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Exploring Rural Women Empowerment: Practices and Challenges in Northern Shoa Zone, Amhara Regional State, Ethiopia

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Abstract

Empowering women involves uplifting those who have historically been marginalized in terms of economic, social, and political standings. The study comprehensively examined the current status of women's empowerment, the obstacles hindering progress, as well as the potential avenues for advancement. This study employed concurrent mixed method approach. Primary data were gathered from focus group discussions and interviews with key informants. Additionally, insights were gathered from 384 randomly selected women through scheduled interviews. Qualitative data were analyzed using a narrative approach while descriptive statistics was used to analyze the quantitative data using SPSS software. The finding revealed 69.8% of households were found male-headed while the remaining 30.2% of them were female-headed. In addition, 59.4% of them did not have knowledge regarding the constitutionally declared women's right and 34.1% of them their land certification is registered under their husband's name. Although the district's women and children affairs is expected to play the lion's share of roles in the women empowerment process, it was found that it has failed to get incredible rating from the respondents. Likewise, 67.5% of the respondents rated the district administration's overall effort and commitment made towards socio-economic empowerment of women as low. Presence of indigenous cooperative societies and existence of different organizations working on gender and reproductive health issues were found that as an opportunity to enhance women empowerment. However, men- dominant culture, poverty, inadequate women's confidence, inadequate facilities, sexual abuse, inadequate women political participation continue to restrict women's control over resources, decision-making regarding finances and property management. Furthermore, prevailing perceptions systematically put women in subordinated positions in the society, curtailing their economic autonomy and weakening their bargaining position within the family. Their weakened bargaining position translated into little or no voice in household decision requires concerted awareness-raising efforts within the community.

Key words: Challenges, empowerment, opportunities, practices, women

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1. Introduction

Empowerment involves enhancing individuals' or groups' ability to make choices and translate them into desired actions and outcomes (Rani, 2021). Specifically focusing on rural women, empowerment means broadening their assets and capabilities to actively engage with, negotiate within, influence, control, and hold accountable the institutions shaping their lives (McGuire, 2015; Engida, 2021). Similarly, women's empowerment denotes their increasing power and autonomy over their own circumstances. This acknowledges the persistent disparities women face compared to men across economic, socio-cultural, and political domains. Consequently, women's empowerment serves as a vital step toward achieving gender equality, wherein individuals' rights, responsibilities, and opportunities are independent of their gender at birth (Tiwari & Malati, 2023; Engida, 2021; Mandal, 2018).

As per the UNFPA, an empowered woman possesses a strong sense of self-worth. She exercises agency in making her own decisions and enjoys access to diverse opportunities and resources, affording her a range of pathways to explore. She commands autonomy over her life, whether at home or beyond, and holds the capacity to shape societal progress towards a fairer social and economic framework, both domestically and globally (Soharwardi & Ahmad, 2020; Mandal, 2013; Esquivel, 2016).

The discourse surrounding women's empowerment has been extensively discussed in development literature for decades, yet empirical evidence demonstrating its tangible impact on the lives of women over time remains limited (Tiwari & Malati, 2023; Cornwall *et al*., 2004; Jetti, 2006; Mulugeta *et al*., 2016). Despite numerous endeavors to empower women, many of these efforts have fallen short of their intended objectives for various reasons. Chief among these is the tendency to view impoverished women as subjects of development rather than active agents within the development process. This approach hampers the creation of an enabling environment, as it casts women primarily as passive recipients of aid and services, rather than as capable participants capable of driving meaningful change (Jaysawal & Saha, 2023; Narayana & Ahamad, 2016; Bushra & Wajiha, 2015).

The Women in Development (WID) movement gained prominence in the early 1970s, spurred by Boserup's (1970) observation of women's invisibility in productive activities. WID aimed to address this by highlighting women as a distinct group excluded from productive work and advocated for their participation in such activities. However, WID often overlooked the significance of women's reproductive labor and failed to challenge unequal gender relations, relegating women to the margins of development and increasing their workload. Subsequently, Gender and Development (GAD) emerged as an alternative approach in the late 1980s, focusing on transforming male-female relations. GAD recognized the importance of women's collective organization for individual empowerment. Despite these shifts in approach, women continue to be marginalized, viewed more as objects deprived of fundamental rights rather than as autonomous individuals capable of fully enjoying life both within and outside the home (Jaysawal & Saha, 2023; Roy *et al*., 2018; Shetty & Hans, 2015).

However, the process of women's empowerment has encountered challenges in its conceptualization and interpretation (Sinha *et al*., 2017; Jetti, 2006). Academic research and intervention projects have grappled with defining empowerment for impoverished women, often measuring it in terms of their participation in material resource creation or acquisition of skills for income generation (Schuler *et al*., 2010; Varghese, 2011). Consequently, indicators such as attendance in training programs, involvement in self-help groups and micro-enterprises, access to credit or loans, and increased income post-income-generating activities have been emphasized, while other crucial outcome variables, such as participation in household decision-making and expenditure, social and political empowerment, shifts in attitudes and behaviors for oneself and others, and addressing strategic gender needs, have often been overlooked (Tiwari & Malati, 2023; Hazarika, 2011). The sluggish progress in mainstreaming gender into development policies and practices has posed a challenge to Gender and Development (GAD) initiatives for grassroots workers and activists since the 1990s (Sinha *et al*.; 2017; Baden and Goetz, 2000).

The failure to integrate women's well-being into that of families is a significant concern, with women often treated as distinct entities and the gendered division of labor ignored within various socio-economic and cultural contexts. The role of men in the women's empowerment process has been underestimated, often viewed as contributing to women's historical subordination in social, political, and economic spheres (Haque *et al*., 2011; Hazarika, 2011; Jaysawal & Saha, 2023). Instead of recognizing husbands as potential allies in transforming women's positions and status, they are often seen as barriers to women's development and empowerment (Roy *et al*., 2018). Consequently, men are frequently excluded from efforts to empower impoverished women, leading to a perception that women's empowerment initiatives occur separately from male involvement. While Gender and Development (GAD) initiatives attempted to address this gap, they faced challenges related to strategies, interventions, a lack of skilled personnel, ultimately resulting in limited impacts at the grassroots level (Engida, 2021; Jaysawal & Saha, 2023).

For instance, studies conducted in Bangladesh have highlighted that rural women often face restrictions on interacting with men outside their immediate family circle, limiting their access to development resources (Haque *et al*., 2011; Parveen and Leonhäuser, 2005). Additionally, research by the World Bank indicates that many women in rural areas engage in farming on land owned by their husbands or male relatives. This dependence prevents them from exercising autonomy in decision-making regarding land use and farming techniques. Furthermore, it hinders their ability to invest in land and access essential resources such as credit, training, and fertilizers, which are crucial for optimizing yield and enhancing productivity (Bank, 2012; Jaysawal & Saha, 2023).

