

## **Gender mainstreaming in Ethiopia: translation of policy into practice and implications on the ground (Draft Paper)**

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### **Abstract**

*In spite of the growing recognition that 'gender' matters amongst development practitioners and institutions which have translated into efforts to 'mainstream gender', there has been an overall persistence and sometimes aggravation of gendered inequalities. This paper explores these contradictions in the context of Ethiopia. It is widely acknowledged that women in Ethiopia are disproportionately disadvantaged on a number of grounds. Drawing on data from four rural sites<sup>3</sup> from the Wellbeing and Developing Countries ESRC Research group, this paper makes the case for a more complex analysis of gender inequalities. It begins with an investigation of the policies and interventions in place to address gender inequalities at the national level. It then explores how patterns of power at the community, household and individual level are inherently gendered in ways that have particularly negative effects on women. It also examines how gender inequalities are being contested at different levels. The paper then concludes with a discussion of the effectiveness of the policies and structures in place at the national level to address gendered inequalities.*

### **1. Introduction**

The Beijing Platform of Action (1995) was hailed a significant victory for feminists globally, signalling universal recognition of the importance of bringing gender centre stage within the development agenda. The term 'gender mainstreaming' was subsequently introduced as the key strategy for achieving gender equality resulting in a proliferation of governments, national and international bilateral organisations and NGOs championing it as an essential development objective. Ten years on, a recent review of progress on the commitments made in the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action presents an ambivalent record of progress and a general atmosphere of discontent and disillusionment (Molyneux & Razavi, 2005). In spite of progress for women globally on a number of development indicators, there has been an overall persistence and sometimes aggravation of gendered inequalities (Molyneux & Razavi, 2005). These are particularly pronounced within Africa in countries such as Ethiopia. This has put the success of gender mainstreaming under question causing

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<sup>2</sup> Established by the ESRC in 2002, WeD is an international interdisciplinary research group, based at the University of Bath, working in collaboration with local institutions in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Peru and Thailand to investigate the relationship between development and human wellbeing. WeD's fundamental goal is to develop a research framework for understanding the social and cultural construction of wellbeing in developing countries. The research in Ethiopia was carried out in 2004 and 2005 and has focused on the linkages between poverty, inequality and quality of life. For further information see [www.wed-Ethiopia.org](http://www.wed-Ethiopia.org) and [www.welldev.org.uk](http://www.welldev.org.uk)

<sup>3</sup> The four rural sites are ones for which successive rounds of panel household data has been collected by the Economics Department of Addis Ababa University in collaboration with the Centre for the Study of African Economies of Oxford University and the International Food Policy Research Institute.

many to argue that gender mainstreaming is in crisis. This paper explores these contradictions in the context of Ethiopia, drawing on findings from the WeD research group.

The paper begins by drawing on a variety of secondary sources to provide a brief summary of how women in Ethiopia are disproportionately disadvantaged on a number of grounds. It then provides an account of how gender has been mainstreamed in Ethiopia and how gender has been incorporated within key Ethiopian policy documents, particularly in relation to addressing gendered inequalities. The paper then turns to the empirical findings of the Wellbeing and Developing Countries (WeD) ESRC Research group to make the case for a more complex analysis of gender inequalities. It explores how women's inequality is reinforced through four key dimensions: gendered division of labour, pregnancy infancy cycle, marriage and violence against women's bodies. It briefly examines how gender inequalities are being contested at different levels. The paper then concludes with a discussion of the effectiveness of the policies and structures in place at the national level to address gendered inequalities.

## **2. Gendered inequalities in Ethiopia**

Ethiopia is recognised as one of the most impoverished countries in the world characterised by persistent levels of extreme poverty and inequality. It has a per capita GNP of approximately US\$100 (ADB, 2004) and ranks 170 out of a total of 177 countries in the Human Development Index (HDI, 2006). Agriculture is a main source of livelihood for the majority of the Ethiopian population who are poor and rural (World Bank, 2005). Ethiopian society is diverse and complex; it is deeply hierarchical and characterised by a distinct gendered division of labour crosscut by ethnicity, religion, class and age.

Women comprise approximately 65% of the informal sector and provide 60% of the total agricultural labour (ADB, 2004). In addition, they perform a key role in maintaining and managing the household through their responsibilities for reproductive activities such as food preparation, health and hygiene and childcare. Women perform longer working days than men, yet lack access to modern technologies that would alleviate their tasks since these tend to be appropriated by men. Much of their time is spent in walking long distances to fetch water, collect fuelwood, and preparing food through labour intensive tasks (e.g. milling flour). In spite of this key role in the Ethiopian economy and household welfare, they experience persistent inequality and discrimination. Women are culturally regarded as inferior to men and are marginalised by hazy legal rights and male biased institutions and markets which ignore the needs of women farmers (Tadesse, 2001).

Although there has been a national improvement in some welfare indicators such as education where national primary gross enrolment in grades 1-4 increased from 30% in 1994-1995 to 83% in 2000-2001 (World Bank, 2005), women consistently perform poorly in measures of education, mortality rates, health and other key social and economic indicators. For example, Ethiopia's performance on the gender gap in primary school enrolment and adult literacy and the representation of women in government is consistently below the average of the whole of sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank, 2002). There is also evidence suggesting that more women are likely to be infected with HIV/AIDS and less likely to have knowledge concerning the disease and awareness of how to prevent it. Access to family planning and choice of methods also remains limited and constrained by husband's approval. Women also lack decision making power in the household and community as well as access and control of productive resources. In addition, women are subject to multiple 'harmful

traditional practices' such as female genital mutilation, early marriage and rape (ADB, 2004; World Bank, 2005; NCTPE, 2003). The explanation of these persistent inequalities can be traced back to a deeply patriarchal society that draws on tradition, culture, law and custom to legitimise the widespread continuation of the subordination of women. How has the government of Ethiopia (and donors) dealt with this? What policies has it implemented to challenge the foundations of unequal power relations?

### 3. Gender mainstreaming in Ethiopia

Gender mainstreaming is used to describe both the *process* of institutionalising gender equality within the development context (Goetz, 1997) and the *strategy* of assessing the effects of policies on women and men through gender planning (Saunders, 2002; Bell et al, 2002; UNDP, 2000, 2003; Byrne et al, 1996; UN, 1997). Under the influence of Gender and Development (GAD)<sup>4</sup> discourses, gender mainstreaming is interpreted as seeking to produce "transformatory processes and practices that will concern, engage and benefit women and men equally by systematically integrating explicit attention to issues of sex and gender into all aspects of an organisation's work" (Woodford-Berger, 2004:66). This redirected attention away from increasing women's participation towards looking for ways to transform the development agenda itself.

There is a general consensus that gender equality concerns can be mainstreamed in two interdependent ways: integrationist and transformative or agenda setting (Jahan, 1995; Mukhopadhyay, 2004; Kanji, 2003). An 'integrationist' approach focuses on the supply side (*or technical side*) of GM by ensuring that "gender equality concerns are integrated in the analysis of problems faced by the particular sector" which is then used to inform policy and practice using targets that are measured using a range of sophisticated monitoring and evaluation tools, frameworks and checklists (Mukhopadhyay, 2004: 96). The latter stem from the rigorous academic and theoretical background of GAD advocates who intended to strengthen technical<sup>5</sup> capacity to enforce the incorporation of gender equality concerns into all aspects of development policy and practice (Mukhopadhyay, 2004).

In contrast, the 'transformative' approach focuses on changing the development agenda itself by creating the demand for change with the introduction of women's concerns in relation to their position<sup>6</sup>. This involves a deeper understanding of the context in which this change is to be enforced such as state-society relationships, political society characteristics and the influence of international development and financial institutions on policy making and practice (Mukhopadhyay, 2004). This moves GM beyond a technical exercise to include a political process whereby agendas, institutions and organisations are changed; analysis shifts towards relations of power and inequality rather than gender roles; and intervention is broadened

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<sup>4</sup> The GAD approach moves beyond Women in Development (WID) and Women and Development (WAD) by providing a more complete analysis with its focus on 'gender relations' between women and men as a category of analysis. It moves beyond a focus on women *per se* and gender roles towards a fundamental re-examination of social structures underpinning unequal power relations between men and women. It recognises that gender relations are socially constructed and that institutions and structures in society reflect this.

<sup>5</sup> The technical often refers to the processes of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, programmes and projects. It further refers to how to get things done in a specific timeframe and with set objectives. It relies on models, frameworks and tools for getting things done (Mukhopadhyay, 2004: 102).

