

# Assessment of the Roles and Constraints of Women in Economic Development of Ethiopia: The Case of Ambo Town Since 1991

Gashaw Ayferam\*

Department of Civics and Ethical Studies, Ambo University, Ambo, Ethiopia

## Abstract

This study is mainly focused on the role of women in economic development with the aim of assessing the roles and constraints of women in economic development of Ethiopia in general and Ambo in particular. Women in Ethiopia or anywhere else in developing countries occupy the low states in the society and their contributions has never been adequately recognized or given economic value. Moreover, women's roles in the economy has often been underestimated and their work in the different sectors has long been invisible. The findings are based on primary and secondary data collections from different sources. The primary data is collected through questionnaires and interview while the secondary data is collected from literature review. The result of the study indicates the significance of the role of women in economic development and the factors that make their economic roles unrecognized. The roles of women, among other things, includes saving, family planning, efficient utilization of resources, productive, reproductive, and community managing role. The role of women in economic development can be improved through gender empowerment measures and by providing women to productive resources such as credit and loan

**Keywords:** Economic development; Unemployment; Investments; Economic activities; Socio-economic policy

## Introduction

Women are more than half of the world population. They are the mothers of the other half. As mothers and careers, as producers and farmers, the work of women supports their families and communities. Yet, throughout the world, the poorest people are predominantly women and their dependent children. Women face an increasing level of violence because of their gender and half a million die each year as a direct or indirect result of pregnancy [1]. Historically, women in both eastern and western societies were viewed as the weaker sex and this view placed women in the category of a lesser being. Even today women in most of the world are less well-nourished than men, less healthy, more vulnerable to physical violence and sexual abuse and less paid. They are much less likely than men to be literate, and still less likely to have professional and technical education. In many nations, women are not fully equals under the law, often burdened with full responsibility for house work and child care, they lack opportunities for entertainment and imagination. In all these ways, unequal social and political circumstances give women unequal human capabilities (ibid). For most of the last 50 years, development theory and practice was focused on economic development. Moreover, the development of infrastructure such as road, electrification, irrigation, schools and hospitals was seen as the basis for economic growth and development. During the 1960's education and health care become the two important elements of development programs because well trained and health workers were seen as crucial for productivity. Although the various programs were introduced in this period, they ignored women as economic actors [2].

By the late 1960s, the social and political upheaval in the developed countries open the way to the emergency of women's movement. In these movements, women started questioning their roles in the society and the discrimination they face in labor markets, political and economic area (ibid). According to the Easter Boserup's study on the role of women in economic development in 1970 women's agricultural production was critical in sustaining social and national economy. The study also bringing onto the international agenda the issue of women and their marginalization in the 1970's in particular and she also highlighted the impact of technological innovation on women,

the displacement of women from their productive labor [3]. Today, we have high percentage of women, female industrialists, ministers, judges and others. We also have an increasing rate of female university graduates in the world. The integration of women in to our labor force has meant less dependent on men, because that these women can take over jobs, there is less dependence. The integration of women has also widened the intellectual pool in social, economic and political debate [1]. In most low income developing countries, women have a triple role. Women's role includes reproductive work that is required to guarantee the maintenance and production of the labor force, productive role and community managing work. In rural areas, their productive role usually takes informal sector and small enterprises located either in the home or neighborhoods. Women's community managing work involves the provision of items for collective consumption undertaken in the local community in both urban and rural contexts [2,3]. In this case, a major and until recently often overlooked feature of least developed countries (LDCs) agrarian system is the crucial role played by women in agriculture particularly in Africa. In Africa, where subsistence farming is predominant and shifting cultivations remains important, nearly all tasks associated with food production are performed by women. Although men who generally perform the initial task of cutting trees and bushes on a potentially cultivatable plot of land, women are responsible for all burning field trees, planting the plot, weeding, harvesting and preparing the crop for storage [4]. Historical evidences indicate that women had been participating in their political, social, and economic aspect of their country, however, their role in development in general and economy in particular had been challenged and well not recognized. As it is the case

\*Corresponding author: Gashaw Ayferam, Department of Civics and Ethical Studies, College of Social Sciences and Humanities, Ambo University, Ambo, Ethiopia, Tel: 0112-364878; E-mail: [dngashu@gmail.com](mailto:dngashu@gmail.com)

Received November 26, 2014; Accepted March 27, 2015; Published April 05, 2015

**Citation:** Ayferam G (2015) Assessment of the Roles and Constraints of Women in Economic Development of Ethiopia: The Case of Ambo Town Since 1991. J Pol Sci Pub Aff 3: 148. doi:10.4172/2332-0761.1000148

**Copyright:** © 2015 Ayferam G. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

in other countries, Ethiopian women are the half portion of the society and they face economic, social, and political problems. They have been neglected from taking power in their own country regardless of their own knowledge and experience of protecting the other half of the population. Women themselves have a problem of feeling inferiority. Inferiority assumption of women is not only the main factor which declines their participation in the life of their family, but also hinders their role in economic development. The discriminatory political, economic and social rules and regulations prevailing in Ethiopia have barred women from enjoying the profits of their labor and economic development [3]. Moreover, the socio-cultural situations of the country that are also associated with gender division of labor and the patriarchy are the source for the disadvantaged position of women which is characterized by pervasive sexual violence, harmful traditional practice, unemployment, lack of formal education and training (ibid, 2006:116). Despite the discriminatory practices and rules, women have played their role in the development endeavors of the country. Before the 1974 revolution, women's organized activities were run by non-governmental bodies such as Ethiopia women's welfare association, the Ethiopian Female Students Association etc. These associations were, however, limited in scope and only existed in the cities. They had little impact on government policies, laws and development programs that encourage the role of women in overall development policy and strategies [3]. After 1974, the Revolutionary Women's Association (REWA) was established by proclamation. In fact, the establishment of the association was for the consolidation of Derge's power rather than promoting the interest of women's. As a result there was little improvement in the lives of Ethiopian women (ibid: 113). A part from this, the current government, FDRE, as a principle has stated that "the historical legacy of inequality and discrimination suffered by women in Ethiopia take in to account, women, in order to remedy this legacy are entitled to affirmative measures. The purpose of such measures shall be to provide special attention to women so as to enable them compete and participate on the basis of equality with men in political, social and economic life as well as in public and private institutions [5].

In Ambo town, women are also involved in all aspects of their society's life. Women are producer and procreator as well as participant in the social, political and cultural activities of their communities. They play an overall role in small scale business, crafts, associations that are economic and even in agriculture (interview with Bizunesh Hailu, January 2013). As it is a case at a national level, the role of women in economic development has also a paramount role for the people in Ambo town. Economic development is unthinkable without the active participation of women. Economic role of women is the main thing in which everybody should give much emphasis. Therefore, this paper assesses the role of women in economic development of Ambo town.

