



Empowering Women through Home-based Work and Institutionalized Threats in Ethiopia

A Research Paper presented by:

Tarik Hadgu Tedla

(Ethiopia)

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for obtaining the degree of
MASTERS OF ARTS IN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

Specialization:

Women, Gender and Development

(WGD)

Members of the Examining Committee:

Dr. Karin A. Siegmann (supervisor)

Dr. Kurian Rachel (second reader)

The Hague, The Netherlands
December 2012

Disclaimer:

This document represents part of the author's study programme while at the Institute of Social Studies. The views stated therein are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Institute.

Inquiries:

Postal address:

Institute of Social Studies
P.O. Box 29776
2502 LT The Hague
The Netherlands

Location:

Kortenaerkade 12
2518 AX The Hague
The Netherlands

Telephone: +31 70 426 0460

Fax: +31 70 426 0799

Acknowledgment

I am so thankful to The Netherlands Fellowships Programme (NFP) for giving me this opportunity and my gratitude also goes to ISS for allowing me to study in this outstanding institute.

I enjoyed writing my research paper and never stressed. The secret behind this was my supervisor. Dr. Karin Astrid Siegmann, I thank you very much from the bottom of my heart, and very much appreciate your patience, your insightful advice, encouragement, as well as the exact, constructive and practical comments.

I would also like to extend my sincerely gratitude to Dr. Kurian Rachel for her inspiration and providing me constructive comments and ideas.

It would have been impossible to do this research without the generous support of my respondents and others who have a bearing in this paper. I extend my gratitude to all the individuals who supported me in my stay in the field. Special thanks goes to Mebrat, Hadas , Medhin, Tekle weini, Hassen, Tewodros and Halefom.

For my beloved husband Zelalem, you are so special for me always have bright future and your academic and moral support is my reason to step forward and realize my thoughts.

I am so grateful to all my family especially heartfelt thanks goes to *Teway, Abebay* and Gezae, you are my way; I am here because of your support, advice and prayer.

To Tieba, you are so special mother, thank you for your special treatment, advice and prayer in my stay with you.

To all my friends in the ISS, sincerely appreciation mainly to Kidist, Kisanet, Genet, Eden, Zemzem, Hone and Yivatte for your all kinds of support when I was in need.

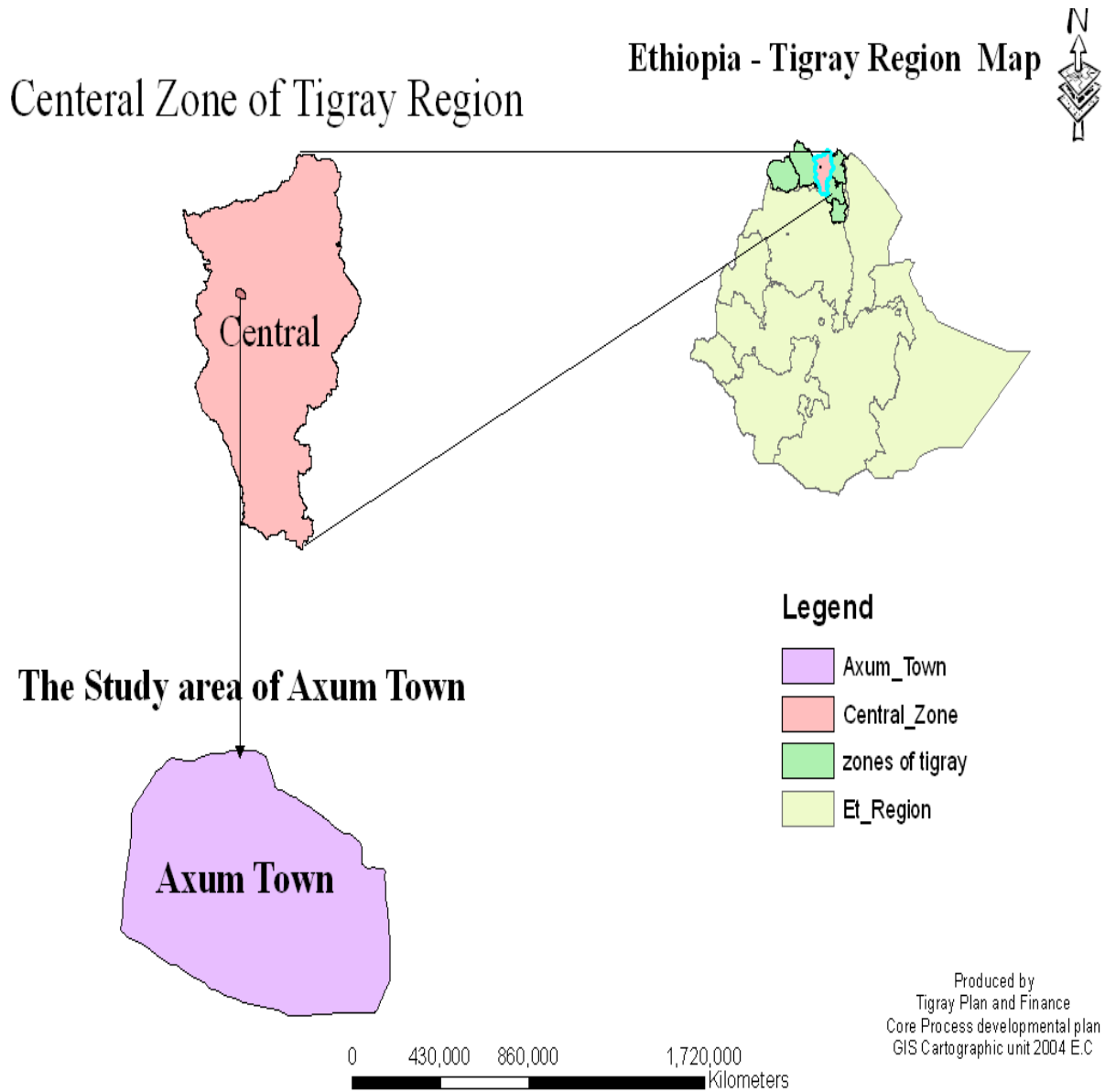
Contents

<i>Acknowledgment</i>	<i>iii</i>
<i>List of Maps</i>	<i>vii</i>
<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>viii</i>
<i>List of Acronyms</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>Abstract</i>	<i>xii</i>
Chapter 1 Introduction	1
1.1 Background	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem	2
1.3 Research Objective and Question	3
1.4 Research Justification	3
1.5 Scope and Limitation	4
Chapter 2: Conceptual and Methodological Framework	5
2.1 Approaches to Empowerment and Home-based Work	5
2.1.1 Approaches to Empowerment	5
2.1.2 Approaches to Home-based Work and the linkage to Empowerment and (Dis) empowerment	8
2.1.3 Conclusion	10
2.2. Research Methodology	11
2.2.1 Sampling Technique	13
2.2.2 Data Collection, Management and Analysis	14
2.2.3 Ethical Consideration	14
Chapter 3: Introduction to the Study Area and Women’s Home-based Work in Ethiopia	16
3.1 Women’s Home-based Work in Ethiopian Context	16
3.2 Overview of the Study area and Women’s Involvement in Basket production in Axum	16
3.3 Basket weaving, usage and the Marketization Process	18
Chapter 4: Basket Weaving as Instrument to Challenge the Dominant Discourse	20
4.1 From (Dis) empowered Position to Process of Empowerment	20
4.2 Basket Production versus women’s Agency	22
4.3 Women Basket Weavers Changing the Dominant Discourse of Male as Bread Winner	23

4.3.1 Challenging Men’s Responsibility in the Economy and its Linkage to Women’s Economic Empowerment	24
4.3.2 Challenging Men’s Decision Making Arena and its Linkages to Women’s Interpersonal Empowerment	25
Chapter 5: The Paradoxical Nature of Institutions for Women’s Empowerment and (Dis) empowerment	27
5.1 Marriage and the Family as Agents and Constraints for Women’s Struggle to Empowerment	27
5.2 The State / Government as Agent and Constraint to Women’s Empowerment	28
5.3 The Market as Threat to Empowerment	30
Chapter 6: Conclusion and Policy Implication	32
6.1 Conclusion	32
6.2 Research and Policy Implication	33
References	35
Appendices	38

List of Maps

Map 1 Study Area Map



List of Figures

1.1 Informant Mebrat weaving a basket in her shop



Source: Field Work, July 2012

1.2 Baskets in the Open market in Axum



Source: Field Work, July 2012

1.3 Baskets displayed in Axum museum compound



Source: Field Work, July 2012

List of Acronyms

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women
CSA	Central Statistical Agency
ILO	International Labour Organization
ISS	International Institute of Social Studies
TPLF	Tigray Peoples Liberation Front

Abstract

In Ethiopia, women predominantly involve in the informal sector. Home-based work as part of this sector, which is mostly occupied by women, is a field of occupation that is scantily studied. The paper therefore focuses on the question that to what extent is home-based work significant, or does it have importance for women at all; looking it in terms of women's empowerment. To develop academic rejoinder for this question, methodologically, the researcher has followed qualitative research tradition. Therefore, data were collected through semi-structured interview, in-depth interview, and focus groups discussion.

To understand the association of home-based work to empowerment and/or disempowerment, analytically, the research follows Kabeer's conceptualization of empowerment where she sees empowerment as a process. The process of empowerment entails change at different levels, and it is all about these individuals who had been denied to make choice get such ability. The empowerment of women from this approach has resource, agency and achievement dimension.

Informed by these methodological and conceptual approaches, my findings reveal that majority of the informants and participants had similar subordinated position in the society having no income to control and no decision to make for the betterment of their lives. But, through basket weaving, they are able to earn income, to control and use this resource and to involve in significant decision making at household level. By this, they are even able to alter the dominant discourse of men as bread winner and women as house maker in the household; where indirectly they are bestowed with economic and interpersonal/ familial empowerment. Thus, though involving oneself in home-based work seems accepting the unequal power relation and gender division of labour, I argue that for the women who are living in a patriarchal society (like the women in my case study), it might be best way to fight against domination, to show the potential and individual agency for social change, and to challenge dominant assumptions and discourses about men and women's role. Yet, it is impossible for them to bring change that alters the wider hierarchy and to break the institutionalized structures that subordinate women. Hence, in this regard, institutions like marriage, family, state and the market continued to have paradoxical nature; having the role of imperiling and supporting women's struggle in the process of empowerment. By implication, the empowerment of women at higher levels will only be realized whenever there is integrated effort of the poor women and development agencies including the government and other development practitioners.

Relevance to Development Studies

The research assesses women's subordinate position in a traditional society and their struggle for empowerment. The way they are empowering themselves by involving in the area of home-based work mainly basket weaving does not directly indicate opposition to the existing social structure and assigned traditional role. But, taking into account their living condition and the nature of the society, involving in home-based work remains to be best way to empowerment.

As indicated in the findings, women by becoming submissive to the traditional job are able to bring change and to even alter men's responsibility in the areas of the economy and decision making that enables them to practically challenge the main discourse of men as bread winner and women as house maker. Therefore, the research is relevant for development study as it is all about development by itself, by contributing to the under researched area of women's home-based work in Ethiopian context.

Keywords

Axum, Basket weaving, Empowerment, Ethiopia, Home-based work, Women

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background

Home-based work is one form of the informal work in which women engages predominantly. In terms of composition “the term “home based worker” is used to refer to the general category of workers who carryout remunerative work within their homes or in the surrounding grounds” (ILO 2002: 44). It has also been defined as “the production in the workers household of goods and services for monetary exchange or barter” Oberhauser 1995; Gracia Ramon et al 1995 as quoted in Estrade 2002:170). Home based work is extremely diverse ranging from “commerce and service occupations _ such as the processing of food stuffs, the production of hand crafts, the marketing of groceries or catalogue merchandise [. . .] child care, hairstyling, and sewing _ to professional services _such as dentistry, accounting, and cosmetology” (Estrade 2002:170).

