

*FSS Discussion Paper No. 5*

**LAND REDISTRIBUTION AND  
FEMALE-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS:**

**A Study in Two Rural Communities  
in Northwest Ethiopia**

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Institute of Development Research  
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**Forum for Social Studies  
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The opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of FSS or its Board of Advisors.

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACSI	Amhara Credit and Saving Institution
BASIS	Broadening Access and Strengthening Input Market Systems.
CERTWID	Center for Research, Training and Information on Women in Development
CSA	Central Statistical Authority
E.C.	Ethiopian calendar
EARO	Ethiopian Agricultural Research Organization
IDR	Institute of Development research
IFPRI	International food Policy Research Institute
ILRI	International Livestock Research Institute
NGO	Non-governmental organizations
PA	Peasant Association
TGE	Transitional Government of Ethiopia
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

## ABSTRACT

*This paper is an assessment of access to and utilization of productive resources by rural female-headed households. The 1996/97 rural land redistribution carried out by the Amhara Regional Government is taken for comparative examination of access to land by female- and male-headed households. The study, which was conducted two years after the redistribution, looks at the different mechanisms of access to land, the resultant land possessions and the extent of land utilization and control by these households.*

*It was found that while female-headed households had been granted comparatively fair access to land during the redistribution, they did not benefit as much as male-headed households. First, despite the fact that in 1996/97 female-headed households had been given land amounting to 1.14 times that of male-headed households, in 1999 they had only 0.56 times that of the latter. The reasons are many and are discussed at length in the text.*

*Second, many female-headed households (87 percent) could not cultivate their plots and had to sharecrop them out, while only 17 percent of male-headed households had to do this. Many of the women also complained that sharecroppers did not properly manage their plots. Lack of other critical factors of production such as labor, oxen, and credit is the major reason why female-headed households rent out their plots.*

The paper concludes by arguing that land redistribution per se, without other supplementary measures, cannot be expected to bring about equitable and adequate access to land and significant improvements in the livelihoods of the rural poor in general and female-headed households in particular. Legal, cultural and social constraints have to be addressed in order to secure women's fair access to and control over resources. Access to labor, oxen and credit are, among other things, critical elements in the effective utilization of land.

## **1. Introduction**

In this country, the issue of women's equality has become of greater concern than ever before. All important government documents, starting with the Constitution and extending to the environmental policy, have given special attention to women. By 1993, the government had already provided the first national policy on Ethiopian women. Since then, efforts have been made to establish women's affairs offices throughout the government structure. Donor agencies, NGOs, and other development partners as well have shown a heightened interest in this respect. Civil institutions concerned with women's rights, such as the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association, have emerged.

The focus of government policies and agencies working on women's issues appears to be more on women's equality in general, while there is some interest in specific areas, such as women's role as it relates to food production (Frank, 1999; EARO, 1999). Census figures show that Ethiopian women constitute almost half (49.7 percent) of the total population (CSA, 1998). Women also constitute the bulk of the labor force of the country. In rural areas, women are said to contribute 40 percent of all agricultural labor (Frank, 1999), while other sources claim that 50-60 percent of the agricultural activity is carried out by women (Addis, 2000).

Wudnesh (1999), citing a number of studies, points out that in rural Ethiopia, between 50 and 80 percent of the labor force required in crop and livestock production, as well in environmental rehabilitation, is provided by female farmers. She indicates that rural women are actively involved in farming activities. These include: (a) crop production, seed cleaning, land preparation, planting, weeding, applying manure, hoeing, scaring birds, harvesting, preparation of threshing grounds, collecting and piling, winnowing, transporting and storing, food preparation for labor assistance in the field, crop storage preparation and taking care of stored grain; (b) in livestock production, women are involved in cutting grass or processing hay, herding and trekking animals, provision of water, caring for sick or



other animals staying at home, barn cleaning, milking and milk processing. In addition, female farmers generate additional income for their families by producing household items such as mats and baskets, brewing beverages and petty trading.

It is important, however, to note that rural women are heterogeneous. For instance, many of them are married and are wives in male-headed households. These women actively participate in agricultural production though the land is generally registered in their husbands' name. Others are heads of households (divorcees, widowed, unmarried, abandoned, etc.). While there are different meanings given to a female or woman-headed household, it is generally understood as a unit where an adult woman (usually with children) resides without a male partner (Ali, 2000). Sometimes, these households are differentiated as *de jure* and *de facto*. In the context of rural Ethiopia, a *de jure* female-headed household is defined as "a household where the land is owned and managed by a woman, such as in families headed by widows or by single or divorced women," while a *de facto* female-headed household is "a household where a woman is responsible for all aspects of managing the household and the farm due to the absence of a husband." By the year 2000, about 20 percent of the rural landholders were *de jure* female-headed households while it was at the same time estimated that 10-15 percent of rural land was possessed by *de facto* female-headed households (Addis, 2000:15-16). Addis also notes that about 35-40 percent of the land in Ethiopia is mainly managed by women farmers.

The proportion of rural female-headed households is increasing. Dessalegn (1994:5) has noted that the 10 to 15 percent of women membership in peasant associations in the past has increased to an estimated level of 20 to 25 percent. The majority of these female heads in rural Ethiopia are divorcees or widows. For instance, Dessalegn (1994) cites studies conducted at the national level that indicate that virtually all female household heads were widows and divorcees. Micro-level studies show the same trend: it was found that among sample female heads, 65.2 percent in Gojjam (Yigremew, 2000) and 88.3 percent in Wello (Ali, 2000) were divorcees or widows. The high rate of female-headed households in Ethiopia is

assumed to be the outcome of the long civil war and the resulting high internal and external displacement, on the one hand, and crippling famines, and resettlement schemes on the other (Dessalegn, 1994:5; Zenebework and Yared, 2000:30).

Though rural women in general constitute half of the population and provide more or less the same percentage of the labor required, the available evidence indicates that women in general, and female-headed households in particular, are discriminated against: they have less access to and control over productive resources such as land (see, for example, Dejene, 1994, 1999; Bruce *et al.*, 1994; Yigremew, 2000; Etenesh, 1999; Yared, 1997; Frank, 1999; Hadera, 1999; Addis *et al.*, 1998; Zenebework and Yared, 2000; TGE, 1993). It has also been argued that the legal framework, culture, the nature of the division of labor, local officials' biases, lack of assets and smaller size of their families all work to disadvantage rural women.

It was in this context that the 1996/97 land redistribution program of the Amhara Region was formulated and implemented. The Regional authorities claimed that women were the main beneficiaries of the redistribution, and that the redistribution had provided a solution to the economic and social problems of rural women. The policy success was extolled to the extent of claiming that it has relieved women from some degrading activities, reassured their equality, and done away with the sources of all their social problems (Yigremew 1997).

However, while policy makers claim that rural women have been enabled to get their fair share of land and assert that this would lead to the betterment of their lives, there is little evidence that in reality the conditions of women in general, and those of female-headed households in particular, has improved (Yigremew, 1997, 2000).

This paper is an attempt to examine the conditions of rural female-headed households in relation to access to and utilization of productive resources, particularly land. The paper assesses the extent to which female-headed households were granted access to land in the 1996/97 land redistribution program and investigates the factors

affecting the use of and control over land and other productive resources by the households. It is a gender-oriented study comparing the situations of male- and female-headed households.

