

## **The Impact of NGOs' Services on Women Empowerment in Bahir Dar, Ethiopia**

Sofanit Mulugeta<sup>1</sup> & Fesseha Hailu<sup>2</sup>

### ***Abstract***

*Women empowerment issues perceived nationally or locally are being addressed by both state and non-state agencies. Beside the government intervention, NGOs are implementing various types of Women Empowerment Programs. In this paper an attempt has been made to shed light on the effectiveness of NGO's functions on women's empowerment in Bahir Dar town. A cross-sectional survey research design was employed to address the research objectives. The respondents were selected using simple random sampling technique from three NGOs working on women's empowerment in Bahir Dar city; namely, Care Ethiopia, Mums for Mums and Catholic Women's Training Center. This study measures women's empowerment at two levels: individual and collective (community) empowerment on four dimensions; (economical, socio-cultural, familial/interpersonal and psychological dimensions). Findings indicate that NGOs were effective on women's empowerment programs on saving and credit service functions with ( $M=129.80$ ,  $SD=12.56$ ), followed by social development and vocational training services ( $M=127.11$ ,  $SD=11.39$ ). The study emphasizes the need for NGOs to organize and integrate their activities to effectively address the problem of women in Bahir Dar city.*

**Key words:** Bahir Dar; women's empowerment; NGOs function; individual empowerment; community empowerment; gender; Amhara Region.

---

<sup>1</sup> Email: sefanit1@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup> Bahir Dar University, Department of Geography & Environmental Studies, email: [fesseha2005@yahoo.com](mailto:fesseha2005@yahoo.com)

## INTRODUCTION

The concept of women empowerment emerged conspicuously in the mid-1980s (UNPIN, 2012), and is broadly defined as an active, multi-dimensional process that enables women to realize their full identity and power in all spheres of life (Samiul Islam M., 2014). The understanding that women empowerment is multidimensional has important implications as number of studies have shown that women may be empowered in one area of life while not in others. In measuring empowerment, behaviors and attributes that indicate empowerment in one context may have different meanings elsewhere (Malhotra et al. 2002). Women's empowerment is the expansion of freedom of choice and action consisting of five dimensions: women's sense of self-worth; their right to have and to determine choices; their right to have access to opportunities and resources; their right to have the power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home; and their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally (UNPIN, 2012).

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are playing an important role in the empowerment of disadvantaged women, supporting them stand on their own through different programs such as socio-economic, vocational training and other similar programs which have multiplier effect on women and their households' living conditions (Margaret S. and N.Kala, 2013).

Women play an important role in the family and society, but in all necessary areas of life women are generally at a significant disadvantage (ibid). Women in almost all the known societies of the world, past or present, have not enjoyed the same status, privileges, rights and powers as that of men (Mittal, 1995). Stein (1997) observes that women are disadvantaged in terms of education, employment, income, access to programs and services, health care, and to benefits of modernization projects such as credit, training and jobs. According to the World Bank (2001), gender inequalities in developing societies inhibit economic growth and national development. The need for the empowerment of women thus arises from this harsh social scenario.

In Ethiopia, like many other developing countries, women face political, social and cultural challenges that undermine their human worth and dignity. Women in Bahir Dar were found suffering from social, cultural and political biases in the traditional male dominated society. Compared to male counterparts women have limited access to educational and employment opportunities. Still largely the households and society directly and indirectly deny or discourage women's role as decision-maker.

Non-Governmental Organizations' (NGOs) participations are identified as effective and efficient with regard to women's self-reliance and empowerment through supporting community-based groups, and relying on participatory processes (Salamon 1994).

However, as Carter et al. (2014) state women's empowerment is challenging to measure because the empowerment process is not directly observable, and needs to be addressed through proxy indicators, indirect measures. Empowerment is a multi-dimensional process which is related in a vast number of ways to many factors, rendering perception and subjectivities.

NGOs in Bahir Dar are innovating and implementing women's empowerment and development Programs addressing social issues, conducting advocacy efforts, raising public awareness and engaged in educational activities with extensive community participation. However, such substantial growth in the sector has inevitably brought critical questions

about their effectiveness, and sustainability in empowering women. There is a dearth of study on the effectiveness of NGO's participation in empowering women in Bahir Dar city. Therefore, this study looks into the dynamism of the process through which women empowerment is achieved and the status of women is boosted with NGO's support in Bahir Dar city.

