



## Challenges and Opportunities Empowering Girl Children: The Case of Indigenous Women Among Konso Nation in South West Ethiopia

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### **Abstract**

The Konso people are among Cushitic-speaking nations who live in south west Ethiopia where traditional leadership gives dominant role for men while very insignificant role for women. The objective of this study is to assess the problems of these girl children and women in the area, to quantify the oppression and indicate the solution. This area particularly keeps this 50% of the population in the house to work household activities. Girl children have no chance to go to school and women allowed to work in houses. Beside women participate in local markets to subsidize their family. Nevertheless, the society gets meager attention for education. Qualitative following descriptive approach, interviews and focus group discussion were implemented for primary data gathering. Data were analyzed thematically through social, economic and political dimension. The study revealed forced marriage, not letting girls to go school and unequal asset sharing among families which usually boys have the privilege. As a result, Konso women and girl children are not becoming competent with men and boys respectively. Currently this situation has now changed slightly and women started to participate in modern administration system at kebele, woreda and zonal levels. Girl children started to join schools. However, this is just a start. More scale upping the situation at wider range is indispensable. This study recommends empowerment of the society, particularly women and girl children, awareness creation, joint continuous efforts through intervention and support from both government and non-governmental organization in the form of economic assistance, political and social intervention.

**Keywords:** *Challenges; Opportunities; Empowerment; Girl Children; Indigenous Women; Konso*

## Introduction

Women's historical experience of discrimination puts them at a disadvantage position enhancing their participation and representation in political decision-making bodies. In this regard studies argue that social and economic status of women in society has a direct influence on their participation in other social institutions. In other word lack of economic resources is one of the biggest obstacles that prevent women from participating in politics in greater numbers. Therefore, making it easier for women to access economic resources is a key in expanding women's presence in the political realm. In Ethiopia, women represent the major force for rural changes, largely as an un-tapped resource that could boost rural development and lead to higher growth rates and increased food production. Among the Menz people of northern Shoa, women are actively involved in all farming activities except ploughing. They take active part in transporting grain to and from the field and have the sole responsibility to process the food after it was produced as well (Helen, 1992).

Haregewein (1984) also affirmed that the processing of cereals, pulses, spices, milk and other foodstuffs is totally a women's domain. Many of traditional food stores and containers are made by women too. The containers are granaries, mud-built silos, pottery, woven-grass and gourds. After the 1974 Ethiopian revolution, some changes started to emerge in Ethiopia in regards to women. The Konso are no exception. Changes have continued in the incumbent government. The regime has declared its commitment to gender equality and empowerment of women by stipulating the rights of women in its constitution, issuing the women's policy of the country and National Action Plan for gender equality (Kassa 2015). Constitutional provision pays greater emphasize on women empowerment, equality of women with men, protection of fundamental right of peoples. Article 25 of the 1987 Ethiopian constitution stipulates that all persons are equal before the law, and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law. The constitution provides women with general protection from male domination and equality in terms of various engagements. Article 34(1) reads as "Men and women, without any distinction as to race, nation, nationality or religion which has attained marriageable age as defined by law, have the right to marry and found a family." They have equal rights while entering into, during marriage and at the time of divorce. Moreover, Article 35 provides the right to women. Even though the country's government is working to eradicate the existing inequality between men and women in socio-economic and political participation, still now there are some problems in the country in general and Konso in particular in implementing the improvements made by the government to overcome gender inequality. The Konso are Cushitic-speaking peoples who are living in the south western part of the Ethiopian country. In Konso tradition, men play significant leadership roles looking at the political structure of Konso, the *Poqalla* (clan chief) is the term that indicates the highest honor and rank in the society. He serves for the administration efficiency by blessing and legitimizing the formation of clan heads.

