

Challenges and Opportunities of Women Political Participation in Ethiopia

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Women's political participation has been recognized internationally as an important measure of the status of women in any particular country. Hence, in recent years, women's participation in politics and decision-making has received significant attention across the world. However, women remain seriously underrepresented in decision-making positions. The central objective of this study is to examine challenges and opportunities of women political participation in Ethiopia. To this end qualitative research methodology was employed. Data was collected from secondary sources mainly from published journal article, books and report of government and non-government organization. The finding of the study shows that different casual factors such as; economic, religious, social and cultural factors contributed to women's poor political participation in the country. The study further revealed that political participation allow women to address their basic problems and needs in their community and ensures the openness, real fight against rent-seeking, accountability, political commitment, political leadership, and political responsiveness of the existing national, regional, districts, and local levels. It is true that more than half percent of the world's population are women. But, they lack access to political decision making as compared to their counter parts at all levels of government. So that women's equal participation in decision-making and politics is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy, but a necessary pre-condition for women's interests to be taken into account.

Keywords: Women; Decision making; Political participation; Ethiopia

Abbreviations: EGM: Expert Group Meeting; FDRE: Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia; FWCW: Fourth World Conference on Women; JICA: Japan International Cooperation Agency; MDGs: Millennium Development Goal; MoLSA: Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs; MoWA: Ministry of Women Affairs; SIDA: Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency; UDHR: Universal Declaration of Human Rights; UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund; WEDO: Women's Environment and Development Organization

Introduction

"Freedom cannot be achieved unless the women have been emancipated from all forms of oppression. All of us take this on board that the objective of reconstruction and development programme will not have been realized unless we see in visible practical terms that the condition of women in our country has radically changed for better and that they have been empowered to intervene in all aspects of life equal with any other member of the society" Nelson Mandela

The possibility for all citizens to participate in the management of public affairs is at the very heart of democracy. At the same time full and equal participation of both women and men in political decision making provides a balance that more accurately reflects the composition of society, and may as such enhance the legitimacy of political processes by making them more democratic and responsive to the concerns and perspectives of all segments of society. Despite these facts in the majority of countries of the world, the political arena remains largely dominated by men, and is even an exclusively male bastion in some countries. As we know in democracy the voice of all is being heard equally. But, throughout history, women which constitute fifty percent of global populations are underrepresented in decision-making processes at all governance levels around the world and even they are dominated and marginalized politically, socially, economically, physically and psychologically by their counter parts. Therefore, the participation of women in the political discourse is a recent phenomenon. The participation of women in political decision-making positions was recognized as a political right after the adoption

of the Universal Declaration of (UDHR) in 1948. UDHR Articles 2 and 21 stipulate equal enjoyment of political rights without discrimination on the basis of one's sex or any other ground. Even in most of western states women franchise right is not recognized in the first wave of democratization except in USA, Britain and some European countries. Like many world countries, the majority of women in Ethiopia has also deprived of social, economic and political rights and hold low status in the society for much history of the country. They have been denied equal access to education, training and gainful employment opportunities and their involvement in policy formulation and decision making processes have been minimal. While Ethiopia's government has made significant strides over the recent years in setting the corner stones of a women's machinery in government. The present government has given priority to the speeding up of equality between men and women. Practically for example the government formulated national policy on women in 1993 with the objective of speeding up of equality between men and women, so that women can participate in the political, social, and economic life of their country on equal terms with men, ensuring that their right to own property as well as their other human rights are respected and that they are not excluded from the enjoyment of the fruits of their labour or from performing public functions and being decision makers. Hence the article centers on two main substantive parts. The first part focuses on the factors that hinder women political participation in Ethiopia and secondly the importance of women political participation.

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Materials and Methods

The researchers used qualitative research as the suitable research method for this study and data are collected from various secondary sources mainly from journal article, government and non-government organization report, book and others. Secondary research is research based on secondary resources that already exist [1]. This method made it possible for the researchers to explore challenges and opportunities of women political participation in Ethiopia.