In Ethiopia, significant efforts have been made to implement affirmative policies aimed at benefiting both rural and urban impoverished women, with a particular focus on economic empowerment measures (Dadi, 2017; Engida, 2021). Notably, the Federal government of Ethiopia has demonstrated commitment to enhancing conditions for women's economic, political, social, and legal empowerment through various policy enhancements. However, progress in the realm of women's economic empowerment remains limited.

Furthermore, the correlation between empowerment and the frequency of agricultural extension services indicates that a significant portion of empowered female farmers received such services no more than three times; contrasting with less than 29 percent of empowered women who had no contact with extension services (Abebe *et al.*, 2016). Additionally, joining Self-Help Groups (SHGs) has led to increased earnings, economic security, and enhanced decision-making abilities among women. This improvement has enabled all women, including those in SHGs, to make small purchases for personal and household use (Engida, 2021; Sahu & Singh, 2012).

According to Regasa (2023) found that in East Shewa and West Arsi zones, Ethiopia, only 10% of women are empowered, but 67.5% achieve gender parity with male household members. Basic disempowerment factors include lack of time (32%), limited resource control (27%), and low decision-making power (27%).

Likewise, the Amhara region has undertaken numerous initiatives to facilitate the effective and seamless implementation of political, social, economic, and legal measures pertaining to women's empowerment. Additionally, regional laws and policies mandate that all organizations operating within the region integrate gender issues into their development agendas. However, despite these efforts, the entrenched economic challenges faced by women persist.

A study by Tigabie *et al.,* (2022) access and control of resources by rural women in Northern Shoa zone, Amhara region findings reveal that women participated in both on-farm and off-farm income activities but faced limited access to extension services and agricultural training. While household resources were generally shared equally, institutional resources remained less accessible. Poultry ownership was primarily female-dominated, whereas other livestock and land were jointly managed by men and women.

Specifically in the study area, in Northern Shoa, a study by Kuma (2021) in Basona Werana Woreda revealed that women's empowerment was strongly influenced by factors such as marital status, land ownership rights, farm size, access to agricultural information, and credit facilities. Moreover, Mulugeta (2021) studied women's labor force participation and poverty reduction in Debre Birhan town, Ethiopia, recommending that several key interventions such as promoting family planning, encouraging women's higher education, increasing media exposure, establishing daycare centers (public/private), and improving women's access to credit is crucial. Consequently, this study seeks to evaluate the practices and obstacles encountered in the empowerment of women in two woredas within the Northern Shoa zone, Amhara regional state.

2. Problem Statement of the Study

Women typically allocate a larger portion of their earnings to benefit their families and communities compared to men (Jaysawal & Saha, 2023). Despite women performing 66% of the world's work and producing 50% of the food, their earnings constitute only 10% of the total income, and they own merely 1% of the property (Mandal, 2018). Whether the goal is to enhance education in developing nations, combat global climate change, or address any other prevailing challenge, empowering women emerges as a crucial component of the solution (Rani, 2021; Uwantege & Mbabazi, 2015).

Hassen (2011) argues that in Ethiopia, women's economic empowerment is influenced by various factors including cultural norms, levels of literacy, the influence of husbands, and religious beliefs. Consequently, women's participation in household income decision-making processes is often restricted, with much of their limited income directed towards household consumption. Within the cultural context, women are perceived as subordinate to men, with husbands assuming dominant roles, and religious beliefs exerting significant influence (Engida, 2021). Similarly, Moindi (2012) asserts that cultural practices play a significant role in perpetuating the subjugation of women in Ethiopian society. This is due to the perception of women as inferior to men, resulting in restrictions on their property ownership rights and limited acknowledgment of their opinions.

Some studies have assessed program contributions using quantitative methods, revealing statistically significant impacts. However, these studies may be susceptible to social desirability bias due to the involvement of program officials or employees as researchers. Their involvement may lead to a tendency to portray them or their organizations more favorably compared to independent academics or researchers. Consequently, such research might obscure various challenges faced by rural impoverished women, including difficulties in accessing credit, managing it effectively, navigating trade-offs between male-female relationships and resource allocation, psychological barriers, higher marginal costs, and cultural influences. Addressing this research gap requires well-structured qualitative studies.

Studies in Ethiopia have shed light on the conceptual disparity between women's lived experiences and social theories, as well as the perceptions of other stakeholders, which could have significant long-term implications for the welfare of all family members. For instance, research by Dessalegn and Sajitha (2016) conducted in one of Ethiopia's food insecure districts, Ilugelan, revealed that changes in annual income or per-capita income did not significantly affect food insecurity. Furthermore, the study found differences in consumption patterns between males and females within the same household, with females consuming food items of lower calorie value. Despite the entitlement of all household members to adequate food (Sen, 1981), gender inequalities within households result in unequal consumption. Similarly, a study by Afework (2015) in the Ambo district of the Oromia region demonstrated that women's empowerment significantly influences the achievement of desired family size but is hindered by attitudes and low levels of male involvement in women's issues. However, these studies primarily adopted quantitative approaches, providing sufficient evidence to underscore the importance of women's empowerment and gender equality within households for the welfare of all members, regardless of age or sex. Notably, previous research has not thoroughly examined the practices of various stakeholders in empowering women or the perceived constraints to women's empowerment from women's perspectives.

Hence, women's empowerment is influenced by various factors. However, this study was concentrated on pivotal elements that directly impact women's empowerment, encompassing both individual and collective experiences. These factors encompass education, skills enhancement, and training; access to equitable employment opportunities that provide fair remuneration;

ownership of property, assets, and financial services; collective mobilization and leadership; as well as social protection measures.

In summary, the objective of this study is to explore the practices and obstacles concerning women's empowerment within specific study areas (two woredas of the Northern Shoa zone, Amhara regional state), Ethiopia. Furthermore, the researcher aims to address the aforementioned gaps within the context of these study areas. Hence, this study strives to answer the following key research questions: 1) what is the existing situation of women empowerment in the study area? 2) What existing practices undertaken to empower women in the study area? 3) What are the challenges of women empowerment in the study area? And 4) what are existing opportunities of women empowerment in the study area?

3. Review of Related Literature

3.1 The Concept of Empowerment

Scholars offer varied interpretations of 'Empowerment'. It signifies granting power or authority to individuals, groups, or society, fostering self-reliance and confidence. This entails the freedom to make decisions across economic, political, social, and cultural realms, devoid of external influence or control. Moreover, it encapsulates safeguarding against physical, moral, and psychological harm, as well as discrimination and gender-based violence. Empowerment also encompasses the liberty to organize for mutual benefit and to express ideas and opinions freely, independent of external pressures (Hassen, 2011).

Empowerment is alternatively described as a grassroots endeavor aimed at reshaping gender dynamics by enhancing women's consciousness. This process empowers women to confront various forms of subjugation perpetrated against them (Ogato, 2008).

