CHAPTER TWO
THE ETHIOPIAN CONTEXT OF RURAL WOMEN POVERTY

2.1 Introduction

Women in Ethiopia as anywhere else occupy the law status in the society. Although they represent half of the population and contribute mainly to food production and other, they have not shared the fruits of development equally with their male counterpart. Rights such as, access to land, credit and other productive resources are difficult for women to attain. They also experience multiple forms of other deprivations such as longer working days, women specific ill health, low levels of education relative to men, and lack of adequate representation in leadership and decision making positions.

The Ethiopian government is well aware that low level of rural development on the one hand, and the unequal access to critical resources and low decision power which is prevailed among men and women heighten the situation and vulnerability of women particularly FHHs. To sort out such crucial problems, the government has been taking various actions so as to strengthen the position of women especially in the agricultural sector. The Plan for Accelerated and Sustainable Development to End Poverty 2005/06 to 2009/10 (PASDEP) and the Federal Rural Land Administration Proclamation can be mentioned as examples. Their main purposes were to safeguard rights such as rights to land, access to credit, and other productive resources. The proclamations also protect women from other deprivations such as longer working days, violence, and discrimination (MOFED 2002; Lemlem et al 2010).
This chapter tries to see first the situation of poverty at national level and followed by regional contexts. Thus, an understanding of Ethiopian as well as Amhara region poverty situation gives clear picture about whether women are affected by poverty or not. Moreover, literatures on efforts of government and non-governmental organizations on reduction of women poverty would be seen briefly.

2.2 Experiences of Rural Poverty in Ethiopia

Ethiopia shares the features of poverty of developing countries. The majority of people in Ethiopia are living in rural areas (84 %) where the incidence and severity of poverty is higher than urban areas. About 38.7% of the population is below the nationally defined poverty line in 2004/05, while it is 39.3% for rural population and 35.1% for urban population (DPRD and MOFED 2008).

Agriculture is the main source of livelihood for more than eight out of ten Ethiopians. This sector, which is mainly dominated by small-scale farmers and characterized by very fragmented land holding system, is extremely vulnerable both to natural (climatic conditions, drought) and anthropogenic hazards (war and civil conflict). Despite efforts to reduce poverty in the country over the past decade, rural people and herders remain poor (IFAD 2006).

Several factors contributed for the cause of deepening rural poverty in Ethiopia. Accordingly, a closer assessment of the poverty situation in Ethiopia held by many researchers. The findings clearly depict the prevalence of major factors that are highlighted as contributing to the exasperation of poverty in Ethiopia. These include: population growth and scarcity of resources; small landholding; farmers skills and low level of education; lack of good-governance, participation and empowerment; inappropriate production systems and marketing services; drought and variability of
rainfall; politics and ethnic conflicts; urban expansion; lack of access to credit services and income (opportunities); and the lack of development or social protection assistance from either government or NGOs; in- and off-farm unemployment; lack of access to health services; traditional, social and cultural factors. (Devereux 2000; Asmamaw 2004; Shumete 2009; Brown, Amdissa, CPRC and ODI 2007; Yared 2002 and 2003; Bevan 2000; Middlebrook 2003; IFAD 2006; Sharp et al 2003). These key elements are in fact connected with each other to aggravate the situation of poverty in Ethiopia.

The chronic poor in Ethiopia suffer from shortages of capabilities and assets to meet their daily needs and to escape from poverty. The financial, human, natural, physical, social and natural resources should be available to all people in order to build a sustainable livelihood; however, the chronic poor lack these all assets (Brown et al 2007; Dercon 1999).

Studies on poverty profile in Ethiopia are undertaken by researchers at various times although not ample. Most of the existing ones are descriptive. They focus on explaining the extent of poverty and most are associated with studies that relate to food entitlement failures. Some of them are mentioned below.

Dercon and Krishnan (1996) carried out a study in rural Ethiopia and Tanzania concerning on the income portfolios of households. Accordingly, households which are found in risk environment have big opportunities to diversify their income sources than those who live in comfortable zone. This is due to adapting the environment and sustaining life.

