CHAPTER NINE
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND REMARKS

9.1 Summary

9.1.1 Theoretical Arguments and Approaches to Poverty and Gender

The outline of this research has been structured to suit an approach of presenting discussions at macro and micro levels. Chapter 1 discusses the relevant concepts, theories and disciplinary perspectives in gender research. The main aim of the literature review in Chapter 1 is to orient the present research approach by drawing on the current theoretical arguments and approaches concerning FHHs vulnerability to poverty and their livelihood strategies. Accordingly, the review of the literature on poverty and FHHs has revealed that the causes of FHHs vulnerability to poverty are to be seen primarily in the context of economic and socio-cultural processes. Therefore, the search for causal factors leading to vulnerability of FHHs to poverty has been attempted.

As noted in many literatures poverty has no single definition. As a result, people give meanings to poverty in different ways which depends on the nature of the problem found. Some argue that poverty should be defined contextually while others define poverty based on material points of view. A poor, according to this definition, is a person or an individual who deprived from well-being related to lack of material income or consumption, low levels of education and health, vulnerability and exposure to risk and voicelessness and powerlessness (World Bank 2001a). Some define poverty from monetary aspect. In this case, income is a means to measure the wealth of individuals. Big organizations in the world like International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB) are known by defining poverty from monetary/
income aspect. In this regard, a poor is a person or an individual whose daily income is about US$ 1.25 (Shah 2011). Thus, most economists and social workers support to use combination of two approaches: material and income. Anthropologists strongly believe that contextual, relational and situational definition of poverty is most appropriate.

Whether it is income or material induced poverty or both, poverty is mostly related to women particularly FHHs. Most authors argue that FHHs are the ‘poorest of the poor’. As most said, feminization of poverty is widespread in the world. This is to mean there is a change in the levels of poverty against women or FHHs. The gap of poverty is increased between women and men. Gender inequality plays prime role for the causes of feminization of poverty (Chant 2007).

In rural areas gender inequalities are pervasive across many dimensions of societal life including household, economic, social, and political institutions. A World Bank study on regional patterns of gender inequalities in basic rights and in access to and control of resources reflect that disparities exist all over the world and no woman in the developing regions has equal rights with man.

Gender inequality remains to be a big issue for the prevalence of poverty across the rural world. This is emanated from lack of sufficient livelihoods in rural places, which exposes women and men to poverty differently. It is becoming more evident that the majority of the poor in developed and developing worlds are women, who are as many as 70% of the world’s poor (Chant 2010). A report on the state of world rural poverty by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) concludes that rural women in developing countries are among the poorest and most vulnerable people in the world. Especially, FHHs who lack access to sufficient
resources are not in a position to survive economically and enjoy a decent standard of living (IFAD 2010).

FHHs are increasing in numbers throughout the world including Ethiopia. Social, economic, political, cultural, and health problems bring the change of household structure. Due to the expansion of impoverishment, diseases, war, conflict, woman’s life style in many countries is undergoing a subtle but significant change. All over the world, in terms of family life, women are slowly and steadily shifting away from patterns of early marriage, child bearing and joint families to longer durations of ‘singleness’. In the wake of socio-economic changes that are sweeping through Third World countries, women-divorced, abandoned, widowed, unmarried are struggling against overwhelming adds to earn a decent living and to bring up their children.

FHHs are distributed unevenly among countries, particularly the developing regions. Their frequency is increasing in the rural areas since the majority of the world populations are living in rural areas. However, rural areas continue to be host of world poverty.

The three major theoretical approaches to address the problems of poverty of women are Feminist Anthropology, Sustainable Livelihood Approach and Empowerment approach.

Anthropology provides an important perspective when it comes to increasing our understanding of poverty. This is because anthropology has a power to understand the society from the setting. Inequality, social justice and socio-economic status are main topics discussed under in association with poverty. The Culture of Poverty and Critical Theories which include globalization, materialism and feminism hold special places in anthropological view of poverty.
However, anthropological theory did not emphasize the relation of gender to inequality and poverty. Gender as a variable was neglected not just in anthropology but also in other disciplines. It was after the emergence of the concept of the feminization of poverty in 1980s, gender got places in many subjects. Winthrop (1991) speculates that the field of anthropology may have displayed its own cultural bias by treating women as invisible when focusing on issues that are related predominantly to men. Anthropological theory and research have yet to determine the extent to which sex roles are moulded by nurture than nature (Withrop 1991). Current anthropological research makes more of an attempt to incorporate cultural, feminist and globalization theory when exploring the effects of poverty on women. The tenets of feminist theory are also embedded within the critical theory perspective. Feminist theory posited that women have rare opportunities to understand truth due to the distortion or creation of women places as home in society’s division of social labour (Benton and Craib 2001).

