

# The Millennium Development Goals and the Status of Gender Disparity in Ethiopia: Achievements and Challenges

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## Abstract

Recognizing the magnitude of the global gender gap and its unbearable consequences, the UN included the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment as one of its 8 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), declared in 2000. Ethiopia adopted the MDGs and has been incorporating them into its consecutive Core Strategic Policies, with the commitment to realize them by 2015. This study was intended to see whether Ethiopia is on track to meet the globally adopted goals by the deadline, with particular reference to gender and to analyse the achievements Ethiopia has made so far and the challenges ahead in achieving gender equality. Both descriptive and analytical methods were employed and a triangular approach was used in analysing data. The status of gender gap in Ethiopia was analysed using the Global Gender Gap Index. The study found that though Ethiopia may not be able to achieve the gender related MDG by the deadline; it has made a significant progress in reducing gender disparity over the last decade. Limited enforcement capacity and gender disaggregated data; significant gender gap at secondary and tertiary level of education and political offices; deep rooted gender insensitive social values and political culture remain as challenges. It is argued that addressing these challenges and identifying Gender Practical and Strategic Needs down at community level could be instrumental in narrowing the gap. Besides, strengthening the recently introduced Gender Responsive Budgeting approach, enhancing the pro-poor policy in general and adopting the Gender and Development policy approach in particular, could be instrumental in closing the gender gap in Ethiopia, in the near future.

**Keywords:** Ethiopia; Gender; Gender Policy; Global Gender Disparity Index; Millennium Development Goals.

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## 1. Introduction

Long before the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were designed in 2000, the UN and its agencies had been working to narrow down the gender gap in the world, recognizing that resources, power and knowledge have not be equally shared by the two sexes of humanity. Thus, when 189 UN member states adopted the Millennium Declaration in 2000, politicians and experts were clear that without incorporating a goal that brings down gender disparity, all sorts of plans, including eradicating poverty would be a futile exercise. Hence, during drawing up of the eight MDGs, the UN included one goal on the *promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment* known as MDG3. It has one target on education and four indicators on female's empowerment and political representation. The following table shows the target set out and the indicators identified.

**Table 1:** MDG 3: Target and Indicators

<b>Goal 3</b>	Promote gender equality and women's empowerment
<b>Target</b>	Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015
<b>Indicators</b>	
1	Ratio of girls to boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education
2	Ratio of literate women to men 15-24 years old
3	Share of women in wage employment in the non-agriculture sector
4	Proportion of seats held by women in national parliament

Source: organized by the authors using information from [1]

According to the joint report produced by the UN Country Team (UNCT) and the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (FDRE-MoFED) in 2012, Ethiopia has made significant progress towards achieving the MDGs. Such progress is highly attributed to Ethiopia's consistent pro-poor policy where more than 65% of its public expenditure has been spent on education, water, health, roads, agriculture, housing and energy. Pro-poor expenditures are defined as those that target food security, increase agricultural production, support infrastructural development and provide support for delivery of basic services in the education and health sectors to the poor [2].

As per the joint report mentioned above, six of the MDGs are already on track and strong efforts are made by the FDRE government and its development partners to ensure that the remaining two (MDG 3 and 5) are brought on track by 2015[3]. While MDG 3 deals with promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, MDG 5 has the target of improving maternal health [4]. As the goal indicates, MDG 5 is highly associated with MDG 3 in the sense that it is dealing with the gender reproductive role of women [5].

To our knowledge, so far, no systematic research has been carried out concerning the current status of gender disparity in Ethiopia, particularly using the Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) developed by the World Economic Forum in 2006. Thus, this study was intended to describe and analyze the achievements Ethiopia has

made so far and the challenges ahead in achieving gender equality in general and the MDG3 in particular, at macro level. Here, we would like to remained readers that although we are aware that Ethiopia is a Federal State and a home to diverse nations, it was not the scope of this paper to assess the status of gender disparity in each Federating State or national group. An in-depth study concerning gender disparity on the urban-rural divide would have also revealed a relatively different image. However, this too was not the scope of this paper. Finally, an in-depth interview with relevant government Offices and development agencies as well as a focus group discussion with specialist on the area would have enriched the paper. However, we had no the financial means to do so.

Relevant National Laws, Policies and Reports of Ethiopian government, literature, UN agencies working documents and reports, UN agencies and Ethiopian Government joint reports, and to some extent the personal observation of the researchers were used as sources of data. Both descriptive and analytical methods were employed and a triangular approach was used in analyzing data, in which data were presented quantitatively and analyzed through narrative means. Data generated through the GGGI was used in evaluating gender gap in Ethiopia. Here, it is worth noting that looking at the MDG 3, gender equality is narrowly interpreted, and there has been a growing recognition that the target and the indicators that frame the goal are too limited. Nevertheless, half of the MDGs now have targets directly related to MDG 3. For example, MDG 1 has a target on decent work for women, MDG 2 on girl's education and MDG 5 on maternal mortality and sexual and reproductive health [6]. Thus, instead of the indicators developed by the United Nations Development Group (UNDG), the more comprehensive and sophisticated index developed by the World Economic Forum (WEF), the GGGI, was used in evaluating the gender gap in Ethiopia. GGGI examines gender gap in four fundamental categories (sub-indexes): Economic Participation and Opportunity, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival and Political Empowerment. Each sub-index has its own indicators (for details how the sub indexes are derived and operationalized, see [7]).

