



Bottlenecks of Gender Equality in West Oromia, Ethiopia

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed at investigating bottlenecks of gender equality in West Oromia, Ethiopia. The study employed a descriptive qualitative case study. Data collection methods were in-depth interviews, key informants, observation, and document review. The study vividly found out that traditionally, parents' property is passed through the men's line, in which women have limited accessibility and control over the resources. The study also showed that women and men were paid differently for the same activities, especially in the informal sector. This devalued women's work capability since their payment is varyingly treated for the same or similar tasks in daily laboring. Women are socially discriminated against, excluded, negatively stereotyped and perceived as inferior and weak. It is also important to note that women are mythically discriminated, degraded, and negatively labeled. The study recommends that to ensure and bring gender equality, these complicated bottlenecks should be addressed by engaging various stakeholders including public and private sectors, local and international non-governmental organizations and other concerned actors.

Keywords: Bottlenecks; Ethiopia; Gender Equality; West Oromia

1. INTRODUCTION

No country in the world has yet achieved gender parity, which means gender disparity still prevails. The issue of gender inequality can be considered a universal feature of developing countries (Ethiopian Demographic & Health Survey, 2008). The gender gap reflected that women are less educated, less paid, highly vulnerable to health risks, unequally represented in politics and highly exposed to violence. It could be a difficult task to identify the root causes of gender disparity in Ethiopia, but the likely causes could be related to culture, economy, historical legacies, institutional design, political system and other unknown factors that may need further investigation (Mulatu, 2016). Gender-based discrimination persists in the workplace, housing, education, disaster relief, health care, and countless other areas. Access to justice continues to be hindered by a range of obstacles. Religion, tradition, and culture continue to be used as a shield for violating women's rights (Farrior, 2009, p.9).

Shimelis (2015, p.1) indicated that recently, women's participation in politics and decision-making has received significant attention across the world. However, women remain seriously underrepresented in decision-making positions. Economic, religious, social and cultural factors contributed to women's poor political participation in the country. The author also added that more than half percent of the world's population are women. But, they lack access to political decision-making as compared to their counterparts at all levels of government. Hailegiorgis (2008) showed that women are victims of male chauvinists due to cultural prejudices; lack of access to and control of resources; lack of participation in decision-making; and unequal power relations.

Ethiopian Demographic & Health Survey (2008) stated that women are entangled with poverty, a higher illiteracy rate, a lower proportion with primary or secondary and above education, a lower proportion not working to earn, low or no-existent media access and, by far younger age at first marriage. Tefera (2014) found out that age, educational status, number of children, work status and exposure to media found to be determinants of contraceptive use decision-making; and women's empowerment through education and economic activities for enabling them to make reproductive decisions through their own or jointly with their husbands. van Eerdewijk et al. (2015) stipulated that the challenges that women academic staff encounter include negative attitudes towards women in public roles; strong norms that women are not capable to perform

and succeed; undermine affirmative action as they feed ideas that women are not able to achieve by themselves; and harassment and insecurity.

Despite gains in some regions and countries for justice and equality, people around the world are still constrained by patriarchal hetero orthodoxy and resultant inequality, discrimination, oppression, and violence (Hazel & Kleyman, 2020). The world religions all agree on the respect for women and their crucial role in family life, especially with an emphasis on women as mothers and wives. They do not, however, advocate emancipation in the sense of total equality with men. Some religious norms and traditions can contribute to the formation of gender inequalities and subordinate the role of women in society. Men's and women's roles are unbalanced in the world of religions (Klingorova & Havlicek, 2015).

Helina (2015) depicted that Ethiopian women are especially vulnerable to harmful traditional practices (HTPs) such as early marriage, abductions and forced marriages, and female genital mutilation, as well as economic, physical, psychological, and sexual violence. Violence against girls such as sexual harassment by male teachers and peers leads to poor academic performance and school dropouts among girls, hindering their ability to be full participants in a knowledge society. On the other hand, promising new laws and policies prohibiting various types of gender-based violence (GBV), including the revised family code, the outlawing of HTPs, the introduction of women's rights into the constitution, and the reform of law enforcement and criminal proceedings have come into effect. UN Women (2014) stated that while global and regional instruments as well as domestic laws and policies for the advancement of women are crucial, their enforcement and implementation are equally important. The outstanding progress made over the year is often comprised of deep-rooted prejudices and stereotypes coupled with limited capacities at different levels.

