

# Findings



Africa Region. Number 119. September 1998

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*Findings reports on ongoing operational, economic and sector work carried out by the World Bank and its member governments in the Africa Region. It is published periodically by the Knowledge Networks, Information and Technology Center on behalf of the Region*

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## **Gender issues in Ethiopia : Implementing the National Policy on Women**

### **Background**

The National Policy on Women (Women's Policy) formulated in 1993, aimed to create appropriate structures within government offices and institutions to establish equitable and gender-sensitive public policies. The Government of Ethiopia in 1995, under its new constitution, renewed its commitment towards this policy.

The government initiated an ambitious and extensive process of regionalization, whereby new regional boundaries were demarcated and administrative powers devolved to regional governments which were authorized to implement all development policies. This represented a departure from the earlier practice of centralized project management by ministries.

This more participatory and decentralized form of governance made the implementation of the national policy a more challenging endeavor. There was correspondingly a great need to build the delivery capacity of the regional governments. While the central level of government promoted gender-sensitive policies and development interventions, very little was known about the constraints and issues at the regional levels.

*...when it comes to the Queen of Sheba, there is a great story, yet no concrete evidence to support it. Do not deny her existence in Ethiopia, however. According to the Ethiopian national epic, Kabra Negast, compiled in the fourteenth century, Makeda, the Queen of Sheba, who visited King Solomon in the Old Testament times, came from Tigre in Northern Ethiopia.... In Ethiopia, it was considered quite natural that a woman should have held supreme power.*

"Women of Power in Ethiopian Legend and History." Selamta (in-flight magazine of Ethiopian Airlines) 13(1, January-March 1996): 25.

## **Objectives of the Women in Development (WID) Report**

Discussions with the Minister, Women's Affairs Office initiated the process of preparing a report with a very regional focus. The procedure for preparation was discussed with the government and other relevant stakeholders. Issues were identified jointly through Participatory Rural Appraisals (PRA) to bring in the voices of grassroots women stakeholders, and through preparation of background reports by a number of local consultants.

The WID report examines and identifies institutional, legal, and regulatory constraints on the expeditious and effective implementation of the women's policy. The objectives of the report were clear. It would:

assist Regional Governments improve the institutional and regulatory framework for the implementation of the Women's Policy; and

provide the basis for World Bank support to the Government of Ethiopia to implement its Women's Policy, and support the Bank's policy dialogue with Ethiopia.

## **Main Findings**

Interventions for women largely consist of ad hoc and unconnected self-standing projects, which, if continued, will remain gender neutral and ineffective in delivering benefits to women.

The biggest challenge faced by the regional governments is that top-down activities do not reach women effectively due to lack of institutional capacity at the sub-regional level and because of lack of participation in delivery assistance services. Moreover, the development plans for women were not demand-driven and therefore failed to recognize substantial variations across regions. This resulted in women being disconnected from all development interventions

## **Legal and Regulatory Issues**

The use of patriarchal customary laws constrained women's access to resources.

The legal framework prohibited poor women from entering informal labor markets.

Prevailing traditional gender biases exist against women in the allocation of land.

Women's access to resources are limited due to biases resulting from the family arbitration system.

Women have no access to legal aid and are severely constrained in seeking remedies from civil courts.

Lack of women's grassroots organizations prevents their participation in development activities.

### **Institutional Issues**

The responsibilities and roles of the Women's Affairs Office are unclear and inadequate.

Regional governments lack the requisite institutional capacity to successfully implement development policies.

Women's Offices are dependent on donors or NGOs due to the lack of a capital budget.

Constraints to the preparation and implementation of appropriate development plans

Lack of regional gender-desegregated data which limits the formulation of gender-sensitive development interventions and responses.

Absence of women's groups because of cultural taboos.

Weak collaboration with non-governmental or private entities.

### **Key Recommendations**

***Consistent Public Policy:*** Public policy should be made consistent by amending discriminatory provisions in the civil court which promote traditional gender biases.

***Mitigation of the Impact of Inequitable Customary Laws:*** (i) Examine the applicability of customary laws by making women aware of their legal rights; and (ii) strengthen awareness of women's roles and rights by building consensus against customary practices.

***Increased Access of Women to Economic and Productive Resources:*** Regional governments need to (i) increase women's access to land and natural resources; (ii) facilitate the entry of poor women into labor markets through access to credits.

***Better access to legal services for women needs to be provided:*** (i) By community leaders being sensitized to legal issues; (ii) through training of women family arbitrators; (iii) through the establishment of small legal funds for poor women who need legal services.

***Affirmative action*** is needed to provide women access to civil and village councils; legal and regulatory procedures should be made minimal to facilitate the formation and working of small grassroots groups.

**The regional government needs to:** (i) Strengthen the technical capacity of women to implement schemes (ii) increase awareness of gender issues at its bureaus and amongst partners involved in formulating development plans, in particular in its sub-regional entities.

**Gender-sensitive development plans** should be the mandate of the regional planning bureaus which incorporate monitorable indicators for policy formulation and project planning.

Regional governments should **provide incentives to bureaus** that undertake gender-responsive development plans.

Regional governments need to **delegate power and responsibilities** to Women's Affairs Bureaus and Women's Affairs Departments for them to carry out their mandates effectively. Furthermore, proper evaluation and monitoring systems need to be in place to prevent incorrect gender-disaggregated data from negatively impacting the programs.

## **Implications for Donors**

Donors should focus support on four specific areas; (i) capacity-building which needs to target the sub-regional levels and include training in the identification, design, and implementation of gender-sensitive development interventions; (ii) programs which promote literacy, family planning and early childhood interventions; (iii) women microentrepreneurs; (iv) the implementation of new gender-sensitive legal and institutional reforms by the government.

## **Next Steps**

A Bank-assisted WID project leading out of the recommendations and finding of the report is under consideration for Ethiopia. The proposed project aims to assist socially and economically vulnerable women to benefit from the increasingly expanding economy and private sector opportunities. It will seek to improve the standard of living of women and contribute to poverty alleviation. Addressing the constraints to implementing the National Policy on Women and supporting the establishment of grassroots women's organizations will build women's ability to organize themselves to effectively voice their concerns and preferences about their economic, social and civic rights.