### **Conceptual framework**

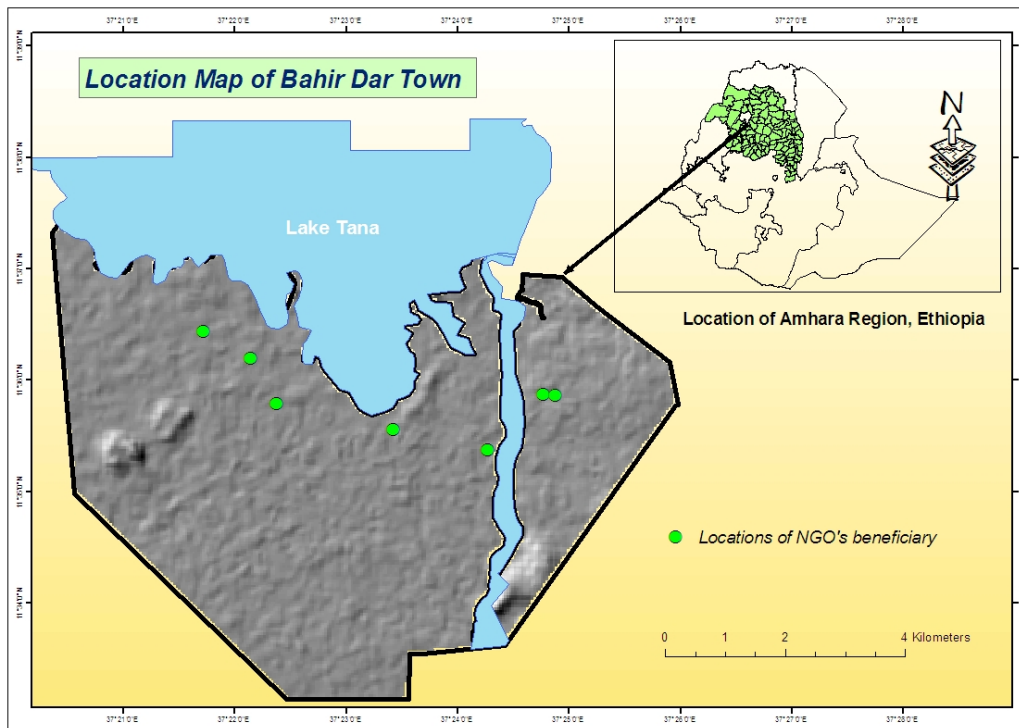
This study constructs two components of empowerment, namely individual and community level empowerment, relying mostly on commonly used dimensions of women's empowerment, drawing from the frameworks developed by various authors (Malhotra et al. 2002). These frameworks suggest that women's empowerment needs to occur along the following dimensions: economic, socio-cultural, familial/interpersonal, legal, political, and psychological. Based on this conceptual framework this study focused on economic, socio-cultural, psychological and familial/interpersonal dimensions of empowerment both at household and community levels. Women's empowerment is operationalized as a dependent variable whereas NGOs functions are treated as independent variables.

- *Economic empowerment*: Economic empowerment is the capacity of women to participate in, contribute to and benefit from growth processes in ways which recognize the value of their contributions, respect their dignity and make it possible to negotiate a fairer distribution of the benefits of growth.
- *Socio-cultural empowerment*: Socio-cultural empowerment refers mainly to women's freedom of movement, commitment to educating daughters, women's visibility in and access to social spaces; access to modern transportation; participation in extra familial groups and social networks.
- *Familial/interpersonal empowerment*: familial/interpersonal empowerment of women refers to participation in domestic decision making, ability to make child bearing decisions, use contraception, control over spouse selection and marriage timing, freedom from domestic violence, shifts in marriage and kinship systems indicating greater value and autonomy for women and local campaigns against domestic violence.
- *Psychological empowerment*: psychological empowerment refers to women's self-esteem, psychological wellbeing, self-confidence, collective awareness of injustice and potential of mobilization.