<sup>6</sup> These are often referred to as strategic gender interests that are identified through women's unequal access to power relations (Molyneux, 1985; Moser, 1993)

beyond projects to include programmes, partnerships, policy processes and agencies themselves (Kanji, 2003).

In response to the glaring inequalities highlighted in the previous section, the government of Ethiopia has made concentrated efforts to 'mainstream gender' and promote the empowerment of women after the fall of the Derg (1991) through various policies, initiatives and programmes. Based on a review of secondary literature and relevant policy documents, the evidence suggests that Ethiopia has pursued an integrationist approach to gender mainstreaming which has not quite taken off. The following discussion seeks to summarise key policies and initiatives aimed at mainstreaming gender and highlight areas of constraint.

Before more recent policy documents are discussed, it is important to note the Derg regime (1974-1991) did make efforts to preach the goals of women's emancipation through its socialist ideologies. These messages were spread through Revolutionary Ethiopian Women's Associations (REWA) whose overarching goal was to raise the economic and political position of women (Pankhurst, 1992). The official propaganda of REWA stated that its aims were to:

- To propagate to women the theory of scientific socialism with a view to raising their political consciousness and cultural standards
- To prepare women to occupy their appropriate position in society and to participate actively in productive social activities
- To make every effort to ensure that the rights of women as mothers are recognised and they, as well as their children, are well cared for
- To liberate women from political, economic and social dependence and prepare them to join hands with their class allies and fully participate in the struggle to build socialist Ethiopia (Ethiopia, Revolutionary Ethiopia Women's Association, 1982: 25-6, cited in Pankhurst (1992))

Although REWA did have a significant role in raising women's awareness, it had limited success in implementing these rights in part because of the authoritarian nature of the political regime (Michael, 2000). Pankhurst (1992) notes how their effectiveness was limited to the level of rhetoric since they lacked real power and were plagued by administrative inefficiency. Nevertheless, it did set the scene for the new government to take on the task of gender mainstreaming in the context of growing emphasis in the international arena of the importance of integrating gender into the development agenda.

The Ethiopian *National Policy on Women* (1993) was an important first step towards mainstreaming gender. The main goal of the policy was to facilitate the conditions for equality between women and men. To this end, it demanded intervention to:

- Mainstream women into existing laws, regulations and customary practices to allow women to participate in decision making structures
- Coordinate and incorporate women's issue in all government programmes and policies at all levels
- Change discriminatory attitudes towards women and girls
- Promote research and awareness in all areas concerning women's development and equity

Of far greater importance was how it stimulated plans for implementation through the creation of gender mainstreaming infrastructure to institutionalise the political and socio-economic rights of women. These took the form of a Women's Affairs Office

(WAO) under the Prime Minister's Office; Women Affairs Departments (WADs) located in each line ministry; Regional Women's Bureaus (RWBs) at the regional administration level; and a women's coordination and desk officer at the Zonal and Woreda level. The overall responsibility of the WAO is to coordinate and implement all aspects of the National Policy for Women at national, regional and sectoral level. In other words, it is the main body responsible for mainstreaming gender throughout the country. The WADs are responsible for addressing gendered inequities in their particular sector and are supposed to liaise closely with the WAO. In comparison, the RWBs, who are accountable to their respective Regional Administrative Council, are responsible for gender mainstreaming at the regional level. The zonal and woreda level desk officers work more closely at the community level to identify and address gender needs. They also play an active role in implementing various gender related programmes and projects. The detailed responsibilities of these machineries are detailed in Table 1 below (ADB, 2004).

**Table 1: Responsibility of gender machineries**

<b>Women's Affairs Office (WAOs)</b>	<b>Women's Affairs Departments (WADs)</b>	<b>Regional Women's Bureau (RWBs)</b>
Location: Prime Minister's Office	Location: 16 Line Ministries Accountable to line ministry and report to WAO.	Location: Accountable to Regional Administrative Council
Coordination, facilitation and monitoring of women's affairs activities at the national level	Create favourable conditions for effective gender mainstreaming and implementation of gender sensitive activities in their particular sector	Provide gender mainstreaming guidance to all Regional, Zonal and Woreda level programmes and project interventions
Initiate proposals for developing gender sensitive policies as well as reviewing existing ones to ensure that gender is mainstreamed	Monitor progress and report to the WAO periodically on challenges and constraints	Identify gender mainstreaming and equity needs at all levels in region
To collect relevant data and information nationally and sectorally in order to disseminate them as well as to undertake studies on pertinent gender and women's issues	Ensure that gender is mainstreamed in all projects and programmes within the authority of their respective sector and ministry	Develop respective gender mainstreaming strategies for the different technical and sectoral bureaus in the region
To organise workshops, conferences and symposiums at the national level to promote and raise awareness on women and gender issues in the Country		Initiate, undertake and disseminate critical research and studies related to gender and women's development issue within the regional context
To enable a conducive environment which will promote women's empowerment and equal participation		To initiate and undertake gender mainstreaming and awareness raising session at all levels of region and across all sectors
		Create favourable conditions for implementation of NPW and monitor various activities. Identify areas of concern base on needs and priorities of each region and plan to achieve those goals

Source: ADB (2004)

The efforts of the WAO are also supported by a number of bilateral and multilateral agencies that have played a greater role more recently in sharpening the

commitments of the National Policy for Women. These include the UN Interagency Working Group on Gender consisting of gender focal points from all agencies and the Group for the Advancement of Women (GAW) (later renamed the Donor Group on Gender Equality). The United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) is also an important programme aimed at facilitating development more generally, but gives specific emphasis to gender (Sida, 2003). Membership of GAW consists primarily of bilateral and UN agencies together with some representatives from various NGOs, EU, OAU, ILO and IOM. It has played a key role in moving forward from the Beijing platform of action commitments for the follow-up Beijing +5 conference in 2000. These efforts are also supported by various organisations and women's associations such as the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association (EWLA), the Network of Ethiopian Women's Associations (NEWA) and the Centre for Research Training and Information for Women in Development (CERTWID) who are all committed to assisting women to empower themselves and benefit from the development process.

In addition to the National Policy for Women, the Ethiopian government's commitment to gender mainstreaming is explicit within the *Ethiopian Constitution* (1995) which is the 'supreme law of the land'. The Constitution enshrines a commitment towards the equal rights of women with men and recommends affirmative action to address past inequalities. Article 35 also asserts that women have the right to land, equal rights in marriage, and the right to be protected from harmful traditional practices (Demessie et al, 2004). It also reaffirms Ethiopia's commitment to various international conventions focused on gender equality such as the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1981) and the Beijing Platform of Action (1995) in addition to broader human rights conventions<sup>7</sup>.

The Constitution has provided an important foundation for further revisions of discriminatory laws. The new *Family Law* has been influential in amending discriminatory provision relating to marriage, divorce and the upbringing of children (NEWA, 2004; NEWA & EWLA, 2003). This process has been greatly assisted by the Ethiopian Women Lawyer's Association (EWLA)<sup>8</sup>. The Family Law has succeeded in raising the legal age of marriage for girls from 15 to 18; asserted that the contract of marriage is between spouses and not between the family; maintained that any matrimonial property should be shared and that the husband must consult with his wife when making decisions concerning property. This has been followed by further revisions of the 1957 *Penal Code* which came into operation in 2005. This dealt specifically with addressing issues related to rape, abduction, domestic violence, female genital mutilation and abortion. One of its most significant changes is with regards to abduction. Now the act of marriage following abduction does not cancel the crime and the act of rape following abduction is still punished. In the past it was not considered a crime if the couple were married afterwards (EWLA, 2004). It has also made female genital mutilation illegal and introduced penalties for perpetrators. However, it has been criticised for failing to include provisions on sexual harassment in schools and workplaces; restraining orders against perpetrators wishing to pursue revenge and there are no provisions of psychological violence.

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<sup>7</sup> The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

<sup>8</sup> EWLA is a private, non profit and non-partisan voluntary organization founded by in 1995. They are committed to eliminating all forms of legal and traditionally sanctioned discriminations against women. Their specific activities include research and law reform advocacy, public education and legal aid services.

In parallel to these key laws and legislations, there have been a number of other key policy documents aimed at creating the conditions for sustainable development which have included some mention on provisions for gender equality. These include the Agricultural Development Led Industrialisation (ADLI) programme, the National Population Policy, the Education and Training Policy, Health Policy, Development Social Welfare Policy, Environmental Policy, Cultural Policy and Policy on Natural Resources and Environment. It is beyond the remit of this paper to discuss this in detail and more information can be found in a report compiled by Haregewoin Cherinet and Emebet Mulugeta commissioned for Sida (2003).