Socio Economic Situation of Women in Ethiopia

Fifty percent of the Ethiopian population comprises of women. They are actively involved in all aspects of their society's life. Though women's share of the division of labour differs from place to place and from culture to culture, their average working day is believed to vary between 13 and 17 hours per day [2].

Their status is low where they: (a) are generally poorer than men because they earn less; (b) are less educated; (c) are increasingly becoming heads of households, with no resources to support their dependents; (d) do not enjoy due acknowledgment for their labour contribution, particularly in agriculture, and (e) do not have decision making power. Ethiopia is a patriarchal society that keeps women at a subordinate position, using religion and culture as an excuse. These excuses have for many years, supported by laws and legislation that uphold patriarchy and women's subordination. This has brought about and maintained disparities between men and women, in division of labour, share of benefits, in law and state, in how households are organized, and how these are interrelated [3].

They also suffer from work stereotype and gender distribution of labor, more are occupy in economically invisible work. Women experience lower socioeconomic status in general and hence is marginalized from making decisions at all levels. Nonetheless, women are poor in terms of access to resources, services and employment [4].

Despite the subordinate status they have in the society, and their exclusion from most of the privileges and opportunities availed to their male counterparts, women's contribution for the survival of the household and economic and social development of the society as producers and reproducers is indispensable. Hence, now a day's efforts have been made to address the problem of gender inequality and gender based discrimination in the country. The Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia formulated several laws and policies to promote gender equality. Particularly Article 35 of the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia clearly stipulates the rights of women. The government has also been promoting the mainstreaming of gender in all of its development policies and strategies to address gender inequality. Women's National Policy was formulated and adopted in 1993 in order to address gender inequality [5]. The incorporation of gender issues in different national policies including Education and Training, Health, HIV/AIDS, Population and others formulated in the same year; as well as adequately addressing women's concerns in the Federal Constitution of 1995 [6].

International and National Legal Framework for Gender Equality

Ethiopia's constitution and national policies are consistent with international legal instruments on gender equality, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); the most comprehensive treaty on women's human rights, which came into force in 1981, has been ratified or

acceded to by 165 states worldwide. It calls for equality between women and men in all civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights and it emphasizes the importance of equal participation of women with men in public life [7]. States that are parties to the Convention are obligated to ensure women equal opportunities in the right to vote and be eligible for election, the Beijing Plat form of Action which focused on full recognition of women's rights and fundamental freedoms, and demands for progress towards gender equality in education and health care, in work and the family, and in the public sphere (ibid). The African Charter on Human and People Rights, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Ethiopian constitution guarantees the rights of women as equal to those of men in all spheres including equality in marriage, the right to equal employment, and rights to maternity leave with pay, the right to acquire, administer, control, use and transfer property, with emphasis on land and inheritance issues and the right to access family planning and education. Ethiopia is therefore making several efforts to strengthen national structures for achieving gender parity [8]. In this regard the former South African president Nelson Mandela argues that "Freedom cannot be achieved unless the women have been emancipated from all forms of oppression. All of us take this on board that the objective of reconstruction and development programme will not have been realized unless we see in visible practical terms that the condition of women in our country has radically changed for better and that they have been empowered to intervene in all aspects of life equal with any other member of the society" [9]. Likewise the government of Ethiopia should work a lot to close gender gap in the country and to bring women at the center of policy making and development. Equality between men and women, and boys and girls, is one of the central pillars of the Growth and Transformation Plan: the Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) the five year national development plan for Ethiopia and the Development Plan for Women and Children (2011-2028) have included specific commitments to increasing women's participation in political life and decision making, promoting women's economic empowerment and reducing violence against women [10]. Moreover, due to women's disadvantage position in the society and as a commitment to gender equality, the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia issued the national Ethiopian Policy on women in 1993 with the following objectives [5].