Apart from the introduction, the paper has three major sections. The first briefly discusses the legal and policy frameworks as well as institutional mechanisms that have been introduced to tackle gender disparity in Ethiopia. The second part deals with the status of gender disparity in Ethiopia against the GGGI. The third section identifies the challenges Ethiopia is facing in narrowing gender gap. Finally, the paper ends up with concluding remarks and the way forward.

## **2. Laws, Policies and Institutional Mechanisms**

### **2.1. Legal frameworks**

#### **2.1.1. Global and Regional Conventions**

Ethiopia has been introducing several legal instruments to address gender related issues. To start with, it has ratified a number of International and Regional conventions adopted to protect the right of women and promote gender equality. For example, Ethiopia is a signatory to the Universal Declarations of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Convention on the Elimination of All Form of Discrimination Against Women, the Convention against Human Trafficking and the Exploitation of Prostitution of others, the African

Union Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, which all guarantee the equality of women and men in general and the right of women in particular. Ethiopia has also ratified the Beijing Plan of Action and many other conventions adopted by International or Regional organization to empower women and ensure gender equality [8]. Such Conventions have been domesticated. For example, the fundamental rights and principles adopted by the UDHR, the ICCPR and the ICESCR are incorporated into the current Constitution of Ethiopia, in the form of human and democratic rights. Such conventions have also been, occasionally, communicated to the Ethiopian public through the State media. They have been incorporated into the curricula through Civic and Ethical education, a common course taught across all levels of education in Ethiopia.

### **2.1.2. Federal Constitution**

The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic Ethiopia (FDRE), introduced a historic measure on gender equality in a country where history vexed with traditions and religious matters made women to suffer due to their sex. The Constitution not only guaranteed the equality of the two sexes but it also recognized the need for affirmative action for women to enable them to compete and participate in all spheres of life. Generally, under Article 35 sub-articles 1-8 of the Federal Constitution [9], the following gender related issues are addressed: equal rights in marriage; entitlement to affirmative action/measures; protection from harmful traditional practices, right to maternity leave with full pay, right to consultation in projects affecting their lives; property rights (to acquire, administer, control, use and transfer); right to equality in employment (promotion, pay, pension, entitlements) and the right to access to family planning education, information and capacity building. Besides, with the purpose of addressing gender disparity, relevant laws have been revised and/or newly adopted. A closer look at the following four different but interrelated revised or newly adopted laws will make this obvious.

### **2.1.3. Family Law**

The Revised Federal Family Code [10], enacted on 4 July 2000, guarantees equality between sexes in their relation concerning marriage (Proc. No. 213/2000). Ethiopia's Regional States have also issued their own Family Laws, which by and large are in line with the Federal Family Code. Both the Federal and Regional Family Codes have made the minimum marriage age 18 years, for both sexes [11].

### **2.1.4. Labour and Employment Laws**

According to the Labour Law, (proclamation No. 377/2003 (Art. 87) [12], women are not to be discriminated against as regards to employment and payment, on the grounds of sex. Moreover, by this law special protection is accorded to pregnant women, including paid maternity leave. Similarly, according to the revised Federal Public Servants Proclamation No. 262/2002 (Art. 13) [13], sex based discrimination is prohibited and female candidates are given preferential treatment to fill vacancies. Women were discriminated against concerning pension. However, following the amendment of the Public Servant Law of the 1962 (Art, 4) by Proc. No.190/99, widows and widowers have been given equal status in pensions [14].

### **2.1.5. Land Use Administration Law**

The Federal Rural Land Administration Law (Proc. No. 89/97) [15] ensures the equality of men and women regarding the use, administration, control, transferring and bequeathing holding rights of land. The proclamation also provides for the participation of women on decisions concerning land allocation. Furthermore, Art.6 (10) this proclamation requires Regional land administration laws to conform the equal rights of women regarding the use, administration, control, transferring and bequeathing holding rights of land. Consequently, land administrations laws have been promulgated in the Regional States of Ethiopia [16]. In most Regional States, the minimum age requirement for rural land entitlement is equal both for female and male (18 years), except in Tigray Region, which lowers the age requirement for female to 16 years [17].

### **2.1.6. Laws on Violence Against Women**

The 1957 Penal Code was revised and enforced as of July 2004. The revised Penal Code incorporated provisions for violence against women. Under this Penal Code, issues like female genital mutilation and other Harmful Traditional Practices (HTP) are penalized and domestic violence is designated as HTP. Besides, rape, sexual abuse, abduction, trafficking for prostitution purposes and forced labour have merited tougher and graver penalties under this Penal Code [18].

Finally, it is worth noting that Ethiopia's Regional States' Constitutions, which by and large resemble to and operate within the general framework of the FDRE constitution, have also addressed the question of gender equality meticulously [19].

