

Research article

Women-based policies and legal frameworks in Ethiopia since 1991: Women's political empowerment analysis

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Abstract: *A comprehensive policy framework and proper implementation are necessary to ensure women's empowerment, including gender equality in decision-making positions. This research examined selected Ethiopian women-based legal frameworks from the perspective of women's political empowerment. It aimed at assessing the extent to which the policies in place improve women's political empowerment. This research primarily utilizes a qualitative approach that draws on relevant primary and secondary data sources. The study used Variety of Democracy Women's Political Empowerment Indicators (V-Dem Index) to review the content of the selected legal frameworks of Ethiopia since 1991. Using the indicators, the 1995 Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, the 1993 National Policy on Ethiopian Women, and other two strategy documents were specifically examined. The results revealed that existing women-based*

policies and strategies in Ethiopia do not fully recognize and comprehensively address the key indicators of women's political empowerment. This has also an adverse impact on the political representation of women in Ethiopia. Thus, reform efforts to comprehensively include women's political empowerment indices during the development and implementation of policy and legal frameworks are still policy concerns in Ethiopia. Indeed, policy reform measures that consider women's perspectives and interests should be developed in order to enhance women's genuine decision-making roles.

Keywords: *Women-based policies, women's political empowerment, variety of democracy indices, gender equality*

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1. Introduction

Improving the political participation of women is essential to their well-being as well as to influencing the democratic, economic, and political aspects of the state and its people (Alamu et al., 2021). As outlined by Joshi and Goehrung (2018) women's political leadership representation refers to the balanced presence of women in formal government institutions with the authority to influence rules, policies, and everything in them that has an impact on their lives and the lives of society. Women's representation in decision-making roles has changed significantly (UN Women, 2023). However, despite the aforementioned positive changes, women are still underrepresented in the public and political spheres of countries including Ethiopia (Sindhuja & Manimekalai, 2018; Tefera, 2017). In Ethiopia, in addition to inconsistent improvements of women in leadership, women's aspirations to ascend the public leadership ladder confront numerous challenges emanating from socio-cultural beliefs, women's work conditions (organizational culture), structural hurdles and from women's themselves. As rights to inclusion of women mobilize more than half of the Ethiopian population and enable the aspiration of the girl child in Ethiopia, addressing the gap is a policy concern.

Women's political empowerment is necessary to have women's political representation and participation. However, little empirical evidence and a lack of integrating theoretical frameworks across several fields are the major obstacles in efforts to define women's political empowerment all-over the world (Alexander et al., 2016; Alexander et al., 2017). According to Sundström et al. (2017) the process of women's political empowerment necessitates the dedication of time, money, and efforts from stakeholders to enhance the enabling capacity for women, accelerating their agency, choice, and participation. In this work, the definition of women's political empowerment has three dimensions: choice (enabling women to make valuable decisions in their daily lives); agency (empowering women to actively influence political agendas and be agents of change); and participation (sufficient numerical presence of women in decision-making positions and processes). Alexander et al. (2017) argued that women's political empowerment is not limited to women having an equal seat in the legislature, rather it encompasses the attainment of equality through or in the political processes, ranging from small to large-scale female political participation. According to Alexander et al. (2017) a politically empowered woman could contribute at least one of the following: (a) exercise political authority in the positions she holds,

(b) engage in civil society organizations to critically influence by advocacy and lobbying, and (c) actively involved in local political endeavors such as joining political parties, running for office, and so on.

Gender-responsive public policies are essential for addressing the diverse needs of men and women, promoting gender equality, and empowering women (IRI & WDN, 2020). Mousmouti (2023) argues that gender responsive legal/policy frameworks promote gender equality while also eliminating discrimination and stereotypes associated with women's political involvement. In this regard, a gender-sensitive parliament or legislature plays an important role in mainstreaming a gender point of view into policymaking procedures, formulating a gender equality-based policy framework (Mousmouti, 2023). Effective formulation and implementation of gender-responsive policies require the participation of several stakeholders and the unique influence of those who possess the relevant legal qualifications (Tiasha, et al., 2023). In this respect, gender-responsive global, regional, and national legal frameworks (policies) have an impact on the advancement of women in political leadership roles.

