CHAPTER THREE
THE RESEARCH CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Identification of the Problem

Ethiopia, one of the poorest countries in the world, is Africa’s third most populous country with a population of 74 million in 2007 census. Almost 84% of the population live in rural areas and are dependent on local agriculture to meet their food needs (CSA 2008). Partly due to this fact there is a general understanding among scholars that the incidence of poverty is highest in the rural areas of the country (MOI 2001).

Ethiopia’s economy is based mainly on agriculture, including crop and livestock production. Agriculture contributes 45% of the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP), more than 80% of employment opportunities and over 90% of the foreign exchange earnings of the country (MoA 2010). However, the Ethiopian economy, particularly agricultural development, is extremely vulnerable to external shocks like climate change, global price fluctuations of exports and imports and other external factors.

Nearly 84% of Ethiopian women reside in rural areas (CSA 2008). Rural women integrated into the rural economy, which is basically labor intensive and exacts a heavy physical burden on all including children. Even though rural women make a significant contribution to the agricultural sector, similar to women in other parts of the developing world, they are usually vulnerable to poverty. Especially FHHs are among those that are hit the hardest by the incidence of poverty in rural areas of the country. This is mainly due to the poor social and economic conditions of women, which result from gender inequalities and discrimination that prevail in the
country (Ellis and Tassew 2005; Action Aid 2008; Farnthworth and Tamene 2010; MOFED 2010; IFAD 2010).

The situation of poverty in Amhara region is seen to be most severe. It suffers from both chronic and transitory food security problems in 49 declared drought prone areas (Middlebrook 2003). The region is represented by a high food insecurity situation and exposed to many shocks, which emanate from a number of factors such as recurrent droughts, famine, marginal land holding, degraded natural resources, loss of jobs, deaths, crop damage, death of animals, and decline in soil fertility (Blench et al 2002). According to the 2004/5 poverty assessment of DPRD and MOFED (2008), among the regions of Ethiopia the second largest number of poor people is found in Amhara region (7.3 million) next to Oromiya region (9.3 million).

About 87.4% of the inhabitants of the region are agrarian and depend on rain-fed agricultural production system for subsistence (CSA 2008). These statistics show the concentrations of poverty in highly populous rural areas (Frank 1999; Middlebrook 2003). Women in this region are estimated to represent about 49.59% of the entire population of the region (CSA 2008) and are the worst victims of poverty. The poverty situation of FHHs in particular is seen to be more severe, which stems basically from the shortage of decisive livelihood assets such as land, livestock, and labor (Middlebrook 2003).

Among the Administrative Zone of Amhara Region, South Gondar is one of the most vulnerable areas due to shortages of food production, low level of rainfall, poor soil fertility, low technology farming practices and small land holding size (Middlebrook 2003). It consists of 11 Woredas in which Libo Kemkem Woreda is

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4 Ethiopia comprises of nine regions and two self-administrative cities. These are Tigray, Afar, Amhara, Oromiya, Harari, Benishagul Gumuz, Gambela, Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples (SNNP), and Somali, and Addis Ababa, and Dire Dawa Cities Administration
situated. Libo Kemkem Woreda is prone to food insecurity and flooding, and is known through the 22 out of 29 are related to rural kebeles food insecure. Moreover, gender-bias against women in this area is deeply ingrained in the society placing FHHs at potentially a greater risk of poverty. As Tekalign and Gezahagn (2003) stated, the level of poverty in Libo Kemekem Woreda is specifically related to meager access and possession of farm resources such as oxen, farmland, credit and infrastructure although the problems vary from one household to another. FHHs in this Woreda are usually disadvantaged in terms of access to land, livestock, credit, other assets, and education, health care and extension service (Mossa 2010; Tekalign and Gezahagn 2003).

Thus, studying the relationship between FHHs and poverty in this area makes it instructive and important from both academic and practical perspectives. So, the study examined rural FHHs vulnerability to poverty at Libo Kemkem Woreda in Amhara Region by looking at the following guiding questions:

- How is the community including FHHs perceived and defined poverty?
- What are the major causes of FHHs’ vulnerability to poverty?
- How FHHs cope with and respond to challenges they have faced? and
- How governmental and non-governmental organizations actions to mitigate poverty are perceived and interpreted by rural people in general and FHHs in particular?
- How FHHs are created and enjoyed being female headship?
3.2 The Hypothesis

