

Full Length Research

Assessment of the roles and constraints of women in the economic development of Ethiopia; the case of Ambo Town since 1991

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This paper highlights the roles of women in the economic development of Ethiopia and their constraints. Women, as half of the populations play a major role in the economic development of Ethiopia but they face a number of constraints even their role in the economy and in the different sectors has often been under estimated. Moreover, women in Ethiopia or anywhere else in developing countries occupy the low states in the society and their contributions have never been adequately recognized. The study was conducted in Ambo town, west shewa zone of Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia. The findings of this study are based on primary and secondary data collected from different sources. The result of the study implies the significance of the role of women in economic development and the factors that make their economic roles unrecognized. Finally, the researcher recommended that serious attention should be paid to their constraints, because women are the pillars of economic development in Ethiopia in general and Ambo in particular.

Keywords: women, roles and constraints, economic development

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INTRODUCTION

Women are more than half of the world population. They are the mothers of the other half. As mothers and careers, as producers and farmers, the work of women supports their families and communities¹. Yet, throughout

the world, the poorest people are predominantly women and their dependent children. Women face an increasing level of violence because of their gender and half a million die each year as a direct or indirect result of pregnancy (Thomas, 2004).

Historically, women in both eastern and western societies were viewed as the weaker sex and this view

¹ <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL.FE.ZS>

placed women in the category of a lesser being. Even today women in most of the world are less well nourished than men, less healthy, more vulnerable to physical violence and sexual abuse and less paid. They are much less likely than men to be literate, and still less likely to have professional and technical education. In many nations, women are not fully equals under the law, often burdened with full responsibility for house work and child care, they lack opportunities for entertainment and imagination. In all these ways, unequal social and political circumstances give women unequal human capabilities (ibid).

For most of the last 50 years, development theory and practice was focused on economic development. Moreover, the development of infrastructure such as road, electrification, irrigation, schools and hospitals was seen as the basis for economic growth and development. During the 1960's education and health care become the two important elements of development programs because well trained and health workers were seen as crucial for productivity. Although the various programs were introduced in this period, they ignored women as economic actors (Ayenew, 2008:103, Ambo University unpublished material).

By the late 1960s, the social and political upheal in the developed countries open the way to the emergency of women's movement. In these movements, women started questioning their roles in the society and the discrimination they face in labor markets, political and economical area (ibid). According to the Easter Boserup's study on the role of women in economic development in 1970 women's agricultural production was critical in sustaining social and national economy. The study also brining onto the international agenda the issue of women and their marginalization in the 1970's in particular and she also highlighted the impact of technological innovation on women, the displacement of women from their productive labor (as cited in Birhanu, 2006:86).

Today, we have high percentage of women, female industrialists, ministers, judges and others. We also have an increasing rate of female university graduates in the world. The integration of women in to our labor force has meant less dependent on men, because that these women can take over jobs, there is less dependence. The integration of women has also widened the intellectual pool in social, economic and political debate (Thomas, 2004).

In most low income developing countries, women have a triple role. Women's role includes reproductive work that is required to guarantee the maintenance and production of the labor force, productive role and community managing work. In rural areas, their productive role usually takes informal sector and small enterprises located either in the home or neighborhoods. Women's community managing work involves the provision of items for collective consumption undertaken

in the local community in both urban and rural contexts (Birhanu, 2006; Ayenew, 2008:102, Ambo University unpublished material).

As it is the case in other countries, Ethiopian women are the half portion of the society and they face economic, social, and political problems. They have been neglected from taking power in their own country regardless of their own knowledge and experience of protecting the other half of the population. Women themselves have a problem of feeling inferiority. Inferiority assumption of women is not only the main factor which declines their participation in the life of their family, but also hinders their role in economic development. The discriminatory political, economic and social rules and regulations prevailing in Ethiopia have barred women from enjoying the profits of their labor and economic development (Birhanu, 2006, Ambo University unpublished material).

Moreover, the socio-cultural situations of the country that are also associated with gender division of labor and the patriarchy are the source for the disadvantaged position of women which is characterized by pervasive sexual violence, harmful traditional practice, unemployment, lack of formal education and training (ibid, 2006:116). Despite the discriminatory practices and rules, women have played their role in the development endeavors of the country.

Before the 1974 revolution, women's organized activities were run by non governmental bodies such as Ethiopia women's welfare association, the Ethiopian Female Students Association etc. These associations were, however, limited in scope and only existed in the cities². They had little impact on government policies, laws and development programs that encourage the role of women in over all development policy and strategies (Birhanu, Ambo University unpublished material). After 1974, the Revolutionary Women's Association (REWA) was established by proclamation. In fact, the establishment of the association was for the consolidation of Derge's power rather than promoting the interest of women's. As a result there was little improvement in the lives of Ethiopian women (ibid: 113).