1.1. Empirical literature review and the research gap

The empirical findings about gender equality policies of countries in Africa differ in accordance with the countries' socio-economic, cultural and political contexts. The existing empirical works in Ethiopia, though limited, focus on the assessment of the contents of women-based policies from different perspectives. Tefera and Wondwosen (2017, 2021 and 2022) critically examined Ethiopia's national women's policy and the FDRE Constitution's provisions from the perspectives of general women's empowerment and gender equality. These authors focused on the shortcomings in these policies and their implementation issues. Sosen and Tshai (2008) also examined the contents of Ethiopian national women's policy and related strategies in terms of their appropriateness, gaps, and implementation constraints. Furthermore, Dejene (2020) examined women-based policies from a transformational perspective – focusing on the instrumentality and integrationist dimensions. Dejene (2020) concluded that gender policies have the potential to transform society when they achieve their inherent values such as women's human and democratic rights, equality in treatment, and the abolition of discrimination. According to Dejene, Ethiopian policy-making regarding gender equality actually takes a top-

down rather than a bottom-up approach, and this endangers the engagement of the community at large, particularly of civil society organizations.

In general, gender-responsive or women-based policies specifically are necessary to bring gender parity by prioritizing and underlining works for the socio-economic and political empowerment of women. Gender aware institutions, collaborative work among actors, adequate allocation of resources, a bottom-up approach, and the creation of a conducive environment are identified as crucial for the effective enforcement of policy frameworks in countries like Ethiopia (Tefera, & Wondosen, 2022; Dejene, 2020; Sosena, & Tshai, 2008; Tefera, 2021). From the studies above, the assessment of gender equality policies and legal frameworks in Ethiopia is exhaustive, specifically, in terms of the dimensions assessed. A scientific work that attempted to critically analyze women-based policies and legal frameworks of Ethiopia specifically from women's political decision-making empowerment dimension is scarce. Thus, this study aims at filling these gaps by analyzing the content of women-based policy frameworks from a women's political (decision-making) empowerment perspective.

1.2. Theoretical framework of the study

According to Creswell (2017), a theory might be presented in research as a guiding perspective, a rational argument, and it is a set of ideas derived from evidence to explain phenomena. The researchers chose feminism as a theoretical lens for this study. Feminism prioritizes increasing women's presence in political and decision-making positions (Phillips, 2016). Feminism theory aims at building evidence on the existing gaps and its link to the historical context of women (female sex) and presents it as a justification for convincing policymakers and affect resourcing, policy, and institutions for implementation. To accomplish this, feminism takes a strong stance on evidence-based advocacy for policy changes aimed at creating the enabling normative conditions and implementing them for empowering women.

Specific to this study, feminist evidence-based advocacy would aim at supporting women's participation in politics and leadership roles (Disch & Hawkesworth, 2016), pushing for strong anti-discrimination laws that protect women from gender-based violence and workplace

discrimination (Lovenduski, 2009), and promoting women's economic independence (Bhandari, 2024).

2. Methods

This study utilized a qualitative research method to effectively address its central objective. The study employed both primary and secondary data sources. The national and international legal frameworks, including the FDRE Constitution, proclamations, policies, ratified conventions, and strategies were used as primary data sources. As Wondemagegn (2012) and Vibhute & Filipos (2009) point out, the Constitution, Acts/Proclamations passed by Parliament (and by the State Legislature), Rules, and Regulations are primary sources in legal research. As secondary data sources, empirical, methodological and theoretical literature was used. By using the primary and secondary data sources, the study triangulated the results and findings. Content analysis of documents and desk review of data have been done to get enriched findings.