This study is an empirical study which emanates from the idea of whether rural FHHs are vulnerable to poverty or not. This issue is debatable; however, much is not done. Given the background to the research problem, the present research is guided by the following working hypotheses:

i. FHHs retain unequal status to that of MHHs. The community do not have positive perceptions towards FHHs. FHHs on their part try to reverse the situation through actively engaging in various social, cultural and political gatherings; however, societies still consider FHHs as transgressors of the culture.

ii. The existing environment in the region creates favorable condition for the high incidence of FHHs. The numbers of FHHs are increasing through time; however, they are the most disadvantageous section of the community due to absence of male breadwinners and/or cultural influences. Most of them are resource poor. But, they are not equal beneficiaries in the existing social security’s like in Safety Nets.

iii. FHHs lack basic productive assets that enable them to lead their life. They lack ample possession of land, labor, livestock, capital and technologies. Shortages of sufficient resources and the existing cultural impositions on female household heads pave the way to live in a difficult life including their dependents. As a result, FHHs devise several coping and adaptive mechanisms. However, they did not recuperate from poverty.
3.3 Aim of the Study

This study aims at looking into the situation of poverty in FHHs in Libo Kemkem Woreda of Amhara Region. It also elucidates their survival strategies.

Based on the research problem stated above, this study has the following specific objectives.

1. To explore the nature and the root causes of FHHs’ vulnerability to poverty
2. To investigate the livelihood and coping strategies of FHHs
3. To assess programs in vogue both by the government and non-government organizations in avert poverty through people’s opinion.
4. To examine the main features of rural FHHs

3.4 Research Methodology and Limitations

3.4.1 Research Methodology

In the preceding chapter, the researcher has discussed the importance of studying the nature, processes, causes and consequences of FHHs in connection with poverty and sources of livelihoods in Libo Kemkem Woreda. Keeping these in view, the researcher has already defined the scope and set objectives of the study. To achieve the objectives, the researcher looked for qualitative and quantitative information on the incidence of poverty in FHHs, causes of poverty, socio-cultural characteristics, resource base, and survival strategies. Besides, the researcher sought similar information from MHHs for comparison purpose. Secondary data were also consulted in order to substantiate the outcomes obtained by qualitative and quantitative methods. This chapter gave insight into how the research project was carried out. It outlined sources of secondary data, methods of data collections; sampling techniques; and methods of data analysis.
3.4.1.1 Primary data collection

Primary data collection requires a variety of research techniques designed to elicit complementary and cross-cutting information. Data collection took place in two phases. The first phase was a preliminary survey for one month in the summer of 2011. The second phase included primary data collection from December 2011 to April 2012. To this end, qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection were employed.

The qualitative as well as quantitative approach of the study was employed to assist the researcher in unveiling main data, for example gender roles, poverty, and livelihood strategies. Such data were needed to provide a better understanding of FHHs in relation to poverty. Therefore, the data collection designed for the study included individual interviews (key informant interviews), observation, household history/life stories, focus group interviews, and survey interview.

3.4.1.1.1 Depth interview of individual informants

This method is a means to generate lots of information about individual’s life history, access to and control over resources and benefits, challenges and experiences, inter-household relations, mutual support networks, decision-making role, resource management, socio-cultural and political participation, poverty reduction efforts and survival mechanisms. The kinds of informants included FHHs (30), MHHs (10), village elders (4), religious leaders (4), politically appointees (2), development agents (4), women from Women Affairs Office (2), Woreda agricultural experts (4). These informants, 60, were taken based on accessibility, nearness to subject areas, and nature of the topic, which is multidimensional. Selection of informants in sample kebeles was undertaken by the help of community development workers and the
community themselves. Most of the in-depth interviews with key informants would be tape-recorded. In circumstances where permission of tape-recording is denied, extensive notes were taken.

3.4.1.2 Observation

Largely, the approach that the researcher used would be the distinctive anthropological method in which the researcher resided in a specific village community and closely observe and record the daily lives of women specifically FHHs\(^5\). Some of the activities and events the researcher shared with informants including participating in community meetings, conflict resolution, public works, and rituals relating to beliefs and traditions (feasts, wedding, and funeral ceremonies). These and other observations helped the researcher in obtaining information about societal perception, household resource management, women’s power, farming and non-farming activities, inter-and intra-household relationships, division of labor, social and economic services and settlement patterns.

