

Handicraft Industry and Women Empowerment: Case from Kechene Pottery Handicraft Workers

*Zemenu Temesgen Ayalew¹, Yayew Genet Chekol²

¹Lecturer, Department of Social Antropology, Faculty of Social Sciences, Bahir Dar University, Ethiopia

²Assistant Professor, Department of Poltical Science ,and International Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Bahir Dar University, Ethiopia

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to analyze the role of handicraft industry for women empowerment in the case of Addis Ababa Kechene pottery handicraft producers. The study primarily seeks to investigate the practices of n pottery handicraft production and its roles for the empowerment of women. Moreover, the study aims to examine perceptions of the community towards pottery handicraft producers and status of women on the sector. For this study qualitative research approach and thematic analysis technique were employed. Different data collection techniques such as in-depth semi-structure interview, focus group discussions (FGD), observation, telephone interview, and informal conversation were used to collect ethnographic data. Accordingly, the findings of the study reveal that handicraft industry has positive impacts for the social, economic, and political empowerment of women. By its very nature the handicraft industry mainly the pottery handicraft were dominated by women and this in turn enable women empower socio-economically. Besides, the study found that women on the handicraft sector were highly discriminated and gives different names that show the inferiority of the sector and individuals on the sector. They considered as the so called Buda by the local community. In general, the study reveals women's participation on handicraft industry has empowering impacts on women on the sector.

Keywords: Pottery, Handicraft, Gender, Empowerment, Kechene

1. Introduction

The economic performance of the cultural and creative sectors is important for Europe: in the EU they account for 3.3% of GDP and employ 6.7 million people (3 % of total employment). The Handicraft industry occupies a pivotal role in the country's economy as it contributes for employment export earnings and generation. Traditionally handicrafts were considered a cottage industry in different parts of the world (UNESCO, 2009). As many countries in the world the cultural industry (handicraft), pottery has a long history of development in Ethiopia. It was in the 1930s that the economic significance of handicraft and its role in the social value first drew the attention of Ethiopian government and an institutional action in the sector began. With the aim of training young Ethiopians in handicraft works, the Ministry of Education opened the first handicraft school was called Haile Sellassie I Handicraft School in *Kolfe* area in Addis Ababa, in 1941. In the following year, Empress Mennen opened another vocational school with the aim of training students in handicrafts products for market purpose (Sida, 2003).

In Ethiopia handicraft sector there is a problem of creating favorable conditions for developing cultural industries i.e. creating institutional framework, and strengthening cultural handicraft industries through creating networks and clusters, access to finance, infrastructure, and capacity building. Although handicraft sector and crafts people were exist unrecognized and marginalized in the society, in recent years there have been many initiatives to develop activities to enhance the economic and socio-cultural roles for instance, the modification of culture policy in 2008 E.C., establishment of handicraft clusters in Addis Ababa Gambella and Amhara regional states and the development of curriculum for vocational education for handicraft courses are part of the initiatives. In line with this, the handicraft industries are showing some form of advancement in Ethiopia in recent years and it contributes more to the society as a whole and specifically for women.

Obviously any society has its own economic and socio-cultural practices that reflect its people way of life. Like and

*Corresponding author

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other Ethiopia people, Kechene communities have their own economic activity such as pottery handicraft. Thus, Handicraft could be taken as the main economic activity in Kechene community.

One commonly reported feature of women lives in many cultures is participation in handicraft activities. Handicraft serves as an outlet for women creativity. In Ethiopia, women participation in handicraft plays a major role in there and their family's economic and material wellbeing. In many activities the gender relation between men and women is not based on equality. Women participation in different activities is hindered by different economic and socio-cultural factors (Guday, 2005, Zemenu, 2021). So that, empowering women has become a significant factor in freeing women who are trapped in the cycle of poverty and hunger. Providing women with access to economic and educational opportunities have become the targeted goals of any successful strategy for poverty eradication. In contrast to other economic sectors, handicraft in pottery is dominated by women although gender based division of labor is visible. Since the sector is predominantly covered by women developing the sector productivity helps to empower women and prove gender equality.

