Affirmative action for women in higher education and the civil service: The case of Ethiopia
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constitution to accelerate the real equality among the sexes. Affirmative action programs, therefore, could be seen as an essential means to attain equality, not as a limitation to the right to equality. Nevertheless, there are other barriers that hinder the successful implementation of affirmative action in practice. The next chapter evaluates the practicability of affirmative action in selected institutions.

Chapter 6

6. Implementation of Affirmative Action in Higher Education and the Civil Service

Despite favourable policies introduced by government to improve the status of women, their implementation has encountered serious setbacks. This is because the full realization of women’s rights not only does require law and policy reforms, but also require effective institutional mechanisms necessary for implementation which is hardly the case.

In order to bridge the gender gap in education and employment, a number of programs were adopted at higher education institutions and the civil service. This chapter describes how these institutions have taken responsibility in implementing affirmative action programs. However, it should be pointed out that this study could not conduct any systematic evaluation of the impact of affirmative action on academic or civil service performance due to the obvious lack of recorded data and statistics on beneficiaries of affirmative action.

This chapter also examines the current practice of affirmative action in higher education and employment institutions. In particular admission policy, department placement and post-admission activities are examined in this chapter in light of the overall effect of affirmative action programs in higher education. Moreover, in the employment sector, it explores the policy and practice of vacancy advertising and recruitment of applicants along with other human resource activities of personnel. This chapter also assesses the
attitudes and perceptions of affirmative action and investigates the prevailing factors that could impede effective implementation of the programs under review. The findings from the questionnaires and the interviews will be presented simultaneously. Questionnaires both closed where respondents are required to select and mark the applicable answer and open where respondents are required to answer the questions in their own words as well as interviews were used in data collection. The data which were gathered through questionnaires and interviews were carefully scrutinized. All major stake holders were represented in the sample, including parliamentarians, employees, lecturers, students, members of women’s groups as well as heads of women’s departments.

The questionnaires and Interviews

A four-part questionnaire was designed for gathering data. Part one was designed to obtain background information of the respondents such as gender, age, qualifications and occupation. Part two contained questions related to their understanding and relevance of affirmative action. The third part consisted of questions related to the effectiveness of affirmative action in terms of implementation in the respective institutions. Questions related to constraints and challenges facing affirmative action at the respective institutions constituted the fourth part. Questionnaires were distributed to instructors, students, employees and parliamentarians.

Accordingly, questionnaires were distributed to 530 respondents, out of which three hundred and sixty were returned, which make a 67.9 % response rate. The questionnaires were distributed to instructors, students, employees and parliamentarians. Of the total of 247 copies of questionnaires distributed to parliamentarians and employees of the civil service both at the federal and regional government levels, 65 and 105 were returned from each group respectively and were used for analysis of this study. In the case of the instructors and university students, 78 and 112 copies respectively were properly filled and returned for analysis out of the 283 questionnaires originally sent to the groups. From a total of 360 respondents, 213 (59.1 %) were women and 147 (40.8 %) were male. In analyzing the data, descriptive methods and percentages were used. It was analyzed and interpreted by way of transcribing and summarizing interviews. The interviews were conducted with the respondents at their respective institutions. The interviews were
carried out to further clarify respondents’ attitudes and perceptions of affirmative action. Open-ended questions were asked to all interviewees where they were encouraged to freely communicate their responses (See Annex 2).

**Selection of Institutions**

This study was conducted among regular students in higher education institutions and permanent employees in the civil service. Four higher education institutions were selected to form the sampling frame, namely universities and colleges that were established several years ago and newly established institutions. These are located in the federal and regional governments. At the federal level, the Addis Ababa University (AAU), and the Ethiopian Civil Service University (ECSU). Moreover, the Mekelle University and the Samara University both based in the respective capitals of the regions are selected at the regional level. Three institutions namely, the Federal Civil Service Commission (FCSC), the Ministry of Capacity Building (MCB) and Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) were selected as far as employment is concerned.

The AAU, formerly known as Haile Selassie I University, is one of the largest higher learning institutions in Africa that was established under the Ministry of Education in 1949. In July 1950, it was established as an autonomous higher learning institution as ‘The University College of Addis Ababa’. The AAU was the only higher institution in the capital, Addis Ababa, until the 1990s. The ECSU which was formally established by the Council of Ministers Regulations No.3/1996, aimed at reducing the shortage of human resource in the civil service both at the federal and regional governments. Accordingly, students at the ECSU are predominately selected by their respective regional governments as the university is mainly established to abridge disparities among regions in education and training. In addition, gender and preferential treatment to disadvantaged regions have become the major agenda of the ECSU in the process of selection. Likewise, Mekelle University that was established by Regulations No. 61/1999 after the merger of the two former colleges: Mekelle Business College and Mekelle University College, is located in Mekelle, the capital of the Tigray regional government.
Semara University is one of the most recently founded higher institutions in the capital of the Afar regional government.

6.1. Assessment of current practices

This section explores how gender-based preferences are operated as they are actually administered in higher education settings. The study provides an overview of how the Ministry of Education implements affirmative action on admission into higher institutions nationwide. It further investigates pre-and post-admission initiatives implemented by individual universities and consider various institutional and legislative aspects since 1995. It has to be noted that one of the critical issues is the extent to which affirmative action policies have actually been implemented at higher institutions. The case studies involves for the amount of change that occurred on behalf of female students on each institutions from 1995 to 2010.

6.1.1. Higher Education: An Overview

The Ministry of Education (MOE), as reviewed in chapter four, is a federal institution mandated to oversight and regulates the entire higher education sector. The MOE formulates educational policies and supervises the standards. It also prepares national examinations, establishes higher education institutions, sets the intake cut-off points and assigns students to the different tertiary educational institutions across the country each year. Higher education in Ethiopia includes institutions with three, four, and six year undergraduate programs depending on the nature and type of the disciplines, as well as those with advanced degree programs through the two year Masters and three year PhD level (Ministry of Education Annual Abstract, 2009/10).

Since 1991/92, the MOE has launched a different admission’s scheme for female students with an intention to improve access to higher educational institutions. In this procedure,
the MOE allocates places to female students on a reduced point basis at tertiary level. The MOE sets different intake cut-off points for male and female students. More specifically, between 1991 and 2004 academic years, the MOE had adopted a system of lower admission grade pointes for women based on the results of ESLCE (Ethiopian School Leaving Certificate Examination), a national examination held annually in Ethiopia as a prerequisite for entrance to all higher educational institutions at an undergraduate level. This examination (ECLCE) was often taken by students at the last year of their secondary school education on which those who are eligible for admission to higher institutions are selected.

Accordingly, in the year 1991/92, female students with 3.2 and 3.0 Grade Point Average (GPA) could register for degree and diploma programs respectively although male students were required a minimum GPA of 3.4 for the degree program and 3.2 for the two year diploma program. However, some inconsistency was observed in the course of the implementation of such admission schemes throughout the years. To mention a few, in 1992/93, 1995/96 and 1998/99 academic years, similar intake cut-off points were applied for both male and female students in admission (See Annex 3, Table 1). This demonstrates that the MOE had lowered the intake cut-off points for females given the fact that adequate seats were available in higher institutions. In this regard, one admission officer at the MOE alleged that female students only received preferences if there are available places in higher institutions.

Since 2004, candidates who wished to join higher education have been required to pass the Ethiopian General Secondary Education Certificate (EGSEC), attend the two year higher education preparatory program, and score a good grade on the Ethiopian Higher Education Entrance Qualification Certificate (EHEEQC) in order to be assigned by the MOE to different higher educational institutions.

It should be noted that higher educational institutions have played a significant role in pioneering affirmative action programs though the manner in executing them has varied across institutions. This discussion focuses on three major affirmative action programs that higher educational institutions have used as strategies to increase female enrolment. These actions include: preferential admission, preferential department placement and
post-admission programs. While all three affirmative action interventions differ in their specific objectives, they aim at increasing the enrollment and participation of female students in academia.

The reservation of seats or preferential admission for female students has the broader objective of facilitating the admission of qualified female applicants with lower points of entry than those of male applicants. Likewise, the objective of preferential department placement is to increase the number of female students in traditionally male-dominated fields like the science disciplines. Post-admission programs that specifically target female students are the third type of affirmative action. These programs have provided special assistance to retain female students in undergraduate studies. These programs include: tutorial classes, extra lessons and financial assistance. The post-admission programs mainly aim at reducing the drop-out rate and enable female students to complete their studies. The financial assistance has specifically favoured women who are constrained by economic pressures to pursue their studies.