In Konso, there are nine clans, each with a clan chief. These are *Keertitta*, *Arkaamayta*, *Tookomaleeta*, *Tikissayta*, *Sawdatta*, *Paasanta*, *Eelayta*, *Mahaleeta* and *Ishalayta* (see also Ongaye 2013; Hallpike 2008). Within the political and social structures, traditionally, women do not have the right to participate in political activities. Socially, they are not allowed to take part in decision making. On the contrary, they are the backbone of the economy in that they take active participation in all economic activities such as agriculture, small-scale business, tannery and pottery. Even in most parts of Konso, men view some activities like weeding, harvesting, tanning and sowing as the sole responsibility of women. Just like the above listed activities, their participation in other sectors of the society is low or almost non-existent. But even if they participate in all economic activities, they do not have valuable resources inheritance or no property right for them. Therefore, the current study focuses on the challenges and opportunities of women empowerment in all socio-economic and political aspect among Konso nation of southwestern Ethiopia. Since Ethiopian including the Konso society is patriarchal societies; there is a tendency to de-emphasize tremendous socio-economic roles that women play and their contribution to

their respective communities (see Mamitu 2004). In Ethiopia, the social status given for women is very low where they appear, generally poorer than men because they earn less, less educated; increasingly becoming heads of households, with no resources to support their dependents, do not enjoy due acknowledgment for their labor contribution, particularly in agriculture, and do not have the decision-making power. It is a known fact that patriarchal societies keep women at a subordinate position using religion and other forms of culture institutions as an excuse. These excuses are for many years which are been supported by laws and legislation that uphold patriarchy and women's subordination. This has brought about and maintained disparities between men and women labor division, share of benefits, how households are organized and interrelated. They also suffer from work stereotype and gender distribution of labor, more occupying economically invisible work. Women experience lower socio-economic status in general and hence marginalized from making decisions at all levels and also women are poor in terms of access to resources, services and employment (Shimelis 2015: 2). But now-a-days, the notion of gender equality, the idea of modern education, human right organizations and governmental influence are working to bring some changes on the status given for women in Ethiopia in general and in Konso particularly. Therefore, the current study focuses on the challenges and opportunities of women empowerment among Konso people of southwestern Ethiopia.

### **Methodology**

In order to investigate the challenges and opportunities of women empowerment among the Konso Nation, this study has employed qualitative approach as its methodology, and an ethnographic account as its strategy of enquiry. To conduct this study, various ethnographic research methods were employed, such as observation, focus group discussion, and in-depth interviews with key informants and discourse analysis. Since it was difficult to obtain necessary information about the history of the society, indigenous power arrangement and administrative system of the Konso people, the researcher relied heavily on the accounts of elderly study participants. Empirical data was collected from two Konso topographic areas: *Kena* and *Karatte*. These topographical areas are the two original Konso divisions. Research participants were purposively selected from women of different ages and sex categories. As strategy of enquiry; ethnography is used as a mechanism in this study. Because it acknowledges the complexity of human experience, the need to experience and the need to research it by close and sustained observation of human behavior (O'reilly, 2005); the researchers obliged to use it. Another reason to use ethnography as the enquiry mechanism in this study is that since the Konso society has its own deep-rooted socio-cultural and traditional political structure as their way of life inherited from their forefathers it needs sustained period to study and understand their value. Also, there is a need to understand the historical roles of women in the socio-economic aspects, the challenges and changes brought by the notion of modern education, gender equality and other modern religions and the attitude of the society towards the change. For this and other reasons, the researcher used ethnography as a strategy of enquiry.

### **Result and Discussion**

#### **The Opportunities of Women Empowerment**

##### **Social Empowerment**

**Modern Education:** Education is milestone of women and girl children empowerment because it enables them to responds to the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their life. This can become reality only when the women of all nations became empowered (Sonali Chanawar, 2016). Today more than any time, the government was committed to bring women to the mainstream of the society. Accordingly, the Konso children and women affair office is one of the offices working on the empowerment of women and girl children in all socio-political and economic activities. As it was

explained in this paper, socially women have high contribution to the social life of Konso. But when we see their educational achievements it is very low. According to the information that was obtained from Konso children and women affair office, before 1980s; there was no girl children's enrolment at school. This is because of the gender attitude of the society. But after 1990 there was quite little difference which showed 2 or 3 girls' children in a class. But this was not based on the interest of the family or the girl's children but it is done by giving awareness creation trainings to families, Kanta (village) leaders, kebele administrators, zone leaders and to girls themselves by working in cooperation with government and nongovernmental organizations. Among those organizations, save the children and Mercy corps is the most one.

