

TRAJECTORIES OF WOMEN, ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION AND SCARCITY: EXAMINING ACCESS TO AND CONTROL OVER RESOURCES IN ETHIOPIA

**By
Zenebe N. Bashaw**

ABSTRACT

Is it worth calling for increased access to and controlled over land resources by women in highly agrarian and patriarchal societies like Ethiopia? Any call for greater access to and control over resources mainly land by women should focus on the feasibility and actual benefits of ownership. Ethiopian society is highly agrarian where 54,021,731 people out of the total 63,494,702 live rural areas. What is more significant is almost 50 percent of the rural population, 26,876,699, constitutes women. And nothing is more important in a society where rural population make up the overwhelming majority than access to and control over productive land. The great majority of women in rural Ethiopia do not have access to and control over resources, mainly land. Even women with access to land ownership do not have actual control over their resources. The objective of this study is to look into the trajectories of access to and control over resources – mainly agricultural land – by women in two rural communities of northern Ethiopia. The study contends that any analysis of the trajectories of access to and control over resources by rural women in Ethiopia should focus on the feasibility and actual benefit of control and use of land resource. This study also shows that acute environmental degradation and resource scarcity account for the downturn trend and actual benefit of control over land as a resource. These causalities have been aggravated by the inadequacies of successive governments' practical concern for appropriate gender approaches. This study also noted that there are rhetorical, political and realist dimensions of the calls for access to and control over resources mainly land by women. The study is based on research projects of the Netherlands-Israeli Research Programme (NIRP) and the Peasant Production and Development project in Ethiopia (PPDE).

INTRODUCTION

Increased calls for resource access and control should focus on feasibilities of deriving benefits from ownership of resources. Rhetorical calls just for the sake of granting titular ownership of resources bog down to zero sum results. From the political dimensions, reforms and policy advocacy need to appreciate the conditions at the micro level and the structures of agrarian societies. The degree of access to and control over resources within a society play significant roles in differentiating members of a society in the process of policy and decision-making. Not all societies have legal, organizational and political frameworks that promote fair access to and control over resources. Concepts ranging from deprivation to marginalization, exclusions and alienations are employed to indicate the extent of denying latitudes in controlling resources within a society. The extent of the problems within "who gets what, when and how" (Harold Laswell, 1969) is highly critical in agrarian societies with scarce resources where the majority of the population live in highly degraded rural areas. The status of women within such a context is more precarious and sordid than other members of societies. The bargaining power of men and women crucially shapes the resource allocation decisions of rural households (International Food Policy Research Institute, 2000: 1). It has been recognized that access to and control over resources molds the bargaining power and status of women (Thomas 1990; Hopkins, Levin and Haddad 1994).

Gender analysis refers to a multitude of methods and approaches that look into the roles and relationships between women and men, and their access to and control over resources. It is not only a cognitive tool for structuring and framing the interactions and relations between the sexes, but also a practical tool that cuts-across needs assessment, activities and responsibilities, resources, access and control, benefits and incentives analysis, and institutional constraints and opportunities. As such gender analysis has passed through a multitude of paradigms and approaches. The past decade witnessed the Gender Roles Framework (GRF); the University College-London Department of Planning Unit (DPU) Framework – 'triple roles model'; the Social Relations Framework developed by the Institute for Development Studies (IDS), Sussex; and the approaches of feminist economics.

In gender analysis access to and control over resources is "one of the principal factors determining the economic and social well-being of women, especially in situations of conflict and reconstruction, when their rights are violated on a mass scale" (United Nations Center For Human Settlements, 1999: 4). This is especially true in countries with an arduous and protracted history of war, famine, environmental degradation, resource scarcity and highly conservative and male dominated societies like Ethiopia. The population of the country was estimated to be 63,494,702 in 2000. Ethiopian society is highly agrarian where 54,021,731 people live in rural areas. What is more significant is almost 50 percent of the rural population, 26,876,699, constitutes women (Central Statistics Authority, 1994).