A focused desk review methodology has been used to review women-based policies, strategies, and legal frameworks in Ethiopia since 1991. The recently developed Variety of Democracy (V-Dem) indicator has been used to review the documents. As suggested by Sundström et al. (2017), this measurement is suitable for assessing women's political empowerment independently among the various dimensions of women's empowerment. The index measures women's political empowerment in straightforward, understandable, and targeted ways (Sundström et al., 2017). The 1991 time cut-point was used because women-based policies were enacted in line with the changes in government and the subsequent reforms in Ethiopia.

Literature and desk reviews dwell on systematic scoping review meta-data; this methodology's approach and tool serve as a design for substantiating evidence and to fill gaps/add value to knowledge creation and evidence-based practice. A systematic scoping review emerged as a strong research methodology and design in knowledge co-creation, recreation, and informing practice (Peters et al., 2021). According to Pollock et al. (2022), it emerged as a methodology tool for ensuring quality, application guidance, and bridging knowledge and policy practice.

Regarding ethics, this research article was approved by Addis Ababa University, College of Development Studies institutional review board named IRB-CoDS on April 3rd, 2024 under the written credential number (ethical approval number) 067/03/2024.

2.1. Review of international and regional legal frameworks for gender equality from women's political (decision-making) empowerment perspective

As a country sharing common global humanitarian, economic, and political principles, Ethiopia has signed international and continental legal frameworks that have been intentionally formulated for the protection and promotion of women's rights, gender equality, and women's empowerment. All international human rights conventions that Ethiopia ratified has become part of domestic legislation, as stated in Article 9 of the FDRE Constitution. Based on this, Ethiopia is a signatory to international inclusive conventions and charters such as the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. These frameworks affirm men and women's equal rights to all economic, social, cultural, civic, and political rights. The international and continental legal frameworks and policy provisions have recognized the importance of ensuring women's equal participation in political and public decision-making positions of countries. Thus, the women-based legal frameworks in Ethiopia mostly base themselves on the following international instruments.

The Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW): It was adopted in 1979 and this international instrument stresses the need to make every possible effort to end discrimination against women in all spheres of society. It also underlines the importance of taking proactive measures, such as legislation and regulations that encourage women's participation in the political process and decision-making. The CEDAW asserts in Part II, Articles 7(b), "State Parties shall ensure that women participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof, as well as to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government." This calls for the equal participation of women in positions of public decision-making. Ethiopia domesticated this convention in 1981.

The 1993 Vienna Declaration and Platform for Action (VDPA): This was generated in the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights, in Vienna, Austria. It encourages all governments to use the opportunity to empower women as agents and beneficiaries of the development process. Moreover, the declaration concerns the eradication of all forms of discrimination against women (DAW) and the elimination of violence against women (VAW). In this regard, the declaration on VAW was drafted by the UN General Assembly and encouraged member states to implement the provisions. The Vienna Declaration calls on member states and all regional and international organizations to work on the advancement of women's access to decision-making positions at all levels. The World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995 was a follow-up to the Vienna declaration of 1993.

Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BDPA): This was the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995. The inadequate representation of women in authority and decision-making is one of the 12 major concerns of the Beijing Conference. The conference pointed out the persistent exclusion of women from decision-making platforms and various aspects of life as key barriers to women's advancement to political leadership positions.

The Beijing platform emphasized that the most effective way to consider women's perspectives and aspirations in the development of public policy is to ensure that women are fairly and equally represented in leadership positions in public/government/institutions. In order to guarantee the tangible involvement and representation of women in leadership and decision-making roles, the BDPA identified the following strategic objectives: (a) Take measures to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making, (b) Enhance women's capacity to participate in leadership and decision-making, (c) Create or strengthen national machinery and other governmental bodies, (d) Integrate gender perspectives in legislation, public policies, programs, and projects; and (e) generate and disseminate gender disaggregated data and information for planning and evaluation.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: This fifteen-year (2015–2030) international public policy has a motto of 'no one left behind' and has built upon the unfinished and off-track Millennium Development Goals by expanding its frameworks to reach the most vulnerable groups, including girls and women. Gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls are among the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In developing their goals, UN member states acknowledged continued gender disparity as a fundamental impediment to achieving sustainable development in the economic, social, and environmental arenas. It identified the goal of ensuring women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, public, and economic life (SDG, in Goal 5 (5.5)). Moreover, it has also the goal of adopting and strengthening solid policies and enforceable legislation to promote gender equality and empower all women and girls at all levels (SDG, Goal 5 (5.c)). The Addis Abeba Action Agenda (AAAA) of July 2015 is an action plan for implementing the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, which originated from Ethiopia's third international conference on development financing.