## **2. Background of the Study**

The paper draws heavily on the author's two rounds of fieldwork conducted in 1997 and 1999 to collect data in two rural communities in the Amhara Region, where land redistribution was carried out in 1996/97. The first study (Yigremew, 1997) focused on the policy, its implementation process, and the outcomes of land redistribution in the Amhara Region (1996/97), while the second was an attempt to assess the different impact of the land redistribution (Yigremew, 2000).

The research was conducted in two *weredas* - Jabi Tehnan and Kuarit, in West Gojjam. Two *kebeles* were selected for the case study - Arbaitu Ensisa, from Jabi Tehnan, and Dinja Tsion, from Kuarit. These are among the surplus grain-producing areas of the Region where the typical *rist* system prevailed until the 1975 land reform. The main sources of information for the first round of the field work were interviews and discussions held with government officials throughout the hierarchy and particularly at the *woreda* and *kebele* levels, members of the different committees established to carry out the policy, political cadres largely involved in implementing the policy, peasants of all categories and of both sexes, including a sample of randomly selected women, as well as the researcher's observations. During the second round of the fieldwork, in-depth interviews with about a hundred informants -both female- and male- household heads- was the main source of data. In both cases, the secondary sources included policy documents, written guidelines, reports, and other relevant material. While the data were disaggregated along gender lines in both studies, in the second study, female household heads that were granted land during the 1996/97 redistribution program constituted just half of the interviewed household heads.

### **3. Literature Review**

The literature on rural women in Ethiopia shows that women are disadvantaged in many respects. They have less access to and control over productive resources than men. This is regardless of their enhanced participation in economic activities. On the average, women have smaller landholdings, smaller households, scarcer labor, less access to education and agricultural extension services, fewer oxen and other livestock assets, less access to farm implements and other services. Moreover, rural women's disadvantaged position in respect of access to resources is compounded by their lack of control over the use and management of such resources. The following discussion focuses on the causes and implications of women's lack of access to these important assets and services.

#### **3.1 Access to Productive Resources**

##### *Access to land*

It is important to note that in the majority of cases the general marriage pattern in highland Ethiopia is monogamous, while the descent system is ambilineal. Women, then, in principle have equal rights with men in terms of resource access, including land inheritance. However, in Ethiopia generally, land is allocated to a household as a unit and in the name of the household head, and in married life, the man is the household head. It is also important to realize that unlike the case of many African societies, where there is intra-household gender division of crop production and land allocation (such as food crop production and fields to women and cash crop production and fields to men) [Davison 1988]), in highland Ethiopia, land is controlled by the husband, while production is a joint venture. This means that women will have direct access to land in their own names only if they are heads of households. In this context, and in this specific study, then, when reference is made to women in relation to land, it means that they are heads of households.

While this is the customary rule, rural women in general are found to have less access to such crucial productive resources. Aspen's 1993 study shows that, regardless of their smaller proportion, female-headed households accounted for 50 percent of the total landless peasant households. Another study by Etenesh (1999), conducted in Ada *wereda*, shows that the average farm size of male- and female-headed households was 2.35 and 1.6 hectares, respectively. Dejene's 1994 findings in his study in east and west Shewa shows the same pattern of holdings. Among 4,415 rural households, where 313 (22 percent) were women, the mean size of holdings was 0.7 and 0.55 hectares for male- and female-headed households, respectively. In their observation on the land policies of the country since the 1975 land reform, Bruce, Hoben, and Dessalegn (1994), arrive at the following conclusion: ". . . [I]t does not appear that land reform improved women's access to land " and that " women remained disadvantaged in regard to using their land." It was also Yared's (1995) finding in North Shewa that female-headed households had less land, and as they did not possess other necessary resources, they did not cultivate the land themselves but rented it out to others. A World Bank study (1998:24-25) notes that in the Amhara Region, while 80 percent of the female heads of households had less than 2 hectares of land and 5 percent had between 2 and 4 hectares, 57 percent of men had less than 2 hectares and 31 percent between 2 and 4 hectares. In two communities in South Wello, it was found that 51.7 percent of female-headed households had holdings of 0.25 to 0.5 hectares, while only 10 percent of male-headed households had this size of holdings. But in the largest holding category of 1.0-1.25 hectare, the proportion was 5 percent and 30 percent for female- and male-headed households, respectively (Ali, 2000).

### *Access to agricultural labor*

The literature also shows that female-headed households generally lack the necessary male labor essential to agricultural production. However, women's lack of agricultural labor is not purely due to their inability to work but a result of the gender division of labor that is significant in the highland agricultural system of the country and the

smaller size of their families. The situation regarding the gender division of labor in the grain-producing highland communities in Ethiopia is similar to Boserup's (1970) 'plow cultivation', where men, assisted by draught animals, use the main farming implement, the plow, while only the manual operations are left to women. The Ethiopian case suggests no difference from the general pattern of gender division of labor helping to reproduce disadvantages for women (see Yared, 1997; Etenesh, 1999; Frank, 1999). Given plow cultivation in the grain-producing areas of the country and the social norms that prohibit women from plowing, rural women face deficiencies in terms of agricultural labor. As a result, a large number of women depend on male labor both for access to resources and for production activities. The smaller family size that is prevalent in the female-headed households may also suggest that women lack the necessary labor force.

#### *Access to oxen and farm implements*

In areas of Ethiopia where plow agriculture is predominant, a pair of oxen is essential for effective farming but as a general rule women here have fewer oxen and farm implements. In a study carried out in Northeast Ethiopia (Tigray, Wello, and part of North Shewa) it was found that 80 percent of female-headed households owned no draught oxen as against 43 percent for male-headed households (Save the Children, 1993). In another study conducted in central Ethiopia (Dejene, 1994), the mean number of draft oxen was 1.6 for male- and 0.93 for female-headed households. Yet another study carried out in central Ethiopia shows that the average number of cattle owned by male- and female-headed households was 6.4 and 4.9 respectively (Etenesh, 1999). In the South Wello study (Ali 2000), 91.7 percent of female-headed households had no oxen at all, while only 26.7 percent male-headed households were found to belong in this situation.

The following could be thought of as possible reasons why female-headed households have limited ownership of oxen. One is the lesser endowment of women with livestock assets as opposed to men. For example, Fafchamps and Quisumbing's research on assets at marriage

(2000a) and on control and ownership of assets within the household (2000b) shows that women bring fewer assets to marriage and take away a smaller share during divorce. In these case studies, the mean value (in Birr) of livestock at marriage was 1,333 for the groom and 300 for the bride. Inherited livestock after marriage was 260 and 80 for the groom and the bride, respectively. The authors argue that if livestock assets remain individually owned during marriage (as is sometimes the case), it was more likely that in the event of divorce such assets would revert back to their previous owners. Relatively smaller landholdings by female-headed households can also be another reason for the smaller number of oxen owned by female-headed households. It could also be thought that as women do not plow and as keeping oxen requires additional labor and resources (such as fodder), women would more likely have no oxen or, at best, own fewer oxen than male-headed households.

#### *Access to extension services*

Women's access to modern technologies and services was found to be even worse. The literature reveals that female farmers are marginalized in extension services and in the process of diffusion of new technologies (Dejene, 1994). Dessalegn (1994) notes that agricultural extension services are "male-oriented", that women, with or without land, "are not expected to attend agricultural extension training programs." Frank (1999) shows that in the Amhara Region, the current extension program is beyond the financial reach of many farmers, but particularly females; there is farm extension but no home extension; there is a stereotypical view among development agents that women farmers are "weak farmers"; hence, women's agricultural information needs are not adequately addressed.