## **2.2. Policies**

In 1993, Ethiopia enacted the *National Policy on Women* (NPW) [20]. The NPW mapped out the problems of Ethiopian women in all fields of development and identified the patriarchal system as the root cause that exposed women to political, economic and social discrimination; reinforced by traditional practices that give credence to cultural/religious norms and values. The *National Population Policy* adopted in 1993, also called for the elimination of legal and customary practices undermining women's economic and social rights, including property rights and access to employment [21]. In addition, the *Development and Social Welfare Policy* adopted in 1996 recommended for mainstreaming gender issues in all programs, projects and services, including by designing women specific components when appropriate [22]

The Education and Training Policy designed by the Transition Government of Ethiopia in 1994 [23], had components included to ensure gender equality, which among others include enabling girls for education and changing the attitudes and values of the Ethiopian society towards girls' education. In 2004, the Ministry of Education (MoE) developed National Girl's Education Strategy [24]. In 2011, the MoE also developed a *Gender Mainstreaming Guideline* to be used at different levels of the education system [25]. Generally, in the education sector, specific steps that favour female students and civil servants have been taken at Teacher's Training Institutions, Colleges and Universities. For example, although it has been varying from year to year, entry points (average point) to preparatory school (grade 11 and 12), vocational training centres and higher education

institutions have been lease for female students compare to their male counter parts. Since recent times, female students have also been receiving special tutorial classes for courses such as Mathematics, English, etc. In some public Universities (for example, Mekelle University, Addis Ababa University, Haromaya University), few female students selected based on their economic background have been receiving limited financial and material supports. When it comes to employment, the cumulative grade point average required to teach in public Universities, for example, have been made to be lease for female candidates compare to their male counter parts. The same is true in terms of academic promotion and scholarship awards.

In 1997, Ethiopia adopted the *Micro and Small Scale Enterprises Development Strategy*, which gives a particular emphasis to addressing gender inequality vis-a-vis access to credit and saving services, entrepreneurial skill developing training opportunities and technologies as well as access to market and information [26].

In 2006, Ethiopia developed the *National Plan of Action for Gender- Equality* (NPA-GE) [27]. In this Plan of Action, the plight of women was assessed and the following were identified as Ethiopian women's gender related problems: being more vulnerable to poverty, having limited or no access to and control over critical resources, lack of ownership of and decision-making rights over property, extended labour time and workload, vulnerability to traditional harmful practices, low status across social strata and subordination to men; low girls enrolment rate, and high chances exposing to HIV/AIDS pandemic, etc. The Plan of Action also recognized absence of appropriate and viable institutional mechanisms as serious constraints hampering efforts towards gender equality [28].

Since 2000, Ethiopia has been implementing three consecutive Core Strategic Plans (globally known as Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper) of a five years term. While the first term called *Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Program (SDPRP)* [29] was implemented from 2001/2-2004/5, the second term: the *Plan for Accelerated and Sustainable Development to End Poverty (PASDEP)* was executed from 2005/6-2009/10. The third one, which is known as *Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP)* is ongoing (2010-2015). Across all the consecutive Strategic Plans, addressing gender disparity and empowering women has been included as one of the Strategic Pillars. For example, during PASDEP period, "unleashing of the productive potential of Ethiopia's women" was identified as one of the pillars [30]. Similarly, in the ongoing Strategic Plan, the GTP, "promoting gender equality and empowering women and youth" is put as one of the Strategic Pillar [31].

Across the three consecutive Core Strategic Plans mentioned above, and other documents, one can identify the following issues incorporated to promote gender equality and women's empowerment: (i) improving the lives of women and reducing their work load (example, by improving access to water supply, transportation and sanitation and labour saving technologies); (ii) increasing girl's access to education; (iii) improving health care services access and facilities related to mothers and women's health (iv) promotion of women's participation in development policies, (v) strengthening non formal education program for women;(vi) eradication of traditional practices harmful to women's health; (vii) implementing gender-sensitive HIV/AIDS prevention(viii) carry out massive and systematic training and awareness campaign on gender equality (ix) adopting agricultural programs and technical and vocational training to the needs of women (x) ensuring the land holding rights of women, (xi)

enhancing the political empowerment of women and (xii) enhancing the economic empowerment of women (by increasing access to credit facilities, supporting women to establish micro and small scale enterprises, favouring goods and services supplied by women entrepreneurs or women's associations during public procurement, etc [32, 33,34 and 35].

Ethiopia's Food Security Program (adopted in 2003), also envisages provision of seed, fertilizer, and agricultural tools and extending credit services to destitute women to help them develop sustainable livelihood through cooperatives and other private sector initiatives; improving nutrition for children under five years of age, pregnant and lactating mothers. In the Food Security Program, female headed households have been given priority. Particular priority has been given to women in the Productive Safety Net Program that include public work for the poor and distribution of food or cash [36].

In 2008, the FDRE-MoFED developed *Guidelines* for mainstreaming gender in the budget process usually known as Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) [37]. This guideline clearly identified GRB indicators. Following the development of the guiding, all sectors at federal and regional level have been required to introduce GRB plans. This in turn implies gender responsive reporting and accountability. Currently, not only gender is integrated in to the annual plans of Federal and Regional Institutions (FRI), but all FRI have also budget line for gender. Since 2010/11, GRB has been more visible, particularly in the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education, with the introduction of Program Budgeting by the MoEED [38].GRB refers to drawing up the whole budget in which resources are allocated on the basis of the analysis done of the practical needs and strategic interests of women and men and the demands expressed by their representatives. It involves therefore an analysis of the entire budget in terms of its benefits for women and men and boys and girls [39; 40].