The status and condition of Ethiopian women in the patriarchal society of the country puts them one level worse than other members of the society in spite of their significant number and role in the agrarian society of the country. Women constitute the majority of the population living in absolute poverty. The United Nations reiterated there

is growing evidence that in the past decade, the number of women living in poverty has increased disproportionately to that of men (United Nations, 1996). The extent of poverty, the state of the environment and the conditions of women therefore proved to be far more acute, far more deteriorated, and far more precarious than a couple of decades ago despite there have been some, but limited and unsteady positive changes. The trajectories of acute poverty, degraded environment, alienated and deprived women have today become one of the most deplorable trends within the structures of agrarian societies. Such a phenomenon particularly has marked an unprecedented proliferation of cases where acute poverty, access to and control over resources, and degraded environment have significantly been influencing and shaping the role, condition and status of women within agrarian societies like Ethiopia.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

This study aims to look into the trajectories of access to and control over resources – mainly agricultural land – by women in two rural communities of Tigray and Wello in northern Ethiopia. The study is based on research projects of the Netherlands-Israeli Research Programme (NIRP) and the Peasant Production and Development project in Ethiopia (PPDE). Is it worth calling for access to and control over resources mainly land by women in the mainly agrarian society of Ethiopia? Do women with access to and control over land resources have actual control and benefits of land ownership? This study attempts to answer these research questions.

From a multicausal approach, it is believed here that any analysis of the trajectories of access to and control over resources by rural women in Ethiopia should focus on the feasibility and actual benefit of control over and use of land resource. Policy and socio-cultural factors play important roles in accounting for the downturn trend, which are mainly influenced by the structure of Ethiopian agrarian society. The multicausal nature of the problem is reflected in women's position and status, which, according to Lawrence Haddad, is formed around a series of cultural and economic factors such as resource use, ownership, control, legal and ideological structures, and education and information (Lawrence Haddad, 1999: 96-97). Acute environmental degradation and resource scarcity also contribute to the increase in the value and control over land as a resource. These causalities have been aggravated by the inadequacies of successive governments' practical concern for appropriate gender approaches that could facilitate, as Charlotte Johnson-Welch puts it, "the process of identification and change of inequities – in power relations, decision-making and resource access and use" (Charlotte Johnson-Welch, 2000: 6).

METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

This study uses case study. Among others, three major types of case studies may be identified: correlational analysis, controlled-case comparison and process tracing (Stephan Van Evera, 1997). Specifically for the trajectories of access to and control over resources, correlational analysis relates to conducting large amounts of quantitative data on the extent of practically using and controlling land by of women across many societies and over time. In controlled-case comparison, cases are selected that vary on the independent variable, for example political, socio-cultural or environmental degradation and scarcity but that are essentially the same for all other variables that might affect the incidence of actual benefits and control over resources. Finally in process tracing, cases with a prima facie assumption of women with access to land but with limited actual benefits as result of political, socio-cultural and environmental degradation and scarcity are selected for further analysis and examination (Stephan Van Evera, 1997). In this study, the case selected is more related to the process tracing methodology of case study.

Primary and secondary sources of data were employed. Intensive interviews, structured questionnaire, informal discussions were held with 200 women. The study also held interviews and discussion with regional and local government officials, non-governmental representatives and elders. Books, journals, official documents, Internet documents were used as secondary sources of data.

ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION AND SCARCITY/ AN OVERVIEW

Ethiopia is an ancient country, historically dated as 3000 years. However, the writing of history in the country, to use Gebru Tareke's words, "has been a contested terrain" as recently as the past few decades. Disagreements have been budding between nationalist-hegemonists and cultural pluralists. "Whereas the first group traced the lineage of the modern state to the ancient Axumite civilization, thereby laying claim to some three thousand years of history," writes Tareke, "the latter group dismissed that claim as historical mythology" (Gebru Tareke, 1996: 217-218). Nonetheless, what is not contested all the time is this history has been full of arduous conflicts, wars, rebellions and famines notwithstanding the country has been commonly portrayed as the cradle of human kind and land of plenty!

More concisely, Donald Levin captures five general categories of images that Ethiopia has received along the centuries. The country has been illustrated as a far-off land; a home of pristine piety; a magnificent kingdom; an outpost of savagery; and a bastion of African independence (D. Levin, 1974). Miles Bredin also adds to the list as "[t]oday, as then, Ethiopia is a surprising place. Where you expect Live Aid-style deserts and starving children, there are monumental mountain ranges and one of the most ancient cultures in Africa" (M. Bredin, 2000, 48-55). In the eyes of John Markakis, the Ethiopian "homeland suffers from an age-old process of physical degradation, the work of natural forces abetted by human and animal action.... Continuous cultivation and grazing stripped the earth of its natural cover, leaving it unprotected against the torrential rains that beat on the inclined surfaces of the highlands" (J. Markakis, 1987: 8).

The country suffers from acute environmental degradation and scarcity, understood in the Ethiopian sense broadly as land degradation (Alemneh Djene, 1990: 49). The agricultural practice in the country fails to meet food production that can feed population with an annual growth rate of 3 percent (Food and Agricultural Organization, 2000). A mix of factors that range from population pressure to unfavorable land tenure system, over-ploughing, over-grazing of farm lands, mismanagement of land resource, deforestation, soil erosion and inappropriate land use systems have been responsible for the ever deterioration of the productivity of land in Ethiopia. Major crops such as *teff* (indigenous grass), wheat, maize, barley and sorghum have barely been produced to the extent of sustaining the population for over a year.

