



**UNIVERSITY OF ICELAND**

Women's Economic Empowerment in Ethiopia:  
the Concept and the Practice

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## **Abstract**

The notion of women's empowerment has been a significant topic of discussion in global feminism for a while. Its importance is widely accepted but it has also been the object of some criticism. Development researches frame many of their interventions using different indicators of the poverty and try to address them by engaging with gender equality narratives. The aim of this PhD research proposal is to put forward a discourse analysis of the role and the unfolding of the concept of economic empowerment. It critically reviews existing feminist interpretation of the gendered implications with a special emphasis on the Ethiopian perspective on the subject.

This research proposal is divided into two parts, the first one introduces the actual proposal; the statement of the problem, the objective, the research question, the hypothesis, the methodology and the relevance of the research. The second part which contains the problem analysis focuses on the use of the concept of economic empowerment in the Ethiopian context both in private and public sphere discourses. It inquiries into the relations between human agency and social structures attempting to conceptualize and explain the practical use and misuse of the concept of empowerment and the paradoxes it entails.

# I. Introduction

## Background

Half of the world's population is composed of women. Empowering women, thus, means empowering an incredibly large number of people. However, as is well known, gender inequality is pervasive throughout the world, although the nature and extent of this inequality varies considerably across countries and regions. In most countries of the Global South, women and men do not have equal rights. There are significant gaps in terms of legal rights, access to and control over resources, economic opportunities, power, and political voice. Women and girls therefore bear the greatest and most direct costs of gender inequalities, but there are adverse impacts that affect society as a whole, ultimately harming everyone.

Empowerment is a too broad and contextual term to be given a single definition. According to Kabeer (1999:437), empowerment is a change and "it refers to expansion on people's ability to make strategic life choice in a context where this ability was previously denied to them". According to this definition, empowerment for a woman means a combination of changes in her aspiration and achievement (agency), i.e. being able to define her own life choices and to pursue her goals (Ibid). In order to be able to make choices for oneself, one needs to understand the power dynamics inherent in every society. Understanding issues concerning power and gender, therefore, is the first step forward in understanding women's empowerment.

Economic empowerment has been defined in different ways as it is processed or carried out in different contexts and realities. Department For International Development (DFID), a UK aid agency defines economic empowerment as: "a process that increases people's access to and control over economic resources and opportunities including jobs, financial services, property and other productive assets (from which one can generate an income), skills development and market information" DFID (2012). The question of this research, thus, is whether the economic empowerment of women underlines or emphasizes the discourses that are being used in the Ethiopian context and does this discourse encompasses the major indicator of economic empowerment?

The Ethiopian government has been taking measures for ending poverty and accelerating sustainable economic growth as is stated in its agenda in the Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) from 2010-2015. The plan was carried out with a clear objective focused on agro-industry, rural development, industrialization, social and human development, good governance and democratization (MoFED, 2010). It has been the major document in implementing the economic growth of the country which encompasses cross-cutting areas, such as gender equality and youth participation.

A World Bank supported project assessed in 2005, concerned with the empowerment of women in Ethiopia on economic and social aspects in rural and urban areas, showed that the status of women in the development arena was minimal both in rural and urban areas (Alsop & Heinsohn, 2005:128). The study shed light on the fact that women face constraints in accessing economic assets, which prevents them from expressing or exercising agency or self-determination.

## Problem Statement

As Ethiopia's economy is one of the fastest-growing economies in the world, there is a need to understand the discourses of women's empowerment in that context. One has to ask if this growth is inclusive or gender sensitive. Inclusive as in does it give fair and equal opportunities for all? Does the Ethiopian economy in this regard include all stakeholders especially the marginalized one, as for example women? The problem in practice is that women's economic empowerment is still lagging behind despite the rhetoric used in the economic development discourses in Ethiopia.