Home-based workers essentially “refers to two types of workers who carry out remunerative work within their homes – independent own account producers and dependent subcontract workers” (Carr et al. 2000:127).

In development discourse, the conceptualization of home-based work with regards to its significance mainly in relation to empowerment effect for workers remained to be bone of contention. But, many researchers using different approaches indicated that it has divergent effect. For instance, using non-feminist approaches, Rowe, Hayes, and Stafford (1999); Edwards and Field Hendrey (2002) indicated home-based work as important to women because it supports to involve in the market and in household production simultaneously. From capability approach, Mehrotra and Biggeri (2007:13), showed home-based work as having contrasting impact; it might be a mechanism for capability expansion and as constraint for human development. Marxist feminists are skeptical of the significance of home-based work and argue that the “capitalist labour processes facilitate and reinforce patriarchal relations through penetrating households” (Allen and Wolkovitz 1987:12). From empowerment approach, home-based work is regarded as less empowering than other forms of work that have autonomous and visible work location (Kantor 2003).

Indicating home-based work in Ethiopian context, first, it is essential to glimpse the situation of women as a whole. Majority women in Ethiopia are (dis)empowered and have subordinated position in the society. One explanation for their subordination is therefore “their socialization process which determines gender roles” (Ethiopian Society of Population Studies: 2008). From this view point, boys are nurtured to be self-reliant, bread winner and responsible whereas, girls are socialized to be dependent and specialize in reproductive works in the household. (Cherinet and Mulugeta 2002; Ethiopian Society of Population Studies 2008). The marginalization of women may of course go beyond this explanation as culture and religion are also imperative instruments for women’s subordination.

While women have subordinate position in the society, according to study in 1989 Ethiopian labour market, the market was found to be highly regulated that demand only educated and professional labour force (Krishnan: 1996). It was also argued that in the Ethiopian labour market, women by and large are underrepresented in higher and professional works and highly represented in the works that do not require “professional skill” like in artesian and craft work (Hallward-Driemeier and Gajigo 2010:15). Thus, considering the lower position of women, and the market being intensive of “skilled” labour, women are concentrated in the informal sector. As studies also indicate around 60% of the informal work operators are women (Cherinet and Mulugeta 2002). Therefore, taking craft (basket weaving) as part of the informal sector in general and home-based work in particular, it is interesting to see whether women’s involvement in this sector is significant; it has its own advantage and disadvantage; or it totally does not have any importance, from the view point of the notion of women’s empowerment and (dis)empowerment. Therefore, the researcher discusses women’s involvement in home-based work in Ethiopia taking example of women basket weavers in Axum and its potential effect to empowerment and/or (dis) empowerment.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Comparing the situation of women and men in Ethiopia, women are the most vulnerable and do not have access to formal work. According to Jones et al. (2010: viii), “women typically have lower levels of education; less access, ownership and control of productive assets; less access to credit; and different social networks than men.” Additionally with substantial regional difference, a range of discriminatory gendered practices overlook girls and women’s human capital development. For instance, despite the claim that gender disparity in school enrolment has been highly diminished, studies indicate that literacy rates are still vastly different for men and women (Jones et al. 2010). On the other side, gendered based violence including rape and early marriage are still widespread (Ibid). Hence, all these gendered based differences and discriminations make women less capable of competing in the Ethiopian formal labour markets. As evidence to this fact, (Hallward-Driemeier and Gajigo 2010:15), indicated that, “in the Ethiopian labour market women are most under-represented among the professional/technical/management group followed by skilled labourers. [But] women are highly over-represented among artisan/crafts.” Provided that, women in Ethiopia account for the larger share of the informal economy operators in which from the total population participating in the informal economy, around 60% of them are women (Cherinet and Mulugeta 2002).

Despite the large figure of women involving in this sector as a whole, the nature of their involvement, significance they get and problems they face while involving in this sector is scantily discussed. Moreover, women’s involvement in home-based work, as part of the informal sector, is the least studied category of craft production in which significant number of women involves. The accounts of Hecht 1992; Zekaria 1999 and Asante 2005, on basket production in Harrar indicate only the tradition of basket work, its composition and cultural value in a descriptive way. Thus, first, there is no knowledge produced on women’s home-based work in Ethiopian context. Second, there is large gap

on how women basket production as home-based work might be associated and explained in relation to its significance and/or its related problems by connecting to different theoretical perspectives. Accordingly, the researcher links basket production to the concept of women's empowerment and/or disempowerment so as to understand its potential effect on producers.

1.3 Research Objective and Question

Given the aforesaid information, the study is intended to understand the connection of women's home-based work to the notion of women's empowerment and /or disempowerment. Therefore, the main question is based on the context in which Ethiopian women are found, how home-based work could empower or (dis)empower women; and what are the threats to empower women from within, if home-based work at all leads to empowerment?

1.4 Research Justification

In relation to home-based work and women's empowerment, it is difficult to find a literature that directly associates these two concepts, but, different approaches argue on the significance and related problems of home-based work to workers. None feminist approach considers home-based work as important for women mainly because its income generating ability might lead to empowerment (Rowe, Hayes and Stafford 1999). From Capability approach home-based work has two contrasting dimensions. It may increase household income and enhances capability and it may go against capabilities that are important for functionings as it may need child labour (Mehrotra and Biggeri 2007). From feminist approach, Marxists for instance are skeptical of the significance of home-based work for women. Other scholars like Sullivan and Lewis (2001) as well as Estrada, (2002) using flexibility and new opportunity as well as exploitation approach argue that the income generation ability of home-based work may empower women, but, it reinforces the existing gender division of labour. Generally, the relation of home-based work and empowerment is arguable and might have different feature in various contexts.

In relation to women's home -based work and empowerment or (dis) empowerment therefore, in Ethiopian context there is large knowledge gap. Hence, my research is significant in a way that it contributes to the understanding of home-based work and its linkage to women's empowerment/disempowerment in Ethiopia, in relation to the context in which women in the study area are found.

Additionally, in mainstream development discourse, women's empowerment is usually associated with resisting norms and traditions as well as something to be realized with external intervention only. But, it has also been argued that agency is main component of empowerment. Thus, it has been argued that "women themselves must be significant actors in the process of change that is being described or measured" (G. Sen 1993; Mehra 1997 quoted in Malhotra et al. 2002:7). Therefore, external intervention being a catalyst to empowerment, and agency as an important element for the process of change, it means that women's empowerment might be observed without even development intervention and without resisting the existing social role.

Therefore, home-based work as women's traditional occupation and how it might have empowerment effect without even resisting the socially assigned role might help to show an alternative way to women's empowerment in this context.

1.5 Scope and Limitation

My research concentrates on one type of home-based work which is characterized by an own account operation or self-employment. It uncovers the empowerment potential of home-based work for women; and potential threats to the process of empowerment through involving in this occupation. It specifically reveals women's involvement in basket production in the northern part of Ethiopia and its connection to empowerment. But, the paper does not provide more information on the general characteristics of home-based work in Ethiopia because of lack of literature. Besides, as the nature of women's home-based work varies, the findings of this paper never represent/or indicate association of all forms of women's home-based work to empowerment and/or (dis)empowerment. Besides, the information is gathered from few informants, hence, the findings in this paper are not representative and generalization based on the findings is unfeasible.

Chapter 2: Conceptual and Methodological Framework

2.1 Approaches to Empowerment and Home-based Work

2.1.1 Approaches to Empowerment

The term empowerment has remained to be a buzzword and used to discuss various agendas in development studies. It also has been used to advocate certain intervention strategies and policies by different organizations like the United Nations.

Broadly speaking, women can be empowered in several dimensions. Thus, several efforts have been made to draw comprehensive frameworks along which women can be empowered. Accordingly, Jejeebhoy (1995) gave emphasis on knowledge, decision-making, physical, emotional, economic and social autonomy; Kishor (2000a) uses financial autonomy; participation in the modern sector, lifetime exposure to employment, sharing of roles and decision-making, equality in marriage etc and A. Sen (1999) framework gives emphasis on absence of gender inequality, access to basic facilities such as schooling; access to professional training and higher education; employment and property ownership (see also Malhotra et al. 2002).

In mainstream development discourse, advocacy of women's empowerment by feminists emanates from the recognition that women's subordination is [. . .] a holistic process, encompassing all aspects of women's lives, including their families, work, legislation and state structures. It is recognized that women's oppression is experienced differently by different groups of women, and that gender relations intersect with other oppressive relations, such as those based on class, age and sexual preference (Wieringa 199:832). Therefore, "in all societies, women have been denied choice to a far greater extent than men for any given social group [. . .]"(Kabeer 1999:12).

But, one thing to keep in mind, feminists define and conceptualize women's empowerment based on their political orientations and their field of interests. Accordingly, Heyzer, (1992), using the term 'gender equity' focuses on women's empowerment in aspects like "labour markets (equal wages with men, access to all sectors); social development (the provision of basic needs, health, education); and [on] relations within the household (time-use, the distribution of resources)" (as cited in Wieringa 1994:833). For Elson (1990), "the empowerment of women goes beyond economic restructuring and focuses on the structuring of social relations which constrain women" (Elson 1990 as quoted in Ibid). Moser (1989) stresses on the importance of women's self-reliance and internal strength for empowerment. Molyneux (1985) accentuates women's empowerment to include obliteration of sexual division of labour, the assuagement of burden in the domestic sphere and removal of institutionalized forms of discrimination. Johnson (1994 quoted in Kabber 1999:12) pointed out that "although women can empower themselves by obtaining some form of control over different aspects of their lives, empowerment also suggests the need to gain some control over power structures, or to change them." For Batliwala, empowerment is "a spiral,

changing consciousness, identifying areas to target for change, planning strategies, acting for change, and analysing activities and outcomes”(quoted in Mosedale 2005:248). According to Nelly Stromquist, empowerment is “a socio-political concept that includes cognitive, psychological, economic and political components” (quoted in Mosedale 2005:248).

Malhotra and Schuler (2005) and Malhotra et al. (2002) conferring idea of women’s empowerment, argued that most of these various approaches to empowerment agree women’s empowerment to have familial/interpersonal, political, economic, socio-cultural and legal dimensions. The economic dimension of women’s empowerment considers the economic empowerment of women at the household, community and other broad levels. At household level it includes “women’s control over income; relative contribution to family support; [and] access to and control of family resources” (Malhotra et al. 2002:13). At community level, empowerment includes “access to employment; ownership of assets and land; access to credit; involvement and/or representation [. . .]” (Ibid). Socio-cultural empowerment can go beyond the household and community level. It takes account of women’s freedom of movement; women’s visibility in and access to social spaces; and women’s literacy (Ibid). And the familial/ interpersonal level, considers “women’s participation in domestic decision making; control over sexual relations; ability to make child bearing decisions; control over spouse selection and marriage timing; [as well as] freedom from domestic violence” (Malhotra et al. 2002:13).

Furthermore, Kabeer gives an advanced conceptualization of empowerment by linking to Sen ’s capability approach. For Kabeer (2005:13) therefore, “empowerment refers to the processes by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such ability.” Or “[it] entails process of change.”

To make choice relevant to the analysis of power it has to be qualified. The qualifications are therefore; first, choice should necessarily imply alternatives or “the ability to have chosen” (Kabeer 1999:2). Second, it should be seen from “consequences of choice and sought to distinguish between first-order choices those critical in allowing women to live the kinds of lives they want-and the other, less strategic choices that follow once these first-order choices have been made” (Ibid).