In the history of Ethiopia, the incidence of famine has been every 6-8 years in northern Ethiopia and every 8-10 years for the whole country (T. Haile, 1988: 90). Richard Pankhurst traced the incidence of one famine on average every decade between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries (1985: 26). There have been forty major famines and food shortages in total, among which fourteen occurred, in northern Ethiopia, particularly in Tigray and Wollo, areas that this study is focused (P. Webb and V. Braun, 1994: 20-21). For years, the country has not produced sufficient food to feed its people. Almost 90 percent of the population live in rural areas where the predominant economic activity is rain-fed agriculture.

The ever-increasing population number and the overwhelming dependence on rain-fed agriculture put tremendous pressure on the carrying capacity and productivity of the land. Berry Hughes argues "population prediction at least for a period of 20-30 years tends to be more accurate than predictions in other issue areas" (Barry Hughes, 1993: 15). The present international consensus is that in the next thirty years the world population will swell to at least 8.2 billion (Novartis Foundation for Sustainable Development, 2000). In the words of Thomas Homer-Dixon, it is not only a mere scarcity of resources that create challenging conditions to sustenance and development without conflicts and instabilities, but also demand sides as a result of population increase (Thomas Homer-Dixon, 1999). It is hardly difficult to discern the status of women within a degraded, highly sensitive, conflictual and male dominated agricultural resource of land. It has been an underlying triggering factor for series of peasant revolts against successive governments in the country. Leslie Gray and Michael Kevane show that "when land becomes scarce or rises in value, or when rights are formalized through titles or registration, these rights to use land are revealed to be secondary and tenuous" (1999: 2). The impact of resource degradation and resources on politico-economic factors in Ethiopia is highly debated (Donella H. Meadows, *et al.*, 1979; A. Djene, 1990; T. J. Lanz, 1996; B. W. Semait, 1989; D. Rahmato, 1999; T. Homer-Dixon, 1999; M. Wolde Mariam, 1984; J. Cohn, 1987; J. Duetch, 1996; G. Tareke, 1996; J. Young, 1997; G. Kebede, 1992; R. Molver, 1991; T. Tvedt, 1993; N. Myers, 1993; M. Cohn and P. Anderson, 1999; J. McCann, 1991; J. Picket, 1991).

Specifically, impacts through feedback loops on political and policy decisions are very interesting to examine, for they have close relationships with limiting or restricting policy choices in land (re)distributions. The causality is mutual in which politico-economic policies bring diverse impacts on the environment. Increased resource degradation and scarcity entails dismal prospects for women. Access to and ownership of agricultural land holds the key to access to other sources of income and assets. The dependence of women on men becomes complete, and rural households will be seen as unitary which in turn discounts and blurs not only the contributions, but also the conditions of women.

Paradoxically women are more active in environmental and resource conservation activities, which are widely recognized and documented (Merchant, 1995; and Steel, 1996). The United Nations gave credence to women as closely associated with local ecological resources and management of biodiversity on a daily basis (2001: 6). They play significant roles in interventions against the problem of food insecurity that is mainly caused by environmental

degradation and resource scarcity. Chris Udry assessed the contribution of women in increasing food security, which costs households as much as 15 percent of potential income (C. Udry, 1996).

WOMEN AND ACCESS TO AND CONTROL OVER LAND RESOURCE: OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

There appears to be increasing evidence that “greater gender equality correlates with higher economic growth and ... poverty reduction strategies must pay serious attention to reducing gender disparities” (Elaine Zuckerman, 2001: 2). Even if the causality needs thorough investigation, the incidence of poverty is highly correlated with lack of access to land (Robin Mearns, 1999: 1). And nothing is more important in a society where rural population make up the overwhelming majority than the availability of productive land (J. Young, 1989: 199). Access to and control over land as a resource have received the greatest amount of attention, because as fixed asset it is easier to define the boundaries of the resource unit (Ruth Meinzen-Dick, *et al.*, 1997: 13). More succinctly, the World Bank summarizes the broader importance of owning land. Access to and control over land shapes equity because land is still one of the major assets held by households; influences efficiency because land is one of the economy's main productive assets; underlines sustainability of resource use, for it is important for agricultural production and the provision of nationally-important ecosystem services; and affects governance because there is a strong link between land tenure and the prevention of conflict (World Bank, 2001). In many parts of Ethiopia poor access to resources is widely acknowledged as a major cause of food insecurity (Yared Amare, *et al.*, 2000: 2). The recognition of the intricate relationships among these factors has led to the growing interest in examining the nature and status of rural women access to and control over resources.