Ethiopia ranks 109 out of 144 countries in the world on gender gap in economic empowerment and participation, according to the data of World Economic Forum (2016). The same data shows that Ethiopia ranks number 42 in terms of the labor force participation, and 105 out of 144 on wage equality for similar work. Ethiopia ranks 45 out of 144 countries in women's political empowerment, and it is the 93 place according to women holding ministerial positions. The figures presented only show the quantity of the gap or disparities. The problem of women economic empowerment transcends in its qualitative nature and is not assessed from the ability of human agency.

## Objectives

The main objective of this research is to examine the Ethiopian government's understanding and implementation of women's economic empowerment and to what extent it has contributed to women's agency in all spheres of private and public life.

## Research questions

1. How does the Ethiopian government understand economic empowerment in its policy frameworks and discourses? How does its understanding differ with international governmental and non-governmental organization working in Ethiopia? How is economic empowerment measured? Who measures it? What kinds of measurements exist?
2. How do the Ethiopian economic empowerment policies and practices increase women's agency in socio-economic and political spheres?

## Hypotheses

- The way the government uses economic empowerment in its narrow and quantitative sense is primarily for political legitimacy rather than for a deep political commitment to women's empowerment.
- Women's economic empowerment does not necessarily contribute to their agency in the public and private spheres.

## Methodology of the research

This is a qualitative research project informed by theories and concepts from gender and development studies. It will use both, primary and secondary, sources of data. For this research project, primary data will be collected in a form of semi-structured interviews with government officials, NGOs (development aid), women's unions/ associations, women workers and women farmers. Document analysis of relevant policy documents and frameworks on development and women's economic empowerment will be assessed. Discourse analysis will be used to examine the Ethiopian governments' understanding of women's economic empowerment. The discourse analysis will help to bring the contextual understanding of the realization of empowerment in different intersectional prevalence. It will question position of women in different statuses of economy, ethnicity, urban or rural constituencies and inquires how they exercise empowerment.

## Relevance of the research

The research will improve and expand the current narrow understanding of women's economic empowerment in Ethiopian policy frameworks and measures. It will highlight the importance of human agency in women's economic empowerment. The research is intended to provide empirical analysis of the current situation of women's economic empowerment in Ethiopia. The element of empowerment in Ethiopian scholarship lacks the depth of analysis from the gender perspective, which this research focuses on. This makes this an original and crucial research in correlating the core element of empowerment and development, which is human agency and capability.

## II. Problem Analysis

### Conceptual and Theoretical framework

#### 1. Conceptualizing economic empowerment

Feminist understanding of equality underpins my analysis of what it means to be empowered for women. The term 'empowerment' is used by a wide range of social actors with significantly different ideological and political positions to denote an array of different meanings (Sardenberg, n.d.). Its loose usage, especially in the 'development lexicon' and governmental and policy-making discourses indicates its ambiguous status. Some feminist critics have questioned its usage (ibid). Kabeer argues for this very reason that empowerment needs to be scrutinized from an advocacy point of view where empowerment of women is defined from a feminist perspective and deployed in a development agenda on the basis of its intrinsic goals (Kabeer, 1999). Where choice is the main element in actualizing power, the space where one exercises one's empowered ability must be considered in a collective manner to challenge the status quo. Social relations, thus, need to be understood in terms of power relations in order to capture the meaning of empowerment.

The concept of empowerment has been one of the key terms in equality work especially after the 1970's the concept got moment in many development discourses (Rowlands, 1997). However, it is one of the most difficult to work with, as no consensus has been reached on its meaning and its effectiveness. It gives policy makers and feminists both an easy and a hard task to engage with. Some find it easy because it has not been clearly defined and it, therefore, allows for diverse interpretations and implementations; others find it hard to subscribe to the action it supposedly implies. This contradictory status of the notion as well as its contextual interpretation makes the notion of empowerment hard to evaluate it from a single focal point.

What is empowerment?