Many researchers have conducted their research study in relation to the economy of handicraft, handicraft and women, such as Pankhurst (1993); in his research "History of Ethiopian handicrafts and handicraft workers" explored the general historical development of handicraft in Ethiopia. Sergework (2009) in her contribution "Social Discrimination and Its Psycho-Social Consequences on Craft-workers: the case of Addis Ababa" explored the opportunities in the handicraft business, marginalization and discrimination associated with craft women, Bula (2009) in his research "socio-economic status of handicraft women among Oromo of west Wallega" explored the socio-economic status of the women in the handicraft industry, and Karsten (1972) in her study "The economics of handicrafts in traditional societies of Sidama and Gamu Goffa," studied the economic value of handicraft among the community. As the researcher tries to review of different researches almost all research studies focus on the general handicraft industry. They did not recognize the existence of many subfields with the handicraft industry. Those studies show that there is gap of studying the pottery handicraft sector as a field of study instead of focusing on the whole handicraft industry and in most cases covering of the whole handicraft industry by pottery. As matters of fact there are many subfields in handicraft industry. However, this study focuses on the pottery handicraft industry. So it is important to study specifically the role of pottery handicraft for gender equality and women empowerment. This research focuses on the role of pottery handicraft on gender equality and women empowerment conducted in Addis Ababa, Gulele sub-city, Kechene. We assess related topics, such as the economy of pottery handicraft making, the cause for women predominance in the pottery handicraft industry. We also explore the socio-economic status of crafts women, and conclude by identifying the major challenges facing crafts women today.

The article is intending to address the following specific objectives likewise, investigating the role pottery handicraft for gender equality and empowerment of women; assessing the contribution of pottery handicraft on decision making power of women in family, society, income, sexuality and fertility preference; and to identify the factors affecting women's empowerment in the handicraft industry.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Handicraft and Women Empowerment

The Millennium Declaration identified Gender Equality and Women Empowerment (GEWE) as one of eight Millennium Development Goals and stated that it was an effective means to combat poverty, hunger and disease, as well as to stimulate development that is truly sustainable. The MDG Summit 2010 called for further action to ensure gender equality in education, health, economic opportunities and decision-making through gender mainstreaming in development policymaking. An important route to achieving gender equality is by empowering of women through education, employment and political representation, as well as by ensuring women access to reproductive health services. Another fundamental step towards the realization of gender equality is supporting economic sectors predominated by women (Rios-Kohn, 2013). The African economy is characterized by the presence of a large segment of people engaged in the informal economy. The informal economy is an important source of employment and income for women in Africa and elsewhere (Yeshiareg, 2019).

ILO has proved that women tend to be at a disadvantage compared to men in getting involved in economic activities, especially those that require long periods of time outside the home, because women tend to spend more time at home and have fewer contacts with others within the community, village or town than men. Therefore, Anna (2010) argues that empowering women through crafts matters, since craftwork tends to be compatible with their domestic roles because of the flexible hours and because of the fact that the work can be done within or near the home. In addition to that, she states that craft is an important sector in women livelihood since it is the only viable option for employment and income generation for many poor women with low levels of skills and education. Participation in the craft sector has become a survival strategy for many poor women of Africa, Asia and Latin America (Anna, 2010 in Liberata, 2012), that is why in various developing countries, a focus on the development of a craft industry has been part of all of their empowerment strategies as it relates to the improvement of women's opportunities to contribute cash to

household incomes. This process not only results in additional information being available for the identification of economic opportunities, but also boosts women self-confidence and enables them to better manage their enterprises (ibid.). Over the last decade, researchers and practitioners from different fields have contributed to deepening the understanding of empowerment. Empowerment is about gaining power and liberty, it is the capacity to act, the strength and potency to accomplish a common community and citizenship duty. It is the vital energy to make choice and decisions to overcome deeply embedded practices (Costantinos, 2005:1 cited in Tsegalem, 2011:34).

This understanding of women empowerment gives a direct link between empowerment and equality of opportunities. The process of self-empowerment improves women ability to manage their lives, i.e. it improves their access to education, access to formal sector employment, access to entrepreneurship, access to finance, control over fertility. This improved ability to manage their own lives entails an expansion of women opportunities in the direction of equal opportunities in comparison with men. As such, empowerment is a process of change that can only be driven by women themselves. On the other hand, although empowerment cannot be given to somebody by someone else, the process of empowerment can be facilitated by others through programs like education, capacity building, political mobilization, changes in systems of property rights and the social and legal institutions that marginalize women (Getanh, 2011).

