

Women Engagement in Business: Evidence from Community Based Cross-Sectional Study in North Gondar Zone, Northwest Ethiopia

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Abstract

Introduction: Overall the World, women have great developmental contribution constituting half of the population. However, in many societies of developing countries, there is deep rooted socio-cultural practices which limited women's access to economic resources like finance, property and credit. Though women's involvement in business activities articulates holistic development, they are more engaged in domestic activities and informal sectors. **Objective:** The objective of the study was to assess women's engagement in business in the case of North Gondar Zone, northwest Ethiopia. **Methods:** Community-based cross-sectional study was conducted in three districts and one town administration of the zone: Dabat, Dembia, Gondar Zuria, and Gondar Town in April 2016. Using multistage sampling technique data was collected via semi-structured questionnaire from 500 married women. Data were entered into Epi-Info 3.5.1 and transferred to SPSS 20 for analysis. **The results:** The result indicated that only 26.7% of the respondents have their own business. Among the main reasons mentioned for not starting business included lack of money (64.2%), lack of knowledge (14.2%), and other hindrance factors mentioned were commitment to child care (7%), unwilling husband (5%), and lack of motivation (4%). However, most of the respondents (95.7%) were found interested to start business in the future if they get the opportunity. **Conclusion:** The women's involvement in business was found minimal. **Keywords:** women, business engagement, North Gondar Zone

Introduction

Women constitute 70% of the global poor(1). Hence, empowering women is one of the most effective ways of promoting holistic development. Investing in the human development of women improves their quality of life and that of their families and communities. This has multiplier effects that expand with each new generation. On the other hand when women are illiterate, with poor health and little control over their fertility, their children also pay the price(2).

Despite the right and its significance, women in the world over share a common feature; they are marginalized in the sphere of public life. This gender disparity tend to be larger in countries with low GDP per capita(3). Unequal power relations between genders are a fundamental way in which societies are organized and gender inequalities between women and men remains common problem in developing countries(4). There is low levels of decision-making even among educated women and women working for cash(5).

Like many developing countries, women in Sub-saharan Africa lived in absolute poverty when comparing to their counterparts. In Ethiopia, there is significant gender gap in which women are economically, socially, culturally and politically disadvantaged (6, 7).

Ethiopia, as a signatory to many international human rights instruments, has been striving for the promotion and protection of women's rights to participate in development endeavors and equally participate in the fruits of development.

In Ethiopia, women's law status is taking place in different forms including their law participation in business and lack of assets ownership. However, Women's economic right underlined that they are fully supported by law to participate in economic activities. This women's economic legal protection is indicated in CEDAW by Law no. 11/2005 as the ratification of rights of the economic, and social & cultural rights(As cited in Santi et al.). It is also suggested in different studies that women's contribution in business capitulate high economic & social returns in a country's competitive market (The Business of empowering women, 2010).

However, despite all these efforts femininity remains an indicator of major disadvantage in Ethiopia. According to the 2014 Global Gender Gap Report, the country ranks 127th out of 142 countries (i.e., 15th from the bottom) indicating large gender disparities(8).

Women's engagement in business is one dimension of empowerment that is classified under resource empowerment. Through this engagement women are able to become more assertive, more confident, develop better negotiation and communication skills, and then enhances their household & community decision making power. However, traditionally they are more involved in reproductive and community roles which burdened their active participation in productive roles. A number of studies indicate that irrespective of the women's huge contributions which is neither valued nor reported, the deep rooted socio-cultural practices limited women's access to economic resources like finance, property and credit. Because of this, their engagement in domestic activities

and informal sectors seen more likely better than their involvement in business activities. Hence gender based discrimination put women in disadvantage position towards access to and control over resources and assets. This situation in turn played a significant role in challenging women's decision making power in household & community levels (9).

This situation in the Amhara National, Regional State (ANRS) is not different. Most rural women in the region are engaged in looking after family members, fetching water, cooking (10) and only 15.5% women are involved in all areas of decision making processes(11).

These national and regional low involvement of women in business activities was the key motivation to conduct this study. Thus, the objective of this study was to assess women's engagement in business in the case of North Gondar Zone, northwest Ethiopia

Methods

Community-based cross-sectional study was conducted in three districts and one town administration of the zone: Dabat, Dembia, Gondar Zuria, and Gondar Town in April 2016. The study population was all married women who are living with their husbands in the selected districts and the town administration.