The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach states that households/communities access to a specific set of assets (capitals) and livelihood strategies are mediated by transforming structures and processes. In this approach the connection between access to resources (assets) and food insecurity is emphasized. Sustainable Livelihoods Approach is an analytical device for improved understanding of livelihoods and poverty as identified by Scoones (1998) and Ellis (2000). This approach is, therefore, a foundation for the analysis of poverty of rural women in general and FHHs in particular in Libo Kemekem Woreda. This framework supports poverty reduction by making empowerment of poor people’s like FHHs, livelihoods a central goal of development efforts. In this context, a livelihood ‘… comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of
living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks, and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base’ (Scoones, 1998).

The framework identifies five types of capital assets which people can build up and/or draw upon: human, physical, social, financial, and natural though some variations of this framework also add political capital. These assets constitute livelihood building blocks. To a limited extent they can be substituted for each other. However, FHHs lack these basic assets compared to MHHs. That is why they are leading desperate life.

Women and men live in very different worlds. In fact, most societies have the common problem of female subordination. This makes gender a very important development issue. Women problems are thus addressed through the Empowerment Approach since it acknowledges inequalities between men and women, and the origins of women’s subordination in the family. Because of the potential understanding of women’s various backgrounds, empowerment approach incorporates different strategies according to the level of men’s domination (Moser, 1993:74).

The Empowerment Approach wants women to owe greater self-reliance and to maintain internal strength to decide their own fate. This enables women, as Moser (1993) argued, to determine choices in life and to influence the direction of change through the ability to gain control over crucial material and non-material resources. What makes the empowerment approach, as Moser claimed, interesting is that it needs women to equip with redistribution of power within, as well as between, societies (Ibid). Moreover, empowerment approach sees women’s oppression as stemming not only from male patriarchal attitudes but also from colonial and neo-colonial
oppression. It recognizes women’s triple role, and seek to meet strategic gender needs indirectly through bottom-up mobilization around practical gender needs.

9.1.2 Focus of the Study, Summary of the Research Arguments and Methodology

This piece of research has attempted to investigate the state of poverty and livelihood strategies of rural FHHs in Libo Kemkem Woreda, South Gondar Administrative Zone of Amhara National Regional State in Ethiopia. The status of MHHs has also been examined for comparative understanding. Accordingly, it seeks to make an investigation of the root causes of vulnerability to poverty, livelihood and coping strategies, reaction of the currently running governmental and non-governmental organizations for the reduction of poverty, and formation of FHHs in the study area.

As shown in Chapter 3, the study was designed to address five principal research questions. The first question deals with examination of how the local people perceive and define poverty. In this respect an attempt was made to identify the local community’s perception of poverty and wealth labeling of the community in spite of the poor level of the community at national as well as international standards (Chapter 6). The second question tries to see the major causes of FHHs vulnerability to poverty/food insecurity. At what extent those FHHs are vulnerable to poverty and due to what problems make them vulnerable to poverty, are they really more vulnerable to poverty compared to MHHs (Chapter 6)?

The third question deals with the assessment of the local people’s adaptive and coping strategies to the recurring food insecurity. In addressing this question an attempt was made to show how the local people have reshaped their adaptive responses and coping mechanisms in the face of mounting external pressures and
crises. In this respect, analyses of traditional adaptive responses to the variable environment and ecological changes and of coping mechanisms to recurrent food insecurity were made using mainly the primary data gathered from the local community (Chapter 7).

The fourth question looks at government as well as non-governmental efforts to avert local community vulnerability to poverty. Moreover, it shows people’s response to these efforts.