First order choices are those strategic life choices_ choice of livelihood, where to live, who to marry, whether to marry, whether to have children, how many children to have, who has rights over children, freedom of movement and choice of friends that are critical for people to live the lives they want. Kabeer (1999:3)

The third qualification of choice is in relation to its “transformatory significance, distinguishing between choices with the potential for challenging and destabilizing social inequalities and those that essentially express and reproduce these inequalities.”

Considering these major qualifications of choice whenever think of women’s empowerment, according to Kabeer, “[it is] the expansion in people’s ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them” (Kabeer 1999:435).

The ability to exercise strategic life choices or empowerment in this sense has three interrelated dimensions, these are; resource, agency and achievement. Accordingly, resources encompass not only material but also innumerable human and capital assets (Kabeer 1999). These resources “are acquired through a variety of social relationships conducted in the various institutional domains that make up a society, including the domains of family, market, state and community” (Kabeer 1999:3). The resource acquired within those relationships “take the form of not only actual allocation, but also of future claims and expectations” (Ibid).

As regards to the measurement of resource to indicate women’s empowerment, issues like access to, and control over resources are usually considered. But, these, notions may not equate with empowerment as “they are measures of potential rather than actualized choice” or as resource is a precondition for empowerment. Therefore, according to Kabeer (1999:14), “a key criterion for assessing the validity of a resource-based measure of women’s empowerment is the validity of its assumptions about the kinds of agency and choices that women are able to exercise as a result of their access to the resource in question.”

Agency, the second component of empowerment is “the ability to define one’s goals and act upon them” (Kabeer 1999:438). It is “about more than observable action; [as] it also encompasses the meaning, motivation and purpose that individuals bring to their activity__their sense of agency [or the power within]” (Kabeer 1999:3). Agency may take various forms like

Bargaining and negotiation, deception and manipulation, subversion and resistance as well as more intangible, cognitive process of reflection and analysis [that could] be exercised by an individual as an individual or by individuals organized as formal or informal groups (Ibid).

Decision making agency is frequently used to indicate women’s empowerment but, according to Kabeer, attention should be given to “the consequential significance of areas of decision making or of different stages in the decision-making process” (Kabeer 1999:18).

Whatever the nature and characteristics of women’s agency in relation to empowerment is, “there is ample justification for government and multilaterals to promote policies that strengthen gender equality through various means” (Malhotra 2002:5). Which means, encouraging women to change their lives, without development intervention, may not bring empowerment in the real sense, because, their (dis)empowerment is grounded in various complicated and institutionalized structures and actions.

Resource and agency together “constitute what Sen (1985b) refers to as capabilities: the potential that people have for living the lives they want of achieving valued ways of ‘being and doing’” (Kabeer 2001:437). Kabeer relates

capabilities to Sen's notion of functioning. This notion refers to "all the possible ways of being and doing that are valued by people in a given context, and of functioning achievements to refer to the particular ways of being and doing that are realized by different individuals (Sen 1985 cited in Kabeer 1999:4). In measuring achievements Kabeer, based on the studies she reviewed, she notes that it is necessary "to distinguish between functioning achievements that testify to women's greater efficiency as agents within prescribed gender roles, and those that are indicative of women as agents of transformation" (Kabeer 1999:27).

According to Kabeer, the process of empowerment implies change at different levels and has different dimensions. Accordingly, "change can occur at the level of the individual, in their "inner" sense of self or in their access to material resources; it can occur in relationships within the family and household; or it can reflect alteration in position in the wider hierarchies of the economy and state" (Kabeer 1999:10). Thus, indicating the causes of denial of women's choice in terms of those different levels can be categorized as "deeper level" or that includes the structural relations of class/cast/gender; "intermediate level"; encompasses "distribution of rules and resources"; and "immediate level" which comprises the " individual agency and achievement" (Kabeer 1999:10).

2.1.2 Approaches to Home-based Work and the linkage to Empowerment and (Dis) empowerment

The conceptualization of home-based work as a whole might be divided into three broad categories. The first category encompasses theories that depicts home-based workers as beneficiaries and more advantageous. From this view point, home- based workers are "relatively advantaged group of individuals who have chosen to work at home to gain flexibility and to better control their time" (Edwards and Field-Hendrey 1996: 27). Accordingly, homework allows workers to care their children and/ or relatives at home while involving in the labour market (Edwards and Field-Hendrey1996); it provides autonomy and control over work and freedom to balance it with family responsibility; it allows households to optimize economic and time resources of their members (Silver 1993:184).

From this stand point, the new opportunity for flexibility approach explains how home-based work is a great magnitude for workers. This approach views home-based work as solution to "problems of balancing work and family" (Huws et al 1996 as quoted in Sullivan and Lewis 2001:124). Besides, according to Silver (1993), new opportunity for flexibility model "envisages the breakdown of traditional roles in that male domestic participation will increase as a result of the lack of spatial separation of work and family" (cited in Sullivan and Lewis 2001:124). Thus, in case of women's telework, the increased flexibility is supposed to facilitate household and family management (Sullivan and Lewis 2001). Additionally, Dooley (1996), using this approach argues that home-based telework provides access to work for those who have childcare responsibilities and restricted to work in the formal work site. Similarly, Rowe et al (1999:66) considered home-based self-employment as a form of community development "for its potential for an alternative or supplement income source for residents and for its economic multiplier". Moreover, as to Kantor (2002) "home-based work is an opportunity for

women to work and earn money without being contradicted by patriarchal ideology” (as quoted in Topçuoğlu 2005:59).

The second category portrays homeworkers as an exploited group, “forced to work for low wages, with few if any benefits, in substandard working conditions, [and] often relying on the supplementary labour of young children” (Edwards and Field-Hendrey 1996: 27). Besides, it depicts “homework as a form of exploitative sweating that ties women to the dual demands of family and employers; leaves them little free time; isolates them socially; and subjects them to their husbands' control” (Allen and Wolkowitz 1987; Beneria and Roldan 1987; Leidner 1987 as cited in Silver 1993:184). Feminist approach mainly Marxist feminist view of home-based work fits best to this category. Because, Marxist feminists theorize women’s work and their position in the labour market as well as at home by emphasizing on capitalist relations and considers home-based work as having less or no advantage for women. According to the account of Marxist Feminists like for instance, Voladia (2000 and 2001), who studied the concentration of women in informal activities in South Africa; Delaney (1996), emphasized on the expansion in the number of home-based workers in Austria; Topçuoğlu (2005), who discussed women’s home-based work in Turkey; and Mies (1981) who studied the dynamics of sexual division of labour and capital accumulation of women lace workers of Narsapu (India), by looking at these case studies they showed how and why women are concentrated in informal home-based work. Thus, the segregated position of women in the labour market (having high concentration in the informal market) is explained through the heterogeneous nature of the labour market that is divided by gender (Barrett & McIntosh 1980). This phenomenon is called by them “segmented labour market”. Accordingly, it has been discussed that there are markets within the labour market that are different in terms of wage rates and social rights. And as women have been denied the opportunity to enter into formal labour markets; they are segregated and are concentrated in the secondary labour market or the informal sector (Beechey 1977 and Topçuoğlu 2005). Hakim (1996) also indicated that home-based informal sector is both an area of horizontal and vertical segregation as it dominantly incorporates women and child labour as well as there is hardly any chance of promotion of this sector . The common analysis underlying these studies is that “capitalist labour processes facilitate and reinforce patriarchal relations through penetrating households” (Allen and Wolkovitz 1987:12).

Associating their argument to empowerment and/or (dis)empowerment therefore, home-based work does not empower women as such because they entered into the labour market without choice or because of the segregation in the formal labour market by capitalist system.

Despite these two optimistic and pessimistic views, in the third category, home-based work is conceptualized as having contradictory effect to workers. For instance, capability approach indicates home-based work as having two contrasting dimensions. Accordingly, on one side, “it may trigger an increase in household income and hence provide a means for capability expansion” (Mehrotra and Biggeri 2007:13). It has been argued that home based work is significant both at family level and for the industry and local economy. At family level for example, “[it] helps to diversify and enhance the household income; saves workers travel time (especially for men); helps to get specific skills in producing goods at home; increases human capital available at household level”(Mehrotra and Biggeri 2007:14). On the other hand, home-

based work “may work as a constraint on human development and the capabilities of household members as it leads, for instance, to child labour and keeps children [away] from school” (Mehrotra and Biggeri 2007:13).

According to Sullivan and Lewis (2001) using new opportunity for “flexibility” and “exploitation” approaches together, they found home-based work as important to increase workers’ independence and autonomy; it enables women to combine multiple roles and leads to make life easy by the flexibility that home-based work brings. But at the same time, it “perpetuates traditional work and family roles” (Sullivan and Lewis 2001:123). Similarly, Estrada (2002) argues that it is a mechanism for income generation that provides women a new economic role and it helps to negotiate their gender roles and relations. Yet, home-based work reinforces women’s traditional role. By the same token, Perrons (2003) who studied the new economy and the work life balance on new media owners argues that “new media [home-based work] creates new opportunities for people to combine intersecting paid work with caring responsibilities,[whilst] a gender imbalance remains” (Perrons 2003:65).

Linking the divergent role of home-based work to Kabeer’s conceptualization of empowerment, or to “the process by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such an ability” (Kabeer 2005:13), first choice should be qualified. Its qualification should therefore be in terms of the existence of alternatives or “the ability to have chosen” (Kabeer 1999:2); in relation to its consequential significance for people’s life and in view of its ability of transforming the existing structures and unequal power relation. From this view point, the (dis)empowerment effect of home-based work explained through the exploitation approaches is not questionable. Whereas, coming to its empowerment effect, it has been argued that it is significant for women, though creating job opportunity and enabling to earn and to have access to income. But, to what extent can these resources (income) be translated to empowerment. Because, the ability to earn income and to have access to resources is always arguable as the relationship of income earning with women’s empowerment might always not have undeviating relationship taking into account the non-economic factors like norms that alter women’s bargaining power in the household (Agarwal 1997). Besides, access to resource is precondition than actual empowerment (Kabeer 1999) or resources are “catalysts for empowerment or conditions under which empowerment is likely to occur” (Malhotra 2002:8). On the other hand, there is no any evidence that designate whether positive effects of home-based work by themselves challenge the institutionalized power structures that subordinate women at different levels.

2.1.3 Conclusion

The term empowerment has been used to indicate various processes and changes that occur at different levels. And, various approaches agree women’s empowerment to occur at least in the economic arena, socio-cultural, interpersonal and legal dimensions (Malhotra et al.2002). The analytical approach of this paper exclusively follows Kabeer’s and Malhotra’s approaches to empowerment. Thus, the ability to make choices (transformatory and important for strategic life choice) in the resource , agency and achievements dimensions of empowerment are linked to the broad

economic and interpersonal dimensions of empowerment using indicators like, earning and controlling income as well as decision making power in different areas in the household. These are taken because, by this, women could transform the existing power relation and dominant discourses of men's and women's responsibility or the other way round. Besides, how different institutions mainly the state or government, the family and the market plays role in empowering and (dis) empowering women using their institutional authority (see Kabeer 1999), will be applied in the analysis.

2.2. Research Methodology

According to Kabeer (2005:13), empowerment is a “process by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such ability.” To make choice relevant to the analysis of power it has to be qualified. For this purpose, first choice should necessarily imply alternatives or “the ability to have chosen” (Kabeer 1999:2). Second, “not all choices are equally relevant to the definition of power” (Kabeer 1999:2). Some choices have greater significance than others in terms of their consequences for people's lives. So, to indicate the process of change in the life of home-based workers from disempowered status to the process of empowerment, using indicators in economic arena or economic empowerment (like income earning and control ability); and in interpersonal or familial empowerment, (using indicators like in areas of basic decision making power in the household) are valuable to the analysis.