The extent to which goals of gender equality are integrated within the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) is also a good indicator of commitment towards gender mainstreaming as they are the overall national strategy for reducing poverty. Ethiopia's first PRSP called the Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Programme (SDPRP) (2002-2005) recognised gender as a crosscutting issue and made a clear commitment to gender equality in the context of the overall development strategy (Moritz & Musisi, 2004) as illustrated below:

“Core dimensions of poverty (opportunity, capability, security/risk, and dis/empowerment) differ along gender lines, and function to heighten the vulnerability of women. For these reasons, the inclusion of gender in any effort to alleviate poverty is non-negotiable” (SDPRP, 2002: 122)

In spite of these key policies and laws in place, there are loopholes. With regards to the SDPRP, there is no indicator for promoting the empowerment of women and gender equality within its overall matrix of indicators and targets for monitoring progress. Moreover, the performance indicators that do exist are gender neutral. A major constraint for the Constitution is that it recognises customary and religious laws relating to personal relations; these include marriage, divorce, property ownership child custody and inheritance adoption (Birke et al, 2002). This means that some of the progress made with the other laws are made void. Another key constraint concerns the separation of jurisdiction and authority between the federal and the regional state contained within the Constitution. Regional states have the power to enact family codes whereas the Federal state retains authority of all other areas of civil law. Constraints arise when regional Family Laws may include elements of customary practices that indirectly discriminate against women. As a result, many regions still practice the old Family Law where the husband is the head of the family and has the right to make all major decisions regarding property.

Indeed, many of the reports consulted for this summary stressed that having the appropriate laws and policies in place were no clear guarantee that their recommendations would be implemented. Indeed, there is still widespread evidence suggesting that FGM continues and that early marriage is prevalent in many areas (World Bank, 2005). A more fundamental constraint is the lack of awareness of women's rights by women themselves. A recent study by EWLA on violence against women in Addis Ababa (2003-2004) notes that many forms of violence such as beating goes unreported because the women didn't know that they could report; were ashamed or afraid to report; or felt that reporting would result in additional violence. A recent World Bank report (2005) also notes that different women have different abilities to report violence. For example, consultations with EWLA revealed the difficulties of bringing a rape case to court if the victim's virginity is in doubt. As a result, EWLA is campaigning that non-virgins should be given equal consideration before the law as they are just as vulnerable to rape.

On the whole, the majority of the reports consulted for this summary together with findings in the WeD research concur that customary practices and the ideas of conforming to cultural norms play a key role in reinforcing and maintaining gender inequalities and are therefore a key obstacle to the implementation of gender sensitive policies. They also conclude that although there is much rhetoric on women's rights and gender equality within policy, laws and regulations, little is done in practice. Part of the explanation for the failure of translation of policy into practice is due to a lack of awareness amongst women themselves and the desire to conform to cultural norms. These difficulties are further compounded by the very infrastructure delegated with the responsibility of gender mainstreaming; and it is this constraint, when addressed, which has the potential to transform gender relations for the better.

The Women Affairs Office has the primary responsibility for creating a conducive environment for gender mainstreaming and monitoring progress. However, various reports indicated that the effectiveness of the women bureaus at the federal and regional levels were hindered by a number of factors (Sida, 2003; ADB, 2004; NEWA, 2005; World Bank/WAO, 1998). These include a lack of clear mandate and authority; poor institutional capacity and lack of capital budget (World Bank/ WAO, 1998). By far the greatest constraint concerns the issue of capacity, particularly in relation to staffing. Many of the delegated staff perform dual roles: they work for their particular line bureau *and* the women's bureau. Often responsibilities in the former outweigh the latter. This is accompanied by lack of clear mandate and responsibility which is particularly acute for the WADs and is linked to an overall lack of accountability for gender issues. At the federal and regional level, Women Affairs machineries have a limited role in key decision making in policy and practice and are not even a member of the cabinet<sup>9</sup>. They therefore lack authority to enforce changes towards more gender sensitive intervention on other line Ministries in spite of the WADs in place. This explains why there are few national sector programmes including gender and few ministries that prepare gender mainstreaming guidelines. Decentralisation has also served to marginalise gender issues by complicating the issue of accountability between Federal and Regional levels. Lack of staffing also limits the extent to which staff can liaise with other stakeholders engaged in gender mainstreaming as well as their interaction with communities on the ground. For example, there is little interaction with local based institutions such as *iddirs* (burial associations) to address these issues.

Another problem highlighted by a recent study conducted in preparation for National Action Plan on Gender was a lack of awareness of the key policies and laws affecting gender rights amongst the woreda officers and even the regional women bureaus to certain extent. This is the outcome of a lack of regular and context specific gender training of staff at all levels which inhibits the overall success of gender mainstreaming initiatives. A lack of adequate financial resources committed towards gender mainstreaming is another key constraint. This inhibits the ability to collect gender disaggregated data which is essential for monitoring progress. At the local level, it restricts the recruitment of staff and places transport constraints on woreda officers carrying out delegated responsibilities. Often, their activities are restricted to 'organising women' rather than conducting gender analysis and educating local women on their rights. This is compounded by an overall sense of demoralisation with gender mainstreaming related to how the WAO has been marginalised resulting in high staff turnover (NEWA, 2004). These problems are not uncommon and characterise many gender mainstreaming structures across the world. Indeed,

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<sup>9</sup> Originally the WAO used to be under the Deputy Prime Minister (highest level of policy making); it was then delegated to the Minister for social Sector and is now reporting to the Permanent Committee at the House of Parliament.

Longwe (1997) characterises the tendency of gender policies to disappear within bureaucracy as the evaporation of gender policy within the 'patriarchal cooking pot'.

The roots of these difficulties can be traced to the inherently political nature of the transformation that gender mainstreaming aims to achieve. As mentioned earlier, gender mainstreaming is a political project which requires a fundamental shift in the way that development intervention is implemented and this is why it is ultimately resisted. This resistance is embedded in the continuation of a policy making infrastructure which remains male-biased and patriarchal. There is a fear of the change in power balance between women and men which partly has its roots in people's cultural attitudes to gender roles and relations. It is also partly a function of a lack of awareness, and more importantly an understanding of what gender mainstreaming entails. It is this bias, and the assumption that gender is a 'woman's issue' that underpins the weak financial and human resource capacity of gender mainstreaming structures. It comes as no surprise that there is high staff turnover within these gender machineries (NEWA, 2004). Ultimately, this weak capacity perpetuates a vicious cycle because it hinders the authority of these structures to assert mechanisms of accountability. The result is that gender mainstreaming can be perceived as elusive and nebulous without a clear agenda for transformative action, thus producing diverse strategies to mainstream based on patchy understandings of what these processes are meant to achieve (Subrahmanian, 2004; Woodford-Berger, 2004).

Thus far, the evidence suggests that there have been consistent efforts to create the infrastructure and policies to commence an 'integrationist' approach to gender mainstreaming. However, to date, it appears that such efforts have been impeded by a number of reasons mainly due to weak capacity amongst the gender mainstreaming infrastructure. Nevertheless, some progress is being made to improve the effectiveness of an 'integrationist' approach. Although the former SDPRP has been criticised for failing to systematically mainstream gender throughout the whole strategy and not providing adequate gender disaggregated data on poverty indicators, it has had some positive outcomes. In particular, it has been instrumental in leading to improved dialogue between the Government of Ethiopia and donors resulting in various new structures to facilitate the implementation of the strategy. Of particular reference to gender mainstreaming was the creation of Joint Group on Gender Equality (JGGE) comprising government officials and donors and a Donor Group on Gender Equality (DGGE)<sup>10</sup>. The key function of these groups is to improve, coordinate and harmonise gender mainstreaming throughout government policies, programmes and projects, particularly the SDPRP (DGGE ToR, 2004). This has become particularly important towards developing a strategy to meet the Millennium Development Goals. The SDPRP together with the aforementioned groups has also stimulated a significant number of new initiatives aimed at translating the National Policy for Women and the various commitments to gender mainstreaming in other policies (e.g. SDPRP) into practice. These initiatives include the National Action Plan on Gender and Gender Budget Analysis, together with better gender-disaggregated reporting. These initiatives were underway towards the end of the SDPRP and were reincorporated into the second PRSP called the Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP) which will run for five years from mid 2005 to mid 2010.