Africa has also continental conventions and protocols that are aimed at achieving gender balance in society, including participation in decision-making positions. The Maputo Protocol is one of the continental legal frameworks.

The Maputo Protocol: This protocol was ratified in 2003. It includes the African Women's Rights Protocol, and others, that are commonly referred to as the Maputo Protocol. The key principles of African women's protocol include gender equality and the abolition of all forms of discrimination that harm women's lives. An affirmative action or any positive measures, was recognized by the protocol for promoting women's active engagement and participation in public decision-making roles in all branches of government. The Article 9 [2] of the protocol presents that the states are obliged to “guarantee increased and effective representation and participation of women at all levels of decision-making”. Member states were also required to have appropriate policies and procedures in place to facilitate the implementation of the protocol's provisions. The Maputo Protocol is formulated under the African Charter on Human and People's Rights. Although Ethiopia signed both the charter and protocol, it has not ratified the Maputo Protocol yet.

Under the framework of the Maputo Protocol, there are sub-regional women's rights-based conventions, including the 2015 ECOWAS (the Economic Community of West African States) Supplementary Act on Equality of Rights between Women and Men for Sustainable Development; the SADC (South Africa Development Community) Protocol on Gender and Development, adopted in 2008; and the Council of Ministers of the East African Community Gender Policy. In all cases, the member nations were obligated by all stated protocols and

regulations to assist in enforcing the protocol and to take all necessary steps to promote women into leadership roles at all levels. Regarding equal representation of women in positions of decision-making, each legislation, policy, and protocol in the region is executed out with its own standards and goals in account.

The other framework is Agenda 2063. It is a 50-year strategic framework for Africa. It was also aimed at establishing a prosperous, inclusive, peaceful, and developed Africa in 2063. Gender equality is among the various aspects of the development agenda of this instrument. Agenda 2063's aspiration six goal seventeen advocates gender equality in all phases of life. It aims to guarantee gender equality in decision-making positions at all levels and mandates member states to achieve 30% female representation by election at all levels of government, including the judiciary. It encourages the establishment of supportive institutions for gender equality (Hingston, 2016).

Generally speaking, both international and regional legal frameworks on gender equality have positively impacted the changing roles of women in public decision-making roles worldwide. Despite the changes in reforms and the subsequent improvements, women's underrepresentation in political leadership roles is persistent. Thus, empirical analysis is needed to understand and better inform policy to address the gap. What is more, Ethiopia needs to engage in context-based proper enforcement of these conventions. In order to fill the gap, Ethiopia needs to formulate an inclusive and comprehensive women's national policy and a strong state machinery to implement it.

2.2. Specification of measurements of women's political empowerment

According to current literature, the Gender-Related Development Index (GDI) and the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) are two significant global measurements and indicators of women's empowerment. However, in 2010, the United Nations introduced new indicators and replaced them with the Gender Inequality Index. The United Nations recently introduced an inequality-adjusted Human Development Index (IHDI) (Sundström et al., 2017). But these are all criticized because of the extensive nature of their indices, which include all facets of women's empowerment (economic, political, educational, and mental/physical). Sundström et al. (2017)

argued that independent measurement by category allows for distinct evaluations of women's development in each.

The Variety of Democracy (V-Dem) index was introduced recently (Sundström et al., 2017). Sundström et al. (2017) argue that this index is appropriate for assessing women's political empowerment. The index assesses women's political empowerment in a clear, understandable, and focused manner. Furthermore, the indicator takes into account the context of developing countries, particularly their extensive geographic scope. This measurement was used as a lens to evaluate the content of the selected policy frameworks in terms of facilitating women's political empowerment in Ethiopia. It is aimed at finding out the degree to which Ethiopian women's participation in political and decision-making processes is being facilitated by the current policy frameworks.