There is a pressing need for the economic empowerment of women in today's world. A fundamental reason for this imperative is the disproportionate representation of women among the world's impoverished populations, particularly pronounced in Africa. Ruzvidzo (2007) notes that Africa stands as the poorest region globally, with women constituting approximately 70 percent of both urban and rural is poor.

Economic empowerment of women holds substantial potential for enhancing household livelihoods. According to UNICEF (2006), one of the most impactful avenues for women's empowerment lies in fostering cooperative dynamics among women. Informal women's collectives, addressing issues like nutrition, food distribution, education, and shelter, play a vital role in elevating the standard of living for women, their families, and communities. Recognizing these women's groups as pivotal agents of empowerment and development is crucial. UNICEF (2006) advocates for their inclusion in poverty reduction strategies by governments and development agencies, promoting enduring partnerships (UNICEF 2006).

3.2 Challenges of women empowerment

As per Dadi (2017), the economic empowerment of rural women faces challenges arising from various factors. These include limited access to information, minimal involvement of rural women in matters affecting their economic empowerment, and restrictions on their mobility. Institutional barriers, such as poor economic conditions and ineffective enforcement of gender equality laws, further hinder their empowerment. Additionally, the reluctance of policymakers to address disempowering factors and the low participation of rural women in decision-making processes concerning access to and control over economic resources contribute to these challenges (Dadi, 2017).

Similarly, factors impacting the empowerment of rural women include access to land, opportunities for independent earnings, involvement in community activities, and decision-making authority over their labor outputs, and self-confidence in their actions. Education and social engagement also play significant roles in determining the empowerment levels of rural women (Bharathamma, 2005).

Numerous scholars have endeavored to discern the multitude of factors influencing women's empowerment, approaching their study from diverse perspectives. Hassen (2011) asserts that women's economic empowerment is influenced by cultural norms, levels of literacy, the influence of husbands, and religious beliefs. The study highlights limited participation of women in household income decision-making, with the majority of their earnings allocated to household consumption. Cultural norms often position women as subordinate to men, with husbands assuming dominant roles, while religious beliefs also wield significant influence.

Similarly, the findings from Nyasengo's study (2012) closely echo those of Hassen (2011), highlighting the significant impact of cultural practices on the subjugation of women within society. Women are often perceived as inferior to men, leading to restrictions on property ownership and limited opportunities for their voices to be heard. Additionally, high levels of illiteracy among women, particularly in Africa, contribute to their limited economic empowerment. This lack of education diminishes their ability to advance in their careers, resulting in a lower quality of life not only for women but also for their children.

Conversely, the overseas development institute (2016) took a distinct approach in identifying factors influencing women's empowerment, categorizing them into 'direct factors' those directly linked to women's individual or collective experience and 'underlying factors' which encompass broader structural conditions shaping these experiences. The process of enhancing women's economic empowerment hinges on six key direct factors that impact woman’s individual and collective experiences:

- Education, skills development, and training
- Access to decent paid work, entailing opportunities for productive employment and fair income
- Unpaid care and work burdens
- Access to property, assets, and financial services

- Collective action and leadership
- Social protection

Similarly, the study indicated that women's individual or collective lived experiences are determined by underlying structural factors that operate across social, political, legal and financial institutions including labour market characteristics ; fiscal policy; legal, regulatory and policy framework; gender norms and discriminatory social norms.

3.3 Theoretical Framework

Women's empowerment entails their active involvement in decision-making processes, the capacity to make strategic choices, and the access, ownership, and control of resources and decisions that significantly impact key life outcomes within the economic and political frameworks of a society (Kwangwari *et al*., 2015).

- **Economic empowerment**

Women's economic empowerment entails the journey toward ensuring women have equal access to and control over economic resources, enabling them to exert greater influence over various aspects of their lives. This ongoing empowerment process has yielded fruitful outcomes, garnering global policy attention due to its potential to contribute significantly to the Sustainable Development Goals (Taylor and Pereznieto, 2014).

Women's economic empowerment is crucial for their well-being as it enables them to become primary earners within their households. This empowerment entails gaining control over and utilizing income-generating resources. It is widely acknowledged that amplifying the voices and visibility of women is contingent upon their access to ownership of economic resources. Achieving economic empowerment involves ensuring equal employment opportunities, organizational benefits, treatment, and working environments for women, on par with men (Mandal, 2013). This underscores the notion that economic empowerment encompasses both earning income and having agency in decision-making processes regarding those earnings.

Scholars hold differing perspectives regarding the significance of economic resources in women's empowerment. Some argue that economic resources inherently embody power and therefore advocate for measures to redistribute material assets within families, communities, and society as a whole. Conversely, others perceive material assets solely as a condition conducive to empowerment. This viewpoint does not advocate for redistributing material assets but emphasizes the importance of ensuring access to resources (Kapitsa, 2008).

Economic empowerment holds significance not only for women but also for their families. A woman's ability to earn income elevates her status within the household, enabling her to contribute to household expenditures and partake in family decision-making alongside men. This economic stability empowers women to attain equal footing within the family unit and consequently within society (Abebe *et al*., 2016). Evidence from various countries indicates that

increasing the portion of household income controlled by women, whether through their own earnings or cash transfers, leads to changes in spending patterns that benefit children within the family (The World Bank, 2012). Furthermore, when more women are empowered to participate in the labor force in a manner that reduces the gap between women's and men's labor force participation, it fosters accelerated economic growth (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2012).

It's crucial to recognize that economic empowerment isn't solely attained through access to earning and decision-making control over earnings. Figure 1 below illustrates various enabling or constraining factors affecting the economic empowerment of women.

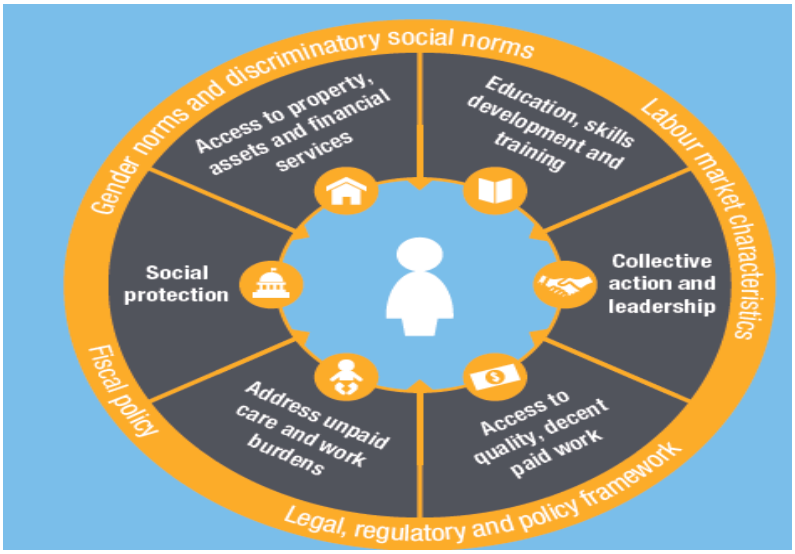

Figure 1: Theoretical framework women's economic empowerment
Source: Overseas Development Institute, 2016

- **Social empowerment**

This concept pertains to achieving equal status for women both within the household and in wider society. It involves women expanding their perspective on life, understanding their circumstances, recognizing their capabilities, and attaining self-confidence and self-awareness. These developments contribute to the cultivation of individual identity, leading to self-determination and greater control in decision-making processes. A lack of awareness among women about their circumstances often results in a loss of control over their situation. Consequently, social empowerment plays a crucial role in helping women comprehend the social context in which they exist, empowering them to anticipate situations, make informed choices, and select options that best align with their needs. Therefore, it underscores the importance of women cultivating awareness regarding their social environment that lives free from all forms of oppression (Abebe *et al.*, 2016).