6.1.1.1 Admissions

Higher institutions have adopted preferential admission policies and reserved places for female candidates in order to increase the enrolment and participation of women in the academia. In doing so, a significant number of female students have gained admission through special preferential programs by which institutions were made accept applicants on reduced entry points (See Annex 3, Table 2). By way of illustration, the Addis Ababa University’s (AAU) legislation requires the academic Senate or the University President to issue guidelines on special admission criteria that would enable disadvantaged groups to enroll in the programs of the University (AAU 2007: Article 61). The University implemented a special admissions program to increase the representation of ‘disadvantaged’ students. However, the legislation does not define the phrase ‘disadvantaged groups’. As noted by Mohammed Habib, Ex-Administrative Vice President of the AAU, the AAU admission policy seeks to provide access to persons who have experienced educational and/or social disadvantage and to address the
underrepresentation of specific community groups in higher education to which women are entitled to the programs.

Accordingly, the AAU set aside a certain percentage of seats to women in some disciplines where they are thought to be underrepresented taking account of the availability of places in the departments. For instance, in 2005/06 academic year, the College of Social Sciences has reserved seats for women in various fields of study. More specifically, the Accounting Department reserved 20%, the Faculty of Law 15%, the Business Education Department 8%, the Economics Department 20%, the Foreign Language and Literature Department 10% and the Library and Information Science Department 7% (AAU Registrar Office: 2007). Conversely, Tewodros Seyoum, Ex-Registrar of the ECSU, claimed in an interview that the civil service university does not reserve places for women, neither in admission nor in department placement for the reason that students are selected and assigned to various disciplines by their respective regional governments. It is, however, presumed that the regional governments have taken the gender issue into account while selecting candidates to join the university.

The Mekelle University’s legislation has also strongly endorsed the importance of affirmative action in admission. According to its policy, special attention is given to disabled students, women and to those who have completed secondary school education in a disadvantaged region, and who are natives of the nationality of the region or those from a nationality whose participation in higher education in general has been low in the past (Article 7.3.2 (1)). Further, the Mekelle University’s legislation has reserved 25% for women in each department while women could also compete for the remaining 75% with men (Article 11). On account of this, it can safely be said that women’s enrollment has steadily increased in the following years. For instance, in the 2009 academic year, out of 6000 students admitted at the Mekelle University 3600 were women which demonstrate an unprecedented rise to 51% (Mekelle University Women’s Affairs Department, 2010).
Likewise, the Semara University’s legislation has introduced affirmative action measures in giving preference to women, disabled people and people from marginalized groups in the admission process (2007: Article 65). Hence, women’s enrollment in the university shows increment gradually. For instance, in the academic year 2009, from the total of 1500 students admitted in Semara University, 500 were women (Semara University Women’s Affairs Department, 2010).

As has been noted, the application of preferential admission criteria in higher institutions depends on the number of applicants in each academic year as well as the level of performance in relation to minimum entry qualifications. Although, in an effort to increase the number of women in higher education, the institutions under review have adopted preferential admission policy for women students, the respective departments will decide on the intake cut-off points in each academic year taking account of available places. All in all, through preferential admission policies, women are admitted to higher institutions at considerable rate. For instance, the participation of women rose from 14.4% to 32.3% from 1995 to 2006 in higher education (Annual Statistics Abstract, 2007). Looking back at the position of women in education, the current educational achievement is significant since the introduction of affirmative action programs. In sum, affirmative action programs that give preferential admissions have been duly credited for increasing women’s enrollment in higher educational institutions as can be shown in the selected institutions.

### 6.1.1.2 Department placement

In the Ethiopian higher institutions traditions, students’ academic performance plays a major role in the placement of students to various studies. As a rule, students are often distributed to different fields of study on the basis of their grade point average achieved at their first year study of completion. The Ministry of education allocate students to various faculties and eventually further allocated to the various specializations on the basis of mainly their academic performances although gender is often taken as a plus-factor to the principle of merit. It has been noted that placements to all regular
undergraduate programs are processed through the Ministry of education until such time as the Addis Ababa University (AAU) establishes its own admissions policies and procedures (AAU’s legislation 2007: Article 58.1). According to the AAU’s legislation, the Admissions and Enrollment Committee makes arrangements to promote diversity in admission and assesses intake capacity against available human and material resources (Article 17.1.1-3). Moreover, the AAU’s legislation states that the Admissions and Enrollment Committee endorses the criteria for special admissions to individual programs which are developed and recommended by the faculties’ respective academic commissions (Article 58.3).

In principle, placement to various studies is done depending on the students-grade point average and choices. However, in practice many women could not join the specialization of their first choice due to lack of the minimum grade point average for the respective studies. In order to overcome such drawbacks, the AAU set the minimum cumulative GPA for female students taken into account the total number of students reserved in each departments since 1997. In an interview with Getachew Alemu, an officer at the office of the registrar of the AAU, in the academic year 2005/06, from the total of female students who applied to join the College of Social Sciences and Humanities, only 10 students were assigned by their first choices, 25 students were assigned to their second choice and 30 students were assigned to their third choice of different studies. Getachew further noted that the requirement of high GPA and unavailability of adequate places in the respective departments constitutes the major factor that would deprive female students from joining the department of their first choice. In such circumstances, female students would be forced to be assigned to their second or third choices of studies that they do not want to join.

Given the underrepresentation of women in traditionally male-dominated fields of specializations, there have recently been significant steps taken by the MOE to ameliorate the discrepancies between male and female students. As explained above, in an effort to raise female enrollments, the MOE uses preferential distribution of female students to different disciplines. In this process, female students are allocated to these streams of
study with reduced GPA. Alongside, Mekelle University’s legislation has introduced affirmative action measures in giving preferences to women, disabled students and students from relatively disadvantaged regions in placement to different departments (Article 7.5.1). In this regard, Tigist Araya, the Head of Women’s Affairs Departments at the Mekelle University, noted in an interview; that preference is given to women in department placement taking account of their academic performances. She further explained that assigning women to their first choice would be less likely due to the disproportionate number of applicants to the limited availability of places in the departments. As a result, students have been assigned to studies of their second and third choices. In fact, students who are not satisfied with their placement could appeal to the higher authorities of the university (Article 8.2.3). However, in practice once assignment to various disciplines is done, students rarely appeal against the decision. This is because they think that the decision will not be reversed.

Although the proportion of women in the natural sciences discipline has increased slightly from 4% in 2000 to 8% in 2009, the gap still persists (Mekelle University Registrar Office, 2010). During the interview, Tigist Araya pointed out that most women opt for different fields of study notably pedagogy, nursing and secretarial science which is affected by gender-role stereotyping of career. She further claimed that women were largely predominated in the field of education: they represented more than 70% of students in this field. However, nationwide, there has been a consistent increase in women participation in the traditionally male-dominated fields over the past decade. In 2005, for example, 18 % of first degree in computer sciences at universities was earned by women, 12 % of first degree in engineering and 8 % in medicine. In 2007/08, women’s enrollment in natural science has even increased to 22% (Annual Educational Statistics Abstract, 2009). By the same token, Meberat Tekelemariam, gender office coordinator in Semara University, noted in an interview that Semara University assigned female students to their choice of specializations taking account of their academic performances. Evidently, the quota reserved for women and preferential department placement have contributed to the increase of women’s enrollment especially in traditionally male-dominated fields (See Annex 3, Table 3).
Despite affirmative action policies, the researcher’s observation and study shows that the dropout rate of female students in higher learning institutions is high compared to their male counterparts. One possible explanation for a higher rate of dropout of female candidates is that students do not get adequate counselling and tutoring during their stay in the institutions. As noted by the gender officers in the respective universities, affirmative action programs at higher educational institutions tend to focus on entry with limited post-admission follow-up to retain students in the academia. Consequently, female students are likely to encounter unfortunate experiences such as high-dropout rate, repetition and withdrawal. For instance, the dropout rate at the AAU for the academic year 2002/03 was 8.6% and 12.9% for men and women respectively. In the academic year 2003/04, the dropout rate was 9.2% and 14.5% for men and women respectively. Similarly, in the academic year 2004/05, the dropout rate for women students was 16.3%, while it was only 6.4% for men (AAU Registrar Office, 2006). As noted earlier, it is clear that though the enrollment of students in higher learning institutions has shown improvement over the past few years, the number of dropouts is parallel to enrollment. As a result, the composition of women graduates from higher institutions remains still low (See Annex 3, Table 4). Nevertheless, the year 2010 has been marked as the highest in the numbers of graduates in which 200,000 students have graduated in different disciplines and levels from AAU during its 60 years of existence according to the Registrar of AAU. In 2009/10 which indicated the landmark case during the history of the university shows that in undergraduate programs from the total of 20,701 students 6,478 were female and in graduated studies from the total of 6,709 students 654 were females (AAU: 2011). This shows women, relative to men still remain underrepresented in higher education.

