Affirmative action for women in higher education and the civil service: The case of Ethiopia
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Chapter 4

4. Description of the Case Studies and Status of Women in Ethiopia

This chapter starts by briefly describing the study area followed by an overview of women’s position in Ethiopia. It reviews gender relations in a historical perspective and examines the influence of the past in contemporary political systems as far as women’s position is concerned. In particular, the focus of the study is from the introduction of a written constitution under the imperial regime in 1930 to the present. The chapter also identifies the major factors that affect women educational attainment and employment opportunities with special emphasis on the socio-cultural, politico-economical and legal barriers to women’s participation.

4.1 Description of the case studies

Ethiopia is an East African country bordered by Eritrea to the north, Kenya to the south, Djibouti and Somalia to the east, as well as Sudan and South Sudan to the west. Ethiopia is the second-most populous country, after Nigeria, on the African continent with around 90,000,000 inhabitants. Ethiopia has a total area of 1,127,127 square kilometers (CIA Fact book: 2013). The capital of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, is the largest city located in the heart of Ethiopia, serving as the headquarters of the African Union. Ethiopia was the only African country beside Liberia that was never colonized during the era of “the scramble for Africa”; which derives many African nations to adopt the colors of Ethiopia’s flag when they gained independence after World War II. In addition to serving
as the seat of African Union, Addis Ababa has become the location of several United Nations and other global institutions that have focus in Africa.

Ethiopia’s economy is based on agriculture which accounts for 41% of GDP and 85% of total employment (Ibid). According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Ethiopia was amongst the few countries that have registered fastest growing economies in the world since 2004. In spite of this fast growth in recent years, GDP per capita is one of the lowest in the world, $1,200 (Ibid). The death rate was estimated at 10.79 deaths per 1,000 people, and the birth rate was 38.5 births per 1,000 people (Ibid). According to a World Bank report published in 2012, 55.81 percent of the population is between the ages of 15 to 64, and only 16.7 percent of the population lives in urban areas.

Ethiopia is home to diverse cultures and ethnic groups with as many as eighty languages; their diversity further signifies their distinctiveness in terms of culture, belief, language and way of life. Based on the 2007 Census conducted by the Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia (CSA), the population of Ethiopia is around 90 million with 50.3% women and around 49.7% male. Despite ethnic, religious and cultural diversity, attitudes towards women remain relatively similar particularly in the rural societies. That is to say, women are disadvantaged in terms of various socio-economic variables across the different ethnic as well as religious groups. Women across the country suffer from high illiteracy rate, access fewer opportunities for education and employment thereby subjected to physical hardship throughout their lives. Many of the ethnic groups in the country are yet practicing harmful traditional practices against women. Despite the socio-cultural variations across different identity groups in the country, women’s role particularly in rural Ethiopia is assumed only as a wife and mother.

4.1.1 The Federal Government of Ethiopia

Since the emergence of modern Ethiopia during the era of Menelik II\textsuperscript{16}, the country had a century-old tradition of unitary and centralized rule. Soon after Emperor Menelik

\textsuperscript{16} Menelik II was Emperor of Ethiopia from 1889-1913.
incorporated the western, eastern and southern parts of the territories that constitute contemporary Ethiopia, successive regimes both imperial and military regimes had administered the country in a highly centralized unitary fashion until the introduction of a federal administrative structure in the mid-1990s under the current regime. In the aftermath of the fall of the military regime in 1991, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF)\textsuperscript{17}-led transitional government had drafted a Transitional Charter of Ethiopia in 1991 that guaranteed the rights of “Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia to self-determination”, which in turn paved the way for a decentralization of power (Negarit Gazetta 22 July 1991:2). Sooner, National/Regional Self-Government Establishment Proclamation No.7/1992 was passed that resulted in the birth of 14 National/Regional self-governments. In 1995 Ethiopia has adopted a new constitution that established the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) comprising of nine ethno-linguistically divided regional states\textsuperscript{18} and two chartered federal cities.\textsuperscript{19} As the nature and scope of the distribution of power between the federal and regional governments vary between the two levels of government, both have parallel legislative, executive and judicial powers. The FDRE constitution accords regional states residual power, wherein all powers not expressly assigned to the federal government or concurrently to the Federal government and the States are reserved for the States (FDRE Constitution 1995: Article 52 (1)). Apparently, both the federal and state institutions are responsible for facilitating the overall socio-economic and political transformation of the country.

\textsuperscript{17} The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) is the ruling political coalition in Ethiopia since 1991 up to present day. EPRDF that was established in 1989 comprises of four ethnic-based political organizations namely: Tigray People’s Liberation Front (founded in 1975), Amhara National Democratic Movement (founded in 1982), Oromo People’s Democratic Organization (founded in 1990) and Southern Ethiopia Peoples Democratic Movement (founded in 1992).

\textsuperscript{18} The Constitution Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Proclamation No. 1, 1995, Article 47(1) lists the following nine regions: the State of Tigray, the State of Afar, the State of Amhara, the State of Oromio, the State of Somalia, the State of Benshangul/Gumuz, the State of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples, the State of Gambella and the State of Harari People.

\textsuperscript{19} Chartered cities have a full measure of self government defined by the city’s own charter. The city of Addis Abeba and Dire Dawa are organized as the two chartered cities.
4.1.2 The Afar Regional State

As mentioned above, under the current federal administrative structure of Ethiopia, there are nine ethno-linguistically divided regional states and two chartered cities. The Afar State is among these nine member states within the federation. The Afar State, which is a homeland to the Afar people with a new capital Samara is located in northeast of Ethiopia. The Afar lowlands stretch from the Awash River (225 km east of the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa) in the south, to the borders adjacent to Eritrea and Djibouti in the north. With an estimated area of over 100,000 km², the region comprises five Zonal administrations and 32 Districts. Based on the 2007 Census conducted by the Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia (CSA), the total population of the Afar regional state is estimated at about 1,390,273 out of which 775,117 are men and 615,156 are women. The urban communities in Afar region account for 188, 135 or 13.4% while 409,123 or 29.4% were pastoralists (CSA; 2008:34). This region is characterized by hot climatic conditions with low and irregular rainfall. The Afars predominant inhabitants of the region are mainly pastoralists that adopt seasonal movements in search of water and pasture land in order to survive the harsh and inhospitable weather conditions. There are also agro-pastoralists in the Afar region who depend entirely on the Awash River basin.

Nevertheless, the Afar region remains one of the most economically neglected regions in Ethiopia due to various inter-related factors. Apart from the marginalization of the Afar people who were partitioned into five administrative provinces within the country, ill-conceived development projects in the Afar area during the consecutive regimes have failed to help improve the socio-economic wellbeing of the society. There are still only three high schools in the entire region which are located in government owned large scale agricultural plantation areas where the number of immigrant workers and their families widely outnumber the local Afars (APDA, 2009).

Although a relatively significant development endeavour has been undertaken in the Afar region since the establishment of the federal regional states in Ethiopia, the Afar women still face huge disadvantages in many aspects. They are burdened with extensive activities ranging from domestic works to the construction of a temporary Afar house,
Ari. They are victims of a harsh environment and harmful traditional practices including female genital mutilation and a forced marriage. Nowadays, Afar women are so severely affected by HIV/AIDS epidemic as well as poor access to education this in turn has influenced the status of women in the politico-economic sphere of the region (Ibid).