- **Political empowerment**

Political empowerment of women entails their active participation in the political arena and various decision-making bodies. It does not imply the acquisition and use of power and authority by women to dominate or subjugate the opposite sex or one group of women over another, which is not desirable. Women's empowerment, therefore, entails the equitable distribution of power and authority between men and women, defined across four levels of power.

Firstly, 'Power over' denotes the perception of power as limited and exerted over others for guidance. Secondly, 'Power to' signifies the creative ability to make decisions and find solutions to problems, encompassing intellectual abilities (knowledge and know-how) as well as economic resources. Thirdly, 'Power with' refers to the capacity to collaborate and collectively negotiate to defend common goals. Lastly, 'Power within' relates to self-awareness, self-esteem, identity, and assertiveness, emphasizing how individuals can manage their lives and effect change through self-analysis and internal strength (BSR, 2017).

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Description of the Study

The study was conducted in Bassonawerana and Angolelanatera woreda in the Northern Shea zone of Amhara Regional state, central highland Ethiopia. Bassonawerana and Angolelanatera woreda Woredas are two of the ten Woredas of North Shewa Zone in Amhara Regional State. It located in the eastern edge of the Ethiopian highlands.

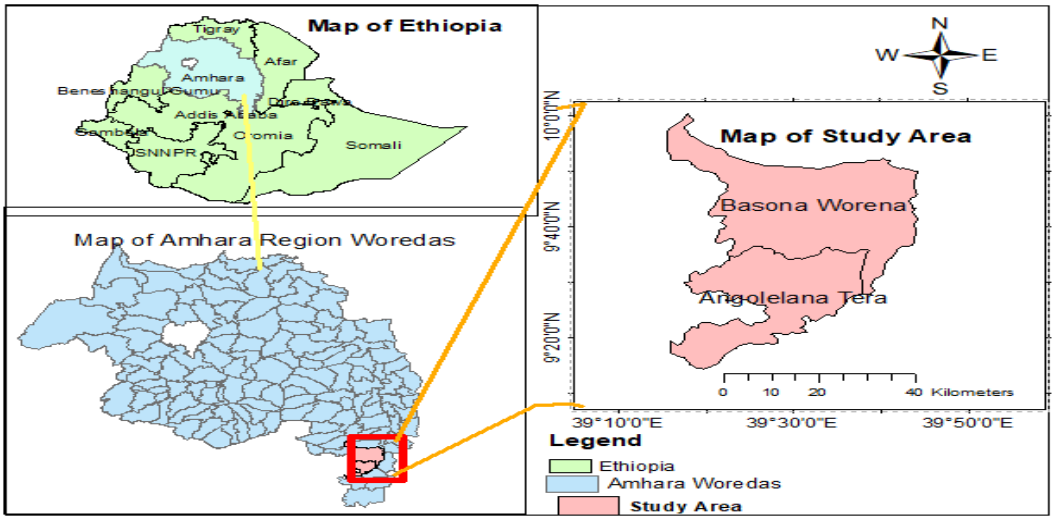

Figure 2: Map of the Study Area (Source: GIS, 2024.)

4.2 Research design and approach

This study a concurrent mixed method approach and descriptive research design was employed. This means qualitative data were collected side by side with the survey questionnaire. In assessing

the practices and challenges of women's empowerment, the primary data were gathered from Bassonawerana and Angolelanatera woreda from Northern Shoa zone, Amhara regional state.

4.3 Sampling Design

In this study, probability and non-probability sampling procedures were used to select the survey areas and the sampling unit frame of women.

1. Bassonawerana and Angolelanatera woreda from Northern Shoa zone, Amhara regional state were selected purposively because of their location from Debrebirhan city and the limited research conducted on this issue.
2. To make generalization about the whole rural women Bassonawerana and Angolelanatera woreda, six rural villages were selected through simple random sampling method.
3. Finally, 384 sample women were selected from selected two woredas of Northen Shoa zone, Amhara regional through Simple Random Sampling method.

Corbetta formula was used for computing sample size when the size of a general population is unknown.

$$n_0 = \frac{z^2 p.q}{e^2}$$

Where n_0= the required sample size
z = the level of confidence of the estimate is 95%. Its statistical table, Z = 1.96)
p = the estimated proportion of an attribute that is present in the population [for unknown level of proportion, the maximum variability (0.5) is used].
e = the desired level of precision
q = 1-p.

The sample size of the study was thus calculated as:

$$n = \frac{z^2 p.q}{e^2} = \frac{(1.96)^2 \times 0.5 \times 0.5}{(0.05)^2} = \frac{0.961525}{0.0025} = 384$$

Additionally, key informant interviews were selected from each Woreda (2 Woredas) with 10 different individuals from different levels such as, Women, youth and child affairs, safety-net program coordinators, Woreda micro & small scale enterprise office, cooperative promoters, women representative, village managers and community leaders, religious leaders, model women farmers and Woreda administrators to get important information on the practices and challenges of women's empowerment in their respective woredas.

Furthermore, 12 focus group discussions were carried out with 8-12 persons from various fields including men participants. In other words, total 12 focus group discussions were administered (8 female groups from male headed households and 4 female groups from female

headed households). A total of 144 rural households were participated in the focus group discussion. The discussions were focused on comprehensive picture of socio-economic conditions of women, existing situation of women empowerment, existing practices undertaken to empower women, potential intervention areas of women empowerment, challenges of women empowerment, and perception of women towards empowerment.

4.4 Methods of Data Collection

The semi-structured interview schedule was prepared to collect information on practices and challenges of women's empowerment Bassonawerana and Angolelanatera woreda from Northern Shao zone, Amhara region. The schedule survey questionnaire was originally prepared in English and for ease of understanding by the data enumerators and respondents it was translated in to the Amharic language. The translated version of the schedule survey questionnaire was tested in a pilot survey. This helped to assess the content, clarity, and logical flow of the questions and the time needed on an average to complete the schedule. Depending on the results of the pilot survey, the data collection instrument was finalized after making the necessary corrections and reorganizations. In addition, qualitative data were collected from key informant interviews (KIIs), focus group discussions (FGDs), and direct observations through semi-structured checklist.