The fifth question deals with the investigation of the formation of FHHs and their life after becoming headships. In relation to this it is argued that the causes for the formation and frequency of FHHs have increased as a result of both internal and external factors. In addressing this question an assessment of factors both, at macro (regional/national) and micro (community) levels, was made on the basis of secondary and primary data respectively. Accordingly, factors related to marital status, such as widowed, divorce, desertion and never-married are examined (Chapter 8). The extent of these problems at the macro level was assessed mainly based on secondary data (Chapter 1), while the magnitude of these problems at micro (community) level was assessed on the basis of primary data gathered through a household survey, and individual and focus group interviews (Chapter 8). The main focus of the analysis at the community level was on the formation of FHHs and the underlying causes to become female headships.

Generally speaking the central argument of this study is that vulnerability of FHHs to poverty/food insecurity has increased through time due to shortages of productive agricultural resources. Present research highlights how these factors have led to an increased vulnerability and livelihood insecurity of FHHs in Libo Kemkem Woreda. It is stated that despite efforts of internal and external actors, vulnerability of
FHHs to poverty has increased over time. Specifically four arguments were addressed through analyzing both secondary and primary data. These are:

i. Vulnerability of FHHs to poverty/ food insecurity has increased due to dwindling of

ii. livelihood resource bases of the community

iii. FHHs are currently less able to cope up with stresses through their traditional coping and adaptive strategies.

iv. FHHs have become more dependent on Safety Net to cope with recurring food shortages.

v. The formation of FHHs has increased over the past decades because of the combined effects of death of spouses, divorce, desertion, and never-married

The researcher has used both primary and secondary data published and unpublished documentary sources or archives for reviewing the status of the problem. With regard to primary data, the researcher has employed qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis. A survey, which took a month, was carried out in the first phase during the summer of 2011/12. The second phase is for data collection from December 12, 2011 to February 1, 2012. The methods of data collection adopted in the course of the field work include: participant observation, in-depth interviews, structured questionnaire interview, case studies, and focus group discussions. 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 are taken as using random sampling techniques. Women informants from MHHs interviewed for comparative purpose.
9.2 Conclusions

9.2.1 The Research Problem in Context

In addressing the basic research arguments, the researcher has first attempted to look at the general situation of FHHs in connection with poverty status and livelihood strategies in Libo Kemkem Woreda, South Gondar Administrative Zone of Amhara Region in Ethiopia by making an extensive review of the secondary information (Chapter 1 and 2). The analyses of the secondary data show that FHHs are chronically food insecure segments of the society on the one hand and their frequency is increased through time on the other hand (Chant 2010; Action Aid 2008).

The agricultural sector in Ethiopia not only takes the lion’s share of the country's total domestic production but also absorbs above 80 percent of country's labor force. As demographic characteristics of the country show that that women comprise half of the population. Women in Ethiopia in general and in Amhara region and the study area in particular are strong participants in agricultural and informal economic activities. However, women’s status and roles in the patriarchal social organization have always been interpreted and explained in relation to men. In spite of their significant contribution to the agricultural development in Ethiopia, women are not acknowledged for their contributions and efforts in the sector. Societies have always been unfair in giving recognition for women for their contribution in farming. Hence, women in the country are mostly considered as unproductive, less valuable, dispensable, less skilled and the like. Moreover, the dominant patriarchal organization of rural households has given more importance for men in agricultural activities particularly in the division of labor.
The frequency of FHHs in Ethiopia in general and Amhara Region in particular are increasing over time; however, they are poorest segment of the society due to the existing economic, social, cultural and political problems. The prevalence of gender disparity and low social status of women among the society influences women access to and control over productive resources, which in turn reduces overall performance of the economy obtained from agriculture sector. Besides the traditional barriers imposed upon the women, FHHs suffer from triple roles: productive, reproductive and community works.

In spite of the growth in the numbers and the enormous responsibilities placed on FHHs, they lack access to sufficient resources to effectively nurture their families and manage households. It makes it hard for many FHHs to survive economically and enjoy a decent standard of living. This makes FHHs with a single source of income, with no other support for sustenance, economically vulnerable. Such vulnerability stems from inequality in gender positions in society; and the low economic status of women. In fact, rural women devise different socio-economic and cultural mechanisms to enable them to cope with adverse livelihood conditions. Food availability is affected by climatic fluctuations, depletion of soil fertility, or the loss of household productive assets or some other related problems. In such situations farmers try to reduce this problem by taking actions that result in trade-offs between current and future consumption. However, due to erratic yields in agriculture there has been food insecurity among rural people and hence they are vulnerable to poverty.