Ali (2000) indicates that in the sample households, 46.7 percent of female-headed and 93.3 percent of male-headed households were using fertilizer. The reasons identified included the following: development agents only sought out landholders; there was a cultural perception that extension programs should address only men; and nearly all development agents being men, so the perception goes, it is

inappropriate for men outside the household to be talking to women alone and, therefore, it is difficult for extension agents to approach women. Hence, women, perceived by local leaders as weak farmers who could not utilize resources as efficiently as men, are denied access to agricultural inputs and technologies.

In this regard, the Ethiopian situation is very similar to Staudt's findings in Kenya (1982:207). She found that bias against women farmers was apparent and commonplace in agricultural policy throughout Africa. The reasons for the bias included the perception of women as traditional, conservative, poverty-stricken, and unwilling and unable to adopt innovations that were promoted by the agricultural administration. She adds: "From a bureaucratic and economic perspective, discrimination might be seen as the most efficient use of scarce resources if preference is extended to those farmers with the cash, land, and propensity to innovate".

#### *Access to rural credit*

The formal agricultural credit services in Ethiopia were, until recently, government monopolies. Currently, as well, government-related regional organizations dominate these services. Credit services are linked to agricultural inputs, such as fertilizer, improved seeds, and pesticides. Therefore, the services are largely associated with endowment with land and other resources necessary for agricultural production. Hence, poor farmers, including the majority of rural women, are marginalized. Even if some of the newly established regional micro-finance institutions claim to serve the rural poor and women, my field experience in two regions (Amhara and the Southern Region) suggests that loans were more often directed to resourceful farmers, and the very few women served by the services were mostly members of well-to-do male-headed families (Yigremew, 2000, de Jong et al., 1999).



### **3.2 Causes of Women's Limited Access to Resources**

The existing literature indicates that the disadvantages experienced by rural women in Ethiopia in terms of access and utilization of resources are varied and complex. These include, among others, the gender division of labor, some cultural values working against women, limited membership in Peasant Associations, the smaller size of women's households, gender biases of local officials, and lack of access to critical resources and services.

#### *Gender division of labour*

In general, the gender division of labour was found to be one of the causes of women's disadvantaged position. Two related dimensions of the division of labour result in women being disadvantaged. One is associated with reproductive and productive activities, the former is assigned more often to women and the latter to men. According to Chafetz (1991), the gender-based division of labour assigns to women the dominant responsibility within the household, while men are assigned the major responsibility in economic or other extra-domestic roles, regardless of their other commitments. Chafetz argues that as the economy and polity (rather than the family) constitute the central institutions of modern societies, this division of labour, priorities, and responsibilities produce power inequalities between men and women. The greater power that accrues to men, in turn, results in a variety of other differences and inequalities, which reinforces the gender division of labour. But the other thing related to this is the asymmetric valuation of activities based on gender criteria. Chafetz notes that the fact that men and women do different work is not tantamount to saying that their work is unequal in value. Division of labour is associated with the unequal ranking and rewarding of tasks as performed by the different gender categories and resulting from power inequality.

The findings of a study conducted in central Ethiopia (Etenesh, 1999) shows that “. . . agricultural knowledge in the area is noticed to be

very much dependent on the cultural ideology that 'women cannot use the plow'. . . . Such gender allocation of agricultural tasks and asymmetrical valuation of farm activities is the outcome of socialisation in determining the way women and men should relate in production." This has made women dependent on male labour for some tasks and has, in turn, resulted in the belief that women could not act as fully independent agents in relation to agricultural production.

Frank (1999), too, notes that in "most communities [in the Amhara Region] the word 'farmer' is defined by someone who can independently engage in the activities of plowing and sowing." Here, as well as in all other agricultural regions in Ethiopia, plowing is generally men's activity. Another study (Yared, 1997) points out that at divorce, elders and local officials often allocate most of the land to the husband, because men were thought to be the 'producers', and it was found that, since women did not plow, they had to give up some of their land. Thus women depend, among other things, on having husbands or grown up sons to strengthen their claim to land.

#### *The patriarchal system prevailing in the grain-producing highlands*

Though ambilineal patterns of descent are the norm in grain-producing highland communities, the real access to family resources and residential benefits are more similar to practices in a patriarchal system. The practices prevailing in the grain-producing areas were also cited as another reason for male dominance. Men are household heads (this was institutionalised by the legal provision in the 1960 Civil Code of the country), and also because of the patrilocal system, wives move to the residential areas of their husbands. This has implications for women's access to land. First, as access to rural land by peasants depends on one's residence in a given Peasant Association's territorial jurisdiction, women forfeit their chances of having access to land. Moreover, as they are expected to go to their husbands' residences, daughters, unlike sons, usually miss out on the allocation of land by the family. In general, young women, divorced

women and even sometimes widowed women without children are considered as transients and not permanent residents of a given area, as a result of which they are not given due attention in land allocation.

Recent studies of Ethiopian rural households by Fafchamps and Quisumbing on assets at marriage (2000a) and on control and ownership of assets (2000b) reveal interesting dimensions of asset holdings at the different cycles of the development of the household. Their study on control and ownership of assets within the household, which includes samples of 1406 households from different regions (Tigray 159, Amhara 412, Oromiya 320, South 426, Other 89), shows that women are in a lower economic position even at the beginning of household formation, which affects their claims at the time of divorce and, hence, for the rest of their lives as heads of households. The researchers note that the newlyweds themselves bring the great majority of the new couple's assets, but with grooms bringing more than 10 times as much start-up capital as brides do. They also note that land and livestock that are inherited after marriage come primarily from the husband's family. Daughters hardly ever inherit anything from their parents.

*Table 1. Mean value (Birr) of assets brought to marriage*

<b>Assets brought to marriage</b>	<b>groom</b>	<b>bride</b>
Value of land received at marriage	500	29
Value of land already owned	1983	66
Inherited land after marriage	967	96

Source: Fafchamps and Quisumbing (2000a)

In their view, the effect of such lower economic status of women in terms of asset possession was reflected in what happens to the disposition of the household assets upon divorce. It can be observed that divorced women in polygamous households are at an even more extreme disadvantage. Even in monogamous households, the

husbands are expected to take the lion's share of the land despite being at fault in causing divorces.

**Table 2. Expectations of currently married couples regarding dispositions of assets upon divorce**

	<u>Land</u>		
	<u>Husband</u>	<u>Wife</u>	<u>divided half/half</u>
<b>a) Disposition upon no-fault divorce</b>			
Monogamous couples	52.6%	2.2%	41.9%
Polygamous couples	68.4%	0.0%	28.1%
<b>b) Disposition upon fault-based</b>			
Husband at fault	41.2%	16.5%	31.9%
Wife at fault (257 observations)	78.6%	0%	11.7%

Source: Fafchamps and Quisumbing (2000b).

The study also found that the size of land with full use rights (by 1027 households, 935 male, 92 female) was 3.54 ha. by male-headed households and 1.82 ha. by female-headed households, while the average for all households was 3.39. This means that female-headed households possessed nearly half of the holdings of male-headed households.

Another source of disadvantage is that land was allocated to the family jointly, and although women could claim land at the time of divorce, in most cases they do not. It is important to note that the Ethiopian case is different from many African countries, where family rights to land for crop use may include such categories as those used by the male compound head, those reserved for the wife or wives (women's fields), and those designated as "common household fields" (Davison, 1988). In Ethiopia, land is registered in the name of the head of the household, whether male or female. As males are household heads in a household of married couples, women are put in a weakened position

when it comes to claiming land rights during divorce or other form of separation.