4.1.3 The Tigray Regional State

The Tigray Regional State, located in the Northern part of Ethiopia, constitutes one of the nine regional states of the Ethiopian Federation. The Tigray region covers an area of 50,000 km² and divided in six Zonal administrative divisions and 35 Districts (http://www.ethiopia.gov.et/English/Information/Pages/StateTigray.aspx). Based on the 2007 Census conducted by the Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia (CSA), the Tigray Region has an estimated total population of 4,314,456, of which 2,124,853 are men and 2,189,603 women (CSA, 2008:34). The urban inhabitants number 842,723 or 19.53% of the total population. In addition to the patriarchal nature of the Tigray culture, significant influence of religion against women’s advancement has inhibited the progress of women in the society (Hammond, 1999). Tigray women were also particularly disadvantaged due to recurrent drought, famine and wars. Losing the breadwinners for their families in the ongoing battles shouldered the Tigray women the burden of performing ‘men’s roles’.

As is the case for all women of rural Ethiopia, Tigray women are entirely burdened with domestic work; although some may help their husbands in the farm field. Apart from very limited access to schools during the imperial and the military regimes, Tigrean girls were not traditionally expected to attend school after elementary level. Eventhough the participation of women in the armed struggle of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) helped to change societal attitudes and relatively enhanced women’s involvement in politics, the overall socio-cultural and politico-economical transformation of both urban and rural Tigrean women still remains low. Similar to women all over Ethiopia, Tigrean women today still face chains of problems such as low rate of literacy, high rate of family dissolution and widowhood, highly exposed to unwanted pregnancy and pandemic diseases like HIV/AIDS.
4.2 Women’s position in Ethiopia: Historical Context

Rita Pankhurst (1995) reminds us all about women’s position in the history of Ethiopia, “Lucy\(^2\) alias Dinknesh - literally "you are lovely" - is the first woman in Ethiopian history, indeed in the history of the world.” Ethiopia has a long recorded history of women’s significant role on the overall socio-economic and politico-military developments of the country. The legendary Queen Sheba of the Axumite kingdom; the founder of the Zagwe dynasty, Queen Yodit; and Empress Eleni, who had, exerted political influence for over half-a-century in the 15\(^{th}\) Century Ethiopian politics were few among the prominent women personalities in Ethiopian history. Moreover, the brave warrior Dele-Wan-Bara, the daughter of Imam Mahfuz, governor of Zayla and wife of the ruler of the Adal kingdom, nicknamed ‘Ahmed Gragn’; the 18\(^{th}\) Century great Empress Mentewab who was regent at the Gondar palace for over three decades; Empress Taytu Betul, a strong and the strategist wife of Emperor Menelik II, were also among those women who hold a remarkable place in the history of Ethiopia. Nevertheless, their significant contribution in all spheres of the country’s affairs could not match with the general women’s status in then and today’s Ethiopia.

4.2.1 Women’s organizations

\(^2\) Lucy (*Australopithecus afarensis*), primitive hominids estimated to have lived about 3.2 million years ago are discovered in 1974 at Hadar along the Awash Valley Basin in Afar Depression of Ethiopia. The four Americans and seven French participants in the expedition team that discovered the skeleton of the earliest human origin, gathered on the evening of 24 November 1974 to celebrate the success at their camp and nicknamed the skeleton as Lucy, after the Beatles song "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds", which was being played repeatedly on a tape recorder. Lucy also has been given a second name, meaning *Dinkeneshe*, meaning "you are amazing" in Amharic.
Women’s active involvement in Ethiopian modern politics can be traced back to over half-a-century although hardly with any clear-cut policies and principles concerning their participation. During the imperial regime, there had existed various non-governmental organizations which were managed by women believed to have had some gender related practices. The Ethiopian Women’s Volunteer Service Association (EWVSA), which was formed during the Italo-Ethiopian War in 1935, was the first nationwide association launched by some women members of the nobility. The primary goal of this organization was to create a favorable environment for aid from the International Red Cross Association during the 1935-41 Italian invasion of Ethiopia. Originally, it was established for supporting resistance fighters against the Italian occupation by supplying provisions and food for the resistance fighters. After the war, the focus of the association shifted mainly to training young women in handicrafts, cooking, secretarial work etc (Zenebework; 1976:49). By looking at the training activities given to women at the time, one could contend that EWVSA has rather reinforced the existing order of patriarchy by confining women just to cooking and handicrafts which were already designated traditional jobs for them. Moreover, the entire activities of EWVSA have focused exclusively on the interests of urban women particularly those in the capital, Addis Ababa with little consideration to the majority of rural women.

The Armed Forces Wives Association (AFWA) was another association that was organized in the 1950s by one of the then prominent women activists, Sendu Gebru\textsuperscript{21} to support widows and children of the resistant fighters following the Italo-Ethiopian war. AFWA was originally established as a welfare organization with limited scope of protecting only the wellbeing of particular group of women and children whose spouses and fathers were in the battlefield. Though assisting women and children in the absence of the men who are breadwinners for a family during wartimes have had positive roles in the society, the organization had neither the capacity to involve the majority of the Ethiopian women nor had it any impact on gender policies, laws and programs. Later, the

\textsuperscript{21} Sendu Gebru was an author, activist, patriot and the first Ethiopian woman parliamentarian. She was also the first Ethiopian school directress of Etege Menen School where she has done a remarkable job in promoting girls education.
Ethiopian Young Women’s Christian Association (EYWCA) that was established in the 1960s was mainly engaged in voluntary and charity oriented activities without a much contributing role in driving the gender problem into the national scene (Paulos, 2011: 230).

Following the expulsion of the Italians, the EWVSA that was dissolved in 1936 was re-established and renamed as the Ethiopian Women Welfare Association (EWWA). It was originally founded in 1931 by Empress Menen and was led by the eldest daughter of the Emperor, Princess Tenagnework till its dissolution in 1974 when the military regime came to power. The organization, as its predecessors, was set up to help the poor, widows, and victims of Italo-Ethiopia war. It was focused on education and training of women either with handicrafts and better child-care roles. In order to perform its activities, the association established schools, clinics and orphanages for the poor with branches in various cities. EWWA had 40 branches\textsuperscript{22} in various cities throughout the country and administered by local people and local funds. The organization focused on bringing back women into their prior position after the end of the war.

In general, the women’s institutions activity in the 1950’s focused on addressing practical needs of women. They undertook various income-raising activities and ran programs such as maternal and childcare services, vocational training schools for women, orphanages and income generating activities for women of low-income groups (Abebech, 1983: 27). It has also been reported that the first lottery venture in Ethiopia was launched by women’s organizations, which was later confiscated by the military regime in 1974. Proceeds from the lotteries helped to address women’s needs and support the work of the organization. In essence, these clearly demonstrate that the associations have focused on reinforcing the relegated role of women focused reaching on their immediate needs with no emphasis for long term and sustainable remedies for their deep-rooted challenges.

Following the 1974 Revolution, which brought the military regime to power, the issue of women in the society had to be brought to the public forum as the new leaders declared

\textsuperscript{22} Harar orphanage, Dessie free clinic and adult classes, Gonder orphanage and Jimma home visit of the poor are some of the branches.
themselves as ‘emancipators’. The Commission for Organizing the Party of the Working People of Ethiopia (COPWE), which was established in the mid 1970’s by the military regime, dissolved the various women’s organizations that had been operational before the revolution and instead organized the scattered women’s associations at a national level. Accordingly, Proclamation No, 138 launched the birth of the Revolutionary Ethiopian Women’s Association (REWA) in 1980 with a principal target of ensuring the rights of women. Subsequent to the formation of the organization, the women’s national congress of September 12, 1980, held in Addis Ababa, was the first meeting of its kind in Ethiopia that brought together approximately 857 women delegates from all administrative regions, provinces and districts of the country (REWA Report, 1987). The participants argued that women’s problems were less likely to be taken seriously during the imperial regime and hence agreed to struggle together for women’s rights in all spheres of life (Ibid). Shortly, REWA had established women’s branch associations at various administrative levels and structures: at the provincial, zonal, district and neighborhood association levels. Accordingly, REWA started launching different activities for women under a strict guidance of the COPWE and later of the Workers Party of Ethiopia (WPE).