Empowerment has been defined in many different ways by a number of scholars and philosophers. It is both a very broad and contextual term and has no single definition. According to Kabeer (1999: 436), empowerment involves a change: "it refers to expansion on people's ability to make strategic life choice in a context where this ability was previously denied to them". One way to think about the meaning of the word 'power', which is the core of the word 'empowerment' is Foucault's understanding of it. For him, it is a free exercise of relationships it navigates; for there is no way one can exercise power in bondage. Power is a relational entity that exists in an exercise. It is constituted in social relationships among subjects who have a minimum extent of freedom (Rowlands, 1997). Power, says Foucault "is not simply a relationship between partners, individual or collective; it is a way in which certain actions modify others" (Foucault, 1982:786). Power exists only when it is put into action: "A power relationship can only be articulated on the basis of two elements which are each indispensable if it is really to be a power relationship: that "the other" be thoroughly recognized." (Foucault, 1982: 787).



Foucault's example of slavery shows in what way power can be understood with regard to recognizing the other". As he puts it: "a slave in chains has no possibility of movement or resistance and is situated in a context of violence and domination, not power" (Deveaux, 1994). This shows that power entails freedom to be exercised. A subject who is exercising power or dominating should make the other i.e. the dominated one free, otherwise it is not considered as exercising power if the other agent is in bondage. For Foucault power exist in hierarchy and in relation, power does not exist in vacuum. "Power relations and the intransitivity of freedom is a permanent political task inherent in all social existence" (Foucault, 1982). Hierarchies in societies be they political, economic, or social rest in the very nature of power relation where one acts upon the other.

### How does power work in empowerment?

In his book *Questioning Empowerment* (1997), Rowland argues that to understand the notion of empowerment, we need to scrutinize, critically, the concept of power. Power for him can be understood in the light of four forms it takes: "power over", "power to", "power with" and "power from within". Rowland explains each of these forms in the following way:

- **Power over:** is a power control where one balances the resistance or obedience of power which deteriorates the processes of oppression.
- **Power to:** a productive power which allows free and creative possibilities to attain things without domination.
- **Power with:** communal work effort to the betterment of a whole which persevere greater outcome as a group.
- **Power from within:** a self confidence and self-esteem that is within one's own being which entails self-worth and respect which transcends to accept and respect others (Rowlands, 1997:13).

Rowland's conception of power examines empowerment from power's different forms; "power over" thus gives voice and the ability to make a decision equipping subjects with self-confidence and self-reliance. It can be related it to subjects asking for capabilities and the ensuing agency they demand. Decision-making refers both to the private and the public spheres, whether it refers to participation in a political or other structural arenas. Thus, empowerment means encompassing and involving decision makers who were outside the circle of decision making and involving them to be part of the bigger circle. (Rahman, 2013).

Empowerment entails a need to have the ability to make and act through decisions and to control resources and profits. In this regard, empowerment for women means a combination of change in their aspiration and achievement (agency), which is, being able to define their own life and choose to peruse their goals. In making a choice by oneself, one needs to understand the power dynamics that exists in society. Understanding issues concerning power and gender is, therefore, a first step forward in understanding women's empowerment. In

other words: “[E]mpowerment entails a process of change. People who exercise a great deal of choice in their lives may be very powerful, but they are not empowered” (Kabeer, 2005:13). Choices come in different ways and are constituted for men and women in different modalities; poverty and disempowerment go hand in hand and in the case where people’s situation makes it impossible for them to make a choice, because of lack of basic needs for example, the capacity of meaningful choice is absent.

The realm of “power to” and “power with” are captured through empowerment with the influence the subject exercises in applying the decision making to others. By becoming aware of their interest, people, therefore, relate to the need of influencing others through their decision (Rowlands, 1997). Not being aware of the oppression of societal structures in regard to their participation in decision- making, deprives women of fully exercising their capabilities. Thus, empowerment should not only involve a decision-making ability but also removal of the negative social construction to make it possible for people to act and influence on the basis of their decisions.