Yared (1997) argues that women frequently choose not to claim land after divorce. The reasons cited are: first, women do not want to stay in their virilocal residence in close proximity to their ex-husbands and their kin. Secondly, it was an accepted cultural norm for women not to claim land after divorce and enter into another household elsewhere; the men retain the land and marry other women. Thirdly, there was some social disapproval directed against women who successfully claim land and marry other men in the same locale. Men have also been known to intimidate women into abandoning their claim to land, especially if the latter had no relatives to support them. It is this researcher's observation that in some highland Christian communities of Ethiopia, a widowed woman will even face difficulties in remaining in her ex-husband's locality unless she is elderly and has a strong support network or has children. All this means that women leave the area, as a result of which they forfeit their rights of access to land.

#### *Limited membership in Peasant Associations (PAs)*

Since 1975, public policies in Ethiopia have stipulated that access to rural land depends on one's residence within the territorial jurisdiction of a given Peasant Association, as well as membership in such Association. In practice, the head is registered as a member representing the household. Women become members of Peasant Associations only when they become heads of households. In addition, it is necessary to possess land in order to get the attention of PA or *kebele* officials. In an earlier study, Tesfaghiorgis observes that the participation of females in Peasant Associations was insignificant: 5.4 percent in Gojjam and 18 percent in Wollo (quoted in Zenebework, 1982). A decade later, another study confirmed the continuation of the trend and noted that women constituted the highest number of those who were not members of Peasant Associations (Dejene (1994).

It was also found (Bruce *et al.*, 1994) that although in principle women as well as men could be PA members, only women heading households (widows and divorcees) were usually given land as members of the Association. This practice has weakened women's claim to land. Of course, in rural Ethiopia, only tax-paying households are of interest to local administrators, and such households are landholders. Interestingly, *Kebele* demographic statistics are also largely based on this category of peasants.

### *Smaller family size of female-headed households*

Since the land reform of 1975, land redistribution by the government has remained the principal and official means for peasants to have access to land. During the Derg regime, family size was also one important criterion for reallocating land to peasants. It was found then that peasants with larger families had access to more farmland. A micro-level study, for instance, showed that for land size categories of 1.0 to 3.9 *timad*, 4.0 to 5.9, and 6.0 to 11.5 *timad*, the corresponding percentage figures for a household of 1 to 3 members were 66 percent for the first category of land, 30 percent for the second, and 4 percent for the third. While for households with 7-12 persons the proportions were 24 percent for the first land size category, 38 percent for the second, and another 38 percent for the third category (Ege, 1990). Generally, female-headed households were found to have fewer members in their households, thus contributing to their disadvantageous position in the allocation of land (see also Dejene, 1994, 1999; Yared, 1995).

### *Gender biases of local officials*

The gender bias of local officials is also a significant factor in contributing to women's limited access to land. Dejene (1994) reports that Peasant Associations discourage female-headed households and deny them equal access to land during redistribution. PA leaders are afraid that once a woman is given land as a member of the PA, she will then remarry a man with land, and this could result in unfair

possession of land by the household. Yared (1997) notes the same kind of problem. At the time of divorce, elders and local officials allocate most of the children and land to the husband, as men are thought to be the 'producers'. Women were looked at as outsiders in the virilocal area. The same biases were found operating against widowed women; when a husband died, a disproportionately large plot was taken from the deceased household, while no land was taken from a household if the deceased was the wife. This was as a result of the expectation that a widower would marry soon after, while it was socially appropriate for a woman to remain unmarried for a long time, or even forever.

#### *Lack of other critical resources*

Ownership of other resources, such as labor and oxen, was also a necessary condition for one's claims to land to be recognised by officials, and even by family members themselves. As has already been noted, women either have fewer oxen or none at all. However, in the plow agriculture system, a pair of oxen is necessary for effective farming. Lack of male labour is also an important factor affecting female-headed households in getting access to land. Therefore, women without such critical resources are considered, at best as "weak farmers," and often as "non-farmers," which has resulted in marginalizing them when it comes to community land distribution (Frank, 1999).

## **4. Empirical Cases From Two Rural Communities**

### **4.1 The 1996/97 Land Redistribution and Access to Land by Female-Headed Households**

It can be argued that after the fall of the Derg, one of the most contentious policy issues to be determined by the new government was rural land ownership. After some debate around two polarized

views, one pro-private and the other (mainly the government and the party in power) pro-state ownership, the latter view gained prominence and was included in the 1995 constitution.

The 1995 Federal Constitution provides:

The right to ownership of rural land and urban land, as well as of all natural resources, is exclusively vested in the State and in the peoples of Ethiopia. Land is a common property of the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia and shall not be subject to sale or to other means of exchange (Art. 40 sub-art. 3).

Sub Articles 4 of the same article also states the following about peasants: "Ethiopian peasants have right to obtain land without payment and the protection against eviction from their possession." These constitutional provisions show that no change has been made in this respect from the policies of the previous regime.

Article 35, sub-article 7 of the Constitution also provides that

Women have the right to acquire, administer, control, use and transfer property. In particular, they have equal rights with men with respect to use, transfer, administration and control of land. They shall also enjoy equal treatment in the inheritance of property.

Article 52(d) further provides that regional governments have the power and responsibility "to administer land and other natural resources in accordance with Federal laws." The Federal rural land administration law was enacted on the 7th of July 1997 (Proclamation No. 89/1997).

However, before the enactment of the law in 1997, the Council of the Amhara National Regional State promulgated a law which provided for the readjustment of rural land holdings on 5 November 1996 (*A Proclamation to Provide for the Reallocation of the Possession of Rural Land in the Amhara National Region, Proclamation No. 16, 1996*, and its amendment, *Proclamation No. 17, February 1997*). The



proclamation stressed, among other things, the need for redressing the problem of inequity in landholdings created by the land redistribution practices under the Derg regime. After land redistribution, government officials, government and party documents and the mass media all confirmed the successful achievements of all the goals of the new policy. It was stated that out of the 756,809 peasant households which had applied for land, 547,087 (72.3 percent) were allotted land, while 209,722 (27.7 percent) failed to benefit (Yigremew, 1997).

Although the policy did not pay special attention to rural women, the success of the policy was more emphasized by referring to the number of rural women who received land and the significance of that to their livelihoods. The success was also contrasted with the dire conditions of rural women in the region. It was stated, for instance, by the Amhara Region Women's Affairs Office that there were about 6.3 million females living in the Amhara region, out of which 18 to 20 percent were heads of households. About 90 percent of working-age women were engaged in informal employment (*medebegna y'althone sira*). There were about 13,453 women prostitutes in the rural areas of the Region (Yigremew, 1997).

Using this scenario as background, it was stated by the Regional Government that among those who got land through the 1996/97 land redistribution program, 129,682 (22.6 percent) were poor women. It was also believed that redistribution would provide a solution to the economic and social problems of women. Officials affirmed that the redistribution had also done away with those activities that lower the dignity of women, had eradicated all causes of their social problems and reassured their equality with men. Their possession of land has also enabled them to 'get married' (Yigremew, 1997).