A part form this, the current government, FDRE, as a principle has stated that "the historical legacy of inequality and discrimination suffered by women in Ethiopia take in to account, women, in order to remedy this legacy are entitled to affirmative measures. The purpose of such measures shall be to provide special attention to women so as to enable them compete and participate on the basis of equality with men in political, social and economic life as well as in public and private

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http://www.ethioembassy.org.uk/about_us/women/women_in_ethiopia.htm

institutions³.

In Ambo town, women are also involved in all aspects of their society's life. Women are producer and procreator as well as participant in the social, political and cultural activities of their communities. They play an overall role in small scale business, crafts, associations that are economic and even in agriculture⁴.

As it is a case at a national level, the role of women in economic development has also a paramount role for the people in Ambo town. Economic development is unthinkable without the active participation of women. Economic role of women is the main thing in which everybody should give much emphasis. Therefore, this paper assesses the role of women in economic development of Ambo town.

The role of women in the economic development of Ethiopia

Ethiopian women are actively involved in all aspects of their society's life. Women are both producers and procreators and they are also active participants in the social, political, economic and cultural activities of their communities⁵. However, the varied and important roles they play have not always been recognized. The discriminatory political, economic and social rules and regulations prevail in Ethiopia have barred women from enjoying the fruits of their labor. Without equal opportunities they have lagged behind men in all fields of self advancement (Birhanu, 2006; Gemechu, 2008).

Before the 1974 revolution, women's organized activities were run mainly by nongovernmental bodies such as the Ethiopian Officer's Wives Association, the Ethiopian Female's Students Association; however, these associations were limited in scope and only existed in cities. They had little or no impact on government policies, laws, regulations, and development programs (Birhanu, 2006). After 1974, the revolutionary Ethiopian Women Association was established by proclamation but this organization served as a means of consolidating the power of the Derg.

Until recently, government in Ethiopia have not had any policy on women's affairs, hence they have not been seen as important potential beneficiaries of government development programs. Gender issues do not only concern women; women's problems can't be solved by

women alone, but it requires the coordinated efforts of the society as a whole, including the government. Care full planning in full consultation with women and political commitment is essential for the integration of women in overall economic development of the country (ibid). Women demand to participate actively in national development and to exercise their right to enjoy its fruits is now receiving support in government and local communities.

The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) has formulated several policies to incorporate and encourage women's participation in modern economic activities⁶. This includes the national policy of Ethiopian women (NPEW), the national population policy, the education and training policy and others⁷. The NPEW is designed on the assumption that government has the obligation to give women the unreserved support to make them active participant in the national development effort on equal terms with men and go on to experience the benefits of their participation (Birhanu, 2006; Medhanit and Sofanit, 2009:16-17).

The main objective of the NPEW include, creating and facilitating conditions for equality between men and women, creating conditions to make rural women beneficiaries of social services like education and health, and eliminating discriminatory perception and practice that constrain the equality of women (Medhanit and Sofanit, 2009). Moreover a number of strategies have also been designed to achieve the above objectives.

For the achievement of the above listed objectives, the government established women's affairs office with full responsibilities and accountabilities. The structure were clearly put delineating the responsibilities of the Women's Affairs Office (WAO) under the prime minister office and the regional and zonal women's affairs sectors, and the Women's Affairs Department (WAD) in the various ministries.

However, assessments done over the year show that both the WAO and WAD in the sectoral ministries lack capacity; they have problems with resources and qualified personnel. Therefore, these problems hinder the effective implementation of the policy (Medhanit and Sofanit, 2009; 17-18).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY, MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted in Ambo district, west shewa

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<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/confer/beijing/national/ethiopia.htm>

⁷ Ibid

³ The 1995 FDRE constitution of Ethiopia

⁴ Interview with Bizunesh Hailu, head office of Ambo district women's and child affairs office.).