In recent years, women's access to and control over land, and their property rights have received considerable attention internationally, regionally and locally (The United Nations Development Fund for Women, 2001: 8). Internationally and regionally a growing interest has developed to address the impediments of women access to and control over resources as witnessed in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women (1985) and the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly of 'Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century'. But such and similar calls unfortunately have been characterized by a mix of rhetorical and political dimensions which are far from the critical questions of locating where power really lies. In other words, when access to and control over land is problematized, it gives rise to disparities in who has real control over the produce of the land. A call for greater access to land ownership is one thing. But addressing and locating concrete problems of power in land ownership has been elusive over the past decades through which gender analysis transcended many aspects. In this study access to and control over resources mainly agricultural land is viewed as:

the right or opportunity to use, manage, or control land and its resources. It includes the ability to reach and make use of the resource. [It constitutes two parameters:] quantitative parameters (such as the nature of tenure, the size of the parcel and its economic value) and qualitative parameters (for example, legal security, and documented, or registered evidence of rights to land). These parameters play an important role in 'measuring' access to land before, during, and after development projects or land administration programs (Komjathy and Nichols, 2001: 2).

Despite the increased calls for women access to and control over land, this case study in the two agrarian regions of northern Ethiopia showed that the focus of such calls should look into who actually controls and draws benefits from land. The status and rights of women not only in access to and control over resources, but also in other broader aspects are characterized by duality. Specifically, the issue of women access to and control over resources in Ethiopia has both spatial and temporal facets. Irrespective to the national and all-inclusive applicability of legal frameworks that at least profess to provide as equal rights to women as men in resource ownership, strong customary and cultural practices dictate the realities of women at the micro level, especially in rural areas. Moreover, from a temporal perspective the numerous quagmires that rural women are in show prospects, which are highly precarious and unsteady. Nationally recognized constitutional rights are influenced by the spatial and diverse customs and beliefs, which in turn are subject to changes and improvements time dimensionally. The extent of the problems of rural women witness distinctive classifications as described by terms that range from the feminization of poverty to the feminization of agriculture, the feminization of immigration and so on.

The 1975 land to the tiller proclamation – Proclamation No 31 of 1975 – of Ethiopia brought fundamental changes in terms of allowing the majority of rural population to land 'ownership'. Under the 'Public Ownership of Rural Lands Proclamation' the reform brought the abolishment of tenancy system; the abolishment of hired farm labor; the abolishment of private ownership of land, placing a limit of 10 hectares as a maximum amount of land that a given farm may cultivate; and the provisions for the establishment of a peasant association (Wosen Yefru, 2000: 362).

According to the Central Statistical Authority, a *de jure* female-headed household – roughly constituting 20 – 25 percent – is a household where the land is owned and managed by a woman, such as in families headed by widows or by single or divorced women. On the other hand, a *de facto* female-headed household is a household where a woman is responsible for all aspects of managing the household and the farm due to the absence of a husband. One should treat these statistical figures with much skepticism. In fact, in Africa in general, William Cavendish realizes that

analysis of rural households and resources is beset by inadequate data (1999). Still, however, as a result of war, sickness and death from HIV/AIDS and migration of men from rural areas to towns and cities, there are trends that signal the decrease role of men in agriculture and the 'feminization of agriculture'. Such factors in turn have increased the number of female-headed rural households (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2000).

Identifying individuals' differential access to and control over resources and benefits is the fundamental feature of gender analysis, and ensuring equitable access and distribution will enhance food security (Charlotte Johnson, *et al.*, 2000: 10). The great majority of women in rural Ethiopia do not have access to and control over resources, mainly land. Even women with access to land ownership do not have actual control over their resources. They receive a significantly lower amount of the produce of their land, for they are dependent on male labor, which is locally termed as 'ye equi'. Feleke Tadele succinctly put it as:

...Despite their equal share with men in socio-economic life, Ethiopia women have little decision-making power and a smaller share of resources and benefits. Eighty-seven per cent of women in Ethiopia are engaged in agriculture, contributing about 50 per cent of income based on subsistence agriculture. However, little attention has been given to involving women in rural development efforts and enabling them to benefit directly from agricultural extension services (2001: 16).

