

Full Length Research Paper

The impact of education on rural women's participation in political and economic activities

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This study endeavored to investigate the impact of education on rural women's participation in political and economic activities. Six hundred rural women and 12 gender Activists were selected for this study from three Zones of Amhara Region, Ethiopia using multi-stage random sampling technique and purposeful sampling techniques respectively. Questionnaire and interviews were used as instruments of data collection. The findings indicated that as rural women's level of education increases, their involvement in political and economic activities and the possible advantages secured from their participation increase. That is, rural women with primary and secondary school educational experience have claimed significantly higher participation in political and economic affairs and highly benefited from their participation compared to the illiterate rural women. Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that the Ethiopian government has to introduce and expand integrated and functional adult literacy in the rural areas.

Key words: Political, economic, rural women education.

INTRODUCTION

Few studies conducted regarding women in Ethiopia portray that mostly women are involved in physical hardship throughout their lives. Such hardship involves carrying loads over long distances, grinding corn manually, working in the homestead, raising children, and cooking. Ethiopian women have little benefits compared to men regarding personal income, assets, healthcare, education, and employment. Over 85% of Ethiopian women are living in rural areas where peasant families participate primarily in subsistence agriculture. Rural women are integrated into the rural economy, which is basically labor intensive and which exerts a heavy physical charge on the majority of women and children (CSA, 2007).

By 1995 the rate of uneducated people in Ethiopia had decreased substantially to 64.5%. The national census conducted in the year 2003 reported that the rate of young uneducated people reached 61.3% (men, 56.1%; women 66.6%). (Ibid).

In Ethiopia, though women's struggle in organized form for their rights and equal participation on national affairs has began during the time of Emperor Haile Sellassie in 1942, their participation in development and good governance has been constitutionally recognized during the time of the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Party government since 1994. As a result, currently, various changes are observed in women's involvement in social, political and economic affairs of the nation. This study sought to examine the impacts or changes education could bring about in women's participation in politics and economic affairs.

Barriers to women's political and economic participation exist throughout the world, and Ethiopia is no exception. Such barriers of women's participation could result from the prevailing social, economic and political systems. Many feminist scholars presume the confinement of women to the private arena, the home, as both means and reasons for preventing women's participation in public affairs

(Drage, 2001). There is a wide range of statistical evidence that shows women's lower political participation than that of men globally (Bum, 1991).

There is also literature which indicates women's area of participation in their stereotyped roles. For example, women are placed in the low ranks of the political structure where their impact on issues affecting their well-being is insignificant (Marshall, 2002).

On the other hand, Randal (1987) points to a tendency of women's interest to participating in community politics more than conventional political institutions. However, this tendency of women to participate in community politics is also socially constructed because community politics otherwise addresses women's immediate concerns (Ibid). Tinker, cited in Tigist (2011), presents a similar opinion when she talks of women in a community being charged with a civic responsibility of fellowship, that is, providing hospitality services to relatives and neighbors.

Chen (2005) argues that the family institution and women's mothering role within the community are cultural phenomena that reflect and reinforce the system of male dominance. Tinker, cited in Tigist (2011), supports this view stating that family relations are one of the three ways in which dominance over women is articulated by, for example, unremunerated labor and control of the wife's labor wages by the husband.

It is posited by UNFPA (1996) that women in politics and in decision-making bodies contribute to redefining of political programs by placing new items on the political agenda that reflect and address women's gender specific concerns, values and experiences thus providing new perspectives on mainstream political issues. According to the UN (1995), one way to ensure women's empowerment and improvement of their status is to establish mechanisms for women's equal participation and equitable representation at all levels of the political process.

The absence of women in political debates and decision-making processes distorts the appreciation of women's interests. Women's interests are not well defined because male representatives and women's associations do not possess adequate and appropriate knowledge (CENRWOR, 1994). However, women's participation in various decision-making levels is still low and needs to be considered to realize democratic ideals in the nation. Women must be included in the political decision-making process if their concerns are to be adequately reflected and democracy is to be truly participatory (McLendon and Eddings, 2002).

Without women in prominent positions such as national legislatures, local government and major economic activities, it is unlikely that the full range of gender issues will be addressed. And the literature has pronounced that women's education plays paramount importance to enhance their participation in politics and economic activities (Ibid).