### **Description of the Study area**

Bahir Dar is the capital city of the Amhara National regional State, and is located in the north central Ethiopia at the southern shore of Lake Tana (fig.1).

Fig. 1 Location map of the study area



Source: CSA, 2012.

Bahir Dar has a total population of 221,991; of which 108,456 are males and 113,535 females (CSA 2007). There is rapid population growth, and it is the seat for various government and non-government organizations' staffs and migrants from the surrounding zones and *woredas* (administration unit equivalent to county). More than 96% of the residents speak Amharic as their mother tongue and nearly 90% are believed to be Orthodox Christian followers (*ibid*).

**Ethical clearance:** Before commencing the study, a letter of cooperation was submitted to each NGO. Moreover, oral consent was also asked from each respondent and so as to keep participants' identity confidential, data was collected anonymously throughout the study.

### Methodology

A cross-sectional survey research design was employed to assess and measure empowerment of women in the study area. As Carter et al. (2014) asserts women's own perceptions of empowerment are both specific to them as individuals, and particular to their social and economic context. The best way to measure empowerment is to ask those directly concerned (beneficiaries). Therefore, information for this study was collected from the beneficiaries.

### Sample size

There were three NGOs providing different services for 1,708 women. To determine the sample size, a population proportion sampling procedure was used. To get the maximum sample size,  $p = 0.5$  was used as there are no previous estimates available. The researchers allowed the maximum errors to be  $\pm 5\%$  of the population proportion. The 95% degree of confidence was used. Therefore, sample size was determined to be 384 women. To determine the sample size proportion from each NGO sampling ratio technique was used. Accordingly, 282 respondents from Care Ethiopia, 31 from Moms for Moms and 71 from Catholic Women's Training Center were selected. However, only 288 questionnaires were returned or properly answered for the analysis of the study.

#### ***Data collection instruments***

Closed ended questionnaires and five point Likert scale questionnaires were used to measure NGO's function on women's empowerment. The reliability index Cronbach's (1951) alpha for the instrument was .917.

Questionnaires were administered by the researchers and research assistants. The items in these questionnaires primarily focused on two sets of issues: first, involvement in several aspects of household decision-making, such as decisions regarding the purchase of new assets, or choices related to children's education or family planning, and second, their participation in community-level leadership and decision-making. Beyond these two main areas of decision-making, further questions covered issues pertaining to self-confidence, and women's access to credit and ownership of assets –including both those used in production, and also other high-value assets like jewelry.

#### ***Data Analysis***

This study employed quantitative research approach in the inquiry process to understand and explain women's empowerment in the study area. Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data.

### **Results and Discussion**

#### **Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents**

The age of the respondents ranged from 18 to 60. Nearly 45% were between 18 and 30 years of age. More than 55 percent of the respondents were married women while the rest were either divorced or single.

Almost 90 % of the respondents were Orthodox Christians whereas the remaining 10% were Muslims. Nearly 30%, 25%, and 45 % of the respondents were illiterate, literate (able to read and write) and completed primary school education, respectively. Our data suggest that almost one-third of the respondents were illiterate- a relatively lower figure when compared to that of a study conducted in India (Margaret S. and N.Kala, 2013) where 42.7 % of participants were illiterate. The general scenario in both cases however indicates that the NGOs provide services mainly to those who have low level of education.

#### **Duration as beneficiary to NGOs services**

The respondents' membership of NGOs ranged from less than six months to more than three years. About 53%, 23% and 24% of the respondents were NGO' beneficiary for more than three years, one to two years and less than one year, respectively. Nearly 24 % of the

respondents were beneficiary of social development service and vocational training while 22.6 % of them were beneficiary of awareness creation and advocacy services (Table 1). The data indicates that social development service and vocational training, and awareness creation and advocacy are the dominant services provided by NGOs in Bahir Dar.