- Facilitating conditions conducive to the speeding of equality between men and women so that women can participate in political, social and economic life of their country on equal terms with men and ensuring that their right to own property as well as their other human rights are respected and that they are not excluded from the enjoyment of their fruits of their labor or from performing public functions and being decision makers.
- Facilitating the necessary conditions whereby rural women can have access to basic social services and to ways and means of lightening their work load.
- Eliminating step by step, prejudices as well as customary and other practices that are based on the idea of male supremacy and enabling women to hold public office and to participate in the decision making process at all levels [11].

A new Federal Family Code, based on the principle of gender equality is also come into effect in July 2000. It rose the minimum age of marriage from 15 to 18 years and established the rights of women to share any assets the household had accumulated if a couple has been living together for at least three years in an irregular union. The Ethiopian penal code criminalizes domestic violence and harmful

traditional practices including early marriage, abduction and female genital mutilation or cutting [8]. Ethiopia is also one of the countries that embraced the principles of the MDGs at the millennium declaration where by 147 heads of State and Government and 191 nations became signatories for their adoption and implementation. A task has also been set up to realize MDGs in Ethiopia. A national action plan for gender equality is also underway to make the gender specific goals of the MDGs a reality in Ethiopia [11].

Arguments for Women's Political Participation

Politics is almost everywhere a male-oriented, male-dominated enterprise and female political participation is not as such good as expected. In today's discussion of women's political representation, there are different important arguments. The justice argument; women account for approximately half the population and therefore have the right to be represented as such; the experience argument; women's experiences are different from men's and need to be represented in discussions that result in policy-making and implementation. These different experiences mean that women 'do politics' differently from men; the interest argument; the interests of men and women are different and even conflicting and therefore women are needed in representative institutions to articulate the interests of women.; the symbolic argument says that every female politician acts a role model for all women, regardless of political views or party membership and will attract other women to the political arena; the critical mass argument states that women are able to achieve solidarity of purpose to represent women's interests when they achieve certain levels of representation; and the democracy argument asserts that the equal representation of women and men enhances the democratization of governance in both transitional and consolidated democracies [12]. All of the arguments deals about the importance of women inclusion in politics are great. As a result women need to be included equally with men in every sphere of their life.

Theories on Women's Interests in the Parliament

The assumption that women have certain interests in common is a main thread in studies on women in parliaments. Scholars divide women representation in the parliament in to two based on rational. These are descriptive and substantive representation of women [9].

Descriptive and substantive representation

Descriptive representation is deal widely acceptable share of seats in parliament as an indicator of political inclusion in society for a category such as women [13]. The term descriptive representation denotes representation on the basis of common characteristics and share experience, for instance representing some one based on gender or class can be categorized as descriptive representation of women [9]. However, in research focusing on descriptive representation, the theoretical reasoning behind this assumption is not well elaborated [13]. On the other hand substantive representation deals with women's interests, gender equality and rational behind women representation. A core idea in this strand of research is that there are certain interests and concerns that arise from women's experiences and that these will be inadequately addressed in a politics that is dominated by men (ibid). In research on substantive representation of women, an aspect of politicization is introduced. It is commonly argued that societies will not achieve equality between women and men by simply disregarding gender-related differences [14].

The Concept of Political Participation

Participation is a development approach, which recognizes the need to involve disadvantage segments of population in the design and implementation of policies concerning their wellbeing. The strengthening of women's participation in all spheres of life has become a major issue in the development discourses and hence, socio-economic development cannot be fully achieved without the active involvements of women in the decision making level in all society [15]. On the other hand political participation refers the active involvement and engagement by individuals both women and men with political process that affect their lives. The act of active engagements includes voting, standing for office, joining of political party or to take part the political campaigns of the political parties and to exert influence in the decision making process through public debate, and dialogue with the representatives they elected or through their capacity to organize themselves; or exercise public power by holding public office at different levels of administrations- local, regional, national and international [16]. Therefore, political participation is understood as a prerequisite for political development hence, by improving women's political participation, given that they constitute over a half of the world's population may help to advance of political development and improve the quality of women's lives [17]. In fact, without the active participation of women, and the incorporation of women's perspective at all levels of decision making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved [18].