In order to increase women's political participation,

ensuring gender equity and equality in education is of a priority agenda (Mulwa, 1999). Practical evidences have also proved this idea to be true. For instance, the study conducted to see the relationship between women's empowerment and other variables showed that four variables (education, family farm size, area under aquaculture and family annual income) had significant positive relationships with the women's extent of empowerment. Besides, a significant relationship was found between women's education and their empowerment and involvement in decision making. This implies that education enhances women's empowerment, both in family and societal affairs. Education also increases woman's understanding and awareness of the situation in which she lives, and her cognitive and psychological realm of empowerment. This is supported by a study conducted by Ahmed, cited in Hiwot (2011), that shows education gives women a voice against social and political injustice, and that they will have more freedom when they have more education and knowledge.

The significant and positive relationship between women's level of education, degree of participation in aquaculture and their extent of empowerment implies that the empowerment status of women can increase with their increased participation in agricultural activities as a function of education. As agriculture is a relatively profitable income generating activity, women participating in it gain more control of the economic and social returns from it. This makes them become self-reliant and enhances their empowerment status within the family as well as in the society in general. Various studies have signified that the involvement in agricultural activities is highly influenced by rural women's level of education (Hiwot, 2011; Tigist, 2011).

Similarly, the multiple regression analysis revealed that only three independent variables were significant predictors of women's participation in various associations and decision making. The variables were; education, extension media contact and training exposure. The results show that 30.4% of the variation in women's participation in decision making can be accounted for the combined effect of these three independent variables, with education constituting 14.9% of variation. Education increases one's understanding of innovations and influences the process of decision making; education and training exposures are the most important factors. For instance, a study conducted to assess the impact of women's education on their participation in credit programs highlighted strong relationship between the two variables (Tigist, 2011).

A study was conducted by analyzing the 1992 national level household sample survey data collected from the female recipients of collateral-free loans of three relatively large rural development agencies in Bangladesh. The study shows that the participation in income-generating projects by poor rural women had been

associated with their level of education, increased level of contraceptive use, decreased level of fertility, elevated level of desire for no more children, and enhanced level of empowerment (Mayoux, 2001).

Similarly, few studies have focused on the impacts of women's level of education on participation in micro-credit. For example, the studies conducted by Tigist (2011); Storey (2003) and Mayoux (2001) conclude that women's level of education affects their participation in micro-credit programs.

As a result, this study examines the nature and extent of changes education could bring about in women's participation in politics and economic affairs. More specifically, the following basic questions were formulated to be answered in the course of the study.

Basic research questions

What are the impacts of education on women's participation in political activities?

Is there a significant mean difference among women with varied educational backgrounds in the benefits gained as a result of participation in leadership?

Is there a significant mean difference among women with different educational backgrounds in the level of advantages they obtain from participation in membership of associations?

Is there a statistically significant mean difference among women with different educational background in their perception of their contribution to ensure good governance?

What are the impacts of education on rural women's involvement in economic activities?

Is there a statistically significant mean difference among women with different educational backgrounds in their possession of resources?

Is there a statistically significant mean difference among women with different educational backgrounds in their participation in projects and benefits secured from this participation?

Is there a statistically significant mean difference among women with different educational backgrounds in their participation in microfinance and the challenges they encounter in credit money management?

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to examine the impacts of education on women's political and economic activities. More specifically, this study aimed at comparing women with varied educational backgrounds on participation in leadership, women's associations and good governance and the benefits they secured as a result of their participation as part of political activity and possession of resources, participation in various projects and micro-

finance and benefits obtained as a result of participation.

Significance of the study

In Ethiopia, there is massive expansion at all levels of formal education. However, little or no emphasis is given to functional adult literacy for the rural people that constitute 85% of the total population. Hence, the results of this study can remind the government that sustainable development in political, social, economic and technological spheres can be ensured or the development process can proceed faster with people having some level of education and training.

Delimitation of the study

Political and economic activities are so wide concepts that constitute different activities. However, it is difficult to encompass all the variables in the two areas. As a result, this study is delimited only to women's participation in leadership, women's associations and good governance and the benefits they secured as a result of their participation as part of political activity. Besides, possession of resources, participation in various projects and micro-finance and benefits obtained as a result of participation were considered as part of economic activities. The challenges women face in managing loan money was also included in this study.

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Population and sampling

The population of the study includes the rural women in Amhara Region. In Amhara Region, Ethiopia, there are 10 Administrative Zones. Multi stage random sampling technique was employed to select sample rural women. Out of 10 zones, three zones were selected randomly. From each of the three zones, two Worredas were selected using similar procedures. Again, from each Worreda, two Kebeles were selected using simple random sampling technique. Finally, 50 rural women were selected from each Kebele using systematic random sampling technique. Through this procedure a total of 600 rural women were selected for the study. In addition, 12 Gender Activists were purposefully selected for interview. Ten arbitrarily selected women were also interviewed. Gender activists are women in the Kebele who are organized to protect women's rights in the area.