Bevan and Joireman (1997) attempted to deal poverty using sociological approach. They focus on examining the meaning and use of different poverty measurements rather than on the real poverty line. Non-economic forms of capital like
human and social capital are basic to decide the fates of rural people of Ethiopia as they indicated. However, entitlement norms including right to access to productive resources, political power, right to leisure, inheritance rules and community support also plays main role in reduction of household poverty.

Dercon and Krishnan (1998) observed changes in poverty levels between 1989 and 1995 and tested the robustness of measured changes to the problems of choice of poverty lines and impact of uncertainty in measured inflation. They come up with that poverty reduced between 1989 and 1994 but remained virtually unchanged between 1994 and 1995 and that household with substantial human and physical capital and better access to roads and towns have both lower poverty levels and are more likely to get better off overtime. They have also elucidated that human capital and access to roads and towns reduce the fluctuations in poverty across the seasons.

Using micro-level panel data from villages in rural Ethiopia, Dercon (2001) analyzed the determinants of growth and changes in poverty during the initial phases of the economic reform (1989-1995) making use of a standard decomposition of income and poverty changes. He observes that the reforms do not deliver similar benefits to the entire poor overall; however, consumption grew and poverty fell substantially during this period. The main factors for changing price of land, labour, human capital and location, which are mostly considered as relative price changes, are due to driving income changes. Empirical results also indicate that the poor have benefited on average more from the reforms than the non-poor households.

The most recent study carried out by Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (MoFED) is primarily based on the 1999/2000 Household Income and Consumption Expenditure (HICE) and Welfare Monitoring Survey (WMS) results. Empirical results show that incidence of poverty is higher in rural than in urban areas
with poverty head count ratio of 45.4 and 36.9% respectively (MoFED 2002). As compared to the 1995/96 level, poverty incidence increased by 11.4% in urban areas and declined by 4.42% in rural areas in 1999/2000 even though the overall poverty incidence decreased by 2.86% during the same period.

Ayalneh et al (2003) examined the extent and severity of rural poverty using the FGT poverty index in 1999/2000 survey of 149 households. The study reveals that nearly 40% of the sample households live below poverty line with average poverty gap of 0.047. The binary logit estimates, which strongly linked rural poverty to entitlement failure to crucial assets such as land, human capital and oxen, shed light on factors behind the persistence of poverty.

DPRD and MOFED undertook an assessment of poverty distribution in all regions of Ethiopia in 2008. In rural areas concentrations of chronic poverty are found in highly populous, drought prone areas in which average land holdings are especially low and food insecurity is continuing. These problems dominated in areas include the highlands of Tigray and Amhara, the lowlands of the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples (SNNP) and parts of Oromiya (e.g., East and West Harerge). There are also significant pockets of chronic poverty in the more peripheral and thinly populated regions of Gambela and Benishangul-Gumuz and arid pastoralist areas (i.e., Afar and Somali Regions). The region with the largest number of poor people was Oromiya (9.3 million), which accounted for one-third of all Ethiopian living in poverty in 2004/05. Large numbers of poor people were also found in Amhara (7.3 million) and SNNP region (5.3 million) (DPRD and MOFED 2008).

DPRD and MOFED (2008) displayed also the headcount poverty measures and the poverty gap by region in 2004/5. Accordingly, the highest poverty measure is in Tigray (48.5%), Benishanguz-Gumuz (45%) and Amhara (40%) follow. Poverty
estimates are lowest in Harari (27%) followed by Addis Ababa (33%) and Dire Dawa (35%). Rural poverty is lowest in Harari at 20%. Regarding to poverty gap, the largest gap registered in Amhara, Benishangul-Gumuz, and Tigray. The gap is the smallest in Harari followed by Addis Abab and Dire Dawa (Ibid: 38). However, the incidence of and severity of poverty assessed by DPRD and MOFED includes not only in rural areas but also in urban areas.

The social groups who are most likely to be chronically poor in rural areas of Ethiopia are: resource poor households, landless or land scarce, oxless, poor pastoralists, FHHs, elderly, disabled, poor non-agricultural households, newly established settlers, and the chronically ill (Middlebrook 2003; Ellis and Tassew 2005; Brown et al 2007).