In the meantime, for graduation rates increment and dropout rates decrement, some institutions have arranged special programs for women students. Orientation, counseling, tutorial and extra lessons could be cited as relevant examples. It is noticeable that higher institutions often organize orientation programs in welcoming students to college life and
campus culture in order to sensitize them with their new environment. In the Ethiopian
cultural context, orientation programs of that kind have a significant impact especially for
women from the rural areas who are often confined to deep-rooted cultural norms and
traditional practices that inhibit their exposure. In light of this, it is essential for
institutions to organize a series of orientation programs for new female students which
would help to familiarize them with the immediate learning environment and the internal
regulations of institutions which could further have an impact on their academic
performance and retention. Moreover, the practices of tutorial classes have largely been
developed in response to the need to retain students in the academia so that the number of
early student dropouts on academic grounds can be minimized. Tutorial classes that are
part of a regular course in the curricula are supplemental to a large lecture course, which
gives students the opportunity to discuss the subject and additional readings in smaller
groups. Tutorials, which are taught in small groups by instructors in the student's field of
concentration, are part of a learning process often in the undergraduate program. One
senior lecture at the AAU explains the advantages of tutorial classes as follows:

  Tutorials encourage students to develop more scholarly approaches to their
  academic disciplines. It is more interactive in that the tutor gives individual
  attention to the students for ensuring a greater participation, notably females.
  Although tutorial sessions are not compulsory; but very important as it
  provides learners with institutional attachment, opportunities for making peer
  group and academic supports from the tutors.

Nevertheless, the interviews with officials and students indicate that giving tutorial
classes has always been considered a challenge. As Abay Akemachew, Head of the
Center for Gender and Development (CGD) in an interview at the ECSU indicated that
the increasing number of students joining higher education institutions in recent years has
burdened the workload of instructors so that giving tutorial classes on a regular basis
becomes difficult as it would involve commitment of the respective departments in
particular and the university staff in general. Besides, the optional nature of tutorial
arrangements led the program to be seen as voluntary in nature. She further noted that
students would not be able to attend tutorials in all subjects in which they face
difficulties, but only in the subject matter whose instructor would volunteer to give the
tutorial classes. For instance, in the academic year 2009, the ECSU organized tutorial
classes for women only in two courses in the department of IPMDS. In addition, according to Abay, the lack of awareness, commitments, and sufficient budget are factors that hinder the effective implementation of tutorials. Abay emphasized that taking account of the work load of instructors, additional incentives would be paramount to manage the program. Consequently, despite high interest for tutorials among students, institutions are obliged to organize only for few courses. This has been observed from the survey conducted to assess the attitudes of students to tutorials in 2009 by CGD of the ECSU. The survey shows that from the total of 100 students interviewed, 90% of them are in favour of attending tutorial classes.

On the contrary, lack of attendance by recipients constitutes another factor for institutions not to arrange tutorials for women. In this regard, Tigist Araya, Head of the Women’s Affairs Departments at the Mekelle University, noted that from the total of 20 tutorial sessions organized in 2003, only 3 % were attended by female students. She further claims that the English Language Improvement Center for Women established at the Mekelle University in 2004 was closed due to lack of sufficient number of students. With respect to the possible reasons, Tigist claims:

Some students perceived tutorial classes as the one arranged only for incompetent and weak students because of this they decline to attend tutorial classes’ fear of having low self-esteem. In addition, the fact that attendance at tutorial sessions is not compulsory, the tutorial sessions is not generally well attended by the students. As far as I know, although tutorials were poorly attended, it did elicit positive responses from those students who did attend.

Students complained about the scheduling of tutorial classes. A female student commented the following:

Because tutorial classes are arranged while exams were approaching, it debarred us from having free time for self-study and preparations for examinations. I believe arranging tutorial classes consistently and in an organized manner would have a positive impact on academic performance.

Respondents were asked whether tutorial programs are implemented in their respective institutions. 54.2% of respondents declared that no such programs existed at their
institutions. Twenty-five percent maintained that occasionally their institutions conduct tutorial programs while 16.6% responded that they were unsure whether such programs have existed. Only five percent claim that their institutions regularly arranged tutorial classes for students. In sum, the majority of respondents indicated that tutorial programs did not exist at their institutions. It is obvious from the responses that consistent tutorial programs were not implemented or were implemented irregularly. Hence, many students were unaware of it. Under these circumstances, it would be naïve to expect affirmative action to be sufficiently successful. The post-admission programs have been, therefore one way of encouraging female students to finish their studies. In short, affirmative action interventions in various forms indeed increase female student’s enrolment in tertiary education. It is a fact that as women’s educational attainment has increased, more women have moved into the labor market both private and public. Below, the implementation framework for affirmative action in employment will be examined in selected institutions in order to demonstrate what the picture is like.

6.1.2 The Civil Service

The FDRE Constitution as reviewed in chapter five emphasizes the need for affirmative action for women, though it has remained vague to provide a fairly detailed guidance with respect to implementation. However, in each of the institutions under review, the Constitution is considered as the source of the government’s authority to implement affirmative action in the civil service. The federal civil servant proclamation which is promulgated by the parliament provides a provision for affirmative action programs in the civil service. The Federal Civil Service Agency (FCSA) frames directives and guidelines about how to implement affirmative action in the civil service. Individual ministries, departments and public agencies are assumed to follow those guidelines and issue the necessary executive directives. The FCSA is responsible for implementing affirmative action because it is in charge of personnel management practices such as appointment and promotion, and certification for pension and disciplinary matters for the entire civil service. To that effect the FCSA enacted implementing guidelines for the Federal Civil Servant Proclamation No. 515/2007.
In principle, affirmative action policies in the employment sector intend to overcome the effects of past discriminations against women and make a positive and continuous effort in their recruitment, promotion and transfer by removing any barriers that limit the professional and personal development of women. The question then arises as to how institutions have implemented affirmative action in the civil service. For the purpose of this study, affirmative action programs that aim at increasing the number of women in employment could be classified into two broad categories: pre-employment and post-employment phases. The pre-employment phase involves activities undertaken by institutions in view of hiring employees such as advertising, selecting and hiring. The post-employment phase includes schemes designed to improve the skills and knowledge of employees through other human resource activities such as training, scholarship, promotion etc. This study examines the existing institutional statutes and plans of action. In line with this, a number of institutions have been selected by the researcher from both the federal and regional governments. At the federal level, three institutions, namely the Federal Civil Service Agency, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Capacity Building have been selected to examine their role in the advancement and promotion of women in enhancing their participation in the civil service. At the regional level, the Bureau of Capacity Building that aimed at building citizens’ capacity in general and women in particular has been selected. Because of a poor recording system in hiring employees, this study mainly depends on information gathered through interviews with respect to the implementation of affirmative action programs in the process of employment in the institutions described above.

6.1.2.1 Advertising

What are critical in implementing the goal of affirmative action are the advertising procedures. In Ethiopia, job opportunities are usually advertised on newspapers, televisions, radios and billboards. One way of increasing the number of women in employment is through advertising job openings that aim at women audiences. In this regard, employers are expected to advertise their job and training vacancies as widely as
possible so that it is likely to reach female applicants who will have an opportunity to apply. Basically, the role of a job advertisement is to attract the attention of job seekers. The question then arises as to whether the advertising procedure in the civil service is directed and made to reach potential applicants, that is, women. Job advertisements may also encourage applications from groups that are underrepresented in the institution. Such advertisements may provide preference for women applicants. For instance, in South Africa, posts have to be advertised to reach the entire pool of potential applicants, especially the historically disadvantaged (South African Public Service Regulations 2001, Part VIII, C2).