My previous studies (1997, 2000) in the two rural *kebeles* confirmed that women (and these are largely household heads) had been given land on more or less equal basis as men (**Tables 3 and 4**). For example, during the first round study, it was found that in Arbaitu Ensisa *Kebele*, out of the 306 women who applied for land, 199 (65 percent) got some, while the rest 107 (35 percent) did not get any. The percentage for men is 69 and 31, respectively. The male-female ratio

of applicants in percentage was 62 to 38 and that those who got land was 60 to 40. On the average, women were allotted 2.03 *timad*, while men got 1.94 *timad*. The picture was even better (as would be shown later) in the second round of the study, in which 50 percent of the sampled households were female-headed. The outcome of the reallocation in Arbaitu Ensisa Kebele, Jabi Tehnan wereda in 1996/97 is presented below.

**Table 3. Successful and failed applicants for land**

Applicants	Men		Women		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Total number of applicants	469	61	306	39	775	100
Applicants who got land	325	62	199	38	524	100
Applicants who didn't get land	144	57	107	43	251	100

Source: Yigremew, 1997.

**Table 4. Distribution of different plots to the new possessors**

Size of reallocated land ( <i>Timad</i> )	Men applicants		Women applicants		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
4	5	100	0	0	5	100
3	71	58	51	42	122	100
2	149	59	102	41	251	100
1	100	68	46	32	146	100
Total	325	62	199	38	524	100
Average	1.94		2.03		1.97	

Source: Yigremew, 1997.

Note: 1 *timad* is approximately equivalent to 0.25 ha

A similar trend was reported in one study conducted in three *weredas* in central Ethiopia, with a sample of 180 households, of which 45

percent were female-headed. It was concluded that, in terms of access to resources, particularly with respect to the availability of farmland, there has not been a significant difference between male and female-headed households (Addis *et. al.*, 1998).

#### **4.2. Beyond Land Redistribution: Female-Headed Households and the Dynamics of Access to Land, its Utilization and Control**

During the second round study, for which nearly 100 households (92 valid observations) who got land during the 1996/97 land redistribution were randomly selected in the two communities, female-headed households were given more attention. They constituted half of the sample. What follows is the outcome of the two studies regarding access to and control over critical resources, such as land, oxen, labour, and rural credit by female-headed households.

##### *Some characteristics of respondents from the 1999 study*

The total number of the household heads selected for the study (valid observations) was 92, and the average age of both the male and female household heads was 30 years (Table 5). This lower average age seems to be the result of the purposive sampling of those young households, which constituted the large majority of those who got land during the 1996/97 redistribution.

*Table 5. Number and mean age of respondents in the two rural communities*

<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Mean age (years)</b>
Men	46	50	30
Women	46	50	30
Total	92	100	Average 30

Despite the same average age, women's access to education was found to be extremely limited compared to men. As **Table 6** shows, the illiteracy rate for women was 82.6 percent while it was 39.1 percent for men. This shows that women's illiteracy rate is more than twice that of men. However, for elementary and higher levels of education the proportions were 30.5 percent and 10.9 percent for men and women, respectively, showing that there were nearly three times more educated men at these levels than women.

**Table 6. Educational status of respondents**

Educational Status	Men		Women		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Illiterate	18	39.1	38	82.6	56	60.9
Reading and writing	14	30.4	3	6.5	17	18.5
Elementary level *	9	19.6	4	8.7	13	14.1
Above elementary level	5	10.9	1	2.2	6	6.5
Total	46	100	46	100	92	100

\* 1 - 6 Grade

**Table 7** shows that despite the same average age of both men and women household heads (30 years), 91 percent of men were married and none were widowed. But there was a high proportion of women (65.2 percent) who were divorced and widowed. This is in line with the findings of other studies already mentioned. It was also found that there were some 5 women (10.9 percent) who were never married. However, as **Box 2** shows, this does not necessarily mean that they had no children.

**Table 7. Marital Status of respondents**

Status	Men		Women		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Married	42	91.3	7*	15.2	49	53.3
Single	3	6.5	5	10.9	8	8.7
Divorced	0	0	18	39.1	18	19.6
Widower/d	1	2.2	12	26.1	13	14.1
Abandoned	0	0	4	8.7	4	4.3
Total	46	100	46	100	92	100

\* These constitute a kind of *de facto* heads of households.

Again, regardless of the disproportionate situation in terms of marital status, on the average women had the same number of children (2.22), many of whom were young, indicating a high dependency ratio in women households (Table 8).

**Table 8. No. of children residing in the family**

Number of Children	Male-headed HHs	Female-headed HHs	TOTAL	
			Number of HHs	Number of Children
0	6	6	12	0
1	7	9	16	16
2	16	13	29	58
3	9	9	18	54
4	5	6	11	44
5	2	2	4	20
6	1	1	2	12
Total	46	46	92	204
Average	2.22	2.22	2.22	

One of the common developments in the countryside is the rapid increase in the number and diversity of rural indigenous organizations.

It was found, (Yigremew, 1999) that, in the two communities, the number of churches, *iqubs* (rotating saving and credit associations), *iddirs* (associations engaged mainly in burial and related services), and *mahibers* (semi-religious associations also important in self-help activities) was increasing rapidly. For instance, until recently, *iddirs* were not known in these communities, but in 1999 there were 14 *iddirs* in the two *kebeles*. These *iddirs* function mainly as burial societies, but some also assist needy members in providing labor and in other ways. People told the author that *iddirs* became necessary mainly as a result of the frequent and increased death of people by malaria since the epidemic of 1991. It is also interesting to note that there were 44 *mahibers* in the two communities. These organizations provide a kind of insurance service to members. Membership is also an indicator, to some extent, of social and economic status.

**Table 9. Membership of men and women in indigenous organizations**

Members	Membership									
	both in <i>iddir</i> & <i>mahiber</i>		in <i>iddir</i> only		in <i>mahiber</i> only		Not member in any		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Men	21	50	9	21.4	7	16.7	5	11.9	42	49.4
Women	9	20.9	10	23.3	5	11.6	19	44.2	43	50.6
Total	30	35.3	19	22.4	12	14.1	24	28.2	85*	100

\* Valid observations

In these communities, not to belong to one of the organizations is considered, among other things, as an indicator of destitution. A woman who gave up her membership due to the inability to pay her dues expressed her feeling thus: “*weg ma'iregen ka'tahu assir amete naw.*” which literally means “It has been ten years since I lost my

dignity and my status.” However, mainly because of lack of money and other resources a lot of women could not benefit from the services the organizations provide. When asked why they were not members, they replied: “What have I to pay/contribute!” Hence, as indicated in **Table 9**, 44.2 percent of women belonged to none of the organizations, while for the men the figure is less than 12 percent. Whereas 50 percent of the men were members of both *iddir* and *mahiber*, the percentage for the women was only 20.9.

A more interesting situation, though not peculiar, was that female-headed households adopted more diversified livelihood strategies than male-headed households (**Table 10**). This situation, however, is consistent with national findings (Dejene, 1994; Central Statistics Authority, 1985) and the majority of African cases (Bay, 1982). **Table 10** indicates that only 11 percent of women reported that they exclusively depended on farming, while 43.5 percent of men did. Women’s engagement in petty trading is more than four times (28.2 percent) that of men (6.55 percent), and nearly 11 percent of women were engaged in farming, petty trading and casual day labor, while none of the men reported such combination of livelihood activities. Women engage in petty trading, including selling green grass, grain, firewood, cotton, local beer and other beverages. They also engage in both agricultural and urban paid work, including fetching water.

**Table 10. Major means of livelihood**

Livelihood	Men		Women		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Farming only	20	43.5	5	10.9	25	27.2
Farming and day labor	23	50	23	50	46	50
Farming and petty trade	3	6.5	13	28.2	16	17.4
Farming + day labor + petty trading	0	0	5	10.9	5	5.4
Total	46	100	46	100	92	100

The recognition of women's diversified activities has important policy implications, as it points to possible areas of interventions in support of women's livelihoods.