### Concept of Economic Development

The study of economic development is one of the newest, most existing and most challenging branch of the broader discipline of economics and political economy. It is a distinct and very important extension of both traditional economics and political economy. In strictly economic terms, economic development means the capacity of a national economy whose initial economic condition has been more or less static for a long time to generate and sustain an annual increase in its gross national product (GNP) at rates of 5% to 7% [4]. Economic development is a concept that refers to a change on means of production, technology, infrastructure and human capital. Thus, economic development would result sector transformation, which is change from agriculture based economy to industry. Moreover,

economic development deals with the welfare of the people in terms of higher incomes and better standards of living. It refers to the problems of underdeveloped countries and economic growth to those of developed countries. Economic development involves something more than economic growth. It is taken to mean as growth plus change, in a sense that it is related with qualitative change in economic wants, goods, incentives, institutions, productivity and knowledge or it is an upward movement of the entire social system. There are essential qualitative dimensions in the development process that extends beyond the growth or expansion of an economy through a simple widening process. This qualitative difference is especially likely to appear in the improved performance of the factor of production and improved techniques of production. It is also likely to appear in the development of institutions and a change in attitudes and values [6,7]. Economic development describes the underlying determinants of growth such as technological and structural changes. In fact, economic development embraces both growth and decline. An economy can grow but it may not develop because of poverty, unemployment and inequality may continue to persist due to the absence of technological and structural changes. Economic development implies both more out and change in the technical and institutional arrangement by which it is produced and distributed [6]. On the other hand, economic development should include material progress especially for those persons with the lowest per capital income [PCI], the eradication of mass poverty with its correlates of illiteracy and diseases. It implies fundamental change in the social, political, technical, institutional frame work as well as in the structure of the economy so as to increase the productivity of capital, efficiency of labor, technical skill, level of effective demand and employment, poverty and ill-health. It is essentially an important component of development. According to Jhingan, an essential component of economic development are; raising national income, reducing poverty, and more equitable distribution of wealth and income. In this regard, fair and equitable distribution of wealth is an essential condition for economic development in the face of glaring inequalities; people will not be prepared to give their whole hearted and continuous co-operation for the implementation of economic programs for development (ibid).

Generally, economic development is thus much more than the acquisition of industries. It may be interpreted as the attainment of a number of ideas of modernization such as rise in production, social and economic equalization, modern knowledge, improved institutions and attitudes, and rationally coordinated systems of policy measures that can remove the host of undesirable conditions in the social system that perpetuated a state of underdevelopment [7].

### Core values of economic development

According to David Goulet, there are three basic components or core values to serve conceptual basis and practical guideline for understanding inner meaning of economic development and setting objectives for economic development. These core values are:

1. Life sustenance (the ability to meet basic needs). All people have certain basic need without which life would be impossible. These basic human needs are food, shelter, health, education, and protection. When any of these needs are in short or absent is an indication of absolute poverty. One of the most important goals of development is to prolong men's lives and to provide as many people as possible with the means of overcoming the helplessness and misery arising from a lack of food, shelter, health and protection.

2. Self-esteem (to be a person and having a sense of worth and self-respect). A second universal component of the good life or goal of

development is self-esteem. Self-esteem is conceived as sense of worth and self-respect or not being used as an instrument by others for their needs and benefit. All human beings in all societies seek the necessity for respect, dignity, honor and recognition. Thus, states to meet this most important value they should establish an objective of raising the level of living standards of the people.

3. Freedom from all kinds of servitude (to be able to choose or expand the range of choice of society's minimization of external constraints). A third universal value that should constitute the meaning of good life is the concept of human freedom. Development ought to free all humans from all kinds of servitude. Freedom here is to be understood in the sense of emancipation from alienating material condition of life and from social servitude to nature, ignorance, other people influence, misery, institutions and dogmatic beliefs. Therefore, a true economic development is the one that release all humans from all kinds of servitude [4].

### Objectives of economic development

Development is both a physical reality and a state of mind in which society has secured the means for obtaining a better life through the combination of social, economic and institutional process. According to Jhingan, development in all societies must have the following three objectives; 1) To raise or increase the availability and widen the distribution of basic life- sustaining goods such as food, shelter, health and protection. 2) To raise the levels of living standards. 3) To expand the ranges of economic and social choices available to individual and nations by freeing them from all forms of servitude and dependence [6].

### Basic requirements for economic development

There are so many basic requirements for the success of economic development. These are:-

- 1) Removing market imperfections.
- 2) Structural changes.
- 3) Capital formation.
- 4) Sustainable environment and investment.
- 5) Existence of strong and competent administration [8].

### Obstacles to economic development

There are some impediments which hinder the gradual process of the economy. Some of these are the following:-

**Vicious circles of poverty:** There are circular relationships known as the vicious circles of poverty that tend to perpetuate the low level of development in least developed countries (LDCs). According to Jhingan, poverty and underdevelopment of the economy are thus synonymous. A country is poor because it is poor and remains underdeveloped as it has not the necessary resources for promoting development [6]. As the Figure 1 shows, low productivity is reflected in low real income. The low level of real income means low saving. The low level of saving leads to low productivity which results in low investment and deficiency of capital. The deficiency of capital, in turn, leads to a low level of productivity and back to low income.

**Low rate of capital formation:** The most pertinent obstacle to economic development is the shortage of capital. This is raised from the vicious circle of poverty. Poverty is both a cause and a consequence of a country's low rate of capital formation. In an underdeveloped country, the masses are under poverty line. They are mostly illiterate and unskilled, use outdated capital equipment and methods of production. They practice subsistence farming, lack mobility and have little connection with the market sector of the economy. Their marginal productivity is extremely low. So, low productivity leads to a low rate of capital formation [6].