Table1. Types of NGOs services and number of beneficiaries

NGO's functions	No of beneficiaries	%
Social development service and vocational training	68	23.6
Awareness creation and advocacy	65	22.6
Financial support	37	12.8
Saving and credit service	47	16.3
Educational training	36	12.5
Income generating program	35	12.2
Total	288	100

### Women's empowerment

The overall women's empowerment mean score was  $M = 122.6$ , with standard deviation of  $SD = 15.4$ . From the total respondents 38.5%, 33.5% and 16.5% rated the general level of their empowerment as high, moderate and low, respectively. This result is consistent with a study conducted in Iran where the role of NGOs contribution in empowering women is moderate (Allah Nikkhah et al., 2011; Margaret S. and N.Kala. 2013). In the male dominated traditional social structure and conservative society NGOs intervention in Bahir Dar city has resulted in a remarkable women's empowerment in economical, socio-cultural, familial/interpersonal and psychological dimensions.

### Individual empowerment

Economical, socio-cultural, familial/interpersonal and psychological dimensions were used to measure women's empowerment at individual and community levels. Individual empowerment was measured using 17 items on a five point Likert scale instrument. The individual empowerment ranged from 42 to 85 with a mean score of 68.82 and a standard deviation of 8.96.

Table2. Women's empowerment at individual and community levels

Individual levels of empowerment	Frequency	%
Low	30	10%
Moderate	113	39.6%
High	121	42.1%
Missing	24	8.3%
Total	288	100%
Community levels of empowerment	Frequency	%

Low	29	9.8%
Moderate	95	33.1%
High	155	53.9%
Missing	9	3.1%
Total	288	100%

### Effects of NGOs' services on individual empowerment

To analyze the effect of NGOs services on women's empowerment one-way ANOVA was computed. Post-hoc multiple comparisons were run to evaluate pair-wise differences among means score of individual empowerment in NGOs' services. The result indicated that NGOs' services (Table 3), social development service and vocational training, awareness creation and advocacy, financial support, saving and credit service, educational training and income generating programs have statistically significant differences among the mean of individual empowerment between groups with sum square =2822.952, mean square =564.590,  $F=7.972$  and  $P=.000$  suggesting that there is difference among NGOs' services on individual empowerment.

Table3. Result of ANOVA on individual empowerment in Bahir Dar

Source of variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	$\eta^2$
Between Groups	2822.952	5	564.590	7.972	.000	.134
Within Groups	18271.680	258	70.820			
Total	21094.633	263				

The result of Tukey test indicated that significant means score differences exists among the following pairs: saving and credit service and income generating program, and saving and credit service and financial support. The mean score of saving and credit service ( $M=73.49$ ,  $SD=6.821$ ) is significantly higher than income generating program ( $M=62.26$ ,  $SD=7.665$ ) as well as that of the financial support ( $M=65.93$ ,  $SD=9.714$ ). Thus, the result show that the function of saving and credit service has higher mean score of individual empowerment compared to other services. This result is consistent with the findings of a study conducted in India in which 68% of the respondents rated saving and credit service as low (Minimol M. C. and Makesh K. G, 2012). In Bahir Dar city, NGOs engaged in the service of saving and credit services seem to have higher contribution than those engaged in other services, which is consistent with a study conducted in India (Brahmbhatt, A. and Sheth P., 2013).

### Community level empowerment



Community level empowerment was measured using 13 items on a five point Likert scale. In measuring community level empowerment economical, socio-cultural, familial/interpersonal and psychological empowerment dimensions were taken into consideration. The community level empowerment score ranged from 28 to 64 with the mean score of 53.76 and a standard deviation of 7.949. Nearly 54% and 33% of women's empowerment at collective level were high and moderate, respectively (Table 2). The mean score of individual empowerment (68.82) was greater than that of collective empowerment (53.76). This result is consistent with other studies conducted in India (Margaret S. and N.Kala, 2013; Waghmode R. H. and Kalyan J. L., 2014) and in Iran (Islam N. and Sultana N., 2005) where NGOs contribute towards the realization of sustainable community development and hence women empowerment.

### Effects of NGOs' services on community empowerment

The ANOVA test result revealed significant differences in the means of community empowerment among six functions of NGOs (  $F(5, 273) = 12.468, P = .000$ ). Based on Cohen's (1988) criteria for eta squared ( $\eta^2$ ) where, (.01=small effect, .06=moderate effect, and .14=large effect), the eta-squared of .186 confirmed that mean differences among the six services have a significant effect on community empowerment. This result is also consistent with a previous study (Allah Nikkhah et al., 2011.) in which the effect size (eta-squared) of NGO's functions as independent variable was .18 indicating that the mean differences between items is high. These differences might be due to the NGOs' activities that help to mobilize women.