Data collection instruments

In order to investigate the impacts of education on rural women's political and economic participations questionnaire and interview were used as data collection instruments. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part required personal information of the participants, while part two sought to gather information about the impact of education on rural women's participation in political and economic activities. The questionnaire items are related

Table 1. Biography of respondents.

Level of education	Illiterate	Reading and writing	Primary school	Secondary school (9-12)
Number of participants	218	180	104	64
leadership participation	11.61	12.74	13.89	14.44
Membership in association	10.24	10.46	11.35	11.30
Good governance	12.57	13.00	13.81	14.03
Participation in projects	17.24	17.46	18.45	18.33
possession of resource	15.27	15.47	23.98	25.77
Credit problem	28.13	26.33	24.80	25.74
Participation in Microfinance	16.00	16,67	16.43	21.68

Table 2. ANOVA: Level of education on leadership participation.

Dependent variables	Df			Sum of square			Mean square		F	Sig
	bm	wm	tot	bm	wm	Tot	Bm	Wm		
Leadership participation	3	563	566	2391.461	17907.69	20299.15	797.05	31.80	25.07	.000

to women's leadership participation (7), membership in various women's associations (5), participation in good governance (8), microfinance, projects (5), and possession of resources (4) and benefits from participation (9). The questionnaire was developed by the researcher and some procedures were followed to assure validity and reliability. To ensure validity, the questionnaire was given to one Associate Professor in English Language Department and another Associate Professor in Educational Psychology Department for validity test (language and item construction check up). The reliability of the items was examined using Chronbach alpha and found to be 0.79 which is acceptable. For illiterate women, women with reading and writing ability and primary school dropouts, the questionnaire was administered by trained M.A. students in the form of structured interview. However, rural women with secondary school background were made to fill the questionnaire by themselves. The second instrument was interview. Interview was employed to gather data from gender activists.

Data analysis techniques

To analyze the data obtained through the questionnaire, One Way ANOVA was employed. ANOVA was used to compare the means of rural women's (with varied educational backgrounds, such as, illiterate, reading and writing, primary school completes and secondary school completes) participation in political and economic activities and the benefits they secured as a result of their participation. The results of the interview were used to substantiate the results of the questionnaire. Out of 600 questionnaires, 34 of them were not properly filled and as a result, discarded from the analysis.

RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Table 1 illustrates that 218 participants are rural women who did not get any access to education. One hundred eighty of them are those who can read and write through

adult literacy education. The remaining 104 and 64 are primary school and secondary school dropped outs respectively. The same table illustrates that except in few cases (credit problem and participation in microfinance), the mean of rural women in political and economic participation linearly varies in favor of rural women with higher educational status. To check whether these differences are statistically different Eight ANOVAs were employed.

Table 2 portrays that the mean differences among women with different educational backgrounds signify that such differences are statistically significant in their benefit from participation in leadership. That is, women benefit from participation in leadership when they have relatively higher educational background. A further look at the data portrays that participation in leadership has increased women's decision making capacity.

One Way ANOVA is run to determine if there are statistically significant differences among the means of women with different educational backgrounds in their level of advantages they obtained from participation in membership. The summary of the results of ANOVA is presented in Table 3. The results depict that women with relatively higher educational backgrounds have claimed that they have benefited from membership in various associations.

The interview result with one secondary school complete woman ascertained that participation in leadership and various committees has resulted to promote women's acceptance in the family and in the community. It also increased women's decision making role on child rearing practice, expenditure, and selling and purchasing of goods. Generally, rural women have indicated that when they are organized in women's associations, they:

Table 3. ANOVA: Level of education on membership in association.

Dependent variables	df			Sum of square			Mean square		F	Sig
	bm	wm	tot	bm	wm	Tot	Bm	Wm		
Membership in association	3	563	566	2391.46	24166.80	27044.55	797.05	42.92	18.57	.000

Table 4. ANOVA: Level of education on good governance.

Dependent variables	Df			Sum of square			Mean square		F	Sig
	bm	wm	tot	bm	wm	Tot	Bm	Wm		
Good governance	3	563	566	1165.108	6404.618	7569.726	388.36	11.37	34.13	.000

Table 5. ANOVA: Level of education on participation in projects.