Accordingly, one informant who is the beneficiary of mercy corps told us her case as follows. "She became the beneficiary of mercy corps after she lost her parents in the Konso Alle ethnic conflict of 2000. The organization gave priority for orphan children and she was one of them. She said they started supporting her financially through by providing school material from 2004 since she was in grade 4. At that time, they were one hundred five orphan children with different academic status. They gave us one thousand five hundred Ethiopian birrs monthly (1500). They organized their saving group called Chooraa. They save quarter of the money and the remaining amount use for other purposes. Now she is grade 12 student and will take her university entrance exam in this year with her friends. At the moment they have around four thousand birrs in their saving account and earned enough money to handle further education."

**Governmental and Non-Governmental Organizations:** As it was discussed above Save the Children and Mercy Corps are the two organizations working on empowering girl children and women in education. The other organization is Save the Children. The approach they used was system building for child protection and supports the actual preventive and response services for children. In this way the organization established the first children parliament in Konso Zone in January, 2011, E.C. The members in the parliament were selected in each primary school whose age was below 18. It includes one girl and one boy. By using these children as the representatives in each primary school; the school community with the school directors discussed to establish children right coordinators club in each primary school. To this club each child provides his or her problem and they solve the problem by calling their families to school. They also arrange awareness giving training in their summer times and participate in student enrolment activities within their Kebeles, directors and teachers. Especially they focus on girls' enrolment. When an enrolled girl left school, they ask the problem and bring back the students to school. When the case of the girl was discussed and the problem is known they report it to the organization administrators and they rehabilitate the students with whatever needed to their education in talking with their families. Generally, the organization is targeted on a total of 4016 girl children and 308 Adults. The measures taken by the organization is to empower women in academic achievement.

**The Key Achievements of the Organizations:** A total of 37 children right protection groups with total membership of 580 was established in the Zone and strengthened through different capacity building trainings to provide quality protection services for children. These groups currently have a capital of 394806.00 (three hundred ninety-four thousand and eight hundred six) birr that enabled them to engage in income generating activities, to improve their economic status. Training is given for 2373/1197 girls/ children and 1450/628F/ care givers on child protection issues (prevention service). A total of 123 children / 32 girls are provided response services by community-based child protection systems (CBCPSs). A total of 47 community-based child protection systems (37 secondary and higher educational institutions-based care system & 10 community-based child protection and care system) with two child representatives each/one girl & one boy per community children care systems) meet regularly on monthly basis to address child related issues in their respective sites.



Picture 1: Children are getting a room for expressing their views and influence decision making regarding girls' enrolment and educational achievement in Konso conference hall  
Source: Konso children and women affair office December 2023.

Ten out of school child clubs established in ten Kebeles that prepare and stage community theatre on girl child related issues for advocacy purpose. Generally, those and the like organizations contributed for the current academic achievement of women among Konso.

Table1. Educational enrolment in the year 2009 and the participation of women educational leaders such as teachers, supervisors and directors.

No	Educational levels	No. of Students			Women participation in %	Difference
		Men	Women	Total		
1	4-Jan	12482	11052	23534	46.96	1430
2	8-May	7149	5637	12786	44.08	1512
3	10-Sep	1645	1284	2929	43.83	361
4	12-Nov	310	137	447	30.64	173
5	12-Jan	21586	18110	39696	4138	3476

Source: Konso education center office annual report December 2023

### Political Empowerment

As it was discussed in the previous section, women have power to give decision which is affected by their lack of economic power. The government started to plan to change the aspect of women by giving economic empowerment then after they start participation in decision. Because to participate and decide on something; it needs something that you say mine. But since it is a tradition of the society, it is not so easy to bring this change alone. According to the information from the Konso children and women affair office, the current condition of women among Konso was brought by working with different government and non-government organizations. As it was described throughout this paper, there are many governmental organizations that contribute a lot to brought change on the status of women among the society by using the government's plan to increase the socio-economic and political participation throughout the country. This plan of the government has base lined to bring highest development by fairly distributing duties and rights among its citizens. This is done by bringing the previously disadvantaged groups to the mainstream of the society through taking different affirmative action's especially for women and children. Southern nation's nationalities and peoples of Ethiopia census report showed the total number of peoples as 9430339 men and 9516584 are women; 50.2% are women and 49.8% are men. In