In principle, REWA had two major objectives. One was to create an enabling environment for women to exercise their rights and discharge their responsibilities as mothers, workers and citizens. The second was to emancipate women from economic dependence and involve them in the newly established socialist institutions as independent producers alongside men (Ibid: 15). The Association had engaged in numerous activities and indeed brought the issue of women’s rights agenda to the forefront. The association was involved in activities of socio-economic nature, in the elimination of harmful traditional practices against women, in organizing programs to enable women to be represented in various committees, in facilitating training opportunities for women abroad; in organizing and conducting awareness raising campaigns for women’s rights; in opening a number of income-generating enterprises and solving the problem related to unemployment. For instance, in 1987, the total number

23 It had one central Council, 16 regional level associations, 111 Provincial level associations, 584 district level associations, 21,058 basic (primary level) associations both in the rural and urban areas and 453 working women’s Committees set up in factories, enterprise and different government offices.
of women in the Ethiopian Trade Union had reached 23.7% and in the trade union leadership, women hold 12.7% (Ibid: 17). Women’s employment in the civil service has also risen. In 1988, from the total of 200,369 permanent civil servants, 46,234 were women. Since its establishment in 1980, REWA had also participated in a number of international conferences, seminars and workshops, which dealt with the integration of women into the national development process (Ibid: 16). According to the REWA, a broad consensus seems to have been reached on the indispensable role of women, who comprise about one half of the population in the country’s overall socio-economic and political transformations. Thus, the slogan “the revolution would not be successful without women’s participation” became very popular. Furthermore, in the political spheres, the WPE has set up Women’s Affairs Division at the level of the Party’s Central Committee with branches throughout the administrative structures of the country. One could argue that the military regime instrumentalized REWA to channel its policies and extend its control from top to bottom. Nevertheless, the status of women during the military regime was in a relatively more progressive position than the imperial era. Women’s associations have changed the composition of their leadership from a few nobilities to that of the mass representatives and broadened their focus upon the rural communities. Likewise scopes of operations have been widened considerably from short term socio-economic needs towards women’s political participation.

After coming to power of the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) in 1991, further measures have been taken by the government in order to promote gender equality in the political, legal and socio-economic spheres. In 1992, a Women's Affairs Office was created within the Prime Minister's Office responsible for coordination and monitoring of Women's Affairs activities at a National level thereby creating conducive environment for the implementation of policy at various levels and in different sectors. In 1993, the National Policy on Women was passed which primarily aimed at “institutionalizing the political, economical and social rights of women by creating appropriate structures 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”. Similarly, Women’s Affairs Bureaus were established at federal, regional and Woreda (district) levels to implement the Women’s Policy and
monitor various activities undertaken at regional level. They also identify areas of concern based on the needs and priorities of each region. Likewise, a Women’s Affairs Committee was set up in the Council of People’s Representatives entrusted with the role of scrutinizing and checking for gender sensitivity in proclamations and laws before their promulgation. At the sector level, there are Women's departments in the various ministries and commissions of the federal and regional governments to deal with the issues of women based on the duties and responsibilities of the respective ministries. Meanwhile, the Women’s Affairs Office has been re-established as a full-fledged Ministry in October 2005. The Ministry of Women’s Affairs 24 is mandated with the duties and responsibilities of ensuring participation and empowerment of women in political, economical, social and cultural matters. The Ministry is further empowered to monitor and coordinate the activities of Women’s Affairs Bureaus branched out at a federal and regional government level.

Subsequently, a series of legislative and institutional reforms were initiated and implemented through education, employment, advancement of women in positions of power and decision making, pension payments for deceased women civil servants to their heirs, right to equality in matrimonial relations and etc. Likewise, the establishment of non-governmental organizations and professional associations has played a significant role in bringing changes in the lives of women and make them active participants of the development process. To mention, the Ethiopian Women’s Lawyers Association, the Women Educationalist Association, the Association of Women's Networking etc. could be cited as examples. The legislature has shown its commitment to redressing the gender imbalances.

### 4.2.2 Women’s position in Education

The limited participation of Ethiopian women in education can be largely explained by reference to the historical development of education. Originally, education was

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24 In 2010, the Ministry of Women’s Affairs was reorganized and renamed as the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs. See the Proclamation to provide for the Definition of Powers and Duties of the Executive Organs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia No. 691/2010.
predominantly religious and ran by churches and mosques. As noted by Teshome (1979:10) traditionally, the educational system in Ethiopia was predominantly religious-oriented, which was mainly targeted to serve the human resource requirements of religious institutions and the state. Moreover, in its long history of existence, church education has served as the main source of civil servants such as judges, governors, scribes, treasures and general administrators (Ibid: 11). At the same time, mosques in the Muslim areas had a parallel function in running ordinary schools in Ethiopia. But unlike the church schools, the koranic schools were maintained by the local committees themselves and received no state assistance of any kind (Markakis, 1994: 226). Since women were not allowed to assume responsibilities in these institutions, they were excluded from any teaching activities (Teshome, 1979:12). At the end of the 19th century, it was reported that there was nearly 90 percent illiteracy in the country and women’s situation was worse. However, some prominent women who managed to climb to the social and political ladder of the gender hierarchy like Empress Taitu, Tsehai Darge, and W/ro Ekuletaw Askal of Gojam were able to study “Kene”, a traditional church education. Nevertheless, influenced by traditional attitudes and beliefs, the introduction of modern education in Ethiopia often favored and followed the patriarchal system based on male domination which explicitly recognized women as dependant (Gobat, 1986: 45). The above description demonstrates that Ethiopia has a long history of didactic education provided almost exclusively to men.

Emperor Menelik II (1889-1913), who had recognized the need for modern education, took the first initiative to open Menelik Junior Secondary School in 1908 in Addis Ababa, although he had already started a modern school within the palace as early as 1905, primarily for the sons of the nobility (Ibid: 28). The Emperor was believed to have issued a proclamation in 1898 encouraging the people to give greater emphasis for modern education. One of his remarkable statements in his proclamation was for parents to send their children, both boys and girls, to schools after the age of six (Ibid: 29). In spite of such efforts, the education of girls lagged far behind for many years due to lack of societal attitudinal changes towards girls’ education. The opening of the first girls’ school in Addis Ababa in 1931 by Empress Menen, however, marked the commencement of the provision of modern education for girls in Ethiopia regardless of the opposition by
the public towards women’s education. There were only eighty female students in the school in 1935 (Astede, 1988:15-16). Nevertheless, the introduction of modern education that had just begun to emerge was disrupted by the Italian occupation (1936-1941). Most government schools were shut down and used for military purposes (Ibid). Meanwhile, after the restoration of independence in 1941, Emperor Haile Selasse resumed to expand modern education in different parts of the country considering it as a basic instrument for his modernization project. As Richard Pankhurst (1962: 256) noted, upon the Emperor’s return to the capital, the Emperor stated: “We need educated people in order to ensure our peace, to reconstruct our country and to enable it to exist as a great nation in the face of European powers.” Notwithstanding the Emperor’s Declaration, women’s participation was still very low though some women joined the newly introduced modern education.