In general the macro level analysis of secondary data has clearly revealed that FHHs in Ethiopia as well as in Amhara region have become more vulnerable to chronic food insecurity than MHHs, who are better off. The situation is becoming worse due to lack of compatible social security systems with the affected population.
The overlapping of these and other external factors on FHHs action spaces at the local level have put them at risk of severe food crisis/famine which they are less able to overcome without public transfers in the near future.

On the basis of field study results, the following sections have highlighted the underlying factors for the FHHs social status and vulnerability to chronic food insecurity.

9.2.2 Livelihood Bases and Vulnerability to Poverty of Female-Headed Households

Poverty is a widespread phenomenon in the area of Libo Kemkem Woreda, South Gondar Administrative Zone of Amhara Region, Ethiopia. This area consists of 34 kebele administrations, of which 29 of them are rural. The rural areas are more vulnerable to different kinds of demographic, social, economic as well as natural induced problems. Thus, almost 22 out of 29 rural kebeles are more susceptible to chronic food insecurity. It covers more than 80 percent of the total population of the area. However, the degree of vulnerability to food insecurity and poverty varies from place to place as well as household to household. Resource poor individual and communities in general are more affected by the problem. FHHs can be mentioned as an example.

People in the study area are poor and some of them are sometimes known as the ‘ultra-poor’, (IFAD 2010) who are well below the poverty line. In line with the Sustainable Livelihood Approach, human, natural, physical, financial, and social capitals are bases to measure the wellbeing of communities in the study area. People categorize themselves as rich, medium, poor and very poor depending on access to and control over resources. Poor and very poor people include the resource deficient individuals who are struggling to live and dependent on government as well as
community support. In this study, an effort was made to compare households based on these assets.

Human assets help households to liberate from food insecurity through creating income sources to the households. Age, education, and labor are parts of human assets which have direct or indirect relationship to the poverty status of households. Accordingly, quantitative findings show that MHHs are found better than FHHs in each stated human assets. For instance, the average age of male-headed and FHHs is 44.4 and 46.6, respectively. This implies FHHs are not able to induce income effectively than MHHs. A household can secure food security if it has more household members as explained by Youseff and Hetler (1983). On this regard, male-headed and FHHs have on average 6.6 and 3.8 household sizes. Household does not compose of equal members as well as labor power. Some had small household size but efficient labor power and vice versa. What matters is access to labor power in the household. In this respect, presence of male-adult labor in the household takes the lion share among household members in the agrarian society. This does not underestimate other household members although they are not equally important to male-adult labor. On average, male-headed and FHHs have 1.1 and 0.2, respectively.

Among livelihood resources, farmland is vital for farmers in the study area. Farmland is not just a source of livelihood but it has also social, cultural and political significance to the people of Libo Kemkem Woreda. However, it is impossible to say that all farmlands regardless of the size have equal importance since some farmlands are very fertile, irrigated, plain slope and vice versa. Based on the quantitative findings, both households possessed almost equal acres of farmland i.e., on average 0.91 and 0.89 acres of farmland owned by male-headed and FHHs, respectively. The successive governments of Ethiopia starting from the Derg regime and recent EPRDF
periods, women particularly FHHs acquired farmland through redistribution. However, due to shortages of other assets like male-adult labor, oxen, and cultural imposition upon women not to plough, forced FHHs to sharecrop or rent out farmlands. This created favorable condition for male household heads to own more farmlands monopoly. The average size of owned and sharecropped/rented land that FHHs have only 1.988; on the contrary MHHs have 2.59 hectares of land.

Next to land, livestock particularly oxen ownership is considered as the most basic asset to farmers in the study area. Livestock possession helps households to secure food security. MHHs possessed more livestock than FHHs on average. However, owning of oxen is the most dispensable livestock for farmers. For example, female-headed and MHHs owned oxen on average 0.3 and 1.35, respectively. Constraint of oxen ownership obliged FHHs to sharecrop or rent out not only land but also an ox or oxen.

