

# Proceeding of the High-Level Dialogue Workshop on the Role of Parliament and Parliamentarians in Advancing Gender Equality in Ethiopia

## Introduction

One of the major priorities of the Ethiopian Civil Society Organizations Council is to become a mouth piece to the sector and promptly respond to the demands and needs of its constituent members. Accordingly, the Ethiopian Civil Society Organizations in collaboration with Action Aid (AAE) Ethiopia has been undertaking a series of dialogues on themes of gender equality with various stakeholders in Ethiopia for the past few months.



The report is an account of the engagement held with of Women caucus members of House of People's Representatives of FDRE parliament. More than 142 participants, out of whom 106 Women Caucus and 36 Male Associates and other invited guest took part in the dialogue.

## Overall Objective of the Workshop

The Overall objective of the high-level dialogue workshop was to enhance the contribution of Ethiopian parliamentarians and women's caucus in advancing gender equality and empowerment of women. Specific Objectives included promoting gender transformative approaches in the chores and activities of MPs; share experiences and best practices; identify the challenges, and barriers of MPs in advancing gender equality in Ethiopia. Besides these, the platform was used to unveil two evidence-based studies, notably, a review of gender-based Laws and Policies on the Equal Rights of Women and Violence against Women and Girls (VAWGs), and Impact of Unpaid Care Work on Women". The key objective was to widen and consolidate the capacity of

MPs in their bid of ensuring the appropriate representation, inclusion and mainstreaming of the rights and interest of women in their daily activities.

## Expected Outcomes

The major outcomes anticipated from the workshop were enhancing the overall awareness of women’s MPs and the Caucus to mainstream gender issues across their legislative, oversight, and representation functions. Participating MPs would be equipped with evidence-based knowledge and information, be inspired and motivated to capably and effectively discharge their gender related roles and responsibilities as MPs.

## Summary of the Proceeding of the Workshop



In the first part of workshop, opening remarks were made and two papers were presented. In her opening remark Mrs. Hana Woldegebriel, Program and Development Director, Ethiopian Civil Society Organizations Council, said Members of the Parliament have a key role in promoting gender equality and are generally expected to actively assume and discharge their gender related roles and activities in their daily

chores.

The Chairwoman of FDRE House of People’s Representatives Women’s Caucus, Mrs. Kemia Judin, said that women parliamentarians are expected to gather data and address the challenges of women and girls are facing at the grass root level. She said despite an increase in the representation and participation of women at national and sub-national levels since the political reform in Ethiopia in



2018, women at local level continue to face a number of challenges. She also added that the plight of women cannot be altered with mere reports and conference hall discussions, but credible and concrete measures and actions that make a difference and change the livelihood of women on the ground. For this, she noted, the women's caucus is working in collaboration with the Civil Society Organizations and the media to further the empowerment of women in the country.



The two presentations that followed assessed the role of MPs and the Caucus in Advancing Gender Equality. The first presentation by Dr. Firehiwot Sintayehu, Addis Ababa University, provided an in-depth analysis and presentation of the current condition of Gender equality, the progresses made and remaining challenges and what MPs and the parliament should be doing to promote gender equality. Women MPs have reached 41.3 %. and family planning coverage has become 63.3%. Besides, the 10-year development plan of the country has included clear gender equality goals including raising the representation of women in legislature and leadership positions by 50% by 2029/30, widening of land ownership of landless women by 53 % and increasing the number of women having access to small and micro business and access to credit finance by 50%. There are, however, still interventions needed in areas of unpaid home care work, early marriage, teen pregnancy, gender-based violence etc. In this regard, MPs can partner with Male MPs and CSOs to advance the empowerment of women. Women MPs can lobby for institutionalizations of the quota system, reforming of the electoral to provide more space to women. They can also ensure the inclusion and representation of women voices in the legislative process, oversighting, appointment and budgeting approval functions.

The second presentation provided an overview of the organization profile, activities, contributions and planned activities of the Women's caucus and areas of potential collaboration between the caucus and the Ethiopian Civil Society Organizations Council (ECSOC). The need for cross sectoral collaboration was earmarked as key issue in the realization of the missions and



planned activities of the caucus. Areas of collaboration including capacity building in areas of gender and leadership, emotional intelligence, personal development and policy formulation were identified.