Accordingly, the enrollment of girls and young women has increased in the then newly opened schools, Empress Menen Junior Secondary School and Handicraft School for girls, which were opened in 1941 and 1942 respectively in Addis Ababa. This has improved the overall enrollment of girls from 8.7 percent in 1946/47 to 12.4 percent in 1950/51 (Annual Abstract Statistics, 1962:19). However, as new schools were opened mostly in the capital city, Addis Ababa, women in the rural areas did not benefit from the expansion of modern schools in the country. At that time, Ethiopia’s overall literacy rate remained very low. There was low-level of educational enrollment and high gender disparity. The participation of girls was not only lower than that of boys, but also decreased drastically as one moves up the ladder of rank in educational hierarchy and particularly in the male-dominated fields of specialization such as engineering and medicine. From the 1967 to the 1970 school years, girls constituted 31 percent of the primary, 27 percent of the junior secondary and 20 percent of the senior secondary school students, while at the university level they constituted only 8 percent of the total student population (Ministry of Education Annual Abstract Statistics, 1962: 32).

Later, after the revolution of 1974, various steps have been taken to increase women’s enrollment in education. Particularly, many primary and secondary schools were opened at different places. Moreover, the launching of the National Literacy Campaign in the late
1970s, with the ultimate goal of widespread literacy, has also contributed to the expansion of education during the military regime. This has increased enrollment rates both in urban and rural areas, as well as a decrease in illiteracy rates. National data show that the illiteracy ratio has decreased to 34.6 percent in 1987 (Ministry of Education Annual Abstract Statistics, 1989: 22). In the meantime, societal attitudes towards women’s education began to change. More specifically, the campaign for equal rights worldwide during the 1970s has had greater influence on societal perception. The establishment of women’s organizations and women’s units in the civil service also brought the issue of women’s rights on the agenda. In addition, the awareness level has increased among the society for the elimination of harmful traditional practices and for the equal enjoyment of rights by women, where parents start to send their girls to school which led to the decrease of illiteracy rate among women.

Since 1991, after the introduction of a federal government structure, regional and local governments are empowered to manage the delivery of social services such as education as their own affairs in which educational opportunities have been expanded throughout the country. Alongside, the government has developed the Education and Training policy in 1994 and launched the Education Sector Development Program (ESDP), with a focus on the comprehensive development of education. ESDP I for the period (1996/1997-2002/2003), ESDP II for the period (2002/2003- 2005/2006), ESDP III for the period (2005/2006-2010/2011) and ESDP IV for the period (2010/2011-2014/2015) intends to improve quality of education, expand access with special emphasis on primary education in rural areas as well as the promotion of education for girls (MOE: 2012). These programs were specifically formulated with different goals of gender equity to increase women enrollment ratio and reform the curricula to make it gender sensitive. The Programs have, among other things, the aim of increasing the share of women’s enrollment in education especially in the rural areas. In particular, ESDP I was intended to emphasize on access, quality, efficiency and equity in education (ESDP I: 1996).

Similarly, the Program Action Plan of ESDP II has emphasized in its strategy to change the attitudes in educating women by creating awareness campaigns and trainings for concerned bodies and encouraging women to join non-traditional fields and to continue
the application of affirmative action for more female students to be able to join higher institutions (ESDP II: 2002).

Likewise, ESDP III has focused on improving the participation of females in education through providing and strengthening counseling services, gender trainings, tutorial services and capacity building programs for women leaders (ESDP III: 2005).

The goal for gender equality under ESDP IV is to promote equal access and success in education and training for women and girls. The programs, among other things, intend to establish and strengthen women education forums, gender mainstreaming, girl students’ clubs at all levels of education and monitor the implementation of affirmative action programs by creating strong work relationships with appropriate bodies and develop the sexual harassment policy at all higher education institutions (ESDP IV: 2010). The ultimate goal of the ESDP is to achieve universal coverage in primary education by the year 2015.

In Ethiopia, the Ministry of Education (MOE) is the federal institution mandated to formulate the educational policy, reform the curriculum and supervise the educational standards. It also prepares national examinations and establishes higher education institutions. In the past, general education was divided into primary (grade 1-6), junior secondary (grade 7 and 8), and senior secondary (grade 9-12), with national examinations given on completion of each level. In 2003, the educational system was re-organized in a new cycle. According to the new cycle of the MOE, primary education is divided into two cycles comprising of basic education (grade1-4) and second cycle of general primary education (grade 5-8). At the end of grade 4 and 8, pupils take a national exam. The first cycle of secondary education is followed by two years of general secondary education (grades 9-10). Upon the completion of grade 10th, students take the Ethiopian General Secondary Education Certificate Examination (EGSECE). This exam helps to determine whether students enter the Preparatory stream or pursue a career in the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) track. On successfully completed EGSECE, pupils can opt to attend the two years second cycle of upper secondary education (11th and 12th grade preparatory school) or pursue a career in the TVET depending on their
achievement on their qualifying exam. Higher education is taken to include a three, four or more years of undergraduate programs and postgraduate education programs of masters and PhD. The tertiary level education is provided in regular, evening, distance and summer programs (Educational Statistic Annual Abstract, 2003).

Although the general literacy rate for women is much lower than for men, there has been considerable improvement in girl’s enrollment at all levels of education. The Gross Enrollment Rate (GER)\(^\text{25}\) has seen a steady increase since 2001 (Educational Statistic Annual Abstract, 2003). As mentioned above, support for primary education has been a priority through ESDP in which students in primary schools increased from 7.4 million in 2000/01 to 9.5 million in 2004/05 with the GER rising from 61% to 79% whereas, the number of students increased from 780,636 in 2003/04 to 942,578 in 2004/05 taking the GER from 22.1% to 27% (MOE, Educational Statistic Annual Abstract: 2006/07). Likewise, primary education had increased in enrollment for five years averaging 4.5% since 2006/07 (Educational Statistic Annual Abstract, 2006/07). GER has increased by 3.0 percentage points from the year 2009/10 ((Educational Statistic Annual Abstract, 2009/10). Although there is an incremental increase in Primary GER among female students while there remains a gender gap in terms of enrollment of boys and girls. For 2010/11, the GER at national level is 96.4%, which shows an increase in GER from 2009/10 (Educational Statistic Annual Abstract, 2010/11). In general, when compared to the previous academic years, such enrollment rate is quite an achievement especially for girls in the Ethiopian education system.

While enrollment in all secondary schools (Grades 9-12) has grown by over 17.8 % per year, reaching almost 1.5 million students in 2007-08, but in the first cycle the rates for boys continued to predominate the rate of girls (Educational Statistic Annual Abstract, 2007/08). It has been noted that the total number of students enrolled in grades 11 and 12 (preparatory grades) in 2007/08 was 193,444, out of which 32.5% were girls (Ibid). When compared to that of 2003/04, the enrollment at these grades level showed an average annual increase of 19.6% (Educational Statistic Annual Abstract, 2007/08). The

\(^{25}\) Gross Enrollment Rate is the percentage of total enrollment in primary schools, irrespective of age.
total number of students enrolled in grades 11 and 12 (preparatory grades) in 2008/09 were 205,260 out of which 27.6% were girls (MOE, Educational Statistic Annual Abstract: 2007/08). However, in both cycles, the average annual growth rate is higher for girls than boys (MOE, Educational Statistic Annual Abstract: 2007/08). It has been noted that, the total number of students enrolled in grades 11 and 12 (preparatory grades) in 2010/11 is 288,216 out of which 41.1% are girls (Educational Statistic Annual Abstract, 2010/11). When compared to 2006/07, the enrollment at this grade level showed an average annual growth of 13.2% (Educational Statistic Annual Abstract, 2010/11). In 2010/11, the GER for the preparatory program is 9.4 % and 6.7 % for boys and girls respectively (Educational Statistic Annual Abstract, 2010/11). Overall, the secondary enrollment rate has increased but the rate for boys is still greater than that of girls.