This is consistent with Naila Kabeer’s analysis. She also captures the element of empowerment from the perspective of structural ability or disability. Having the agency of making decisions and the need to be in a position of power to be able to be empowered. She claims that empowerment should be complimented with free choice and equal access to resources to exercise this choice; it needs to be entrenched in the ability to make decision by the free choice one is endowed. Institutions that make decisions and choices should be equally accessible to everyone.

Equality has a lot to do with the concept of empowerment, for empowering, for example, women in the economic sphere without equality can lead to disempowerment rather than empowerment. Equality does not just mean equal number of men and women in a given sector, it is about power as much as it is about projects; it is about policies as much as programs. It is also about what kind of power positions are given to or taken on between men and women.

In the same token, empowerment can also be understood, as Kabeer suggests, in the light of three dimensions: resource, agency and achievement:

**A. Resource:** which is a pre-condition not only material but various social and human resources that actualize the ability to exercise power. “It’s the ability to define priorities and enforce claims”; it is the element of decision making.

**B. Agency:** which is the process that encompasses decision-making. It has both positive and negative definitions positively it can resonate “power to” which refer to people’s capacity of choice and pursue their own goals no matter objection arises from others. In the negative sense of it, “power over” agency can be overriding the choice of others sometimes resulting on violence.

**C. Achievement:** can be understood as the outcome of resource and agency. The outcome of both can be constituted from capabilities where people actualize their potential to live the life they want. The freedom to make the choice and achieving the value of being (Kabeer, 1999).

Kabeer identifies resources as the primary dimension of power, referring not only to material means but, the various human and social resources that serve to enhance the ability to exercise choice (Kabeer, 1999). The other two dimensions are consistent with, Alsop's and Heinsohn's views that empowerment involves "enhancing an individual's or group's capacity to make choices and transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes" (Alsop & Heinsohn, 2005: 5). Thus agency which is structured in degrees of empowerment can have different scale of measurement for example if a person really have the opportunity to choose, 2<sup>nd</sup> whether that person really exercise the opportunity to choose and 3<sup>rd</sup> if the outcome is desirable once the choice is made (ibid).

### Economic empowerment

Economic empowerment is defined by DFID as "a process that increases people's access to and control over economic resources and opportunities including jobs, financial services, property and other productive assets (from which one can generate an income), skills development and market information" (2012:44). Economic empowerment refers to people's ability to make a choice in developing economically, but it needs free institutions with equal access to all. It is the power of agency and accesses to use resources which benefit better livelihood and quality of life. Economic empowerment can be defined as a "multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. It is a process that fosters power in people, for use in their own lives, their communities, and in their society, by acting on issues that they define as important" (Bayeh, 2016). It can be attained by involving the action of boosting the status of women through literacy, education, training and raising awareness.

OECD, underlines economic empowerment for women as:

... a prerequisite for sustainable development and pro poor growth. Achieving women's economic empowerment requires sound public policies, a holistic approach and long-term commitment and gender-specific perspectives must be integrated at the design stage of policy and programming. Women must have more equitable access to assets and services; infrastructure programmes should be designed to benefit the poor, both men and women, and employment opportunities must be improved while increasing recognition of women's vast unpaid work. Innovative approaches and partnerships include increased dialogue among development actors, improved co-ordination amongst donors and support for women organizing at the national and global level (OECD, 2012:3).

By contextualizing the need of women and adopting a holistic approach of involving women from different categories, economic empowerment must be perceived as the liberating element of women in bondage, which gives them a human agency to make free choice to exercise power. Donor-centered empowerment must consider context in interpreting discourses of empowerment. Economic empowerment increases women's access to economic resources and opportunities including jobs, financial services, property and other productive assets, skills development and market information. It is central to process of maintain benefits at all level: household, community and broader level (Bayeh, 2016).