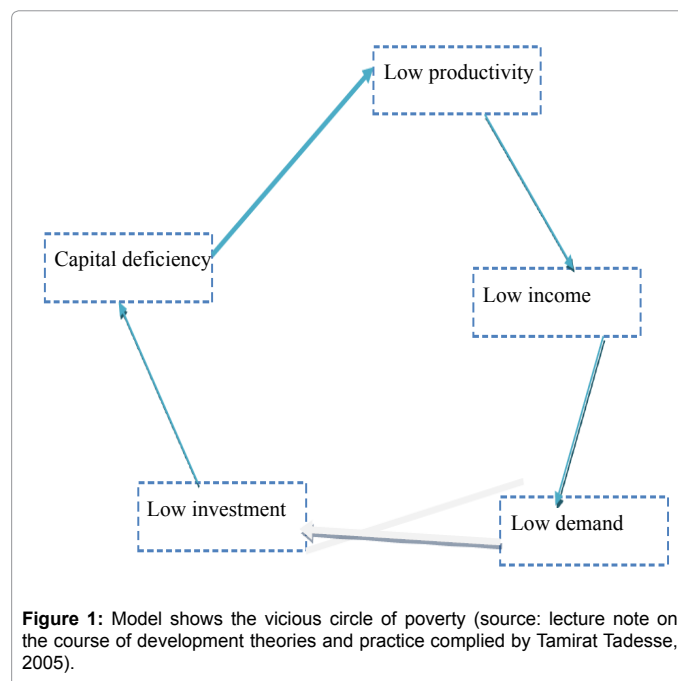


Figure 1: Model shows the vicious circle of poverty (source: lecture note on the course of development theories and practice compiled by Tamirat Tadesse, 2005).

**Socio-cultural constraints:** There are elements of social resistance to economic change in underdeveloped countries which include institutional factors characterized by rigid stratification of occupations reinforced by traditional beliefs and values; attitudes involving inferior valuation attached to business roles and the tendency of the society to be divided by ethnic or religious distinction, difference in cultural tradition and social pattern, kinship loyalties and regional identification (ibid).

**Human resources constraints:** Underdeveloped human recourse is an important obstacle to economic development particularly in LDCs. Such countries lack in people possessing critical skills and knowledge requires for all round development of the economy. Underdeveloped human resources are manifest in low labor productivity, factor immobility, limited specialization in occupation, and in customary values and traditional social institutions that minimize the incentives for economic development.

**Agricultural and foreign exchange constraint:** The majority of LDCs are predominantly agricultural production constitutes a large share of their gross domestic product (GDP) and agricultural commodities form a considerable part of the value of their total exports. The agricultural practices are controlled by custom and tradition. For instance the farmer are fear full of science and technology.

In addition of the farmer behavior, the constraint on agricultural growth are to be found in the environment in which farmers operate; the technology available to them, the incentives for production and investment, the availability and price of inputs, the provision of irrigation, and climate condition. As a result of environmental factor, agricultural output fails to meet the rising demand of the developing economy (ibid).

## Gender, Development and Economy

### Gender and development

Gender refers to the biological characteristics which are associated with male and female and also the norms and expectations regarding

behavior that are associated with men and women in particular societies at particular times [9]. Gender is the result of the interplay of culture, religion, and similar factor of a society. It refers to historically defined identities, roles and behaviors of different group such as men\_ women, girls\_ boys, and old men\_ old women and so on [10]. Therefore, gender is socially constructed category and may change over time and space. Within the development process the first person to focus on the ways in which women were affected differently from men through the modernization project was Easter Boserup. She argued that as societies and economies moved from a rural substance base to an industrial urban core, women were increasingly excluded. This was because of the association of women with the domestic and reproductive sphere of child care and house work, while men's roles in society were constructed as involving non domestic activity [9].

On the other hand, the increasing gender awareness led to development organizations and governments implementing polices which they hoped would involve women to a greater degree in development. For example, the United Nations (UNs) declared from 1975-85 the UN decade for women. These initiatives recognized that development that excluded women could not really be termed development, but in many cases the approaches did not really address the root issues of gender inequality and disadvantage, or involve women in making decisions about their lives (ibid). In this regard, one of the key short comings of many gender and development project, according to Chant and Gutmann, has been the lack of engagement with men. Men were regarded as the problem, but rather than dealing with the problem, projects continued to deal with the role of women in society and tried to help women's empowerment. However, since the early 1990s there has been an increasing focus on incorporating men in to gender and development projects and a consideration of the ways in which men's roles and positions in society are socially constructed.

### Measuring gender and development

As international organizations have become increasingly aware of how gender and development are linked, the ways in which development is measured have become more gender sensitive. In 1995, United Nation Development Program (UNDP) introduces two new development measures as part of the gender and development; the gender related development index (GDI) and gender empowerment measure (GEM).

**Gender related development index (GDI):** This measure of development incorporate three dimension of development in relation to human well-being. These are: 1) A long and health life, as measured by life expectancy at birth. 2) Knowledge or literacy, as measured by the adult literacy rate and the combined primary, secondary and tertiary gross enrolment ratio. 3) A decent standard of living, as measured by per-capital income (PCI) [7,9]. This Measures looks at men and women separately to calculate whether one gender has better human development levels than the other or not.

**The gender empowerment measure/ GEM/:** This is a measure of women's opportunity and achievements in the economic and political spheres. The GEM captures gender inequality in three key areas. 1) Economic participation and decision making power, as measured by two indicators, women's and men's percentage shares of position as legislatures, senior officials and managers; and women's and men's percentage share of professional and technical position. 2) Political participation and decision making, as measured by women's and men's percentage shares of parliamentary seats. 3) Power over economic resources, as measured by women's and men's estimated earned income (source: adopted from UNDP, 1995 as cited in Willis, 2005:136).

### Gender equality, empowerment and sustainable development

Gender equality is not only a goal in its own right, but also an essential ingredient of achieving all the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) [11]. It is at the core of the MDGs that will be achieved from improving health and fighting disease, to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, to increase access to safe water and to ensure environmental sustainability. An attempt to meet the MDGs without incorporating gender equality will increase the costs and minimize success. Therefore, without incorporating gender equality and empowerment in sustainable development efforts it is not possible for developing countries like Ethiopia to achieve the eight MDGs (ibid). The MDGs are eight goals to be achieved by 2015 that responds to the world's main development challenges. Figure 2 shows the core role of gender equality and empowerment for the achievement of other MDGs.

The World Bank report indicated that the gender division of labor in the home, social norms and prejudice, and unequal access and control over resource prevent women from taking equal advantage of economic opportunities [11]. Because of these reasons it is highly advisable to recognize gender differential constraints when designing and implementing various polices and strategies. On the other hand, there is strong need for economic empowerment of women in our today's world. The main reason why women must be economically empowered is the fact that they constitute the majority of the world's poor people. Improving access of small scale rural male and female farmers in to productive resources is one of the best mechanisms for ensuring sustainable human development [11]. Therefore, to achieve sustainable development the government should take measures in revising polices and set up plans to increase the proportion of women's involved as decision maker, planners, managers and technical advisors in the design, development and implementation of polices and programmer for sustainable development(ibid).