Segen people Zone, the percentage share of women is 51.3 and 48.7 are men. When we come to Konso Zone the total number of people is 275,535 among which men is 132,613(48.16) and women 142,922(51.8). Even though, they have the highest number in the region, zone and woreda, their participation in all socio-economic and political sectors is not as expected. Therefore, the federal government gives its priority towards changing the aspects of women and prioritizing their right by establishing different development packages and establishing children and women affair offices to increase their participation and to eradicate harmful traditional practices that hinder their participation. Generally, the mainstreaming strategy is for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmer in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality." Gender main streaming entails bringing the perceptions, experience, knowledge and interests of women as well as men to bear on policy-making, planning and decision-making. Mainstreaming should situate gender equality issues at the Centre of analyses and policy decisions, medium-term plans, program budgets, and institutional structures and processes. Accordingly, women get the chance to become Kanta chairperson, Kanta vice chairperson, Kanta leader and Kanta vice leader (Konso women and children affairs office (Annual report December 2019.) The other administrative sector of the society in which slight women participation in leadership is the kebele chief administration, kebele vice administration, kebele chief executive, kebele councilors and kebele vice councilors which accounts 35% of the administration but at zonal level women has no political participation (Konso children and women affairs office annual report 2019).

### **Economic Empowerment**

Women's historical experience of discrimination puts them at a disadvantage position enhancing their participation and representation in political decision-making bodies. In this regard studies argue that social and economic status of women in society has a direct influence on their participation in other social institutions. In other word lack of economic resources is one of the biggest obstacles that prevent women from participating in politics in greater numbers. Making it easier for women to access economic resources, therefore, is a key in expanding women's presence in the political realm. Accordingly, the Konso children and women affairs office is working towards mainstreaming women by understanding their disadvantaged social and economic positions. Because in Konso culture, women are not subjected to valuable resources like, land and valuable goods at home. Even a widowed woman is unable to negotiate representing her family and also has no full right to sell any of valuable resources for food and medical purpose for her children. By looking to this, Konso children and women affairs started working with different governmental and nongovernmental organizations to improve this situation. According to the information from the office, the major organization working towards the eradication of this problem was community-based child protection systems, Save the Children, Meserete humanitarian organization Konso field office, self-help groups and Pact Ethiopian organization.

### **Income Generation Activities (IGA)**

Quick assessment was made on expected market demand and availability of raw materials for production of the stoves. To implement these three sites (Karat town, Kolme town and Fasha town) were proposed through consultation made with the zone office of water, mines, irrigation and energy. After assessment, in Karat town there are number of private and organized women groups found on the production of the fuel saving stoves where their question leads to market promotion. In Kolme town another NGO (Mercy Corps) have already started intervention of same. Therefore; the project has selected Fasha town, where the area is at mid-altitude, the natural resource was already degraded, search for firewood is one of the time-consuming tasks for the women in the area. Last quarter, the group of the organized 15 women started saving as Village Saving and Loan Association (VSLA), the already constructed classroom was provided by the kebele administration and this project undertakes maintenance

to make space appropriate for the workshop. Accordingly, based on identified checklist, fuel saving stove production materials and production moulds were purchased and provided to the workshop. Practical training was given to the group members (15 women) for 4 days and the organized women group has started producing the fuel saving stoves. In addition, expert from zone office of cooperative development has started supporting them in by law development as multi-purpose cooperative so that the women group may also be able to access other income generating activities beside the fuel saving stove production and marketing.

## Sheep & Goat Credit

According to the information from Konso women and youth affairs office, under this activity 1920 women were selected from 15 project kebeles, i.e. 128 women from each kebele. Among the 128 women 64 women were selected as the primary (first round) beneficiaries of the in-kind sheep & goat credit and the other 64 women are expected to receive offspring. Following the selection of the first round (primary) beneficiary women, they were organized into groups (SHGs) and made to collect and save 10% insurance money (of the value of the 2 goats) before receiving the goats. Finally, goats were purchased and distributed for 963 women (each two goats).