Moreover, examining the gender proportionality at the tertiary level at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, the share of women becomes very small as one goes up higher in the rank. For instance, from the total enrollment of 173,901 students in undergraduate degree programs in 2005/06 academic year, only 43,066 were women (Educational Statistic Annual Abstract, 2005/06). Postgraduate enrollment includes all programs after the first degree typically the masters and PhD levels. Enrollment in postgraduate programs is still very small with the percentage of female students at any other level of education. For instance, in 2005/06 women’s share in postgraduate master’s degree program was only 9.9% while 5.2% constitutes their share in the Ph.D. program offered in the country (Ibid). Similarly, in 2010/11, the percentage of female is 13.8% which is very small when compared to other sectors of education (Ibid: 2010/11). Graduates from Higher Education institutions typically complete one of three degree streams, Undergraduate, Postgraduate Masters, or Postgraduate Ph.D. In 2007/08, there were 47,979 graduates from Undergraduate degree of which 9,931 were female (Ibid: 2009/10). Similarly, in 2007/08, from the total of 2,664 graduates from Postgraduate degree, only 284 were female (Ibid). This represents the low level of female participation in both Undergraduate and Postgraduate programs. Likewise, in 2010/11, from the total of 81,598 graduates from the three programs, 21,464 were female graduates (Ibid: 2010/11). More specifically, there were 20,565 female graduates from Undergraduate program and 899 female graduates from Postgraduate degree (Ibid). Although there is an
increase in the number of female graduates in the past few years, the number is still small.

Overall, women's participation in higher education has steadily increased though their percentage still remains smaller than at any other level of education. For instance, from 1995 to 2006, it rose from 18.5% to 42.3% (Educational Statistic Annual Abstract, 2006/07). Particularly, the participation of women in Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs) has been steadily increasing since the year 2005. Asmaru Berihun, Head of Gender and Educational Equity Department in the Ministry of Education, at an interview with the Ethiopian News Agency in 2009 indicated that the total undergraduate enrollment of students in both government and private institutions in the year 2004 was 98,404 out of which 20,418 were women. In 2008, the number of women students rose to 63,317. This figure clearly demonstrates the constant rise of the number of women students. Asmaru Berihun further noted that the number of women students in post graduate programs was only 172 before 2004 and this number has attained 703 in 2008 that accounts 9.6 percent (Ethiopian News Agency, 2009). This shows progress in the participation of women in undergraduate and postgraduate programs. In this regard, the expansion of higher learning institutions constitutes one of the main factors for the increment of student’s enrollment in general and women in particular. Moreover, awareness creation, training campaigns and the establishment of gender offices in higher education have also contributed for the accretion.

In short, the overall enrollment of students in general and women in particular show steady increase for the last decade. Yet, the gender gap still persists in all levels of education especially at the tertiary level of higher education. As it is widely known, there is a strong link between educational achievement and employment opportunities in the labor market. In other words, the low enrollment of women in education will have a negative impact on their opportunities in employment. Needless to say, limited participation in education deters women from entering the labour market extensively. Below, the position of women in employment will be examined.
4.2.3 Women’s position in Employment

The genesis of Modern Administration of the European style in Ethiopia dates back to 1907 when Menelik II initiated the formation of the first cabinet of Ministers. He then established nine ministries: Ministry of War, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Pen, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Education and Fine Arts and Ministry of the Imperial Court (Bahiru, 2002:112) During that time and in the subsequent years, the public administration lacked specific personnel rules and regulations. Nevertheless, in the early 1960s, Emperor Haile Sellassie undertook institutionalization and restructuring measures in the sphere of public administration to govern the sector by clearly defined rules and regulations. In this regard, the role of enlightened Ethiopians in pressurizing the system to have good administration as well as the attempted coup d’etat26 have made a significant contribution in the establishment of the new system of administration (Merit: 60). Subsequently, after issuance of the Public Services Order No. 23/1961, the Central Personnel Agency was established with the duties and responsibilities of setting a homogeneous public service. This landmark event made structural and functional change in the civil service (Ibid: 59). Article 9 (1) of Order No. 23, 1961 reads as follows:

The Agency shall be responsible for recruitment of classified and unclassified Public Servants and may conduct such open competitive examinations, interviews or other tests for admission to the service and will fairly test the relative capacity and fitness of the persons examined for the position to be filled.

The aforementioned provision clearly manifested that vacancies would be open to the general public and individuals are appointed through examinations and interviews. It

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26 On December 13, 1960 while the emperor was abroad an attempted coup d’etat was launched to achieve social and political change in the country. The revolt was led by the commander of the Imperial Bodyguard Mengistu Neway, his brother Girmame Neway, a few security officials and intellectuals. Although the coup was initially successful in the capital, it later failed to achieve popular support.
states that recruitment to a position shall be made only according to merit and fitness to be determined as far as practicable by competitive examination.

Although the Central Personnel Agency does not allow any preferential treatment in the selection process of job applicants, there have been changes in employment opportunities for women. The fact that women tended to start to work in manufacturing industries meant that women employment rates have increased. For instance, in 1951, there were only 587 women employees and the number has risen to 1,138 in 1954 (Pankhurst, 1957:98).

During the military regime (1974-1991) the civil service was reorganized and restructured in line with the socialist system of the new government and renamed as Public Service Commission.

Since the mid-1990s, Ethiopia has been implementing new structures in its public service to accommodate the new policy of decentralization. Accordingly, in 1995, the Federal Civil Service Commission (FCSC) was re-established and in 2006 re-named as the Federal Civil Service Agency (FCSA). FSCA is responsible in all matters related to civil servants recruitment, selection, promotion, transfer, salary increment, position classification, salary scale and exclusive rights to issue regulations to federal civil service institutions, after approval by the council of ministers.

At the regional level, the civil service bureaus have similar powers in their respective states. The government further introduced the Civil Service Reform Program to bring significant improvements in the management and performance of the civil service, among other things, amendment of the legal framework, standardizing structures and processes and training staff.

27 The Federal Civil Service Commission (FCSC) was reestablished by Proclamation No. 8/1995 and later renamed as the Federal Civil Service Agency (FCSA) by Proclamation No. 471/2006. In 2010, the Federal Civil Service Agency was reorganized and renamed as the Ministry of Civil Service. See a Proclamation to provide for the Definition of Powers and Duties of the Executive Organs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia No. 691/2010.
Despite women’s contribution to the overall economic development through both remunerated economic and unpaid domestic activities, they have had limited access to employment opportunities in comparison with men. This is due to their limited access to education and vocational training. In particular, their lower educational attainment has direct impact in accessing to formal sector jobs, which ultimately caused the concentration of women in low paid production jobs with limited career prospects. Furthermore, the burden of household chores, lack of exposure and contacts, limited access to information and traditional attitudes are also some of the causes that limit women’s aspirations.

The next section deals with the barriers to women’s advancement in detail. The unemployment rate for women in 1999 was 12.5 % at the national level, whereas for men it was only 4.3% (Annual Personnel Statistical Abstract, 2000). According to the report of the Civil Service Agency carried out in 2001, around 53.4% of women undertake rudimentary activities such as the sale of goods, and services on the streets and public places, cleaning, washing, and taking care of apartment houses, hotels etc (Annual Personnel Statistical Abstract, 2001).