FHHs also suffered from shortages of financial asset including credits, fertilizers, and remittances compared to MHHs. Credit institutions like Amhara Credit and Saving Institution (ACSI), Safety Net Program (GOS), World Bank (NGO) and individuals found in the study area that any farmers was able to access. But, FHHs could lack to access credits than MHHs for various reasons like fear of debt, lack of ample credit sources, and rigid institutional criteria. In short, FHHs have less sources of credit than MHHs. About 69.0 percent of FHHs and 32.7 percent of MHHs had no sources of credit. Among the aforementioned sources of credit, World Bank for FHHs (24.0%) and Safety Net Program for MHHs (25.3%) are major sources of credit although all governmental as well as non-governmental organizations established to support the poor particularly. Due to mismanagement, and embezzlement done by
political appointees and their less bargaining power, FHHs did not use sources of credit effectively.

Another source of assets that households obtained in times of need is social capital. Social capital is generated from the society themselves and provides supports to households in the form of financial, labor, material, psychological and technical assistances in times of need. Social assets come from funeral groups, saving group, church group, labor reciprocal group, and festive group. However, access to and control over this asset varies from household to household. About 32 percent of FHHs and 90 percent of MHHs are member of more than four social institutions. The most utilized kind of social institution by both households is funeral society. It does not differentiate the poor from the rich. In sum, MHHs recorded good performance in using of these institutions to FHHs, because access to social institutions was derived from other sources of assets. For instance, exchange of labor and festive groups requires availability of adult male power and preparation of feasts to the group during working time. This is beyond the capacity of FHHs. However, due to poor status and old ages of some of FHHs, they are benefited in obtaining transfers either food/cash-for-work or aid from the government than MHHs.

Based on availability of assets, assessment is done on households whether they are food insecure or not. About 79.3 percent of FHHs and 26.7 percent of MHHs faced food shortages in the past 12 months. About 61.3 FHHs and 22.0 percent of MHHs were victims of food shortages for three successive months. This, according to Federal Productive Safety Net Program of Ethiopia, is termed as chronically food insecure households. Moreover, FHHs (6.0%) suffered from food shortages for successive five months. In general, the cross sectional data displays that the food security status of FHHs has become worse while MHHs have showed progress.
The probit model result shows that the dummy variables of head of household sex and sources of credit have effect of vulnerability and significant at a significant level of 1% and 5%, respectively. As far as the continuous variables that proposed to affect vulnerability are concerned, age household head, size of owned land, and livestock holding in TLU have effect on vulnerability. They are found significant at a significant level of 10%, 1% and 1%, respectively. From the results of independent T-test, there is a difference between the two groups, vulnerable and non vulnerable, in the variables of adult equivalent, size of owned land and livestock holding in TLU. They are statistically significant at a significant level of 1%. Moreover, the results of cross tabulation shows that head of household head type, education level of household head, access to irrigated land, users of fertilizer are significant at 1% level of significant, and access to social support is significant at 5% level of significant on vulnerability to poverty. The remaining variables like sources of credit, received remittances and migration of household members are not significant to vulnerability.

9.2.3 Survival Strategies and Poverty Reduction Interventions

Libo Kemkem Woreda consists mainly of large plains and gorges, and is prone to environmental and climatic shocks. It is a mountainous country-side where farming is made more difficult because of land degradation, soil erosion, and depletion of natural resources. Most households produce food hardly sufficient for their own consumption. The situation is further aggravated by natural calamities. Of all the calamities, drought and the resulting food shortage are the major challenging problems causing misery among the population.

Women comprise half of the population, while FHHs share one fourth of the total population. Hence, they could not escape from problems faced by other households. Resource poor individuals and communities are naturally more affected
by the problem, more so the FHHs as they own poor resources. Though the land owning pattern between the male-headed and FHHs does not show much variation (0.907 and 0.888 hectare respectively) the other inputs like male adult children, oxen, cultural taboo are critical in drifting the FHH to poverty stricken vulnerability. The situations forced FHHs to resort different survival strategies so as to sustain their lives and their dependents.

Households in the study area have been responding to droughts and vulnerability by employing various coping and adaptive strategies. Coping strategies employed by the study communities include ex-ante actions such as diversification of sources of income to ex-post actions adopted at times of distress such as reducing number and amount of meals. Among a total of 20 different activities which were recorded during the survey; only 17 of these were found among FHHs, and 12 among MHHs. Perhaps more striking is the fact that there are a few activities that female-headed and MHHs do not sometimes engage in. For instance, among agricultural activities, 97.4 percent of male-headed households reported gaining income from work in crop production, compared to only 33.3 percent of FHHs. About 74.7 percent of the FHHs and 3.3 percent of MHHs earn income through sharecropping out farmland.