Finally, in 2014, the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia [41], put percentage of women candidates among the parameter used to allocate public money for political parties, which is being implemented during the ongoing 2015 election. It is believed that such policy will motivate political parties to recruit as many as possible women members, which in turn will increase the number of women in the political sphere in Ethiopia. It is a common knowledge that political parties are the main institutions where futures political leaders are trained

### **2.3. Institutional Mechanisms**

Since 1992, Ethiopia introduced institutional machineries mandated with ensuring gender equality, eliminating any form of discrimination and harmful traditional practices against women and girls and empowering women economically, politically and socially.

#### **2.3.1. Federal level: Ministry of Women, Youth and Children Affairs**

Since 1992/3, there was Women's Affairs Office under the Office of the Prime Minister. Considering the gravity of gender related problems; however, this Office was promoted to Ministerial level in 2005. Currently, this Ministerial Office is known as Ministry of Women, Youth and Children Affairs (MoWYCA). Furthermore, the Women's Affairs Standing Committee in the House of Peoples Representatives (federal legislative body) is institutional machinery established to oversee the inclusion of women's needs on laws enacted by the parliament

and policies developed by the Prime Minister's Office and other sector based Ministers. Besides, all other Parliamentary Standing Committees have at least one women member so that women's issues will be tabled in the deliberation of the committees. There has been a deliberate move of assigning a woman deputy chair person to most Standing Committees as well. A women parliamentarian Caucus has also been established [42].

### **2.3.2. Regional Level: the Bureau of Women, Youth and Children's Affairs**

Currently, each Regional State has Bureau of Women, Youth and Children's Affairs (previously known as Bureau of Women's Affairs (BoWA). The Bureau of Women, Youth and Children's Affairs (BoWYCA) is mandated with mainstreaming gender and ensuring the equal opportunity of both sexes in their respective regions; including by supervising the implementation of affirmative action introduced to bring women to equal level from their history long discrimination. Below Regional level, Women's Affairs/gender focal person/ have been established at Zonal, District (*Wereda*) and sub district (*Kebele*) levels [43]

### **2.3.3. Sector Level: Gender Affairs Department (GAD)**

To ensure that gender issues are mainstreamed and considered in each sector, Ethiopia established Gender Affairs Department (often called Women's Affairs Department (WAD) in every major Federal (Ministries /Agencies /Commissioners and Higher Education Institutions) and a gender focal person in Regional Bureaus [44] The GADs/WADs are mandated with mainstreaming gender during formulation and implementation of development policies/plans, projects, programs, etc in their respective institutions. While the general objectives of the GADs/WADs are derived from the National Policy on Women, their specific objectives are formulated by harmonizing the objectives of the specific institution with those of the national policy [45]

Finally, it is important to note that while GADs/WADs and WAB are accountable to their respective institution, they have working relations with MoWYCA. They share their quarterly and annual reports with MoWTCA and the later provides technical feedbacks and support to build their capacity [46].

## **3. The Status of Gender Disparity in Ethiopia**

In the above section, we have tried to identify some of the revised or newly adopted laws, policies and institutions introduced in the last two decades, to ensure gender equality in Ethiopia. In the following section, we shall see the status of gender disparity in Ethiopia. We have consulted several government and development agencies documents as well literatures produced by academicians. Due methodological conveniences and the availability of up to-date data, however, we have decided to use the data generated by the World Economic Forum in 2013, using the four pillars of GGGI.

“The [GGGI] is a framework for capturing the magnitude and scope of gender-based disparities and tracking their progress. The Index benchmarks national gender gaps on economic, political, education and health criteria, and provides country rankings that allow for effective comparisons across regions and income groups, and over time” [47]



The GGGI examines the gap between men and women in four fundamental categories (sub-indexes): Economic Participation and Opportunity, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival and Political Empowerment. For example, economic participation and opportunity is measured by percentage share of senior and professional positions, and power over economic resources as measured by estimated earned income. The following table shows, Ethiopia's gender parity index as of 2013.

**Table-2:** Economic Participation and Opportunity (over all rank-93)

	Indicators	Progress		Female/ Male ratio	Rank /136 countries
		Female	Male		
Economic Participation and Opportunity	Labour force participation	81	91	0.89	30
	Wage equality for similar work	-	-	0.65	73
	Estimated earned income (PPP US\$)	917	1360	0.67	38
	Legislators, senior officials and managers	16	84	0.19	93
	Professional and technical workers	33	67	0.49	101

Source: [48].

Economic development and social transformation is unthinkable without the engagement of women. This is to argue that women's economic empowerment is a prerequisite for sustainable development and the achievement of all MDGs [49]. In the developing world, including Ethiopia, Women's potentials have been less exploited and utilized. This is due to the fact that development projects had been male focused, and women have been neglected from the formal employment sector.