Participating in economic empowerment has many indicators we must embark on to unbundle the complexity of the notion of empowerment. Next sub-topic will deal with the concept itself and the feminist interpretations of it.

## 2. Feminist interpretation of economic empowerment

The notion of empowerment has entailed many scholarly interpretations, focusing on the question of gender rights and equality. The concept empowerment comprises a history of social change. It is linked to feminist consciousness and collective action which intertwined itself with international development around the 1970 and the emphasis on the need to transform power relations for women to gain equality and full right (Cornwall, 2014). Since the feminist discourses shifted to gender equality, two modalities have taken place in approaching the question of gender economic equality; the question of women development and women empowerment the misuse or ambiguous usage of the term “empowerment” in development researches and practice masks a problematic concept which leads to unclear actions (ibid: 3), this misusing of the term is due to the unclear definition of its root word ‘power’. Rowlands look at the concept of women empowerment from both development and gender perspective and says that both notions do not capture the total picture of what empowerment means (Rowlands, 1997).

Empowerment is about changing the position of those who used to exercise little or no power over their own lives. “Power having two central aspects – control over resources (physical, human, intellectual, financial, and the self), and control over ideology (beliefs, values and attitudes), then empowerment therefore, is the process of gaining control” (Cornwall, 2014). The realization of women to develop themselves and take crucial power positions leading them to make decision on their own and part-take in action on political spectrum to emancipate other women is important in understanding notion of empowerment. Feminist theorists, such as Kabeer, have suggested that resources can be a primary dimension of power from the focal point of not only material but also various human and social resources, which serve to enhance the ability to exercise choice (Kabeer, 1999). The need to reciprocate the self-understanding and capacity in self-expression has to transcend in their ability to access resources and to control over the resources they have, not just to alleviate poverty: “the kind of changes that can transform the root causes of that poverty and begin to address the deep structural basis of gender inequality. The conditions need to be fostered for shifts in consciousness so that women understand their situations and come together to bring about change that can benefit not only them, but also other women” Cornwall,2014).

In her book *The Psyche Life of Power*, Judith Butler points out that the subjection of power relations hide or are unnoticed by the discourse we use to interpret power; the paradox of not recognizing the subject the power is being posed to makes it (i.e. the subject) sustain its agency (Butler, 1997). Thus “subjugation signifies the process of becoming subordinated by power as well as the process of becoming a subject” (bid: 2).

In understanding how power works, it is important to question ways of actualizing freedom and obstacles in context of women in order to encapsulate the notion of what it means to exercise power in Foucauldian terms. Monique Deveaux examines this notion in two ways: the fact that society looks at women from the perspective of motherhood or caregiver, and

on the basis of “shame”. In these circumstances, women are portrayed in such a way that they are removed from the main decision-making arena and are made to feel shame. As Deveaux (1994: 234) writes, “[t]he heightened self-consciousness that comes with emotions of self-assessment may become ... a stagnant self-obsession.” This could develop from the shame surrounding oppression, further disempowering women in all power relations.

Deveaux criticized the power relations of free agents that Foucault argues, and assumes that Foucault does not look at notion of freedom from the women’s perspective, where structural inequalities are clearly visible and patriarchal violence is inflicted upon them. Although the importance of freedom cannot be denied in the way to empowerment, the reality still indicates that the kinds of freedoms enjoyed differ when put into context of other women and me. Society in its embedment of culture and norm endowed men the higher attainable freedom where in most cultures it denied the women. Shortage of this grant makes the women lack the inclusivity of enjoying what true empowerment may constitute. Thus, this lack of power makes empowerment empty to the extent of being disempowered.