### Women in development

Between the 1950s and 1970s development issues in the so called third world focused on modernization and technological innovation. The assumption was to benefit the poor and remove poverty. However, the benefits of development were not able to reach the needy people [3]. More specifically, the status and the traditional rights of women have deteriorated more than ever, mainly due to planner's failure to address

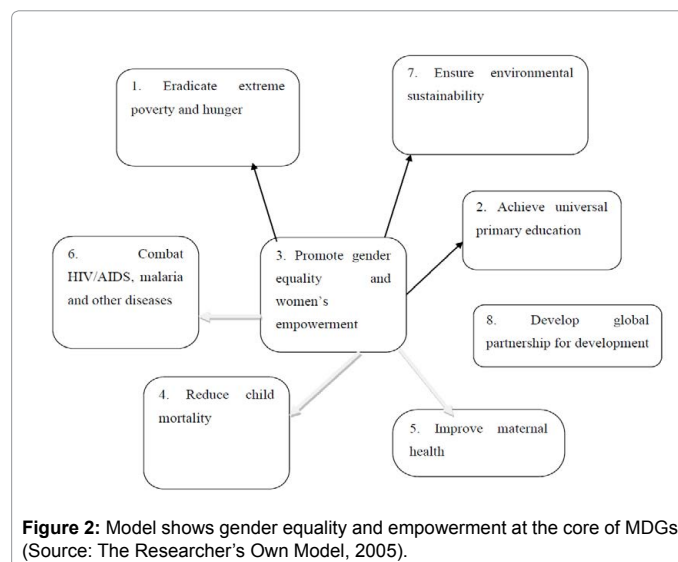


Figure 2: Model shows gender equality and empowerment at the core of MDGs (Source: The Researcher's Own Model, 2005).

the role and needs of women as distinct from men, and women's limited access and control over resources and benefits (ibid). In this regard, there are three factors that contributed to bring and incorporate women in development issue onto the international agenda. First, it was believed that because of their central role in productive and reproductive tasks, women in the third world could play a crucial role in the population control program. Second, women's crucial roles in subsistence farming and social reproductive tasks were thought to be an important channel for the provision of basic needs for the family. Third, following Easter Boserup studies, concern about the third world women grew and the need to study the lives of poor women as a way of getting to the bottom of poverty become clear (ibid).

### Women and economy

There are considerable difference in women's and men's access and opportunities to exert power on economic structures in their societies. In most parts of the world, women are virtually absent from and are poorly represented in economic decision making including the formulation of financial, monetary, commercial and other economic policies as well as tax systems and rules governing pay [12]. Various internal biases against women with in the households are strongly influenced the economic status of women [2]. Studies which are conducted in relation to women and men indicate that women earn income much lower than men. There are various reasons for the prevalence of large earnings differentials between men and women. These are: 1) Women are paid much less for performing similar tasks. 2) They are not allowed to join high paying occupations. 3) In urban areas, most women do not succeed in getting formal employment in either private or public sector. They are forced to accept low productivity job. 4) Rural women have very little access to necessary resources such as land. 5) Women's are normally assumed as not eligible for institutionally provided resource such as credit and training. 6) Government employment or incomes generating progress in general are not open to women (ibid). On the other hand, women have entered the work force increasingly by choice and they become aware of their rights. Although many women have advanced in economic structures, for the majority of women, particularly obstacles have hindered their ability to achieve economic autonomy and to ensure sustainable development for themselves and their dependents [12].

### Women's Role in Economic Development

#### The triple role of women in economic development

In most low income developing countries, women's work or role includes productive, reproductive and community managing works and usually referred as triple role of women. The productive role of women's includes production of goods and service for consumption by the household for income and is performed by both men and women [2]. Women's productive work is often carried out alongside with their domestic and child care responsibilities and tends to be less visible and valued than men's productive work (ibid). In regard to reproductive work, the reproductive activities of women are also known as the domestic role and include all the burdens involved in procreation; bearing and rearing of children. It also includes processing and preparing food, clearing of house, fetching of water from far places, gathering and collecting fuel wood and animal dung, caring of sick family members and olds [3].

Finally, women's community activities include providing and maintenance of resource, such as, health care and education. The best example for this community role in Ethiopia are Idir, Ekub, Mahiber, Wenfel, Debo and weddings and so on [2,3].

### Women's role in economic development

Women play a vital role in the economic development of one's country. They provide an important source of labor for cash crop production, cultivate food for household consumption and generate additional income through cottage industries [4]. Due to the time consuming nature of their diverse responsibilities, women tend to work longer hours than their male counter parts. Studies concerning the allocation of women's time among different activities have greatly increase recognition of the importance of women's economic contribution.

According to Smith and Todaro, since women produce a large share of agricultural output, successful agricultural reform will require raising women's productivity. The diversity of women's duties makes it difficult to determine their share of agricultural production, much less place an economic value on their work. It is estimated that in addition to work with in the house hold, women provide 60% to 80% of agricultural labor in Africa and Asia and about 40% in Latin America. However, much of this work is statistically invisible in that women often receive no payment for the work they perform [4]. Moreover, the most important role of women's is providing food security for the house hold. This is accomplished through the supplementation of house hold earnings, diversification of house hold income sources and rising of livestock. Women's investments in revenue generating projects and livestock are crucial to stabilizing household income, especially in female headed households, where resource constraints are the most severe. However, financial investment are inherently risky when credit and resource are unavailable, reducing the variability of household earnings generally entails choosing less efficient methods of production and thus result lower income. This situation occurs most frequently in a female headed household, where resource constraints are greatest. As a result of their restricted ranges of choice, women tend to retain traditional modes of economic activity and their productivity becomes stagnated while that of men has continued to improve (ibid). An improvement in economic condition would improve the standard living of the women. But real change would require a transformation of the attitudes of governments and men regarding women. There have been some changes for women in urban areas where education, health care and employment outside the home have become more available (ibid).

### Women economic participation

Traditionally, women are involved in productive, reproductive and participatory roles. A number of studies indicate that women do about 50-60% of the agricultural work in farming household. Women are the back bone any society and are active in micro and informal sector, which are given little consideration. Their contribution is neither values nor reported [13]. Because of the deep-rooted socio cultural practices and their low education status, women have limited access to economic resource such as land, property, credit, financial services and so on and are usually engaged in informal activities.

According to Haddaswolde, the majority of women are engaged in domestic and informal activities, such as provision of fuel and water, child and family care and food processing, which are essential for the survival of households. These informal and household jobs are unpaid and are generally governed by custom. In this regard, most frequently women are excused from formal sectors. For instance, the federal civil service report of 1997/8 indicator that of the total civil service employees in the country, only 18% are women. About 95% of these women are in clerical and other low paying jobs. Only about

5% are working in administrative and decision making positions [13]. Moreover, the government and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are encouraging micro credit facilities and skills training programmer for women. Such a movement will definitely improve their economic status, but the process is low (ibid).