From Kabeer's approach, as women's choices should be relevant to the life that women want to live, it is important to indicate how choices challenge the existing power relation and the dominant discourse of the two genders in the society, that is, of men as bread winner and women as house maker. To understand this situation, following qualitative research methodology or identifying techniques that could help in providing information rich cases is vital. Therefore, the best way to gather this detail information was following qualitative research methodology and techniques. Hence, semi-structured interview, in-depth interview and focus groups discussion were found to be vital instruments to gather the necessary data.

Interview Method

To gather the necessary data for the research question, one among many appropriate techniques of data collection in qualitative research is interview method. Interviewing is “a method of data collection that involves researchers seeking open-ended answers related to a number of questions, topic areas, or themes” (O'Leary 2009:194). Interview methods are various ranging from formal, informal, structured, semi-structured and unstructured to group and individual. These all have their own characteristic, advantages and disadvantages (O'Leary 2009). In this paper, semi-structured interview and in-depth interview were applied.

Semi-structured interview

I prepared questions and asked the informants in a somewhat structured way. This helped me to have a guide-line while gathering the data from informants and to easily collect the data while the informants were engaged in their job.

Issues like what you get from weaving basket; who decides upon the income that you get from your production; what are the challenges that you face and who controls your production and why; is there any reward that you get by weaving baskets including the income that could be earned, respect from your family and the community at large; and how your work is important in changing gender roles in the household . . . , were asked to informants.

Applying semi-structured interview was necessary because it helped me to gather detail information by providing some leading questions. Additionally, it was vital to crosscheck the data that were gathered using focus group discussion and in-depth interview methods.

I contacted twenty interviewees and it was conducted in the open market. I was asking respondents individually but, in some instances other women who were around my respondent were explaining/ elaborating some ideas when the targeted informant could not give detail answer for the question.

In-Depth Interview

An in-depth interview was conducted with four women where three of them have basket shop and at the same time are basket weavers. Asking these women deeply was important to investigate their experience both as weavers and as owners of basket shop. This was necessary to find out the basic challenges that women are facing, as owners of a business and as producers. Besides, it was important to acquire detail clarification on how this work affects their living in different aspects in terms of empowerment and/or disempowerment.

Focus Groups Discussion

From its very nature this method serves to study the way in which individuals collectively construct meaning on certain phenomena (Bryman and Teevan 2004). Accordingly, to better use the method, first I located my group participants. I then form homogenous groups in terms of skill, family background, place of origin, work place and age. Here, great care was taken in order to avoid any dominance of one group member over the others. Yet, it was difficult to control extraneous disasters because the focus group discussion was conducted in the open market and work place of women. Hence, in the meantime, some of them had to sell their products whenever buyer comes.

As to Morgan (1996) the rule of thumb in focus groups discussions is for groups to be 3-5 with 5-10 participants each. Accordingly, I firstly locate a total of 18 participants and with that I was able to have three focus groups discussion; in which the participants in each of the groups were six and the discussion was held for 1- 1 ½ hours and only for one session.

Through applying this technique, respondents were asked to discuss how and why they started weaving basket; what they think of the benefit that they are getting; what problems do they face while weaving weaving; whether their job is considered as valid by their family members; what is the perception of the community of involving in weaving; are women marginalized because of their work or do women get special treatment and respect etc. This technique was important to triangulate the data gathered using semi-structured and in-depth interview. And fortunately, the information collected through three of these methods has similarities.

2.2.1 Sampling Technique

My research is to get comprehensive information on one kind of home-based work and its potential towards women's empowerment/or disempowerment. Thus, purposive sampling was important as it is a key technique "in selecting information rich cases for study in-depth" (Patton 1990:169). Besides,

“purposive sampling strategies are designed to enhance understandings of selected individuals’ or groups’ experience(s)” (Devers and Frankel 2000:264). I applied homogenous sampling technique for the need of getting detail description of women basket weavers whose economy is mainly dependent on basket production. Because, these women are information rich for my study, as they easily describe their position in the society before they start weaving, their long experiences of weaving, and their struggle to empowerment and challenges from institutions mainly the market.

In selecting respondents, first I visited Culture and Tourism bureau of the area as I heard that the office has intervention programmes towards indigenous handcraft products and producers in the region. I visited them so as to contact my respondents through. But, they informed me that their intervention programme is too small to find representative sample for all the women involving in basket weaving. So, I decided to start interview with women whom I could easily meet by myself. Therefore, I started interviewing those women who were weaving and selling stored baskets in their shops in the down town. These women informed me that it is very difficult to get informants from those who do not have shops like them. They suggested me that the best way of reaching them is waiting in the open market every Saturday. Because, Saturday is the market day of the locality and mainly it is basket market day. Accordingly, I convened informants in the market place and interviewed twenty individuals in two market days.

I selected the study site based on my living experience and consequential assumption that the community is predominantly Orthodox Christian. Hence, comparing with other parts of the region, very clear women subordination and mechanical gender role is observed. So, I need to show women’s mechanism of overcoming such normalized, institutionalized and persisted problems.

2.2.2 Data Collection, Management and Analysis

Primary data was collected from women basket producers in and around Axum town. While collecting the data, I took notes, recorded informants’ voice and took photographs.

Besides, at daily base I transferred the notes from note book and the audio voices as well as photographs into an electronic folder created for this purpose only. After putting in a folder, coding of data was taken place. Coding ‘refers to data reduction either by a system of symbols or by numbers. (Richards 2005:85).According to Richards (2005:86), in qualitative research ‘ [a researcher has] to do some of data reduction, to store information describing the attributes of an interviewee, for example (gender, age, ethnicity etc).Accordingly, ideas gathered from women who have similar family background, skill, income, educational background and age were put together. Besides, similar ideas, opinions and answers were put together and then title was given based on their theme and content. Simultaneously, data transcribing and translating were done. This was followed by translation, categorization, analysis and interpretation by linking the data to the deducted concepts and theories of empowerment and home-based work.

2.2.3 Ethical Consideration

When I arrive at the study site, I first visited the local officials and asked them to write a recommendation letter for me in local language which could help me to have easy entry to informants. But, they said that the recommendation from my advisor is enough to go and to collect data from the field. But, they helped me in person by going with me to meet individuals who are known by their office. Accordingly, after meeting informants, I first explained what my title was, why I was conducting a research and I clearly indicated that my research was pure academic. Besides, I explained that I did not have any relation either with governmental or nongovernmental agencies that can positively or negatively influence their work. Additionally, before I started interview, I asked for their consent to be my interviewee. I also asked whether I can use tape recorder and photographer. Moreover, I told them that if they do not want their real name to be mentioned in my paper, I can use another name so that they will become anonymous. But, having witnessed that they were not doing any sin, they agreed for their names to be written and their situation, mainly their problem to be recorded.

Chapter 3: Introduction to the Study Area and Women's Home-based Work in Ethiopia

3.1 Women's Home-based Work in Ethiopian Context

Few Scholars from history, archaeology and anthropology studied about traditional women's work without mentioning the term home-based work. Accordingly; Tsehai Berhane Sellassie, (as indicated in Bizuneh 2001) wrote about women's involvement in pottery production in Walayita; Brandt (1996) studied women's traditional work of stone tools in southern Ethiopia; and Hecht (1991), Zekaria (1999) as well as Asante (2005) all wrote about women's involvement in basket weaving in Harrar.

Having, little research done on women's home-based work, it is difficult to provide a general overview of the nature of home-based work at country level. For this reason, I need to highlight only the specific nature of women's home-based basket production in Ethiopia.

Basket production is not well studied and documented field of women's occupation. The only basket production that few authors wrote about it is basket production in Harrar town. The first author on basket production in Harrar is therefore Hecht (1992). In her monograph, she indicated that basket production had existed for centuries and is woven by women. She explained and indicated the different kinds of decorated baskets used for different purposes. She stated that basket weaving in Harrar has remained to be women's work. Additionally, she discussed that "for a Harrari woman, it was essential to know how to do this delicate basketwork. She [as a Harrari woman] also had to know how to arrange the baskets in her home according to precise rules. By these abilities, she showed that she belonged to the Harari elite in the town" (Hecht 1992:2). In this case, basket weaving might be seen from two angles. On the one hand, it might be used as a mechanism to access resource, and to share power from the community. On the other hand, the precise rules and ways of arranging baskets in the house might be considered as mechanisms to subordinate women by forcing them to take much time in this type of reproductive work.

Zekaria (1999) another author who also gave a descriptive analysis on basketry in Harrar, discussed the aesthetic, cultural and symbolic value of basket for women as well as men though it is woven by women only. He discussed line by line of the process of basket production by Harrari women. Additionally, Asante (2005) discussed the function, styles, and indicators of decline of basket production in the town. Besides, he discussed the market exchange of baskets and its significance for women as source of income.

3.2 Overview of the Study Area and Women's Involvement in Basket production in Axum

Axum, located in northern part of Ethiopia, is one among the ancient historical sites of East Africa possessing antiques cultural and material remnants. As described by Hable Sellassie (1972:59), "Axum as capital of the state was the cultural, economic and commercial centre of the empire." Moreover, Adhna

(1998:42) explained that “ everything that defined the Ethiopian state was a result of Axumite invention and innovation”. The legacy of the Axumite civilization is therefore being shown in the overall living condition of the Ethiopians; mainly, it has demonstrated social, cultural, religious, economic and political effect on the northern and central highlanders. As regards to the specific contribution of Axum to Ethiopia, the Axumites were issuing their own coin, they introduced Christianity in the 4th century, they invented their own writing system (in which the alphabets and numbers are still in use) and they erected many stelea which have not yet investigated of when and why these were erected, but, still have significant indication of classic technological advancement and civilization of the region (Hable Sellassie 1972).

Though nobody has written about basketry in Axum, may be because it is predominantly done by women, there is no doubt that the art of basket weaving traces back its origin to this civilization. As also stated in tourist travel guide of tourism and culture bureau of the town, Axumite craftsmanship is considered as the basis of classical Ethiopian handcrafts.

But, probably with the adoption of Orthodox Christianity by majority of Ethiopians, (which is direct legacy of Axum); various state systems like the feudal (where the rulers claim to be descendants of late Axumite emperors) and the evolved culture, as a result of the hybridity of religion, political system and the existed culture, might have their own contribution to women’s subordination and the development of a patriarchal society. Hence, as long term effect, Ethiopia has become a patriarchal society that keeps women in a subordinate position (Cherinet and Mulugeta 2002). Thus, at this time, similar to other women from the developing world, “[Ethiopian women are] silent and their voice has been stifled by economic and cultural factors” (Ethiopian Society of Population Studies 2008:14). It has been also argued that, “economic and cultural factors, coupled with institutional factors dictate the gender-based division of labour, rights, responsibilities, opportunities, and access to and control over resources” (Ethiopian Society of Population Studies 2008:14). As a result, women are depicted as “docile, submissive, patient, and tolerant of monotonous work and violence, for which culture is used as a justification” (Hirut as quoted in Ethiopian Society of Population Studies 2008:14).

Coming specifically to women in Axum area, the problem is not different, but much tighten because of the adoption and existence of Orthodox Christianity and its hybridity to the existing culture for centuries. As a result, hierarchy, patriarchy and gender based division of labour is vibrant. Provided this fact, for centuries, men continued to be dominant and considered as bread winner, whilst, women are seen as house makers. Hence, many women have subordinate position in the society and they are disempowered.