The National Action Plan on Gender (NAP) was formulated specifically to put the commitments to gender mainstreaming scattered across the various policies into action (PASDEP, 2005). Specific objectives include:

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<sup>10</sup> Formally known as the Donor's Group for the Advancement of Women (GAW)

1. To mainstream and articulate gender concerns on broad policy processes including the PASDEP, MDGs and budget process
2. To strengthen gender analysis and overall gender sensitivity of the PASDEP monitoring and evaluation system (including the core indicator set, data collection methods)
3. To strengthen the Women Affairs Office (WAO) institutional structures and functioning, and identify entry points/activities for enhancing gender mainstreaming across government policies and programs

Progress thus far is that a draft NAP has been completed and plans for implementation are underway. With regards to the Gender Budget Analysis, this is a response to the recognition that policy implementation can be approved through Government Budget. The aim of the initiative is to analyse public expenditure from a gender perspective, particularly how it has affected women and men as users of public services. Its ultimate goal is to allow government to use a budgetary process to address gender inequality.

These steps represent important progress towards an integrationist approach to gender mainstreaming which will kick-start the more transformative agenda of gender mainstreaming. However, time will be the ultimate test.

#### **4. Gendered inequalities on the ground**

How do these initiatives to mainstream gender and overcome gender inequalities translate at the grassroots at the level of household and individual? How does policy deal with the factors that maintain unequal power relations? The following discussion draws on the analysis of power and poverty by Bevan, Pankhurst and Holland (2005) in conjunction with preliminary findings from WeD Ethiopia's research in four rural communities<sup>11</sup> (DEEP<sup>12</sup> sites). The research revealed that gender crosscuts with class, age, ethnicity and religion in different ways to produce imbalanced power relations that disproportionately affect women. The evidence suggests that women are subject to 'controlling power' structures which describe the structural relationships of exploitation, exclusion, domination and destruction found within households and communities (Bevan et al, 2005). They are also negatively affected by 'dispositional power' which comprises the structuring of symbolic resources or capital, including knowledge and information, political ideologies, religious beliefs and customary values. These two types of power in turn greatly constrain a woman's individual agentic power which describes the capacity of individuals to make potentially life-transforming decisions and to act on them<sup>13</sup>. The following discussion will now explore these dimensions of power over four facets of women's inequalities. These are the gendered division of labour; the pregnancy/infancy/birth cycle; marriage and violence against women's bodies.

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<sup>11</sup> Our four case study sites are Yelem and Dessu in Amhara Region and Tirfe and Kedada in Oromia Region. Yelem and Tirfe are surplus-producing sites close to major roads and relatively well connected to markets and government services. Yelem is situated in the highlands of Gojjam, while Tirfe is on the southern edge of the Rift Valley. Yelem is the wealthier site. The other two are situated mostly in the lowlands, are relatively recently settled, are difficult to reach except on foot, are drought-prone often facing food production shortfalls, and are less well-connected to markets and government services. Kedada has recently been poorer than Dessu.

<sup>12</sup> In-Depth-Exploration of Ethiopian Poverty

<sup>13</sup> The exercise of agency comprises three types of power: (i) internal individual human 'power to' and (ii) 'power within' are human power resources that are a function of health, skills, personality, habitus, moral character and reflexivity accumulated in the past<sup>13</sup>; (iii) external individual 'power to' depends on a person's current roles and relationships which affect personal access to the material, relational, cultural and political power resources needed for social action (Bevan et al, 2005).

#### **4.1: Gendered division of labour**

The gendered division of labour is a key mechanism of reinforcing unequal relations between women and men. It legitimises the heavy workloads of women which are underpinned by relations of exploitation and domination by men (i.e. controlling power structure). The following quote reveals how ideas of 'appropriate' gendered behaviour are reinforced through gendered roles. Men are perceived as the decision makers, the ones who control assets, provide security for the household, participate in community affairs and gain respect for their responsibilities. In contrast, women are expected to perform a 'double shift day'. They are seen as being primarily responsible for traditional female reproductive and domestic roles such as food preparation and childcare. A wife is responsible for fulfilling her husband's every want. She should be demure and respectful of her culture and allow her husband to make the major decisions.

*Wond* (male) Head of the household manage and control household resources; main rules are engaging in farming and giving social and psychological security to household members; main rights are respect from hh members, make contractual agreements, not doing house activities which are the responsibility of women.

*Set* (female): main responsibilities are child-caring, food preparation etc, fulfil whatever husband needs; main rules are not to participate in local meetings which includes males only (female response); treatment of husband, to respect the culture, not to be talkative (male response) . Main rights – second head of household, giving advice to her family (female response) preparation and distribution of food to family members, respect from children. (Yelem)

These norms are reinforced through community gatherings where women are expected to be absent or 'quiet' at community meetings to allow their husband's to take an active role. These rules can be bent when husbands are absent, or when women are single and/or are part of an *iddir* (customary burial associations) or *mahiber* (association dedicated to a saint<sup>14</sup>).

Women are expected to be confined on their houses and do household activities. They will only attend outside events when their husbands are not around or they are single and have their own *iddir* or *mahiber*. Women have equal right to own properties with men. They can only sell or exchange something with the permission of their husbands. (Yelem)

Any resistance to this set formula is often perceived as disrespecting culture and religious upbringing, and is consequently severely frowned upon (particularly from the older generations). However, poorer women seeking a means of survival are faced with no choice but to take on labour which is seen as 'shameful' for women because it is not regarded as traditional female activities as illustrated below.

Adult females do not go to other rural areas for work. But there are about 2/3 women, who are very poor, who work at Hamus Gebeya (they prepare Katikala (alcoholic distilled drink) four/six days a month). One of the respondent states that the community consider it as shameful to go to rural area for work for adult female. (Tirfe)

Young girls and boys are socialised into these roles and unequal gender relations from an early age through the careful guidance of their parents and religious upbringing. Although there is a slight difference in gender roles amongst Christians and Muslims (i.e. in that the Muslim girls are more restricted in what activities they can take on), there appears to be agreement that a young girl's responsibility is to

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<sup>14</sup> Most of the women *mahibers* are dedicated to the Virgin Mary. Members meet at a member's house in turn once a month on the saint's day and have a meal together.

become proficient in carrying out 'female activities' within the sphere of the household.

Both girls and boys should start working in the house at 3, as messengers from about 3 years of age and began working out side at 4. Boys should begin to go out in the fields with fathers or shepherds in order to prepare them for work (at 4) and at 6 they should start herding in assistance with elders at the age of 6 and independently at 7. Then hoeing, clearing crop fields, weeding, levelling threshing floor as they grow 10. At 6 girls should be able to roast and boil coffee, collect fire wood, fetch water, clean house and begin to make Injera, Wat. (Dessu: Young Lives 1M Poor man)

Girls should clean houses, make the fire, roast/boil coffee, collect fire wood, fetch water and Christian girls should also herd animals and weed. Both Christian and Muslim girls should completely manage to work all female activities at the age of 10. (Dessu)

Increasingly, there is evidence suggesting that both women and men are beginning to challenge these gender roles in nuanced ways. For example, in our protocol data<sup>15</sup> from Kedada we have a case study of one man with 3 wives who supports his 15 year old daughter in her education against her mother who wants her to get married. In Dessu, we have another case where the male household was supportive of his children going to school. However, because of labour shortage he had to retain his eldest son and daughter to assist with household and agricultural tasks whilst the younger children (including girls) went to school. This illustrates the complexity of gender relations which are crosscut by the circumstances of the household.

More subtle variations in gender roles are witnessed across religious denomination (whether you are Muslim or Christian), ethnicity and class/wealth. The following quote from the Young lives protocol<sup>16</sup> in Dessu (a predominantly Muslim site) reveals how Christian Amhara girls are taught to perform agricultural fieldwork skills in addition to traditional female domestic tasks within the household. They also appear to be more mobile than Muslim girls who tend to be restricted in the places they can visit (e.g. markets). Religion crosscut by ethnicity also appears to affect parent's attitudes to education. Muslim Argoba parents tend to view education as having a bad influence over their child's "survival" whilst Amhara Christian parents see education as a way of increasing economic opportunities as illustrated below. However, it is important to note that the Argoba tend to favour Muslim education which is different from secular education. So this moves the question beyond the issue of having education or not, towards the *type* of education.

Muslim and Christian parents have different views and practices as far as genderization of skill learning Muslim Argoba believe that it is a religious duty that girls should learn only home making work skills and remain in the house. But the Amhara Christians believe that girls must learn important fieldwork skills too. Thus both category parents revealed that unlike Muslims, Amhara girls equally begin to be engaged in herding as boys.