### Women and economic development in the world

Throughout history men and women have contributed to producing and reproducing the social world around them, both on a day to day basis and over long periods of time. Yet the nature of this partnership and the distribution of responsibilities within it have taken different forms over time. Until recently, paid workers both in western and eastern countries was predominantly the sphere of men. For the vast majority of the population in developed and developing world, productive activities and the activities of the household are not separated. Women often had considerable influence within the household as a result of their importance in economic process even if they were excluded from the male realms of politics and warfare [14]. With time and the progress of industrialization, an increasing division was established between home and work place. The idea of separate sphere public and private become entrenched popular attitudes. Men, by merit of their employment outside the home, spent more time in the public realm and become more involved in local affairs', politics and market. While, women are responsible for tasks such as child care, maintaining the home and preparing food for the family (Ibid). Generally, the rates of employment of women outside the home for all classes were quite low until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is over the past few decades this situation has changed radically and more women have moved in to the labor force. Today around 60% of women in most European countries are hold paid jobs outside the home [14].

### Women and economic development in Africa

A major and often overlooked feature of LDCs agrarian systems, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, is the crucial role played by women in agricultural production [4]. In Africa, where subsistence farming is predominant and shifting cultivation remains important, nearly all tasks associated with subsistence food production are performed by women. In some cases, they were found to do 70% and in other case they perform nearly 80% of the total. Typically, these tasks are performed only with the most primitive tools and hard labor simply to produce enough output to meet the family subsistence requirements, while the men often attempt to generate cash income through work on nearby plantations or in the cities (ibid). In sub-Saharan Africa, subsistence farming is usually and essentially a female activity. Women are the primary laborers on small farmers where they contribute 2/3 or more of all hours of work on food production, processing and marketing are female responsibilities (ibid).

### The role of women in the economic development of Ethiopia

Ethiopian women are actively involved in all aspects of their society's life. Women are both producers and procreators and they are also active participants in the social, political, economic and cultural activities of their communities. However, the varied and important roles they play have not always been recognized. The discriminatory political, economic and social rules and regulations prevail in Ethiopia have barred women from enjoying the fruits of their labor. Without equal opportunities they have lagged behind men in all fields of self-advancement [3,11]. Before the 1974 revolution, women's organized activities were run mainly by nongovernmental bodies such as the Ethiopian Officer's Wives Association, the Ethiopian Female's Students Association; however, these associations were limited in scope and

only existed in cities. They had little or no impact on government policies, laws, regulations, and development programs [3]. After 1974, the revolutionary Ethiopian Women Association was established by proclamation but this organization served as a means of consolidating the power of the Derg. Until recently, government in Ethiopia have not had any policy on women's affairs, hence they have not been seen as important potential beneficiaries of government development programs. Gender issues do not only concern women; women's problems can't be solved by women alone, but it requires the coordinated efforts of the society as a whole, including the government. Care full planning in full consultation with women and political commitment is essential for the integration of women in overall economic development of the country (ibid). Women demand to participate actively in national development and to exercise their right to enjoy its fruits is now receiving support in government and local communities. The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) has formulated several policies to incorporate and encourage women's participation in modern economic activities. This includes the national policy of Ethiopian women (NPEW), the national population policy, the education and training policy and others. The NPEW is designed on the assumption that government has the obligation to give women the unreserved support to make them active participant in the national development effort on equal terms with men and go on to experience the benefits of their participation [3,10]. The main objective of the NPEW include, creating and facilitating conditions for equality between men and women, creating conditions to make rural women beneficiaries of social services like education and health, and eliminating discriminatory perception and practice that constrain the equality of women [10]. Moreover a number of strategies have also been designed to achieve the above objectives.

For the achievement of the above listed objectives, the government established women's affairs office with full responsibilities and accountabilities. The structure were clearly put delineating the responsibilities of the Women's Affairs Office (WAO) under the prime minister office and the regional and zonal women's affairs sectors, and the Women's Affairs Department (WAD) in the various ministries. However, assessments done over the year show that both the WAO and WAD in the sectoral ministries lack capacity; they have problems with resources and qualified personnel. Therefore, these problems hinder the effective implementation of the policy [10].

### Data Analysis and Interpretation

This chapter deals with the analysis and interpretation of the collected data. The data is collected from respondents through questionnaire and interview with key informants. The data shows the significant role of women in the economic development of Ambo town. They contribute for the economic development of the town through their participations in income generation activities and also play a significant role in saving and efficient utilization of resource. In contrast, different problems hinder the effective roles of women and often make their roles invisible. As clearly indicated in this chapter, even though various difficulties affect women, they continue to play a significant role in economic development.

### Demographic characteristics of the respondents

From the Table 1, it is clearly indicated that from the total number of the respondents 66.7% are females and the remaining 33.3% are males. This indicates that the majority of the respondents are females because the main target (the target group) of the study is concerned on women's role. With regarding to the age group of the respondents, 66.7% are found in the age between 18-30 years. The remains 22.2%

Number	Item/characteristics	Number of respondents	Percent %	
	Sex	A. Male	15	33.3%
		B. Female	30	66.7%
		Total	45	100%
2.	Age	A. 18-30	30	66.7%
		B. 31-50	10	22.2%
		C. 51 and above	5	11.1%
		Total	45	100%
3	Education level	A. 1-12	7	15.5%
		B. Diploma	16	35.6%
		C. Degree and above	24	53.3%
		Total	45	100%
4.	House hold title	A. Male headed house hold	26	57.8%
		B. Female headed house hold	19	42.2%
		Total	45	100%
5	Monthly income	A. Less than 1000 birr	14	31.1%
		B. 1001-2000 birr	19	42.2%
		C. 2001-5000	9	20%
		D. Greater than 5000	3	6.7%
		Total	45	100%

Table 1: Background information of the respondents.

Number	Item/character	Number of Respondents	Percent %	
1	What seems the contribution of women in the economic development of the town in terms their economic activity?	A. High	13	28.9%
		B. Medium	23	51.1%
		C. Low	9	20%
		Total	45	100%
2	To what extent women participate in the economic development of the town?	A. High	15	33.3%
		B. Medium	22	48.9%
		C. Low	8	17.6%
		Total	45	100%
3	Is there any tangible role of women in economic development?	A. yes	41	91.1%
		B. No	4	8.8%
		Total	45	100%

Table 2: The role and contribution of women in the economic development of Ambo town.

and 11.1% are found between 31-50 and above 51 respectively. This implies that the majority of the respondents are the most beneficiary age group in the economic development of one's country. Therefore the data (the information) is obtained from the economically active productive age group. As indicated in the table, the level of education of the respondents is 53.3%, 35.6% and 15.5% for degree and above, diploma and 1-12 respectively. From this, we can conclude that the majority of the respondents are found in the high level of educational status. It is well recognized and established fact that education is an indicator of economic development and also has a fundamental role for the developments of one's country. So, any policy that improves the educational status is expected to bring long run sustainable development.