4.5 Methods of Data Analysis

In qualitative data were adjusted and realized by reading and editing the record transcript and discussion notes. Thus, qualitative data were analyzed using a narrative approach while quantitative data, after collecting the data, the data were coded and entered. Using SPSS statistical package, the collected data were analyzed to draw meaningful interpretations. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze the data.

4.6 Ethical Considerations

In conducting a research, adhering to the principles of research ethics is essential. First, a written letter from Ethiopian Civil Service University was submitted to the zonal/Woreda administrative in order to get permission to conduct the study. Second, the objectives of conducting the study were explained and assurance was given that the responses obtained would be kept confidential and would be used solely for the purposes of the research. Thirdly, respondents were informed that they had the right not to answer to any of the questions. Lastly, respondents were informed about the rights they had to be informed of the results of the study. Furthermore, the name of respondents was avoided from the schedule survey questionnaire. The data were collected from them based on their verbal consent.

5. Results and Discussions

5.1 Overview of Socio-economic Profile of Respondents

Survey part of findings, all of respondents was women. The sex, age, marital status, family size and level of education of sampled household heads were assessed as demographic characteristics. With regard to the sex composition of household heads, 69.8% of household heads were male-head while the remaining 30.2% of them were female-headed households (Table 1).

With regard to marital status composition of household head, majority (70.8%) of the household heads were married while 2.6%, 12.2% and 14.3% of them were unmarried, divorced and widowed respectively. With regard to the education level of household heads, more than half (57.6%) of the household heads had no education level whereas the remaining 18%, 8.6%, 7.6%, 4.9%, 2.6 and 0.8% of household heads could only read & write (non-formal education) level, grade 1-4 education level, grade 5-8 education level, grade 9-10 education level, grade 11-12 education level, and college diploma & above education level and respectively (Table 1).

Table 1: The demographic profile of the respondents

Variable Name				**Percentage**
Sex of household heads	Male headed			69.8
	Female headed			30.2
Marital status composition of household heads	Married			70.8
	Unmarried			2.6
	Divorced			12.2
	Widowed			14.3
Educational level of household heads	No education level			57.6
	Only can read and write education level			18.0
	Grade 1-4 education level			8.6
	Grade 5-8 education level			7.6
	Grade 9-10 education level			4.9
	Grade 11-12 education			2.6
	College diploma and above education			0.8
Means of access to land holding	Inherited from family			52.3
	Gift from relatives/on kinship basis			8.3
	Government redistribution			35.9
	Other (like rent, share crop)			3.4
	Minimum	**Maximum**	**Mean**	**Std. D**
Age composition of household	19	78	40.09	11.94
Composition of household family size	1	11	4.84	1.66
Total land area in hectare holding	0	4	1.11	0.84

Source: Field survey, 2024.

With regards to age composition of household heads, the result illustrates that the mean age of sampled household heads was 40.09 years with the range of 19 to 78 years with standard deviation 11.94. With regard to family size of households, the mean family size of sampled households was 4.84 with the range of 1 to 11 with standard deviation 1.66 (Table 1).

With regards to household size of land holding, the survey result illustrates that the mean size of land holding of sampled household was 1.11 hectare of land with the range of 0 to 4 hectare of land with standard deviation 0.84 (Table 1). Respondents were also asked how they had acquired the land they currently have. More than half (52.3%) of the household's means of access to land holding that they had inherited the land from their family ,while 8.3%, 35.9% and 3.4% acquired their current land as gift from their relatives/on kinship basis, government redistribution and other (like renting and share cropping) respectively.

5.2 Access to public institution

With regards to households, access to public institution (services) like agricultural extension center, health extension center, access to credit service and so on services directly and indirectly has contribution for women empowerment.

Table 2: Household access to public institution (n=384)

Option of the respondents		Percentage
Access to agricultural extension services	Yes	90.6
	No	9.4
Access to health extension services	Yes	93.2
	No	6.8
Access to credit service to support women livelihood	Yes	53.4
	No	46.6
Women received support from extension agents	Advice service	68.5
	Training	13.3
	Demonstration	5.5
	Conflict resolution	3.6
	Controlling water distribution	2.9
	Others	5.7
	No	0.5
Women access to training services on socio-economic empowerment of rural women	Yes	34.4
	No	65.6

Source: Field survey, 2024.

90.6% of women respondents were reported that they have access to agricultural extension services. Similarly, majority (93.2%) of women respondents confirmed they had access to health extension services. Consequently, access to the agricultural and health extension center provided women's with a range of services like advisory support, training, practical demonstrations, conflict resolution, and control of water distribution. However, almost half (46.6%) of women respondents were reported they do not have access to credit service to empower women in their

locality. Moreover, more than two- thirds (65.6%) of respondents reported that they did not receive trainings on socio-economic empowerment of women (Table 2).

However, with regard to access to credit service to support women livelihood, almost half (46.6%) of women respondents were reported they do not have access to credit service to empower women in their locality (Table 2).

With regards to women access to training services on socio-economic empowerment of rural women, more than two-thirds (65.6%) of respondents reported that they did not acquire training services on socio-economic empowerment of women while 34.4% of them confirmed that they obtained training service on socio-economic empowerment of women (Table 2).

5.3 The Existing Status of Women Empowerment

In this section a number of women empowerment indicators were analyzed separately to show the current practices of socio-economic empowerment of women in the area under consideration.

With regards to women with equal access with their husbands to rights of land use in their household, 35.9% of respondents reported that had no equal access to rights of land use with their husbands. Similarly, with regards to women with equal right with their husband for property management in their household, 33.9% of respondents reported have no equality with their husband for property management in their household. In similar fashion regards to women with equal decision-making power with their husband regarding all household matters, 38% of respondents have no equal decision making power with their respective husbands (Table 3).

According to the result regarding land registration and certification, a large proportion (34.1%) sampled respondents reported that their lands are registered under their husbands' names, while the remaining respondents responded that their land registration and certification is found in their names, in their husbands' names, in the name of others (like their father and mother) and in the leasers' names. The challenges related to land registration and certification were husbands' unwillingness to allow land registration and certification in the name of both wife and husband.

This study tried to identify the existing situation of the women empowerment in various rural villages of study area. In identifying the situation, qualitative data were collected using various empowerment indicators obtained from discussions made with different groups.

Focus group discussions were conducted with older female group with male-headed households of sampled villages. The equality issue of land use rights between wife and husband was the first question raised to the group. The discussants expressed that the equality of land use rights between wife and husband has currently improved. There are improvements and women participation outside home activities like removing weed, harvesting crops; currently there is equality between women and men because both women and men are participating within and outside home activities. Generally, the enhancement of women empowerment contributes to improvement of the living standard of in the localities (Older female group discussion male headed, 2024).