Communities in Ethiopia perceive and assign themselves as poor, very poor, better-off in various ways. As explained by Sara (2007), poor households were distinguished from very poor households based on the possession of landholding, livestock, and corrugated iron-roofed houses rather than thatched houses, adult male labor, and saving system. They own less than one pair of oxen, small or marginal land or landless and thatched houses, etc. However, the better-off households owned at least two pairs of oxen, large size of land, corrugated iron-roofed houses, deposits of cash or cereals, and engaged in investments such as livestock and grain trade (Ibid).

Various researchers came up with equivalent terms to poor, chronic poor or destitute in their findings. It is presented in the following table.
Table 2.1: Local Perceptions of Chronic Poverty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local perception of chronic poverty</th>
<th>English</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Amharic</em></td>
<td><em>Meskin</em> the poor, destitute'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Geltu (bätam dāha)</em></td>
<td><em>the poorest of the poor (chronically food insecure)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Lemagn</em></td>
<td><em>A person who doesn’t have any roots: they have no material assets, have no social voice, and no power displaced and became beggar</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Yata yeneta yegereta</em></td>
<td><em>white poor: white is clean, meaning they have nothing</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Cherso deha</em></td>
<td><em>absolutely/ completely poor’</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ye mecheresha deha</em></td>
<td><em>the completely poor there is no body poorer</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Minim yelelew</em></td>
<td><em>those who have nothing’</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Tsom-adari</em></td>
<td><em>those who pass the night fasting go to bed hungry</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Wuha anfari</em></td>
<td>‘those who cook water’</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: Sharp, Devereux et al, 2003; Pankhurst A. 2005

2.3 Rural Amhara Regional Poverty Context

The Amhara Region, which includes one-fifth of Ethiopia’s population and land area, has immense potential resources: water, land, livestock, working people, cultural and historical attractions, and varied agro-ecologies. But despite this potential, the Amhara Region is one of the poorest in Ethiopia. Some 89% of its people live in rural areas and rely mainly on subsistence agriculture.

The Government of Ethiopia Household Income Consumption and Expenditure Survey carried out a study on 17,332 households in Ethiopia in 2000. Among these samples, about 1740 has taken from rural Amhara. The study displays that real per capita expenditure in Amhara is close to the rural national mean, which is about 2614 calorie average adult intake. In rural Amhara, 42.9% of households are poor. In this region an adult person obtains an income less than US$ 0.36 per day on average and this covers about 65.8% for the country as a whole. This is meant that about 20% of rural Amhara people are extremely poor versus 23% nationally. Up to
71% of household income in Amhara is spent on food while the national average is 67% (MOFED 2002).

The Amhara region suffers from both chronic and transitory food security problems in 49 declared drought prone areas and it is unlikely that structural food self-sufficiency will be achieved in the short term (Middlebrook 2003). Of the 105 Woredas in the region sixty-four are drought-prone and chronically food insecure (Amhara National Regional State Food Security Research Assessment Report, USAID 2000). Most droughts prone Woredas are in North and South Wollo, North Gondar and Wage Himera Zones are the most drought prone areas in which farmers to engage in rain-fed agriculture in low potential areas (Middlebrook 2003).

Poverty indicators appear to have worsened since the 1980s: some 57% of the population is considered poor according to government figures, and food poverty is at 61% (World Bank 2000b; CSA 2001 cited by Blench, Ralsgard, Gossage, Dessalegn 2002). The average life expectancy at birth is expected to 54 years. Life expectancy could be even shorter due to the prevalence of HIV/AIDS pandemic and other communicable diseases (CSA 2008).

Like other regions of Ethiopia, the challenges facing smallholder agriculture in Amhara region remain overwhelming: a scarce and declining resource base; small and diminishing per capita holdings; land degradation; decreasing productivity and increasing food shortages; limited opportunities for technological improvements; enormous and increasing population pressure; frequent environmental shocks and deep-seated livelihood insecurity; and growing structural poverty and destitution (SARDP 2010; Sharp et al 2003; Blench et al 2002). In balance, the high potential areas within the region are unfortunately offset by the very low potential of 47 drought prone Woredas towards the east and although much development activity is
focused in these areas a high percentage is still based around relief/rehabilitation activities (Middlebrook 2003).

In many areas such as North and South Wollo, South Gondar and Wag Himra the agricultural environment is so infertile that it is unlikely that any quantum leap in food production can be attained in the medium to long term (Ibid). Individual farmers as well as the past three regimes had focused on resettlement for maintaining people’s food security. This led to the out-migration of several hundred Amhara farmers to other regions of the country (USAID 2000).