Factors that Hinders Women's Political Participation in Ethiopia

The exclusion of women in political participation and decision making processes was one inherited by human history. Even when democracy had birth ancient Athens in 5th century BC, the exclusion of women from political participation and decision making was existed. The Athenians women had no a right to vote or to participate in the democratic process and even they had not considered as a citizens [16]. Even in European countries women had neither a right to political participation nor involve the decision making and public affairs up until the beginning of 20th century. Therefore, women franchise right is not recognized in the first wave of democratization (1828–1926) in many of European countries [19]. As to the case of Ethiopia, women's status in the political and public sector is very recent phenomena and still their participation is very low. They are still largely underrepresented in decision-making positions at all levels. They have also not made major progress in attaining political power in legislative bodies. The number of elected women representatives is still low; More and more women are engaged in formal employment, but are underrepresented in middle and higher management positions; The number of women leaders and decision makers at the various level of the decentralized government structure is still very low [6]. Therefore for a variety of reasons women tend to be reluctant to become political candidates whom we discussed in detail as follows.

Socio-cultural factors

In many countries, traditions continue to emphasize women's primary roles as mothers and housewives and to restrict them to those roles. A traditional strong, patriarchal value system favors sexually segregated roles, and 'traditional cultural values' militate against the advancement, progress and participation of women in any political process. Societies all over the world are dominated by an ideology of 'a woman's place'. According to this ideology, women should only play

the role of 'working mother', which is generally low-paid and apolitical. In addition, in some countries, men even tell women how to vote. This is the environment, in which a certain collective image of women in traditional, apolitical roles continues to dominate, which many women face [20].

So that today, cultural ideas about women can affect women's levels of representation throughout the political process, from an individual woman's decision to enter politics, to party selection of candidates, to the decisions made by voters on election day [21]. Hence, women face prejudice as leaders because people tend to assume that leadership is a masculine trait. And when women do lead, they face a problem. People evaluate autocratic behavior by women more negatively than the same behavior by men [22]. Thus, even in countries where women have made gains in employment or education, they face cultural barriers to participation in politics [21].

In the context of Ethiopia, there is a traditional belief that, women are made to take care of children and do kitchen works than participating outside home activity. Hence, there is division of works between men and women, which means home activities are belongs to women and outside home activities are belongs to men. Women are overburdened with different household activities like cooking, take caring kids, washing and so on. These all activities make women busy in the household and impede their involvement in the politics of the country. In line with this a study conducted by Gidudu et al on Socio-cultural Factors that Hinder Women's Access to Management Positions, revealed that women has to do house duties, gardening, and washing up while men go out for duty and also go for further studies outside the family as women stay back to take charge of the family [23].

Culturally, there is a belief that women are supposed to be led but not to lead. In fact stereotyped notions about women constitute major barriers; societal perception about leadership ability of women, women's lack of assertiveness is some barriers that hinder the participation of women [6]. In this regard traditional attitudes towards gender equality influence women's advancement in political participation. Theories of socialization have long emphasized the enduring division of sex roles within a society especially the existence of egalitarian or traditional attitudes towards women in the private and public spheres. Socialization theories emphasize that these attitudes are acquired early in life through formative agencies, including the existence of traditional sex role learnt in the home and family, local community, and in schools and the workplace. In cultures with traditional values concerning the role of women in the home and family, many women may be reluctant to run and, if they seek the office, they may fail to attract sufficient party and electoral support to win [24]. Most importantly in the country Women are considered subordinate to men and second class members/citizens both in the family and in the society especially in most parts of rural areas.

Religious factors

Religion is another important source of cultural beliefs in most countries. Arguments about women's inferiority to men are present across all dominant religions, and religion has long been used to exclude women from aspects of social, political, or religious life around the world [21].