Women tend to make up the greatest portion of the informal sector as petty trading, handicrafts, food processing, fuel wood carrying and domestic services as such activities require little or no education and skills. For instance, according to the Civil Service Agency’s report carried out in 2002, out of the total of 997,380 individuals engaged in the informal sector, 60% were women (FSCA Report, 2002). Social stereotypes that sustain the perception of women as less capable than men tend to engage women in small businesses that need small capital and less skill. Even among those women employed in the formal sector, the majority of them are engaged in low-paying jobs such as in clerical and manual activities (FSCA Report, 2004/05). Although the proportion of women increased from 14% to 22% in the period 1995-2005, their status in professional and administrative positions was insignificant (FSCA Report, 2004/05). Conversely, jobs with high-paying salaries tend to be occupied by men. For instance, in 2005/06, permanent female employees both in the federal and regional governments constitute
32.2%. Among them, women in clerical and fiscal jobs were 60%, in custodial and manual 42%, administrative position 23.3% and in professional and scientific posts 10.2% (Annual Personnel Statistics Abstract, 2005/06). The occupational distribution among the sexes therefore shows that women are concentrated on low-paying jobs like clerical and fiscal jobs. That is to say, the gender gap has widened significantly at administrative and professional positions. Meanwhile, there has also been a steady increase of women in the civil service. At the Federal level, in 2006, 28.3% and 33.4% of women are employed in the professional and administrative positions respectively (Annual Personnel Statistics Annual Abstract, 2007/08). In addition, according to the 2008 statistical data obtained from the Federal Civil Service Commission, there were a total of 325,727 government employees out of which women constituted 30% (Annual Personnel Statistics Annual Abstract, 2009/10).

In general, the low participation rate of women in the formal sector is mainly coupled with low-educational attainment. In other words, the lack of access to the requisite skill and knowledge through training opportunities has direct impact on the level of participation of women in the labor force. In this connection, the National Labour Force survey conducted by FCSC in 2007 revealed that from the total trainees, only 1.3% of women employees received the training opportunity (Report of FCSC, 2007). Overall, women’s participation in government jobs from the years 2000 to 2010 for the entire work force is 34% and senior position 18% (Annual Personnel Statistical Abstract, 2011). There are a number of barriers that influence women’s participation in education and employment. The next section briefly explains these barriers.

4.3 Barriers to women’s participation

The multidimensionality of women’s subordination debarred them from full-fledged participation in social life. Women’s oppression can be manifested through cultural prejudices, traditional perceptions and exploitation in society. Women also experience lack of free choice and control over their career development that in turn leads to underrepresentation in education and employment spheres. Despite the government’s
efforts to provide equal opportunities to women and design non-discriminatory policies, the existences of deep-seated discriminatory practices thwarted their progress and yet drive women to suffer from legal, economic, institutional and social constraints. Notably, societal norms and constraints that hinder the social progress of women constitute a key factor for the low participation of women in education and employment systems. Needless to say, societal discrimination against women have left them vulnerable to unequal pay for the same work performed, low paid or stereotypical jobs and positions. Furthermore, the patriarchal social organizations, sex based division of labour, sexual violence, sexual harassment, deprivation of reproductive control, lack of sex education, early marriage, abduction, lack of access to land resources and female infanticide groomed women for a life of subservience. Besides, it has been consistently pointed out that institutional arrangements for promoting women's rights lack the required human resource and budget. In short, the combination of the different factors that reinforce the gender gap in Ethiopia can be grouped into socio-cultural, politico-economical, legal and institutional categories.

4.3.1 Socio-cultural and economic constraints

It is known that the unequal status of women in Ethiopia has resulted from the socio-cultural norms which are deeply entrenched in society. The existing socio-cultural practices played a great role not only for women’s oppression but also were a major obstacle to their empowerment. Such societal norms are likely to impede women’s access to full citizenship as they prescribe different treatment for men and women. Deeply gendered socio-cultural norms, sex-stereotypes and patriarchal ideologies limit women’s chances for successful educational pursuits and confine their rights to matrimonial relationships. As is the case in many developing countries, women in Ethiopia traditionally have been consigned to strict societal roles that limited their activities to household chores and childcare activities while men perform activities outside home. In particular, women in the rural areas are heavily burdened in the household as they are expected to wake up so early, to clean, get children ready for school, do the cooking,
washing and sacrifice their carrier and aspirations. As is the case in other patriarchal structures, women in Ethiopia are similarly expected to play sex-stereotype roles that have marginalized them to low-wage jobs and denial of access to education. Women’s lack of access to higher education and their concentration in caretaker jobs are important explanations for their economic and social subordination.

4.3.1.1 Harmful traditional practices

Harmful traditional practices that range from female genital mutilation to the preference of male, female infanticide, violence against women, early marriage and early pregnancy practices related to child delivery have severe health and psychological implications on top of denying the basic rights of the girl child from birth on. In Ethiopia, cultural-based abuses including wife beating, societal abuse of young girls, rape and female genital mutilation (FGM) are pervasive social problems. Other harmful traditional practices surveyed by the National Committee on Traditional Practices of Ethiopia (NCTPE) include uvulectomy, early marriage, abduction, and food and work prohibitions. Abduction and Absuma are among the different types of customary conclusions of marriage in Ethiopia. The fact that secondary schools in rural areas are located far from parents’ residence, parents tend to prevent their daughters from exposures to potential dangers of unwanted marriage as they travel to and from school. This, in turn, contributes to the reduction of potential girls in higher education. Furthermore, societal pressures urging the importance and necessity of early marriage may also limit women’s educational attainment. In the regional governments of the federations, especially in the Amhara and Tigrary regional governments, girls are used to be given away to marriage as early as seven years of age. The marriage could be concluded either through pre-arranged agreements between the parents of the future spouses in which the girl’s parents would in

28 Abduction is one of the harmful traditional practices that forces women to marriage. Most of the time, it is conducted while girls go to school or to fetch water in the rural areas. A man gets together with his friends stalk a girl he is interested in and abducts her. He takes her to his village, rapes her and keeps her as his wife.

29 Absuma is cross-cousin marriage in Afar society. It is a type of marriage that allows a person to marry his cousin.
turn receive fees or cattle in the form of dowry.\textsuperscript{30} According to NCTPE studies such marriages mostly end up in early divorce in the family, which ultimately contributes to the increase of prostitution and mass unemployment in the cities (2003:140). Moreover, a 1998 survey conducted by the NCTPE on harmful traditional practices against women indicated that the prevalence rate of early marriage in Ethiopia amounts to 75\% (Ibid: 139). It is believed that FGM has a widespread practice in Amhara, Tigray, Somali and Afar regional governments. Further, sexual harassment and rape constitute factors that affect female’s education. Due to fear of attack on females, parents become reluctant to send their daughters to school. As a result, in some rural areas, the majority of parents prefer to send their sons rather than their daughters to school (Emebet, 2004:85). This implies that parents tend to protect their daughters by sequestering them at home rather than risking their daughter’s safety. In short, apart from health and psychological complications, harmful traditional practices of various forms have influenced particularly Ethiopian rural women’s lives both by limiting their access to education and depriving their opportunities in employment.

\textbf{4.3.1.2 Patriarchal attitude}

Patriarchy is a system in which the role of men is considered as supreme and authoritative in the social organization of society. It is well known that Ethiopian societies are organized around patriarchal patterns where male domination and female subordination are still present, including in symbolic representation, proverbs, in the music etc. Indeed, the Ethiopian patriarchal culture bestows men with more power than women in all aspects of life and men’s activities and achievements are considered as superior to that of women. While men’s roles are recognized as standard, women are encouraged to be just like men at their best. Although the position of women may slightly vary among nationalities, women in general have suffered from economic dependency, inferiority perceptions, men supremacy, biased social attitudes and religious oppressions.