According to the WEF Global Gender Gap Report (2013), the economic participation and opportunity of Ethiopian women is still low, although there has been a significant increase across time. For example, the estimated amount of income for females in 2013 was 917 USD/year whereas male's income was 1360 USD. This indicates that Ethiopian men enjoy an extra income close to half of the estimated income of their women counterparts. Furthermore, the number of female legislators, senior officials and managers at the federal level are five times less than their male counterparts. This demonstrates that women are not equally represented in the governmental structure. The report also indicates that female's employment opportunity in professional and technical work is 33% while the number of male is 67%. Generally, from the report, we can conclude that women do not have equal economic participation and opportunity compared to men in the formal sector

especially in areas which require special skills. Therefore, Ethiopia needs to invest considerable amount of resources to increase women’s participation in political and economic activities by providing them with short-term and long-term trainings to enhance their skills and competitiveness.

**Table-3:** Educational Attainment (over all rank-131)

	Indicators	Progress		Female/ Male ratio	Rank /136 countries
		Female	Male		
Educational Attainment	Literacy rate	29	49	0.59	129
	Enrolment in primary education	86	89	0.93	116
	Enrolment in secondary education	11	17	0.66	116
	Enrolment in tertiary education	5	11	0.43	126

Source: [50]

Ethiopia has registered a remarkable achievement in expanding universal primary education and an increase in the total number of primary, secondary schools and tertiary Education Institutions. The achievement is attributed to the commitment of the Ethiopian government that has been demonstrated through persistent increase on education expenditure [51]. Consequently, gender disparity at primary level has been reduced significantly. The gender disparity (ratio of girls to boys) in primary education has improved from 0.85 in 2006/07 to 0.93 in 2011/13 and from 0.59 in 2006/07 to 0.83 in 2011/12 in secondary education. In 2013, gender disparities stand at 0.88 and 0.66 in secondary education first cycle (grade 9 – 10) and second cycle (grade 11 – 12), respectively [52]. As the above table indicates the disparity between male and female in higher education generally remains high. However, the country has almost eliminated gender disparities in primary education though more effort is required to raise progression from primary to secondary schools among girls in order to eliminate gender disparities at secondary and tertiary levels by 2015. According to the, Ministry of Education’s Education Statistical Annual Abstract, as of 2012, gender parity gap for first cycle secondary education (grades 9-10) for 2004 E.C (2011/12) is 0.88 and for the second cycle (grades 11-12) was 0.76 [53].

Although females’ life expectancy is estimated to be 2 years greater than males’, Ethiopia has one of the highest rates of maternal mortality in Africa. Progress on reducing maternal mortality has stalled since 2005 when the country managed to reduce maternal mortality rate from 871 in 2000/01 to 676 per 100,000 births in 2010/11. This means that with the MDG target of 267 per 100,000 births by 2015, the country is clearly off-track on goal five [55].

**Table-4:** Health and Survival (over all rank-68)

	Indicators	Progress		Female/ Male ratio	Rank /136 countries
		Female	Male		
Health and Survival	Sex ratio at birth (female/male)	-	-	0.97	1
	Life expectancy	51	49	1.04	85

Source: [54]

There are a number of factors behind this dismal performance, namely: delays in seeking skilled emergency obstetric care, in delivering the health facility, and lack of timely as well large proportions of unmet family planning needs among girls in child-bearing ages. For example, although the percentage of women (aged between 15 and 49) using modern contraception increased from 6.3% in 2000 to 18.7% in 2012 and contraceptive use prevalence rate for the same age group increased from 6% in 2000 to 29% 2010/2011, performance on these indicators is still very low compared to many African countries [56]. Similarly, the percentage of deliveries attended by skilled birth attendants was only 20.4% in 2012/13, much lower than the 74% and 44% deliveries attended by skilled birth attendants for urban and rural communities respectively in the Southern and Eastern African Region. Here it is worth mentioning that the Ethiopian government has been increasing Women-centred intervention aiming at reducing maternal mortality. These include increasing the number of women trained as extension service providers, and enhancing the quality and coverage of ante-natal and post-natal services as well as increasing the awareness on and distribution of contraceptives. [57].

**Table-5:** Political Empowerment (over all rank-66)

	Indicators	Progress		Female/Male ratio	Rank /136 countries
		Female	Male		
Political Empowerment	Women in parliament	28	72	0.39	35
	Women in ministerial positions	10	90	0.11	101
	Years with female head of state (last 50)	0	50	0.00	60

Source: [58]

Active participation of women in politics plays a central role in bringing about sustainable socio-economic and political development in a given country. In other words, the participation of women at the national, regional

and local levels of government as a key policy and decision makers is decisive to address the diverse problems of a society from a gender perspective. Indeed, the decisions have a huge impact on the ways in which women and men lead their lives, on the rules they are expected to abide by, and on the structures that determine to whom and how political power should be distributed. They also shape how public resources have to be allocated and whether the provision of social services takes into account gender practical and strategic needs (see *infra*).