Legal discrimination is only one of many sources of gender imbalances. The passage of better laws does not guarantee that these laws will be enforced, especially in countries with social norms disadvantaging women's participation in the formal economy. The focus is on laws because they are actionable in the short run, in contrast to norms and attitudes, which may take longer to change (Hyland, Djankoy & Goldberg, 2020, p.2).

Regarding gender gap size, political empowerment is the area where women are severely under-represented despite significant improvement. The fact that women are persistently less present in

the labor market than men contributes to the economic participation and opportunity gap. Regarding health and survival means that millions of women in these and other countries are not yet granted the same access to health as men (World Economic Forum, 2020).

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2017) defines gender equality as women and men, girls and boys having equal conditions, treatment and opportunities for realizing their full potential, human rights and dignity, and for contributing to (and benefitting from) economic, social, cultural and political development. It is, therefore, the equal valuing by society of the similarities and the differences of men and women, and the roles they play. It is based on women and men being full partners in the home, community and society.

Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men and girls and boys are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups and that all human beings are free to develop their abilities and make choices without the limitations set by stereotypes and prejudices about gender roles (UNICEF, 2017).

As far as the researchers' review of the available literature is concerned on the issue under study, it is rare to have this kind of research in Oromia in general and Western Oromia in particular. This study undoubtedly needed to be undertaken since the region is economically, politically, demographically and socio-culturally might be unique from the study sites so far undertaken. With this in mind, the researchers were highly convinced that much more rigorous research needs to be undertaken to understand the bottlenecks of gender equality in Western Oromia, Ethiopia. The study aimed at addressing four specific objectives: (1) to identify economic bottlenecks to gender equality, (2) to describe political bottlenecks to gender equality, (3) to find out social bottlenecks to gender equality, and (4) to find out cultural challenges to gender equality,

The researchers have had some justifications to deal with the issue at hand. Gender equality is a global concern because almost half of the world's population is women. Researching gender equality would help to devise interventions to address challenges and maximize concerted efforts towards assets of gender equality. The researchers were interested in studying gender equality as an issue and women as a segment of society that social work professionals need to deal with. An engagement of professional social workers with this issue as well as a segment of society helps to

devise feasible and sustainable interventions based on their assets. Briefly, the findings of the study might be used by both academicians and practitioners in the area.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Study Design

The study was a descriptive qualitative case study with a cross-sectional design. Based on techniques of research, the researchers used qualitative methods to provide an appropriate way of investigating the research questions in detail. The qualitative research method would be helpful to unearth detailed and comprehensive information about the issue under study because Creswell (2007) suggests that qualitative research allows the participants to discover their own experiences and perspectives of a phenomenon verbatim. Besides, qualitative research seeks to arrive at an understanding of a particular phenomenon from the perspective of those experiencing it (Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas, 2013). For this reason, the researchers used this technique to investigate the bottlenecks to and assets of gender equality comprehensively and rigorously.

Based on the purpose of the research, the study deployed descriptive research. Descriptive research is used to describe a situation, problem, phenomenon, relationship, social setting, living condition of a community, concern and issue properly (Krueger & Nueman, 2006; Kumar, 1996). For this truth, the researchers described bottlenecks and assets of gender equality.

Regarding approaches of qualitative research, a case study was used from among the five approaches to inquiry: case study, ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory and narrative research. This detailed description of a phenomenon can be achieved when an investigator studies a bounded system or a case at one point in time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (Creswell, 2007). Likewise, Hancock and Algozzine (2006) added that case study research is richly descriptive because it is grounded in deep and varied sources of information including quotes of key participants, anecdotes, prose composed from interviews, and other literary techniques to create mental images that bring to life the complexity of the phenomenon being studied. For this reason, the current researchers used triangulation of data sources such as in-depth interviews, key informants, observation and document review to articulate the issue under study by engaging different participants such as women and men, and experts in the area.

Of the types of case studies (single instrumental, collective or multiple and intrinsic case study) as stated by Creswell (2007), a single instrumental case study was employed since it best fits as the study interviewed women and men as well as experts in the area. Based on the time dimension, the study employed a cross-sectional design. According to Creswell (2012), cross-sectional research is useful for obtaining an overall picture at one point in time. Upon this, data were collected and concurrently analyzed within a defined period frame from February 4 to 25, 2020.