Dependent variables	Df			Sum of square			Mean square		F	Sig
	bm	Wm	tot	bm	wm	Tot	bm	Wm		
Participation in projects	3	563	566	106.608	1658.371	1764.979	35.53	2.94	12.08	.000

1. were informed and even convinced to take loans,
2. have actively participated and engaged in making and weaving loom and *ikub* [an association in which women contribute money weekly or monthly which will be given to one of them until it reaches all of them in turns],
3. have participated in forestation activities.
4. were initiated to become beneficiaries from extension [agriculture, health] services, and
5. were organized so that they could participate in income generating activities.

Three ANOVAs were run to see the mean differences of rural women's political participation as a result of their educational backgrounds. To see whether there exists statistically significant mean differences among women with different educational background in their perception of contribution to ensure good governance, ANOVA is carried out. As can be seen from Table 4, the results depict that the mean differences are considerably significant at $P < .001$. That is, women with elementary and secondary educational background have scored greater mean scores. That is, women with better educational backgrounds have perceived that they have contributed to ensure good governance in the society.

In view with the Gender Activists has reported that rural women have organized to influence the local government, health and agricultural extension workers and the police to immediately respond to their needs in the locality. They said that the local government is sensitive to solve problems females encounter with regard to family life, violation of their rights and the rights of children. In line with this, the interviewed women have

also indicated that women's association and gender activists are creating pressure on local government to fight rape and abduction and early marriage.

In Tables 5-8, ANOVA was carried out on sub categories of economic participation. The results have indicated that in all cases significant mean differences were observed in favor of rural women with primary and secondary school experiences. The results in each category are similar with the total mean differences. To substantiate the quantitative results, the results of the interview were analyzed.

The results in Table 5 show that women with relatively higher education status have achieved greater mean score in items regarding their participation in various projects and benefits they secured from participation. The difference was found to be significant. Significant mean difference was obtained across education level for women's participation in various self-initiated projects and projects where by the initiatives are taken by other organizations. Women with primary and secondary education level have indicated that they have participated in self-initiated projects such as, local textile, tea cafes, horticulture and Non government organizations initiated projects such as, Water Conservation, Soil Conservation and Other Natural Resource Conservation compared to illiterate women.

Further, item by item analysis of the data has revealed that women with primary and secondary education have indicated that their annual income has increased, changed their family life style and traditional practices, and improved family health as a result of participation in various projects more than those with low level of

Table 6. ANOVA: Level of education on possession of resources.

Dependent variables	Df			Sum of square			Mean square		F	Sig
	bm	Wm	tot	bm	wm	Tot	bm	Wm		
possession of resource	3	563	566	75.051	945.313	1020.364	25.01	1.679	4.88	.000

Table 7. ANOVA: Level of education on credit problems.

Dependent variables	Df			Sum of square			Mean square		F	Sig
	bm	Wm	tot	bm	Wm	Tot	bm	Wm		
Credit problem	3	563	566	17.919	387.764	405.684	5.97	.689	9.66	.000

Table 8. ANOVA: level of education on participation in microfinance.

Dependent variables	Df			Sum of square			Mean square		F	Sig
	bm	Wm	tot	bm	wm	Tot	bm	Wm		
Participation in Microfinance	3	563	566	174.108	3843.717	4017.825	58.03	6.827	8.5	

education. The informal discussion made with one husband whose wife has completed primary education has supported this result. He said "The health of the children, cleanness of our house and cloth has been drastically changed due to my wife. She has totally changed our life"

The Gender Activists portrayed that women have highly benefited from participating in various projects. The responses of Gender Activists with regard to the impacts of women's participation in various projects are summarized as follows.

1. They participate in assemblies,
2. They have improved their living by breeding cattle for the loans they receive,
3. They are aware of their and others' rights,
4. They have mutual understanding and support
5. They educate their children, and
6. They have become entrepreneurs.

The analysis of one way ANOVA has revealed that the level of education affects women's ownership of land, domestic animals, house hold utensils, money and plants (Table 6).

The mean comparison of women across the level of education has indicated that women with primary and secondary education have obtained lower mean score with regard to problems they encountered as a result of no participation while husbands solicited credit than they did to those who are illiterate.

To measure the difference of mean scores between women who have participated while their husbands take

credit and those who have not participated on the nature and extent of problems they encountered and in managing the money obtained through credit, those who have participated have reported that they have encountered fewer problems compared to those who have not. The One Way ANOVA in Table 7 has revealed that the difference was statistically significant.

An interview with a primary school complete rural woman who had participated in taking the credit together with her husband has reported "We work hard, save the money, and discuss on expenditure." While an illiterate rural woman who had not participated stated "I heard that my husband has received credit from my neighbors and I do not know how he spends it."