According to the gender based division of labour and the mechanical division of feminine and masculine acts and activities, women and men should act differently and should involve in different spheres. Accordingly, women in the Christian community of this area are expected to act, work, eat and even speak in a certain feminine way.

Though, the dwellers are predominantly Christian, in which according to the Ethiopian Central Statistical Agency (CSA) (2007) report, in Axum town, there are 44,647, inhabitants of whom 20,741 are men and 23,906 are women. From this population, around 10 % are followers of Islam. The minority Muslim women also have to go according to the traditional role assigned to the

Christian women. The only visible difference is, Muslim married women should veil their hair, while Christians do instead show stylish traditional hair dressing. Therefore, the ideal feminine woman, no matter about her religion, is expected to be excellent housewife to mean woman who cares her children properly, who has the ability to create harmonious relationship with neighbours and relatives, as well as a woman who is expert of producing traditional food and other products that can be produced at home (in-depth interview 2012). Basket production in Axum is therefore grounded in these traditionally assigned reproductive women's role in the household.

3.3 Basket Weaving, Usage and the Marketization Process

Basket weaving as women's reproductive role was traditionally produced at home and never had market value. But, now women consider basket weaving as means to generate income. Therefore, at this time, most women in Axum weave baskets manually at home side by side with their reproductive work in the household. According to informants, basket weaving does not require much more finance to start a business with, and especially before some years the price of raw materials was very cheap. Even some informants indicated that they had also an opportunity of getting some raw materials for free as they predominantly use variety of local grasses. But, with government development programme in the area of environmental protection, all the areas or source of the raw materials were owned by the government. Hence, it has become impossible to get the raw material freely. This has become the starting point of the marketization of the raw materials and it has shown limitless increase in price. Consequently, at this time, the raw materials are very expensive and it is not easy to start even a business with. Besides, informants indicated that the number of local buyers is drastically reducing because of the deterioration of the economy as a result of the unregulated nature of the market, population increase and ever increasing price of products.

Based on the shape and function that baskets have, and based on the service that baskets give, as indicated in Tigray tourism and culture brochure,

In Axum there are basketry of various shapes and functions that are made from various types of grass further, there are decorative as well as household utensils that are exclusively considered of the domain of the female.

Similarly, from my observation and as my informants explained, production of basket in this area can broadly be divided into two categories. The first category is associated with the traditional service that baskets provide to a given household. According to the data from focus group discussion, in earlier times or before the domination of plastic products to the local market, women were weaving different baskets to be used in the household. And, most household instruments (like instruments to serve food and to put cereals), were woven by women. These traditional baskets with their traditional service could be produced by any woman who ever has grown up with the community, as producing basket had been associated with women's main responsibility, and was considered as expression of intelligence. The types of baskets that are used to serve in the household are relatively not as such finest and can be produced from indigenous or local materials only. Besides, creative design was not as such needed.

The second type of women's basket production in Axum is a continuation and the result of the artistic and transformative work of women on the traditionally assigned women's reproductive role. These baskets are used during marriage celebration and mostly are produced to generate income. Thus, these baskets are the most important to this essay, in which according to the findings, they have potential of empowering women at household and individual level through bringing change in their life (see chapter 4).

Basket market of the town has not got attention from the government yet. But, my informants in the in-depth interview noted that those women who have basket shops have to pay taxes for the government like other shops. Whereas, those women who sell their products in the open market, they do not have to pay anything for the government.

With regard to the chain and market regulation of this production, the suppliers of the raw materials are merchants and farmers. This is to mean that for the raw material that can locally be generated like the different types of grasses, majority of the suppliers are farmers mainly women farmers. Whereas, for the semi-processed material that is imported from abroad, the main suppliers are men merchants from the town.

According to participants, the nature of production of this basket weaving may not be included into global value chain as there is little recognition and acceptance of these products and yet they are less competitive in overseas markets. For this reason, most of them are sold at the local market of the town either to the indigenous people or to some tourists who usually come to visit the historical sites of the area. Consequently, I might say that this type of home-based work is characterized by an own account operation production.

Chapter 4: Basket Weaving as Instrument to Challenge the Dominant Discourse

The analysis stands on feminist view point of women's subordination and approach for their empowerment. Despite the difference within feminists, their main outlook is that "in all societies, women have been denied choice to a far greater extent than men for any given social group [. . .]"(Kabeer 1999:12). In Ethiopian context, studies reveal that women have been denied of choice, and their marginalization or lack of choice was explained in terms of lack of access to resources such as land, education, provision of health service and so on (Almaz 1991; Hirut 2004; Mukuria et al. 2005 as quoted in Ethiopian Society of Population Studies 2008). But, their (dis)empowered position is not only related to lack of access to resource, in its conventional sense, but also, to threats of institutions and structural barriers that narrow down and deny women's choice.

This chapter starts with process of women's empowerment through basket weaving by taking their previous condition as point of reference. This is followed by conversing women's involvement in basket weaving and its linkage to women's individual agency of their willingness for social change. This is followed by discussing the involvement of women in home-based work, and how they challenge the dominant discourse of men as responsible in the economy and decision making arena at household level, and its relation to empowerment.

4.1 From (Dis) empowered Position to Process of Empowerment

Women's basket weaving in Axum was one of the traditionally assigned women's reproductive works in the household. Almost all informants explained that weaving baskets neither had economic value nor had any effect to the unequal power relation of women and men in this patriarchal society.

Indicating informants disempowered position, most of them were students and after dropout from school they had nothing to own. Hence, they started weaving while they are at home. Others enter into this business, having another means of income mainly land (for those informants who have rural background). They indicated that, they start the business of weaving because production from the land is either not enough to cover their basic needs, or they do not have full decision making power over the production. As Letemaram indicated, "income from such productive resources has to be controlled either by men or by men and women, for that matter, most women want to have resources to own and control" (interview on 26/07/12). The individual case below provides vibrant expression on the (dis)empowered condition of women and how they try to change their subordinate position, passing through multiple obstacles.

Case of Hadas Berhe

My name is Hadas Berhe and I am 45 years old. I had been working as a domestic worker for 15 years. I had attended modern education up to ninth grade while I was working as a domestic worker. At this time I am a sanitary worker of tourism bureau of Axum and my monthly salary when I first employed was 105 Birr (around 5 Euro). By this salary, I was expected to clean offices and the museum two times a day. As my salary was too small to afford for food I was working additional works in my free time. Because, from 105 Birr I had to pay 50 for house rent, so I could not buy food with 55 birr for a month and I had even only one cloth. As a result most of the times I was not eating normal food like *enjera* (Ethiopian staple food) rather I was buying very cheap foods and sometimes my friends used to give me if they have extra food and clothes. While I was in this condition, tourism bureau ordered me to work the whole day and informed me that the tourism policy has been changed and they informed me that it is not like other governmental offices rather it is like hotel. Accordingly, I was ordered to spend the whole day in the museum unless, they informed me that they will employ another person. But still the salary was 105 Birr and I was not affording for basic needs. I had no alternative rather than working and I started working the whole day with them.

One day I was watering the plants in around the museum and cleaning the nearby areas. While doing this, one foreigner observed my work and gave me 10 Ethiopian Birr as a reward to my committed extra work. So, I used the money to buy raw materials for basket and started weaving baskets while I was working. Many tourists were attracted and asked me to sell my basket. But, I said them no as it was impossible to sell my product in the office. One day my boss heard me while I was saying that I cannot sell my products here. So, he asked me about the condition and later allowed me to sell my products and to put some of them as exhibition. As a result, I started to earn enough money for my living. More than this, I was able to help my poor sisters, brothers and my father. After a time, one of my brothers bought a house for the family and I took responsibility of finishing the construction. Hearing this, the tourism bureau stopped me selling my products there. As a result, now I am paying 1500 Birr (around 75 euro) rent per month and despite the significance of the profession I am not profitable. This is for the reasons that even though the site of my shop is very nice for market, tourists who are major buyers are not allowed to go freely and buy my products. In case they come, the so called tourist guides come to my shop and say that this is not legal, not traditional and it is less quality. Sometimes they call double price so that the buyer go out. Sometimes they come in group and rob. I never try to challenge them, because I know if I do, they even may kill me. Because I do not have guarantee at all. On the other hand, the government officials mainly tax collectors do not want to know how much I could sell rather they simply calculate the estimate value of the baskets in the shop and order me to pay tax accordingly (interview 23/07/12)

Majority of the informants had similar background, if not had (dis)empowered position having no income to control and no decision to make for the betterment of their lives. But, after entering into this business, they are able to earn income, to control and use the resource and to involve in significant decision making at the household level.

4.2 Basket Production versus women's Agency

Women found in this patriarchal society, having no access to productive resources exercise their agency that has significant implication to empowerment. In this topic, emphasis is given to expression of their agency or their exercise of choice in a way that challenges the existing imbalanced power relation in the household.

To start with, agency can be seen from various dimensions. According to (Kabeer 2005:14), "agency in relation to empowerment, [. . .] implies not only actively exercising choice, but also doing this in ways that challenge power relations." She explained agency as having two forms. These are "passive' forms of agency (action taken when there is little choice), and 'active' agency (purposeful behaviour)" (Kabeer 2005:15). There is also a distinction of greater effectiveness of agency and agency that is transformative. Greater effectiveness of agency relates to women's greater efficiency in carrying out their given roles and responsibilities, and transformative agency is "[women's] ability to act on the restrictive aspects of these roles and responsibilities in order to change them" (Kabeer 2005: 15). She further explains agency as "more than observable action; it also encompasses the meaning, motivation and purpose which individuals bring to their activity, their sense of agency or the "power within". Besides, "[agency] encompasses a much wider range of purposive actions, including bargaining, negotiation, deception, manipulation, subversion, resistance and protest as well as the more intangible, cognitive process of reflection and analysis"(Kabeer 1999:21).

Agency in relation to my analysis therefore includes the passive, progressive and transformative forms which can also be linked to women's efficiency to do socially assigned roles and the transformative one in which women try to act on it not by simply opposing to it but by being submissive to it. Therefore, the individual agency of converting the reproductive domestic work into productive resource and the choice of women to work at home, be it submissive or transformative, might be claimed as indicator of women's decision making agency that have empowerment effect and even have implication of challenging the dominant discourse of men as bread winner and women as house maker in this community. Because, in reality, weaving baskets neither had economic value nor had any effect to the unequal power relation and differentials in decision making in the household. But, probably as a result of earlier social movements, women's role is not only being changed but also being diversified with little or no change in men's role. The commence of the agenda of social change including changing gender role in this area goes back to the era of the birth of a revolutionary party known as Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF). This was a political mobilization evolved in the 1970s espoused with Marxist/ Leninist ideology. The agenda of women and their subordination therefore originates from its ideological foundation. Hence, "women were seen as the most oppressed section of society in Tigray and indeed their oppression was multi-facet" (Berhe 2009: 290). As response to the so-called multiple oppression, therefore, TPLF tried to liberate women by trying to share power in the household and breaking the mechanical gender roles in the community. Consequently, women in the rural areas started to plough lands; they actively and almost equally participated in the public sphere, like in meetings, in public decision which were never women's role in the community (Berhe 2009 and 2004).

When TPLF seize the state apparatus, then socio-economic development has become primary issue than changing the previous social structure and gender relations. From my observation and as informants stated, having no change in men's role, women besides the works that are done outside have continued to be responsible of all the tasks that should be done in the household. Thus, in my case, in response to the feminization of responsibility in the public and private sphere, and failure of men to be responsible, they specialize their reproductive work, by simply making their products more market oriented. Informant Hadas's note strengthens this argument:

In earlier times, women had no more responsibility about the income to be earned in the household. But now, women are more curious about the household income and there are many female-headed households. As a result, there are women who device mechanisms of generating income from reproductive women's work by making their products more stylish and market oriented (Interview 19/07/2012).