The remainder two papers presented the findings of a study conducted on gender policies and unpaid home work. In the first part, the conditions of women in the economic and social sector, access and use of technology and their situation in Gender Based violence was presented backed and substantiated with figures and facts. Despite progress that have been made to improve access, women continue to disproportionality be excluded from having access to economic and social opportunities and enjoying sufficient access to technology. This forms a violation of their rights. It shatters their dream of realizing their potentially and obstructs the overall effort for development and eradication of poverty. The second presentation, which was stimulating and informative, was on unpaid care work and its repercussions on women. It revealed that rural women spend their time in household chores that are unpaid and more importantly, viewed as not work in itself, and hence the description of domestic workers as “Jobless.”

During the stimulating deliberations that followed a wide range of issues of were raised and discussed. These have included the issue of quote for women, the theory-practice gap, the need for addressing the plight of women at the local level, trafficking of young Girls and women and a number of others.

**Women Quota and the Need for a Legal Framework:** Those countries which are successful in improving the conditions of women are those that have implemented successful quota system and structure. There is a need to make use of the quota system and reserve places for women. However, regarding women there is no legal framework which provides a as institutional basis to the application of quota. The Quota framework is also only applied in the ranks of government appointment. There is no use of quota within the ranks of opposition political parties. The quota system, thus, needs to be consolidated. It shall be expanded both in the ruling party and opposition political parties. While the progresses by the ruling party are

positive and need to be encouraged, the government should strive to develop a legal framework on quota structures for women.,

**Interventions at Grassroots level are Key:** Generally speaking, at the moment the representation of women at the higher level appears to be good. The President of the Republic, for instance, is a woman. Moreover, the number of women representatives in the parliament is also growing. However, much of the plight and problems of women is found at grass root level, and there is a need to take concrete actions on these. Such activities shall not only be based in cities. In this regard, when MPs travel to their constituencies and district divisions, they need to travel with a checklist to scrutinize the situation and the status of women rights on the ground.

**Discrepancy between Policy and practice:** There are a lot of legal and policy provisions. However, the practical enforcement of these to improve the livelihood of women is significantly limited. There is a need to double efforts towards the implementation of existing policies and legal frameworks.

### **More women to positions of Influence**

Despite of all the progresses, there is, still a problem in bringing women to key and influential positions. In this regard, we have some serious problem – we have not been able to bring women into positions of high-level leadership positions of influence. Those women who could change things should come to the fore and be given the opportunity in high level and influential positions

**Human Traffickers and the Plight of Women:** Young girls in Ethiopia are facing a huge challenge. Brokers are increasingly deceiving and trafficking them. There is a need that we take action on this.

**Neef for More Evidence Based Applied Research.** The number of studies currently available is highly inadequate. There is a need to conduct more evidence-based studies. Studies conducted by some scholars are driven by personal considerations of promotion, while others have issues of quality. And hence there is a need for more in-depth and thorough studies and applied research.

**On the need to change the attitudes of women:** There is a need to target and change the attitudes of women. Often times, the biggest challenge in women's empowerment work is changing the attitude and self-perception of women and girls. At times, it is easy to change the views of men rather than women.

**What Should the Parliament, the Caucus, and CSOs do?** There is lack of systematic and an integrated work between CSOs. Many of Civil Society Organization work on attitudinal and behavioral changes. However, there is also a need to work on improving the livelihood and economic standing of people as well. On the other hand, when laws are made, the parliament needs to make sure that it is done in a participatory manner. This does not seem to be the case all the time. The parliament shall ensure that all approved laws are enacted with proper inclusion of the perspectives of women. Besides, although there are changes, there is still inadequate representation and participation of women in leadership positions. This needs to change. Another important gender equality problem in Ethiopia is that girls at lower-level face a number of challenges, especially those girls in school who are coming to the puberty age. When Members of the Parliament visit their constituencies, they shall pay visits to these girls and give them some advices.