Although there are different methods of advertising job vacancies, advertisement in the Ethiopian civil service can be categorized into two types: unfocused methods and focused methods. The “unfocused” method of advertising often includes the phrase “No difference is made between men and women applicants”. In the unfocused methods institutions use the “welcoming” way of advertising. It is more of a neutral form of advertising in which applications are welcomed from all qualified persons. Such type of advertisement might be to encourage everyone equally rather than focusing on a particular group. An employer’s advertisements might state that “applications from all men and women are welcomed”. Such unfocused methods cannot be said to favour any person or groups. It simply encourages applications from both men and women candidates.

In the “focused” methods, institutions are often keen to take affirmative action to attract more women job applications by using the “preferential” method of advertising. In the “preferential” method, the institution would add the following paragraph to the text of the advertisements “both men and women can apply for the job though we would particularly encourage applications from women”. This type of advertisement does not discourage applications from men but rather includes statements that encourage women to apply. Under such type of advertisement, women applicants will receive preferential treatment in the recruitment process. Opponents of affirmative action have also argued that such kind of statements in advertisements could hinder potential men applicants from
applying to a certain job. Government regulations, as reviewed in chapter five, required institutions to clearly include the phrase “women applicants are encouraged” in their job advertisement. Specifically, the sample attached to the federal directive on human resource selection and recruitment requires employing institutions to use “focused” methods of advertisements in order to encourage women applicants (2008:23). A number of respondents to the interviews believe that the “focused” type of advertisement encourages women job seekers. In connection with this, Nureya Mohammed, Directress of Policies and Affirmative Action in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, claimed in an interview as follows:

A focused method of advertising broadens the opportunities for women. If one wants to apply affirmative action, it is more appropriate to start at job advertising. One has to hold the door open for potential women applicants. I believe applications from women have to be welcomed.

Shewa Amin, gender expert at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs commented as follows:

The focused type of job advertisement encourages women to apply and increase the possibility to be selected. It encourages women to take part in the competition discarding matters that otherwise debarred them from competing in the past. I believe the method of advertisements in the civil service have a role in limiting or encouraging potential women applicants for a given job.

In sum, the methods of advertisement that an institution utilizes needs to vary depending on the availability of women employees in a given institution in general and the position in particular. Since the directive does not oblige institutions to advertise as per the sample, employers have a choice of using either “unfocused” or “focused” methods of encouragement. In light of this, the “unfocused” method might be fair where women employees are relatively sufficient in number. The “focused” type of advertisement is more appropriate in sectors of the civil service where women are underrepresented. It has to be noted that women in the Ethiopian context are vastly underrepresented in many occupations. In this regard, such affirmative action policies would help to modify the advertising process in institutions in which women are more likely to pay attention to job
opportunities. This, however, is only the initial step to ensure that women have an equal employment opportunity. After advertising the next step relates to screening of applicants and recruiting by institutions.

6.1.2.2 Recruitment, Promotion and Transfer

Regulations of affirmative action policies have modified the hiring process such that employment opportunities are made available to women job seekers. Accordingly, employing institutions are required to modify their recruitment methods so that there is a better probability to be inclusive to women job seekers. These modifications could lead to a possible increased job opportunity for women. Needless to say, selecting and recruiting the right people to the right job is of paramount importance to the success of the workforce. In such processes, employing institutions have the legal responsibility to ensure that recruitment is carried out without discrimination on grounds of sex, ethnicity, disability, age, religion or belief, or any other unjustifiable criteria (Federal Civil Servants Proclamation, 2007: Article 13(1)). Once the applicant’s pool has been approved, employing institutions then screen and determine the person that best fits the available position. In this regard, institutions establish a minimum education level for a particular job opening.

As reviewed in chapter five, the Ethiopian system of recruitment applies a different procedure. According to the federal directives on human resource selection and recruitment, preference is given to women candidates if they score equal points at competitions with men or at the maximum a 3% difference (2008: Article 5.6.1(b)). Affirmative action was to be considered only if competing candidates have equivalent qualifications. This means, suppose there are two competitors, a man scoring 85% and a woman scoring 82%, the latter would be given a preferential treatment. In this case, the woman is preferred because the difference is not more than 3%. This mainly focuses on the initial stage of recruiting employees. In this regard, it has to be noted that professional qualification remains the basis for selection of applicants while gender might be taken into consideration at a later stage as a plus factor to performance (Federal Civil Servants Proclamation; 2007: Article 13(2&3)). Affirmative action, therefore, does not violate the merit principle.
Instead, it provides an opportunity for more qualified women to compete for jobs. Nevertheless, such a practise could still have detrimental effects for women. Suppose there are eight vacancies or opportunities for recruitment or promotion in a given year, if none of the women candidates have achieved to score equal points as their men counterparts in the examination for recruitment or promotion, affirmative action will not come into operation. Consequently, only men candidates will access to be employed or promoted in each circumstance and women candidates will be disregarded.

Moreover, in the selection and hiring of individuals, officials at human resource departments are not strictly abided by the rules of the legislation in applying the 3% for women applicants. In relation to implementation of affirmative action in recruitment, one official at FCSC who does not want to disclose his name stated:

We really do not apply affirmative action for women in recruitment consistently. In the process of selection of candidates, we only considered qualifications.

Furthermore, during one of the interviews, a senior human resource official at Ministry of Capacity Building, who does not want to reveal his name made the following comment:

The consideration of the 3% for women in hiring is a forgotten issue. We just apply in rare cases when it is raised by any members of the hiring committee.

The 3% actually limits institutions to extend the preferential treatment for women at large and sometimes it becomes difficult to decide on applicants due to a small range of difference among them. In this regard, Tadesse Belachew, an expert in Afar Capacity Building Bureau had this to say during an interview:

It is very hard to select a woman from the pool of candidates….what if their difference is 3.2%, shall we select a man? I believe that the 3% is nominal as it hardly encourages women to apply. The legislation lacks flexibility.

It has been widely suggested that the 3% difference does not enlarge women’s opportunities in the labour force. In an attempt to resolve such barriers, the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Tigrary Capacity Building Bureau have intended to
raise the Three Point to Five, although it has not been yet ratified and has become enforceable (Draft legislations 2008 and 2007 respectively). Even if the face value of this measure shows increment, the mere fact of raising by two points will not have any meaningful impact in enabling women to compete and further changes their position in the long term.

For the purpose of this discussion; the criteria announced by employing institutions for vacancies could categorized into core criteria and supportive criteria. While the core criterion is the minimum academic qualification required for a certain job, the supportive criterion related to the work experience. It has to be noted that this discussion is neither intended to diminish nor to lessen the value and purpose of work experience. In the civil service, both the core and supportive criteria are considered as part and parcel of the job, and be fulfilled by all job-seekers irrespective of their gender. In fact, these criteria play a decisive role in selecting an employee who is suitable for a given job. However, the researcher believes that a distinction has to be drawn between the supportive and core criterion in enhancing women’s employment. This is because the supportive criterion becomes an obstacle for potential women candidates for a given job. In other words, the supportive criterion, which has a greater credit in competition, indirectly discriminates potential women applicants as the door is not opened. In this regard, one informant in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that if a certain job demands a university degree and ten year work experience, although many women of first degree holders’ could apply for the position, it would be difficult for them to fulfil the stringent supportive criteria of years of work experience, provided that the changing participation of women in education is a recent phenomenon. With regard to recruitment and selection, the South African White paper on public service training and education also makes the observation that overemphasis on formal qualifications and experience, to the detriment of previously disadvantaged groups appeared to hamper the effective implementation of affirmative action program (Section 2.2.7.2). Moreover, in determining whether a person is suitably qualified for a job, an employer may not unfairly discriminate against a person solely on the grounds of that person’s lack of relevant experience (South African EEA, 1998: Section 20 (5)).
In this regard, many interviewees believe that the supportive criterion does not encourage women to apply; it is rather against the interest of potential women applicants. One senior female government official who declined to be named claimed:

It is a façade affirmative action that is not intended to improve the situation of women. It is rather just an ostentatious preferential system. It is not more than a verbal commitment. In short, it is a form of tokenism.

Another informant explained the situation as follows:

Affirmative action is like a “bottleneck”. Surprisingly, much emphasis is given for work experience in selecting candidates not only in recruiting but also in later stages of employment such as in accessing to training and promotion. And it has consequential impact in debarring women applicants to a larger extent which ended up in a smaller percentage of women’s participation in the civil service.