Besides, married informants indicated that they prefer weaving baskets for the reason that they want to manage the household; they need to have free time; and they need to look after their children as there is no or there is little support from husbands either in division of labour in the household or in earning enough income.

In this case, we are talking about these women who do not have adequate educational background, advocacy and support from development agencies. For such women therefore, it is unthinkable to ask why should not oppose their assigned role, or why should not exercise agency that directly opposes their gender roles, or why they involve in basket weaving that simply sustains the gender division of labour, rather I argue that the ability of women to convert the reproductive women's work into productive work and the preference to work at home is their agency that has consequential empowerment effect. But, this type of agency is submissive and transformatory at the same time. It is submissive because these women are not fighting against; rather they are becoming submissive to their socially assigned gender role. But, it is also transformatory in a way that it is becoming a mechanism to oppose the socially assigned role by using this work as a means to shift and balance the unequal power relation and to avoid male domination in the household (see below how it alters the dominant discourse of male as bread winner and female as house maker).

To wind up, the ability of women to convert their reproductive work to productive work in addition to their responsibilities in the public and private sphere and their preference to work at home indicates women's decision making agency and readiness for change that even alters the existing patriarchy and unequal power relation of men and women in the household.

4.3 Women Basket Weavers Changing the Dominant Discourse of Male as Bread Winner

“Ethiopia is a patriarchal society that keeps women at a subordinate position, using religion and culture as an excuse” (Cherinet and Mulugeta 2002: xii). Though division of labour and women's gender role and responsibility may differ across culture within the Ethiopian context, the patriarchal society reinforces women's disempowered position by restricting their capacity and

choice to reproductive work and strengthening the dominant discourse of the notion of men as bread winner and the women as house maker. This concept restricts women's access to resources and to basic household decision making. But, women showed their ability putting themselves in bread winner position through achieving and being responsible for almost all the duties and responsibilities of men in this traditional society. For more clarification, informant Hadas explained that

In earlier times, women had no more responsibility about the income to be earned in the household. But now, women are more curious and responsible of the income to be earned (interview 23/07/2012).

Moreover, participants noted and ascertained that there are even some women who are heads of the family and are fulfilling the needs of their children which traditionally were the responsibility of their husbands. In the next sub topics therefore, how women basket weavers showed their readiness for change through altering the previous domains of men in areas of the economy and household decision making are discussed.

4.3.1 Challenging Men's Responsibility in the Economy and its Linkage to Women's Economic Empowerment

In this topic, women's involvement in basket weaving is discussed in association with its role in changing women's responsibility (in relation to earning income, usage and control) which were traditionally categorized as men's domain and responsibility. These responsibilities are vital for women's lives hence are considered as indicators of women's economic empowerment.

At household level, some among the indicators of women's economic empowerment include, "women's control over income; relative contribution to family support; access to and control of family resources" (Malhotra et al 2002: 13). From this view point, women's capability of earning income and its use, as well as women's control over the income earned are discussed as indicators of women's economic and interpersonal empowerment at household level that broadens women's domain and challenges men's principal responsibility.

Basket weavers indicate that the predominant significance of weaving is to earn income. But, earning income in this traditional society was principal task of men, being head of the household. Against this notion therefore, informant Abrehet, Beriha, and Tsiriyti who live with their family explained that they do not ask for their family to cover their costs for education. Hence, "basket weaving is better mechanism of having income to be used to cover educational expenses" (23/07/12). The reasons for trying to cover their educational expense while they are within the family may vary. But, most of them noted that their families are not economically capable of covering all the cost for their children's education. Very few noted that their family do not allow them to continue their education (interview 24/07/12). Similarly, Informant Hadas earns enough income from basket weaving and uses her income to support her poor sisters, brothers and her father. Even though, she neither has children nor is continuing her education; rather her brothers and sisters are pursuing their education and getting married and she explained that doing this is her preference (23/07/2012). Besides, informant Tekle and Yalem are using their income to their personal expenses and to build houses. Additionally, from my focus groups discussion, three women explained that

they have three university students completely covering their cost from the returns earned by selling baskets.

So, even though, earning income does not have logical association to empowerment, in this case, it is empowering women as the resource is directly translated to achievements or it is assisting women to live the lives they want in Kabeer's notion of empowerment. Moreover, all these activities and responsibilities were traditionally supposed to be performed by the head of the family or the man, but now are being done by them.

Income control in the household was also another responsibility that can be categorized to men's sphere and also is one among the best ways of measuring and indicating women's empowerment. Based on the data, basket weaving enables women to control their income. Hitherto, there is difference of income control in relation to women's educational background and marital status. Some single informants whose age range is from 15-25 said that the income is controlled by their family and few said it is controlled by them (interview 25/07/12). For the married women, most of them indicated that their husbands never ask or try to control their profit. But, they underlined that if the profit is as such significant they use it to the household consumption by adding to the payments earned by other member of the family mainly the husband and this is based on their own free will. But, if the earning is small, they totally control it by themselves and use it for different purposes mainly to cover invisible costs of the household. For instance they use it to cover costs that should be paid in marriage ceremonies, in baptism and other related social gatherings which are basic to live within the community without marginalization.

To sum up, though earning and income control use to be the responsibility of men in the patriarchal society, women proved to do this and challenged the discourse of men as bread winner. By doing this woman are bestowed with economic empowerment.

4.3.2 Challenging Men's Decision Making Arena and its Linkages to Women's Interpersonal Empowerment

It has been indicated that in Ethiopia, in the process of nurturing, boys are learned to be self-reliant and major bread winners, whilst, girls are anticipated to conform, dependency and submissiveness, by teaching to be expert of reproductive works in their entire lives. (Cherinet and Mulugeta 2002 and 2003; Hirut 2004 as quoted in Ethiopian Society of Population Studies 2008). As a result, women's decision making in the household were almost non-existent. But, women basket weavers in Axum broke this tradition and now they do involve in basic decisions in the household. These decisions might be associated to the notion of familiar/interpersonal empowerment at household level.

I used women's multi-dimensional change in decision making mainly decision making over the income earned; women and girls decision over when to marry and who to marry or those "strategic life choices" in Kabeer's way of explanation, are discussed as indicators of change of responsibility of the husband or the father and at the same time as indicator of women's empowerment.

In the case of decision making in the household over the income from this occupation, there is significant difference in the dimensions of women's

empowerment when seen across informants' age and marital status. For instance Beriha and Akberet (young female students) mentioned that "our income is controlled by our fathers and mothers and we do this because we know that our fathers and mothers are better in saving and managing the earnings than we children are" (interview 27/07/12). Medhin also strengthens this idea by noting that "the decision over who to manage the money depends on personal skill not on age and sex. For instance, I have responsibility of managing our income, because, I am better in managing than other members of our family" (25/07/2012).

Whatever the decision over who to control the income is, the income has different purposes that lead to different dimensions of empowerment when comprehended across age, educational background and marital status. For instance informant Azeb and Akberet said that "the earnings from basket weaving has significant contribution to our decision making in relation whether to continue our education or not" (interview 24/07/12). In this regard, they pointed out that if their families do not allow them to pursue their education, they can leave the family and rent houses in the town. So, they weave basket in their free time and cover all the educational expenses without any assistance from the family. For instance, Hiwot said that "my family does not have economic capacity to pay for my educational expenses hence, I use to cover the cost for house rent, exercise book and to buy my clothes till I finish my college education" (22/07/2012). Besides, Medhin explained that "the income earned from basket weaving is important for my future life as I can deposit significant money for dowry. And if I earn dowry, I can negotiate over whom to marry and to select from the individuals who request for marital relation" (interview 20/07/2012). She also added that "if you do not have source of income, the decision and negotiation over when and whom to marry remains to be the responsibility of the family; which means you will get husband who you do not know" (interview 20/07/2012).

To finalize the discussion, traditionally, young girls' life destiny was dependent upon the family as a whole and mainly the decision making power of the father by virtue of being a man. But, young girls by involving in basket weaving changed this trend hence started to decide upon their future life like in marital relations and education. Furthermore, though women in this patriarchal society had invisible contribution over basic decision making in the household, through involving in this production they get equal right of deciding over their children future life. Thus, it might be claimed that, the dominant notion of men bread winner and decision maker in the household is being challenged. This change in power relation can therefore be explained in terms of familiar or interpersonal empowerment.

Chapter 5: The Paradoxical Nature of Institutions for Women's Empowerment and (Dis) empowerment

From Kabeer's conceptualization of resource as essential component of empowerment, resources can be found in various institutions that constitute a society and these resources can be acquired through various social relationships (Kabeer 1999). According to Kabeer (1999:3), "the resources acquired within these various relationships take the form of not only actual allocation, but also, future claims and expectations." On the other hand, institutions have power of limiting resources which may result to narrow down choices of different categories of people in a given society mainly in the labour market. Thus, "rules and norms can be seen as intangible "enabling" or "disabling" social resources that are drawn upon in the exercise of power and serves to demarcate the boundaries of choice for different categories of individuals" (Kabeer 1999:3). In this analysis, different institutions mainly marriage, family, state/government and the market are found to be fundamental actors that facilitate and at the same time hinder women's empowerment through home-based work.

5.1 Marriage and the Family as Agents and Constraints for Women's Struggle to Empowerment

In my case, marriage and the family as institutions have paradoxical nature in relation to women's empowerment. On one side, they support women to empower themselves through providing respect and recognition. My study indicates that women who involve in home-based basket weaving are entitled to certain resources which enable them to claim for power within this community. For instance, Hecht (1992) in her study of Harrari baskets noted that, the knowledge of basket weaving and arranging according to precise rules in their traditional house, is essential for the inclusion and/or exclusion of women to the elite group in the town.

From my data, informant Abeba, Hiwot, and Hadas explained that "the society at large and our family in particular give not only value and respect but also inspire us to involve in this job" (interview 26/07/12). Besides, Medhin explained the significance of basket work itself as a profession and the resource embedded with it motivates to expand her business, as she stated:

Human beings should involve in different activities no matter what the level of their education is. I believe that nobody should be dependent on one skill or profession. For example I can compare the one who attended only modern education with one who is skilled and is educated. In case for example, there is no peace in the country, how and by whom is the one who only is qualified with modern education going to be employed? But, the one who is educated and at the sometimes skilful, he/she may not need to be dependent on the employer or on the government because, in such hard times, he/she can simply start his/her business. As he/she can do his/her work where ever and whenever as he/ she may not need to pay tax for the skill; she/he does not need to go through any legal framework to start the business; he/she may get

acquainted with many people because of his/her skill. Thus, the individual skill provides an additional work in hard times. Besides, I for example am getting respect and recognition from all my customers, my relatives, friends as well as my family which gives me courage to continue my work (interview 23/07/2012).

On the other hand, the family and especially marriage as an institution restricts and tapered women's choices in the labour market. For more clarification, for instance, in the labour market, there are various kinds of works that can be done at home and outside home which have relatively equivalent value with basket work in terms of income generating ability. These include spinning, traditional hair dressing, domestic work, daily labour in construction sites, daily labour in agricultural sites, working as petty trader in the market etc. But, these works do not have equal value in the society. For this reason, women are encouraged to involve in the most socially accepted type of work than others. In this case, some women are completely restricted and obliged to involve in one type of work hence, institutions serve to limit choices using norms as mechanism to deny resource and then limit choices. To substantiate the argument, from the words of Mebrat, "married women's involvement in labour intensive outworking may lead to divorce and social exclusion" (interview on 20 /07/2012). Those married women in focus groups discussion also informed me that they completely choose to weave baskets. Because, married women are culturally obligated to involve in jobs that can go with their marital status. As informant Yibralem also noted "I do not want to involve in other jobs rather than basket weaving as others do not go with my marital statuses" (interview on 27/07/2012). Likewise, informant Mebrat stated,

As a married woman, my family does not encourage me to work other works. But, even if I can involve in other jobs, the economic benefit that I could get is not enough to pay for housemaid. And, working out without having housemaid means I have to do all the reproductive work in the house besides the out work. Plus to that, I am losing respect that I have to get as a married women for simply involving in socially unaccepted works, hence I choose weaving baskets than others (22/07/2012).