Vulnerable groups in Amhara region frequently include FHHs, households with aged persons and low access to male labor, and poor households without oxen. However, assessment makes clear that lack of high quality cultivable land, labor, seeds and tools, draught power, livestock and other productive assets leaves 20-30% of the most vulnerable groups in desperate conditions (Middlebrook 2003).

2.4 Situation of Rural Women Poverty

Although women's contribution to their households, food production and national economies is immense, it has not been translated into better access to resources or decision-making powers. As a result, women remained to be the poorest of the poor constituting 70% of the global poor (Chant 2010). Women in Ethiopia face similar constraints. Due to the different roles and responsibilities men and women have in the society, the causes and experiences of poverty also differ by gender. Rights such as, access to land, credit and other productive resources are difficult for women to attain (Lemlem et al 2011; Lemlem et al 2010; Mossa 2010).

In rural Ethiopia, according to DPRD and MOFED (2008) survey, there is no statistically significant difference in poverty between FHHs and MHHs. One would
expect that FHHs would have higher poverty incidence in both rural and urban areas because women in Ethiopia tend to have completed less schooling and may have lower levels of physical capital. In rural areas, however, most FHHs have access to land and this may partly explain why differences in poverty are not as marked as those found in urban areas.

Dercon (1999) stated there is no simple relationship between poverty and FHHs in rural Ethiopia. This has also been noted by the participatory poverty assessment conducted for the World Bank in 1996 (World Bank 1998). It finds that while no doubt certain FHHs are poor, the evidence is more mixed. Nevertheless, since FHHs generally and traditionally have less easily access to land and productive resources, it makes them more vulnerable.

Sharp et al (2003) recently investigated the causes of destitution in north-eastern Ethiopia based on a stratified random sample of 2,127 households, 14% of which were destitute. Of the MH, 8% were destitute, in comparison with 35% of FH. The most important determinant of destitution was not now much land a household owned but rather how much land they cultivated themselves: “the typical destitute household gives up control of half their farmland.

Sharp et al (2003) studies on Destitution in Wollo are gendered. One in three FHHs (35%), but only one in twelve MHHs (8%) is destitute. So, FHHs are four times more likely to be destitute than MHHs.

Increasing household size sometimes exposes to poverty. According to DPRD and MOFED (2008), the PPA findings and poverty analysis on the processes involved in moving in and out of poverty and vulnerability confirmed that large family size is found to be a significant factor predisposing people to poverty. However, according to Sharp et al (2003), destitution has indirectly relationship with household size.
Accordingly, the household size of destitute households and non.destitute households are less or equal to 3 and 4.8 compared to the average household size (4.6).

2.5 Rural Women’s Based Development Interventions in Ethiopia

Ethiopian women particularly rural women engage in all aspects of their societal life. Women shoulder triple responsibilities even though they do not deserve recognition among the society. This is due to unequal and discrimination prevailing in the political, economic and social rules and regulations of the country. Thus, women have been lagged behind men in all fields of self-advancement.

Economic development is unthinkable without women participation. Women labor forces constitute higher proportion in some economic sectors than men. However, Ethiopian women have not received their fair share of the nation’s wealth because their participation in the economy has been undervalued. These internal and external pressures put the government under pressure to formulate and incorporate women’s policy in the constitution.

One of the policies formulated by Ethiopian government concerning women is the National Policy on Women (Women’s Policy) in 1993. It aimed to shape the government offices and institutions to establish equitable and gender-sensitive public policies. In 1995, the Government of Ethiopia renewed its commitment towards this policy under new constitution (SARDP 2005).

Women constitute approximately half of the population of Ethiopia and a concerted effort has been made to give vent to the equality provisions of the constitution in the form of a National Policy on Ethiopian Women. Following the Beijing conference of 1995, Ethiopia had identified seven priority areas that need to
be tackled in order to ensure gender-equitable development. Accordingly, the situation analysis focused its attention on these basic agendas namely:

i. Poverty and Economic Empowerment of Women and Girls

ii. Education and Training of Women and Girls

iii. Reproductive Rights, Health and HIV/AIDS

iv. Human Rights and Violence against Women and Girls

v. Empowering Women in Decision Making

vi. Women and the Environment (Ministry of Women’s Affairs (MOWA) 2006).