Picture 2: Women House head Goat credit scheme  
Source: SOS organization, January 2017



Picture 3: Men headed house hold sheep & goat beneficiaries  
Source: SOS, organization January 2017

## Production of Aloe soap & Moringa Flour

According to the information from the coordinator, household's income diversification is one of resilience building activities planned in the project. Aloe Vera soap and Moringa flour production and marketing were planned by the project as part of income generation diversification. At the beginning of 2016, Duraite kebele was selected as appropriate site to domesticate Aloe vera plant and production of aloe soap. Ideal site selection for domestication of the aloe vera plant, construction of processing center, and

organization of 20 women into group and training was done during the previous quarters. Since then the women group is producing the Aloe soap named “Karsaliya “130 women (in 13 Kebeles, a group of 10 women in each project kebele except in Duraite and Ayayite) were also trained on Moringa flour processing in the previous quarters. In this quarter, a group of 22 women was organized in Ayayite kebele for aloe soap production and Moringa flour processing. The women group has started to domesticate the Aloe Vera plant on farm provided to them by the Kebele. As the program coordinator told, support was made for construction of workshop and materials were also purchased to initiate the soap production. Training on Aloe soap production for the women is expected to take place early in the next quarter in order to make them start the soap production the same way the Karsaliya women group is doing.

As one of their members of the women group informed me that “This income generating activities is good but due the distance between our homes and working place sometimes difficult to manage with farm work and bringing fodder for our cattle. Not only this but since we have a lot to do in our homes this type of activities is better for those who do not engage in farm activities. The other problem related with this women empowerment as she explained in her case, since valuable resources like land, domestic animals and coffee are the household incomes which are allowed for male (husband), we do not own them till now. Even-though the government has given to us, still it belongs to our husbands or when husband is not alive, his clan’ closest relative owns them”.

### **Organising Women Self-help Groups**

To keep sustainable women in-kind goat credit scheme in the community, orienting the beneficiary women into Village Saving and Loan Associations (VSLAs) methodology was indispensable. As it was reported all the 45 self-help groups (SHGs) have already been established, however the software work had been the remaining part and in order to develop them into village saving and loan associations (VSLAs), a sort of mechanism was needed at kebele level. VSLA training (on VSLA methodology) was provided to 15 facilitators selected from community (1 from each project kebele) with the purpose to train the SHGs (in-kind credit women groups) and transform them to VSLAs. In the previous reports, 20 SHGs were transformed to VSLAs and started saving quarterly at nearly acceptable members range. In this quarter additional 10 SHGs were transformed to VSLAs increasing the total VSLAs established by the project to 30. The VSLAs mobilise savings from their members and provide loans to their members based on VSLA methodology and its own group by law. One of them is getting reached maturity and graduated. In addition, in this quarter business skill training and management skill training were given to members and management committee. Here below is the information from members of VSLG.

“She said she was member of modern VSLG but also she has also her own traditional self-help group termed Takaytuma. While explaining the situation, she said all are beneficial but in the traditional village and saving loan group; we help each other in household and outside home farm works both for cash and freely. But in the modern one we do not work at the farm but we save only money that we get from homemade Cheqa or Areqe.

### **Challenges of Women Empowerment**

#### **The Belief of Women That Are Outsiders for Their Clan**

In Konso society, it is strictly forbidden for women to directly inherit their parent’s property as they are expected to obtain their share from the individual whom they marry in the future. If a man dies without having a male child, his unmarried female children can use his land only until they marry. After their marriage, the land is directly transferred to their father's close relatives and/or in their absence to clan members. Moreover, after marriage, they are denied not only the right to inherit his land but also to use it.