This research study conducted intensive interviews with more than 250 farmers and women in the two research regions in a four-year period. In Tigray region Atsbi Wonberta and Humera areas were covered while in Wello region Kalu 'wereda' (district) was selected as a research site. Almost two third of the respondents (127) were women with access to land resource. The study mainly aimed at looking into to what extent women with access to land do have actual control over their ownership of land as an important resource, and attempted to foresee the feasibility and viability of increased calls for greater access to and ownership of land by women. Ruth Meinzen-Dick *et al.* argue access to and control over resources "include far more than titles and pieces of paper specifying 'ownership' of a defined piece of land or other resource. They encompass a diverse set of tenure rules and other aspects of access to and use of resources" (Ruth Meinzen-Dick, *et al.*, 1997: 1). The Secretary General's report of the United Nations underlined that although rural women may have *de jure* rights, they do not have *de facto* rights (2001: 6).

Perhaps a common denominator among the many variables might be the culturally transcendent dominant role of men in the long history of the country. Distinctively the ownership of and succession to land has historically been a fiercely protected sphere of men. The question of land has been a burning issue leading to protracted peasant revolts. Based on the land question, the manner and nature of warfare have been shaped, where "whose face have you not disfigured? Whose wife and child have you not captured?" ran rebels' song for a long time (Richard A. Caulk, 1978: 460). Generally in Africa women obtain rights to land through men, mainly through their husbands or sons (Charity Kabutha, 1999: 9).

According to the results of this research study, one major problem of women with access to land was their inability to efficiently and effectively use their land. They are highly dependent on men labor. What is widely known as 'ye equi', which literally translates to as equal share of the produce of the land, was practiced in the research areas. 20 percent of the interviewees had an average family size of 6 in which women were responsible for supporting the family, while 15 percent of the respondents constituted women headed households. The extent of the women's dependence on men labor is such that in Humera area of Tigray region women with access to big plots of land could not actually use their land. The plots that they received were virgin plots full of acacia trees that need a labor force of a community to clear and put to use. In Kalu area more than 63 percent of the women with access to land did not own oxen, an indispensable component of agriculture in the region. A landless male farmer with a pair of oxen can receive much of the produce of a plot of land if he works on the plot, which actually belongs to a woman. Even if women entrust equal share arrangement to their relatives, there was not any humanitarian based help to women and the latter need to pay.

The inability of women to benefit from having access to land brings a paradoxical exclusion of women from agricultural resources, which according to Charles Gore, includes "restriction access to land resources and patterns of land poverty; exclusion from access to productive inputs, high value crops and output markets; and processes of land degradation." Gore emphasized "in the past in Africa, some people were poor because they were excluded from livelihood. Now they are poor because they are excluded from livelihood and they are excluded from livelihood because they are poor". (Charles Gore, 1994:26,81). For S. Baden and K. Milward, it has become common in development circles to talk of the "feminization of poverty". The phrase implies that poverty is becoming a female phenomenon, or that women are becoming poorer relative to men (Baden, and Milward, 1995). Mayra Buvinic provides the nature of the feminization of poverty as:

When the yardstick used to measure the degree of people's poverty is their level of well-being, women are traditionally found to be more impoverished than men. But poverty is more commonly defined according to income, and today, although the gap between the two sexes is decreasing in terms of well-being, it is increasing in terms of income. The evidence is imperfect, but current trends suggest that women account for a growing proportion of those people who are

considered poor on the basis of income, not only in industrial countries such as the United States, but also in the developing world (1997: 3).

The search for solutions to the sordid state of poor peasants in which women constitute the poorest of the poor more often than not require addressing the actual disparity of having access to and control over resources. It was learned during the research study that land distribution policies do not take into consideration the special needs that women need in land utilization. In Atsbi Wonberta of Tigray the majority of women own plots of land as far as 5 hours of walk from where they reside. It was nearly impossible for women farmers to frequently travel and work on their farms especially in weeding seasons in which they have greater responsibilities. Women in such conditions, as witnessed in Kalu area of this research, were forced to rely on the labor of their children as young as 7 years old.

For the mainly agrarian society of Ethiopia that suffers from chronic food insecurity understanding the link between access to land and actual benefits of land ownership of land is as essential as searching measures for lessening both the problem food insecurity and poverty (Melmed-Sanjak and Lastarria-Cornhiel, 1998: 5). The results wield wider impacts when women are the largest members of the society with limited actual benefits and control over resources. The fact speaks volumes due to the repercussions of women's alienation from actual benefits of and control over resources on children who are the future of society. Mayra Buvinic argues that women are caught in a vicious circle of deprivation in which they are unable to cope with too much work that will lead them to hand over child-care responsibilities to older daughters, who then must drop out of school. As a result, "deprivation carries from one generation of women to the next, leading to the feminization of income poverty" (Buvinic, 1997: 8).