The V-Dem Women's political empowerment measurements have three sub-indexes (Sundström et al., 2017 p.1).

- A. **The women civil liberties sub-index:** It includes indicators of women's freedom of domestic movement, freedom from forced labor, property rights, and access to justice.
- B. **The women civil society participation sub-index:** It includes indicators of women's freedom of discussion, participation in civil society organizations (CSO), and representation in the ranks of journalists.
- C. **The women political participation sub-index:** It reflects the extent to which women are represented in formal political positions, both in terms of presence of women in the legislature as well as political power distribution by gender.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Examining women-based policy frameworks in Ethiopia from women political (Decision-making) empowerment approaches

The study employed a review of the existing women-based legal frameworks including policies and strategies in Ethiopia. The Variety of Democracy (V-Dem) approach was utilized to interpret the contents in the documents and discern the gaps and improvements.

A. the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) Constitution: The constitution that was drafted in 1995 has ruled Ethiopia and Ethiopians since 1991. By including the issue of

women's rights in the 1995 Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE), the Ethiopian government affirmed its commitment to gender equality. The Constitution's Chapter 3 addresses everyone's (men's and women's) fundamental human and democratic rights.

According to the V-Dem index, the first measurement of women's political empowerment is legitimizing women's civil liberties. Among the different indicators of women's civil liberties as identified by the V-Dem Institute, the right to liberty of movement and freedom from forced labor are the first two, and these rights are acknowledged by the FDRE Constitution under Articles 32 (1) and 18 (3), respectively. Indeed, the Constitution has given due concern to the civil liberties of Ethiopian women by stipulating separate provisions that aim to address deep-rooted discrimination against women in the social, cultural, political, and economic aspects of the country. In this regard, Article 35, with its various sub-articles, outlined the rights of Ethiopian women.

In Article 35(1), the FDRE Constitution allowed the equal enjoyment of all constitutional rights and protections by women. Again in this article, Sub-Articles (2–9), the Constitution guaranteed equal rights of women in marriage, entitlement to affirmative action measures, right to maternity leave with full pay, right to consultation in projects affecting their lives, property rights, right to equality in employment, and education, etc. Besides, a woman's right to property is also explicitly stated in Article 40(1) of the FDRE Constitution. Lastly, as an indicator of women's civil liberties, the right of access to justice for Ethiopian women is also recognized by the Constitution under Article 37.

On the other hand, there is another way to measure women's political empowerment, and that is through their participation in civil society. This approach utilizes the three indicators mentioned above. The first indicator is freedom of speech. Article 29 (1 & 2) of the 1995 FDRE Constitution recognizes this right by declaring that everyone in Ethiopia has the right to express themselves freely and to hold beliefs without hindrance. Article 31 (Freedom of Association) of the Constitution grants women the right to participate in civil society organizations, that relates to the other indicator. The equal work and equal payment of women are also acknowledged by this supreme law as an additional indicator of the grant of women's civil society participation.

The final measure of women's political empowerment consists of two key components that each state should execute: the representation of women in the legislature and in the allocation of political power at all levels. There is one sub-article under Article 35 of the FDRE constitution that focuses on the right of women's consultation on projects affecting their lives. It is worthwhile to consider the views and interests of women in policy and strategy development. Meanwhile, women in Ethiopia have the right to vote and to be elected (Article 38). The Constitution appreciates positive/affirmative measures to enhance the participation and involvement of women in the political and public affairs of the country. In this regard, in accordance with the FDRE Constitution, the 2019 Ethiopian electoral proclamation provides incentives to political parties based on the number of female candidates they propose, the number of female party members, and the number of females in leadership posts. Therefore, those criteria are determined to promote women's engagement in the political processes of the country.