Table 3: The existing practices of women empowerment (n=384)

Opinion of respondents		Percentage
Women with equal access with their husband to rights of land use in their household	Yes	64.1
	No	35.9
Women with equal right with their husband for property management in their household	Yes	66.1
	No	33.9
Women with equal decision-making power with their husband for all life matters in their household	Yes	62.0
	No	38.0
Under whose name is the land registered and certified	In the name of wife	23.2
	In the name of the husband	34.1
	In the name of both wife and husband	33.3
	In the leaser's name	1.3
	In the name of others (their father and mother)	8.1
The types of women faced challenges during land registration and certification	My husband was not willing	20.6
	Cultural influence	22.4
	There was no any challenge land registration & certification	52.6
	Other challenges	4.4

Source: Field survey, 2024.

Focus group discussions were also conducted with young female group with male headed households of sampled villages. The equality issue of land use rights between wives and husbands was the first question raised to the group. The discussants explained that there is variation the equality issue of land use rights between women and men (wife and husband) from home to home. In some households there is an equality land use right between wife and husband while in other household there are no equality land use rights between wife and their husband. Furthermore, most of the discussants reported that they do not have land registered in their names since they were not mature enough to have their own land during land distribution therefore their land certificate found the name of their husband. However, some of participants reported that they do not have their own land since they had been displaced from other part of Ethiopia (Young female group discussion _ male headed, 2024).

Focus group discussion was conducted with female headed households of sampled of villages. The equality issue of land use rights between wife and husband was the first question raised to the group. Theoretically women have equally right sharing the land during in cases of divorces, but practically women do not exercise their rights. The discussants reported that mainly women's boundary of land cross by men and they did not get fair treatments in courts despite women having equal rights with men. Therefore, the participants confirmed that majority of female headed women their family livelihood is rely on selling local drinks (Female group discussion_ female headed, 2024).

Focus group discussion was conducted with male of sampled of villages. The practices of socio-economic empowerment of women were the first question raised to the group. The discussants reported that currently, as told by government and non-government organization in different meetings, men and women are equal in their economic and political participation. However, there are challenges of women and men equality in their locality because naturally women could not participate in plowing of land due to topography of the land. Women are more decision makers for household consumption expenditures, while men are more decision makers regarding selling agricultural products and livestock. Furthermore, the discussants confirmed that still manly men are more decision maker than women in the household activities. But, the discussants reported that women have a lot of burden of works at household than men. Hence, still women's burdens continue like women are responsible giving care to their children and home activities like food preparation. Men influential still continue because most of men do not believe in equality of husband and wife especially in political participation; men are dominant in their locality (Male Focus Group Discussion, 2024).

One woman case (KIIs, 2024):

> *Since I was divorced, I have had no piece of land to plough. My husband is died. When he was alive we didn't have our own but rental land. Soon after he died the owner of the land took it from me. We, women without husbands badly need support from all concerned bodies. Life is challenging us a lot.*

5.4 Practices Undertaken to Empower Women in the Study Area

In this section a number of women empowerment indicators are analyzed one by one to show the current practices of socio-economic empowerment of women in the area under consideration. In an effort to comprehend the image of the current practices of women empowerment in the study area, analysis begins with an equality of women's right with their husbands. With regards to women's knowledge regarding the constitutionally declared women's rights, more than half (59.4%) women respondents confirmed they do not have knowledge regarding the constitutionally declared women's' rights, while 40.6% reported they do have knowledge regarding the constitutionally declared women's rights. However, regarding women's knowledge of their right to property equal to their husbands', more than half of respondents (64.1%) were aware, while 35.9% were not (Table 5).

With regards to women's knowledge regarding the constitutionally declared women's rights, more than half (59.4%) of women respondents confirmed they do not have knowledge regarding the constitutionally declared women's right. Additionally, regarding women's knowledge regarding the right to properties equal to their husband, 35.9% of respondents reported that women do not have this knowledge (Table 4).

Table 4: Rate of the effort of the public institution to develop women socio-economic capacity (n=384)

Level of opinion	Vh (%)	H (%)	M (%)	L (%)	VL (%)
The district Bureau of women's and children's affair effort for women empowerment	2.3	10.7	25.8	37.8	23.4
The district Bureau of agricultural development effort for women empowerment	1.0	21.1	32.3	28.1	17.4
The district administration office effort for women empowerment	0.8	5.7	26.0	42.2	25.3
The district Bureau of Rural Land Administration Office effort for women empowerment	5.7	6.3	26.3	35.9	25.8

NB: Vh= Very high, H= High, M=Moderate, L=Low, VL= Very low

Source: Field survey, 2024.

Furthermore, respondents were asked to evaluate the various actors' commitment to solve the respondents' socio-economic problems. The question starts from the efforts of the district's women's and children's affairs office in women empowerment. Accordingly, the efforts of the district's women and children affairs office was rated low and very low (61.2%). Although this office is expected to play the lion's share of roles in the women empowerment process, it has failed to get ~~in~~credible rating from the respondents it is serving. Likewise, 45.5% of respondents rated the efforts of the district's office of agricultural development on empowerment of women issue as low and very low. In the same way, more than half of respondents (67.5%) rated the district administration's overall effort and commitment they have made towards socio-economic empowerment of women living in the study area is low and very low. Moreover, 61.7% of respondents rated the efforts of their districts' rural land administration office low and very low (Table 4).

Table 5: Women's awareness regarding their right

Variable Name	Percentage	
	Yes	No
Women's knowledge regarding the constitutionally declared women's' right	40.6	59.4
Women's knowledge regarding the right to properties equal to their husband	64.1	35.9

Source: Field survey, 2024.

A question was raised to the group to help rate the efforts of the district bureau of public sectors. The discussants rated that the effort of the district bureau of women's and children's affair to develop women empowerment is low; some of them did not even knew the bureau. However, the discussants rated the effort of the district bureau of agricultural development to develop women empowerment as high. Generally, the discussants rated that the effort of the district bureau of administration to develop women empowerment as low; some of them they did not even know the bureau (Older female group discussion male headed, 2024).

Similarly, all youth married female FGD discussants reported that they did not have information regarding the district bureau of women's and children's affairs. Thus, FGD participants rated the effort of the district bureau of women's and children's affair to develop women socio-economic capacity as low. Similarly, all youth married female FGD discussants rated that the effort of the district bureau of agricultural development to develop women socio-economic capacity as low. Generally, all youth married female FGDs discussants rated that they did not have information about the effort of the district administration office to develop women empowerment. Therefore, FGDs participants rated the effort of the district administration office to develop women socio-economic capacity as low (Young female group discussion _ male headed, 2024).

In similar fashion, female group discussion_ female headed FGD participants confirmed that the effort of the district Bureau of women's and children's affair to development of women socio-economic capacity was very low; some of them did not even have information regarding the sector availability in the district. But, female headed households FGD participants rated that the effort of the district bureau of agricultural development to development of women socio-economic capacity as high but females were reluctant to use agricultural services. FGD discussants expressed that rural communities were reluctant to adoption of technology and using advisory service of extension agents. Moreover, female-headed households FGD participants rated that the effort of the district administration office to development of women socio-economic capacity as low; some of them did not even have information regarding the sector availability in the district (Female group discussion_ female headed, 2024).