The questionnaire that constitutes items regarding women's participation in microfinance or credit associations, returning the loan money and making profits out of the loan obtained was given to women with varied educational backgrounds. One Way ANOVA was carried out to compare the means. The results in Table 8 portrayed that women with primary and secondary education have significantly exceeded illiterate women in microfinance participation, returning the loan and making profits. Unreported Post-hoc analysis has clearly identified the differences. That is, in the majority of the variables, significant mean differences were obtained between rural women with primary and secondary school experiences and illiterate women. However, no difference was observed between illiterate women and women who only are able to read and write and between women with primary and secondary school experience and literate women.

This implies that the impact of education is higher as the level increases.

The interview result has pointed out that those who have secured loan and worked privately have benefited a lot. These women were able to pay for their children's education, purchase food stuffs in groups for reduced price and some of them, in addition to these, could buy sheep and cattle. They have also begun to save money in banks. Above all, they are organized to stand against anything that violates their freedom.

With regard to the changes observed in women's life as a result of taking credits, an interviewed woman said

"Yes, there is change. For instance, they wear clean clothes; they satisfy their children's needs and interests; and some of them assert that they take loans, buy chicken and sheep for the money and earn profits from selling them. They witnessed that they pay their loans and buy other chicken and sheep for the money they earned as profits. Others have bought Televisions."

They said that women's engagement in business and the women-centered safety-net program have brought the change. These changes are attributed to their economic independence from men. Especially the educated women are ready to accept every innovation forwarded from the government compared to the illiterate ones.

Sixty seven percent of the target Kebele Gender Activists have asserted that women were meeting weekly while making weaving loom and at *Ikub* [an association in which members contribute money weekly or monthly so that they can take it by lots until everyone of the members receive their money at last], share experiences and enhance their income. They help each other and also loan each other and together from other organizations to do various activities.

The interview made with rural women who were attending adult literacy program revealed that after they joined the program they started to save money and their labor by avoiding traditional practices such as early marriage and investing on religious festivals, started to discuss family planning, voluntary HIV test and about their children's fate with their husbands.

DISCUSSION

This study investigates the changes that are observed in rural women as a result of their participation in political and economic activities as a function of education. The results of One Way ANOVA portrayed that rural women's level of education has positively affected their participation in leadership, membership of various women's associations and participation in ensuring good governance and benefits as a result of such participation. The interview results have supported the quantitative results.

That is, the Gender Activists have witnessed that changes are observed in women's courage to speak in public, expression of their views freely, and demand for their rights as their education level increases. The Gender Activists have further reported that membership in women's associations has encouraged women's participation in political decisions starting from participation in election up to becoming the member of the ruling party. Rural women expressed that they got financial advantages by virtue of being the member of women's associations and ruling party.

When women were asked to explain any advantages they have secured as a result of women's associations, they reported that they create influence on credit associations to increase women's participation in credit services, employ different social and legal mechanisms to protect women's rights and promote women's acceptance at home and in the community. It also increased women's decision making roles in child rearing practices, family expenditure, and selling and purchasing of goods. However, the majority of women have pointed out that those women with some level of education are by far better in coping up with the innovations introduced by the government and NGOs. The findings of this study ascertain a study conducted by Ahmed who concluded that education gives women 'a voice' against social and political injustice, and that they will have more freedom when they have more education and knowledge. In view of this, Tigist (2011) stated that education increase one's understanding of innovations and influences the process of decision making,

As three One Way ANOVAs have disclosed; rural women's level of education significantly influenced their participation in microfinance, projects, possession of resources and management of credit. Besides, education has significantly determined rural women's benefits as a result of their participation in microfinance and various projects. Both the quantitative and qualitative results have revealed that rural women with relatively better level of education have benefited more in participating in microfinance and self initiated and NGO sponsored projects. This result is in accord with the already established facts that education helps women to wisely and properly manage the money obtained from credit institutions, returning the money back and making profits out of the credit (Tigist, 2011).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

From the findings of this study, it possible to conclude that as rural women's level of education increases, their involvement in political and economic activities and the possible advantages secured from their participation increase. That is, rural women with primary and secondary school educational experience have claimed significantly

higher participation in political and economic affairs and highly benefited from their participation compared to the illiterate rural women. Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that the Ethiopian government has to introduce and expand integrated and functional adult literacy in the rural areas.

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Appendix

Dependent variables	Df			Sum of square			Mean square		F	Sig
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