*The dynamics of access to land, utilization and control*

Despite the different methodologies used for the two studies I undertook, a pattern of land allocation similar to that in the 1997 study was also found in my second round fieldwork in 1999, which was aimed at assessing the impact of the redistribution. As **Table 11** shows, average land size acquired by women through the redistribution was 1.86 *timad*, while it was 1.63 *timad* for men. Twenty-nine women (63 percent) got two or more *timad* of land while the number of men who got the same amount was nineteen (41 percent).

**Table 11. Land allotted during the 1996/97 land redistribution**

Applicants	Size of allotted land (timad)							Average	Total
	4	3	2	1.5	1	0.5			
Men	0	12	7	4	15	8	1.63	46	
Women	1	11	17	4	4	9	1.86	46	
Total	1	23	24	8	19	17	1.78	92	

As can be observed from **Table 12**, peasants' attitudes towards the quality of land show that there was no significant variation, though 28.3 percent of the men as against 17.4 percent of the women reported that their plots were of poor quality. The figures for average quality were 13 percent and 21.7 percent for men and women, respectively. Moreover, even though more than half of each group reported that their plots were of poor quality, the difference between the men and the women groups was not significant.



**Table 12. Peasants' attitude towards the quality of the land received during the 1996/97 redistribution**

Quality	Men		Women		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Good	13	28.3	8	17.4	21	22.8
Average	6	13	10	21.7	16	17.4
Poor	27	58.7	28	60.7	55	59.8
Total	46	100	46	100	92	100

However, access to land and its utilization are not limited to and guaranteed by land redistribution alone. After two years of land redistribution, the male-headed households had augmented their holdings while female-headed ones had lost some of their allotted plots. As Table 13 shows, although women had on the average received relatively larger plots of land during redistribution, in the final analysis, they were found holding less land than the men.

This shows that redistribution is only one means of getting access to land and that men have other means of acquiring land, such as purchasing, renting, sharecropping, gifts, etc., that are not equally available to women. Etenesh (1999) has found that in Ada *wereda*, central Ethiopia, access to land through such means as purchase, inheritance, gifts by family, allocation by government and renting, were used by male-headed households, while only the last two - government allocation and renting - by female-headed households. The same is true in our study. Although field studies in the two communities show that female-headed households were granted equal - or even a little more - land during the redistribution, they continued to have smaller holdings than male-headed households.

**Table 13. Total average landholding and means of acquisition 1999 (in timad)**

Means of acquisition	Men	Women	Total average
Acquired during the 1996/97 redistribution	1.63	1.86	1.78
Acquired at other time and/or by other means	1.91	0.13	0.97
Total average holding	3.54	1.99	2.77

Women not only do not have limited access to land but they also, for different reasons, lose their plots previously allotted to them. Here is a case reported by a widowed woman.

**Box 1. Widowed woman, 25, with one son who got 3 timad of land during the 1996/97 land redistribution**

“We had land when I was married, but when my husband died another previous wife, who also had one son like me, appropriated all the land. I appealed to the *Kebele*, but the Chairman of the *Kebele* was her relative, so they supported her and I lost all the land.”

Moreover, as female-headed households in general do not have oxen (see, **Table 17**), and as they generally do not plow, they are forced to sharecrop their land. As can be seen from **Table 14**, while 87 percent of the women reported that they had rented out (sharecropped) their plots, 82.6 percent of the men were cultivating their own plots. Among those 13 percent of women reported as cultivating their plots, most did not have their own oxen, and none of them reported that they themselves did the plowing. In order to get their land cultivated, women either have their father, son, or other male relative to plow their land, or they provide labor to someone with oxen in exchange for the plowing he does for them. Some also reported that their

associations (mainly *mahibers*) plow women's land by way of providing assistance. Moreover, it was found that what women cultivated through such arrangements was their *guaro* (homestead), not their plots located further away from their homestead.

*Table 14. Possession and cultivation of land\**

Mode of cultivation	Men		Women		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
'Owner'-cultivated	38	82.6	6	13	44	47.8
Sharecropped/tenant-cultivated	8	17.4	40	87	48	52.2
Total	46	100	46	100	92	100

\* Some plots were kept idle.

However, even if one assumes that female-headed households have been granted a fair share of land through the land redistribution program, the control and utilization of land still appears to be a critical problem. Sometimes, poor and powerless women are denied access by the powerful, and they become victims of gender-based violence. The following case illustrates the problem.

**Box 2. A 30 year old woman, never married but has 2 children from 2 fathers; no livestock, depends on casual day labor and sale of firewood for her livelihood, and who got 2. 5 timad in the redistribution.**

“I was given good land in 1997 and I got 70 kilos of teff. In 1997/98 I gave it to another sharecropper; he is kind of a rebel and he rented my land to another sharecropper. He denied me the share. When I asked him, he told me to file an application if I wanted to. I took my case to the *Kebele*, which gave me a *metria* (summons) but I was afraid to give it to him. When I asked other people to sharecrop it, all were scared, so now it is fallow. Now, I am crying. The fathers of both children do not help me. Of course, I do not know one of them. It was one night when I could not come back from a distant market because it was too late to return home. I paid rent and slept in a house. Somebody raped me at night in the house and he left early in the morning. That day I conceived the child.”

Those who continued to have access to their plots could not benefit much from their holdings either. For the years 1996/97 to 1998/99, on the average, about 19 percent of women’s plots did not produce any crops while about 7 percent of men reported such failure (Table 15). A few women also reported that they did not know the conditions of their plots in 1998/99.

**Table 15. Cultivation and yield of the newly allocated land since the redistribution**

Condition of plots	Respondents					
	1989 E.C.		1990 E. C.		1991 E. C.	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Cultivated and some yield	93.5	76.1	91.3	78.3	93.5	69.6
No yield/not cultivated	6.5	19.6	8.7	19.6	6.5	17.4
Half-no-yield/not cultivated, half-cultivated and some yield	-	4.3	-	2.2	2.2	6.5
Condition not known	-	-	-	-		6.5

However, given their low status, as well as dependence on male labor and guardianship, women could not have effective bargaining power and control in their relations with sharecroppers. For example, a divorced woman had the following complaint (Box 3).

**Box 3. Divorced woman, 28, with 4 children and who got 2 timad of land during redistribution**

“ Last year I got less than one *madaberia teff*, (less than 50 kilos); then the sharecropper asked me to sell the land to him but I refused. Consequently, on *Hamle 12*, long after the planting season was over, he informed me that he would not cultivate my land. It was too late and I did not succeed in my attempt to find another tenant. This year, I gave it to another sharecropper.”

**Table 16** also shows that women had lots of complaints. Four women have been denied access, and another four said that their plots were encroached upon. In contrast, only one man reported that he was involved in a land boundary conflict.

**Table 16. Complaints of women about the management of and access to their plots**

Complaint	N	%
No fertilizer applied	22	47.8
Not properly worked	19	41.3
Border violated	4	8.9
Access denied	4	8.9

About 48 percent of the women complained that tenants did not apply fertilizer. This was, however, partly because of women’s inability to contribute their share toward the purchase of the inputs. About 41.3

percent reported that their plots were not properly cultivated (not prepared, planted, weeded, harvested, etc. on time).