5.5 The challenges of women empowerment in the study area

The researcher identified potential challenges but allowed respondents to choose from these challenges the one they thought was negatively affecting their empowerment level. Nearly all of sampled respondents reported that inadequate training opportunities for rural women on women's rights and socio-economic activities, inadequate income generating activities for rural women, inadequate awareness and misconception about gender issues among rural local communities and inadequate effective linkage and interaction amongst development stakeholders at district and local village levels as the most challenging for women empowerment (Table 6).

Followed by other challenges of rural women empowerment; respondents confirmed that inadequate financial support for gender and development at district and rural village level, inadequate appropriate mechanism for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of gender strategic plan at district and local village level and lack of awareness and inadequate appropriate sex disaggregated data at district and rural village level respectively. On the other hand, gender blind/gender neutral agricultural and rural development strategies at district or rural village level were viewed as the least but the challenge for their socio-economic empowerment (79.9%) (Table 6).

Table 6: Challenges to women empowerment in the study area (n=384)

Item	Responses (%)	
	Yes	No
Inadequate awareness and misconception gender issues among rural local communities	87.8	12.2
Inadequate income generating activities for rural women	89.1	10.9
Inadequate training opportunities for rural women on women's rights and socio-economic activities	90.1	9.9
Inadequate financial support for gender and development at district and rural village level	86.7	13.3
Gender blind/gender neutral agricultural and rural development strategies at district or rural village level	79.9	20.1
Inadequate appropriate sex disaggregated data at district and rural village level	81.3	18.8
Inadequate appropriate mechanism for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of gender strategic plan at district and local village level	84.9	15.1
Inadequate effective linkage and interaction amongst development stakeholders at district and local village levels	87.0	13.0

Source: Field survey, 2024.

Similar to the survey findings, FGD participants reported that the most challenges of women empowerment were cultural influence/men dominant culture, inadequate awareness, inadequate of access to productive land, poverty and like. Majority of FGDs participants reported that they faced challenge during land registration and certification due to their illegibility at the time of land redistribution as result most of them not given land (Older female group discussion_ male headed, 2024).

All youth married female FGD discussants reported that there was no adequate practical implementation and support from district and village administrative for women empowerment. According to youth married FGD participants, they did not have land registered in their names since they were not legible to have their own land during land distribution therefore their land certificate found the name of their husband (Young female group discussion _ male headed, 2024).

FGD participants confirmed that inadequate women's confidence and follow up were the main challenges of female headed household in their locality. Moreover, some of the female headed household participants reported that they did not have their own land due to their age during land redistribution (Female group discussion_ female headed, 2024).

According to male FGDs discussants the challenges of socio-economic empowerment of rural women in their locality raised relatively men had more access to productive resources (land and water) than women. Therefore, men were users and decision maker regards to productive sources (land and water) but women played supportive roles for their husbands. Accordingly, women empowerment faced challenges due to inadequate facilities, inadequate clean water availabilities, sexual abuse, cultural influence/men dominant cultural, gender-bias, inadequate women

confidence, inadequate men confidence on their wife, inadequate women political participation, biological reasons, topography of land, inadequate education expansion and like (Male Focus Group Discussion, 2024).

> *There is no problem the women experienced in using their property equally with the male. But the main problem they encountered daily is the water shortage (KIIs, 2024).*

According to the key informant interviews conducted with women and youth affairs office of district**,** a lot of actions had been taken so far in solving the challenges the women were experiencing in the district. The first action was awareness creation for women on how to involve in income generation activities by equipping them with modern technology through trainings about modern stoves making and collecting milk but inadequate markets to sell improved stoves. The second action was bringing women in to the political leadership by balancing the district's cabinets based on gender. But, there was inadequate number of women in leadership positions due to social view against women, and it needs effort at the grass root level. Third, although immediate results could not been seen, they are working with religious view of the society.

On the other hand, interviews conducted with cooperative association office of the district showed that they were well aware of the challenges the women were facing, and rated the existing empowerment level as poor.

The cooperative Association office representative of the district:

> *We plan to empower women in many ways but we are unable to get them as they are always occupied with domestic task loads. In many cases, their husbands are also not willing to send their wives to our office when we need to talk with them on any matters. Labor division in to' women's work and Men's work' is becoming a source of many challenges in empowering women as the division leaves heavy and drudgery tasks for the women.*

5.6 The Existing Opportunities of Women Empowerment in the Study Area

By way of identifying hindrances to achieve women empowerment, respondents were provided with a number of potential opportunities that enhance their socio-economic empowerment.

Accordingly, 89.8%, 89.1% and 88.3% of respondents reported that presence of women and children affairs office at regional, zonal, and district levels, presence of social support systems (indigenous cooperative societies) at district and local levels and existence of different organizations working on gender and reproductive health issues respectively as a catalyst and opportunity to enhance their socio-economic empowerment (Table 7).

Similarly, presence of different women associations at different levels, commitment of the government to reform the civil service by mainstreaming gender at all levels and projects, technological advancement like internet and telecommunication services is viewed opportunities considered by 87.5%, 87.2% and 87.0% of respondents respectively (Table 7).

Furthermore, 86.2%, 85.9%, 85.9% and 84.6% of respondents have reported that availability of donor organizations at different levels favoring gender and development programs and projects, existence of gender sensitive poverty reduction strategy and projects at district and local village levels, more media coverage on gender issues and high demand for qualified female gender experts at national, regional, zonal, and district levels also contributed as opportunity to enhance their socio-economic women empowerment (Table 7).

Table 7: List of opportunities of empowerment of rural women in the study area (n=384)

	Responses (%)	
Items	**Yes**	**No**
Presence of women and children affairs office at regional, zonal, and district levels	89.8	10.2
Presence of different women associations at different levels	87.5	12.5
Commitment of the government to reform the civil service by mainstreaming gender at all levels	87.2	12.8
Existence of gender sensitive poverty reduction strategy and projects at district and local village levels	85.9	14.1
High demand for qualified female gender experts at national, regional, zonal, and district levels	84.6	15.4
More media coverage on gender issues	85.9	14.1
Presence of social support systems (indigenous cooperative societies) at district and local levels	89.1	10.9
Technological advancement like internet and telecommunication services	87.0	13.0
Existence of different organizations working on gender and reproductive health issues	88.3	11.7
Availability of donor organizations at different levels favoring gender and development programs and projects	86.2	13.8

Source: Field survey, 2024.

In the same way with the survey findings; FGDs discussants explained that relatively currently there were different opportunities to enhance women empowerment in their locality like availability education, urbanization, availability of training, changing public opinion, land certification and utilization, legal support/ court support, improvement of husbands perception regarding support their wife inside house activities like washing cloth, water fetching, firewood collection and carrying (FGDs, 2024).