In sum, it is sound to deduce that all indicators of women's civil liberty, women's civil society participation, and, to some extent, women's political participation indicators identified by the V-Dem Institute are acknowledged by the FDRE Constitution, and it is a good benchmark at policy level to do further work on women's political empowerment and this granting implies government commitment to gender equality. This result validates the conclusion made by Tefera and Wondosen (2022), who claimed that getting constitutional attention for a certain matter is essential before pursuing a particular course of action by various legal methods, such as policies and strategies. This finding also affirms the result revealed by Sindhuja and Manimekalai (2018) who claimed that legal recognition of equality between men and women needs priority before actual implementation. Furthermore, recognizing these rights is essential to guaranteeing women's legal protection and equal opportunities in various areas of employment, education, social services, justice, and other liberties that would enhance women's ability to make decisions. In particular, the country's supreme law's granting of these rights is essential for combating gender prejudices and stereotypes, offering assistance, encouraging women to take part in all positions, strengthening women's organizations, and taking other constructive actions that help to make women active participants in policy-making and decision-making activities.

B. The 1993 National Policy on Ethiopian Women: Ethiopia got its first policy on women's affairs in 1993, named the National Policy on Ethiopian Women (NPEW). This policy recognized the deep-rooted patriarchal system as a basic cause of the prevalent lower status of women in the social, economic, and political practices of the country. And this policy aimed to promote the socio-economic and political rights of women by establishing institutional machinery. The national women's policy bases itself on respecting the fundamental human and democratic rights of women recognized by the FDRE Constitution.

The political empowerment of women is just the policy's objectives. The primary objective of the policy is to provide women with an opportunity to hold public office and take part in decision-making at all levels. The government committed to dealing with laws, regulations, and customs that promote male dominance and women's subjugation in this area. Based on this, according to UN Women (2014), amendments have been made to some critical legal laws in Ethiopia that were discriminatory and undermined the roles of women in all spheres. Among them, the former Family Law, Criminal Law, and Penal Code were upgraded and amended in the 2000s to facilitate gender equality between the two genders and to abolish any forms of discrimination and violence against women (UN Women, 2014). Meanwhile, the policy aimed to increase the participation of women in the formulation and implementation of laws, policies, and projects that could positively affect women's themselves and society at large. Another objective of the women's policy is to safeguard women's property rights. The motive behind this is to recognize women for their efforts and allow them to enjoy the fruits of their labor.

The national policy for Ethiopian women includes strategies for implementing the policy's defined objectives. Among the strategies, women's human and democratic rights have been prioritized. As explicitly determined in the policy, all necessary measures need to be taken to ensure women's freedom of speech, writing, peaceful assembly, and forming associations, as well as their right to vote or be elected.

The authors examined the National Policy on Ethiopian Women using the V-Dem index (Women Political Empowerment Approaches), as it has been discussed in the preceding paragraphs. The examination's findings demonstrate that most of the indicators of women's political empowerment are incorporated into the policy, but not all. The policy effectively addresses indicators of women's civil liberties and civil society participation, but falls short in

addressing all women's political participation indicators. The policy underlines the essence of ensuring women's participation in public administration and decision-making positions. However, it does not specify the extent to which special reservations are to be reserved for women in the different organs of government (gender quota). The work of Jalalzai and Krook (2010), O'Brien and Piscopo (2019) and Ndlovu and Mutale (2013) confirm gender quotas as a distinctive public policy that promotes women's representation in positions of decision-making. The success of this strategy has been demonstrated in over 100 countries, including Rwanda, Finland, and Norway, which are exemplary in their representation of women in public bodies (Jalalzai & Krook, 2010).

The ways of promoting women's leadership (decision-making) roles have also never been stated in the Ethiopian national women's policy. This result supports the finding of Wondemagegn (2013) which stated that "In Ethiopia, important areas of underrepresentation of women in agriculture (for example, land use), economic opportunities, and higher-level decision-making have not been covered by existing measures of existing regular policies" (p. 175). Meanwhile, as Wondemagegn (2013) argued, specific measures are not envisioned in the policy frameworks to elevate women to decision-making areas. Thus, according to Sindhuja and Manimekalai (2018) in addition to other courses of action, ordinary policies and codes of conduct need to specify measures regarding women's political participation and ways of abolishing discrimination in any political process.