Accordingly, one of my informants from Debana Kebele told me that “they are three daughters that their mother gave birth to. The age of the first daughter is 15, the second is 10 the last one is 6. Their father was died of malaria. As she told me their first daughter was grade 6 but the other two didn’t get the chance for studying since their father died. Once upon a time the little daughter was seriously sick and for medical purpose, I need money. So, I need to sell one of our oxen but the clan members prevented me rather you have to remarry his oldest or youngest son. As the case is serious and very difficult, I refused their advice and borrowed money from my brother for my daughter medical purpose. Then after my first daughter graduated from a collage, she started helping us and now all of us are students ‘except the first one which is helped by my parents support. Even now I do not have the right to sell or exchange the valuable resource for my daughters’ education as well for our basic needs”.

The reason for the prohibition of girls from inheriting land is that since she marries into another clan; she would alienate the scarce resource (land) of her family to an alien clan group. The outlook behind this belief is that the one who inherits the land is not the woman, but her children who in fact belong to another clan. When she dies, she leaves the land for her children (i.e., for another clan). The sole inheritance female children might get from their parents is a certain bracelet from her mother at her mother's death. Rarely do they inherit an insignificant amount of cash from their mother (Berry, 1993 cited in Watson, 1998:6). Also, in Konso tradition, women have no right to sell any valuable resources like livestock and coffee in the absence of her husband. Even when her child gets sick, she has to borrow money from her brother or from her husband’s family instead of selling her assets to save the life of her child. But now the government also replacing the traditional women works groups like *Parka*, *Alumala* and *Takaytuma* by “modern” associations like 1to 5 cooperative groups village loan saving institutions, goat, sheep or hen credit to women and so on. But even the government invests more on such institutions; it does not stop the property ownership of men.

### **The Belief That Women Are Not Capable of Making Decisions**

In Konso, due to the belief that women are not strong as men, their economic sphere narrowed to domestic affairs with little or no economic gain. For example, if we take farming or any work that demands high energy and labor, is considered to be men’s duty. However, in reality the majority of the farm work in Konso is being done by women. And also, similarly, they participate in pottery, blacksmithing and other house hold activities like *Chaqa* preparation. According to the Konso category, women among Konso are categorized as *Xawuda* women and *Etanta*, Likewise, carrying heavy load of grain and the like from the fields to *Koossa* (granary) supposed to be men’s duty. But this task is mostly done by women, which is a fact that does not denied by the Konso men themselves. Moreover, women participate in many household and outdoor activities like farming, marketing. However, they do not participate in the community work like wall building, terrace mending, well cleaning and important community decision making activities, which are considered to be exclusively men’s domain. Because in this domain’s women have no direct role rather indirect role such as helping them in bringing food for them and providing stones during community trace building.

Regardless of women participation in some economic activities, such activities, however, do not seen as active employments or brought high regard to Konso women in the society. Accordingly, one informant from Gena woreda Mecheqe Kebele told her case as follows.

“As a house wife I’m doing all the house works and also everything in the farm. She told that most of the time my work is fixed. Early in the morning I go to farm and bring fodder for cattle’s then after I back home I prepare and give breakfast for my kids and send them to school. Then after I return to farm to work in the field either weeding or preparing the land for further crops. After that I collect all the necessary things for food in the field like cassava, moringa and pigeon beans. In the afternoon I bring all those and start preparation for dinner. But the solely job of my husband is he just rise in the morning and

go to the community gathering place (Mora) after he returned back home, he will get his breakfast and go to other farm lands to check traces and boundaries which need maintains. Then as he back around 6:00 local time he just goes to Chaqa house to drink and play with his friends. Finally, in the evening he returns home after 1:30 because in Konso culture male has not to stay at day time or before 12:00 local time in his house because he is termed as a weak male. For thus all husbands most likely return after evening. Even though he does not consider all the things I did in home and outdoor work. Therefore, he always says for me what have you done throughout the day? You are doing nothing in this house he says because according to his perception the only work is farm work. So, it is very difficult for some Konso men to believe women as a whole day worker.