Historically, women have been the subject of marginalization in the Ethiopian politics. However, their political participation both at the federal and regional levels has been increasing progressively since the seizure of power by EPRDF in 1991. Indeed, the government has put in place affirmative action as a policy strategy to improve the position of women in the political domain at all levels of government. As we can see from the above table, the representation of women in the federal legislature (House of Peoples Representatives) in 2013 (during the 2010-2015 term) is close to 30%, although their representation in the highest decision making positions such as ministerial position is still low. In fact, since 2005, there has been some progress on the political participation and representation of women in the federal and regional tiers of government. For example, although the gap was still huge, there was an increase on the participation of women during the 4th General Elections of 2010, where 1000 (12.4%) of the total candidates that had run for the House of Peoples' Representatives (Federal Parliament) and 725 (15.3%) candidates that had done so for state councils were female. What is more is that among the voters registered in 2010, 15,252,240 (47.8%) had been women. Generally, however, although women constitute half of the total population of Ethiopia, they have been marginalized from political participation and their performance has been affected by interwoven socio-cultural and economic aspects. In this respect, there are three major factors [59].

The first factor which has been negatively affecting women's political participation is male dominated political culture. This prevalent masculine model of politics puts a stranglehold on the participation of women. Shvedova [60] states that "men dominate the political arena, men formulate the rules of the political game; and men define the standards for evaluation." Thus, political life has been organized according to male norms and values, and in some cases, even male life styles. Due to the prevalence of such political environment, women are forced either to distance themselves from politics or leave all forms of political activity for men. Similarly, in Ethiopia, women perceive politics as a man's world, a domain exclusively constituted by, and for, men [61].

Male domination on politics is also reflected on political parties, which are dominated by men who tend to resist greater participation of women in politics. Correspondingly, political parties are not pro-active in changing their structures in favour of women and supporting them to actively participate in political dialogue and debate. In spite of the fact that women play an important role in mobilizing support for parties during election campaign, they rarely occupy key positions within the structure of the parties [62] Moreover, the selection and nomination process within political parties is also biased against women in that "male characteristics" are emphasized and often become the criteria for selecting candidates [63] This results in an underestimation of women as politicians by those who provide money for election campaigns. Generally, this political culture and practices has significantly affected women's political participation and their performance in politics till today, including in Ethiopia. Here, however, it is worth to note that, as mentioned elsewhere, in the last two decades, there has been a progress on the participation of women in politics in Ethiopia. Women have been assigned to Ministerial

and State Minister levels. Currently for example, besides the Minister for Women, Youth and Children, the Ministry of Civil Service is headed by a woman. There are also several women State Ministers under the various Ministerial Offices and women Speakers or Deputy Speakers of Regional Council, in the Regional States of Ethiopia. It is argued that the equal participation and contribution of female fighters during the Tigray People's Liberation front struggle against the Derg regime has contributed a lot to today's participation of women in the Central Committee of the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front, the ruling party, member parties, which in turn help them to take Ministerial and Deputy Ministerial positions at national level.

The second factor is unemployment and poverty. In Ethiopia, the proportion of female workers in low-or-no skill jobs as seasonal and short term contractual worker is found to be much higher than that of men [64]. As a result, the average wages of women is lower than that of men; mostly occupying the highly paid managerial and professional positions. Women with inadequate or no income have no time and energy to think about, and work for politics. Some researchers indicate that Ethiopian women suffer a lot from poverty and unemployment as compared to their men counterparts [65]. By implication, therefore, Ethiopian women are engaged in a variety of informal jobs to sustain their family. Like any woman elsewhere, Ethiopian women also invest much of their time and resources in reproductive, productive and community roles [66]. Thus, even those women who are interested in politics will not have enough time to participate in public political discourse. As a result, their participation and representation in the federal and regional levels of government is not up to expected level.

Illiteracy and limited access to higher education is the third factor which has been affecting the political participation of women. It is apparent that men and women have not had equal access to higher education especially in the developing societies like Ethiopia [67]. Thus, due to their low level of education attainment, women have been less competitive than men in politics. This is due to the fact that their male counterparts exceed them in education levels, especially being a graduate of higher academic institutions.

Finally, women's perception of politics as a "*dirty game*" has been discouraging them from playing a role in the political life of the society. Ethiopian women also used to say that "*politics and electric wire should not be approached*" [68]. This is to show the risks associated with political participation. Also more alarmingly, the few new bold women who got elected or appointed by the government have not been able to share their experience, challenges and success stories.

#### **4. Challenges and the way forward**

Adapting domesticating several International and Regional conventions and declarations designed to ensure gender equality, recognizing the equality of male and female citizens by the Constitution of the FDRE and other laws and adopting several policies designed to narrow down gender gaps were meant to transform the deep rooted gender based discriminatory beliefs, values and practices in Ethiopia. To some extent, this has yielded results. For example, in the last two decades, we have seen some progress on females' participation in politics and education. There has also been a struggle in minimizing harmful practices such as early marriage; genital mutilation and dissemination against female on the issue of land and other property ownership as well as

sending children to school, etc. Women's' participation in the public services (including on higher education institutions), the defence and police, and in the economy too have been fairly increasing.

