Strengths and weaknesses of gender equality and women's empowerment efforts in Ethiopia

The strengths of gender equality and women's empowerment efforts in Ethiopia include (Cherinet and Mulugeta, 2003; MOWA, 2006; Ogato, 2009; Ogato, 2011; Ogato, 2013): the current constitution and subsequently promulgated legal reforms and policies have created an enabling environment for the promotion of gender equality and the emergence of various types of women's organizations; the main objectives of the national policy of Ethiopian women include: creating and facilitating conditions for equality between men and women, creating conditions to make rural women beneficiaries of social services like education and health, and eliminating stereotypes, and discriminatory perception and practices that constrain the equality of women; a number of strategies have been designed to achieve the policy objectives, two of which are the participation of women in the formulation of policies, laws, rules and regulations, and ensuring the democratic and human right of women; and the Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Programme (SDPRP) has embodied among other things, Harmful Traditional Practices (HTPs) in terms of public awareness, consultations with the community to enable women and girl children to benefit from development, and envisages the strengthening of the legal environment.

The weaknesses of gender equality and women's empowerment efforts in Ethiopia include: the coverage of national Ethiopian women's Policy of women's issues was limited; inadequate assessment of women's roles and responsibilities particularly in the rural community and their access to and ownership of resources. Although the document mentions women's role in decision making, it lacks a focused analysis of the serious implication of the absence of women from the arenas of decision making, the policy document fails to show the link between women's low status and their poor health. The section on harmful customs and practices should have been examined through a rights-based approach. Both the Women's Affairs Office (WAO) and the women's Affairs Departments (WADs) suffer from lack of capacity, mainly human resource; The Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Programme (SDPRP) document in general was found to be gender neutral and has not addressed the gender differentials in the indicators used; the absence of sex-disaggregated socio-economic data and the inability of the government to use such data in policies. In the summary of poverty in Ethiopia, gender has not been considered as a factor. Many of the development goals, policies, strategies or targets of poverty reduction did not incorporate gender issues.

Employment was not mentioned at all. No reference was made to gender in the environment section. The SDPRP acknowledges the need for gender sensitivity in the education and health policies and programmes for equitable development and poverty reduction, but does not directly state the importance of women in decision making to poverty reduction. The matrix describing SDPRP indicators and indicative targets have not included an intermediate outcome indicator that would measure progress towards empowerment of women and gender equality as per goal 3 of the MDG (Cherinet and Mulugeta, 2003; MOWA, 2006; Ogato, 2009; Ogato, 2011; Ogato, 2013).

Policy and strategy implications for achieving millennium development goals in Ethiopia

Based on the critical review of the status of gender equality and women's empowerment efforts in least developed countries and analysis of the current gender equality and women's empowerment efforts in Ethiopia, the following policy and strategy implications are identified for Ethiopia to achieve the millennium development goals and address gender issues in development (Elson, 1998; Gopa, 1999; FAO, 2004; Heyzer, 2005; APF and NEPAD, 2007; MOWA, 2006; Galmiche-Tejeda, and Townsend, 2006; UNICEF, 2006; Ruzvidzo, 2007; Ogato, 2009; Ogato, 2011; Ogato, 2013):

1. There is a need for a national gender policy in Ethiopia to address poverty and multidimensional empowerment of women and girls; education and training of women and girls; reproductive rights, health and HIV/AIDS; human rights and violence against women and girls; empowering women in decision-making; women and the environment; and institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women;
2. The national gender policy framework for Ethiopia should be anchored on gender equality principles, and process in which women's roles in reproduction and production are not only valued, but are seen as the core of the nation's wealth upon which national development is anchored;
3. The main thrust of the national gender policy for Ethiopia should be to promote gender-sensitive and gender responsive culture in policy planning and national development;
4. A major task in the implementation of the national gender policy for Ethiopia should be how best to confront patriarchy, exacerbated in the culture of male supremacy;
5. A key focus should be given to institutional framework in Ethiopian Gender policy which can genuinely facilitate implementation and monitoring of gender equality and women empowerment plans, programmes and projects;
6. A well coordinated gender mainstreaming framework should be ensured within and across public and private

institutions for better effectiveness and accountability in the implementation process of the policy;

7. A national gender strategic framework and action plan should be developed to be reviewed every five years to guide a system-wide approach to gender mainstreaming and implementation of the policy;
8. The presidency, the Federal Executive Council, the Legislative and Judiciary must embrace and demonstrate gender equality principles and practice for any meaningful change to occur in the wider society;
9. The core strategies for achieving the objectives of the national gender policy should include: Policy, partnership and programme; Gender education and capacity building; Legislative reforms; Economic reforms; Information communication; Research and data; and Monitoring and evaluation;
10. Line-ministries and all development sectors in Ethiopia should be able to develop gender-responsive development policies, programmes and projects;
11. The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia should strengthen institutional capacity of gender equality and women's empowerment national machineries and adapt gender-responsive budgeting system;
12. Suitable information, education, and communication campaigns should be promoted by stakeholders to deal with the social structures and traditional practices challenging the enforcement of legal policy measures; and
13. The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia should devise more practical and equitable gender equality and women's empowerment macro and micro economic policies by putting gender equality concerns at the centre of macro and microeconomic policies.

Conclusion

Gender equality and women's empowerment is at the hub of sustainable development efforts in least developed countries. In other words, without gender equality and women's empowerment policy measures it is hardly possible for least developed countries like Ethiopia to realize poverty reduction goals, millennium development targets and sustainable development objectives. Moreover, economic, legal, social, and political empowerment policy measures are all equally important to deal with the existing gender inequalities and low status of women in least developed countries and Ethiopia.

There is a need for the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia to develop a national gender policy with broad objectives. The current gender inequality and women's empowerment issues in development will be alleviated through proper national gender policy development and implementation. The action of the former Ethiopian Ministry of Women's Affairs in developing National Action Plan for Gender Equality is a good start towards realizing

gender equality and women's empowerment goals in Ethiopia.

In conclusion, the efforts being made by the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia to address gender equality and women's empowerment issue is commendable. Nevertheless, a lot has to be done for more effective gender equality and women's empowerment thereby the MDGs and sustainable development objectives will be achieved in Ethiopia. Adaptation of the good practices of gender equality and women's empowerment from different successful countries, proper implementation of the ratified international conventions on gender equality and women's empowerment and development and implementation of appropriate national gender policy will improve the condition of Ethiopian women in the years to come.

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