Moreover, households sometimes resort to engage in risk taking activities if life situation becomes very awful. Nearly all have reported having adopted at least one coping mechanism. The most prevalent mechanisms for coping with food insecurity were reducing the number of meals per day, which accounted by 87.3 percent and 34 percent of female-headed and MHHs, respectively. Hence, the proportion of households that have adopted one or more coping strategies in a community indicates the prevalence of food insecurity.
On the other hand, adaptive strategies used by the study communities include indigenous techniques, including (but not limited to) soil and water conservation, combination and diversification of annual and perennial crops production activities and permanent resettlement program. Some of the adaptive strategies are mainly run by governmental as well as non-governmental organization interventions. For instance, government is used to design various policies and programs to improve the rural people’s life. The preparation of the full poverty reduction strategy paper (PRSP) named as Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Program (SDPRP) is to mention one example. To meet the objectives of SDPRP, the government runs Productive Safety Net Programs (public works, household extension, and resettlement); land registration and certification; and natural resource conservations. However, lack of awareness, negative attitudes, negligence, and misuse of programs were some of the constraints to carry out the programs successfully.

In sum, FHHs face challenges while carrying out different activities. Lack of male income earner, child raising, limited job opportunities and feeble social supports were major constraints that FHHs are facing.

9.2.4 Status of Female-Headed Households among the Community

As discussed in Chapter 5, many factors contributed to the formation of FHHs in the study area. Divorce, widowed, desertion and never married are among the factors that led to the formation of FHHs. For instance, families disintegrate due to impoverishment, diseases (like malaria, HIV/AIDS, water borne diseases), conflict over household resources, migration, adultery, sexual incompatibility, extravagancy, bareness, old age, the supremacy of the male are immediate factors for the disintegration of families, and finally led singleness through compulsion or will. Even though it is rarely found, there are cases where women do not get married totally
because of their involvement in “despised” occupation such as tannery, pottery, etc. The community undermines those individuals who are labeled as slaves and evil eyed, and others who have health problems like leprosy, elephantiasis. Therefore, the aforementioned factors which generally termed as economic, social, health, culture and political processes are considered to be the prime factors for the rise of FHHs in the study community. Quantitative findings show that from the total of 150 FHHs about 48.7 percent and 43.3 percent of the total respondents are widowed and divorced, respectively. Desertion accounted for 11 percent from the total respondents. The remaining 0.7 percent, which is so negligible were never married.

In this patriarchal community, loosing ones father or male spouse has showed psychosocial and economic impacts on members of families headed by female. Since male spouses are considered as bread winners and guardians of families, their death or absence immediately brings about household economic crises. This creates conditions that enforce women to work industriously more than before to feed family members. Besides, beyond the economic barriers created due to the death of male spouses, women who are heads of households suffer from male-favored social relationships.

The long term effects of women's exclusion from general social systems have been observed in detaining their contribution, knowledge, skill and experience in public places. Hence, the coming out of women in public places is a recent phenomenon which was previously considered as taboo. But, if we analyze males’ position in the society, they are bestowed all the privileges available, including decision-making powers. In all social, economic and political matters of the community, males who are heads of households are considered to be eligible and capable since they are believed to have the necessary experiences, knowledge and skill. On the contrary, women, particularly heads of households, are excluded in
matters for some reasons. In most cultural settings, as Sachs (1996) explained, rural women are evaluated from their connections to the environment, from their work in subsistence, reproductive and productive realms and from the patriarchal nature of rural families. This, in turn, negatively affected their social and economic status.

Currently, due to the campaign on rights of women at all levels, the awareness of the community in general and people in power in particular about women’s rights have been improving. Both governmental and non-governmental organizations are participating in the campaign process. The changes brought in the community are now easily observed through the participation of women in public conferences and meetings like their male counterparts. Especially, women who are heads of households are highly participating in conferences and meetings at Kebele, Woreda, Zonal and Regional levels. This is a new change that needs to appreciate. The participation of women in public places has helped them to demand their rights of access to and control over agricultural resources such as land, labor, capital etc.