Nevertheless, there is still need for further transforming discriminatory attitudes towards the female gender at the workplace, in the public sphere and at home. The traditional patriarchy of Ethiopia which remains buttressed by religion and culture, which has been causing gender differentials in access, participation, and service provision across the education, health, economic systems and sectors still remain prevalent. Moreover, although the Ethiopian government has made large strides in setting the corner stone of institutional machinery at Federal, Regional and sub-regional levels, these institutions have limited capacity in reaching out the pre-dominantly agrarian and pastoralist society of Ethiopia, where gender based problems and gender disparity are highly pervasive.

The MoWYCA still have insufficient capacity to enforce changes towards gender sensitive intervention among other lines of Ministers and Regional bureaus, despite the WADs and WAB are in place. There is lack of strong coordinating mechanism among the institutions introduced to promote gender equality and empower women with stakeholders and partners working on the sector which results in duplications of efforts and resources. Due to capacity related and other problems, national policies and legal instruments, continental and local protocols, conventions and declaration adopted to ensure gender equality and the human rights of the citizenry have not been fully and strictly implemented [69]. Particularly, the gender responsive budgeting adopted in 2008, which could have been instrumental in gender mainstreaming, is not fully operational across Federal, Regional and sub-regional level institutions. Today, Federal, Regional and sub-regional institutions suffer from lack of up-to-date gender disaggregated data. The following specific and general challenges identified by WABEKON [70]; UNDAF [71]; MoE [72] and MoWYCA [73] and other development agents at various times still remain prevalent.

*On economic participation and opportunity:* women are bound by time-consuming household chores given that, especially in the rural environment, there is very limited presence of household technology which could help ease the burden of repetitive non-remunerated household tasks thus freeing up time for studying and/or lucrative activities; women have limited access to market, hampering their ability to timely decide on action related to purchasing and selling at the right moment in time; women's contributions to the economy remain virtually invisible in national statistics and related reporting due to women's economic activities focusing on involvement in the informal sector and deep-rooted traditional values and attitudes impeding access and control over resources and participation in politics are limiting the economic participation and opportunity of Ethiopian women [74].

*On educational attainment:* gender gap is still persistent at all levels with the gap being positively correlated to the level of education (highest gap at tertiary level); performance of female students generally lags behind that of male; gender based violence is negatively affecting female students' enrolment and performance at all levels of education; within higher learning institutions female attrition is higher than that of male students; female participation in general secondary education (grade 9-10) and preparatory secondary education (grade 11-12) is still low; in many places, the distance from home to secondary schools is long for a great number of girls which

exposes them to all kinds of harassment and security threats; gender sensitive leadership and management capacities in the education sector remains weak; gender disparity of adult literacy rate is widespread across Ethiopia [75].

*On health and survival:* women's low awareness on many health issues due to low educational attainment, non participation at meetings due to workload and cultural influence and inadequate penetration of the media; male supremacy and cultural barriers, making women unable to discuss what affects them, even revealing their pregnancy; religious belief barring women from using contraception; inadequate health care services due to shortage of staff and supplies, including contraception of choice; non-involvement of men in population issues including on use of contraception; high prevalence of harmful traditional practices/violence against women; and insufficient psycho-social and legal support services for victims and survivors of violence and harmful practices, etc [76; 77].

*On political empowerment:* women are still under represented at all organs of government, particularly at the executive branch with the gap being positively correlated to the level of governance; there is low level of awareness about women's rights throughout society and government machinery; there is deep-rooted gender-insensitive socio-cultural norms, attitudes and values that are hindering the equal participation of women in politics; socio-culturally embedded attitudes and norms which condone practices that violate women's rights in the public space and work places which pushes women from coming to the political sphere, lack of assertiveness from women's side to participate in politics and lack of support and appreciation from their men counterparts and the presence of gender insensitive political parties are some of the challenges that need to be addressed [78].

The first important issue in addressing gender related problem is to recognize the existence of the problem itself and to design legal instruments and policies that can address gender specific and strategic needs as well as to identify policy approaches to realize them. In this regard, Ethiopia has made tremendous effort in revising existing laws and/or introducing new laws as well as policies intended to tackle gender based problems throughout the last two decades. No doubt there has also been an attempt in the identification of Practical Gender Needs (PGN) and Strategic Gender Needs (SGN) throughout the various policy documents produced or projects or programs designed by the Ethiopian government alone or in collaboration with development agencies, in the last two decades. PGN are the needs that women identify in their socially accepted roles in society. Practical needs do not challenge the gender division of labour or women's subordinate position in society, although arising out of them. Practical gender needs are a response to immediate perceived necessity, identified within a specific context. They are practical in nature and are often concerned with inadequacies in living conditions such as water provision, health care and employment. SGN are the needs women identify because of their subordinate position to men in their society. Strategic gender needs vary according to specific contexts. They relate to gender division of labour, power and control and may include such issues as legal rights, combating domestic violence, equal wages and women's control over their bodies. Meeting strategic gender needs helps women to achieve greater equality. It also changes existing roles and therefore challenges women's subordinate position [79]. However, until 2010 where gender related assistance from development agencies and national budgets were pooled together (see, UNDAF, 2010) there had been lack of coordinated engagement in addressing the PGN and SGN in Ethiopia. Moreover, whether the revised or newly introduced laws and policies

that have been implemented are strong and comprehensive enough to address the SGN in Ethiopia requires an independent scientific inquiry.