But the major religions of the world are differentially conservative or patriarchal in their views about the place of women, both in the church hierarchy and in society. For example, Protestantism promotes nonhierarchical religious practices and more readily accepts women as religious leaders compared with Catholicism and Orthodox

Christianity. And Islamic law is typically interpreted in a manner that constrains the activities of women [25,26].

Hence, exclusion of women from religious institutions and religious leadership may have a negative impact on women's status in society and limit their opportunities in politics and public life. Hence, religious is one of the anachronistic cultural beliefs in many communities in the country that excludes women from the mainstream of leadership. In most religions, power and authority is believed to divinely belong to men hence subjugating women. Thus women are encouraged to play subsidiary roles since their place is in the kitchen and men are the decision makers. Arguments about women's inferiority to men are present across all dominant religions, and traditionally religion has long been used to exclude women from aspects of social, political, or religious life around the world [21]. Women are also seem to be their own enemies in their own political advancement and empowerment, especially when they internalize these long held anachronistic assumptions and perceptions that politics is a dirty game thus a preserve game of men [27].

Economic factors

Women's historical experience of discrimination puts them at a disadvantage position economically. Socio-economic status of women to a greater extent play a significant role in enhancing their participation and representation in political decision making bodies. In this regard Shvedova in 2002 argues that social and economic status of women in society has a direct influence on their participation in political institutions and elected bodies [20]. In other word Lack of economic resources is one of the biggest obstacles that prevent women from participating in politics in greater numbers. Making it easier for women to access economic resources, therefore, is a key in expanding women's presence in the political realm [28]. The study done by Seyedeh et al also revealed that most of women are financially dependent on their husbands or relatives [17]. So they may not be possible to them to enter in political campaign. Razia Faiz, former Member of Parliament of Bangladesh also argues that lack of financial resources is the overwhelming obstacles to women political participation. Women move from their father's home to their husband's home . . . They are like refugees. They have no base from which to develop contacts with the people or to build knowledge and experience about the issues. Furthermore, they have no money of their own; the money belongs to their fathers, their husbands or their in-laws. Given the rising cost of running an effective campaign, this poses another serious hurdle for women in the developing world [20].

In fact women's participation in political life depends largely on their access to employment which gives them not only material independence, but also certain professional skills and grater self-confidence. So that access to means of production and finances has a direct relationship and influence on the participation of women in political institutions. Having aware about the impacts of economy on women the Ethiopia government formulated Economic Reform policy in 1992 with the aims to promote economic development and improve the living standard of the most vulnerable sections of the society, particularly women [5], but still in most Ethiopian society women have no right to decide on one's own property in the house hold because the household head is always the father which can control every asset and property of the family. Due to this facts women always needs to get permission of the father to buy some consumption materials and other resources of the household. Even if women are salaried, most of the time their income is controlled by men and sometimes if father and mother have their own income independently, women cover household

expenses while men enjoy outside home like hotels and bars. So women are always dependent on men economically which is the main cause for their low participation to politics of the country.

Gender roles-patriarchy: The family is the main institution of patriarchy, which is an important concept in explaining gender inequality [29]. Literarily, it means “the rule of the father”; more broadly, it refers to a society ruled and dominated by men over women. This is inherent in most African families. Giving men a higher social status over females has crept into public life, which reflects in state activities. The family plays an important role in maintaining this patriarchal order across generations. The socialization of children to expect and accept different roles in life has created a social mechanism for the development of values that engender the several forms of discrimination against the female sex. The greatest psychological weapon available to man is the length of time they have enjoyed dominance over women, who have taken it for granted especially in the area of politics that often continue to stereotype women and justify their subordination [30].