2.2 Study Area

The study was conducted in Western Oromia of Ethiopia. It was undertaken in West Wollega in general and its town in particular. So the study was undertaken in Gimbi town of West Wollega. Gimbi is 438km far away from Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia. The researchers selected the study site purposely because the researchers are familiar with the area in addition to consideration of resources into account.

2.3 Participants of the Study and Inclusion Criteria

In this study, women and men were participants of the study. In addition, experts were also part of the study participants because they are knowledgeable people about the issue under study. The researchers set certain inclusion criteria to recruit those participants from the target population. Setting inclusion criteria is very important to smoothen the data collection process from the appropriate target population. The screened participants were categorized into three groups for this study. These groups include women, men, and experts with their respective inclusion criteria. The first inclusion criteria were carried out for women. The inclusion criteria that were used for this group include (1) women who have married because they may have common experiences of gender equality or gender inequality; (2) those who show willingness and keenness to participate in the study; and (3) those who live in the study site. The second inclusion criteria were conducted for men. (1) men who have married because they may have common experiences of gender equality or gender inequality; (2) those who show willingness and keenness to participate in the study; and (3) those who live in the study site. The third inclusion criteria were undertaken for experts. The inclusion criteria that were employed for the group include (1) experts who have knowledge and expertise about the issue at hand; (2) those who are willing and have the

motivation to be part of the study; and (3) those who work in governmental and non-governmental organizations.

2.4 Sample Technique

Non-probability sampling was employed in the study. From the common type of non-probability sampling techniques such as purposive, availability, snowball, and quota; the purposive technique was used by the researchers of this study to select the participants of the study. Dejong, Monette and Sullivan (1994) stipulated that investigators use their judgment and prior knowledge to choose people from the sample who would best serve the purposes of the study. Accordingly, the researchers selected several participants from the target population purposively, those who can best fit the issue under discussion rather than worrying about the representativeness of the study.

2.5 Sample Sizes

The sample size of the qualitative research method can be influenced by the idea of saturation, in which a researcher stops collecting data when the categories (or themes) are saturated: when gathering fresh data no longer sparks new insights or reveals new properties (Creswell, 2014). Likewise, Fusch and Ness (2015) stated that data saturation is achieved neither because of the large sample size nor the small sample size. Rather the richness and thickness of data get paramount consideration in data saturation. In other words, rich refers to the quality of data-exhaustive and deep data; and thick means quantity of data- a lot of data. Both researchers also further indicated that data saturation can be attained through data triangulation. Accordingly, nine participants of the study were interviewed, and thick and rich data were collected until all of the pre-stated research questions were answered.

2.6 Methods of Data Collection

According to Kothari (2004), while deciding about the method of data collection to be used for the study, the researcher should keep in mind two types of data: primary and secondary.

The primary data are those which are collected afresh and for the first time, and thus happen to be original. The secondary data, on the other hand, are those which have already been collected by someone else and which have already been passed through different data analysis processes. For this study, the researchers used both primary and secondary data sources to collect data.

Hox and Boeije (2005) stipulated that primary data are data that are gathered for the specific research problem at hand, using procedures that fit the research problem best. They further stipulated that on every occasion that the primary data are collected, new data are added to the existing store of social knowledge. To do so, the researchers collected primary data during the study through several data collection methods: in-depth interviews, key informants, observation and document review. This study used in-depth interviews with seven participants and two key informants. The researchers of this study were complete observers while data collection with other methods was undergone to capture untold stories and unexpressed topics regarding the issue at hand. On the other hand, the available written materials such as books, book chapters, journals, articles, master theses, electronic materials and legal framework documents at local, regional, and international levels were reviewed as secondary data sources.

2.7 Methods of Data Analysis

As the study was a qualitative case study, thematic data analysis was employed. As Creswell (2007) portrayed, the most common elements of qualitative data analysis include coding and categorizing theme. Accordingly, the researchers attempted to reduce the collected data into manageable themes from field notes and recorders. Since coding involves a systematic recording of data, codes to cover key themes, ideas and concepts that were collected from the study site were used. Categories and sub-categories for codes were developed. This means that data collected through in-depth interviews, key informant interviews, and observations were thematically categorized and analyzed. Then, detailed analyses were categorized according to their similarity and difference of ideas. Besides, thematic ideas were identified and categorized based on the research questions. Then, headings for the categorized themes were given. Finally, the researchers came up with the headings and sub-headings in the data presentation.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study found out that in Ethiopia, women were economically, socially, culturally and politically deprived of the enjoyment of equal treatment, in accessing job opportunities, participating in decision-making processes, and contributing to or benefitting from resources as bottlenecks of gender equality.