The sample size was calculated assuming 50% proportion, 95% confidence interval and a 5% margin of error. Considering 10% non-response rate, the total sample size determined was 424. However to increase the power of the study the sample size taken was 500. Multistage sampling technique was used where three districts and one town administration of the zone out of the 23 districts of the zone; and proportionate kebeles from each sampled districts was randomly selected. Finally the respondents were selected via systematic random sampling.

Training was given for both data collectors and supervisors. To this end, 13 experts in the zone civil service office were used for data collection and supervision. Besides, the questionnaire was pre-tested on local people living outside the selected kebeles. The variables included in the questionnaire were related with Socio-demographic characteristics, women's participation in business, their saving practices, money management, and household decision making practices. Data were entered into Epi-Info 3.5.1 and transferred to SPSS 20 for analysis.

With regard to ethical issue, letter of permission was obtained from the University of Gondar, Research and Community services vice President office; and North Gondar zone women and children affairs office. In the same manner, participants were informed about the study purpose and confidentiality issues. They were also informed about their freedom to withdraw at any time if they feel so. Verbal consent was obtained from each study participant.

Results and discussions

Socio demographic characteristics of the study population

From three districts of North Gondar Zone (Dabat, Dembia and Gondar zuria) and Gondar Town administration, a total of 500 women were participated in the study. Around 84% were between the age of 18 to 45 with the mean age of 35.4 (+10.7). The majority of the respondents were Orthodox Christians by religion (97.2%), illiterate (38.8%); and housewife (69.5%). With regard to income, over half of the respondents' (68.2%) monthly income was below Birr 2,250 in which the source of income for 50% was Husband's income (Table 1).

Table1. Demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the study population

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
Less than30	186	37%
30-45	234	47%
More than 45	79	16%
Religion		
Orthodox	480	97.2%
Muslim	11	2.2 %
Others	3	0.6 %
Education		
Illiterate	196	38.8%
Able to read and write	66	13.1%
Primary education	75	14.9%
Secondary school & above	145	28.7%
Occupation		
Housewife	347	69.5%
Farmer	38	7.6%
Employee	60	12.0%
Merchant	31	6.2%
Others	24	4.7%
Husband's occupation		
Farmer	256	51.3%
Employee	104	20.8%
Pension	68	13.6%
Merchant	27	5.4%
Others	45	8.9%
HH monthly income in Birr		
No income	10	3.8%
Less than 2250	180	68.2%
2250-5750	48	18.2%
More than 5750	26	9.8%
Source of income		
Own informal activity	152	41.08%
Husband income	185	50 %
Others	33	8.9%

Women's practice in business activities

Money holding ability and management practice

Women's economic status in the household emerged as an important factor associated with their autonomy in decision making(12). This indicates that the ownership and control of property is one of the most critical contributors to improve women's household decision making. Empowerment as a key aspect in women's lives took place through their control over their earning that would obviously increase their financial independence.(Santi et al.) Encouraging women to manage money is a powerful means of empowerment.

Thus, question related with the respondents money holding ability and management practice was incorporated in the study. In this regard, most of the respondents (84.2%) hold money for food items. However, above 40% of them don't have money for their own needs such as for purchasing clothes, for transport, and for social gathering contributions (Figure 1).