3.4.1.3 Life history narrative

Case histories of selected individuals that are typical and/or representative were recorded. The case study individuals were FHHs and women in MHHs. Case studies were conducted in order to substantiate certain facts that had already been established in the household survey. This method was undertaken to probe important issues in-depth and to gain valuable insights into variables of typical cases that cannot be done by a survey. Case studies were selected from the baseline household survey sample according to key variables in relation to poverty, livelihoods and gender. An

\(^5\) Residing in a specific village helps to understand the behavior of the target communities, however; since the study communities are women or FHHs, it is socially and practically unacceptable to live with them for studying, as a result to capture the behavior of these communities as well as the physical setting, a female assistant employed in order to make the study ease.
interview guide, which comprised of key questions in the study, was designed as a checklist. The general case study guide questions were formulated under the following topics: marriage formation, dowry, household resource distribution, causes of FHHs, psychological and economic challenges and benefits of being household heads, social life, people perception towards FHHs, their status compared to women in MHHs, wealth status, perception towards poverty, and coping strategies.

3.4.1.4 Focus group discussion (FGD)

This method has been widely used in generating data. FGD was conducted primarily for generating themes or issues to be further probed using a household survey questionnaire. The researcher together with the assistance of the local development workers identified groups of people who were thought to share similar types of experience. At least 6 of FGDs, which range from 6 to 8 participants, would be held. The FGDs were categorized into FHHs, FHHs and women in MHHs, kebeles political appointees, village elders and religious leaders, and development agents and officers. A guide for discussions comprised on the following topics: gender roles and issues, access to, control over and distribution of resources and assets, intra-and inter-household entitlements; position of FHHs in the community, the nature of poverty; people perception towards FHHs and efforts for improving FHHs in particular and women status in the community.

3.4.1.2 Sampling

3.4.1.2.1 Household survey

Both probability and non-probability sampling techniques were used based on the nature of the instruments for primary data collection. The subjects of key-informant interviews and participants in community group discussions were selected
using purposive sampling techniques based on their deep experiences and knowledge. Informants were selected with the help of kebele appointed officials and development agents.

Sample households for household and individual survey were selected based on purposive and random sampling techniques. The first stage was the selection of study area. The study area, Libo Kemkem Woreda, was selected purposively due to the researcher familiarity, accessibility, and vulnerability of the area by epidemics, flooding and food insecurity. The second stage was the selection of kebeles. According to the information found from the Department of Food Security of Libo Kemkem Woreda, about 22 out of 29 kebeles are severely affected by chronic food insecurity. Among the 22 kebeles, 2 kebeles (Ginaza Silkisa and Yifag Akababi) were selected purposively for three reasons such as familiarity, accessibility, and adjacent to towns. Moreover, communities of the kebeles have big interaction with dwellers of the town, which would be bases for adaptation for diverse coping mechanisms by the community.

According to CSA (2010:324), Ginaza Silkisa and Yifag Akababi Kebeles comprised 1287 (1067 MHHs & 220 FHHs) and 618 (518 MHHs & 100 FHHs) households respectively. About 101 (9.47%) of MHHs and 103 (46.8%) of FHHs from Ginaza Selkisa and 49 (9.4%) of MHHs and 47 (47%) of FHHs from Yifag Akababi with a total of 300 households were taken using random sampling techniques. Women informants from MHHs were interviewed for comparative purpose.
Table 3.1: Distribution of population and households in sampled kebeles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sampling Kebeles</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Households</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
<th>Average Family size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Both sexes</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>MHHs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ginaza Silkisa</td>
<td>6194</td>
<td>3182</td>
<td>3012</td>
<td>1067</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yifag Akababi</td>
<td>2899</td>
<td>1501</td>
<td>1398</td>
<td>518</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9093</td>
<td>4683</td>
<td>4410</td>
<td>1585</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CSA Ethiopia (2007:324); Health Extension Workers of Kebeles and Author

The household questionnaire gave emphasis to a range of potential indicators relating to the key features of poverty (ability to meet basic needs, access to productive assets and dependence on transfers), livelihood (short, medium, and long term livelihood strategies), and FHHs (cause, incidence, typology, family size). The contents of household questionnaire included age of household, female headedness by typologies, family size and composition, household livelihood activities, constraints to livelihood, access to labor, landlessness, access to farming land, credit access, off farm activities, access to draught power for ploughing; livestock holdings and access; current diet; housing quality; and basic household items.