Within gender analysis some envision that just giving women access to land will revolutionize agriculture by resolving food insecurity and other agrarian problems of developing countries like Ethiopia. For example, the recommendations of the Kigali Plan of Actions of 1998, which among others, called for the adequate and secure rights of women to property ownership, and their independence from men in order to secure or enjoy their rights belongs to (United Nations, 1998). Given what lies at the micro level within the structure of agrarian societies and the extent of women's status to effectively use ownership of land, this study is very much skeptical of just calling for women's access to land resource. It is true that proper intervention in redressing the problem of resource inequality, environmental degradation and scarcity in the country should tackle the problem of rural women. The field works in Atsbi Wonberta, Kalu and Humera indicated that the structure of the agrarian societies in northern Ethiopia is highly patriarchal. Men still possess high sphere of political and social space. The dependence of women with access to land on men led to series of conflicts between landowners and laborers. In the three areas of this study, more than 65 percent of women reported that they had an average of 4 incidences of conflicts with men laborers who worked on their farm. Late start by male laborers (144) constituted the highest incidence of conflicts followed by breach of agreements (59) and high demand of produce (42).

Conflicts on	Average Incidence (in numbers of two farming seasons)		
	Atsbi Wonberta	Kalu	Humera
Late start	23	37	44
Negligence	18	12	4
Breach of agreements	28	19	7
High demand of produce	12	8	22
Others	9	4	3

Average incidence of conflicts between women land owners and laborers.

The condition of agricultural land in northern Ethiopia has been undergoing tremendous negative changes leading to a sharp decline in food productivity and vicious circle of chronic food insecurity. A mix of factors ranging from population pressure, farming system, overexploitation, government policies, land tenure and its associated problem of security for conservation, soil erosion, culture and knowledge of environmental conservation/protection and the like account for the decline in the productivity of agricultural land in northern Ethiopia. The tenuous nature of agricultural land in the two research areas needs well-organized and continuous land management system. In spite of a decline in the fertility of agricultural land across-the-board, there appears a link between productivity and management of agricultural land. A comparative assessment of land owned by women and leased on to landless men and land owned and managed by male-headed households revealed a disparity in productivity. Rain distribution being a constant factor, a comparison of land productivity within a four-year period between the two land management modes showed an average decline of 12.4 kilo grams of produce per year of leased land. Paradoxically women's role in conservation and environmental protection is well documented.

The indispensability of land as a resource base on the one hand and the need to reconcile the rhetorical call for increased access to and control over land resources constitute one of the major problems that policy makers and rural development experts face. The realities of women on the ground as witnessed in this and similar

corresponding researches showed that the majority of them were not actual owners of their produce. The different paradigms within gender analysis, which this research classified as falling on rhetorical, political and realist dimensions, in different ways recommend that gender mainstreaming and empowerment are keys to addressing the problem of women control over resources. Nonetheless, the results of this study in the three sites indicated that if one thinks in terms of empowering women in the country, the prospects are grim. The centrality of empowerment constitutes rights and power towards owning land and its produce. To Jo Rowlands such power and rights are power over (controlling power over someone and something); power to (generative or productive power that creates new possibilities and actions without domination); power with (power generating a feeling that the whole is greater than the sum of individuals and action as a group is more effective; and power from within (a sense that there is strength in each and every individual) (Rowlands, 1997).

The gender approaches of the two successive regimes in Ethiopia have been too weak to provide either a stimulus for reform or a challenge to the patriarchal structures of the agrarian society. Many respondents in this research study believed that despite the positive changes and attempts by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Front (EPRDF), the incumbent party in the country, to address gender issues in resource ownership, women are far from influencing decisions at the local level. The composition of local decision-making organs in Tigray and Wello, where EPRDF has a strong root, showed that there were increasing participations by women. Among the five villages in Atsbi Wonberta, women led two local administrative councils, while in Humera women had strong voices in the tight returnee communities. Despite the push for increased role of women in Kalu, the influence of Islamic customs proved to be a serious challenge. I had the chance of participating in a meeting of two local administrative councils in which the main agendas were distribution of seeds and arbitration of conflicts arising out of land management between women owners and men laborers. The experience revealed that the higher the participation of women in local councils, the higher the impacts on instilling the need to address gender inequalities. Informal discussions with men farmers indicated that there were recognitions that women need special attention in farm management and ownership of their produce. Nonetheless, men were not hesitant to disclose their resistance to giving women special treatment at the expense of endangering customs and family decision-making. Unfortunately these issues are at the center of addressing who really owns the land which in turn determines access to other resources and benefits such as extension services, credit and membership to farmers' organizations (cf. The United Nations, 2001: 6).