Besides to National Policy of Ethiopian Women (1993) and Federal Constitution (1995), there is recently a growing concern about women’s conditions in the development arenas. Some government development policies and strategies have acknowledged women’s disadvantage and some measures are initiated to support them. Development Social Welfare Policy (DSWP) (1996), Food Security Strategy (FSS) (2002), and the Ethiopian Women’s Development Fund (EWDF) (2001) have important focus on advancing women’s causes (Yigremew 2001).

Moreover, the Government of Ethiopia has made certain efforts to address poverty in rural areas through adopting of development plans and strategies. The major policies designed in recent years have included ‘Agriculture Development-Led Industrialization’ (ADLI-since 1991), the ‘Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Program’ (SDPRP-2004/05), and the ‘Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty’ (PASDEP-2005/06 to 2009/10). Significant programs that support agriculture but also have social protection aspects include the ‘Food Security Program’ (FSP) and its flagship component, the ‘Productive Safety Net Program’ (PSNP) take gender as main issue. It underscores that “inclusion of gender
in any effort to alleviate poverty is non-negotiable (Devereux and Guenther 2009: 6; FAO 2007).

2.5.1 Ethiopia’s Gender Empowerment Policy

Well formulated gender empowerment policy is a very important component of Ethiopia’s sustainable rural agriculture development model. The policy comprises strategies for empowering female farmers at the grass root level. Gender empowerment model constitutes basic elements. It is described as follows.

- **Economic Empowerment:** Ethiopian rural women lack basic resources which include education, land, time, capital, and financial services. Thus, rural women problems can easily be treated by economic empowerment (Ruzvidzo 2007; Baden and Oxaal 1997; UNICEF 2006).
- **Legal Empowerment:** Legislative reform empowers women and girls to maintain their rights (UNICEF 2006; Ruzvidzo 2007).
- **Political Empowerment:** Involvement of women in politics builds their consciousness and helps them to safeguard their right including children and families (UNICEF 2006).
- **Social Empowerment:** Women can tackle emerging socio-economic and environmental challenges through organizing themselves in groups.
- **Productive Resources:** These resources are used to produce agricultural outputs. Land and irrigation water are the two key productive resources for which access by rural women must be improved to guarantee gender empowerment.

**Agricultural Services:** These services are important for supporting production and management of agricultural products. Credit and agricultural extension services and
rural institutions are important agricultural services for which access of rural women must be improved through gender empowerment.

2.6 Summary

Ethiopia is one of the poorest countries in the world. As most of the people of developing countries, large proportion (84%) of Ethiopian people resides in the countryside. The rural people are most vulnerable to poverty. Since they depend on very fragmented and small scale agriculture farmlands, most of the people are not self-sufficient. Moreover, natural as well as anthropogenic problems affect the yield of agricultural production negatively. For instance, population growth; use of low technology farm implements; low level of education, inappropriate production systems and marketing services; drought and variability of rainfall; politics and ethnic conflicts; urban expansion; lack of access to credit services and income (opportunities) can be mentioned as some of the problems prevailed in the region. From the regions of Ethiopia, Amhara region is the host of a large number of poor people. Its people share similar kinds of experiences to the poor people of other regions. Some 89% of the people live in rural areas and rely on subsistence agriculture.

The social groups who are most likely to be chronically poor in rural areas of Ethiopia are: resource poor households, landless or land scarce, oxless, poor pastoralists, FHHs, elderly, disabled, poor non-agricultural households, newly established settlers, and the chronically ill.

Women comprise of half of the population of Ethiopia as well as Amhara region. Their contribution in the agricultural sector is immense. Especially female headships carry out triple responsibilities. However, they are the most resource
deficient groups of people. Most of them lead hand-to-mouth. In fact, the Ethiopian government has been made some efforts to tackle women’s problem through formulation of policies. One of the policies formulated by Ethiopian government concerning women is the National Policy on Women (Women's Policy) in 1993. Well formulated gender empowerment policy is a very important component of Ethiopia’s sustainable rural agriculture development model. The policy comprises of strategies for empowering female farmers at the grass root level. Gender empowerment model constitutes basic elements such as economic, political, social, technological, and legal empowerment.