## Deep Rooted Negative Attitude Towards Women

In examining some social aspects like marriage as I tried to explain above, the Konso are exogamous peoples who do not marry within their clans rather outside of their clan. As far as choice is concerned, women have no full right to decide on whom to marry rather the marriage is arranged by the two families. Based on this we saw a case study by one graduate student at Addis Ababa University in 2018 who born in Fasha Kebele Kugnara village. She told me her case as follows:” ‘She was born and raised they’re in Fasha Kebele. Her father was Fasha Kebele chief administrator and has one son who is attending school with her sister. But due to the cultural influence and as the son is the first-born son (Qarta) in his home he gives priority for him even the girl is his eldest sister. Therefore, to get support and continue her education, one boy in her Kebele is a nurse in his occupation asked her to be his friend after completion of her grade 10. As she told the case for her family, her family allowed her to be his girlfriend and also as the boy asked his family, they also accepted the girl to be his girlfriend.

As the two families accepted their friendship, they become good friends. And also, their parents start relationship. At the end of her preparatory school her family accepted bride wealth from the boy's family and then after she joined Addis Ababa University Geography department and agreed to marry him after her graduation. As they already made marriage agreement, she is waiting for wedding ceremony but things are reversed when she was in 3rd year second semester and she heard that her boyfriend married another girl. As she told me she was very confused. But her father and the boy's family hide the case and do not tell the case for her because the girl that he married was not chosen by his family and only by his interest. For this, the two families started to arrange the second marriage secretly by avoiding financial support for her and the boy also agreed on this idea. Since it is her graduation year there was high investment for graduation cloth and research works. But when she asks her father to send money, he responded her that you are not part of my family, you are already their wife so ask them. For this reason, she stopped her graduation cloth preparation and focused only on her research works by asking money from her uncle who is lecturer in Dilla University. In this form she finished her research works and invited her father for her graduation but she got the same response from her father. As she finished her graduation her family and her boyfriend's family again agreed not to give money to search job after she return home unless she must agree for marrying him as his second wife and if not, she agrees, the marriage must undertake forcefully. As one of her girlfriends from her village told all these plans for her, she left going back to Konso and go to her uncle home in Dilla. Then she applied for pedagogy and passed. As she announced her acceptance, she reported the case for Konso children and women affair office with her uncle the case and they freed her by paying Moral Kassa legally. Now she is a pedagogy student in Wolayita Sodo University this year”.

There are many related cases but they are interrelated and have the same causes. I selected these case studies only to show how marriage affects girls' academics. But according to the constitution of Ethiopia marriage must depend on age and consent of the two. The marrying spouses must give their consent voluntarily. If the consent is extorted by force or compulsion, such consent is a defective one, a defective consent results in a defective marriage. The minimum age requirement for both of the marrying

spouses is 18 years. If the marrying spouses are below the age years, they cannot conclude a valid marriage. All forms of marriage must respect the age requirement that has to be observed like the requirement of consent (Meron, 2008).

