

Proceeding of the dialogue workshop on the Role of the Academia in Promoting Gender Equality in Ethiopia

Introduction

The Ethiopian Civil Society Organizations in collaboration with Action Aid Ethiopia (AAE) has been undertaking a series of high-level dialogues on Gender equality in Ethiopia. The dialogues were held between participants from key stakeholder institutions and CSOs. This workshop focuses on academic institutions and scholars and their role in promoting gender equality.



OBJECTIVES OF THE WORKSHOP

The core objective of this workshop was to increase the role and contributions of academic institutions and the academia in advancing gender equality in Ethiopia. Besides, as its specific corollary objective, the workshop aimed at reflecting on current efforts and endeavors aimed at promoting gender equality by the academia in Ethiopia, both within, and more so outside the academia; create better understanding and clarity on opportunities and challenges facing the promotion of gender equality in Ethiopia, and the strategies to address these and on the future way forward and strategies to strengthen the Academia's role in furthering gender equality in Ethiopia

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Expected outcomes of the workshop included creating Clarity on existing initiatives, efforts and endeavors on gender equality by the academic community; current challenge and barriers facing the academia in its effort to advance gender equality; increased grasp on the future way forward and avenues for interventions, an interfacing and networking among scholars and academic institutions working in the field increased.

Mrs. Hana Woldegebriel, Program and Development Director, Ethiopian Civil Society Organizations (ECSOC), speaking about the importance of the engagement said academic institutions are expected for one to be places of gender equality and empowerment which others would emulate, and for another, shall be in a position to pro-actively lead the efforts and endeavors of gender equality with scientific research, leadership and outreach activities.

SUMMARY OF THE PROCEEDING OF WORKSHOP



Following remarks by Mrs. Hana, a presentation on the role of the academia in promoting gender equality: Challenges and Opportunities was given by Dr. Sewalem Tsega, associate professor at Addis Ababa University. The presentation was structured into two major parts. The first focused on background and policy framework, analysis and presentation of the roles, opportunities and challenges of Gender Equality in Ethiopia. Dr. Sewalem started by asking if there is any inequality, where, and how we know this.



According to her, inequality does exist in our life and precisely because Gender equality remains to be an agenda for society. Her presentation also outlined the legal and policy frameworks on gender equality, among others, agenda for sustainable development (SDGs) goals (2030), the Dakar framework for action, and the FDRE constitution which states about the equality of women. While progresses made in the development of legal, institutional and policy framework is a step in the right direction, the practical application and implementation of these remains enormously at large. According to her “good policies are thought through up until the implementation stage.” She also commended the timely nature of the theme of discussion. According to her, the theme is timely for two reasons 1) Gender identity systems are being challenged like never before. The idea of a single dominant form of masculinity is increasingly put under spotlight and calls for reform are gaining momentum. 2) COVID-19 pandemic and response measures have exacerbated existing gender inequalities.



In the second part of the presentation, she stated that the role of academic institutions in promoting gender equality

fall in under the auspices of the three core missions of universities notably, teaching and learning, Research, and outreach. The academia produces graduates in the field of Gender and Development at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Universities also conduct different researches on gender that inform policy making. Outreach activities include participating in media, collaborating with CSOs, advocacy, fund raising, participation in different gender related dialogues, networking etc. Talking about the challenges, she noted that limited resources, cultural issues surrounding gender perceptions, the persistence of gender imbalances and pay gaps both at the top and bottom levels of the academic hierarchy, gender segregation across academic disciplines and activities, among others, remain as obstructions. In her concluding remarks, she stated that Gender equality in the academic/ HEIs will result in gender equality in the society. She also emphasized the need to for collaboration and solidarity on gender work in Ethiopia.



During the discussion, participants emphasized for the universities to do more. It was noted that the universities' role in education should not be limited to education within the premises of the campuses. Rather, it shall go beyond the

campus to transform society. Education should not only be limited to providing a degree on Gender Studies. It shall rather focus on socio-cultural transformation and creation of a scientific society. Gender inequality is structural rooted in the structural and super structural foundations. And the value of education, research and community outreach should be in transforming these structural formations and effecting attitudinal change.

In their research and community outreach function, universities are also expected to provide society with a locally rooted and contextually grounded solution. The roles of the academia chiefly lie in showing sustainable and locally rooted solutions. Gender analysis shall also be a key variable that needs to be conducted in all research endeavors. Universities' role in gender research, publication, knowledge dissemination remains a key priority.

On the other hand, the academia is also expected to transform itself as an institutional setting which others would emulate as an example. The working environment within academic institutions was described in itself questionable. Girls in campus are going through difficult periods and often times face sexual harassment. Empowered women within universities also struggle with cultural stigmatization that messes their personal and marital life.



Finally, the workshop was concluded with the closing remarks provided by Dr. Kalewongel. In his remarks, Dr. Kalewongel underlined the needs for the academia to step up its efforts in advancing gender equality as

academic institutions are widely expected to proactively lead the overall effort of socio-economic transformation and change