Insufficient pool of women applicants are observed in various job advertisements. In this regard, Dereje Tegeyebelu, Head of Human Resource Management Department at the Civil Service Commission made the following remarks:

In my opinion, the insufficient pool of women applicants impedes the effective implementation of affirmative action. Such insufficiency is attributed to a number of factors, including lack of work experience, cultural and attitudinal perceptions towards women, engagement in household activities that could hinder women from watching an advertisement and resistance by partners, if especially the job would involve some fieldwork. Generally, the poor educational background of the majority of women has left them at an extreme disadvantage related to men regarding formal qualifications and skills, which ultimately debarred them from applying to job vacancies.

It is noted that a smaller percentage of women than men do apply for job vacancies in the institutions. For instance, in the Ethiopian Ministry of Capacity Building job vacancies that were advertised in September 2008, a total of 300 applicants were registered out of which only 20 were women. Likewise, since 2002, from the total of 30 women applicants, only 16 were hired by FCSC in different positions for the subsequent 5 years until 2007 (Human Resource Department, 2008). Similar trends have existed in both the
federal and regional governments’ institutions although the matter becomes worse in the later. For instance, in the Afar regional government Capacity Building Bureau from 2000-2005, 22 women applied for a job, 12 were short listed and 8 were hired. Similarly, in Tigrary Capacity Building Bureau, in 2005 from the total of 60 registered applicants, only 8 were women (Tigrary Capacity Building Bureau, 2006). Indeed, if a small number of women apply for jobs, an even smaller number of them will have a chance of securing the position. Hence, women in the civil service holding higher positions remain only 6.4% (Annual Personnel Statistics Abstract, 2007). This effect was partly due to the fact that women were less likely than men to have long years of experience and a university degree. For instance, in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, only 8% of women with more than 15 years of experience possessed first degree in comparison with men, at 38% (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Human Resource List, 2010).

It is widely believed that promotions and transfers provide employees with the opportunity to develop their skills. However, women are unlikely to get such opportunities in the civil service. Discrimination against women in promotion is often based on the common perception that “women are not capable of handling stressful situations” and further claimed that “women tend to be emotionally influenced when it comes to taking decisions as high ranking personnel in the public sector” (Hoobler et al; 2009: 943). Such perceptions have resulted in depriving women employees’ promotion opportunities. Here, it is worth mentioning Almaz Haile’s case on promotion. She states:

I have been working in the Construction Bank of Ethiopia for over 20 years and competed with a man for a higher position in my department. Later, the position was granted for a man who has even less academic qualifications and work experience than me. I was denied the position on the ground that the position is difficult for women. You know........it is for the sole sake of my gender. It is because I am a woman. Finally, I resigned and started a new job in a non-governmental organization.

The interview conducted during this study indicated that some government officials are against preference for women in promotion. One official in the FCSC, who asked not to be named, indicates:
It is inappropriate to give preference for women in promotion once they are hired by institutions. How many times should we apply this affirmative action?

Similarly, an official from the Ethiopian Foreign Ministry pointed out:

It is improper to consider affirmative action on promotion. It is believed that a woman who could reach at this stage should be able to compete with other applicants on the basis of merit. Affirmative action has to be given only to those women at an earlier stage like hiring. I think the best person should be promoted irrespective of gender.

A hiring official at the FCSC allegedly indicated as follows:

Job promotion should generally depend on acquiring qualifications and experiences in order to be able to perform a more advanced job. I believe everyone should compete for higher position based on merit alone.

The other crucial area where women employees need preference is in the transfer of employees from one institution to another or from rural areas to urban areas. It is clear that transfer to urban areas enable women employees for better opportunities in that they are be able to advance their studies. However, it is only the Tigray State that provides preferential treatment for women employees in case of transfer (Tigray State Directive on Selection and Recruitment of Civil Servants, 2007: Article 51). The initiative taken by the Tigray state is a modest start that could be taken as a role model in both the federal and other regional states. On the whole, although affirmative action policies are created in increasing women’s participation in the civil service, women still face serious barriers heading to higher positions and in transferring to different working areas to career advancement. In the same way, the implementation of affirmative action also stretches to the post-employment activities in which employees would have access to the benefits and skills after being hired by the employing institutions.

6.1.2.3 Training and Scholarship

Post-employment activities include training, scholarship, skill building activities and empowerment programs that aim to make employees more competitive. In fact, training
programs encourage employees to acquire and develop knowledge, skills and experience, which have the effect of improving capacity and development of performance. In particular, training and scholarship programs enable women employees to be competitive in the workforce. Further, training strategies respond to the changing job demands and improve women’s career in the civil service. For the purpose of this study, training refers to short-term programs arranged for no more than a year, while scholarships refer to long term schemes planned for more than a year. However, the data of employees accessed for training and scholarship in the civil service show that women’s participation is insignificant compared to men. For instance, women constituted less than 15% out of more than 5,000 graduates who participated in training for the year 2000 to 2005 (Annual Personnel Statistics Abstract, 2006). This statistical data on training of women working in the civil service implies that lack of access to further professional career obliges women to hold lower positions in employment, which in turn verifies the lack of adequate concern paid to bridge the gender gap. Similarly, in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2008/9, from the total of 10 trainees, 9 were men and only one woman had participated in the training. In the same year, five employees specifically, one woman and four men have had access to scholarship opportunities. In the subsequent years, 2009/10, from the total of 14 trainees, only two were women. In the same year, four men and no woman secured scholarship opportunities (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Human Resource List, 2010). In this regard, Gashaw Kassa, Head of the Scholarship and Assessment Centre at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, gave two reasons for women’s low-rate of participation in training and scholarship. One relates to the lack of professional women employees in the institution and the other is failure to meet the requirements. Gashaw further noted that it is not possible for a woman with a six years service to compete with a man of 20 years service provided that a higher grade is given for years of service. Here one may wonder how the gap will be bridged if such severe preconditions are permitted to persist.

As explained earlier, the supportive requirement, particularly the work experience, plays a pivotal role in determining the appropriate candidate for job vacancy. The same would apply in training and scholarship programs too. In spite of the constitutional guarantees,
women often encountered obstacles in implementing affirmative action programs. One of
my informants who do not want to disclose her name expressed the situation as follows:

Women who could pass the challenge in the hiring procedure are confronted
with the second trap in advancing their career either by training or
scholarship programs. It is just like passing through the eye of a needle. For
example, I was first hired to this institution as a secretary graduating in
diploma. Then, after continuing my studies by extension program, I
graduated in management in a degree program. But it took me years to be
assigned in the appropriate position. Then, the institution had an
announcement to apply for a scholarship for a masters’ degree. Although I
always apply and compete, it was in vain because of the famous curb of
women ‘years of service’. In the competition, highest percentage is given to
‘years of service’ which in effect debarred many women from applying.
Women are highly discouraged by the stringent criteria of candidate’s
selection. But later the committee justified it as if there are not enough
women applicants. How can a woman be in the salon if she can’t enter the
gate?

It is a fact that men were recruited in the civil service for a much longer time while
women’s inclusion and participation in the employment is a recent phenomenon. If, in
any case, work experience is to remain as the major criteria for selection of candidates
either for training or scholarship, it definitely would continue to discriminate women
indirectly as it is already more disadvantageous for them. Needless to say, such practices
will have a negative impact on the changing position of women at various levels of
employment. Thus, the requirement of long-years of service would clearly exclude
women from accessing any scholarships or trainings, which in effect is denial of career
development opportunities. Unlike the hiring procedure, the announcement for training
and scholarship does not limit by years of services. It requires the minimum years of
service in the institutions that is not more than three years in most cases. However, the
rules of procedure in selection of candidates allocates 30% for years of service for
instance in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (See Annex 4). That means the longer years of
service one has in institutions, the higher probability to acquire the training or scholarship
programs. In this respect, Halima, the Head of Women’s Affairs and Affirmative Action
Directorate at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, explains as follows:

I believe the 3% in hiring brings basic and fundamental change neither to
women nor to the society. Rather through training and education the number
of women professionals will be augmented if they could utilize it effectively
and extensively.
It can safely be concluded that the current scheme of affirmative action programs in employment seems to be inconsiderate of the legacies of inequality and discrimination against women as envisaged by the FDRE constitution on two grounds. Firstly, the 3% would unlikely bring about significant changes in women’s participation in the workforce. It has been suggested that the present approach only benefits those few women who can fulfil all the requirements and compete equally with men. It does not bring many women into the fore. However, taken the historically determined factual situation of women and the legacies thereof, expecting them to instantly compete with men is certainly unrealistic. Women were disadvantaged by the patriarchal structures which result in fewer women advancing in their careers or applying for high-level positions. Although the national policy on women envisages for the inclusion of more women employees in the civil services, the program does not widen enough to grasp adequate numbers. In the course of action, women who had been victims of discrimination for centuries are obliged to stay behind the screen. Thus, the 3% in recruitment needs to be flexible in order to accommodate more women in places where they are highly underrepresented. Secondly, the supportive requirements, which otherwise should have encouraged women applicants, is unfavorable and hinders women’s participation greatly in the civil service. In addition, once women are hired by institutions, they could hardly compete and succeed in advancing their career either through training or scholarship for reasons of lack of long-term service.