### 4.3. Access to Other Critical Resources

#### *Oxen ownership*

Despite the crucial role of oxen in the intensive plow-cultivation system of the area, women had relatively fewer access to this factor of production (Table 17).

*Table 17. Oxen ownership*

Peasants	Number of oxen owned							
	None		1 ox		2 oxen		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Men	13	28.3	30	65.2	3	6.5	46	50
Women	42	91.3	3	6.5	1	2.2	46	50
Total	55	59.8	33	35.9	4	4.3	92	100

Though nearly 60 percent of the total respondents had no oxen at all, the figure was 91.3 percent for women. Again only 6.5 percent of the women had one ox as against 65.2 percent of the men. Although there were insignificant amount of loans given to the peasants by the *Wereda* Agriculture Offices (see Table 20 and 21), none were for buying plow oxen. The Amhara Credit and Savings Institution had a short-term loan policy, but it does not give loans for the purchase of plow oxen at all.

In 1997, the Amhara Region Agriculture Bureau noted that 26 percent of all farmers in the region had no oxen, and this had been one of the constraints in the effort to enable the poor peasants to participate in the extension program. The Bureau proposed to provide loans for the purchase of plow oxen to 15 to 20 selected poor farmers every year in

each *Wereda*. Unfortunately, the criteria for eligibility for the loans included possession of at least 0.5 hectare (2 *timad*) of farmland and a minimum household size of 4 members. Although I had not come across such loan services in my 1999 fieldwork, given their disadvantaged position, I would assume it would have been difficult for many of the women to have access to credit services.

#### *Access to credit*

Lack of access to financial resources was another serious problem of female-headed households in the study area. Seasonal cash shortage, for instance, could lead to unfavorable dealings with sharecroppers. It has been noted that among the reasons why fertilizer was not applied on the plots of female-headed households, one was that they could not contribute their share to pay for the input. Lack of financial resources could even result in losing one's land rights, as peasants have to pay land tax to remain landholders. In one of the communities under study, a few peasants had reported to the *kebele* administration that they would return their newly acquired plots to the authorities as they could not pay their taxes. At other times, *kebele* officials themselves ask landholders to pay their taxes or return the land to the *kebele*. Here is the case of an informant who was threatened that she would lose her land unless she paid her tax (Box 4).

***Box 4. Divorced woman (3 times), 20 years old, with no child, no livestock, who sells local beverages, and who received 2 timad of land during the 1996/97 redistribution***

“The land I got is poor. In 1989 *teff* was planted but there was no yield. In 1990 it was Niger seed that was planted, but no yield again. Now it is fallow. People said the land was poor, so no one wanted to plow it. I used to pay the land tax by selling *tella* [local beer], but now there is no market for *tella* so I could not pay the tax. Because of this, the *Kebele* officials have warned me not to cultivate the land; I think they will take it away.”

The formal rural credit services in the area are very limited, and credit is given for specific purposes. Their sources are *Wereda* Agriculture Offices and the regional Amhara Credit and Savings Institution (ACSI). Loan policies and administration are very stringent and bureaucratic, and services are very limited and virtually inaccessible to poor peasants.

In the two *Weredas* where fieldwork was conducted in 1999 (Yigremew, 2000), less than one-third of the *Kebeles* were reached by ACSI. In the two *kebeles*, on the average, 52.5 and 16.5 per cent of peasants were given credit from ACSI and the *Wereda* Agricultural Offices, respectively in 1998/99. Moreover, among the respondents interviewed, only 9.8 percent were able to get some credit from ACSI. Loans were short-term, particularly those of ACSI, where the longest loan period was one year.

Poor women practically could not have access to these services. As shown in **Table 18**, only 6.5 percent of the women respondents were able to have access compared to 13 percent of the men. About 71 percent of those poor women did not apply for credit at all. During discussions I had with them, many noted that they were afraid of the debt risk, but others complained that there was discrimination against the poor and the credit scheme was not 'meant for them'. Some of the responses were: "I am poor, and I know that the poor will not get it;" "The *awaj* (policy) said credit was not to be given to wood sellers, for how would they repay it;" "I did not deserve it; I saw no *setegna adari* [single women who make their living by selling some alcohol, etc.] getting it;" "I heard that it was for those who had good land;" "I know nothing about how to go about it."



**Table 18. Access to credit from the Amhara Credit and Savings Institution (ACSI)**

Applicants	Those who got credit		Those who applied but could not get it		Those who did not apply at all		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Men	6	13	13	28.3	27	58.7	46	50
Women	3	6.5	10	21.7	33	71.3	46	50
Total	9	9.8	23	25	60	65.2	92	100

Though ‘the poorest of the poor’, but ‘especially women’, were targets of such credit services on paper, on the ground, it was found that only those resourceful, male-headed households and female peasants in male-headed households had access. It was somehow tricky that the Amhara Credit and Savings Institution’s (ACSI) reports (and charts put on the wall) boasted that a large proportion of their clients were women. For instance, the ACSI reports for 1991 E.C. showed that 82.8 percent of those who got credit in *Arbaitu Ensisa Kebeke* and 89.4 percent in *Dinja Tsion* were ‘women’ (Table 19). However, closer examination of the composition of the women who got credit in *Dinja Tsion Kebele* revealed that 59.6 percent of them were wives in male-headed households, and only 25.5 percent were women heads of households.

**Table 19. Access to credit from the ACSI, Arbaitu Ensisa Kebele, 1991 E. C.**

Borrower	No. of borrowers	%
Men	10	17.2
Women	48	82.8
Total	58	100

During detailed discussions with officials and informants, it was found that, first, those male-headed households that received credit in the name of wives were endowed with better assets, such as land and oxen, and were not poor; second, wives who received credit in their name were not real actors in terms of managing and controlling the loan. According to women heads of households, the main reason for such discrimination against female heads was their risky economic status, as they lack oxen and other assets, which would have been used as collateral (though collateral was not officially stated as a requirement).

*Table 20. Access to credit from the Wereda Agriculture Office, Dinja Tsion Kebele, 1991 E. C.*

Borrower	Number of borrowers	Average holdings of farmland/timad	Average oxen
Men	15	3.43	1.23
Women	-	-	-

In the case of credit from the *Wereda* Agriculture Offices, in 1991 E. C., no women got credit in *Dinja Tsion kebele*, while the proportion was only 11.1 percent in *Arbaitu Ensisa* (**Tables 20 and 21**). In addition, it can be seen that those who got credit from the *Wereda* Office had land and oxen.

*Table 21. Access to credit from the Wereda Agriculture Office, Arbaitu Ensisa Kebele, 1991 E. C.*

Borrower	Number of borrowers	%
Men	16	88.9
Women	2	11.1
Total	18	100

### *Access to male labor, education and social networks*

There was a high proportion women who were divorced (39 percent) and widowed (26 percent) while there were no divorced men and only 2.2 percent were widowed. This shows a shortage of male labour required for agricultural activities. Moreover, despite this disparity in marital status, female-headed households had on the average the same number of children (2.22) as male-headed households. As many of the children were young there was a high dependency ratio in female-headed households.

Female-headed households were also found to have less social networks. Though membership in indigenous institutions was an important means of insurance and support, about 44 percent of female-headed households were not able to join any of the *iddirs* and *mahibers*. In general, during discussions, many women expressed the view that they did not believe their newly acquired plots would change their lives. The smaller size and poor quality of the plots were among the causes for such pessimism.