3.1 Definition of Gender Equality

The study disclosed that human being is equal even though their sex is given differently in nature. This means they have been given different sexes naturally as female and male. Every person is equal regardless of sex. The study pointed out that gender equality is in which both men and women are given equal opportunities and equally benefited from it. Likewise, UNICEF (2017, p.3) asserted that gender equality means that women and men, girls and boys enjoy the same rights, resources, opportunities, treatments and protections.

3.2 Economic Bottlenecks to Gender Equality

Data collected from the participants of the study displayed that low participation of women in microfinance is one of the economic bottlenecks to gender equality because of lack of information, high-interest rates and misuse of borrowed money. Women are relatively less benefited from microfinance and are limited to engage income-generating activities since borrowed money is misused by women themselves and wasted by their counterparts. The study showed that women and men are paid differently for the same activities, especially in the informal sector. The findings of the study further revealed that it devalues women's work capacity since their payment is varyingly treated for daily laboring the same or similar tasks. In addition, women were involved in low payment activities such as secretaries, janitors, messengers, and domestic workers. Furthermore, they were primarily occupied with reproductive activities.

The study stipulated that men have more accessibility and control over resources when compared with women counterparts. Traditionally, parents' property is passed through the men's line, in which women have limited opportunities, and women were dependent on their husbands for financial support. Men, who are husbands, are passing the final decision on how to use money and this is worse, particularly when men are breadwinners that persists in economic inequality. The study depicted that education is a key pillar for women's empowerment. However, it is noted that women are less educated so they occupied a dominantly informal sector. The current findings of the study showed that there was discrimination between women and men particularly regarding equal property ownership and share of property in which men are dominating. It can be deduced that men are controlling, owning, dominating and managing resources. This implies that women are less benefitted economically. It is also noted that women were disadvantaged,

discriminated and marginalized in terms of controlling resources, making decisions and inheriting resources.

Likewise, the current study is congruent with the available literature. Women are victims of male chauvinism due to cultural prejudices, lack of access and control over resources, gender equality entrenched in social, cultural, economic and political structures and gender gap reflected that women are less educated, less paid, unequally represented in politics and highly exposed to violence (Hailegiorgis, 2008; Mulatu, 2016). Daniel (2004) stated that despite the position that women are actively involved in the social, economic and political facets of life; the discriminatory political, economic and social rules and regulations prevailing in Ethiopia have affected women to the extent that those societies' irregularities have ultimately barred women from enjoying the fruits of their labor.

3.3 Political Bottlenecks to Gender Equality

The study revealed that women's political leadership was suspected that women could not lead especially in top leadership positions as compared to men because of negative deep-rooted attitudinal assumptions towards women. Women's political participation is less observed starting from the grassroots level to the top level, which is local, zonal, regional and federal levels. The study found that although efforts have been made to empower women, women were not genuinely participated in the political sphere by the government. Meaningful efforts need to take place beyond political consumption. The current finding is fitted into the literature reviewed. Shimelis (2015) confirmed that women remain seriously underrepresented in governmental sectors and decision-making positions. Economic, religious, social and cultural factors contributed to women's poor political participation in the country. They lack access to political decision-making as compared to their counterparts at all levels of government. In a nutshell, women were relatively less represented in the political structure of government from the grassroots level to the federal level in the country, Ethiopia.

3.4 Social Bottlenecks to Gender Equality

The study unveiled those social challenges to gender equality emanated from societal values, and norms generally what society creates, but restrict women from different opportunities. Different societies knowingly or unknowingly discriminate between two sexes. This means women or girls are restricted from different opportunities at home, at the workplace and in the community. It is

vividly noted that women or girls are denied opportunities not because of incapability rather they are females. It also observed that there exists gender discrimination in different places (home, workplace, social institution) systematically. The study further showed that women sometimes hold inferior regarding some jobs that are assigned and performed by men only. Data gathered from the participants indicated that even though there is a change from the past regarding gender equality but there is still gender inequality since culture, society and the environment we have grown all matter. It is noted that their attitudes were shaped for a long time in that way, and it is difficult to change overnight from two sides, women and men. Women are affected to experience equality fully because of those factors and men are also affected by those factors to permit women to exercise their rights or realities.