\textsuperscript{30} The Tigary regional government would be an exception to this practice where the bride would receive money or property in the form of dowry from bridegroom parents.
Likewise, under most systems of customary law women have no right to ownership, inheritance and equal shares of matrimonial property. It is obvious that without property rights and economic power, women would be vulnerable to domestic violence and abuse. That is to say, customary and religious laws, which are based on the ideologies of the patriarchal order largely, promote women submissiveness.

Moreover, male supremacy and women suppression is often expressed in the oral traditions and in the form of songs in society. To mention some, “A woman’s ornament is her husband”, this Amharic proverb states that a woman without a husband is without charm and beauty. “A house built by a woman will be demolished by a hyena’s bark”. This Tigrigna saying is a clear case denoting a lack of consideration and of denigration of women’s capacity to produce something solid. “Women’s mind is in perpetual suspense like their hanging breast”. In this Afarigna proverb, women’s mind is characterized by uncertainties and is always in a floating state of mind similar to that of their breast hanging and moving over their chest. Such self-expressing stereotypes reflect the extent women experience discrimination and unequal treatment in their access to resources: food, health care, education, employment, control over productive resources and decision-making.

Many traditional beliefs and cultural attitudes regarding the role and status of women in society are still prevalent in Ethiopia and women find it difficult to extricate themselves from this culture and tradition lest they be ostracized. Notwithstanding, the increasing number of women’s education and entry into the job market, domestic work is generally considered as a woman’s duties and identity. Conversely, a man is perceived to be the bread winner, head of household and has a right to public life. Confining women’s identity to the domestic sphere is one of the barriers that discourage women from entering into the public life. In brief, patriarchal attitudes bred in the society through various levels of socialization processes are hostile to women’s involvement in all aspects of social, economical and political life in Ethiopia.

4.3.1.3 Sex-stereotyping
Although the set up of sex-role stereotypes varies between cultures, all share women’s inferior position in common. Sex-role stereotypes are well established in early childhood. The male child is valued more than the female child by the parents, siblings and the community. In other words, traditional practices and religious norms discriminate women from infancy throughout their lifetime. Mostly, the differentiation begins right from the birth of the female child and sometimes even before that during pregnancy in case of selective abortions and femicides. The idea that the birth of a boy is more valuable than the birth of a girl has resulted in favouring boys over girls in most cultures. It has been noted that in some parts of Ethiopia, the ceremony that parents perform differs if a newborn child is a boy or a girl. In the Northern part of Ethiopia if the baby is a girl, people applaud three times, whereas if the baby is a boy, they do so seven times.

In the Christianity religious practice, baptism differs for boys and girls. That is to say, the church baptizes boys at 40 days and girls 80 days after birth. By the same token, Islam requires different procedures in *Akika*. It is a ceremony of slaughtering a sheep by parents at birth of a child. In *Akika*, when the new born child is a boy, the parents slaughtered two sheep to express their happiness while one sheep is enough if the baby is a girl. Moreover, at an early age, girls are instructed to behave shy, quiet, not to speak out, to be obedient to their male partners, father, brother, and elders. At a later stage, women are also subjected to greater cultural taboos and restrictions. This in turn, makes women reluctant to assert or to question violation against their right because of a prevailing culture of not questioning or speak out. Conversely, traditional gender roles cast men as strong, rational, protective and decisive. Thinking that women are weak people who are incapable of many things, after marriage most women are expected to fully depend on their husband.

These sex-stereotypes are embedded in child-rearing patterns of Ethiopian societies that continue throughout the life cycle and contribute enormously to the gender disparities and inequalities faced by girls and women in school and in later life. Such practices preclude women’s greater involvement in education and the labour force.
As described earlier, societal attitudes pressurize and expect women to conform to norms of femininity. In this connection, Alasebu (1988) in her report to the UN Inter-Agency Group on Women in Development relating to the situation of women in Ethiopia, pointed out that the patriarchal nature of Ethiopian society is dominant in defining stereotyped roles. According to her report, society presupposes a woman to be a wife or mother and limits her role in the house and promoting ideals, and norms that reinforce these perceptions. Perceptions about the designated roles for women in society have acted against women’s educational gains and employment aspirations. That is to say, stereotyped women’s roles portrayed in textbooks, teaching methods, and the attitudes of teachers obviously limit girls’ achievement in traditionally male-dominated fields. Women eventually have come to accept to engage in traditionally female-dominated fields. In short, culture, religious beliefs and social norms are all factors which dictate women to play a stereotyped role by placing them under the control and authority of men. It also contributes to discrimination by restricting women’s role as housewives and mothers. Ultimately, such practices intrude women’s right and aspirations against advancing their careers.

Given this context, women’s equal right to exercise and enjoy economic, social and cultural rights is restrained by the socially constructed attitudes that make women to have a secondary societal position. These attitudes and practices are deeply embedded in social relations based on gender norms and they have reinforced women’s economic dependence on their male partners. Women’s low enrollment and excessively higher rate of unemployment are also an expression of high gender-based socio-economic inequity. As being marginalized and subordinated for a long time, women in Ethiopia are constrained in participating effectively in the social and economical sphere.

4.3.2 Structural and political barriers

Like in many developing countries, women in Ethiopia face structural and political barriers that hinder their rights to equality in the social, economical and political sphere. In addition to cultural and customary barriers, negative attitudes and sex-stereotyped
perceptions as reviewed earlier; gender inequality has also been attributed to structural and political barriers. These barriers include firstly, lack of accessibility and affordability to major information sources and bureaucratic barriers preventing access to information to women. For example, access to the radio, TV and the internet remains low in Ethiopia, particularly in rural areas. This in turn makes many women ignorant of the existence of laws that recognize their rights and can be invoked for their protection. As a result, women fail to claim their rights in the social, cultural, economical and political spheres of life.

Secondly, adherence to traditional roles and discriminatory attitudes that often starts within the family then further reinforces by the media and the school. Such portrays of men and women may have a significant influence on children’s development. This stereotyping also emphasizes the tendency for decision-making and leadership positions to remain the domain of men and further strengthens male supremacy in the public arena. Thirdly, the underrepresentation of women in most levels of government structures and in leadership positions especially in ministerial and other executive bodies have prevented them from having a significant impact on many key institutions of the government. It has been noted that the number of women in positions at decision-making levels remains low in spite of slowly inching their way into government positions. It is noteworthy that promoting more women in management positions plays a pivotal role in putting women’s agendas at a higher priority level towards the general process of advancement of women. It is often argued that without the active participation of women the goals of equality cannot be achieved.

Finally, and most importantly, is the failure to actively engage men in gender equality work. Gender has long been seen as women’s responsibility and gender equality as women’s agenda. This has been demonstrated in various occasions related to gender. For instance, there is a common practice to leave gender issues such as gender courses, workshops, conferences and seminars only for women. Gender issues have been widely marginalized and regarded as issues of importance only to women and of no concern to men. However, in practice the active engagement of men is crucial for the promotion of gender equality in a sustainable manner. It has been argued that gender equality is not
possible without the active involvement and support of men. It is stated that “Unless men’s practices, attitudes, and relations change, efforts to promote gender equality will face an uphill struggle” (Ruxton, 2004:5). It has also been emphasized that failure to address and involve men in the struggle to gender equality marginalizes women and will remain futile. “Men are the gatekeepers of current gender orders and are potential resistors of change. If we do not effectively reach men and boys, many of our efforts will be either thwarted or simply ignored.” (Kaufman in Ruxton, 2004:20). A move towards a gender equitable society thus requires the active engagement of men. In brief, it is important to include various activities at early childhood care and education settings to promote gender equality in the society.