2.2 The Socio-Economic Status of Pottery Handicraft Women in Ethiopia

The status of women in Ethiopia is a complex matter involving the interrelated factors making up the whole of women lives. The status of women is often described in terms of the specific sector they work in, level of women income, employment, education, health, fertility and the roles played within the family and community compared with those of men. It also involves how these roles are perceived or valued by the society. Furthermore, women status indicates power, autonomy, prestige and ideological dimension (Amsalu, 1996 in Sergework, 2009). Among Ethiopian societies, handicraft workers have been considered as occupational minorities where they are highly vulnerable discrimination. The discrimination is manifested in different ways i.e. restrictions of social interaction and consumption of food and drink with others, with others, avoidance of inter group marriage, and beliefs about craft workers supernatural power. The women in pottery handicraft sector faces double marginalization as a women and potter.

The extent of discrimination of potter women is so extreme that, women potter handicraft workers are not allowed to be member of different local institutions like "*Edir*", "*mahiber*" (religion based association), "*Ekub*" etc. Generally in Ethiopia specifically in *Kechene* community, craft workers are perceived by the majority as possessors of special supernatural powers which are considered as dangerous, potential sources of illness and even death. They are thought of as possessing "evil eye" and they are stereotyped as "*buda*" (Sergework, 2009).

A craft person, in order to improve their way of life has been migrated from different rural parts of the country in to urban centers. As it is cited on the journal of Africa, most of the craftsmen in the North Shewa had migrated to Addis Ababa, and these are so many "*Ballejji*" or craft workers around "*ketchene*" (Journal of Africa, 1998, in sergework, 2009).

Though craft workers play important roles in the society they faced unacknowledged or even unconscious prejudice and discrimination by the urban majority which consequently harm the social, economic, and psychological pattern of their life.

3. Material and Method

This research relies on qualitative methodology via data collection techniques of interview, Focus Group Discussion (FGD), Observation. Secondary sources were reviewed to get information on the nature of handicraft and the lived experiences of women pottery handicraft workers. Sufficient amount of literature from books, thesis, articles, and journals were reviewed to construct the conceptual and theoretical approaches and to triangulate the field data. In addition to this, based on permits of Woreda administrator documents about the general situation of the study area (social, economic, and political) situation were reviewed.

4. Finding and Discussions

4.1 Contribution of Pottery Handicraft for socio-economic Empowerment of Women

This study proved that pottery craft business had contributed to the economic, social and political empowerment of women and gender equality. As the informants revealed that, the first benefit got by pottery craft women is increment of income and change of their decision making power on their life. In relation to the income gained by women before and after doing craft business has shown that all 4 informants and focus group discussants expressed that they have an income which was less than 500 birr per month before doing craft business, while after doing craft business all of the informants and FGD discussants (100%) had an income greater than 1000 birr per month..

Research informants expressed that, access to increased income helps craftswomen to acquire a wide range of property like house, car, capital to start small businesses, school fees at private schools for children and university level

for their children, mobile phones, access to saving and credit services, improved welfare (better nutrition, clothing and medical care) etc. Moreover, one of our informants reported that women are able to contribute to the acquisition of modern houses for their families and taxi which have created employment opportunities for their husbands, and children.

As expressed by FGD discussants, before gaining income from craft business, men were used to make all decisions concerning food, clothing, child education and any other concerning the use of family income which is not the case today. Their views on how, when, where to allocate family income are taken into account, they are no longer relying on their husbands or other family members for everything, they had become economically independent.

As seen in the theoretical part of the literature, Marxist feminist theory and empowerment theory, women's access to economic resources helps to improve gender equality and helps to improve women's decision making power. Research participants proved that after women starts work in the association and their economy become increase their decision making power on all family issues increased at the same time.

In this regard we have argued that income and decision making power have positive relationship. When someone becomes economically developed his/her decision power is become to develop. Because the economic resources they owned have a direct and indirect impact on the family and if they limit from the decision making power of their own issue by her wife he is facing a problem of accessing the resources of his wife. So to properly exploit the resources of his wife he obliged to her what his wife have said. In line with this we have argued that since the pottery handicraft industry if predominantly dominated by women it is the best way to empower women economically and prove gender equality.

4.2 The Socio-Economic Status of Women Handicraft workers in Kechene

In different societies different values and meanings are given for pottery handicraft producers and production activities. In most societies of the country Pottery handicraft workers/potters were discriminated through different derogatory terms such as "buda", "shemane", "kutet betash", and economically poor. Similarly in the case of my study area community/ Kechne pottery handicraft workers the community perceptions towards potters are unworthy.