To sum up, since the indicators of women's political participation identified by the V-Dem are not included in the policy, all women's political empowerment approaches are not entertained in the National Policy on Ethiopian Women, which could affect Ethiopian women's political participation and decision-making role.

C. National Action Plan for Gender Equality (NAP-GE) 2006-2010: This action plan was assumed to be an Ethiopian government commitment to bringing gender equitable development to the country. The NAP-GE was incorporated into the broader development policy of the country, which was a Plan for Accelerated and Sustainable Development to End Poverty (PASDEP). It was aimed at including gender equality in the processes of poverty reduction. Particularly, the NAP-GE has been targeted to attain the objectives underlined in the 1995 FDRE Constitution, PASDEP, MDGs, Beijing Platform for Action (BPA), the 2000 Beijing+5 Political

Declaration and outcome document, and other governing principles in the national and international legal frameworks.

The primary goal of this five-year action plan was to promote gender equality and so support Ethiopia's social, political, and economic development. It also has strategic goals in place to achieve gender equality in every sector of the country. Under democratization and governance, one of the plan's key objectives was to increase women's access to decision-making at all levels, especially in the political and public spheres. The government set the following specific objectives to boost women's involvement and representation in public and political leadership positions: 2006–2010.

- (a) Enact gender sensitive electoral law: to enforce this, the plan aimed to assess the existed electoral law and planned to develop a revised all-inclusive electoral law and lobby for its enactment.
- (b) Implement constitutionally guaranteed affirmative action measures to rectify gender imbalances in political representation and decision making. The government has planned several kinds of measures to carry out this strategic goal, from improved capacity-building efforts to increasing women's political knowledge to training programs intended for changing attitudes among the community, women, and political party leaders. Hand in hand with this, it has been planned to enhance women's engagement in the three organs of government decision-making positions by forming lobby and advocacy groups. The government declared in the action plan to uphold women's and men's equal rights in all political endeavors, including freedom of association.
- (c) Build women's and girls' capacity in leadership and managerial skills and in exercising their rights. To bring this to the ground, many activities had been planned. Among these, the government showed its commitment to providing continuous leadership, management, self-esteem, and capacity-building training to make women equally competitive in leadership positions.
- (d) Initiate specific measures to increase gender balanced representation within the political and public sphere. The action plan calls for the implementation of gender-sensitive selection criteria and positive discrimination in different government organizations in order to advance women into positions of decision-making.

According to the V-Dem women's political empowerment measurements, the NAP-GE Ethiopian gender equality action plan is more oriented toward the indicators of women's political participation sub-index among the three sub-indices that are not found in the Ethiopia's women's national policy. This action plan is more concerned with the promotion of women's engagement at all levels of public and political decision-making positions. The action plan, however, while promoting women's political participation, fails to adequately address women's civil liberty and civil society participation indicators, highlighting the need for a comprehensive approach to women's empowerment.

D. The 2017 Ethiopian Women's Development and Change Strategy:As officially proclaimed in the document, the aim of this strategy is to promote gender equality and ensuring women's equal participation in social, political, economic, and cultural spheres. Furthermore, safeguarding women's fundamental rights, building an atmosphere that supports women's associations, working toward building capacity, ensuring that women are represented in positions of decision-making, and monitoring the inclusion and enforcement of women's issues in development policies, strategies, and legal frameworks are among the strategy's key objectives.

As mentioned above, one of the significant objectives of the Ethiopian women's development and change strategy is to increase the role of Ethiopian women in decision-making areas. The plan recognizes that increasing women's political involvement and strengthening women's organizations can help increase the number of women in political leadership positions.