In general, the current procedures overemphasis the importance of formal qualifications and work experience to the detriment of women who were not in the civil service for many years. In fact, it is improper to exclude women for the sole sake of shorter period of service in institutions by denying them all the opportunities in trainings and scholarships. As has been noted earlier, the supportive requirements enable institutions to determine the right applicant for available position. In view of this, it is not appropriate to disregard it completely. However, the overemphasis on years of services is often used to exclude women from positions and further educations at the civil service. For this reason, it is pertinent to set different years of service for women applicants. This would enable
women who would have the ability and potential to succeed but do not possess long years of work experience to qualify for appointment at the civil service. Redefining the supportive criterion, therefore, would enable a large number of women to be included in the pool of applicants. In sum, in order to overcome such hurdles, institutions need to take account of past legacies and adopt mechanisms that ought to accommodate women extensively. Otherwise, women could hardly benefit from any affirmative action programs, which could safely be concluded that women have been reluctantly invited to the civil service. With such sluggish measures, it would take centuries to reach the equality base for women; ultimately, women tend to lag behind their male counterparts in career developments. The next section investigates the challenges that have emerged in the course of implementation of affirmative action programs.

6.2 Challenges to the implementation of affirmative action

Positive developments have been observed in women’s employment opportunities and educational gains since the implementation of affirmative action programs. This has mainly resulted in visible quantitative gains for women in terms of their increased participation in the education and employment spheres, which is an encouraging and necessary step towards the advancement of women. Although patriarchal attitudes and practices have, by no means, been eradicated totally, evidently there has been increased awareness and broad acceptance of women to the public sphere in both the federal and state institutions. However, challenges have emerged in the course of the implementation of affirmative action programs. As has been noted, understanding the principle of affirmative action is pivotal for its successful implementation. Such comprehension also remains essential both for the beneficiaries of the program to claim their right and policy executors to implement the program effectively and efficiently.

6.2.1 Attitudinal

It has been suggested that much of the attitudes about affirmative action seem to have resulted from the misunderstanding of the concept of affirmative action. This section
assesses the attitudes and perceptions of affirmative action and investigates the prevailing factors that could impede its implementation.

6.2.1.1 Perceptions

The underlying assumption in the debates is that an individual's understanding of what affirmative action entails will certainly influence his or her attitude. Much of the controversy about confusion and misconceptions concerning affirmative action is the main source for the lack of understanding of the main premises underlying affirmative action. Indeed, lack of sensitization of affirmative action programs which often resulted from lack of conceptual clarity by policy implementers do constitute the major challenges. During interviews with a number of respondents, it was claimed that many officials do not have the knowledge of the principle related to affirmative action. In this regard, it is noticeable that even those civil servants who would like to comply with the policy may lack the required awareness of what they could and could not do. During an interview, Mohammed Ahmed, a senior official at the Afar Education Bureau, made the following remarks:

I am really confused about affirmative action. Are all women entitled to affirmative action? Do women need to ask for it or are they eligible automatically? You know as there is no detailed policy document regarding affirmative action, it creates misunderstanding in implementation.

Dawit Berhane, another official in the Tigray Capacity Building Bureau, made a similar remark:

I am not clear if all women are entitled to the affirmative action programs. I perceive that since it is a support it should be given only for needy women.

The above remarks demonstrate the variance perception on affirmative action among respondents. Questionnaires were distributed to university instructors, students, parliamentarians and employees in the civil service to gather sufficient facts. The perceptions of respondents were designed in three different perceptions namely, Award, Assistance and Right. In this context, an award is a gift given to someone as a present.
Assistance refers to a voluntary giving of help or support. A right meant an entitlement to a guarantee of access the violation of which is unlawful.

From the total of 360 respondents, the majority 182 (50.5%) of respondents believe that affirmative action program is an award and 107 (29.7%) of the respondents perceive affirmative action as an assistance, likewise only 71(19.7%) of the respondents consider affirmative action as a right. The majority of respondents both men and women including members of parliament and many experts have a misperception of the concept of affirmative action because of inadequate information and lack of awareness. Those respondents who saw affirmative action as assistance based their arguments on the assumption that women are biologically incapable to compete with men. Those who claim affirmative action as an award asserted that since it is aimed only at women, disregarding men, it is a gift for women. Those respondents who allege affirmative action as a right argue that women have been denied the rights to opportunities and resources unlike men therefore, any mechanisms that enable women to their share should constitute as their right. Hence, there is a misconception about affirmative action among the law makers. This, therefore, demonstrates that affirmative action has been mainly considered as assistance, and even worse as a gift provided by the government for women. Such misperceptions have an impact on the attitude of implementers in executing the program consistently. In other words, the enforcement of the program has depended on the discretion and willingness of implementers to extend support to women. It is apparent that lack of awareness could bring ineffective implementation of the program.

6.2.1.2 Equal opportunities

The principle of equality of opportunity is the central theme of affirmative action and is viewed as a crucial mechanism to overcome inequalities experienced by those who were discriminated against in the past. Affirmative action is justified as a response to ensure equality of opportunity. However, the experiences in the various countries reviewed in chapter three reveal that a policy of formal equality alone, though necessary, is not
sufficient to remedy the lingering effects of past societal discriminations. Given this background, respondents were asked whether they perceived that women are given equal opportunities as men. From the total of 360 respondents, 312 (86.7%) of respondents asserts that women do not have equal opportunity as men. Only 48 (13.3%) of the respondents deemed that women have equal opportunity with that of men. Those respondents who claim that women do not have equal opportunity as men base their answers on the existing patriarchal cultures and norms towards women. Whilst those respondents who allege that women have equal opportunity as men pointed out the rising rate of enrollment in education and increasing participation in employment.

6.2.1.3 Necessity

Given the majority of respondents believe that women are not given equal opportunities as men, it is appropriate to examine respondents’ perspective on the necessity of affirmative action. From the total of 360 respondents, the majority 220 (61.1%) affirmed the necessity for affirmative action for women while 108 (30.0%) of respondents oppose affirmative action for women. 32 (8.9%) percent of respondents allege that it has to depend on the circumstances of the case. These respondents asserted that each case has to be taken into consideration either to grant or deny affirmative action. They claim it has to be need-based. Hence, the majority of respondents consider the use of affirmative action as a means to advance women’s opportunities equally with men. They perceive affirmative action as a true advantage for women and a chance to further their studies and career. Women have strongly endorsed the necessity of affirmative action because of past legacies though there are some antagonists. Some men also have the impression that affirmative action has a role in bridging the gender-gap in the social sector. In addition, support for affirmative action was significantly enhanced by adherence to the principle of role modeling. It has been suggested that having more women in male-dominated domains encouraged the youth in pursuing their careers. The attitudes rejecting affirmative action are partly due to unawareness of prior discriminatory practices against women and partly for the purpose of their own opportunities and self-interest. These respondents further claim that affirmative action jeopardizes the existence of keen competition for limited opportunities available in the civil service and higher education.
Moreover, during our discussions, many women believe that affirmative action is a necessary tool in combating discrimination and bringing about sexual equality, which in turn brings socio-economic development in the country. They further maintain that affirmative action programs inspire a culture of responsiveness or sensitivity by institutions to gender representation in the enrolment process. Likewise, affirmative action policies seem to have enhanced gender sensitivity in planning and programming as well. A number of interviewees in this study clearly expressed their support for affirmative action for both academic and social reasons. Hailemicheal Abera, President of ECSC pointed out:

Affirmative action programs are good because they expand enrollment opportunities for students into higher education institutions, and therefore increase the likelihood of having more women staff in the academics in the future.

Affirmative action programs have also helped increase awareness of the socio-cultural, structural and other challenges that constrain women students’ from entering higher educational institutions. In this regard, Ubah Mohammed, Ex-State Minister of Women’s Affairs noted as follows:

Affirmative action plays a great role in changing societal attitudes towards women. The society will believe that women have been deprived of the opportunity; they have the capacity, and can participate in male-dominated careers not only in traditional fields if provided with the opportunities.