3.4.1.3 Secondary data collection

Several secondary sources of information in the form of published and unpublished documents were used in this study to identify the socio-economic condition of women in general and FHHs in particular in rural areas. Gathering of data took place from various concerned governmental and non-governmental organizations at national, regional, zonal and Woreda levels. Among governmental organizations Women’s Affairs; Finance and Economic Development; Agriculture Research Institutes; Agriculture and Rural Developments; Environmental Protection,
Land Administration and Use Authority (EPLAUA); Disaster and Food Security Sector; Central Statistics Agency are mentioned to some. Research works, strategic papers, reports, surveys on rural women and FHHs would also be investigated in non-governmental organizations such as Organization for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa (OSSREA), Forum for Social Studies (FSS), Save the Children-UK, SIDA Amhara, World Vision, Amhara Development Association, Organization for Rehabilitation and Development in Amhara (ORDA).

In short, a detailed review of literature on women and poverty in Ethiopia was conducted and relevant qualitative and quantitative information were extracted from publications, journals, magazines, newspapers, brochures, websites and other relevant sources. Other related literature on gender issues and rural FHHs on both Ethiopian and other countries experiences was assessed and utilized for comparative understanding.

3.4.1.4 Data analysis and presentation

The information collected through various instruments were recorded and analyzed separately. Then the whole data were grouped into qualitative and quantitative data sets. Finally the perspectives and insights from the interpretations of qualitative and quantitative data were integrated to handle the research problem. The process of data recording and analysis are briefly described as follows.

i. Qualitative data: The information collected through individual interviews and focus-group discussions; case history narratives and observation were written into notebooks and recorded in tape recorders. All the notes taken translated into English. Tape recorded data were first transcribed and then entered into the computer. All the qualitative information gathered during each rounds of fieldwork was transcribed, and
written down in English and then entered into the computer using word processing. Finally the entire qualitative information were interpreted and analyzed separately.

ii. Quantitative data: This data set acquired through structured questionnaire interview was processed and analyzed in different ways. In the survey questionnaire most of responses were pre-coded, and very few open-ended questions were reorganized and coded latter. Then the responses were fed into the computer using SPSS software. The analysis and presentation involved descriptive statistics like averages, percentage and mean. The analysis results were frequency distributions and percentages depicted in tables, graphs and logical arguments. The research outcomes were cross tabulated and then tested using statistical tools such as Independent T-Test and probit model.

3.4.2 Limitations of the Study

The study did not escape from certain limitations, mainly associated with data availability of FHHs at national, regional, zonal and local level. Information concerning to FHHs are found in some literatures but they are very scanty in nature and they focus only in some areas. At country level, data on FHHs are found from the Central Statistical Agency (CSA) of Ethiopia. One of the information provided by CSA Ethiopia is population, households and housing units. Household as a basic unit of consumption or production is very fundamental to workings of this thesis; however, it is not found separately as MHHs and FHHs rather households. Moreover, information is available in the form of marital status, which is categorized in six ways such as never-married, currently married, divorced, separated, widow/ widower and living together as husband and spouse at regional level. Thus, the data found in the CSA did not tell as the exact numerical size of FHHs.
Another attempt made by the researcher was to find out information about FHHs in Amhara National Regional bureaus like Agriculture and Rural Development Bureau, Finance and Economic Development Bureau, Central Statistical Agency-Bahir Dar branch and at Woreda level but it is possible to say that none was found. The reason is that the notion of FHHs adopted by bureaus and other offices is not clear and is different from sector to sector. As a result, the researcher came up with this problem through undertaking of surveys with the help of development agents specially Health Extension Workers in each sites of the study. Thus, two major challenges encountered the researcher were statistical information and definition of FHHs.

The third major obstacle that the researcher has faced during data collection was paucity of income and expenditure information at household and Woreda level. It is obvious that income and expenditure information are basic to understand the extent of poverty; however, it was very difficult to collect this data during household survey for some reasons. First, since most of the rural people of the study community were illiterate, they did not have clear data or did not know how much they obtained and expended at monthly or annually. Moreover, target groups mainly FHHs were found at old ages, in which it became a problem to produce income-expenditure data. Second, some households attempted to notify income and expenditures information but they explained in terms of not on cash rather in kind. Even this information was inconsistent and very difficult to put it in units. Although the researcher tried his best to come up with these difficulties through various ways, the researcher has found it very challenging. Thus, the researcher has finally decided to exclude this information in order not to distort the findings and biased other researchers.
3.5 Significance of the Study

The study would have several uses. The three major ones are analytical, cognitive and normative purposes. Analytical purpose: - This study examines the specific situations of FHHs in Libo Kemkem Woreda context and rendering various realities. To date, FHHs have not considered so explicitly in relation to socio-economic category under feminization of poverty. Thus, seeking to understand the impoverishment of FHHs and their survival strategies holds considerable significance.