By the same token, Sen’s capabilities approach from the light of feminist interpretation of the concept of economic empowerment deals with the quality of livelihood starting from basic needs to those that equates women with men. Sen argues that because it is not possible to conceptualize empowerment only from the income-centered approach it is important to put emphasis on the need to nourish freedom; to live disease-free lives, to be able to move around, to be educated, to participate in public life, and so on (Sen, 2005). Capabilities’ approach captures the human life and its quality, where it deals with action of doing which “realities the evaluation of quality of life to the assessment of the capabilities to functioning” (Sen, n.d.:43). Poverty, says Sen, is deprivation of these capabilities, which is even worse when looking at it from the angle of women, where it is incomparable to that of men. Development studies lack the study of deprivation of capabilities from the human agency perspective when it comes to women. Kogge takes his argument and adds that the deficit of actualizing women in quality education, health, political participation and economic participation has been the main reason in the drawback of women in the decision-making arena and disempowering them in all levels (Kogge, 2013). Thus, removal of gender inequalities is a transcendental notion where not only women, but to their whole family and the society as whole, which will benefit from it.

Economic empowerment is perceived as a tool for gender equality. According to Blumberg (2005), it enables the woman to make decision on her own where the well-being of her family will be fulfilled and the self-confidence will allow her to have a voice. The need to economically empower women means actualizing a human agency, where other women in the house hold, e.g. daughters will be given an equal chance for basic education and access to advance and grow like their male counterparties. Blumberg also states that gender equality in empowering women economically benefits the macro-level economy of the World. A true world economy growth has to subscribe women's empowerment with bases of free and equal access to human agency, where right of projected voices (i.e. human agency) and resources (i.e. material and capacity) are being fully utilized. Feminists thus try to look at empowerment from many outlooks and what one finds in most of the literature about empowerment is a common denominator of human agency which was denied to women due to different cultural or social norms.

Research showed that empowerment is perceived, for example, by South Asian feminists as an emancipatory project, where it needed to be actualized at the grassroots level, this was due to the post 1975 women's movement, which then grew in the 1980s, when governments started to plan development as an agenda for rural development (Biewener & Bacqué, 2015). The question of empowerment, at this point, geared up a notion of political and social change regarding subjectivity, agency and identity. At the time of the women's movement, the top-down approach by government was criticized for the mere idea it had concern only in welfare for women as a "beneficiary" which alienated her from her sense of self-determination, but soon after that the rural development agenda was redesigned as a bottom-up approach, which triangulates empowerment from its root (ibid).

Feminists insisted that not only communal or self-organized movements of emancipation are needed, but that it is necessary to empower women on an individual level. Thus, a feminist empowerment necessitates the four components of power within, power to, power over and power with, which were explained above. The feminist who works on empowerment dwells more on psychological assets, which go beyond material, social and financial assets, where actors or subjects need "a raised level of consciousness if they are to translate their assets into choices- that is, to become agents" (Biewener & Bacqué, 2015:64). Agency must take a central part of empowerment in recognizing the ability of free choice and equal access to power. It needs to be incorporated in the actions of economically empowered women in all its indicators like health, education, political participation, income and many more.

In her work, Butler is known to conceptualize gender performativity, where she says that performativity deals with agency where the human freedom is exercised. The performativity of gender, as she puts it, deals with which people counts as lives, as who is a person who is actualized as full subject, where her/his voice matters (Butler, 2009). Societal norms, thus, not only make us perceive whose lives matter, but they also gender us and presuppose our actions on how we act as gendered beings. Butler points out that norms act on us before we are able to act on them (ibid). This means that before we can choose to act on certain gender norms, the norms themselves precondition us on how to act. In this forced action of norms on ourselves we are then forced to ask: where is the human agency one exercises full right and freedom on?