The responses to questions reflected the positive impact of affirmative action. This correlated with the arguments in favour of affirmative action, which were indicated in the literature review, maintaining that affirmative action is mainly aimed at bridging the gender gap and redressing gender inequalities between the disadvantaged and privileged groups. The reasoning given was because they further believe that historically, women will only have equal opportunity when efforts are made to compensate them for their historical disadvantages, so that their prospects for success are more equal with those of their competitors. The conclusions, therefore, is that affirmative action as a mechanism to redress gender inequality is strongly endorsed in the society.
6.2.1.4 Stereotypes

The preconceptions existing in the society characterize women in the public sphere as less competent and not able to attend some educational process at high level. Both the beneficiaries as well as non-beneficiaries of affirmative action perceive beneficiaries as less qualified than non-beneficiaries based on the assumption that individuals were hired only because of their group membership (Heilman, McCullough, & Gilbert, 1996: 604). Such stigma of incompetence in the eyes of non-beneficiaries of affirmative action programs have led to negative expectations and stereotypes (Heliman, Block & Lucas, 1992).

Respondents were asked whether or not they perceive beneficiaries of affirmative action equally competent as non-beneficiaries of the program. From the total of 360 respondents, the majority 234 (65%) perceived beneficiaries as less competent than non-beneficiaries while 126 (35%) stated they are better or equally competent as non-beneficiaries. Assumed prejudices and stereotypes were supported by the respondents, who believed that women are less intelligent, less capable and less hardworking. The attitudes of these respondents regarding competency of beneficiaries is influenced by the preconceptions and stereotypes regarding women and the information they possess about affirmative action. In our discussions, one student said that “many view women beneficiaries as less talented and not entitled to the position”. Those respondents who believe that beneficiaries of affirmative action are equally competent with non-beneficiaries asserted that women had been deprived of only the favourable circumstances not the capacity. They further declared that affirmative action programs only endorsed women to get the opportunity; henceforth they will be appraising by their performance. The conclusion, therefore, is that many people relate weakness and incapability with the term affirmative action so much so that women beneficiaries of affirmative action are viewed as less competent than their male counterparts. There is a prevailing perception that affirmative action is granted for those who are weak and cannot succeed by themselves.
6.2.1.5 Self-image

Given the general lack of knowledge about what affirmative action is and how it operates, it is expected to find variations in attitudes (Crosby, Golden, & Hinkle: 2001). It has been declared that such stereotyping and negative attitudes influence the implementation of affirmative action. In other words, attitudes are strongly influenced by the precise manner in which affirmative action program is described. In this respect, information and communication is paramount. Critics suggested that affirmative action undermines the self-confidence of beneficiaries of the policy (Nacoste 1990, Boxil 1992). Members of targeted groups may also question their qualifications and performance (Nacoste, 1989:108).

The perception of women on becoming beneficiaries of affirmative action program is ambiguous. Respondents were asked whether they perceived to be stigmatized or lack self-confidence. From the total of 127 respondents, the majority 78 (61.4%) of respondents indicate a positive self-image while 32 (25.2%) consider that being beneficiaries of affirmative action program may be a disadvantage. Only 17 (13.4%) of the respondents indicate low self-esteem. For these respondents, affirmative action hurts self-confidence of beneficiaries. They indicated the verbal abuse especially by men against women beneficiaries. They also allege the negative connotation related to the very concept of affirmative action worldwide. Reactions will become increasingly negative as there is no clarification of the concept.

For some, affirmative action becomes not only a means to succeed but also a way of challenging existing stereotypes and of fighting against discrimination. Affirmative action also makes women feel capable as their male counterparts and reduce a major reason of social prejudice. Beneficiaries, both in education and employment sectors perceive the implementation of affirmative action as a strategy of reducing the social gap between men and women. A female university student explains:
To me, affirmative action is a chance for the future, the chance to develop career, the opportunity to proving to myself and others that women can be somebody and we are not inferior to men. When I joined to higher education, I felt more self confident.

Another female student declares:

I have personally benefitted from affirmative action. It contributed to forming a new self image, which is reflected by the positive self esteem and increased self confidence. I believe my admission to higher education not only benefits me but also eliminates the age-old attitudes towards women. It changes the way females are perceived by others and perceive themselves.

Of course, there are also opposite views, as exceptions from this. The reasons for this attitude are largely explained by reference to the societal perception of beneficiaries’ competency that erodes their self-confidence. It is noted that the negative perception associated to the affiliation with affirmative action make women to be hesitant to seek the program. During the interviews, few women have also expressed ambiguous attitudes towards becoming beneficiaries as some of them felt demean. A female student commented as follows:

Becoming beneficiaries of affirmative action challenges the positive self-image of women by designating as ‘incapable’. Our colleagues question our achievements and develop the notion that “you are here for the sole sake of affirmative action; you came here with low cut-off points”. They also humiliate and assign nicknames for beneficiaries. Thus, as a woman, it is better to manage as best as we can.

During one of the interviews, another female student explains the feelings of becoming beneficiaries in this way:

It is really hard to become beneficiaries of the program. Men consider all women as though they could not compete by themselves. They also think that we should be treated in every respect differently. They perceive that if a woman is selected or has good grade, they still assumed that it was because of affirmative action. They take it for granted that affirmative action beneficiaries are incapable. Some of the students even challenge the quality of the grade granted to beneficiaries. So because of this many women do not want to become beneficiaries of the program.
It is noted that such negative feelings occurred more often for the beneficiaries of affirmative action in education as opposed to the employment sector. Students are afraid of discrimination and repercussions from their male counterparts. This is partly because their admission or departmental placement with low cut-off points could easily be identifiable by other students or their classmates. However, with regard to beneficiaries in employment as preferential hiring or promotion is not noticeable by other employees at large, women employees who were hired or promoted through affirmative action have less likely such feelings.

6.2.6 Lowering standards

When asked if affirmative action has resulted in lowering of standards at their institutions, the majority 179 (49.7%) of respondents agree that affirmative action efforts result in lowering of standards at their respective institutions while 138 (38.3%) disagree. Only 43 (11.9%) of the respondents indicated that they did not know. It is evident, therefore, that the majority of respondents perceive affirmative action efforts as resulting in the lowering of standards at institutions. However, interviews with hiring officials asserted that affirmative action does not lower qualifications. In this regard, Dereje Tegeyebelu, Head of the Human Resource Management Department of the Civil Service Commission, states:

Gender is a plus factor to qualifications. We only add three points to women if they score equal grades to that of men. So in this way, we never compromised qualification. The applicants’ gender will not be a decisive factor: they must meet the requirements of the position. There is no way to hire unqualified women. For instance, recently we hired a male candidate because they have more than 3% grade difference with a female candidate.

The responses manifest that there is a clear lack of knowledge of what affirmative action is about and the perception that it is based on the incorrect premise of confusing the changing standards with lowering them.

6.2.1.7 Adequacy
It is widely believed that women in Ethiopia are not benefiting from the program effectively and extensively. Respondents were asked whether women are given adequate priority as beneficiaries of affirmative action programs. 256 (71.1%) thought that affirmative action programs had not been put into practice adequately while 87 (24.2%) believe that women are adequately benefited from affirmative action programs and the 17 (4.7%) did not know. The reason given was lack of adequate number of women coming in the playing field, lack of awareness, negative attitude that discourage women, lack of competent authority that could supervise the work of the institutions. The neglect of women as affirmative action beneficiaries is also evident in many institutions. During the interviews many agreed that affirmative action was not adequate and a lot has to be done for the advancement of women.

The conclusion, therefore, is that students more than employees believe that women are given adequate priority as beneficiaries of affirmative action program in higher institutions. This is partly because students measure the success of such programs according to the overall progress of women nationwide while employees do so based on the progress of women at their respective institutions.

6.2.2 Institutional framework

It has been widely argued that institutional commitment to affirmative action such as continuous follow-up and appropriate monitoring and evaluation systems facilitate the program to succeed. Institutions have to establish procedures to monitor and evaluate the implementation of affirmative action programs on an ongoing basis and to determine whether reasonable progress is being made.