This research study has observed that despite there are efforts to diversify the income of rural communities not only in Tigray and Wello, but also nationally in the country, the cases of Tigray and Wello indicated that there was high dependence on incomes derived from land. As stated previously, many women in the research sites were just titular owners of plots of land. One major aspect of income diversification projects has been the food-for-work (FFW) and cash-for-work (CFW) programs. These schemes are interchangeably called employment generation schemes (EGS), employment guarantee schemes (EGS) and so on. Such projects have crucial aspects of generating supplementary incomes for peasant farmers. Employment and income generation schemes have long history as poverty mitigation strategies by government and non-government organizations in developing countries (The World Bank 1989: 39-66; R. Zetter 1996: 217; UNRSID 1995: 7; W. Nymugasira 1995: 161-64; B. Hurley 1990). This documentation of income and employment generation schemes results from the overriding problem of deep-rooted poverty. Besides the frequent deficiencies arising from systems of governance, the problems are accompanied by drought and conflicts in most of developing countries. In Ethiopia according to the National Policy on Disaster and Preparedness Measure (NPDPM), the general objectives of such schemes aim at a) providing a means of income (in cash or in kind) to the most affected people in disaster affected areas; b) building up the assets of affected areas in order to improve their resilience to disaster; c) creating conditions for eliminating the root causes of disaster and building up the infrastructures for future development and; d) reinforcing work ethos of the affected population (NPDPM 1993: 22).

The major activities undertaken through income and employment generating projects were micro dam constructions, soil conservation, road constructions and reforestation. The financial, organizational and grass-root advantages of NGOs could mobilize peasants farmers for intensive participation. Tigray and Wello areas have been major regions in which extensive and large-scale income and employment projects have been taking place since the 1980s, and especially after 1991. The results of one comprehensive study of 24 such projects in the country were found out to be inducing people for "extensive communal activities for the first time in many areas, and that farmers, necessarily cautious people, are at least open-minded and often positive about the benefits of the *physical works*, but will finally judge them by the test of time" (emphasis added, Solomon and Yeraswork 1984:94). The contribution – material, financial and labor – of NGOs and the community in employment and income generating projects is 70:30. Whilst a number of NGOs' projects pay in the form of food - 3 kegs per person per day, few NGOs, like the Adigrat Catholic Secretariat in Eastern Tigray, pay in cash. In the 1980s UNICEF undertook similar cash-for-work project in Ethiopia (cf. Webb and Von Braun 1993).

Selections in such important employment and income generating projects mainly give priority to landless peasants. Interviews and discussions at three project sites of Haresaw, Debre Selam (Rubafelege) and Atsbi Endesilassie and payment distribution center of Atsbi Wonberta, and supplementary interviews conducted for other projects in Irob and Saese Tsadamba of Tigray showed that women registered as owners of land could not participate

in the projects although they derive meager benefits from their ownership. This was highly true in cases of fallow plots where women could not clear the plots and put them in use. What do such and other cases indicate? Selection criteria in project participation do not look into the nature of mere access to and titular ownership of land. Similarly calls for access to and ownership of resources mainly land fail short of dissecting the nature of who really does have control over the produce of the land. Landless men peasants who work on plots owned by women, on the other hand, were selected to participate in FFW/CFW projects and could derive incomes from both sides.

Rural women in Ethiopia have long arduous and traversing courses to travel in order to realize equal control over agricultural land as long as access to and control over agricultural land remains an underlying source of income. The problem is situated on two angles that are characterized and influenced by time dimensionality. The first perspective encompasses political and social aspects, which show little, but limited improvements with time. The recognition of the problem both internationally and regionally, the roles of donors and non-governmental organizations, and the active participation of women brought the issue to the macro level of policy formulation. As a case in point, the formulation of a new Family Law in 2000 that aims to substitute the 1960 Family Law, which used to recognize the husband as the head of the family, is an encouraging move. The interest to see successful agrarian policy implementations, geared towards tackling the problems of food insecurity and poverty, take into consideration the role of women's participation. Time dimensionally, the changes are positive, but too limited to bring real women's control over resources without impediments. The second view is the impacts of environmental degradation and scarcity that aggravate the problem of land availability.