As the table shows that, 31.1% and 42.2% of the respondent's monthly income are less than 1000 birr and between 1001-200 birr respectively, where as 20% and 6.7 of the respondents monthly income is between 2001-5000 and greater than 5000. This indicated that the majority of the respondents are found in medium income generating activities. Finally, 57.8% of the respondents are male headed household while 42.2% are female headed house hold. From this, we can conclude that the study involves both female and male household family.

### Women's role and contribution in economic development

As shown in the Table 2, among the total population of the

respondents 51.1% of them respond that the contribution or role of women in the economic development of the town is medium. While the remaining 28.9% and 20% of the respondents answer that their role are high and low respectively. With regard to respondents that say the contribution of women in economic development is high and medium, they forward that women contribute to poverty reduction by doing additional working activity; trading and also they promote food security and increase the quality of life. The contributions of women in the economic development of the town are more related with proper utilization of the available resource including money without extravagancy. The contribution of women also involves assisting and helping those children and old persons who have no family. The respondents also forward different measurement for the contribution of women, for instance, their trading activities, their contributions of GDP for the town and their tangible activities are some of the indicators.

One the other hand, among the total number of the respondents 48.9 % of them says that the participation (involvement) of women in the economic activity of the town is medium. While the rest 33.3% and 17. 8% of the respondents say high and low respectively. The respondents say that women are participating in trading and other income generation activities. In regard to the role of women in economic development, among the total respondent, 91.1% of them say that women have tangible role in economic development of the town while the rest 8.8% replay that women have no role at all. The respondents that say women have role further argue that women play community managing and coordinating role at the house hold level. Women's community managing role includes supply of food and provision of water. Therefore, we can conclude that the role of women is significant for country's economic development in general and Ambo town in particular.

### Constraints that limit the effective contribution of women in economic activity

As indicated in the above Table 3, the majority of the respondents agree about the affection of traditional backward beliefs and attitudes on women economic activity. They say that cultural norms, men dominance, early marriage and inferiority assumption of women in the society are the major factors which affect women's economic participation in the life of their family and in the society at large. Besides this, the respondents forward other view on the low contribution of women in the economic development in relation to their weakness. These are; lack of initiative or having a sense of we are low (low self- esteem), did not have acceptance if I perform this, lack of self-confidence, this cannot be worked by me and workload in the house and others. On the other hand, few respondents, 9% of them, agree that backward traditions that is rooted in society does not affect women 'economic participation. As clearly indicated in the table, the respondents say that we solve economic problem by saving or deposit of money, by leading their life based on plan and others.

### The role of government in encouraging women's participation in economic activity

As indicated in the Table 4, among the total population of the respondents, 60% of them say that the assistance of government to encourage women's role in the achievement of economic development is high. There are some reasons that they forward for its assistance. Some of the assistance are by forming cooperation, by giving training that helps to them enter in any job they want, by a ascertaining that helps them to protect themselves from un useful traditional actions

Number	Item/ character		Number of respondents	Percent %
1	Do you think the grass root backward traditions of the society such as the male dominance and internalization of that dominance and cultural influences affect women economic activity?	A. Yes	36	80%
		B. No	9	20%
		Total	45	100%
2	How do you solve economic problem you face and others are facing?	A. By saving before or deposit of money	13	28.9%
		B. By leading based on plan	14	31.1%
		C. By working during leisure time	7	15.6%
		D. By discussing with others	11	24.4%
		Total	45	100%

**Table 3:** Constraints that limit the effective contributions of women in their economic activity and methods of solving economic problem.

Number	Item/ character		Number of respondent s	percent
1	What is the role of government in encouraging women's economic participation?	A. High	27	60%
		B. Medium	15	33.3%
		C. Low	3	6.7%
		Total	45	100%
2	Do you believe that the government gives adequate right and legal entitlement that strength women's participation in economic activity?	A. Yes	40	88.9%
		B. No	5	11.1%
		Total	45	100%

**Table 4:** The role of government in encouraging women's economic participations.

and sexual attack, by encouraging their participation in productive works, by assisting economic aid, by giving priority or due attention in education, due attention in completion for job and other assistances.

On the other hand, a few respondents say that the assistance of the government in encouraging women's economic role in economic development is low. The reason that they mention is that the government adopts and drafts policies to encourage the role of women but the implementation has paper value. As shown in Table 4, 88.9% of the respondent asserted that the government provides adequate right to women to encourage their economic participation. For this matter, they picked up Article 35 of the FDRE constitution that give guarantee for women's right. According to this article, women shall have equal right with men in the enjoyment of rights and protections. So, in order to combat the historical legacy of inequality and discrimination, government gave special attention to women to compete and participate with men [5].

### The role of women in economic development of the Town

According to Teshome Wondimu, women in Ambo town play a vital role in economic development of their town from the three points of view. These are saving role, efficient utilization or usage of resource, and family planning role. Women play a great role in saving what they earn both in kind and in cash. They are active participants in traditional saving institution such as Equib, Edir and so on. In this case, women are not only the active participants in these traditional saving institutions, but also play a crucial role in leading, coordinating , managing and organizing these traditional saving institutions. Women are less likely to engage or involve in extravagant and wasteful practice than men. Extravagant and wasteful practices at all levels can affect the national economy of a given society. If a person is wasteful and extravagant, it many affect the life of his family and ultimately that of the society at large. If these practice are dominant, it many seriously affect the development of the national as well as the local economy. This is because extravagant and wasteful practices are antithesis of saving and have a potential impact on economic development. Therefore, we can conclude that women play a vital role in economic development through saving and in turn by reducing extravagant and wasteful practice both at house hold and local levels [7]. Regarding the saving

Year	Number of total Group	Number of women	Amount of money deposit (saving )
From 2002 up to 2004	53	573	142,445 birr
2005	30	515	90,715 birr
Total	83	1088	194,215 birr

**Table 5:** The saving role of women in Ambo Town since 2002.

role that women play, women's and child affair's office is responsible for organizing women in group and providing of funds , credit and loans for themselves. The office also has the task of creating awareness about the importance of saving. As indicated in the following table, women play a saving role and in turn they maintain and achieve food security at house hold and community level.