6.2.2.1 Monitoring and evaluation

Although, in principle, affirmative action increases the representation of women in the public sphere, it is important to note that such programs are feasible only to the extent that they are implemented comprehensively and effectively. Monitoring would be required to ensure that the implemented programs are in motion and making progress.
Evidently monitoring mechanisms enable institutions to be accountable for their failure to perform as per the stated objectives and plans. Moreover, institutions with better-enforced affirmative action programs could admit or hire more women than institutions with poorly enforced affirmative action programs. It is clear that affirmative action programs could not succeed on the basis of principles and intentions alone. They rather require oversight and monitoring to hold institutions accountable for their stated goals and plans in gender equality. Against this background, respondents were questioned about their perceptions of whether the monitoring of affirmative action policies and procedures at their institutions had been successful. 194 (53.9%) were of the opinion that such procedures did not exist while 123 (34.2%) indicated that they did not know or were unaware of the procedures. Only 43 (11.9%) claimed that such mechanisms existed. In sum, the majority of the respondents indicated that they were either unsure or did not know about the monitoring and evaluation of affirmative action programs at their institutions. This sentiment was supported by the interviews. An expert at the FCSC commented as follows:

There are plans for general training not specifically for affirmative action. There are no goals and timetables set by the institution. Affirmative action is implementation but there is no statistics or evidence to say these are employees appointed on the basis of affirmative action.

It is evident from the above comments and the aforementioned responses that monitoring of affirmative action policies and procedures has not been successful at institutions of higher education and employment. In addition to those who indicated that monitoring of affirmative action policies and procedures were not successful a large percentage who either did not respond or were unaware indicated that there was no evidence of any monitoring procedures or effective communications about such procedures or there was no feedback on monitoring. As reviewed in chapter three, in countries like the USA, India and South Africa, monitoring of affirmative action programs is considered most essential for its success.

In Ethiopia, as for the monitoring procedures, there are no specific legal provisions. Due to this, employers become reluctant to have regular review of their workforce composition to determine whether there is fair employment, or to undertake remedial
action where necessary. The interviews with officials at the civil service and higher education revealed that in the absence of such procedures the institutions will be unable to ascertain whether the program is progressing or whether there are any shortcomings that require rectification. In an interview, a member of the recruitment committee made the following remarks:

We sometimes apply affirmative action for women applicants and sometimes we don’t. However, neither the management nor women job seekers questioned the procedure. We consider affirmative action as voluntary not mandatory. So far we neither have any regular monitoring nor occasional reports. Thus, we don’t have knowledge of the progress made by affirmative action in our institution.

Another recruitment officer who declined to disclose his name revealed that:

Because of lack of efficient monitoring and evaluating system, in most cases affirmative action programs remain only on paper. As far as I have experienced affirmative action is little more than a lip service. There are no attempts made by institutions to facilitate its implementation especially in the civil service.

A senior lecturer at the AAU indicates that

Monitoring and evaluation system is a good reminder to be conscious to apply affirmative action in recruiting or promoting women. There shall be proper monitoring and evaluation of the system. Institutions need to develop a reporting system for monitoring and evaluating the progress to each departments and higher education institutions toward achieving its goals.

The conclusion, therefore, is that institutions were ill-prepared to establish effective monitoring systems. Responses to earlier questions and information from the interview have indicated that an affirmative action policy does not exist at the majority of institutions. Hence, women are unaware of it. Under the circumstances, it would be naïve to expect affirmative action to succeed. This calls for internal control mechanisms to be strengthened.

6.2.2.2 Grievance redressal
It has been suggested that the existence of effective grievance procedures for handling individual complaints is of paramount importance for the successful implementation of affirmative action programs (Hitt & Keats, 1984; Hitt et al., 1983). The presence of appropriate grievance redressal procedures to resolve complaints internally are advantageous both to the institutions and the complainant. Beneficiaries who feel disadvantaged or treated unfairly by the respective institutions can use internal grievance redressal procedures to resolve their differences.

Nevertheless, the lack of clear and detailed legislation in implementing affirmative action, make the matter worse in complaints handling both in education and employment sectors. In other words, institutions have not established grievance redressal procedures to review, investigate, and resolve alleged violations of affirmative action policy. As reviewed in chapter three, different countries have developed their own grievance redressal mechanisms. For instance, in South Africa, in case of non-compliance, the Department of Labour and the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on the Public Service and Administration have the authority to take action against defaulting departments and administrations (White Paper on affirmative action in the public service 1998, Section: 4.9). Likewise, in India, any employee aggrieved about the implementation of affirmative action in public service can complain to the Head of the department, or directly to the Ministry of Personnel, or to the National Commission for Scheduled Class and Scheduled Tribes, or to the Commission for Backward Classes or to the National Commission for Women or to the central or state administrative tribunals and High Courts for legal remedy (World Bank Report, 2001: 15).

The interviews with officials at educational and employing institutions in Ethiopia revealed that aggrieved women file their complaints to the respective women’s department whose role is only limited in giving advisory opinions. Because of this, women complainants barely brought their case to the departments. In this regard, Meberte Tekelemariam, Coordinator of Gender Office in Semara University, confirmed that no complaints have ever been filed to their office regarding affirmative action. Similarly, in case of recruitment, women complainants encountered difficulties in the internal complaint process system as there is no place to complain. The disciplinary committee
established in all institutions is mandated to handle only post-employment disputes. In case of recruitment, applicants have a right to bring their complaints to the selection committee for reconsideration of the case. If the committee did not reverse their decision, which they did not in most cases, the applicants have no chance to further file their complaints. Alternatively, in post-employment cases, women complainants can bring their case to administrative tribunals and courts for legal remedy. In fact, women complainants at the recruitment phase could not enforce their right to affirmative action in a court of law. It follows that, women complainants brought their case neither to the disciplinary committee nor to gender departments as noted by Solomon, Head of Administrative Courts in Civil Service Commission and Nureya Mohammed, Directress of Policies and Affirmative Action in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, at their respective institutions. As per the interviewees, so far no case has been instituted against a recruitment committee ordering to halt its employment interview for an alleged breach of affirmative action policies in the exercise. As a result, women complainants face difficulties in enforcing their right. During one of my interviews, a woman employee made the following comment:

We have to go nowhere and file our complaints. Our right to affirmative action is a tiger paper. It is a right which you cannot enforce it anywhere. That is why most officials are reluctant to implement the program. They do not consider the matter seriously and they know that nothing will happen if they did not comply with the rules. I know that it is my right but at the same time I am aware that it cannot be enforced. I would rather prefer to keep silent as no justice would be served.

In sum, implementing institutions do not feel sufficiently accountable to affirmative action programs. The policy refrains from stipulating tangible penalties on institutions and authorities declining to implement affirmative action programs accordingly. Affirmative action programs, therefore, depend on voluntary efforts per se and remain more of a matter of discretion for authorities than a policy. Thus, women beneficiaries of affirmative action measures would not be in a position to make a ‘claim’ for affirmative action programs. Generally, affirmative action programs would need formal supervisory mechanisms in order to ensure their consistent implementation. It can safely be
concluded that the absence of adequate enforcement and monitoring mechanisms has rendered the legislation toothless.

6.3 Conclusion

The findings from this study confirm that attitudes, perceptions, practices and procedures related to affirmative action in higher education and employing institutions provide indicators of the challenges at implementation. While these findings alone may not provide a complete picture of the complexities related to affirmative action implementations, the data collected in this research identify specific areas that can be remedied in order to achieve the objectives set out in the constitution. In other words, this study has helped to identify the possible barriers for the effective implementation of affirmative action which could serve as a basis for further research.

Chapter 7

Concluding remarks and recommendations

This study notes that some sporadic and spontaneous steps had been taken to improve the situation of women in some sectors of the Ethiopian societies notably in urban areas during the consecutive regimes, namely the Imperial Era (1930-1974) and the Military regime (1974-1991). However, fully-fledged policy reform towards gender equality was officially enacted and took an institutional shape in the current federal system of government which has been in place since 1991. The Women’s Policy (1993), the National Action Plan on Gender Equality (2006) and the Women Development and Change Program Implementation package (2006) are among the various policies and strategies that directly focused on speeding up equality between men and women. Furthermore, the 1995 FDRE Constitution incorporates a series of provisions that deal with the rights of women in a comprehensive manner. These include women’s right to equality in marital, personal, and family matters, the right to maternity leave, participation in policy matters, exercising property rights, pension entitlements, access to family planning, and the right to equal pay for equal work (Articles 34 and 35(5-8)). The Constitution further provides provisions the elimination of traditional practices