If people were to act on their desire, says Butler, it is considered as acting against the fixed norms by society (Butler, 2009). So, if women, for example, try changing social norms because they do not enunciate their interests, will society hold them against this? In many societies we do witness the questioning of equality of gender roles as a taboo, just because it is not the norm. But the questioning of such norms must continue until it becomes the norm accepted by all and puts into consideration all lives to be counted and all matters. It is when such questions are framed and asked that the human agency is actualized and freedom is exercised on behalf of all; where all voices echo the equity of ontology. Where power relations are fairly recognizing the distribution of capital and resources, where the accessibility of development is shared equally and with notion of quality, where the capabilities of human beings are attained for sake of growth, these are the questions that societies should make their founding grounds.



### 3. Discourse on women's empowerment in Ethiopia

Ethiopia is a country that is striving to elevate itself from poverty and develop its economy for a better future. The country is trying to bring women's role in economic development to the forefront. Being one of the fastest growing countries economically (FDRE, 2011), Ethiopia needs to include women in this growth. However, with a cultural background of gender-based discrimination and inequalities, the number of women in the work force is still insignificant. According to the World Economic Forum (2016), the economic participation ratio of female to male was 0.60 where the wage equality gap was 0.57 and gap on legislator, senior officials and managers was 0.36. Although the government is striving to alleviate the problem at hand, it is not easy to breach the gap of low empowerment and gender pay gap (Bayeh, 2016).

The government of Ethiopia has taken the economic growth in a direction of more sustainable approach with numerous indicators put into consideration. It has implemented the Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP), which was prepared to strategically plan the development in social and economic growth of the country. The GTP I was carried out by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (MoFED) for the year 2005–2010, which was amended and carried on for the next fiscal years from 2010–2015. In the GTP I, the government was able to cover many areas of development with a special focus on meeting Millennium Development Goal (MDG) on "accelerated, sustained and broad based economic development" (MoFED, 2002).

GTP I was a more comprehensive and broadly-based and was implemented in 2002. It was known as Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Program (SDPRP). The adoption of the SDPRP was more of a donor-mandated requirement from the international organizations, mainly World Bank and IMF. The article looked at the GTP I from two perspectives of economic growth and social development. The economic growth was dated back from 1957 in recording different growth regarding different economic sectors up to the present, where a broad-based sustainable development was introduced in 2002 (Adugna, 2015). The Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction program was officially launched in 2005 and it implemented poverty reduction with different ministries and regional state governments in the country. The growth and transformation Plan had agenda on fast growth and development to accelerate growth on agriculture and advanced industry. Numbers and facts show the fast growth of the country, where the first recorded economic growth after the introduction of GTP was 10.1 percent ("GTP Main document - Vol 1 - Resources - MOFEC," 2010).

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has ranked Ethiopia among the five fastest growing economies in the World (Adugna, 2015). This record was achieved during the implementation of GTP I, when opportunities of new jobs' creation and youth employment in both, private and public, sectors were achieved. Poverty reduction was high and the Human Development Index rose from 0.284 in 2000 0.435 in 2013 (ibid). Even though there was a fast growth and an increase in life expectancy and better health services took place, the country maintained

the lowest income inequalities when the social development was not aggregated by gender and the focus of measurement of growth continued to be quantitative. The discourse on the GTP lacked a deep analysis of social element of growth, and aggregated data measuring economic growth. The gender blind assessment it presents made it difficult to know exactly what it means to be economically empowered.

The scholarly literature shows that to achieve better development an incorporation of both men and women in the development sector is needed in Ethiopia. In their study on microfinance and women empowerment and role of institutions, Haile, Bock and Folmar (2012) showed that microfinance opportunities designed for the poor helps to foster the economic growth by easily enabling access to microfinances; besides elevating the societies from poverty it has helped advance their empowerment. However empirical data in the same study revealed that the dynamics of empowerment regarding sex, class and ethnicity is very diverse. Women in the microfinance programs face different challenges and opportunities on social and cultural intake of empowerment from that of men in the same society. In some parts of the society, the idea of empowering women have been a success in such that women were able to reduce poverty at household level and were able to be make decisions and change the livelihoods of their children by improving the access to basic needs, such as food, clothing and education (ibid). Women were able to take care of themselves, and even marital conflict was reduced due to the outcome of women's ownership of assets and better income. Shared division of domestic labor was introduced at some societal settings and recognition of this division and implementation produced a peaceful interaction households.