Research reports and findings indicate the role of land as resource and income base for rural households is declining. The findings argue that most rural households are undergoing diversification in their sources of income. They further state rural households are not able to support themselves exclusively on land-based activities; therefore, they seek additional income from different sources. The strategy a household can adopt depends on, among other factors, access to productive resources such as land, capital, education and skills (United Nations, 2001). Stephan Dercon and Pramila Krishana, studying peasant households in Ethiopia and Tanzania, argue, "a rural household may have a plot of land, purchase consumer goods and inputs in local markets, and grow crops both for subsistence and for sale." Moreover, "the household might engage in local crafts and trades, hire out its labor and keep livestock. The household might receive remittances from relatives away in town and help in a crisis from neighbors" (Dercon and Krishnan, 1996: 850).

This study believes that the findings of similar studies as indicated above are worth noting. It is true that rural households are increasingly attempting to diversify their sources of income. They try as many means as witnessed in Atsbi Wombera, for instance, by sending their children to Saudi Arabia to get income in the form of remittance. One village in the area was described as a rich cash community due to the large amount of foreign currency remitted from Saudi Arabia by immigrant young especially female children of peasant farmers. Even one local NGO helped in setting up a small bank in the area to facilitate savings and currency exchanges. When one thinks of diversifying incomes by illegally cutting trees for sale, by migrating in large numbers to urban areas, by opening local bars which, as witnessed in Atsbi and Humera, were centers of prostitution thereby increasing the incidence of HIV and by forcing children to stay home and work (as high as 27 cases in Kalu area of Wello), then the strategies need to be reconsidered thoroughly

It does translate to labeling all strategies as double swords. We are talking about poor peasants gripped with absolute poverty; peasants with one clothe, who, when go to rivers to wash their clothe, as seen in Geda village of Kalu, wrapped themselves with a blanket until their washed cloth gets dried; peasants with land that could not produce food that can feed families for the whole year; and peasants with a daily income of as low as less than fifty US cents. Rural households in Tigray and Wello, although they derive additional incomes through labor and small scale trade activities, dependence on small plots of land has been complete and a question of survival. In the research areas, the definition of the level of poverty is mainly linked to owning a plot of land and supplementary resources to cultivate it (mainly oxen, access to fertilizers, seeds and credits). The higher the size of the plot, the better the status of a farmer is. Above all, the higher the fertility of the plot, the higher the income of a household becomes. Rural households with limited or no actual control over the produce of their land constitute the poorest of the poor. Statistically women account the majority of the poorest of the poor.

CONCLUSION

The indispensability of land resources for the livelihood of millions of rural people in Africa is tremendous. Agrarian societies are facing increasing problems of environmental degradation and resource scarcity. Acute environmental degradation and resource scarcity are producing impacts that seriously challenge the capacity to provide enough agricultural land for an increasing world population with various needs. A mix of factors such as population increase, politico-economic policies, resource use management and approaches, soil erosion and other account for the intensity of the problem. African governments are faced with challenges in responding to demands for resource distribution amid acute scarcity. The overwhelming war and famine-ridden agrarian society of Ethiopia is litmus test of the challenges. In the context of this problem, the status and condition of women actual control over land is worse than other members of the society. The livelihood of the great majority of rural women depends on access to

and control over land resource, which in turn substantially influences access to other resources and assets. What is more significant is almost 50 percent of the rural population, 26,876,699, constitutes women.

Within gender analysis some envision that just giving women access to land will revolutionize agriculture by resolving food insecurity and other agrarian problems of developing countries like Ethiopia. Given what lies at the micro level within the structure of agrarian societies and the extent of women's status to effectively use ownership of land, this study is very much skeptical of just calling for women's access to land resource. Increased calls for resource access and control should focus on feasibilities of extracting benefits from ownership of resources. Rhetorical calls just for the sake of granting titular ownership of resources bog down to zero sum results. From the political dimensions, reforms and policy advocacy need to appreciate the conditions at the micro level and the structures of agrarian societies.

This study ventured to look into the trajectories of access to and control over resources by rural women in Ethiopia, which should focus on the feasibility and actual benefit of control over and use of land resource. It attempted to show that actual control of the produce of women's land ownership does not belong to the owners. The failure to bring about special and realistic considerations of women's conditions in land (re)distribution programs, conflict in the management of leased agricultural land, a decline in the productivity of leased land, inability to benefit from public projects, and an extensive and almost absolute dependence on agricultural land, and the corresponding challenges of income diversification constitute major themes that this research tried to shed light. Women access to and control over resources mainly agricultural land need to be problematized. Mainstream gender analysis should focus on critically questioning the pros and cons of addressing the role and status of women within access to and control over agricultural land. By way of conclusion, there is a need to redirect the attention from changing fashions to fashioning changes in shaping the almost conflictual gender relations to follow a conflictual-cooperative dimension in resource management and ownership.

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