In relation to their socio-economic status research informants expressed that, in recent years the business environment is encouraging to them. There is a change in the society's perception to handicraft products in recent years. Pottery handicraft traders come frequently from different parts of the country. During FGD, focus group discussants argued that their relationship within the members and non-member potters in their area is also changed in recent years. The informants also expressed that in recent years they have started participate in community associations with non-potters, such as traditional burial association (*Edirs*), traditional saving associations (*Equb*), and *Mahibers* and the local community perception against them is changed.

During focus group discussion, discussants argued that it is not mean that there is no any stigmatization and discourage from other non-artesian sides, but the main thing is there is change in the perception of the society year to year. One of the key informants and the leader of the association expression show this:

I have learned the knowledge of pottery handicraft from her neighbor and within a short period of time I have started to work different pottery products. But I have faced a serious discrimination and discourage from my family. They tried everything to stop me working handicraft, but they did not able to do that. Surprisingly my sister and aunt follow my footsteps and started working pottery handicraft, because she have impressed by the change in my life. The discrimination and discouraging of my family did not go for long time. They need to get my assistance and this obliged them to stop their dissemination. She said that money is your friend, if you have money every one is your friend.

In relation to this research informant revealed that in past not only the local community different government higher officials also discriminate potters. Surprisingly when they come to their own mission they come by wearing of eye glass to protect "evil eye" "buda". But in the past 5 years most things become changed for example you are coming without eye glass it is a great attitudinal change.

During FGD, focus group discussants expressed that, "Nowadays, the stigmatization and the discouraging conditions are no more an issue." One of the research informants reaffirmed that the attitude of people is changing and this creates a favorable working environment for potters.

"The old discriminatory and discouraging traditional practices are becoming a history. She expressed that now days, many people ask me for training on pottery." The potters are appreciating their profession by comparing it with the presence of many people who are looking for employment. They are producing continuously and the market for the sector shows advancement through time. One of the potters explained her production activities "There are times that I wish temporarily if there were no orders; ... [to] take some rest. ... but when you see others looking for jobs ... you will praise God since there is plenty of work that you can gain a living" as a potter.

In relation to societal perception of handicraft workers one of the informant proved that in the past non-artesian communities highly discriminate and discourage. The societies discrimination emanates from the "evil eye"

stigma associated with the potters. But in recent years the discriminatory and stereotyping practices of handicraft workers are on verge of stopping. And handicraft workers started to joined different socio-economic associations of the local communities. For instance there are artisans within the *Equib* and *Eder* I have a member in.

4.3 Gender Division of Labor in Handicraft Industry

There are many female handicraft workers in Kechene who works as a potter for fulfillment of their needs. According to my findings, most of FGD discussants believe that they are inferior toward their male colleagues in terms of physical strength. However, they have thought that they have able to work all activities that are expected as masculine. The existence of difference in physical strength between men and women does not mean that one work is exclusively done by men. It may be an impact on the quality of the product and time of accomplishment of a specific activity.

One of research informants stressed that, it doesn't matter whether you are male or female as long as the person is dedicated to his/her job but nevertheless in the pottery handicraft industry there are some tasks which is expected as done by males, which are tasks that require strength and potential. For instance, mixing of raw materials/ማቡካት, collecting mud from the distant area through donkey backs, pulverizing the pottery and this task is (mostly) not exclusively done by males because it requires a physical strength. They argued that it is not to mean women not working this task. During FGD group discussants argued that, in their association those tasks expected as masculine was done by females. During field work we have also observed the reality that those activities expected as male tasks were done by females.

In the past the public sphere is usually dominated by males while the domestic sphere is dominated by females, but now this kind of perception is on the way of changing, as females nowadays are going out of private realm. During field work we have proved that how these females are working hard in the public spheres, and how they are dedicated for their job. Thus it can be concluded that, concept of culture and nature didn't have a reality on the context pottery handicraft.

4.4 Challenges of Women Handicraft Workers in Kechene

Though the study established that craft business was crucial in promoting the social, economic and political wellbeing of women and their families, some challenges have been identified both at the side of women producers and organization. This section will present the challenges faced by women handicraft workers. In this regard the challenges mentioned by research participants:

4.4.1 Lack of Market opportunity

The handicraft industries are faced with a rapidly changing environment characterized in particular by new technologies (digital shift) and globalization, which bring with them new challenges and opportunities. In this changing context, access to finance remains a major difficulty: the banking sector does not have the necessary expertise to analyses business models in these sectors and does not adequately value their intangible assets. The financial and economic crisis only makes this situation more critical at the very time when investments are needed to adapt. During interview with informants, informants said that they have a problem of making seasonal and trendiness handicrafts products, as well as the socio-environmental requirements of the markets.