When it comes to the response from the divorced and single women they do have more choices and relatively can involve in the labour market freely. Yet, they involve in basket weaving considering it as best alternative and they believe that it is profitable than other jobs. Informant Birikit explained that "I change my jobs when basket work is not profitable; mainly I weave baskets from September to January only" (interview on 24/07/2012). Informant Letemaram also indicated that "I do have land, and in the harvesting season I do not weave baskets. I usually do it in my free time" (interview conducted on 26/07/12).

Generally, the family and marriage affects women's empowerment both positively and negatively.

5.2 The State / Government as Agent and Constraint to Women's Empowerment

The state is a powerful institution that has the potential of determining women's empowerment. Surprisingly enough, in Axum, through most of the women mainly those who do not have formal or governmental jobs involve in different traditional and informal home-based works like in spinning and

basket weaving, the government does not have any statistical data, let alone organized mechanism of supporting this people. Moreover, the government/state remains to be negligent and there is no recognition of the power of women in changing their lives, hence, the state is giving scant attention to these women. To substantiate this, there was one intervention that had been led by the state, through one of its branches that is Culture and Tourism Bureau of the region. The intervention was too small to change women's life and to solve their problem. As Tewodros indicated, "first of all, there is neither governmental nor nongovernmental agency that tries to help this occupation and these women except the tourism and culture bureau of the area" (interview on 30/07/2012).

To discuss the process of the intervention programme, it was for the first time that the government made an intervention, in 2006/7, led by Ethiopian Cultural Heritage. This was mainly interested in site development, heritage documentation and craft development, which gave more focus to tourism development than solving the real problems of the poor women in the area. Craft development programme, one among the areas of interest of the intervention, was assumed to be beneficiary for women, and had five sub categories. These were jewellery, skin, weaving clothes, and pottery work as well as basket production. As basket is woven by women, the individuals who were supposed to get benefit from were therefore the poor women basket weavers.

The main idea of the project with regards to development of handcrafts was to open production and demonstration centre that attracts tourists and indirectly supports the people who involves in this type of work. Despite, the project was not able to solve and avoid their challenges mainly in areas of demonstration and production sites. For this reason, only one union composed of six individuals with their own commitment were able to be succeeded and got a place for demonstration and production within the museum. As a whole, this intervention was not enough and not beneficiary to the poor at all. Another problem from tourism bureau is that the government urges women to produce traditional basket than the new fashion which are economically significant for women. The Tourism and Culture bureau urge this because, "the traditional baskets have significant contribution for tourism development in the town"(Tewedros 28/07/12).

On the other hand, the significance of state intervention for women's empowerment is a core point that no one should contempt. As stated in Malhotra (2002:9), "there is ample justification for government and multilaterals to promote policies that strengthen gender equality through various means, including legal and political reforms and interventions." Political and socio-economic reforms that promote women's empowerment mainly for women who try to empower themselves while they live in a patriarchal and hierarchal society, intervention and promotion remains to be necessity, unless empowerment mainly at high levels is impossible.

To show its necessity in this case study, it is important to explain the experience of the six individuals supported by tourism and culture bureau of the area. Before the government intervention programme, they were weaving baskets individually and selling to the middle men. As a result, the price was very cheap and they were not beneficiaries (interview 20/07/2012). The government specifically (culture and tourism bureau) first sent them to Addis Ababa (the capital city) for trainings purpose. This government intervention (in

training form) added with their personal commitment, right after the training they created a union and requested the tourism bureau of the town to give them place for production and demonstration. As a result, it gave them production and demonstration (market) place in the museum. They said that, at this time their life is changed. Because, as informant Etenesh said, “we are not only earning enough money, but also, have become responsible of using and controlling our income” (interview on 27/07/12). She also added “we are using the earning for multiple purposes mainly to support our children to attend their education in universities” (interview on 28/07/2012).

In general, the state as significant actor for women’s empowerment, is not giving attention to women’s empowerment from within, mainly for these women involving in home-based work. And even the empowerment agenda and intervention programme that had been made had its own primary agenda of developing tourism sector than supporting the poor.

5.3 The Market as Threat to Empowerment

The market is another institution that has significant effect in the process of women’s empowerment. In my case, it has remained to threat women’s empowerment not only through exclusion from the formal labour market but also through structural marginalization of these weavers because of the existing unequal power relation of men and women as well as the poor and the rich.

To start the discussion, the basket market is problematic and there are various variables that affect the price and the market as a whole. But, women try to come over these problems through devising various mechanisms. According to Mebrat, the probability of selling is dependent on the quality, design and type of the basket. The quality of a basket is measured by the components from which it is made up of. For instance, *edni laka*; *qancha meshela* and *qancha lequa* (different types of grasses) are important components to weave best quality basket. *Saeri bet*, (another type of grass) is comparatively less quality than the above three components (interview on 21/07/2012). Informant Beriha on the other hand explained that, “if you produce a basket with best and creative design, you might not have to worry about the market” (interview on 28/07/2012). Informant Hadas and Medhin also indicated that small baskets mainly woven for decoration purpose have good market than the large baskets like *Mesob* (the largest basket ever produced for sell). On the other hand, all informants indicated that the market for basket is seasonal. For instance, from September to February producers can sell many baskets with better price. But, from March to August, the market is almost dead. Informant Mebrat for example explained that

Basket shop is not like other shops. This is to mean, the product market is seasonal. I personally as you see, am owner of this basket shop. I am paying 1700 birr (around 160 Euro) per month. In the months from September to February I do have good market and I am profitable. But, for the remaining about six months I do not have market; I am just paying house rent more than my profit. So, market or the market being seasonal is my main challenge (interview conducted 21/07/2012).

The issues of shape, design and or quality that basket weavers are focusing on, are mechanisms that women use to be competitive in the product market. But, the striking problem that women are not able to manage is the

monopolization of the product market by few rich men traders. Informant Medhin stated that:

There are very few rich individuals who own more than five cars. These rich individuals are much networked and organized. These individuals provide free services to tourists like for example receipting and providing transport service from airport to the town and then to the historical sites. Then they inform them to buy baskets and other handcrafts from their shops only. Thus, most foreigners buy from the shops of such rich individuals. But, we the poor women and the producer are not benefiting as we are not networked and we are not rich like them (interview 23/07/2012).

Additionally informant Hadas explained that:

As you see the site of my shop is very nice for market and I arrange my baskets in a way that attract buyers. As a result, many buyers including tourists come to my shop at daily base. I do not have any problem to sell my baskets to local buyers, but, I do not get profit from them. Whereas, whenever, tourists or any foreigner (main buyers) visit my shop, the so called 'tourist guides' immediately come and tell the buyers as if my shop is not legal, my product is not traditional, and even sometimes they call double price so that the buyers go out. Beyond that, though I do have Basic English knowledge that enables me to communicate and sell my products, they say that if you speak English we will kill you. These so called 'tourist guides' do have direct relation and business with the rich men in the town (interview on 23/07/12).

This reflects, though women revealed that they can do all what men can do, but, the normalized discourse of the inequality of men and women and the rich and the poor remains in the mentality of the community. Thus, the product market is monopolized by powerful men; hence, the majority poor are not benefiting from their products. These all encumber women's effort of self-empowerment.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Policy Implication

6.1 Conclusion

Going back to the research question, which is, based on the context in which Ethiopian women are found, how home-based work could empower or (dis)empower women; and what are the threats to empower women from within, if home-based work at all leads to empowerment. In this case, the experience of women basket weavers in Axum is taken as an example.

The paper follows feminist thought of women's position in different society, or it is informed by the idea that, "women's subordination is seen as a holistic process, encompassing all aspects of women's lives, including their families, work, and legislation and state structures" (Wieringa 1994:832). Thus, empowering women and/or women's groups to make their own choices remains to be relevant and is considered as fruitful strategy for changing their subordinate position and by that for liberating them from patriarchal and male dominated societal structure.

The research follows Kabeer's conceptualization of empowerment in which she sees empowerment as a process; where it is those people who have been denied power that can be empowered. The process of empowerment entails change at different levels, and it is about the ability to make choice. In explaining choice in terms of empowerment, it should first be qualified. So, there should be alternatives to choose, unless, "there is logical association between poverty and disempowerment because an insufficiency of the material means for meeting one's basic needs may impose painful trade-offs between important dimensions of choice" (Kabeer 1999:2). This means their choice should be relevant to women's life or to strategic life choices and it should be transformatory to the existing social structures and gender relations. The empowerment of women from this approach therefore has three interrelated dimensions. These are resource, agency and achievement. Resource, the enabling or the precondition for empowerment, agency the pillar of empowerment or it is exercising choice in ways that challenge power relations (Kabeer 1999) and achievements is composed of agency and resources.

Based on this concept of empowerment, it is important to see how the poor women found in a patriarchal society; nurtured to be submissive to the existing unequal power relation; learned in their whole lives to be house maker and to accept the bread winner and decision maker position of men; and hence, excluded from the formal labour markets and other significant resources empower themselves. And to what extent does their agency bring change in the process of empowerment be it at the level of the individual; "sense of self or in their access to material resource; change in relationships within the family and the household and/or alteration in the wider hierarchy of the economy and the state" (Kabeer 1999:10).

So my findings clearly reveal that, majority of the informants had similar subordinated position in the society having no income to control and no decision to make for the betterment of their lives. But, through basket weaving, they are able to earn income, to control and use resource, and to involve in significant decision making at the household level. By this, they are able even to alter the mainstream discourse of men as bread winner and

women as house maker in the patriarchal society, where indirectly they are bestowed with economic and interpersonal/ familial empowerment. Thus, practically women have brought change at individual and household level and further even altered the dominant discourse of men as bread winner and women as house maker through the sense of the self or through devising a mechanism to have resource to reverse that tradition.

Their mechanism does not directly challenge the norms and traditions of the society. Rather they are able to extract resources from different institutions; mainly from such dominant institutions that make up the society like marriage, family, state and the market. Initially, these are gendered institutions bounded by patriarchal structure; culture and power imbalances of men and women and the poor and the rich and were mostly instruments of women's subordination (Wieringa 1994). But, because of this kind of agency, the institutions rather than completely having (dis)empowerment effect, remained to have paradoxical nature, by at some point empowering and at other point hampering their struggle to the process of empowerment

Yet, it is impossible for them to bring change at higher levels that could challenge the wider hierarchy and to break the institutionalized structures that subordinate women.

Therefore, from the literature that I use, home-based work as a whole could be seen as providing various significances to women. But, it has been criticized for its role in sustaining and reinforcing gender based division of labour. Moreover, from Kabear's view point of empowerment, even the significances by themselves are questionable as there is no any evidence that designate whether positive effects of home-based challenge the existing power imbalances and gendered division of labour. But, for the women whom they live in a patriarchal and hierarchal society like the women in my case, involving in home-based work might be best way to fight against domination and to show the potential and individual agency of the need for social change and for changing their previous subordinate position in the society.