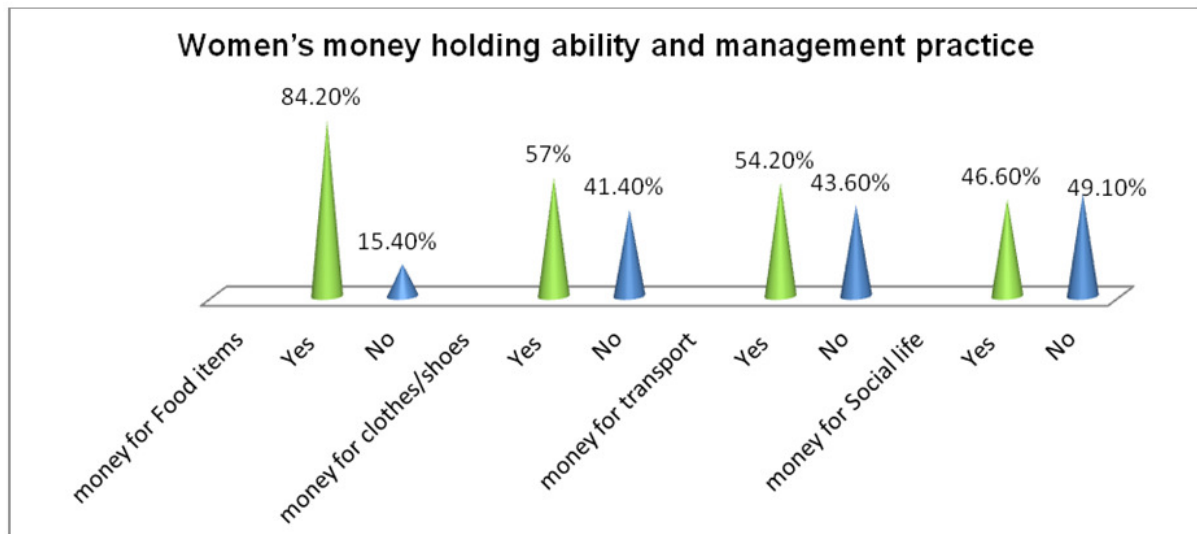


Figure1. women`s money holding ability and management practice

Most importantly, social gathering play a great role in getting informed about various issues, taking lessons, sharing best experiences and challenge handling mechanisms. Since most of the time such gatherings have a rule of contributing some money regularly, having money on hand to pay as contributions increases the probability of participation. However, only 46% of the respondents have the chance to hold money at hand for those issues.

Regarding money holding for transport purpose, around 43 % of the respondents replied as they do not hold money. This could limit their freedom of movement in general and delimit some of their advantages they can get from communicating and interacting with others. In similar vein, around 28% of the respondents reported as there are decisions left only for the husband`s in the household.

Respondents were asked if they have independent accumulated money of their own that they alone can decide for various purposes. Hence, 33% responded as they don`t have independent accumulated money; and only 23% perceived as they have adequate amount.

“So often, it takes only one woman to make a difference. If you empower that woman with information, training and microloan, she can lift up her entire family and contribute to the success of her community; *Condoleezza rice, former US secretary of State*” (As cited in Ernst and young, 2009). In the same manner different literatures showed that savings and bank account ownership has positive contribution for women`s economic empowerment(13). Thus, to assess the women`s practice in this regard, whether they have a bank account or an account in any other savings institution in their own name or jointly with someone else was another question incorporated. However, around 70% of the respondents reported as they don`t have any bank account. 23.4% have account together with their husband`s. And only 7.4% has their own bank account which clearly indicates the low economic empowerment of the women. (Figure1). Similarly a study conducted in Nekemte, Ethiopia indicated women`s low access to financial institutions and only 45.8% of the studied women had independent bank account (Figure 2).