The Muslims never allow girls to go out to markets or other events where as rich/middle Christians could assign some one to protect their girls if they go out to festivals or markets. The two sub groups seem to maintain contrary values and attitudes to wards religious and formal education from gender perspective and goal orientation. Argoba Muslim parents highly value religious education as an appropriate means of socializing children and it enables them to acquire the required behaviour as their survival strategies. On the contrary they believed formal education will have effect against their children's present or future survival in the community. The Amhara/Christians rather consider formal education as positive survival/strategy against logically and nationally defined economic resource problems. Although Amhara parents seem to agree with Muslims on misdirecting effects of formal education in terms of behaviour, they value it in terms of economic survival strategy. (Dessu: Young Lives 1M)

<sup>15</sup> [http://www.wed-ethiopia.org/deep\\_research\\_timetable.htm](http://www.wed-ethiopia.org/deep_research_timetable.htm)

<sup>16</sup> [http://www.wed-ethiopia.org/deep\\_research\\_timetable.htm](http://www.wed-ethiopia.org/deep_research_timetable.htm)

For young girls, this socialisation process is an important means of preparing them in 'housewifely duties' to make them good wives and mothers.

An adolescent girl who does not fulfil all housewifely duties may not get married and will be given the nickname *geltu* (lazy). (Yelem)

Being a good wife and producing offspring (particularly boys) is crucial for affirming female identity. Women who produce sons are rewarded with praise and respect from husbands and other women since males are seen as being able to "defend themselves and their family better from any danger" whilst females are "easy victims for enemies". For this reason, male infants receive more care and nourishment than female children. Only when the girls become of marriageable age, do they receive more attention and care from their mothers as it is important for her to find a husband who will provide an important source of support for the parents in their old age. Alternatively, when a mother has many children, she needs more female children to help her take care of the domestic household tasks.

There is a belief, particularly among Orthodox Christians, that it is better to give birth to male than female children. They believe that males can defend themselves and their family better from any danger while females are easy victims for enemies. A husband feels happiness when his wife gives birth to a son and the wife also feels proud. The husband may kill a sheep or a goat for the wife who gave birth to a son. When a son is born, women who gather in the house of the woman giving birth make a thin loud clamour called *illita* seven times, but only three times if the child is female'. (Tirfe)

Women and girls who fail to fulfil these gender norms, particularly those who do not produce children, are generally seen as failures and treated with disdain as illustrated below.

Even if the husband may be infertile it is the woman who is blamed: she is labelled as *beklo* (mule) and considered to be cursed. (Yelem)

However, we do have a case in Dessu where the couple have not had children but seem happy and the husband treats his wife well; thus raising the importance of interrogating generalisations and recognising diversity.

#### **4.2: The pregnancy/birth/infancy cycle**

A key factor compounding women's inequality that deserves being considered separately as a distinct dimension of the gendered division of labour in its own right is the biological role that women perform in society. If we look at this in power terms, it is an important means in which women's bodies are dominated and exploited. A key finding of the research was that women's childbearing and childrearing responsibilities and related needs were rarely recognised in prevailing discourses on gender relations. However, research by WeD Ethiopia in 20 rural WIDE<sup>17</sup> sites in 2004 summarised by Bevan (2004)<sup>18</sup> below revealed that women experienced difficulties in relation to infertility, pregnancy outside marriage, abortions, spontaneous miscarriages, pregnancy, delivery and infancy. These were further exacerbated by seasonal changes in food, cash and water availability, temperature, disease outbreaks and the timing of women's agricultural labour.

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<sup>17</sup> See <http://www.wed-ethiopia.org/research.htm>

<sup>18</sup> Bevan, P. (2004) "Hunger, poverty and famine in Ethiopia: mothers and babies under stress", *Ethiopia WeD Working paper 4*, University of Bath, <http://www.wed-ethiopia.org/docs/working-paper4.pdf>

*Infertility* was a key problem for rural women in Ethiopia as failure to become a mother challenges the very foundations of female adult identity and status. Not only does it cause profound personal unhappiness, it can also result in divorce and stigmatisation by the rest of the community. In the long run, it also means that there is less labour for the household and insecurity in old age. Paradoxically, when infertility is due to the male, there is little criticism and often the woman is blamed.

Much female infertility is caused by *abortions* and *miscarriages* often associated with child pregnancies (due to early customary marriages) and circumcision. Pregnancies outside of marriage are regarded as taboo, and many resort to abortion using unsafe methods such as malaria tablets or drinking bleach to avoid stigmatisation. Women who experience spontaneous miscarriages are blamed. Lack of the appropriate care (or ability to afford it) can lead to further complications and immense pain that can result in death or infertility.

The experience of *pregnancy* and *delivery* can also produce much suffering for women. Faced with the responsibility for other domestic tasks within the household, women struggle to reach a balance whilst dealing with the effects of pregnancy such as sickness, fatigue and pain. This is particularly difficult during times when agricultural work in the fields is crucial (e.g. weeding, sowing and harvesting). During times of drought, hunger can cause negative effects to the unborn child as they fail to attain adequate nutrition to develop. Female circumcision can produce considerable problems for the delivery of the child that can result in death for both the mother and infant.

Bevan notes that “a major maternal worry” is the health of the baby. When an infant falls ill and traditional methods of healing fail, not all can afford the costs of formal health facilities. Young children are also more prone to droughts and disease epidemics. Because young boys are favoured over girls, they tend to be fed more, making young girls particularly vulnerable.

In summary, Bevan outlines three key issues that create hardship for women: food and diet for mother and baby; work and time-use in relation to women's' multiple roles within the household; and maternal and baby illness and health care. The *food and diet* of both the mother and baby is crucial throughout the pregnancy infancy cycle. Their propensity to find enough food to survive (to avoid starvation) and find the right types of food to flourish (nutrition) is dependent on their physical location and relative wealth. Women's' multiple roles in the production and maintenance of the household together with their biological role as mother means that they have to find a delicate balance within their 'double shift day'. Lastly, the pregnancy/infancy cycle is a particularly vulnerable time for mothers and babies that requires reliable preventive health measures and sufficient health care to mitigate pregnancy related illnesses. However much of this care is of poor quality, unaffordable or non-existent.

The extent of acute and chronic suffering experience by mothers and babies during the pregnancy/infancy cycle is summarised in the table overleaf:

**Table 2: Acute and chronic suffering experienced by mothers and baby**

<b>Mothers</b>	<b>Babies</b>
Infertility Unwanted pregnancies Too many pregnancies Botched abortions Miscarriages Difficult pregnancies Illnesses during pregnancy Starvation and nutritional failures during pregnancy Overwork during pregnancy Absence of, poor, or costly health facilities during pregnancy Lack of care and support during pregnancy Difficult deliveries Absence of, poor or costly health facilities during pregnancy Lack of care and support during pregnancy Difficult deliveries Absence of, poor, or costly health facilities during delivery Post delivery complications Absence, of, poor or costly facilities for new mother and baby Overwork once baby is born Starvation or nutritional failures whilst breastfeeding Being responsible for the physical welfare of the children, especially in times of famine Worry about feeding the family Worry about the health of their baby	Nutritional failures while in the womb Problematic birth experiences Starvation or nutritional failures in the first trimester Local diseases and illnesses Neglect which may be result of mothers having to make ends meet in hunger periods or because the child is female (i.e. due to cultural preference for boys)

Source: Bevan (2004)

### **4.3: Marriage**

The main purpose of marriage is to strengthen or establish new social capital networks by joining families, kin groups of clans. These networks become important sources of support at times of stress (famine or death of family) or labour during the key agricultural periods. Being married is important for a woman's adult status and identity. Being unmarried risks being labelled a "failure". However, the mechanisms through which couples are 'married', the actual experience of marriage, and the impact of ending marriage (through widowhood or divorce) play a profound role in entrenching and legitimising gendered inequalities.

The research revealed different marriage rules amongst the sites according to ethnicity and religion. Yet, all sites practice virilocal marriage residence rules where women are expected to move away from their parental village to that of the groom and often into or next to his parent's home. The implication of this move is that a woman is often socially and geographically isolated from kin and friends. For the Oromo of Kedada (All Muslims) and Tirfe (mostly Muslims) and the Argobas of Dessu (all Muslims) bridewealth is often given to the wife's family from the husband's family. This can include cash or material items such as clothes or livestock to help support the birth of new children. Often there are strict rules about who one is able to marry and marriages are frequently arranged by parents. Within the research, there were many cases of young girls reporting that they would return home to find parents had

arranged a marriage against their will. On the whole, women have little say in the matter as illustrated below.