6.2 Research and Policy Implication

The Ethiopian government is trying to change women's condition through crafting, adopting and implementing various policies that are assumed to alleviate women's subordination, discrimination and poverty. Among others, The National Policy on Women, introduced in 1993, was the first policy crafted mainly on women's issues. The principal objective of the policy include; creating conducive environment to the equality of men and women. By this women can be active participants and beneficiaries in the overall socio-economic and political development. Beyond this, gender equality is guaranteed by the constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. The country has also adopted global agreements and conventions like the Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and Millennium Development Goal (MGD). The focus of the government and its allies as a whole is therefore the issue of gender equality and women's empowerment.

Despite, the commitment and effort of inclusion of women to the development process, the practical women's problem on the ground is still untouched. As can be seen from the analysis, poor women even trying to

empower by their effort are tumbled by institutionalized barriers. As a result, women could not bring significant change in the existing unequal power relation, though they proved that they can change the dominant discourse as they are able to do what men were expected to do in the traditional society. But still they are submissive to the existing gender role because of lack of appropriate development intervention. Therefore, the policy designed at the macro level should be translated to solve the problem on the ground. Thus, considering their agency, women's empowerment at different levels might be realized. On the other hand, collecting clear statistical data and studying the different types of women's home based work and their empowerment and/or disempowerment effect might be areas of research that further have policy implications.

References

- Adhana, A.H. (1998) 'Tigray—the Birth of a Nation within the Ethiopian Polity', *Mohammed Salib, MA & Markakis, John (eds) Ethnicity and the State in Eastern Africa*, Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet : 42-49.
- Agarwal, B. (1997) "'Bargaining"and Gender Relations: Within and Beyond the Household', *Feminist economics* 3(1): 1-51.
- Allen, S. and C. Wolkowitz (1987) *Homeworking: Myths and Realities*. Macmillan Education Basingstoke.
- Asante, B. (2005) 'Women's Craft Guilds and the Traditional Basketry (Ge Mot) of Harar, Ethiopia', *African study monographs. Supplementary issue*. 29: 61-72.
- Axum Tourism and Culture Office 'Aksum Discovery and Memory: Travel Sketches guide. Published by *Ethiopian Cultural Heritage project in cooperation with Tigray Tourism and Culture*.
- Barrett, M. and M. McIntosh (1980) 'The 'family Wage': Some Problems for Socialists and Feminists', *Capital & Class* 4(2): 51-72.
- Beechey, V. (1977) 'Some Notes on Female Wage Labour in Capitalist Production', *Capital & Class* 1(3): 45-66.
- Berhe, A. (2009) *A Political History of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (1975-1991): Revolt, Ideology and Mobilisation in Ethiopia*. Tsehai Publishers & Distributors.
- Berhe, A. (2004) 'The Origins of the Tigray people's Liberation Front', *African Affairs* 103(413): 569-592.
- Bizuneh, B. (2001) 'Women in Ethiopian History: A Bibliographic Review', *Northeast African Studies* 8(3): 7-32.
- Brandt, S.A. (1996) 'The Ethnoarchaeology of flaked stone tool use in southern Ethiopia', *Aspects of African Archaeology, Papers from the 10th Congress of the PanAfrican Association for Prehistory and Related Studies*, pp733-738.
- Bryman, A. and J.J. Teevan (2004) *Social Research Methods*. Vol. 2. Oxford university press Oxford.
- Carr, M., M.A. Chen and J. Tate (2000) 'Globalization and Home-Based Workers', *Feminist Economics* 6(3): 123-142.
- Central Statistical Agency (CSA) (2007) 'The 2007 Population and Housing Census of Ethiopia: Statistical Report for Tigray Region'. Addis Ababa
- Cherinet, H., E. Mulugeta (2002) 'Country Gender Profile Ethiopia', *Prepared for the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida)* .
- Devers, K.J. and R.M. Frankel (2000) 'Study Design in Qualitative Research--2: Sampling and Data Collection Strategies.', *Education for health (Abingdon, England)* 13(2): 263.
- Dooley, B. (1996) 'At Work Away from Work.', *The Psychologist* .
- Edwards, L.N. and E. Field-Hendrey (2002) 'Home-Based Work and Women's Labor Force Decisions', *Journal of Labor Economics* 20(1): 170-200.

- Edwards, L.N. and E. Field-Hendrey (1996) 'Home-Based Workers: Data from the 1990 Census of Population', *Monthly Lab.Rev.* 119: 26.
- Estrada, S.L. (2002) 'Work, Gender, and Space: Women's Home-Based Work in Tijuana, Mexico', *Journal of Developing Societies* 18(2-3): 169-195.
- Ethiopian Society of Population Studies, (2008) 'Gender Inequality and Women's Empowerment'. Addis Ababa: UNFPA.
- Hable-Selassie, S. (1972) *Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History to 1270*. Haile Selassie University.
- Hallward-Driemeier, M. and O. Gajigo (2010) 'Strengthening Economic Rights and Women's Occupational Choice: The Impact of Reforming Ethiopia's Family Law', *World Bank Mimeo.Washington DC: World Bank* .
- Hakim, C. (1996) 'The Sexual Division of Labour and Women's Heterogeneity', *The British journal of sociology* 47(1): 178-188
- Hecht, E.D. (1992) 'Basketwork of Harar', *African Study Monographs, Supplemental Issue* 18: 1-39.
- ILO, W. (2002) 'Men in the Informal Economy: A Statistical Picture', *International Labor Organization Geneva* .
- Jejeebhoy, S.J. (1995) *Women's Education, Autonomy, and Reproductive Behaviour: Experience from Developing Countries*. Clarendon Press Oxford.
- Jones, N., Y. Tafere and T. Woldehanna (2010) 'Gendered Risks, Poverty and Vulnerability in Ethiopia: To what Extent is the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) Making a Difference?'
- Kabeer, N. (1999) 'Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment', *Development and change* 30(3): 435-464.
- Kabeer, N. (2005) 'Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: A Critical Analysis of the Third Millennium Development Goal 1', *Gender & Development* 13(1): 13-24.
- Kantor, P. (2003) 'Women's Empowerment through Home-based Work: Evidence from India', *Development and change* 34(3): 425-445.
- Krishnan, P. (1996) 'Family Background, Education and Employment In Urban Ethiopia', *Oxford Bulletin of Economics and Statistics* 58(1): 167-183.
- Malhotra, A. and S.R. Schuler (2005) 'Women's Empowerment as a Variable in International Development', *Measuring empowerment: Cross-disciplinary perspectives* : 71-88.
- Malhotra, A., S. R.Schuler and C. Boender (2002) 'Measuring Women's Empowerment as Variable in International Development'. Background Paper Prepared for the World Bank Workshop on Poverty and Gender: New Perspectives.
- Mehrotra, S.K. and M. Biggeri (2007) *Asian Informal Workers: Global Risks, Local Protection / Ed. by Santosh K. Mehrotra, Mario Biggeri*. Vol. 68. London [etc.]: Routledge.
- Mies, M. (1981) 'Dynamics of Sexual Division of Labour and Capital Accumulation: Women Lace Workers of Narsapur', *Economic and Political Weekly* : 487-500.

- Molyneux, M. (1985) 'Mobilization without Emancipation? Women's Interests, the State, and Revolution in Nicaragua', *Feminist studies* : 227-254.
- Morgan, D.L. (1996) *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research*. Vol. 16. Sage Publications, Incorporated.
- Mosedale, S. (2005) 'Assessing Women's Empowerment: Towards a Conceptual Framework', *Journal of International Development* 17(2): 243-257.
- Moser, C.O.N. (1989) 'Gender Planning in the Third World: Meeting Practical and Strategic Gender Needs', *World Development* 17(11): 1799-1825.
- O'Leary, Z. (2009) *The Essential Guide to Doing Your Research Project*. Sage Publications Limited.
- Patton, M. (1990) 'Purposeful Sampling', *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*. London: Sage : 169-183.
- Perrons, D. (2003) 'The New Economy and the work-life Balance: Conceptual Explorations and a Case Study of New Media', *Gender, Work & Organization* 10(1): 65-93.
- Richards, L. (2005) 'Handling Qualitative Data: A Practical Guide.'
- Rowe, B.R., G.W. Haynes and K. Stafford (1999) 'The Contribution of Home-Based Business Income to Rural and Urban Economies', *Economic Development Quarterly* 13(1): 66-77.
- Sen, A.(1999) *Development as Freedom*. Oxford University Press.
- Silver, H. (1993) 'Homework and domestic work', *Sociological Forum*, Springer pp181-204.
- Sullivan, C. and S. Lewis (2002) 'Home-based Telework, Gender, and the Synchronization of Work and Family: Perspectives of Teleworkers and their co-residents', *Gender, Work & Organization* 8(2): 123-145.
- Topçuoglu, R. A. (2005) 'Home-Based Work and Informal Sector in the Period of Globalisation: An Analysis through Capitalism and Patriarchy: The Case of Turkey', MA thesis. Middle East Technical University
- Valodia, I. (2001) 'Economic Policy and women's Informal Work in South Africa', *Development and Change* 32(5): 871-892.
- Valodia, I. (2000) 'Economic policy and women's informal and flexible work in South Africa', TIPS Conference" 2000 Annual Forum.
- Wieringa, S. (1994) 'Women's Interests and Empowerment: Gender Planning Reconsidered', *Development and Change* 25(4): 829-848.
- Zekaria, A. (1999) 'Harari Basketry through the Eyes of Amina Ismael Sherif', *Ethiopia: traditions of creativity* : 47-63.

Appendices

Interview guiding Open ended questions

- How and why did you start weaving baskets?
- What are the inputs needed to weave basket?
- Is basket work linked to women's work at home?
- What benefits do you get from weaving?
- What potential opportunities and challenges do you have to empower yourself through producing baskets?
- How your family, your community and the government perceive your work?
- Who controls the income earned from this and why?
- Does your income affect decision making in the household? If yes in what kind of decisions do you involve as a result of your work?

Profile of Informants

No	Name	Age	Place of birth	Marital status	Level of education
1.	Mebrat Abera	21	Axum	Married	10 th
2.	Medhin Teklehaymanot	19	Axum	Single	10 th
3.	Tirhas G/hiwot	25	Axum	Married	10 th
4.	Birhin Tetemqe	26	Axum	Married	4 th
5.	Medhin Girmay	25	Axum	Single	10 th
6.	Tekle Tekalin	35	Axum	Divorced	3 rd
7.	Abelesh Libanos	45	Axum	Divorced	12 th
8.	Silas Tesfay	41	Axum	Death	Meseret tt
9.	Letebrhan Fisaha	27	Axum	Married	8 th
10.	Etenesh T/birhan	28	Axum	Single	10+2
11.	Yibralem Teklay	28	Axum	Married	No
12.	Hiwot Meressa	21	Modogo	Single	College
13.	Jemila Mohammed	14	Axum	Single	9 th
14.	Letemaram G/chel	60	Mirena	Death	No
15.	Tekle Gidey	25	Mirena	Divorced	No
16.	Yalem Kebede	27	Edaga Berhe	Married	4 th
17.	Alganesh Msfm	60	Axum	Married	No
18.	Tsige Hadush	17	Mirena	Single	10 th
19.	Abeba Abrhaley	27	Axum	Married	10 th
20.	Abeba Kahsay	20	Axum	Single	10 th
21.	Azeb Kahsay	20	Axum	Single	10 th
22.	Akberet Zebrehe	17	Axum	Single	10 th
23.	Tsiryti Birhane	20	Modogo	Married	8 th
24.	Birkti Taddis	30	Modogo	Divorced	No
25	Tewodros Abraham (government official)				
26	Hassen (government Of- ficial)				
26	Teklweini (government official)				