The Table 5 clearly shows that from the year 2002 up to 2004 there are 53 groups and the number of women is 573 and the saving amount in cash is 142,445 birr. In 2005 the number of women and the amount (deposit) of money is increase. From this we can conclude that the saving role of women is increased from time to time due to the effort made by the government by providing loan and credit. Next to the saving role of women, they are more effective in better and efficient utilization or usage of resource. Women play a great role in effective and efficient use of available resource particularly at house hold level. Moreover, women play a significant role in family planning. Since population growth is seen as a threat of economic development, economic empowerment of women is essential way of controlling population growth [7]. Women are playing family planning role and in turn promote the process of economic development and achieve food security (Ibid).

Moreover, women also play productive, reproductive and community managing role. The reproductive role of women is associated with biological and social reproduction tasks and also known as domestic roles. The reproductive role of women includes preparing food, cleaning, washing, cooking and the task of bearing and nurturing children. In this regard, reproductive role is considered as the responsibility of women than men. The fact that women take care of such activities or roles creates the necessary condition for men to involve themselves in activities that are self-enhancing, better relaxing and materially rewarding. With regard to productive roles, the role of women's includes the activities in the area of agriculture, small scale



business enterprise, marketing, and formal and informal economic activities, that are related to the production of goods and services with a market value. In productive role, women are not fully involved in formal economic activity rather they are involved in informal economic activities and these informal economic activities are less valued and less waged in the society. Women in Ambo town are participating particularly in informal sector and doing activities such as trading, making and sealing Enjera, Bread, Areke, Tella, and the like. However, culturally, women involvement and contribution in productive sphere is not given due recognition and considered as invisible labor force. But, this attitude has just started to change at least among the educated due to the effort made by both the government and other national and international NGOs to increase the status of women. Finally, women also play community roles. These activities are related with the social and cultural events of the community. Community roles are assumed to be the extension of women's reproductive work. As everybody knows that the participation of women is vital in local community institution such as in Idir, Ikub, wedding and other social and cultural events and ceremonies. In this case, women are participating in preparing food because these activities require food usually in large amount. In summary, if women are assigned to work on all the reproductive, reproductive, and community task and reproductive task take up time and energy without providing any income and recognized value. In this case, what the implication is that if reproductive tasks which take much of time is not valued, it lead to denial of opportunities to engage in productive role or economic activities which in turn lead women to invisible contribution and lack of qualification in the national economy in general.

Additionally, according to the interview that was conducted or made with official of women's and child's affairs office, and finance and economic development office of Ambo town Administration, the following are the major contributions and indicators of the role of women's in economic development both at household and community levels.

**Improved their per capital income:** Women participation in the economic activities can improve the long term economic and social living conditions of its household. Women significantly increase their PCI through participating in income generation activities (IGA) and small scale business and also through wealth creation, asset building and others. In this case, increase PCI of women means that family consumption is increase and in turn better quality of life and longer life expectancy will be achieved. Moreover, the PCI of women are increased than before by participating in trading activities, by producing and processing of local or domestic alcohols such as tella, Areke and so on and by selling what they produced.

**Accumulation of Asset:** Ownership of durable house hold assets was regarded as one of the most important indicators of improvement in the house hold welfare. In addition to the positive impact of income over the house hold, women participation in the economic activity is also improving the ownership of key house hold assets [7].

**Housing improvement:** It is a well-established fact that housing and its related investments is the key indicator of country's economic development. In this case women's play a vital role in improving and maintaining quality of house. Housing improvements can be regarded as an integral part of economic strategies [7].

**Participation in IGA:** Women's are highly participating in income generating activities particularly in Micro and small scale business and they increase their PCI (interview with Bizunesh Hailu, March 2013). In summary, according to the respondents, some of the contributions

of women in the economic development of Ambo town are promoting economic growth, achieving food security, promoting efficiency and reducing poverty, and helping future generation by promoting sustainable development. Moreover, women play a great role and actively involved in IGA such as small and medium business which are common in the town.

### Constraints to effective women's economic role

According to Belaynesh Kumsa, there are many constraints that hinder the effective role of women in economic development. Among these obstacles the most and often still unsolved problem is the traditional backward attitudes, beliefs and customs of the society towards women which are continued as a historical legacy across the country. This traditional backward attitudes towards women (assuming women as a weaker sex, second citizens, dependent, passive, and ignorant) are not only hinder and make the effective role of women invisible and unrecognized, but also it make and force women's to internalize and accept their weakness and for long period even still remain unconfident. Even though, the government tries to change the attitudes of the society through different mechanisms it is not eradicated and remain difficult. In general, the following are considered as common barriers and often make the role of women unrecognized and insignificant.

**Low level educational background:** According to women's and child's affairs office, the majority of Ambo town women's are not educated. From this, we can conclude that women's non-educational status hinder their expected role.

**Lack of initial capital to start their own business:** Despite, the high interest and motivation of women to work, lack of initial capital to start up and to run the business hinder their economic activity.

**Lack of business know-how:** Women involve in various economic activities especially in marketing process and trading activities, but they lack business know-how i.e. how to run business and cost-benefit analysis.

**Lack of monitoring women's cooperation activities:** The government is trying to coordinate women in group to work in cooperation and solve their economic problem. However, there is no supervision and follow up about the day to day activities of these women's cooperation work. According to the respondents, women's organized activities are run in the town even without a better problem identification, problem solving and technical support rather various local government bodies and NGOs continue to assist women's only financially [7].

**Dependency of family on women's:** Culturally, in some family, some members are dependent on the earning of women. In some case husband remains dependent on their wife income. Such dependency of family members on women's makes their role invisible and unrecognized. However, women's are continued to play their role in various economic activities.

**Lack of interest to work in group (cooperation):** Women's are fearful of cooperation and they are not well aware of the benefits of working together. Working in cooperation especially for women can make their role visible and it also increase their confidence.

**Women's dependency on men's income:** Despite the existence of family dependency on women's, in some case there is also women's dependency on men's income. This is due to the influence exerted by their husband. If this is developed, they did not give decision by

their own in their overall life. In this case, dependency of women's can bring lack of decision making power and this make the role of women unrecognized.

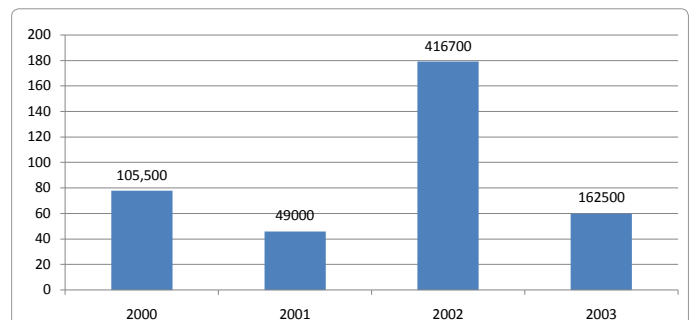
**Lack of confidence and inferiority:** In this case, the most and often difficult problem for the integrations of women in to the economic development and in other various political offices is lack of confidence. Women lack of confidence is mainly due to the culture of the society and their inferiority assumption. In addition, women's are not highly committed and they lack interest to take full responsibilities and accountabilities and they are fear of challenges especially in office positions. Despite, the existence of the above mentioned barriers for women's effective role in economic development, they are continued to play their role in economic development. Even though, different problems hinder the participation of women's, their roles in various economic activities are very significant.