Marriage within a clan is forbidden; it is not an individual affair but the concern of the clan – it unites two clans. Forms of marriage include marriage by purchase, marriage by exchange, abduction, by consent of partners without parental agreement, marrying dead sister's husband, marrying dead husband's brother, marrying a divorcee. (Kedada)

More violent forms of marriage through abduction (involving kidnapping and rape) were frequent. This proved to be a strategy used by poorer men to either avoid or reduce the large bridewealth payments. This form of marriage caused much distress for young girls who experienced the terror of rape. Divorce was not an option because of the fear of stigmatisation from the community as illustrated below

During my marriage, I was very sad because I married through abduction. Since divorce was considered as devotion from accepted norms, I chose to stay with my husband for some years. (Tirfe)

Polygyny is also prevalent amongst the Muslim Oromos and can have negative consequences for wives and children where tensions between wives can lead to competition for resources within households and mistreatment of children. The practice of having multiple partners has also contributed to the spread of sexual diseases which have disproportionately affected women. This is compounded by adultery amongst men.

The inheritance of a widow by a dead husband's brother or through the replacement of a dead wife by her sister is still practiced amongst Muslim Oromos. This arrangement can create similar constraints to women as those entrenched in polygynous relationships as illustrated below.

I was 14 years old married. This was the worst thing in my life because I married my sister's husband when she died. This was a big impact in my life. Another impact in my life was the death of my husband. In 1993, I was married to a second husband. I am pregnant with the second child for my second husband. But he married another woman, so he didn't help me. (Kedada: ALF widow 24)

The Amhara are the dominant ethnic group in Yelem and a large proportion in Dessu but are a minority in Tirfe and Kedada. Although Amhara rules differ, they still serve to embed the view that the woman is the possession of the man and that her purpose is to run the household and produce children. It is common amongst the Amhara to marry early which in turn results in early pregnancy which create difficulties of young girls as their bodies are not fully developed to handle pregnancy.

For Amharas marriage is a contractual agreement involving the pooling of labour and property to establish a new household and raise children. Three recognised types of marriage are 'equal partner', communion marriage (indissoluble), pay marriage (monthly salary). There is also living together. (Yelem)

These different marriage types are accompanied by different rules regarding widowhood and divorce. Fafchamps and Quisumbing (2002) give a detailed account of how the control and ownership of assets following death or divorce varies according to ethnicity, the degree to which assets were brought into the marriage (from the wife's side), and religion; thus illustrating the complexity of gender relations under different circumstances<sup>19</sup>. They also note that government's policy on land and

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<sup>19</sup>They also note that disposition upon death or divorce only loosely depends on individual ownership during marriage but control is associated with larger claims upon divorce. Assets brought into marriage have little impact on disposition upon death, but matter in the case of divorce.

conversion to non-Orthodox Christian faith is having some impact on the allocation of assets after death or divorce, but recognise that this needs more investigation. WeD research revealed that divorce from marriage through bridewealth (common amongst the Oromo Muslims) usually results in the divorced wife losing all her rights to property as illustrated below.

A divorced wife has no right to take any property which she and her husband got after marriage; she can only take her clothes and gifts she received from her parents during the marriage which may include furniture and cows. (Tirfe)

In Muslim marriage rule there is a statement that is signed by the couples in case divorce happened. The wife should wait six months if her husband permit to marry with other man. And there is also rule how they divided their property or land or their livestock. The wife couldn't get anything from the property or land except the endowments that she get from her parent; otherwise she returned back with thirty birr only. But there are differences in divorcing by now Muslim females get 70 and above money during divorcing. (Dessu)

Although women have greater claims to property amongst the Amhara (see below), in reality their ability to secure this right is constrained. This is particularly the case for women with no source of independent income (Pankhurst, 2006). As a result, many may decide to withhold their right and migrate back to their home village.

During divorce children may live with their father or mother depending on the parents agreement. If the father agreed to give some money or agricultural land for the children, the mother will take them with her, otherwise the children will live with their father. Since both husband and wife have equal right on their house one of them will leave the house on agreement. (Yelem)

However, this research did reveal that there were changes in place with the fall of the imperial and Derg era. New laws were imposed so that women could refuse the proposal to marry their dead husband's brother, and that they could retain their rights to property. There was also a greater prevalence of women getting HIV/AIDS testing before marriage and greater tendency of couples marrying for love as illustrated below

There is still dominancy of men. There is no much change since 1991; women are still confined in the house. However the way of marriage changed a lot, the ceremony is now completed with a small expenditure and early marriage decreased highly, less divorce, widows are getting a good judgement from the court. (Yelem)

In Kedada there was also evidence that couples were eloping to get married, calling it 'voluntary abduction' to avoid arranged marriages.

#### **4.4: Violence on women's bodies**

Unequal power relations are also expressed through physical violence towards women's bodies in the form of female circumcision (known as one type of female genital mutilation (FGM)) and widespread domestic abuse. What makes this more alarming is the fact that woman accept this violence without question, thus highlighting the extent to which gender inequalities are firmly entrenched within society. Kabeer (2003) notes that power is most effective when it restricts choice and hence agency without overtly appearing to do so. Indeed, a recent report by the World Bank (2005)<sup>20</sup> drew on data from a nationally representative household survey in 1999 by the Central Statistical Authority of Ethiopia to report that 85% of women believed that their husband was justified in beating his wife for: burning the food, arguing, going out without telling, neglecting the children, and refusing sexual

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<sup>20</sup> Ethiopia Well-being and Poverty in Ethiopia: the Role of Agriculture and Agency (World Bank, 2005)

relations. The report also noted that 60% of all women support female circumcision. This reaffirms Bevan and Pankhurst's (2006) claim that culturally females have been accorded a lower status and value than males, and male violence against women has been regarded as normal.

In the WeD sites, beating did appear to be a widespread mechanism for superiors to assert control and issue punishment. It was frequently used by adults with children and by men on women. However, the evidence did suggest that more women are beginning to challenge regular beating by escaping to their parent's home and others are reporting the husband's behaviour to the elders in the traditional courts. Rape through abduction as a means of marriage is arguably the most distressing form of violence against a woman's body and cases were reported amongst the WeD sites. Indeed, it was often a key reason mothers did not want to send young girls to school as they feared that their young daughters may be abducted. However, when this does occur, the female victim has little authority to bring the abductor to justice even if she takes him to court (because it is culturally acceptable). Recently, the case of a young 13 year old girl who was abducted and raped repeatedly after she escaped a first time came to the attention of the media, not because of the horrifying experience of repeated rape, but because of the way the court treated the case. It provides a classic example of the conflict between 'tradition' and 'culture' embedded within the perpetrators and the court itself versus new legislation demanding change. The court (particularly the male judge) found it difficult to convict the abductor as it is culturally acceptable to rape a virgin since it is a form marriage) (c.f. Wax, 2004). As a result the abductor escaped a sentence of 10 years in jail.

Cultural resistance to change in relation to women's bodies was most pronounced with female circumcision. There was little recognition of the "harmfulness of such practices" (Yelem). Circumcision is practiced by both males and females of the Amhara and Argoba ethnic groups; usually after birth or at the age of 7. Amongst the Oromo, female circumcision takes place before marriage. Even though circumcision has been prohibited by the Ethiopian government, the following vignette illustrates how female circumcision is still practised secretly and women actively seek to get circumcised.

**1<sup>st</sup> respondent:** Girls are circumcised for cultural reasons. Girls who are not circumcised and who are christened cannot be buried in churchyards if they died. It is regarded as a shame not to have been circumcised. Among the Oromo, in fact, a woman would not be wedded if she is not circumcised. Kitani (female circumcision) has been prohibited for the last two years or so. I have stopped doing it. It is possible that some people still do it secretly, but I do not know. Even after it has been legally banned, there are a number of people who ask to please come and circumcise their daughters. This indicates that there are still many people who want to do it. This is because being uncircumcised is regarded as a source of shame. People believe that uncircumcised daughters would only bring shame and dishonour to them. Well, it has been customary from the time of our ancestors to circumcise women. Now, in your days, we are being told not to do it anymore. The good thing about circumcision is that it brings about liberation (or freedom). Freedom from being mocked and insulted, freedom from being an object of criticism. It is also good to respect and continue with a cultural practice that has come down to us from our ancestors. Circumcision was not regarded as a bad or harmful practice in our days. I do not know why your generation found it to be harmful.