As per the strategy, women's political participation could be achieved by strengthening women's associations and groups, i.e. improving the current and establishing new women's organizations, allowing women to collaboratively question issues related to development, democracy, and good governance. This strategy highlights the importance of women's organizations as a source of emerging female leaders. Moreover, the strategy places a strong emphasis on advancing women in leadership and decision-making positions. In this sense, the plan concentrates on boosting the participation of women in the legislative, executive, and judicial branches at all levels of decision-making positions. Moreover, as it emphasizes, it proposes taking measures to encourage women to actively participate in positions of leadership. Beyond this, another aspect of the plan to advance women's political involvement is to mitigate gender-based discrimination, injustice, rights violations, and harassment through a series of struggles against customary law, patriarchal

thinking, and stereotypes. The last but not least point of focus of this strategy is the institutionalization of women's issues in public institutions with sufficient funding to address women's concerns and advance women's interests.

The 2017 Ethiopian women's development and change strategy has been assessed based on the V-Dem women's political empowerment measurements, just like in the previous legal framework. As a result, the strategy laid a greater emphasis on indicators of women's political participation and women's participation in civil society. Although it was thought to be essential for women's political empowerment, the strategy did not fully address indicators of women's civil liberties. The document specifically emphasized expanding women's political involvement as a way to increase the number of women in positions of political leadership. According to the V-Dem approach, exclusively emphasizing women's associations and political involvement is insufficient to accomplish women's political empowerment. Instead, women's civil rights must be appropriately valued in order to advance freedom and justice, which in turn affects women's political empowerment.

4. Conclusion and further research areas

Ethiopian women-based policy frameworks have been examined using the V-Dem women's political empowerment measurement indices. Based on this index, the provisions of the FDRE 1995 constitution, the national policy on Ethiopian women of 1993, the 2006 national action plan for gender equality and the 2017 Ethiopian women's development and change strategy have all been reviewed. The V-Dem index-based review of those policies reveals that Ethiopia lacks a women-based strategy or policy that comprehensively acknowledges and effectively addresses the basic indicators of women's political empowerment. The assessment specifically indicates the gaps. The indicators that are related to women's civil liberty and women's civil society participation are often the focus of the majority of women-based initiatives, policies, and strategies in Ethiopia. The 2006 national action plan for gender equality and the 2017 Ethiopian women's development and change strategy place relatively some emphasis on the indicators of women's political participation. Thus, policy development related to women's political empowerment is advancing content-wise but is not comprehensive. Indeed, all those policy frameworks did not include specific measures such as quotas and other specific affirmative action measures acknowledged by continental initiatives (e.g., Agenda 2063) with their

indicators that are vital to increasing women's decision-making role. In Ethiopia, these shortcomings of women-based policies were found to be a bottleneck in the struggle to bridge the gender gap in decision-making positions.

The women's civil liberty, women's civil society participation, and women's political participation indices are interdependent and interconnected; mainstreaming them into frameworks can boost the visibility of women in politics and positively impact gender equality measures. Thus, policymaking in Ethiopia has to take all three sets of the V-Dem indices into account in order to achieve transformative women's political empowerment.

Also, national policymakers need to take into account an alternative set of legislation that addresses women's political engagement in particular measures, such as the V-Dem indices. In order to support women and enhance their agency to influence the nation's political life, a distinct and comprehensively gender-responsive policy framework is needed. Among others, the institutions for collaboration, the timetable for the goals to be achieved, the parties to be involved in the policy, the resources required, and the precise measurement indices to track progress and introduce frameworks are also needed. Additionally, from formulation through execution to evaluation, every step of the policy-making process should take into account the interests of both sexes in order for it to be considered effective.

As an area for future research, Ethiopia's women-based policy frameworks have brought up a wide range of women's issues. As previously stated, the goal of this research is to look at those policies solely from the perspective of women's political empowerment, but it could be crucial to look at them from the perspective of all women's empowerment dimensions. Another area for research in this regard would be the institutionalization of these legal frameworks among actors and the state of their application.

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1 Competing interests

No competing interests were disclosed.

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