⁵ <http://www.ethpress.gov.et/herald/index.php/herald/development/5204-tapping-into-the-potential-of-women-entrepreneurship-in-ethiopia>

zone of Oromiya regional state, Ethiopia which is located 125km away from the capital of the country (Addis Ababa). The study was conducted through both qualitative and quantitative research techniques and questionnaire and interview were used as a source of data collection. In this study, the researcher used purposive (non probability) sampling method to select the representative groups of the entire population and to collect data from the respondents. According to 2007 population and housing census of Ethiopia, the residents of Ambo town are 48,171 and of which 23,537 are female while the rest 24,634 are males. Accordingly, among the total population 45 respondents whose age is 18 and above were selected purposively. From this, 15 respondents were male and the rest 25 were female and the researcher used questionnaire for 45 respondents with 15 male and 25 women. For the accomplishment of the study, the data that the researcher collected through the above method were presented and analyzed based on descriptive method.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This part deals with the analysis and interpretation of the collected data. The data is collected from respondents through questionnaire and interview with key informants. The data shows the significant role of women in the economic development of Ambo town. They contribute for the economic development of the town through their participations in income generation activities and also play a significant role in saving and efficient utilization of resource. In contrast, different problems hinder the effective roles of women and often make their roles invisible. As clearly indicated in this chapter, even though various difficulties affect women, they continue to play a significant role in economic development.

Demographic characteristics of the respondents

From the Table 1, it is clearly indicated that from the total number of the respondents 66.7% are females and the remaining 33.3% are males. This indicates that the majority of the respondents are females because the main target (the target group) of the study is concerned on women's role.

With regarding to the age group of the respondents, 66.7% are found in the age between 18-30 years. The remains 22.2% and 11.1% are found between 31-50 and above 51 respectively. This implies that the majority of the respondents are the most beneficiary age group in the economic development of one's country. Therefore the data (the information) is obtained from the economically active productive age group.

As indicated in the Table 1, the level of education of the respondents is 53.3%, 35.6% and 15.5% for degree and above, diploma and 1-12 respectively. From this, we can conclude that the majority of the respondents are found in the high level of educational status. It is well recognized and established fact that education is an indicator of economic development and also has a fundamental role for the developments of one's country. So, any policy that improves the educational status is expected to bring long run sustainable development.

As the Table 1 shows that, 31.1% and 42.2% of the respondent's monthly income are less than 1000 birr and between 1001-200 birr respectively, where as 20% and 6.7 of the respondents monthly income is between 2001-5000 and greater than 5000. This indicated that the majority of the respondents are found in medium income generating activities. Finally, 57.8% of the respondents are male headed household while 42.2% are female headed house hold. From this, we can conclude that the study involves both female and male household family.

Women's role and contribution in economic development.

As shown in the Table 2, among the total population of the respondents 51.1% of them respond that the contribution or role of women in the economic development of the town is medium. While the remaining 28.9% and 20% of the respondents answer that their role are high and low respectively. With regard to respondents that say the contribution of women in economic development is high and medium, they forward that women contribute to poverty reduction by doing additional working activity; trading and also they promote food security and increase the quality of life. The contributions of women in the economic development of the town are more related with proper utilization of the available resource including money without extravagancy. The contribution of women also involves assisting and helping those children and old persons who have no family. The respondents also forward different measurement for the contribution of women, for instance, their trading activities, their contributions of GDP for the town and their tangible activities are some of the indicators.

One the other hand, among the total number of the respondents 48.9 % of them says that the participation (involvement) of women in the economic activity of the town is medium. While the rest 33.3% and 17. 8% of the respondents say high and low respectively. The respondents say that women are participating in trading and other income generation activities.

In regard to the role of women in economic development, among the total respondent, 91.1% of them say that women have tangible role in economic

Table1. Background information of the respondents

Number	Item /characteristics	Number of respondents	Percent %	
1	Sex	A. Male	15	33.3%
		B. Female	30	66.7%
		Total	45	100%
2.	Age	A. 18-30	30	66.7%
		B. 31-50	10	22.2%
		C. 51and above	5	11.1%
		Total	45	100%
3	Education level	A. 1-12	7	15.5%
		B. Diploma	16	35.6%
		C. Degree and above	24	53.3%
		Total	45	100%
4.	House hold title	A. Male headed house hold	26	57.8%
		B. Female headed house hold	19	42.2%
		Total	45	100%
5	Monthly income	A. Less than 1000 birr	14	31.1%
		B. 1001-2000 birr	19	42.2%
		C. 2001-5000	9	20%
		D. Greater than 5000	3	6.7%
	Total	45	100%	

(Source: computed from primary source, 2005)

Table 2. The role and contribution of women in the economic development of Ambo town

Number	Item/character	Number of Respondents	Percent %	
1	What seems the contribution of women in the economic development of the town in terms their economic activity?	A. High	13	28.9%
		B. Medium	23	51.1%
		C. Low	9	20%
		Total	45	100%
2	To what extent women participate in the economic development of the town?	A. High	15	33.3%
		B. Medium	22	48.9%
		C. Low	8	17.6%
		Total	45	100%
3	Is there any tangible role of women in economic development?	A. yes	41	91.1%
		B. No	4	8.8%
		Total	45	100%

(Source: computed from primary source, 2005)

development of the town while the rest 8.8% replay that women have no role at all. The respondents that say women have role further argue that women play

community managing and coordinating role at the house hold level. Women's community managing role includes supply of food and provision of water. Therefore, we can

Table 3. Constraints that limit the effective contributions of women in their economic activity and methods of solving economic problem.