## Conclusion

This study was conducted among the Konso people of southwest Ethiopia with the aim of assessing the opportunities and challenges of women empowerment. The study focuses on various aspects of Konso women, and the opportunities created by the government by the notion of “modern” education, exogenous religion and other governmental and non-governmental organizations who work to fill the gap (inequality) in socio-political and economic participation between men and women. The socio-economic and political participation of women is limited given the patriarchal nature of the Konso. This low participation of women in all socio-economic and political activities is due to some social and biological factors. The biological factors generally include the biological body makeup that differentiates the two sexes, however, it is difficult to make generalization as the variables vary across different cultures. It was believed in earlier times that the difference between men and women to be biological, and the division of labor also to be decided on the basis of their biological difference. However, the main cause for the male and female difference is not only biology, but rather the societal values and norms on the way in which women roles are socially constructed. Depending on the information extracted from my respondents, and as it was explained throughout this paper, among the Konso one learns to acquire its gender roles of being a man or woman by a task assigned to him or her through society’s socialization process. These social roles were not inherited or conferred to someone by birth, but acquired gradually through the society’s task allocation. The division of role in the gender line among Konso society is something which is the result of social attitude and social construction which is deep rooted within the society’s culture. Some social aspects like marriage, the Konso are exogamous peoples who do not marry within their clans rather outside of their clan. Women have no full right to decide on who to marry rather the marriage is arranged by the two families. Women involvement in non-marital family aspects is also not much appreciated among the Konso. This reality can easily some proverbs. For example, there is a proverb **saying “Eskata esho helapa anan hawulane kiday aba baayita”** literally “do not burry me with women and children”. The hidden meaning in this proverb is that women and children have nothing perfect rather than chaos. The other related proverb reads **“Tola aeskatada eshona hayumiyane eqine kine”** literally “those who get led by women become destroyed”. The latter shows how women were politically devoid of running political issues. If leadership is given to women, it leads to destruction of the family or the community. Regarding marriage when a given girl is getting marries, her father blesses and give her his advice. Like be fruitful in all things. They advise the girl by saying **“Enayo anika otoni tolayshu kumbabe mugneye, oliyew kumbabe muki, otoni erindela mukneye at asew mugei”** meaning my daughter I advise you that when you married please agree with whatever they do if the lie dawn so do you and if they lie up so do you. Since Konso is exogamous society and marriage is not allowed within their clan as they belief that women might give away secretes of the people to peoples in the future husbands’ villages Exogamous marriage drags women’s education as well as other social aspects among Konso because educated girl can marry another clan for this families hate sending girls to school. Even if the government influences them to do so they send them in order not to be accused for the violation of their right but not to teach and help her to reach on good result. But when you ask those who are educated and even working on women affairs office about women educational achievement or women empowerment, they positively respond but when you come back to their home and ask them, they respond that **“Eskata abadasute tamari mana enuqarye nesishan”** or **“Eskata abaadimala tamari”** There is contrasting ideas about education and exogamous marriage. Marriage within the clan is totally strict and even any unacceptable jokes within similar clan are not supported; give the name *Maneyra*. Success in any activities is difficult for Konso women. The idea which contrasts with marriage is education. According to the rule education is human rights but due to their marriage culture women are not able to use this right. According to the information

from elders, in Konso culture women are believed not peoples to lead rather to be leaded by men. For this they hate women leadership. Because educated women participate on leadership. As regards to the economy; in Konso there is high variation between the role of women and men due to the belief that women are not strong enough as men. Their economic sphere narrowed to domestic affairs with little or no economic gain. For example, if we take farming and or any work that demands high energy and labor, is considered to be men's duty. However, in reality the majority of the farm work in Konso is being done by women. In addition, women participate in pottery, blacksmithing and other house hold activities like *Chaqa* preparation. Women among Konso are categorized as *Xawuda* women and *Etanta*, carrying heavy load of grain and the like from the fields to *Koossa* (granary) supposed to be men's duty. But this task is mostly done by women, which is a fact that does not denied by the Konso men themselves. Moreover, women participate in many household and outdoor activities like farming, marketing. However, they do not participate in the community work like wall building, terrace mending, well cleaning and important community decision making activities, which are considered to be exclusively men's domain. Because in this domain's women has no direct role rather indirect role such as helping them in bringing food for them and providing stones during community trace building.

### **Recommendations**

The following four prescriptions are provided based on the findings of the study: The deep-rooted gender ideology that made women to be considered inferior to men in socio-political and economic aspects, has negatively affected in decisions about their own life. Women's consciousness whereby they attribute the reason of their inferiority to God's will has also contributed a lot to the continuity of their status. This has negatively influenced women's active role in both traditional and formal political organizations. To change this gender-based thinking, it needs basic awareness creation education for the general public in general and females in particular. Since women are the major economic producers and social life builders, the strong position men hold socially, economically and politically have limited women's access to and control over resources. Thus, to change women's life, legal intervention and consecutive public awareness to bring attitudinal change should be the target of change agents. Unless women realize their full right over their productive and reproductive capacities, enacting and implementing different programs and projects might not bring a meaningful change in their life. Thus, successive efforts should be made in bringing attitudinal changes on behalf of men particularly in the use of household resources, inheritance and property ownership. Generally, since this gender-based thinking is embedded in the social organization of the community, the attempts of bringing change likely to follow multidisciplinary approaches. Finally, individualistic approach to change the current situation of women will not be effective. Thus, women empowerment demands the combined effort, intervention and support of the government, local non-governmental organizations and international development supporters.

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