In many societies women are portrayed as weak and incapable of making smart decisions. They have been depicted across generations to be only capable of trivial matters, constantly engaged in gossip and hearsay, utterly incompetent and less intelligent. This was projected and reinforced through the years through male-dominated institutions and patriarchal societies which internalized the idea that the woman was inferior. With the constant reinforcement of the notion that women are inferior in every aspect, it became hard for women to pursue their political rights as an active participant. For a woman to enter politics, such patriarchal attitudes make it even harder. The truth is that such attitudes are not a thing of the past. Such attitudes towards women still exist in societies all over the world today – in both developed and developing countries [31].

In Ethiopian societies, men and women have clearly defined roles that are dictated by the dominant ideology which is patriarchy. Most of the time men are taken as breadwinners; head of the household who has the authority to represent the family outside of the home. Since house work is solely the responsibility of women, a man never cooks even if he has no choice but cook to satisfy his hunger pang. It is a shame for a man to step into a kitchen let alone cook.

Family work and time constraints: Continuing uneven distribution of family care responsibilities means that women spend far more time than men in home- and child-care. Studies repeatedly demonstrate that women pay a “motherhood penalty,” across fields relating not just to the time, effort, and medical care of pregnancy and child birth, but to the far greater maternal involvement necessary for breastfeeding, and to the persistent tendency of women to do a larger share of childcare as the child grows. Anyone deeply involved in childcare, whether male or female, would face tough time constraints navigating between family responsibilities and a political position; because the work is rarely equally shared, women are more disadvantaged [32]. Like many other women, in Ethiopia women are traditionally in charge of domestic chores, while men are responsible for activities outside the home and men often spend their free time socializing outside the home, while women take care of the household which makes them difficult to engage in politics. To summarize the above points, Ethiopia is ranking 118th out of 135 countries in the 2012 Global Gender Gap Report, though an improvement from the previous position, reflects the prevalence of resilient gender roles and stereotypes [10]. The position and empowerment of women and girls in society are hindered by negative attitudes perpetuating inequality affecting all aspects of

their lives. Although women’s political representation has improved over the years, negative social perceptions about the leadership ability of women, their low socio-economic status, low educational and skills levels and lack of strong role models all contribute to women low participation in decision-making positions. The burden of household chores and inequitable access to higher education also limit women’s ability to enjoy the opportunities and benefits of citizenship as men on an equal footing in the political sphere.

In addition to the above mentioned factors, according to Miranda when many women especially in developing countries were asked if they would consider entering politics, their answer is negative [33]. Foremost their reasons is that politics is reputed to be dirty, where methods employed include the illegal and the unethical to win in elections and assume power, and where the corruption of public service for personal and narrow group interests has been the accepted norm. Another scholar Nadezhda Shvedova mention political obstacle that hinders women involvement in politics [20]. To this end Shvedova argues that men dominate the political arena; men formulate the rules of the political game; and men define the standards for evaluation [20]. The existence of this male dominated model results in women either rejecting politics altogether or rejecting male-style politics. Generally many women in Ethiopia have little independents on decision making on most individuals and family issues. Women are also discriminated on the ground of being women and as such low status is characterized virtually every aspects of girls and women’s lives.

Enhancing Women Political Participation in Ethiopian

The apparent invisibility of women in politics is a worldwide phenomenon. Poor representation and low level participation is not a recent trend in Ethiopia. Women make up to about 49.5% of the population [34]. In spite of these statistics, women participation has been minimal at the public policy and decision-making levels. Lack of commitment for increased women participation and absence of sufficient political knowledge about women representation have been some of the problems for poor participation of women in the politics [9].

To enhance women participation, the FDRE Constitution recognizes women’s equal rights with men in the political, social, economic and cultural spheres [34]. Accordingly, women have the right to take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly and through freely elected representatives, the right to vote and to be elected to any level of government offices and to be a member of any political organization, labor union, trade organization or employers or professional association of their choice. As a result, the number of women in decision making and leadership roles has increased considerably [35]. At the same time now efforts were undertaken practically to increase the representation of women in political processes in Ethiopia. In this respect, the number or seats held by women in the Ethiopian parliament has significantly improved and reached 22% in 2010 as compared to 2% in 1995. With regard to leadership and decision making, in the same year, women’s representation reached 13% at Ministerial, 8.3% among State Ministerial, 25% at Commissioner and 12.7% at Ambassador Level (ibid). But, still Ethiopia is one of the countries where women representatives in the parliament are unsatisfactory [9].