Number	Item/ character		Number of respondents	Percent %
1	Do you think the grass root backward traditions of the society such as the male dominance and internalization of that dominance and cultural influences affect women economic activity?	A. Yes	36	80%
		B. No	9	20%
		Total	45	100%
2	How do you solve economic problem you face and others are facing?	A. By saving before or deposit of money	13	28.9%
		B. By leading based on plan	14	31.1%
		C. By working during leisure time	7	15.6%
		D. By discussing with others	11	24.4%
		Total	45	100%

(Source: computed from primary source, 2005).

conclude that the role of women is significant for country's economic development in general and Ambo town in particular.

Constraints that limit the effective contribution of women in economic activity

As indicated in the Table 3, the majority of the respondents agree about the affection of traditional backward beliefs and attitudes on women economic activity. They say that cultural norms, men dominance, early marriage and inferiority assumption of women in the society are the major factors which affect women's economic participation in the life of their family and in the society at large. Besides this, the respondents forward other view on the low contribution of women in the economic development in relation to their weakness. These are; lack of initiative or having a sense of we are low (low self- esteem), did not have acceptance if I perform this, lack of self confidence, this cannot be worked by me and workload in the house and others.

On the other hand, few respondents, 9% of them, agree that backward traditions that is rooted in society does not affect women 'economic participation. As clearly

indicated in the Table 3, the respondents say that we solve economic problem by saving or deposit of money, by leading their life based on plan and others.

The role of government in encouraging women's participation in economic activity

As indicated in the Table 4, among the total population of the respondents, 60% of them say that the assistance of government to encourage women's role in the achievement of economic development is high. There are some reasons that they forward for its assistance. Some of the assistance are by forming cooperation, by giving training that helps to them enter in any job they want, by a ascertaining that helps them to protect themselves from un useful traditional actions and sexual attack, by encouraging their participation in productive works, by assisting economic aid, by giving priority or due attention in education, due attention in completion for job and other assistances.

On the other hand, a few respondents say that the assistance of the government in encouraging women's economic role in economic development is low. The reason that they mention is that the government adopts

Table 4. The role of government in encouraging women's economic participations

Number	Item/ character	Number of respondent s	percent	
1	What is the role of government in encouraging women's economic participation?	A. High	27	60%
		B. Medium	15	33.3%
		C. Low	3	6.7%
		Total	45	100%
2	Do you believe that the government gives adequate right and legal entitlement that strength women's participation in economic activity?	A. Yes	40	88.9%
		B. No	5	11.1%
		Total	45	100%

(Source: computed from primary source, 2005)

and drafts policies to encourage the role of women but the implementation has paper value.

As shown in Table 4, 88.9% of the respondent asserted that the government provides adequate right to women to encourage their economic participation. For this matter, they picked up Article 35 of the FDRE constitution that give guarantee for women's right. According to this article, women shall have equal right with men in the enjoyment of rights and protections. So, in order to combat the historical legacy of inequality and discrimination, government gave special attention to women to compete and participate with men (FDRE constitution, 1995).

The role of women in economic development of the Town

According to Teshome Wondimu, women in Ambo town play a vital role in economic development of their town from the three points of view. These are saving role, efficient utilization or usage of resource, and family planning role. Women play a great role in saving what they earn both in kind and in cash. They are active participants in traditional saving institution such as *Equib*, *Edir* and so on. In this case, women are not only the active participants in these traditional saving institutions, but also play a crucial role in leading, coordinating ,

managing and organizing these traditional saving institutions.

Women are less likely to engage or involve in extravagant and wasteful practice than men. Extravagant and wasteful practices at all levels can affect the national economy of a given society. If a person is wasteful and extravagant, it many affect the life of his family and ultimately that of the society at large. If these practice are dominant, it many seriously affect the development of the national as well as the local economy. This is because extravagant and wasteful practices are antithesis of saving and have a potential impact on economic development. Therefore, we can conclude that women play a vital role in economic development through saving and in turn by reducing extravagant and wasteful practice both at house hold and local levels⁸.