Moreover, a few studies have been conducted on female headship in Amhara region (Zenebe 2004; Stone and Mengistu 2003; Yigremew 2001; Ali 2000; Tiruwork 1998; Dejene 1994, 1995; Dessalegn 1991. A study on the Status of Female Headships in Libo Kemkem Woreda was also conducted (Mossa 2010). But, as noted by Kazdin (1992) as quoted by Marczyk, DeMatteo, and Festinger (2005:38), “A large portion of research stems from researchers’ efforts to build upon, expand, or re-explain the results of previously conducted research studies. This is because research tends to raise more questions than it answers, and those newly raised questions often become the focus of future research studies”. In this case, the study on FHHs vulnerability to poverty in Libo Kemkem Woreda will enrich substantively to the FHHs literature.

Cognitive purposes: This research would also serve for practical purpose. First, by revealing the root-causes of poverty and the means of survival strategies

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6 These concepts are adopted from the study of “Poverty, Food insecurity and Livelihood strategies in Rural Gedeo: The case of Haroressa and Chichu PAs, SNNP” by Shumet (2009:838).
employed by FHHs in the study area, it attempted to suggest locally appropriate strategies for poverty reduction and diversification of livelihood mechanisms. In other words, the research will contribute to the understanding of the causes of poverty on the community in general and FHHs in particular and provides valuable insights into the possible ways of reducing poverty and enhancing food security in the study area. Its findings addressed the affected groups through non-governmental organizations and local governmental officials working in the area such as educators, development and social workers, health personnel, etc. This will sensitize the peoples concerned on the causes of poverty so that they would fight or seek the way out of it.

Second, in 2000, 189 United Nations Member states reached a consensus and signed the Millennium Declaration which conveyed a new strategy for making progress towards global development. This agenda was articulated as 8 goals called Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Thus, the first two goals such as “The idea of eradication of extreme poverty and hunger” (MDG 1) and “promoting gender equality and empowerment of women” (MDG 2) are prominent on the agenda of policy makers in developing countries, including Ethiopia. Ethiopia is one of the states agreed and signed on Millennium Declaration. In this regard, this study will inform policy makers and planners about key social, cultural, political, technological, ecological and economic constraints to feminization of poverty in the rural settings. More specifically, it will serve as an authentic and reliable reference material to policy makers and governmental and non-governmental organizations that are involved in poverty reduction, livelihood diversification, empowerment of women, and development issues.
**Normative purpose:** by giving a clear picture of poverty and livelihood strategies among rural FHHs at the local level, it will help to design better intervention program.

### 3.6 Thesis Organization

This thesis has examined many issues of rural women specifically FHHs. MHHs experiences are also included for comparative understandings. Its coverage ranges from the review of literature to remarks and suggestions of the study. It is generally divided into nine main chapters.

Chapter one includes reviews of all necessary secondary documents, which is relevant to the topic. The major components of the chapter comprise analytical concepts, empirical findings, and theoretical approaches to the study.

Chapter two is part of the literature review, which focuses mainly on the Ethiopian context of rural women poverty. Data related with experiences of rural poverty in Ethiopia and Amhara region and struggles of interventionist organizations in reduction of poverty is reviewed. Situations of women poverty are described.

Chapter three consists of research contexts and methodology of the study. It is the building blocks of the thesis. Under this chapter, identification of the problem, objectives, hypotheses, significance, methodology and limitations of the study are explained in detail.

Chapter four describes the physical characteristics and social organization of the study area. The physical characteristics encompass location, population, religion, language, topography, climate, land use, economic activities and social institutions. Social organization takes account of marriage, family’s role in socialization, homestead, settlement pattern, indigenous associations and role of elders.
Chapter five is regarded as the core section of the findings. It examines about the vulnerability of rural FHHs to poverty. It contains overview of poverty contextually and rural livelihood bases of FHHs and their vulnerability to poverty, food security status, and trends in poverty over time.

Chapter six elucidates survival strategies adopted by rural FHHs and their challenges. It includes livelihood activities, migration, and restraints of FHHs.

Chapter seven investigates role of government and non-governmental organizations in poverty reduction of rural people, particularly FHHs.

Chapter eight focuses on the features of FHHs in the study area. It comprises of contextual definition, causes and incidence, socio-cultural status and, positive aspects of being female headships.

Chapter nine is the last chapter of the thesis. It comes up with the summary, conclusion and remarks and suggestions of the study.