Various *Policy Approaches* have been recommended by different scholars and development agents with the purpose of addressing PGN and SGN. Ethiopia has been persistently applying the *Women Empowerment Approach*, including through Affirmative Action. However, the effectiveness of Affirmative Action in addressing SGN is now being questioned. For example, it has been argued that increasing the number of women in the political sphere is not the best way in addressing gender based problems in a sustainable way [80]. It is true that since the 1970 and 80s; there has been an evolution on policy approaches developed to address gender disparity. Overtime however, the following three approaches captured the attention of academicians and policy makers alike.

*Women in development (WID)*: this approach seeks to integrate women into the existing development programmes, but without transforming the existing unequal gender relationships. It does not question the relation of gender inequality and therefore tends to address the symptoms rather than the causes of gender inequality. Under this approach no gender analysis was done to ensure that WID activities would meet the SGN and men were not to be consulted with regard to the projects/programs designed to address gender related problems [81]. In a similar fashion but focusing on efficiency, the *women and development (WAD)* approach was later developed as alternative approach with particular focus on achieving more efficient and effective development through the integration of women into existing development processes [82]. WAD recognizes that women have always been economic actors and emphasizes structural change of the global political economy, but does not address the linkage between patriarchy and economic exploitation [83].

The third one, which is more comprehensive, is called the *Gender and Development (GAD)* approach. This approach looks at the unequal relations between the rich and the poor and the advantaged and the disadvantaged and the additional inequalities that women face in these contexts. It recognizes that women, poor people and other disadvantaged groups are the victims of social structures that prevent equitable development. The ultimate goal of a GAD approach is to create equitable and sustainable development with women and men as equal decision-makers. The GAD approach takes into account the different practical and strategic needs of women and men at all stages of a project cycle. Rather than working exclusively with women, GAD involves both women and men, in recognition of the fact that efforts to promote gender equality require commitment and behavioral changes from both sexes [83; 84].

Looking at the various approaches, although women empowerment approach could be effective in the short, in the foreseeable future, GAD seems the only approach that can bring sustainable gender equality. If this is true, it is paramount that Ethiopia should consider this approach in tackling gender disparity and gender related problems in its future plans. In fact, one can argue that the pro-poor policy Ethiopia has been implementing for over a decade can be equated with the GAD approach. However, GAD requires more than designing pro-poor policy in that it involves the generation of *gender disaggregated* data and *gender analysis* which are instrumental for identifying PGN and SGN.



## **5. Concluding Remarks**

To Sum up, the evaluation made in this paper shows that Ethiopia has registered remarkable progress in achieving broad-based economic growth and human development over the past decade. Ethiopia has taken concrete steps in framing the global development agenda within the national context. The mainstreaming of MDGs in the GTP and its predecessor- the PASDEP-has significantly contributed to the fast progress on the MDGs as this enables government to improve coordination of interventions across government ministries and departments.

Ethiopia's policy and programmatic measures in the areas of gender-mainstreaming and women's empowerment have started to yield positive results. Given its baseline, Ethiopia's performance vis-a-vis MDGs 3 and 5 have been significant. As per the Global Gender Gap Report, even recently, Ethiopia's rank shifted from 122 (out of 136 countries) in 2008 to 118 in 2013. The gender disparities at all levels of education have narrowed down significantly and more so in primary education over the last decade. In addition, the proportions of women in formal employment and the number of seats held by women in parliament have increased. However, from our analysis; gender disparity has remained to be one of the critical challenges of the government to achieve the MDGs. It is now crystal clear that Ethiopia is off-track with regards to MDGs 3 and 5.

Based on the various reports (compiled by the Ethiopian government, UN's developments agencies and other donors) we came across as well as our personal observation, in addition to what has been said elsewhere in this paper, the following could be helpful in narrowing gender disparity to a significant level in the near future: strengthening implementation follow up of national laws and policies adopted to close gender gap; strengthening the pro-poor policy approach that has a direct effect on narrowing gender disparity and minimizing gender related problems; strengthening collaboration with international and local development partners to have a common vision and demonstrate political commitment to support initiatives aimed at accelerating broad-based socio-economic development; coordinating gender related funds allocated from national budget, local and international development partners.

Furthermore, enhancing the quality and coverage of the various policies that have been introduced to enhance literacy rate and to narrow down gender disparity at secondary and tertiary levels of education across the country; enhancing the quality and coverage of female friendly education, health and family planning services; exerting more effort on the empowerment of women through access to education, economic opportunities, provision of leadership and entrepreneurial skill as well as providing them with physical and financial resources; enhancing the incorporation of a gender perspective into the planning processes (particularly strengthening gender responsive budgeting, monitoring, evaluation and accountability) in all ministerial sectors and regional bureaus, particularly those concerned with development planning, personnel policies, management, and legal affairs; providing tools and training in gender awareness, gender analysis and gender planning to decision-makers, senior managers and other key personnel; using sex-disaggregated data in statistical analysis to reveal how policies impact differently on women and men; and finally, focusing on promotion of good governance, infrastructure and human development, inclusive growth and economic transformation in framing the next development agenda will contrite their share in closing the gender gap sooner than later.

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