Regarding the saving role that women play, women's and child affair's office is responsible for organizing women in group and providing of funds , credit and loans for themselves. The office also has the task of creating awareness about the importance of saving. As indicated As indicated in Table 5, women play a saving role and in turn they maintain and achieve food security at house

⁸ Interview with Teshome Wondimu, head of finance and Economic development office of Ambo town Administration.

Table 5. The saving role of women in Ambo Town since 2002

Year	Number of total Group	Number of women	Amount of money deposit (saving)
From 2002 up to 2004	53	573	142,445 birr
2005	30	515	90,715 birr
Total	83	1088	194,215 birr

Source: an interview conducted with women's and child's affairs office, April 2013.

hold and community level⁹.

The Table 5 clearly shows that from the year 2002 up to 2004 there are 53 groups and the number of women is 573 and the saving amount in cash is 142,445 birr. In 2005 the number of women and the amount (deposit) of money is increase¹⁰. From this we can conclude that the saving role of women is increased from time to time due to the effort made by the government by providing loan and credit.

Next to the saving role of women, they are more effective in better and efficient utilization or usage of resource. Women play a great role in effective and efficient use of available resource particularly at house hold level. Moreover, women play a significant role in family planning. Since population growth is seen as a threat of economic development, economic empowerment of women is essential way of controlling population growth¹¹. Women are playing family planning role and intur promote the process of economic development and achieve food security(Ibid).

Moreover, women also play productive, reproductive and community managing role. The reproductive role of women is associated with biological and social reproduction tasks and also known as domestic roles. The reproductive role of women includes preparing food, cleaning, washing, cooking and the task of bearing and nurturing children. In this regard, reproductive role is considered as the responsibility of women than men. The fact that women take care of such activities or roles creates the necessary condition for men to involve themselves in activities that are self enhancing, better relaxing and materially rewarding.

With regard to productive roles, the role of women's

includes the activities in the area of agriculture, small scale business enterprise, marketing, and formal and informal economic activities, that are related to the production of goods and services with a market value. In productive role, women are not fully involved in formal economic activity rather they are involved in informal economic activates and this informal economic activities are less valued and less waged in the society. Women in Ambo town are participating particularly in informal sector and doing activities such as trading, making and sealing *Enjera, Bread, Areke, Tella*, and the like. However, culturally, women involvement and contribution in productive sphere is not given due recognition and considered as invisible labor force. But, this attitude has just started to change at least among the educated due to the effort made by both the government and other national and international NGOs to increase the status of women.

Finally, women also play community roles. These activities are related with the social and cultural events of the community. Community roles are assumed to be the extension of women's reproductive work. As everybody knows that the participation of women is vital in local community institution such as in *Idir, Ikub*, wedding and other social and cultural events and ceremonies. In this case, women are participating in preparing food because these activities require food usually in large amount.

In summary, if women are assigned to work on all the reproductive, reproductive, and community task and reproductive task take up time and energy without providing any income and recognized value. In this case, what the implication is that if reproductive tasks which take much of time is not valued, it lead to denial of opportunities to engage in productive role or economic activities which inturn lead women to invisible contribution and lack of qualification in the national economy in general.

Additionally, according to the interview that was conducted or made with official of women's and child's affairs office, and finance and economic development

⁹ Interview with Belaynesh Kumsa, head of Ambo district women and child affairs office.

¹⁰ Interview with Belaynesh Kumsa, head of Ambo district women and child affairs office

¹¹ Interview with Teshome Wondimu, head of finance and Economic development office of Ambo town Administration

office of Ambo town Administration, the following are the major contribution's and indicator's of the role of women's in economic development both at household and community levels.

A. Improved their per capital income.

Women participation in the economic activities can improve the long term economic and social living conditions of its household. Women significantly increase their PCI through participating in income generation activities (IGA) and small scale business and also through wealth creation, asset building and others. In this case, increase PCI of women means that family consumption is increase and in turn better quality of life and longer life expectancy will be achieved. Moreover, the PCI of women are increased than before by participating in trading activities, by producing and processing of local or domestic alcohols such as *tella*¹², *Arake*¹³ and so on and by selling what they produced¹⁴.