#### ***Box 5. Complaints by a 35-year-old divorced woman***

I have divorced six years before. Since then I live as female household head. I have 4 children who are with me since the divorce. At the time of my divorce, I requested my share of land. But although all the children remained with me, my ex-husband refused to give me land. He has never given me even 5 cents. He lives his own life. I have two sheep, and 1.5 *timad* land in two plots. One of the plots I received in 1989 E. C. (1996) is of very poor quality and no one wants it. As a result, it remained idle for the last two years. Now it is given to a sharecropper. The *kebele* officials have exempted me from paying the land tax. I have never asked for official loans, I am a member of none of the indigenous organizations. . . . No one assists me and in the future, I would like to get married.

## **5. Conclusion and Some Suggestions**

It is important to realize that the situation of female-headed households, particularly with regard to access to productive resources and their utilization deserves special attention. Poverty reduction, food production, social equality, and other development goals require explicit measures that address the gender-intensified disadvantages faced by Ethiopian women. Promoting equality between women and men is easier said than done. Policies alone are not a panacea for women's problems. Despite all the new policy initiatives and institutional measures, the condition of Ethiopian women does not seem to be improving.

Rural development programs in this country since the Derg extol the importance of land redistribution in bringing about development, social equity and in addressing women's gender-specific constraints. However, in reality, this is not the case. First of all, very often the land that female-headed households have received is very small. Given the low productivity of the land, and the small size of their households, it is difficult to produce adequate food for survival. Secondly, given the diversified mechanisms of getting access to land, land redistribution carried out only once cannot bring about social equity in the long run and will not even guarantee continuous access to the allotted land and its utilization. This is because first, land redistribution is only one means of getting access to land, and second and more importantly, it cannot even guarantee the continuous possession and use of the land allotted. Our case study showed that while men augmented their holdings using a number of supplementary mechanisms, women could not even control and utilize those plots allocated to them during the redistribution. Nor do women have the same access to social institutions that would allow them to augment their landholdings outside of official redistribution. For example, despite the traditional and legal conception of daughter's equality to sons in terms of resource access from the family and other sources, inheritance and gifts are more often channeled to boys than girls.

Thirdly, land is only one of the important factors of production. Given the complementary nature of those different factors of production such as labor, oxen, and capital in the context of Ethiopian agriculture and which are not adequately accessible to female-headed households, access to a small piece of land alone does not guarantee any improved livelihood. This study has shown that productivity on women's plots has been hampered partly because of lack of access to critical inputs like working capital.

Rural women's disadvantage in Ethiopia particularly in relation to access, utilization and control of productive resources is caused by a complex set of interactive factors. Ideology and power play key roles in such unfair relations. It was found that women could not even utilize their plots because some of them were denied access. This is a result of women's lower status in the society and lack of secure legal protection. The law by itself does not do much unless it is enforced and the social dimensions of its implementation are also given due attention.

Women also could not work their plots because they lacked male labor and other necessary resources. The gender norm, among other factors, prohibits women from working on their plots in the same way as men. Women could not have access to rural credit mainly because they did not have the necessary assets (good land, movable property, good houses, etc.) that *de facto* serve as collateral. Although, at the policy level, poor women were targets of such rural services, in practice those reported on the documents and charts as 'women' were found to be the names of wives in well-to-do and male-headed households.

As Chafetz (1991:78) has argued, power and ideology seem to control the balance in the gender relations in the case under consideration. Power, which in this case is men's ability to exact compliance by way of controlling resources, and to impose values, norms, standards of judgment and situational definition on women; and the gender ideology that legitimates male power and justifies male advantage by "explaining" why and how males and females are different and therefore have different, typically unequal rights, obligations,

restrictions and rewards. These two- power and ideology- are crucial mechanisms that translate gender norms and differentiation into female disadvantage. It was found that rural women in the case study areas have developed a kind of subordinate feeling in their relations with men. The common expression that a woman is discriminated against simply because “she is a woman,” reflects such attitudes.

Based on this study, it can be tentatively suggested that the betterment of rural women requires more practical and specific measures in addition to policy commitments.

In the case of access to and control over land, legal, social, and cultural constraints need to be addressed. Women’s rights to land could be better enhanced if women had independent title in their own name which would make it possible for them to retain the land in case of marital breakdown (Zenebework and Yared, 2000). It can be suggested that even co-registration of holdings, for instance, rather than by heads of households alone may foster more effective recognition of women’s rights to land. This is because frequently women forfeit their rights when they are separated from their husbands by divorce or other means and become heads of households. In addition, the law should allow some flexibility in terms of residential criteria of land rights as social norms sometimes prohibit divorced or widowed women to remain in their ex-husband’s locality.

The main constraints facing women in the use of their plots are shortage or lack of other factors of production particularly labor, oxen, and capital. Hence, they require practical and specific measures to enable them to have access to such critical resources. It was found, for instance, in the fieldwork that there was no credit available for the purchase of oxen for traction power which was one of the critical constraints facing poor women. Given the existing business-like credit schemes under structural adjustment and an underdeveloped capital market, it can be argued that poor female-headed households will be discriminated against in terms of access to credit for capital and inputs like oxen and fertilizer. Therefore, it will be important to encourage the development of credit institutions that specifically address rural

women's needs. In this respect, it would be important to draw some lessons from other developing countries.

While credit may be one of the solutions for lack of capital and other factors and inputs, other ways should also be explored to enable female-headed households to have access to labor required for production. Such mechanisms may include means of getting male labor (by ways of exchange of resources, for example) or encouraging women to do the work by themselves using improved technology. Mechanisms should be sought and introduced in the rural areas how women could have access to oxen and male labor using effectively other resources they own (for example, their labor, crop residues and other animal feed like grass from their plots, and others).

It is also important that special attention be given to the protection and enforcement of women's rights. The cultural and social predicaments of women have to be addressed in order to enable women to claim their rights. Mechanisms that would enable women to have access to oxen and male labor in exchange for other resources that they own should be sought. For instance, there is a need for a mechanism that ensures women's right to land use in case of divorce. Currently, the legal provision is not largely made practical because of residential requirements for land rights and the social norm and practical difficulties women encounter in living in their ex-husbands' localities. In addition to the possibility of establishing special institutions for women's issues, it is also necessary to provide gender education.

In terms of livelihood strategies, it is important to note that there are activities that are more practiced by women than men. This case study and other different studies have shown that women are more entrepreneurial than men in some areas as exhibited by their involvement in petty trade and diversified livelihood strategies. Therefore it is also important to study and identify women's livelihood strategies and design support projects accordingly.

Special attention should also be paid to other areas of technological development like the development and supply of improved tools and implements for women that will increase their agricultural

productivity and ease their heavy work burden. It would also be necessary to seek some support for women in the areas of child rearing and other reproductive responsibilities so as to enable them increase their productivity. Home and other family services like kindergarten are some examples. But some legal and administrative measures are also important to minimize the unfair burden on women in terms of responsibilities to child rearing. Social services in the areas of health and education are also necessary for women's better future. This could be supplemented by easing women's work burden through improved access to water, energy, childcare and other services.

Organizationally, it was found in the fieldwork that women did not have the necessary institutional prerequisites to enhance their interests and protect their rights. For instance, although those women affairs units were provided by the 1993 national policy on women, they were absent (until mid-1999) at the *wereda* and *kebele* levels where the actual duties of implementing policies are located. Moreover, efforts towards establishing independent women's organizations have not yet started. Therefore, it is imperative that women establish their own organizations and strengthen their capacities at the local level. It would also be important to explore any relevant experiences of other societies in order to draw lessons that could enhance the process of gender-equitable development.

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