9.3 Remarks and Suggestions

The previous sections highlight the findings of the present research and it is stated that FHHs are increasingly vulnerable to chronic food insecurity, as their livelihood resources and strategies have been destabilized by the internal and external factors. In this section the researcher suggests some ideas for consideration in planning for poverty reduction, enhancing FHHs resilience and restricting the frequency of formation of FHHs.

9.3.1 Mitigate Female-Headed Households’ Vulnerability to Poverty

The researcher proposes three ways to lessen FHHs vulnerability to chronic food insecurity.
First, the findings indicate that FHHs vulnerability to poverty is emanated from not only from shortages of resources but also loss of one’s social status leads FHHs to become more vulnerable. It is argued that low social status or gender inequality by itself is a discriminatory actions and a source of losing rights to access to and control over productive agricultural resources. Thus, to eliminate discrimination against women in general and gradually ensure the protection of FHHs rights in particular, joint involvement of all development stakeholders and government body is absolutely needed.

Second, some people do not consider women in general and FHHs in particular who are residing in the rural areas as farmers due to not ploughing farmlands. Cultural as well as traditional barriers exposed FHHs to vulnerability of various problems like food insecurity since they cannot till their farmlands because of cultural influence. Furthermore, the existing tradition does not encourage FHHs to use hired labor. The prominence of FHHs as decision-makers in their households is largely due to the absence of male adults in the households and the economic ‘independence’ that they gain from earning their own income. However, many of these women are subjugated to male authority within the excuse of traditional rites. Thus, there is a need to make free FHHs from such cultural and traditional barriers in order to make self-sufficient. This is done through the coordination of the community and the government sectors. Especially, Women, Youth, and Children Office at various levels should be a role model for others in execution of women’s rights. Local self-reliance, autonomy in the decision-making processes, provision of space for cultural assertion and spiritual welfare and social learning may tackle traditional and cultural barriers.
Third, FHHs are resource poor people in the study area. They lack basic livelihood assets such as farmland, labor, capital, and agricultural inputs. They did not obtain credits, better seeds, fertilizer, extension services, and technologies due to less bargaining power, low social status, discrimination, as well other personal problems. Thus, fair treatment of FHHs during redistribution of resources will be a solution for the reduction of FHHs vulnerability to poverty.

9.3.2 Support Female-Headed Households’ Efforts

FHHs insist support from the community, government, and non-government organizations so as to secure their sustainability. The researcher could not find any special document that enables to keep the interests of FHHs in neither governmental nor non-governmental side. Government did not treat women or FHH’s interests independently in the existing policies, strategies, programs although it boasted to be on the side of the poor people. So there is a need to see the problems of FHHs separately through the following actions.

a) Widen job opportunities through income generating activities
b) Strengthen social security systems
c) Increase political participation at each level
d) Organize them to keep their rights

9.3.3 Reduce Triggering Factors for the Formation of Female-Headed Households

The frequency of the FHHs in the study area is increased from time to time. As mentioned before, a number of explanations are presented for the ubiquity of FHHs in the study area. Thus, equivalent measures should be taken in order to address the high frequency of FHHs through implementation of at least the following three actions.
First, the existing tradition and religion of the community particularly the study people do not allow individuals to marry more than once. This prevents divorce rate. However, there is a certain condition that becomes beyond the capacity of individuals to disintegrate their families like death of spouses, which left female single.

Second, people of the Amhara region as well as Libo Kemkem Woreda have family law that governs the family members. However, the feasibility of the law is full of doubt due to the predominance of patriarchal patterns of authority over women within and between households continues to be reproduced through cultural norms and legal traditions in the rural areas. Lack of full implementation of the law and over shadowed by legal traditions provide more confidence to men to exercise authority over women. Moreover, men take much share during divorce through misuse of the family law. This triggers the formation of divorced women in the area. Thus, there is a need to implement the law seriously.

Third, impoverishment of households has become triggering factor for the creation of divorced women in the study area. Internal (depletion of household assets) and external (barren farmland, land and environmental degradation, climate change, globalization) led most households to be chronically food insecure. Therefore, sustainable build of assets through adoption of poverty reduction strategies should be implemented. For this, government has to take the lion’s share of work in parallel with the involvement of the people. Since the rural people lack education, advocacy and awareness break people’s doubt and bring confidence. Moreover, establishment of Social Security Systems like Safety Net Program in sustainable manner make the people free from victims of impoverishment.