However, this very study also demonstrated the lack of empowerment the microfinance programme has had for women. It shows that a part of society are double-burdened women with the domestic work load (Haile et al., 2012). Mothers who borrowed money were busy working outside the household to pay the debt while their daughters were taking the part of their mothers at home and performing the household chores, which led to girls not attending and, at times, dropping out of school. The programme was also a cause of marital disputes in some cases, where wives had problems with decision-making and some were being forced to take a loan through their husbands, while the husbands spent the money and were unable to pay it back (ibid).

As Ogato (2013) points out, there is a need to change the traditional structures, which are detrimental to women in a community, and this requires institutional reform. Traditionally, women have been given space only in domestic housework and to change this reality people's behavior must be influenced to protect and realize the interest of women by institutional reforms and ways of incentivizing the reform mechanism. A bottom-up approach in changing gender power relation is important in reforming institutions; equipping women and men in building the worldview of equal share of power and decision making by fostering education and awareness raising. The participation of women in development is an important element

and Ethiopia has recognized the importance of women's participation in development activities and remarks this participation as a building block for its future prosperity.

The need to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MGD) has encouraged the government of Ethiopia to introduce different indicators of development and pressured implementers in different developmental sectors urging them to meet the target. The urgency of the MGD was highly reflected, for example, on developmental health sector on 1 Million Community Health Workers' Campaign, providing health services where there were no or few doctors available. The campaign had both, positive and negative, aspects where extension health workers were massively trained to handle uncomplicated procedure, especially in the pre-natal and post-natal stage when the community health workers or extension health officers communicated with communities and created awareness on primary health care, which the MGD were focused on (Maes, Closser, Vorel, & Tesfaye, 2015). The problem of this specific program in Ethiopia lays in funding as the country started to train large number of extension workers but did not have a sustainable budget to pay the workers. At times, there was a fear that with this many trained workers job creation could elapse into volunteerism (ibid). The majority of these extension workers are women, and an article by Maes, Closser, Vorel and Tesfay (2015), further explains that the budget for the low salary that the extension workers were paid from sometimes was deducted from the army's budget. The same article also showed that the need the government is portraying a picture of a better health care is underlining an image for the donors and NGOs which lacks empathy and concern for some categories especially women in this case which hamper their social and economic existence. This program thus, relies on unpaid women's labor, which alienates any type of economic empowerment a women may wish for; the absence of payment deprives her of economic decision-making both at home and in the work place makes the vulnerability even worse for the majority of women in the rural part of Ethiopia.

With all these challenges at hand, the discourses that are circulated by the government of Ethiopia and donors at times is the valuable work that is being done in saving lives of mothers and babies and empowerment of women in the country which goes hand in hand with work ethics; serving ones country for the better good and creating model citizens for others to copy (Maes et al., 2015). As such, the true connotation of empowerment needs to be re-examined and deconstructed at all levels.

Development research on women and girls has shown that investing in women is more profitable in terms of money because women and girls work more efficiently than men, even though 70% of the World's poor are women (Shain, 2013). Women and girls have better rate of loan repayment in time and invest most of their income in their families. Because of this sort of research findings international organizations, e.g. World Bank, have deployed countries to adopt their public economic policies to what they call "smart economy" that mainstreams gender in all its aspects at all levels (ibid). As most of other Global South countries, Ethiopia has taken the path of neoliberal approach to economic development, which resulted in

impoverishment and marginalization women of the South. Governments adapt measurements brought to them by international organizations without really examining if they work in their contexts; this and other control mind game by big international organizations and the interest to get loans on the side of Global South governments is jeopardizing the true actualization of human agency and empowerment, especially to women and girls everywhere in the developing world.

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