**2<sup>nd</sup> respondent:** In the past girls were circumcised on the eve of their weddings. These days the girls are circumcised by their own request. On the occasion of her circumcision, a woman is treated to good food; an animal would be slaughtered, her prospective husband will bring over chuko (powdered barley soaked in butter). All the relatives and friends of her prospective husband would be invited and they pass the night at her place, playing and singing. Everybody invited will bring over whatever they can afford in the form of food stuffs. I have been circumcised on the occasion of my wedding. I would have been an object of gossip if I had not been circumcised.

**Q: Would you have your daughter circumcised in the future?**

A: Yes, of course, I will have her circumcised prior to her wedding according to the Oromo culture. (Tirfe)

The vignette above illustrates how female circumcision is considered an important rite towards adulthood and status for women; central for affirming female identity. At a more fundamental level, female circumcision serves to ensure the subservience of wives to their husband. Previous research on this has demonstrated how FGM is used to ensure the marriageability of girls, inhibit female sexual desire, protect their virginity before marriage and cleanliness (Tadesse, 2001).

Those who are not circumcised risk ridicule by the community in the form of “shame” and “dishonour” to the extent that they may not be “wedded” or buried appropriately upon their death. Resistance is seen as bad behaviour and risks bringing shame to oneself and your family. It is also worth mentioning that the researchers found it extremely difficult to find someone openly opposed to the idea of circumcision as illustrated below. Even when they did find someone who was opposed to the idea in principle and recognised that “nobody benefits from the circumcision of girls”, they confessed that they would still have their daughter circumcised because of pressure from parents and relatives as illustrated below.

**Third respondent:** (Note from researcher: It is difficult to find women who would say that they have been harmed by circumcision as it is difficult to find women who have not been circumcised. This respondent is a woman who opposes circumcision, a nurse). They believe that a woman would not be able to get a husband if she is not circumcised; they believe that she would have a bad reputation. From the vantage point of health, however, it is clear that circumcision causes a number of problems. For instance, it makes labour during birth very painful and protracted. The risk of contracting deadly diseases including HIV/AIDS is also great due to the unsanitary condition of the instruments that are used for the job. There is no benefit at all in circumcision. In fact, it is a very harmful practice in terms of health.

NB, it is difficult to find women who would say that they have been harmed by circumcision; even women who might have been harmed by it would find it difficult to state that openly; they would, instead, find some other explanation for their difficulties. Even though circumcision has been outlawed recently, the public still looks upon it positively as a good cultural practice. Nobody benefits from the circumcision of girls, except may be the expert woman who gets paid for the job.

**Q: Are you circumcised yourself?**

A: Yes, I am. My parents had me circumcised in my infancy. Since we are Amhara it happened on the seventh day of my birth.

**Q: Have you gotten your daughter circumcised?**

A: Yes, I am. The reason is, as I said to you, both my parents and relatives would not give me peace if I had not done it. As I said to you, despite the legal prohibitions, the public has not as yet understood the benefits of abandoning the practice. It is still practiced secretly. (Tirfe)

Other studies on the impact of culturally condoned violence against women reinforce how it operates as a form of ‘controlling power’ to dominate women by ensuring the subservience of wives to their husbands. Yet, there was evidence that the younger generations are beginning to resist such practices which will be explored below.

#### **4.5: Government intervention and individual change**

When turning to the evidence on the presence of factors challenging women’s subordination and unequal balance of power, various issues emerged. The findings did reveal traces of ‘collaborative power structures’ where the welfare mix of institutions and organisations sought to tackle unequal relations. For example, it appears that the socialist government since 1974 have been recognised by the community as spreading messages about the equality of women which have

translated into legislation on land rights on widowhood or divorce for women as illustrated below.

As in other parts of Ethiopia after the revolution women in Tirfe are entitled to their own land for agriculture. After 1975 married women and men were allocated a definite amount of land and women have the right to take their share of land after divorce. Most female land owners are widows. After the death of the husband it is the widow's responsibility to lead the household as her husband did. (Tirfe)

Imperial times – everybody assumed that women are less than men. So they had been underestimated. The Derg attitudes changed and women got the right to participate in local and government organisations; the people also believed in the equality of men and women. (Kedada)

During the Derg regime, the Revolutionary Ethiopian Women's Association (REWA) was the main woman's organisation present (Michael, 2000; Pankhurst, 1992). Although it was regarded with fear and suspicion by women because of its links with the military and because of the way in which it imposed labour and took up valuable time for meetings, it did play an important role in raising women's awareness about their rights as is clear from the quote above. However, the nature of political rule prevented 'women's rights' being given separate consideration. Nevertheless, it did set the scene for intervention from the present government which has been discussed in section 3. When we turn towards evidence from our sites in present time, it is clear that some are still struggling to put legislation into practice.

They were giving identification card for the farmer in relation with the announcement of women's right for the land equally with the men. Because in our surrounding Muslim women haven't right to land the women themselves accept this because it is a religious rule. If one of the women tried to argue about her right she would become outcast from the society. So they accept and live till now. But now they are trying to get used to the right which is given from the government. (Dessu : CommDiaryF)

If the husband dies, his brother will inherit her. In the imperial and Derg eras, the wife was expected to accept the proposal for the marriage of her husband's brother. Otherwise she will be evicted from the land. Recently the law supports the women and they began to refuse the proposal. They can live alone with their children, while occupying their properties. (Yelem:HHDevCycle 2005)

However, protocol data from Kedada suggested that some women chose to vote for existing government because of the rights that it asserted for women. There was also evidence from most of the rural sites that the current government organised various awareness raising campaigns on family planning, female genital mutilation, marriage by abduction and rape, wife inheritance, polygamy and HIV/AIDS. Communities in Tirfe and Yelem were advised against practising bridewealth because of the extra costs it places on the households. In all rural sites, communities were warned about the penalties and punishments for practicing harmful practices against women such as female circumcision. In particular, the difficulties related to child birth with early marriage and female circumcision were raised. These messages also appeared to be spread through the schools to the younger generations. There were several cases where respondents reported that HIV/AIDS tests were carried out prior to marriage. Yet many respondents in all sites reported that in spite of the raised awareness, some of these harmful practices were still taking place "secretly" (e.g. female circumcision). The persistence of such activities is always attributed to the desire to conform to cultural norms (as illustrated in earlier section). However, there is a notable gap in terms of *who* conforms to these norms. Our research revealed a growing tension between older and younger generations: older people proved most resistant to change, whilst the younger generations actively sought to contest certain practices. These struggles are most clear in the arena of 'marriage' where young couples agree to elope together as illustrated below.

First, the boy and girls establish love affection secretly. When they decided to establish marriage, they write an application letter to establish marriage to the police expressing that they voluntarily agreed to live together as wife and husband so that it shouldn't be taken as forced abduction. They attach their photographs with the application. Finally, they agree to flee to the house of one of the husband's relative. The relative tell the condition to the parent of the groom. Then elders are sent to the parents of the bride to discuss on the issue and to change the abduction into formal marriage. Sometimes, the bride's parents may refuse to accept the elders and take the case to police or court in the woreda level. But since the boy and the girls already submitted the contractual agreement showing the establishment of marriage between themselves, the accusation has no value and acceptance by the police. Older people don't accept such kinds of marriage. According to them since it doesn't involve *gabra* (dowry) and bride wealth, such kinds of marriage can easily lead to divorce, which is almost impossible in Kedada. In addition, the marriage couldn't get sufficient support form relatives and kins so that the legitimacy of the new family is questioned. (Kedada, Collective Action protocol<sup>21</sup>)

There was also evidence suggesting that women were beginning to contest traditional marriage laws such as wife inheritance and property. For example, there were some cases where young women refused to marry individuals chosen by parents and would choose their own partner even if the bridewealth was low as illustrated below.