Table4. Results of ANOVA on NGOs' services at community level empowerment in Bahir Dar

NGOs functions	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Social development service and vocational training	66	57.17	5.958	41	64
Awareness raising and advocacy	63	53.84	8.190	33	64
Financial support	34	48.06	9.658	28	62
Saving and credit service	47	56.49	6.153	40	64
Educational training	34	54.47	6.868	41	64
Income generating program	35	48.34	6.553	34	60
Total	279	53.76	7.949	28	64

ANOVA Community level of empowerment:

Source of variation	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	$\eta^2$
Between Groups	3265.864	5	653.173	12.468	.000	.186
Within Groups	14301.563	273	52.387			
Total	17567.427	278				



Furthermore, post-hoc multiple comparisons were used to evaluate pair-wise differences among means score of community empowerment in NGO's services. The result of Tukey test indicated that significant means score difference exists between the following pairs: social development service and vocational training and financial support; social development service and vocational training and income generating program. Tukey test indicated that the mean scores of social development service and vocational training ( $M=57.17$ ,  $SD=5.95$ ) is significantly higher than that of financial support ( $M=48.06$ ,  $SD=9.65$ ) and that of income generating program ( $M=48.34$ ,  $SD=6.55$ ). This finding is inconsistent with a study conducted in Malaysia where microfinance programs performed better than other programs in improving the economic well-being of women through job creation and income generation (Allah Nikkiah H. and Bin Redzuan M., 2010). In Bahir Dar, NGOs engaged in the services of social development services and vocational training have significant effect on community empowerment than NGOs engaged in other functions (Table 4).

### The overall effects of NGOs' services on women's empowerment

Women's empowerment in this study, as mentioned earlier, includes two levels : individual and collective empowerment. The results of the ANOVA test indicated statistically significant difference in the mean of women's empowerment among the six services provided by the NGOs,  $F(5, 249) = 9.556$ ,  $P = .000$  (Table 5).

Table.5 General results of NGO's services on women empowerment in Bahir Dar

	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Social development service and vocational training	64	127.11	11.394	98	146
Awareness raising and advocacy	61	121.95	17.075	78	146
Financial support	25	116.68	15.968	77	145
Saving and credit service	45	129.80	12.564	95	145
Educational training	26	122.08	14.710	98	148
Income generating program	34	110.38	13.459	77	134
Total	255	122.58	15.336	77	148

ANOVA: Women's empowerment

Source of variation	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	$\eta^2$
Between Groups	9618.335	5	1923.667	9.556	.000	.161
Within Groups	50123.602	249	201.300			
Total	59741.937	254				

The result of Tukey test indicated that as significant mean score difference exists between saving and credit service and income generating program, and saving and credit service and financial support since  $p < .05$  is defined for the six services (Table 5). This comparative result suggested that saving and credit service has higher level of performance ( $M=129.80$ ,  $SD=12.56$ ), followed by social development service and vocational training ( $M=127.11$ ,

SD=11.39), and educational training (M=122.08, SD=14.71). Using Cohen's (1988) criteria for eta squared ( $\eta^2$ ) the effect size is computed to be .161 indicating that mean differences among services have a large effect on women's empowerment in Bahir Dar.

### **Conclusion**

This study measured women's empowerment at two levels: individual and collective (community) empowerment on four dimensions; economical, socio-cultural, familial/interpersonal and psychological dimensions. Saving and credit service (M=73.49, SD=6.821) has the highest significance than that of other programs at individual level (M=62.26, SD=7.665), while the mean scores of social development service and vocational training (M=57.17, SD=5.95) are significantly higher than that of other dimensions at community level. The overall (individual and community level empowerment) results of the ANOVA test indicate that statistically significant difference exists in the mean of score women's empowerment among the six functions of NGOs,  $F(5, 249) = 9.556$ ,  $P = .000$ . In Bahir Dar the saving and credit service of NGOs has more prominent contribution to women's empowerment (M=129.80, SD=12.56), followed by social development service and vocational training (M=127.11, SD=11.39).