4.3.3 Legal challenges

Sex-based discriminatory practices in Ethiopia did exist not only in the traditional and cultural practices of society, but also were affirmed in the legal system. The laws continued to institutionalize secondary status for women with regard to nationality and citizenship rights, pension benefit rights, marital rights, parental rights, and property rights. The family law relegated women to a position of submissiveness, as complied in the legal code of Fetha Negest around 1240 and codified in the 1960 Civil Code. The Fetha Negest, the law of the kings, was a customary law written by priests around 13th century, remained as supreme law of Ethiopia until the enactment of the first written constitution in 1931. As translated by Abba Paulos Tzadus the Fetha Negest requires a female to be obedient, shy, quiet, virgin, not to speak loudly and to refrain from entering the church during menstruation (1968:148).

Likewise, the 1960 Civil Code which was enacted during the imperial era affirmed women’s inferior position as demonstrated in its various provisions dealing with personal and property rights. For instance, in the personal relations, the husband is declared to be the sole head of the household and entitled to choose their common residence (Articles 635(1) and 641). Moreover, the husband is empowered to control the behavior of his wife. It is declared that unless otherwise provided by the code, “the wife owes him
obedience in all lawful things which he orders”; further, the wife is duty bound to perform the household duties if the husband is unable to provide her with servants (Articles 644(2), 635(2) and 646).

Similarly, with regard to common property and divorce, women would not have rights equal to men despite their many responsibilities in the household. The law specifically grants the decisive power to the husband for the administration of their common property. Besides, the husband has the right to control over the administration of personal property of the wife (Article 656). In case of divorce, if the alleged ground does not constitute serious grounds for divorce, the wife may lose her property despite the husband causing the ground for the divorce. For instance, a persistently battered woman who claims for divorce may lose her right in the division of property since wife battering and other domestic violence were not considered as serious grounds for divorce. In general, these discriminatory provisions have given predominance to the husband and used to create obedient wives.

As in many countries in the 19th century, the 1930 nationality law of Ethiopia did not provide women with equal right to men to acquire, change, transfer or retain nationality. More specifically, a woman who gets married to a foreigner loses her Ethiopian nationality provided that the marriage gives her the nationality of her husband. Article 4 reads:

A lawful marriage contracted abroad of an Ethiopian woman with a foreigner deprives her of the Ethiopian nationality if her marriage with the foreigner gives her the nationality of her husband; otherwise she keeps her Ethiopian nationality.

Moreover, it is stated that “every child born in a lawful mixed marriage follows the nationality of its father” (Article 6). In this discriminatory provision, while an Ethiopian man married to a foreign woman can transfer his nationality to his child; an Ethiopian woman married to a foreign man cannot do the same for her child. Such discriminatory provisions limit women’s right to nationality upon change in civil status.
With regard to the pension law, the existence of different retirement ages for men and women civil servants appears to discriminate against women. That is to say, a man retires on reaching the age of sixty years while fifty-five year is for a woman (Public Servants Pension Decree 1961: Article 4(1) (a)). The law also provides gender-based discriminations on pensions of deceased women employees to their heirs. In case of a widow’s pension, it stated that “if a public servant who is entitled to a pension dies before or after retirement, a pension shall be paid to his widow” (Article 15). This implies that when a man employee dies, the law automatically entitled his survivors’ to pension benefits. On the contrary, with regard to a widower’s pension, the law declared that “a pension shall be paid to a widower who was wholly or mainly supported by his wife at the time of her death” (Article 24). This implies that a widower would be entitled to his deceased wife’s pension if he could only prove that he was supported by his wife at the time of her death. In other words, women workers were discriminated by the legislation on the basis of their sex; the man is the victim, though.

Similarly, the criminal law ignores major forms of violence against women including female genital mutilation, marital rape and sexual harassment. In the 1957 Penal Code, domestic violence is simply treated under the general provisions stated for "bodily injury". Abduction and sexual offences such as rape are considered as crimes punishable under the law with rigorous imprisonment not exceeding three years, and when it is committed on an unconscious or defenseless woman not exceeding five years (Articles 558(1) and 559). However, the Penal law provides that no prosecution shall follow where a valid marriage is subsequently concluded between the victim and the abductor. In such cases, the perpetrator is exempted from criminal responsibility, Article 558(2) states:

Where the woman carried off is responsible and freely contracts with her abductor a valid marriage, proceedings shall be instituted only where such marriage is subsequently annulled by law.

By the same token, sexual offenders would be free from prosecution in the event of subsequent marriage. Article 599 reads:

Where the victim of rape, indecent assault or seduction, or abuse of her state of distress or dependence upon another, freely contracts a marriage with the
offender, and where such marriage is not declared null and void, no prosecution shall follow. Where proceedings have already taken place and have resulted in a conviction, the sentence shall terminate forthwith.

The loophole in the penal law could not provide women with the required degree of protection from violence.

In sum, the above described legal framework provided unequal rights and subordinate status to women in relation to men in various perspectives of life. Such discriminatory laws were repealed since 1994 after the promulgation of the FDRE constitution. Chapter five will review the policy developments in favour of women’s rights under the new legal framework.

4.4 Conclusion

As briefly reviewed above, although women’s organizations have been in existence since the late 1930s, the earliest ones were mainly engaged in welfare activities. In spite of some favorable practices for women, it hardly performed any sustainable activities towards tackling women’s deep-rooted discriminatory practices in a well-organized manner. Women’s issues have not been recognized and addressed as a right for many years. This was due to the lack of proper understanding, awareness and commitment of the leaders. The aim of women’s organizations during the Imperial regime was neither to fight the gender discriminatory practices nor was it to create awareness among women concerning their positions. Hence, the organizations did not facilitate women to secure their rights and struggle for their participation in various spheres of life.

Although women’s issues have come out as an agenda since the 1974 Ethiopian revolution, not much has been done in practice regarding the position and rights of women during the military regime. Women’s associations at the time were much more practically engaged in activities of the Workers Party of Ethiopia implementing political agendas of the ruling military power.
In a nutshell, the role of those organizations both during the Imperial and the Military régimes had remained minimal as they failed to realize the emancipation and empowerment of women in terms of extending their participation in society. Nevertheless, since the change of regime in 1991 and the introduction of the federal administrative structures, women have been involved in achieving their rights through legal reforms and development of policies and programs.

As explained earlier, the societal norms and values bestowed women a relatively inferior status and a diminished position in every aspect of life. This manifests itself in considerable gender gaps in education, employment, economic and political power which further marginalized women within society. In order to address such drawbacks both the federal and regional governments have undertaken policy, legal and institutional reforms since 1991. Yet, women still remain at a considerable economic disadvantage relative to men. They have poorer access to well-paid jobs than do men. Although the removal of barriers by law to women’s access to the rights and benefits could be considered a first step on the path to equality, it may not bring about their full participation in all aspects of social life unless supported by practically implementable measures that could undo centuries of injustice and impediments. Particularly in Ethiopia, merely lifting the barriers through formal laws is not sufficient to bring about changes as discriminatory practises are deeply-seated in society.

Hence, it can safely be concluded that the abolition of discriminatory laws and the guarantee of equal rights per se would not bring about profound changes in women’s rights. In other words, equality of opportunities in substantive terms will not be achieved unless active measures are taken to redress the existing social and economic inequalities. It is, therefore, imperative to take steps to increase women’s participation, including the introduction of affirmative action measures with the goal of achieving gender balance in all branches of government, as well as in decision-making positions. To that effect, the government has adopted affirmative action measures that are targeted to place women in more advantageous positions than they historically occupied. The next chapter analyzes the legal framework of affirmative action programs for women in Ethiopia.