In our experience we have proved that in the handicraft sector of Ethiopia there is a problem of making handicraft products market oriented and seasonal. The problem emanates from the producers lack of training on "what" and "when" the market wants some product.

4.4.2 Middle Persons in the marketing process

During interview informants expressed that there are a lot of middlemen in the marketing chain whose activities affect the profitability of producers. During focus group discussion (FGD) all group discussants mentioned that middle person in the market is a serious problem and it limits pottery workers to get the fruits of their work. The existence of middle person is becoming of a serious problem of the almost the whole production sectors. There is no direct contact between buyer and seller.

4.4.3 Low Capacity Building Programmes

One of the major problems that pottery handicraft workers in the research area faced was lack of capacity building trainings. During FGD focus group discussants mentioned since capacity enhancement is critical to produce more quality products and get market opportunities it has a direct impact on their income. In this regard one of our in-depth interviewee proved that starting from the formation of the business we did not have seen any training from the governments or any NGOs. Because of lack of training we have obliged to put the technology/pottery finishing material we get from support of NGO for two years without work. This lack of technology transfer is severe problem of the

industry in general and our association in specific. This lack of transfer of technology limits our productivity and quality of production of the association.

5. Conclusion

This research study is conducted to fill the gap of research studies conducted by different researchers focus on the general handicraft industry and to view the positive relation of the women's predominance of the pottery handicraft industry and gender equality and women's economic, political, and social empowerment. The research was conducted at Addis Ababa, *Gulele* sub-city, *Kechene* in pottery handicraft industry, and the research in particular focus on women pottery handicraft workers and the purpose of the study was to explore the role of pottery handicraft industry for gender equality and women's empowerment. The research employed qualitative research methodology. First hand empirical data was collected through different anthropological data collection techniques such as semi-structure interview, observation, and focus group discussion (FGD). Samples of the research selected through non-probability sampling techniques of purposive and snow-ball sampling techniques.

The pottery handicraft industry in *Kechene* was predominantly dominated by women. As we have seen in the findings of the research women's predominance of the handicraft industry helps them to improve their decision making power. It enables women own economic resources, In addition to this the research proved that owning economic resources and decision making power have a direct positive relationship. So it possible to say that supporting sectors predominated by women would be the main vehicle for improving gender equality and women's economic empowerment. Generally it is possible to conclude that pottery handicraft industry make a significant contribution for the socio-economic empowerment of women and to narrow the gap gender equality. Supporting of women working in the industry is taken as a main vehicle for empowering of women and proving gender equality.

In relation to the socio-economic status of potters the findings of the research proved that, traditional discriminatory and discouraging practices associated with handicraft industry are becoming to change. Most discriminatory and discouraging actions associated with potters had becoming of a history. Handicraft workers become members of different socio-economic institutions of the local community. In the past becoming of a member of this institution was unthinkable.

6. Recommendations

6.1 Developing policies and advocacy, activities of professional networks and associations of handicraft

Based on the empirical findings of the study, it is argued that the handicraft sector and women on the handicraft sector has much to do with the fact that the issue is still poorly understood and given inadequate attention within the public policy domains. At the very beginning, finding solution to women on the handicraft sector requires recognizing the problem and there is a political will to address the problem. Therefore, informed deliberate policy actions are important for effective empowerment of women on the sector and prevention of risks and maximize the benefits.

6.2 Strengthening organization potential of handicraft workers, in particular, through special lifelong education and training

Most of the pottery handicraft workers produce their products through knowledge gained form their parents. As a result they did not know how to produce well commercialized products, problem on creating market networks and so on. In this regard providing long and short term trainings for potters are expected from the government.

6.3 Establishing clusters and hubs for handicraft workers

The study findings revels that on the study area there is no well-organized handicraft clusters, mainly for potters. The development of clusters helps to develop chains between row material suppliers, producers, and markets. On the other hand, the absence of established clusters affected the integration between suppliers, producers. Therefore, the government must to establish clusters for pottery handicraft workers.

6.4 Internationalization (i. e. focus on global markets)

The study found that the main challenge of handicraft producers in the study area were lack of access to market opportunity. This mainly emanates from the lack of marketability quality of handicraft products. Besides, the global handicraft market needs more standardized and commercialized products. In this context, helping handicraft producers to produce more standardized products plays significant role for the empowerment of women.

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