Women were empowered individually and collectively as they were involved in NGOs issue-oriented activities which helped them to realizing themselves and understand the situation in which they live in. Women should be encouraged to involve in various activities that are organized by NGOs. Through their involvement in NGOs' activities women could be able to acquire knowledge and develop skills, and could have access to job, resources and power.

Empowerment means giving women the capacity to give themselves power; enabling women to access to vital information and enabling the women to avail of vital resources and services (Lazo L., 1995). However, remarkable empowerment may not be achieved through the above mentioned program as they target only on few women. Therefore, based on detailed study, opening extra programs with networked activities, and targeting to reach large number of women which takes into account the local realities could mitigate the problem in the study area.

The study found better (53.9%) collective level empowerment than (42.1%) individual level empowerment. Individuals who work together could help to achieve more extensive impact than each could have had alone.

Since empowerment is a complex phenomenon to measure because of its multidimensional aspects and its relationship with time as a process, the methodology used in this research should have been an integration of qualitative and quantitative methods. Hence, the authors would like to acknowledge the limitations that arise from the use of only quantitative method in this study.

## Reference

- Allah Nikkhah H. and Bin Redzuan M. 2010. The Role of NGOs in Promoting Empowerment for Sustainable Community Development. *J Hum Ecol*, 30(2): 85-92.
- Allah Nikkhah H, RedzuanM and Abu-Samah A. 2011. The Effect of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO)'s Approaches on Women's Empowerment in Shiraz, Iran. *J Hum Ecol*, 34(3): 179-187.
- Brahmbhatt, A. and Sheth P. 2013. The Role of NGOs in Empowering Women- an Empirical Study of the Selected NGOs of India. *Asian Journal of Multidimensional Research* Vol.2 Issue 3, March 2013.
- Carter J. et al. 2014. 'Learning about women's empowerment in the context of development projects: do the figures tell us enough?' *Gender & Development*, 22 (2): 327-349.
- Cronbach, L. 1951. 'Coefficient Alpha and the Internal Structure of Tests' *Psychometrika*, 16(3), 297-334.
- CSA. 2012. 'Population and Housing Census of Ethiopia', Addis Ababa.
- Islam N. Sultana N, (2005). Role of NGOs In Empowering The Vulnerable Women: A Study on ACD. *Asian Affairs*, Vol. 27, No. 4 : 24-40, October - December, 2005.
- Lazo L. 1995. Women, Education and Empowerment: Pathways towards Autonomy. Edited by Carolyn Medel-Anonuevo.
- Malhotra A. et al. 2002. 'Measuring Women's Empowerment as a Variable in International Development', World Bank, Gender and Development Group, Washington DC.
- Margaret S. and N.Kala. 2013. Study on Impact Of Ngo Interventions on the Empowerment of Women. *Journal of Business Management & Social Sciences Research (JBM&SSR)* ISSN No: 2319-5614 Volume 2, No.3, March 2013.
- Minimol M. C. and Makesh K. G, 2012. Empowering rural women in Kerala: A study on the role of Self Help Groups (SHGs). *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology* Vol. 4(9), pp. 270-280, November, 2012. Available online at <http://www.academicjournals.org/IJSA> DOI: 10.5897/IJSA12.003.
- Mittal. 1995. 'Do income generating Programmes Empower Women? A discussion on the changing status of women in rural Nepal.
- Salamon, L. 1994. 'The Rise of the Nonprofit Sector' *Foreign Affairs*, 73(4), 109-122.
- Samiul Islam M. 2014. Women's Empowerment in Bangladesh: A Case Study of Two NGOs. Bangladesh Development Research Working Paper Series.
- Stein, J. 1997. 'Empowerment& Women's Health' London: Zed Books, World Bank 2004 (draft).
- Waghamode R. H. and Kalyan J. L. 2014. Women Empowerment in India. *A Study. Reviews of Literature* • Volume 1 Issue 7 • Feb 2014.
- World Bank. 2001. 'Engendering Development: Through Gender Equality in Rights, Resources, and Voice' Washington D.C, Oxford University Press and World Bank.
- UN Population Information Network UN Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. 2012.