> *The current practice is good! There is a good start of empowering women in terms of saving culture, decision making on key resources, and creating job opportunity. The existing practice is very good, and I am happy with it. Support in terms of ambulance delivery from nearby towns during deliveries is encouraging. Vaccination service for immunization at home is also equally appreciated. But, there are areas where there is no road availability to provide the ambulance service so as to save the life of mothers and babies at the time of delivery and*

post-delivery follow up service. Water shortage is another challenge of the women to provide for the family a safe food and keep the children's health (KIIs, 2024).

There is favorable condition for women to improve their economic status from government support in forming small groups of women so as to provide loans from Micro Finance Institutions (KIIs, 2024).

5.7 Discussion

With regards to households access to public institutions like agricultural extension center, health extension center, access to credit service and so on services directly and indirectly has contribution for women empowerment. More than three fourth of women respondents reported that they had access to agricultural and health extension services but due to cultural influence they were not beneficiaries compare to men. Thus females were reluctant to use agricultural services; they were also reluctant to the adoption of technology and using advisory service of extension agents. Thus, men who have access to agricultural and health received advisory service, training, demonstration, conflict resolution, controlling water distribution and others compared to women. Almost half of women respondents reported they did not have access to credit services to empower women in their locality. Moreover, more than half of respondents reported that they did not acquire training services on socio-economic empowerment of women. This is supported by various literatures (Rani, 2021; Tiwari & Malati, 2023; Engida, 2021). Women should stand equal to men in terms of education, livelihood, health and all other parameters (Jaysawal & Saha, 2023).

With regards to the existing status of socio-economic empowerment of women; 35.9% of women reported they did not have equal access to rights of land use with their husbands. Similarly, 33.9% of women confirmed they did not have equality with their husband in property management in their household. Moreover, 38% of respondents had no equal decision making power with their respective husbands. Furthermore, a large proportion women respondent reported that the certification process of their land is registered under their husbands' names because of their husbands' unwillingness to allow land registration and certification in the names of both wife and husband, cultural influence and other challenges like institutional challenges faced during land registration and certification. The result was consistent with the study of Dadi (2017) and Bushra & Wajiha (2015) socio-eco factors influences empowerment of women.

Furthermore, focus group discussion (FGD) discussants explained that there was variation the equality issue of land use rights between women and men (wife and husband) from home to home. In some households there is an equality land use right between wife and husband, while in others there are no equality land use rights between wife and their husband. Furthermore, most of young female FGDs discussants reported that they did not have land registered in their names since they were not mature enough to have their own land during land distribution therefore their land certificate found the name of their husband (Young female group discussion –male-headed, 2024).

Additionally, focus group discussion was conducted with female- headed households of sampled of villages. FGD discussants reported that mainly women's boundary of land cross by men and they did not get faire solution from courts despite of women have equal right with men. Therefore, FGD participants confirmed that majority of female headed women their family livelihood is rely on selling local drink (Female group discussion_ female headed, 2024).

Therefore, there is challenge of women and men equality in their locality because for household consumption expenditures, women are more decision makers while men are more decision makers regarding selling agricultural products and livestock. Consequently, FGDs still manly men are more decision maker than women in the household activities resulted women have a lot of burden of works at household than men. Subsequently, still women burden continue like women are responsible giving care their baby and home activities like food preparation, men influential still continue because most of men did not belief equality of husband and wife especially in political participation men are dominant at their locality.

> *Since I was divorced, I have no piece of land to plough. My husband was died. When he was alive we didn't have our own land but rental land. Soon after he was died the owner of the land took it from me. We, women without husband badly need support from all concerned body. Life is challenging us a lot (KIIs, 2024).*

With regards to practices undertaken to empower women respondents were asked to evaluate the various actors' commitment to solve the respondents' socio-economic problems. Accordingly, majority of them reflected that the efforts of the district's women and children affairs office were low and very low. Although this office is expected to play the lion's share of roles in the women empowerment process, it had failed to get credible ratings from the respondents. Likewise, more than half (67.5%) of respondents rated the district administration's overall effort and commitment they have made towards socio-economic empowerment of women living in the study area is low and very low. However, Narayana & Ahamad (2016) noted that governments, educational institutions, non-governmental organizations are responsible for the prevention of all forms of discrimination against women.

With regards to the challenges of socio- economic women empowerment, nearly all respondents reported that inadequate training opportunities for rural women on women's rights and socio-economic activities, inadequate income generating activities for rural women, inadequate awareness and misconception about gender issues among rural local communities and inadequate effective linkage and interaction amongst development stakeholders at district and local village levels pose the most challenges for women empowerment. In line with this, Engida (2021) suggested that education can benefit from building self-confidence, self-efficacy, decision-making power and increase gender parity in organizations and institutions.

According to male FGDs discussants, the challenges of socio-economic empowerment of rural women in their locality, men have relatively more access to productive resources (land and water) than women. Therefore, men are users and decision-makers with regards to productive sources (land and water) but women play supportive roles for their husbands. Accordingly,

women empowerment faces challenges due to inadequate facilities, inadequate clean water availabilities, sexual abuse, cultural influence/men dominant cultural, gender bias, inadequate women confidence, inadequate men confidence on their wife, inadequate women political participation, biological reasons, topography of land, inadequate education expansion and like (Male Focus Group Discussion, 2024).

> *There is no problem the women experienced in using their property equally with the male. But the main problem they encountered daily is the water shortage (KIIs, 2024).*

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Women illiteracy rate was found to be high among the women respondents in the study area. Women are marginalized in making independent decisions on household income-expenditure, property management, and sales of agricultural products. In granting access to resources like land, decision-making power in the household, practices and perceptions systematically put women in subordinated positions in the society, curtailing their economic autonomy and weakening their bargaining position within the family translated into little or no voice in household decision. Therefore, the government needs to exert maximum efforts at least in providing adult education since such education will change attitudes and perception of the society in favor of women empowerment. Education serves as a crucial avenue for women to liberate themselves from the constraints of cultural norms perpetuating male dominance.

The effort by concerned officers of the district in ensuring women empowerment was found to be low and moderate. Mounting challenges and declining opportunities are exacerbating women's empowerment in the study area. Therefore, different income generating activities through establishing different women associations in the rural area should be strengthened. Moreover, diversified supports beyond the advice support needs to be equally treated and provided to the women. In addition, the current inadequate efforts by public institutions in the achievement of women empowerment must be changed so as to enhance women empowerment.

In short, it was found women's empowerment in a number of areas such as access to and decisions on credit, access to education was limited. According to the findings, there are unequal division of labor among men and women in community. Women spend much of their time on back-breaking reproductive activities mostly carried out in daily basis. This unfair sexual division of labor limits women's potential and time to look for opportunities of self-development. Therefore, the current efforts the governmental and non- governmental organizations working in women empowerment socially and economically was a good starting point for the future success to come on this area. Such initiatives and programs should be supported by local administrators and local financial institutions working in the district.

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