B. Accumulation of Asset.

Ownership of durable house hold assets was regarded as one of the most important indicators of improvement in the house hold welfare. In addition to the positive impact of income over the house hold, women participation in the economic activity is also improving the ownership of key house hold assets.¹⁵

C. Housing improvement

It is a well established fact that housing and its related investments is the key indicator of country's economic development. In this case women's play a vital role in improving and maintaining quality of house. Housing improvements can be regarded as an integral part of economic strategies.¹⁶

D. Participation in IGA

Women's are highly participating in income generating activities particularly in Micro and small scale business

¹² *Tella* is an Ethiopian home-brewed beer which differs from the others.

¹³ *Arake* is a distilled beverage

¹⁴ Interview with Teshome Wondimu, head of finance and Economic development office of Ambo town Administration head of Ambo district economic development office

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ ibid

and they increase their PCI¹⁷.

In summary, according to the respondents, some of the contributions of women in the economic development of Ambo town are promoting economic growth, achieving food security, promoting efficiency and reducing poverty, and helping future generation by promoting sustainable development. Moreover, women play a great role and actively involved in IGA such as small and medium business which are common in the town.

Constraints to effective women's economic role

As in most parts of the world, Ethiopian women's access to economic opportunities is limited. With minimal access to formal employment, they are highly concentrated in small scale, self-initiated and administered businesses, commonly referred to as 'the informal sector'¹⁸.

According to Belaynesh Kumsa, there are many constraints that hinder the effective role of women in economic development. Among these obstacles the most and often still unsolved problem is the traditional backward attitudes, beliefs and customs of the society towards women which are continued as a historical legacy across the country. This traditional backward attitudes towards women (assuming women as a weaker sex, second citizens, dependent, passive, and ignorant) are not only hinder and make the effective role of women invisible and unrecognized, but also it make and force women's to internalize and accept their weakness and for long period even still remain unconfident. Even though, the government tries to change the attitudes of the society through different mechanisms it is not eradicated and remain difficult. In general, the following are considered as common barriers and often make the role of women unrecognized and insignificant.

A. Low level educational back ground

According to women's and child's affairs office, the majority of Ambo town women's are not educated. From this, we can conclude that women's non-educational status hinder their expected role.

B. Lack of initial capital to start their own business.

Despite, the high interest and motivation of women to

¹⁷ Interview with Belaynesh Kumsa, head of Ambo district women and child affairs office

¹⁸ <http://www.actionaid.org/ethiopia/what-we-do/womens-development>

work, lack of initial capital to start up and to run the business hinder their economic activity.

C. Lack of business know-how

Women involve in various economic activities especially in marketing process and trading activities, but they lack business know-how i.e. how to run business and cost-benefit analysis.

D. Lack of monitoring women's cooperation activities

The government is trying to coordinate women in group to work in cooperation and solve their economic problem. However, there is no supervision and follow up about the day to day activities of these women's cooperation work. According to the respondents, women's organized activities are run in the town even without a better problem identification, problem solving and technical support rather various local government bodies and NGOS continue to assist women's only financially.¹⁹

E. Dependency of family on women's

Culturally, in some family, some members are dependent on the earning of women. In some case husband remains dependant on their wife income. Such dependency of family members on women's makes their role invisible and unrecognized. However, women's are continued to play their role in various economic activities.

F. Lack of interest to work in group (cooperation)

Women's are fearful of cooperation and they are not well aware of the benefits of working together. Working in cooperation especially for women can make their role visible and it also increase their confidence.

G. Women's dependency on men's income.

Despite the existence of family dependency on women's, in some case there is also women's dependency on men's income. This is due to the influence exerted by their husband. If this is developed, they did not give decision by their own in their overall life. In this case, dependency of women's can bring lack of decision making power and this make the role of women unrecognized.

¹⁹ Interview with Teshome Wondimu, head of finance and Economic development office of Ambo town Administration

H. Lack of confidence and inferiority

In this case, the most and often difficult problem for the integrations of women in to the economic development and in other various political offices is lack of confidence. Women lack of confidence is mainly due to the culture of the society and their inferiority assumption. In addition, women's are not highly committed and they lack interest to take full responsibilities and accountabilities and they are fear of challenges especially in office positions.

Despite, the existence of the above mentioned barriers for women's effective role in economic development, they are continued to play their role in economic development. Even though, different problems hinder the participation of women's, their roles in various economic activities are very significant.