If the bride entered the groom's house without the consent of her parents, the *gebera* could be settled with the 100 birr given for the *gosa*. It is if the bride is strong to defend her husband not to pay the *gebera*. Recently married youth do that. (Tirfe : HHDevCycle 2005)

Further protocol research on disputes and resolutions supported these findings and also revealed that there was a general agreement that compared with the past; women were more able to assert their rights through legal means (Pankhurst, 2006). Marital disputes emerged as one of the key types of disputes that had obvious gender dimensions, followed closely by disputes within families and among kin. Analysing the causes of disputes provides clues on the ways in which women are beginning to challenge gendered inequalities. The key causes of such disputes were related to the husband's behaviour in terms of wife beating, adultery, additional wives and fear of HIV/AIDS. These are often interlinked with issues relating to the control over property and labour, particularly when there are other wives involved. Such disputes are first brought to customary institutions comprising mainly of elders, and if not settled are then taken to the formal Kebele social court. Pankhurst (2006) notes that the distinction between the two arenas is not so clear cut and that there are overlaps of responsibility where the elders are often delegated the responsibility for implementing court decisions. Although there is a consensus that the customary systems are male biased with regards to abduction and rape, there is some notable progress on divorce settlement where more and more women are insisting on asserting their right to property. These findings support the work of Teklu (2004) on women's access to land in the Amhara Region. Teklu emphasises the importance of recognising the heterogeneity amongst women where different women have different abilities to assert their rights. The study revealed that it was the socially and economically poor women who lack family support rather than those who were widowed or divorced who tend to be most disadvantaged. Because such women lack sufficient labour to cultivate the land, they are forced to sharecrop, thus losing the full benefits of the land holding.

There were also examples where traditional work arrangements and friendship groups continued to provide an important source of support for women seeking to balance their 'double shift days'.

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<sup>21</sup> [http://www.wed-ethiopia.org/deep\\_research\\_timetable.htm](http://www.wed-ethiopia.org/deep_research_timetable.htm)

*Wonfel* for women: Party ceremony of wonfel for females. All women work together, so as to finish the work in short period of time. Every women should found at 3 o'clock, they work like baking injera, cooking wat, preparing tella. I know these cooperative workers over 15 years, starting from as I married during agricultural work like geso, wonfel debo, the women's work only inside the house to prepare or making injera, cooking wat, to prepare dough. There is all about division. The owner of the house, the women, is the important person. She ordered all females that comes outside the house. She led and provide the work that work by them. (Dessu)

Neighbours: We take care of each other during maternity. We exchange labour services for agricultural work. We help each other at times of illness. We stand together both in sorrow and in happiness. (Tirfe)

Another important way in which women can assert greater power is within *iddirs*. In some cases they even take on strong leadership roles as illustrated below

*Iddir*: Now women are coming to the leaders' circle, which was not known 20-30 years back. There are no restrictions on involvement in leadership. As my informants say it is the ability and not sex that enable a person to be a leader. Women who are under the control of their husbands, come to the meeting when he is absent. Women who are household heads also are not nominated. So it is not restriction but ability that keeps the women from being elected. (Tirfe)

It is also worth pointing out that the *mehaber* provide an important arena for women to exercise agency outside the realm of patriarchal church. Pankhurst (1992) provides a detailed account of how the *mehaber* give opportunities for women to make regular visits to different communities which is not normally permitted considering the restrictions on women's movement.

### **Summary**

Taken together, it is clear how customary values and religious beliefs operate as 'dispositional power' to legitimise and reinforce the gendered division of labour which in turn serves to maintain the exploitation of women's labour and their exclusion from certain activities (e.g. decision making); thus reinforcing controlling power structures. When focusing on the various forms of marriage, it is also clear how woman's bodies can be the subject of domination through abduction and wife inheritance practices as well the gendered division of labour legitimised through patriarchal cultural norms. Similarly this domination also extends to the psychological where virilocality increases the isolation and exclusion of women from their kin and family. Moreover, little recognition is given to the strains a woman's body has to undergo during the pregnancy cycle and the particular risks both her and her unborn child or infant may experience. This is particularly acute at times of food shortage and famine (Bevan, 2004). These dimensions of 'controlling power structures' are further exemplified through the practice of female circumcision. Choosing not to be circumcised risks being ridiculed by the rest of the community and will reduce a woman's chances of marriage. This has further implications to a woman's livelihood by restricting her external individual 'power' to mobilise material, relational, cultural and political resources for social action. There is little resistance to these dimensions of inequality because of how the ideas of appropriate gendered behaviour are intermeshed with femininity and masculinity. As a result, these values and beliefs are inculcated to the next generation.

All in all, it is clear that from these empirical findings that the policies in place are not really having the desired effects on the ground. Indeed, the evidence suggests that gender relations are being contested at the local level by women and men in ways that are not directly initiated from above. At the same time, it is important not to lose sight of the subtle changes that are taking place which do suggest that the attempts to address these inequalities might be having some impact.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

So far, the paper has explored the policy interventions in place and the key mechanisms of mainstreaming gender have been summarised. The paper then turned towards empirical research from four rural sites. It revealed that the government had made progress on some fronts in terms of addressing unequal inheritance laws. However, there was limited evidence that these have been effectively translated into practice. It also highlighted that more women were beginning to find ways to contest inequalities in subtle and nuanced ways. Nevertheless, it is clear that there is still a significant gap between the rhetoric of national discourses of gender justice encapsulated in policy and gender mainstreaming structures at the national and regional levels and what gets put into practice when we explore the realities on the ground. It is clear that cultural norms and traditions remain an important driving force behind gendered inequalities.

If we return to the original definition of gender mainstreaming as both the *process* of institutionalising gender equality within the development context and the *strategy* of assessing the effects of policies on women and men through gender planning we see the points of weakness. An integrationist approach has been taken even though the intention has been transformative. The government is still struggling with putting the appropriate mechanisms in place that have sufficient authority to challenge gender norms that are embedded in institutions from the start. The National Action Plan for Gender and Gender Budget Analysis are important step forwards. What is still missing is more engagement with realities on the ground. This requires a deeper understanding of the context in which this change is to be realised such as state-society relationships, political society characteristics and the influence of international development and financial institutions on policy making and practice. This should also involve greater understandings of people's own initiatives on the ground.

Understanding people's perceptions and attitudes on gender issues is a key step towards addressing gender inequalities. The evidence from the WeD sites has revealed that local customs play a fundamental role in legitimising power imbalances. Violence against women is a key example of how certain forms of dispositional power are maintained through culture and in some cases supported by women themselves (e.g. female circumcision). Change will not take place unless women want the change for themselves. This is not to say we are imposing an idea of western feminism from above. It is about providing women and men with the appropriate information to enable a process of 'conscientization' whereby women are enabled to define and analyse their subordination and construct and pursue a vision of the world that they would like to live in (Kabeer, 1994; Rowlands, 1997; 1999). A crucial part of this is having access to education and external information. Indeed, the National Committee on Traditional Practices of Ethiopia (NCTPE) asserts that education is key in combating 'harmful traditional practices'. It argues that education is a way of empowering women to withstand traditional pressures for conformity (NCTPE, 2003). NCTPE recognises that educating women is important as they have a key role in socialising their children. In this sense, education is perceived as central to breaking the chain.

Indeed, a recent World Bank report (2005) suggests that one reason women may not contest their subordination more openly is because of little awareness of what an alternative would be. Drawing on data from Central Statistic Authority (2001), the report notes that on the whole, the majority of Ethiopians (particularly in the rural areas) have little exposure to mass media which is more pronounced for women. Informal research by the author also revealed that various institutions working on

women's rights that did produce programmes on women's rights to be transmitted by radio were confined to the immediate vicinity of Addis Ababa. However, it is important to interrogate the quality of education. Poluha's (2004) study on schooling shows how what goes on in schools can actually perpetuate or reinforce the continuity of customary practices which may be discriminatory towards women.

At the same time, we should not over-privilege a focus on 'consciousness raising' at the risk of turning a blind eye to the way in which institutional structures and politics may constrain and enable certain activities (Parpart, 2002). This echoes the work of Goetz (1995:1) who states that "understanding the gendered features of institutional norms, structures and practices is an important key to ensuring that women and men benefit equally from macro level policy changes". Clearly, greater steps are needed to strengthen the accountability of various institutions responsible for gender mainstreaming. More importantly, there needs to be a more consistent effort to implement the changes to the Penal Code and Family Law to ensure that women have equal protection under the law.

In this paper, I have attempted to summarise the key dimensions of inequality affecting women in four rural sites. I have also included a summary of the steps taken to mainstream gender. The gap between policy and practice on the ground is wide. It is clear that more needs to be done to learn from people's initiatives on the ground. Currently, the WeD research group has completed fieldwork in November 2005 and is now in the process of rigorously analysing a larger data set including two additional urban sites. This analysis will allow a deeper understanding of gendered power relations and their relationship to poverty and subjective wellbeing outcomes. We will therefore have a lot more to say about how these relations are being contested on the ground and ways in which to bridge the gap between policy and implementation.

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