### The role of government in encouraging women's economic role

The government through its various bodies and in cooperation with NGO has been encouraging women's economic role by the provision of revolving funds, by organizing Micro and small scale enterprise (MSSE) there by transferring idle government equity (assets) in the accounts to micro financial institutions (MFI) such as oromia credit and saving share company (OCSSCO). Additionally, Ambo town administration particularly women's and child's affairs office, and finance and economic development office encourages women's organized activities by signing collateral agreements with the credit institutions under the umbrella of Micro and small enterprises. Moreover, the government also gives assistance in cooperation with NGOs to those women living with HIV /AIDS. This was currently facilitated by finance and Economic development office of Ambo town Administration [7].

According to Bizunesh Hailu, in previous government it is dead time for women. Women are highly marginalized and they lack even the right to have their own property. Before 1991, women are not considered as equal important and significant actors in economic development of a given society. Moreover, women are highly demoralized by the society and even the people accept for century as a norm and culture and become in herited. In contrast to this, the current government is highly committed to recognize women as an important actor in the development process of the country. The government gives adequate right and legal entitlement including the right to ownership, equal employment opportunity and so on. Since 1991, especially after 1997, there is a tremendous change regarding the status of women's. Their participation and involvement are increase in various socio- economic activities. The government gives high attention and priority for women and youth because it is believed that economic development cannot occur without the active involvement of women and youth. In this regard, women's and child affairs office in cooperation with UNICEF promotes the economic role of women's through the provisions of credit and loan. The Scheme 1 indicated the number of women's who have access to credit and loans from the UNICEF project form the year 2000 up to 2003.

As indicate in the Scheme 1, the number on the left side of the graph shows the numbers of women who have access to credit and loan while the numbers on the top of each indicates the amount of money they gained. Finally, the numbers that found below the graph shows the year from 2000 up to 2003. From this we can conclude that the government through women's and child's affairs office and in cooperation with various local and international organization are encouraging women's role.



Scheme 1: The number of women who have access to credit and loan from UNICEF project from 2000-2003.

In general, the government has provided some programs and facilities to enhance women participation in the development of the economy. Some of these are: - 1) Facilitating credit and loan. 2) Mother Education. 3) Promote forum association. 4) Promote IGA. 5) Formulating effective policy for women's

### Possible solution to improve women's role in economic development of the town

There are many potential and actual solutions that might be used in the future and at present time to facilitate women's role in economic development. These are giving training, ensuring their equal status, facilitating to have their own income establishing cooperatives, providing psychological make-up to develop self-confidence, giving special reward, promoting and developing peer education to reduce their inferiority feeling, and so on interview with Marta and Bizunesh. Moreover, the prospected solutions to increase women's role in economic development in the town may be participating them in IGA both individually and cooperatively (in group) by providing the necessary basic business skill (technical or business know how), providing initial capitals and working place or marketing place with the continuous monitoring and technical supports.

### Conclusion

Like any other less developed countries, in Ethiopia, the half portion of the society, women, suffer from economic, political, social, and cultural aspects in the past especially before 1991. From the economic aspect, women are excluded from participating in high income economic (generating) activities; often women lack the right to have their own property and equality of employment opportunity. Cultural norms like men dominance and traditional belief system are the major constraints that face women and also affect their role in economic development and other sectors. It is clearly indicated in the study that the society assigned lower status to women, lower valuation to their work and denied recognition to their contribution. An improvement in understanding the need of participation of women in various activities has been a better way during recent period especially during this regime. Women's role and their involvement in economic activities can benefit the whole society and also enable to conduct a strong war or to fight against poverty. It also speeds up economic growth, food security, promotes efficiency, helping future generation and promotes sustainable development. As indicated in the study, women improvement in economic activities is also expected to improve personal well-being, investments (house hold) and enable households to feed themselves and their family members.

Moreover, the role of women in the economic development of Ambo town is considered as having greatest value in building up local

production and in promoting economic growth. Without question, women who apply their knowledge to produce valuable goods and services and to solve problems of the society often are regarded as important ingredients of economic development. The study shows that the economic role of women's in the town is important not only to reduce poverty but also to increase family consumption. Therefore, for economic development to occur, women's role is significant. Based on the investigation on the role of women in economic development, we can conclude that women's role and involvement in the economic development of the country as well as the town is very significant even if there are some constraints. As the role of women rises, economic development will increase and poverty decrease. Moreover, women's economic role is not only the most effective way of reducing poverty but also it is the main instrument of achievement food security. So, economic development is unthinkable without the active involvement and contributions of women.

### References

1. Ancy T (2004) Economics focus.
2. Birhanu A (2008) Module of civics and Ethical Education.
3. Megersa B (2006) An introductory text on Gender issue in cooperatives–Module for Distance Education. Ambo College, Jemma University.
4. Smith SC, Michael PT (2006) Economic development. (8<sup>th</sup> edn), Dorling Kindersley, India.
5. FDRE (1995) The constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, federal Negarit Gazeta. Addis Ababa.
6. Jhingan ML (1997) The Economics of Development and planning. (38<sup>th</sup> edn) Vrinda publications.
7. Wondimu Z (2013) Compiled notes on civics and ethical education. Adama science and Technology University.
8. Mahider (2006) Development Economic. (2<sup>nd</sup> edition).
9. Willis K (2005) Theories and Practices of Development. Routledge, Taylor and Francis, London.
10. Medhanit A, Sofanit M (2009) Gender and the law. Prepared under the Sponsorship of the Justice and legal system research institute (unpublished).
11. Gemechu S (2008) Assessment of Gender Role in crop Production and management practice in Ambo District, Ethiopia.
12. Strasbourg (2008) Economic development: Mehara offset press.
13. Haddas WG (2001) The Interim poverty reduction strategy paper (I-PRSP) of Ethiopia: Glimpse from A Gender Perspective. In Reflections: Documentation of panos Ethiopia's forum on gender. Master printing press, Addis Ababa.
14. Giddens A (2001) Sociology. (4<sup>th</sup> edition) Polity press, London.