The current study found that women are unfairly treated and they are considered as inferior to men from a religious point of view. The study explicitly stated that men are dominantly occupied with religious services. In religious scriptures, women are indoctrinated to obey the patriarchal domination of men. Similarly, Klingorová and Havlíček (2015) confirmed that some religious norms and traditions can contribute to the formation of gender inequalities and subordinate the role of women in society. Men's and women's roles are unbalanced in the world of religions.

3.5 Cultural Bottlenecks to Gender Equality

The study stated that women are traditionally perceived as inferior and weak. It is also important to note that women are mythically discriminated, degraded and negatively stereotyped. The study discovered that women are negatively viewed and stereotyped. This kind of stereotype is manifested by different proverbs of Afan Oromo, which are widely spoken by the Oromo people. For instance, *Dubartiin dheertuu malee beektuu hinqabdu* (there is a tall woman but not a wise woman). Similarly, *Dubartiin beekaa deessi malee, beektuu hinqabdu* (woman begets a wise man, but she is illiterate). It is meant that women are wrongly perceived as ignorant and illiterate which discourages women not to be seen in the political sphere and public arena. *Beekumsi dubartii gorduuba* (knowledge of women is limited in the kitchen). Meaning, women's knowledge and capacity are not beyond the kitchen. Women are limited and restricted not to participate publicly in different activities. Another proverb is *Dubartiifi harreen uleen tolu* (both woman and donkey deserve to be beaten). From the above proverb, it is meant that women deserve to be beaten and maltreated unless otherwise, women are not discharging their roles and tasks as expected.

3.6 Gender Mainstreaming

The study found that several governmental organizations aim at ensuring and respecting women's rights at different levels. At each woreda, town and zonal level, there is the Women, Children and Youth Office, which strives to mitigate injustices, discriminations and imbalances of gender equality. In addition, at every regional state and city level, there is the Women, Children and Youth Bureau, which works to address gender inequalities, gender inequities, harmful traditional practices against women and women's disempowerment. More importantly, at the federal or national level, there is the Women, Children and Youth Affairs Ministry that helps by formulating policies and guidelines and providing technical support to bureaus found at regional state and city levels as well as offices at zonal and woreda levels. This finding is strongly fitting with the existing structure. Accordingly, Reeves and Baden (2000) depicted that responsibility for the implementation of gender policy is diffused across the organizational structure, rather than concentrated in a small central unit.

3.7 Women Leadership and Empowerment

The study displayed that women are currently empowered and brought to different levels of leadership exercise starting from the grassroots level to the federal level by the Ethiopian government from the perspective of political empowerment. This is evident that at the federal level, fifty percent of women are appointed as ministers in 2019. This means that half of the federal women's cabinets are proportionally assigned to women as equal to men.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Gender equality is negatively impacted by several daunting bottlenecks including economic, political and socio-cultural factors. The study disclosed that there is an improvement in gender equality when compared with past times. Gender equality is economically challenged through minimum payment for what they have been doing against their counterpart. It also stated that women have less accessibility to and control over resources. Traditionally, parents' property is passed through the men's line, in which women have limited access to and control over the properties. Women were less participated in the decision-making process and underrepresented in government offices. Women are socially discriminated, excluded and negatively stereotyped. There are different assets, which can be optimized to empower and ensure equality of gender.

These opportunities can be manifested in terms of strategies, policies, structures, plans and activities.

Women were entangled with various overwhelming challenges in terms of economic, political, social and cultural factors. Therefore, the study recommends that to ensure and bring gender equality, these complicated challenges should be addressed by engaging various stakeholders including public and private sectors, local and international non-governmental organizations and other concerned actors. To utilize existing opportunities, policies, strategies, plans and structures should be implemented on the ground to realize gender equality.

The researchers have justified dealing with the issue at hand. Gender equality is a global concern. Firstly, it is a global phenomenon because almost half of the world's population is women (Shimelis, 2015). The researchers were sure that the research questions they seek to answer in fact deal with the issue undergone that affects a significant number of women. Thus, researching gender equality helps to devise interventions to address challenges and maximize concerted efforts toward opportunities for gender equality. Secondly, the researchers were interested in studying gender equality as an issue and women as a segment of society that social work professionals need to deal with. An engagement of professional social workers and practitioners with this issue as well as the segment of society helps to devise feasible and sustainable interventions to address the challenges of gender equality.

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