The role of government in encouraging women's economic role

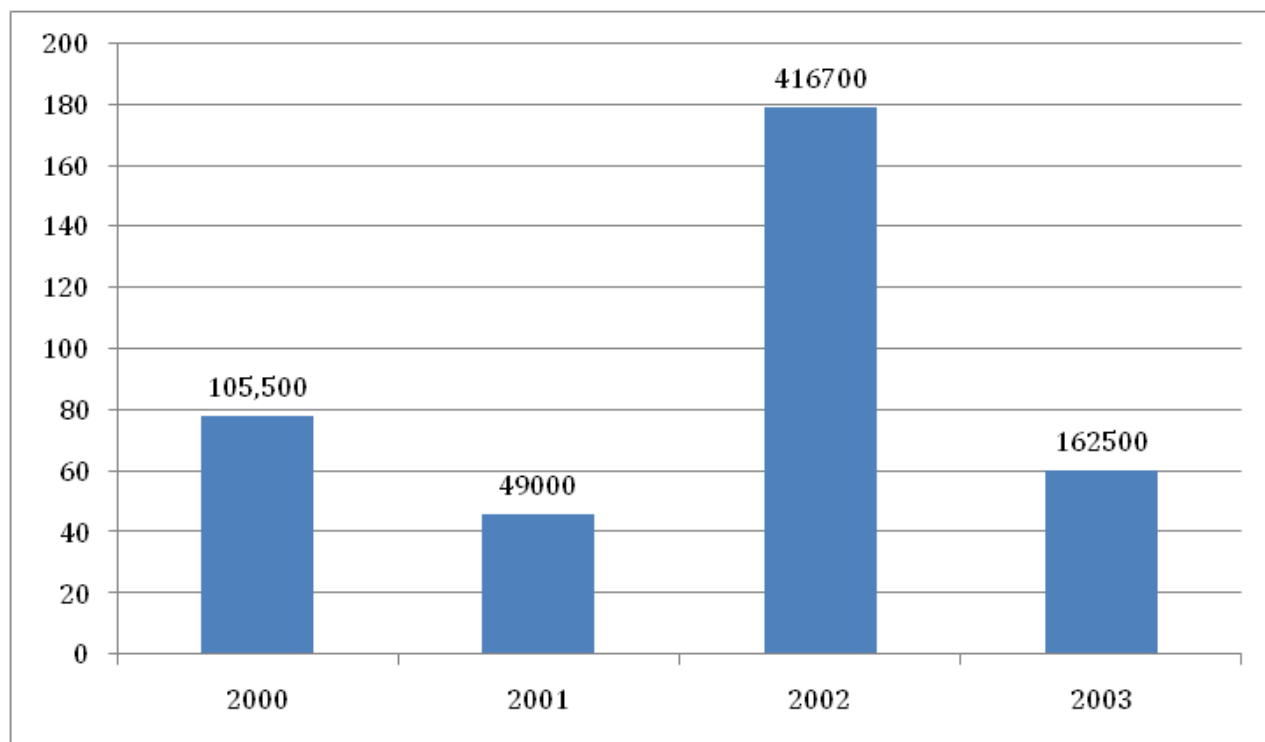
The Small and Micro Enterprise (SME) sector has the potential to provide a livelihood for a large number of populous in developing countries²⁰. In this regard, the government through its various bodies and in cooperation with NGO has been encouraging women's economic role by the provision of revolving funds, by organizing Micro and small scale enterprise (MSSE) there by transferring idle government equity (assets) in the accounts to micro financial institutions (MFI) such as Oromia credit and saving share company (OCSSCO). Additionally, Ambo town administration particularly women's and child's affairs office, and finance and economic development office encourages women's organized activities by signing collateral agreements with the credit institutions under the umbrella of Micro and small enterprises. Moreover, the government also gives assistance in cooperation with NGOs to those women living with HIV /AIDS. This was currently facilitated by finance and Economic development office of Ambo town Administration.²¹

According to Bizunesh Hailu, in previous government it is dead time for women. Women are highly marginalized and they lack even the right to have their own property. Before 1991, women are not considered as equal important and significant actors in economic development

²⁰

<http://www.ethpress.gov.et/herald/index.php/herald/development/5204-tapping-into-the-potential-of-women-entrepreneurship-in-ethiopia>

²¹ Interview with Teshome Wondimu, head of finance and Economic development office of Ambo town Administration.



Graph 1: The number of women who have access to credit and loan from UNCEF project from 2000-2003.

of a given society. Moreover, women are highly demoralized by the society and even the people accept for century as a norm and culture and become inherited. In contrast to this, the current government is highly committed to recognize women as an important actor in the development process of the country. The government gives adequate right and legal entitlement including the right to ownership, equal employment opportunity and so on. Since 1991, especially after 1997, there is a tremendous change regarding the status of women's. Their participation and involvement are increase in various socio- economic activities. The government gives high attention and priority for women and youth because it is believed that economic development cannot occur without the active involvement of women and youth²².