Importance of Women Political Participation

According to Haque ensuring women’s political participation is essential to bring legitimacy to government and establish democracy in its real and practical manner, as validity and trustworthiness

of democracy can be in question if females, who are 50% of the population, stay marginalized or segregated from the political and public institutions in the society [36]. In addition to this the degree and level of women's representation in the government has considerable and significant impacts on the lives of the people in any operational political and public milieu [37]. Therefore, increasing women's representation and participation in the political and public decision-making positions:

Is a question of democracy, democratic process, and equality as well as a question of political and civil rights that has been guaranteed by the international organizations' (UN) agreements, treaties, covenants and conventions;

Facilitates more changes and pave the way for more spaces to women; calls for the efficient, maximum and equitable utilization of human, financial, material and information resources by all human beings;

Avoids the questions that would be raised about the legitimacy of the democratic process and decision making authorities;

Can allow women to address their basic problems and needs in the community; and ensures the openness (transparency), real fight against rent-seeking (mainly the recently rampant corruption), accountability, political commitment, political leadership, and political responsiveness of the existing national, regional, zonal/districts, and local levels political democracy, democratization process, and governance of the governments and political institutions, and promotes peace and democratic development in any country as a whole [38].

More over without greater representation of women in parliamentary and executive positions as well as in the judiciary, it is difficult to achieve participatory, accountable, and transparent governance which can ensure political, cultural, social and economic priority goals of the wider society. Besides every human being has the right to participate in decisions that define her or his life. This right is the foundation of the ideal of equal participation in decision-making among women and men. This right argues that since women know their situation best, they should participate equally with men to have their perspective effectively incorporated at all levels of decision-making, from the private to the public spheres of their lives, from the local to the global [33]. Equality in political decision-making performs a leverage function without which it is highly unlikely that a real integration of the equality dimension in government policy-making is feasible. In this respect, women's equal participation in political life plays a pivotal role in the general process of the advancement of women. Women's equal participation in decision-making is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women's interests to be taken into account. Without the active participation of women and the incorporation of women's perspective at all levels of decision making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved [18].

Conclusion

There was a cross section of factors that hinder women's access to political participation in Ethiopia. However, the government of Ethiopia has declared its commitment to gender equality and empowerment of women by stipulating the rights of women in its constitution, issuing the women's policy of the country and National Action Plan for gender equality to put gender mainstreaming into action in Ethiopia and in its regions across the various policies. Despite all these, women are still at the subordinate position and women in the country occupy

low status in the society. Their involvement in policy formulation and decision making processes has been minimal. But, if half of the world's population remains vulnerable to economic, political, legal and social marginalization, the hope of advancing democracy and prosperity will remain in serious jeopardy. In spite of the fact that world over today, democracy has become a vital tool for attaining sustainable development; the impact of the definition of democracy remains elusive. Political participation, which is the manifestation of democracy and allows for diversity of opinion and participation of both men and women cannot thrive by excluding the women folk that constitute half of the world's population. Without equal participation of women to political process, the hope for democracy and democratization is in none sense. Thus, the democratic process is able to grow and develop effectively when all people are given equal encouragement to exercise their democratic rights, and when women can experience benefits equally with their counter parts. Additionally the active participation of women, on equal terms with men, at all levels of decision-making is essential to the achievement of equality, sustainable development, peace and democracy and the inclusion of their perspectives and experiences into the decision-making processes can result to the solutions that satisfy larger number of the society, which have social benefits, better and more appropriate social, political, legal, and economic solutions for their problems.

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