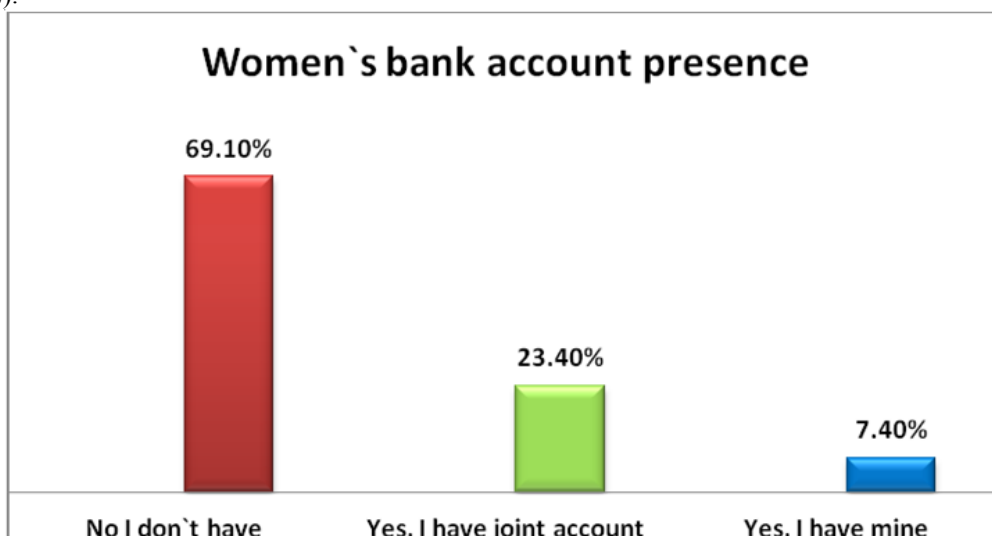


Figure2: presence of women`s bank account

On the other hand, 32% of the respondents reported as their husband's has separated account. And this figure is expected to be underestimated due to the fact that some women may not really know about the existence of their husband's bank account.

Women's practice in business activities

Various studies revealed that Strengthening women by increasing their participation in income generating activities would help women to boost their ability in making household & strategic decisions.(As Cited in Puspa, 2007). Moreover, a study by Santi indicated that education and training are basic capacity builders for women to take active part in business and control their earnings.

In relation to respondent's involvement in business, only 26.7% of the respondents have their own informal business. Among the main reasons mentioned for not starting business included lack of money 64.2%, and lack of knowledge 14.2% .

However, most of the respondents (95.7%) are interested to start business in the future if they get the opportunity. With regard to the type of business 42.6 % are interested on selling animal and animal products, 17% on beverages, 16.2 % on selling agricultural products, and the rest on other types of business (Table 2).

Table2: Women's practice in business related issues

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Making plans on how to improve the family income		
Never	80	16.1%
Sometimes	158	31.9%
Occasionally	57	11.5%
Most of the time	152	30.6%
Always	49	9.9%
Thinking to start some business		
Never	136	27.3%
Sometimes	132	26.5%
Occasionally	52	10.4%
Most of the time	126	25.3%
Always	52	10.4%
Complaining about the income level you have		
Never	187	37.7%
Sometimes	117	23.6%
Occasionally	94	19.0%
Most of the time	57	11.5%
Always	41	8.3%
Discussing with intimate ones on income generating issues		
Never	155	31.3%
Sometimes	170	34.3%
Occasionally	58	11.7%
Most of the time	86	17.3%
Always	27	5.4%

Regarding women's practice in business engagement, the result revealed around 27% had never thought to start any business activity. Besides, though they reported as they have low income, 37.7% of the respondents had never complained about the level of income they have. This might be related with the low level of assertiveness they have as well as the influence of many women working in informal sectors earning low salary and serving as facilitators rather than owners. Similarly, 31.3% of the respondents have never had discussion with family members, relatives, and/or friends on issues of engagement in income generating activities

Women's saving practice

It is evident that women in developing countries are living in poverty due to the fact that they have been curtailed from education, formal employment and property rights. Hence microfinance institutions are found to add potential value in facilitating credit and mobilizing savings to improve the well-being of poor women in developing countries(14). Some traditional institutions like Equb are mostly used by women to improve their saving practice and to get financial back up. Also studies illustrated that women are found very performing in returning their credits than their male counterparts. If women are empowered to have access to financial services, they will become more assertive to take some roles in community decisions which give power to deal with systemic gender inequities and economic independence (As cited in Puspa Raj Sharma, 2007).

Accordingly the women's saving practice which was assessed in this study indicated that only 36% of them

have saving practice. Besides, the respondents were asked what they can do if they get money suddenly. Thus, 47% the respondents replied as they will spend for consumption, and around 40% reported as they can consume half of it and save the rest. Though, 97.3% of the respondents indicated as they have saving institution near to them.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Majority of the respondents hold money only for daily food consumption; and they do not have any bank account experiencing weak saving practice. Around three-fourth of the respondents don't have their own business due to lack of money, lack of knowledge, child care responsibilities, unwilling husband, and lack of motivation. However, most of the respondents were found interested to be engaged in business activities if they get the opportunity. Thus, it needs due attention to improve the women's engagement in business activities and their saving practices through creating enabling environment, providing capacity building trainings, and facilitating access to start-up capital.

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