In this regard, women's and child affairs office in cooperation with UNICEF promotes the economic role of women's through the provisions of credit and loan.

As indicated in the Graph 1, the number on the left side of the graph shows the numbers of women who have access to credit and loan while the numbers on the top of each indicates the amount of money they gained. Finally, the numbers that found below the graph shows the year from 2000 up to 2003 (source: data taken from interview

with Belayneshe Kumsa). From this we can conclude that the government through women's and child's affairs office and in cooperation with various local and international organization are encouraging women's role.

In general, the government has provided some programs and facilities to enhance women participation in the development of the economy. Some of these are:-

- A. Facilitating credit and loan
- B. Education mothers
- C. Promote forum association
- D. Promote IGA
- F. Formulating effective policy for women's

Possible Solution to Improve Women's Role in Economic Development of the Town

There are many potential and actual solutions that might be used in the future and at present time to facilitate women's role in economic development. These are giving training, ensuring their equal status, facilitating to have their own income establishing cooperatives, providing psychological make up to develop self confidence, giving special reward, promoting and developing peer education to reduce their inferiority feeling, and so on (interview with Marta and Bizunesh, 2013). Moreover, the prospected

²² Interview with Belayneshe Kumsa, head of Ambo district women and child affairs office

solutions to increase women's role in economic development in the town may be participating them in IGA both individually and cooperatively (in group) by providing the necessary basic business skill (technical or business know how), providing initial capitals and working place or marketing place with the continuous monitoring and technical supports.²³

CONCLUSION

Like any other less developed countries, in Ethiopia, the half portion of the society, women, suffer from economic, political, social, and cultural aspects in the past especially before 1991. From the economic aspect, women are excluded from participating in high income economic (generating) activities; often women lack the right to have their own property and equality of employment opportunity. Cultural norms like men dominance and traditional belief system are the major constraints that face women and also affect their role in economic development and other sectors. It is clearly indicated in the study that the society assigned lower status to women, lower valuation to their work and denied recognition to their contribution.

An improvement in understanding the need of participation of women in various activities has been a better way during recent period especially during this regime. Women's role and their involvement in economic activities can benefit the whole society and also enable to conduct a strong war or to fight against poverty. It also speeds up economic growth, food security, promotes efficiency, helping future generation and promotes sustainable development. As indicated in the study, women improvement in economic activities is also expected to improve personal well being, investments (house hold) and enable households to feed themselves and their family members.

Moreover, the role of women in the economic development of Ambo town is considered as having greatest value in building up local production and in promoting economic growth. Without question, women who apply their knowledge to produce valuable goods and services and to solve problems of the society often are regarded as important ingredients of economic development. The study shows that the economic role of women's in the town is important not only to reduce poverty but also to increase family consumption. Therefore, for economic development to occur, women's role is significant.

Based on the investigation on the role of women in economic development, we can conclude that women's role and involvement in the economic development of the

country as well as the town is very significant even if there are some constraints. As the role of women rises, economic development will increase and poverty decrease. Moreover, women's economic role is not only the most effective way of reducing poverty but also it is the main instrument of achievement food security. So, economic development is unthinkable without the active involvement and contributions of women.

RECOMMENDATION

- ❖ The significant contribution of women in saving, family planning, reproductive, and productive works entails clear message for development policy makers. Therefore, they should recognize that the integration of women's role and needs in the development paradigms is a prerequisite for successful development planning and implementation.
- ❖ Particular attention must be given to gender empowerment in economic sector.
- ❖ It is essential to improve the level of income of women and facilitate their labor in appropriate place.
- ❖ It is advisable to incorporate women in overall aspect of socio-economic policy measures both by the government and non-governmental organization (NGOs).
- ❖ The government through its various bodies should create feasible program which can enhance the economic role of women.
- ❖ The government through women's and child's affairs office should launch training skills and gender based education with the aim of enhancing women's self confidence.
- ❖ The government in cooperation with NGOs should provide credit and loan for women.
- ❖ The existing women's group in the town should be organized and strengthened to increase women's access to extension activities.
- ❖ The society should minimize the belief of inferiority assumption, cultural norm, male dominance and restriction of women from education and training centers.
- ❖ Planning out what must be done drawing lessons from the past experiences and believe that women's concerns are the issue of the society as a whole.
- ❖ Government should help women to get recognition as they are productive enough and have the capacity to participate in the economic activity in both house hold and nation at large.

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²³ Interview with Teshome Wondimu , head of finance and Economic development office of Ambo town Administration.

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INTERVIEW

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