

*Research Article*

# The Impediments to Women's Access to Land in Bodji Dirmeji Woreda of Western Wollega

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## ABSTRACT

Land has an important place in the life of people. It is a significant indicator of wealth, power, political and social security in Ethiopia in general and Oromo society in particular. Men and women differently command over land. Access to land is crucial for combating discrimination. Women who are denied such access tend to be disadvantaged, a pattern that results in economic powerlessness. This study aims at investigating impediments to women's access to land in the Boji Dirmeji district of Oromia region. It looks at sociocultural and structural, legal, administrative and institutional impediments that women face in accessing and owning land, along with identifying the knowledge gaps among women.

The study provides qualitative and quantitative insights into conditions that impede women's land rights in Bodji Dirmeji Woreda. The study was conducted in four kebeles of Amuma Hagalo, Burka Bodji, Daro Sombo, and Idebu Tobe. It uses a cross sectional research design. It employed household survey, in depth interviews, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), case study and observation as methods of data collection. About 139 households were participated in the survey. In addition, four FGDs and 16 in depth interviews were conducted.

The study found that, less than 50 percent of women have ownership of land. The most common sources of land ownership for women in all the kebeles were land inheritance and land redistribution. The study identified patriarchy and socio cultural factors as impeding women's land access and ownership in all the study kebeles. The findings indicate that the majority of women within kebeles are non-literate; unaware of any existing entitlements and lack of sufficient assets to fight for their rights, and that their involvement in land administration institutions is limited.

**Keywords:** Access to land, Women, Impediments, Land acquisition, Land inheritance, Patriarchy

## INTRODUCTION

### Background of the study

Land is an economic resource and an important factor in the formation of individual and collective identity, and in the day to day organization of social, cultural, political and religious life. It is also an enormous political resource that defines power relations between individuals, families and communities in established systems of governance [1]. According to Lastarria-

Cornhiel and Fraiss, land represents an important cultural resource, a productive factor and capital asset, and those who control rights to land have a certain amount of power over those who do not, especially in rural agrarian economies.

The Oromo consider land as "Dachee Haadha Margo", meaning, "mother earth". Accordingly, land is symbolized with mother. They articulate the value of land in their language by saying 'Baattoo', loosely translated into English to mean 'carrier'. They used to employ this term to show the holistic values of Mother Earth in their entire lives. The Oromo use this term in their daily speeches and on different rituals, oaths, and curses [2].

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However, land is differently owned and used across social groups. Men and women access land differently in many developing countries. Women, who comprise over half of the world's population, rarely own any reasonable forms of property; do not have adequate access to the same, and do not even make major decisions pertaining to allocation and use of such property. A report on world economic forum exposes women own less than 20% of the world's land. A survey of 34 developing nations by the United Nations food and agriculture organization puts that percentage as low as 10. This is staggering if you consider that half of the world's population is women. More than 400 million of them farm and produce the majority of the world's food supply. Yet female farmers lack equal rights to own land in more than 90 countries. Women are the backbone of the development of rural and national economies as they represent 43% of the global agricultural labor force and in Africa, 80% of the agricultural production comes from small farmers, who are mostly rural women but they do not have access and control over all land and productive resources.

Access to and control over resources and benefits is determined by socio cultural norms which have significant impacts on gender relations. Social relations of production and consumption (access to and control over means and benefits of production) constrain women in many communities [3]. These inequalities of opportunities in access to and control over resources have made women more vulnerable to poverty than men in many parts of the world. Women's access to land, in particular, is widely recognized as important both for ensuring equality of basic rights and for reducing poverty and ensuring household food security. While women's land rights have become better protected by national laws, discrimination against women stems from both the state (e.g. *via* administrative processes) and customary systems. Africa is a continent where most of its rural communities still use land based on traditional/customary land tenure schemes instead of modern land tenure systems established by state institutions. This appears to be a common practice especially in rural parts of sub-Saharan Africa. There are seemingly three reasons for the close relationship between Africans and the land. First, land is the main source of livelihood; second, it is a source of power and social status; and third, it is an indicator of identity of the people occupying it.

In most African countries women's de facto access to, and control of land is restricted by lack of implementation of existing laws, by customary law, traditional and social practices, norms and power structures within communities and households, and by lack of legal security systems to protect women against land grabbing. He also explains women's right to land and property is central to women's economic empowerment, as land is a base for food production and income generation, as collateral for credit and as a means of holding savings for the future.

Among farming communities where the basic property is land, women's access to it is determined by patriarchy embedded in cultural tradition. Study carried out in Kenya reveals women only own land to the extent that they perceive or believe this be the case especially within marriage or other cohabitation relationships. It only dawns to them that they neither own nor control property when such relationships go sour. Similarly, in Ethiopia men dominate ownership and decision making over land. Mamo and Shigeta disclose that Arsi Oromo men in Ethiopia traditionally dominate decision making regarding major resources such as land and livestock, whereas the role of women

has been limited primarily to domestic affairs.

In rural area including Ethiopia, land is the major indicator of social and economic wellbeing. In such societies, the landless and those with insecure tenure rights typically constitute the poorest and most marginalized and vulnerable groups. The rights of these groups tend to be secondary, rarely extending beyond use rights; moreover, these rights are often unprotected and weak, especially for women. Women's rights are often secondary, derivative and temporary, obtained through marriage, children, or other relationships with men and thus precarious when the male link is severed [4].

In rural Ethiopia, land appears to be one of the causes for social inequality and conflict among most households despite the fact that it was redistributed "equally" after the 1974 revolution. In addition, Tesfaye notes that the availability and quality of rural land to users has decreased greatly because of population growth and environmental deterioration. These and other factors seem to exert adverse impacts on the land rights of women in rural Ethiopia.

According to Zenabaworke, many women of rural Ethiopia have had almost no land rights in practical terms due to discriminatory cultural values and belief systems. As the Ethiopian rural society is patriarchal in their family structure, men have been controllers of almost every facet of rural life in the country social, economic, and political. They also have used and administered nearly all the natural resources (including land) that support the livelihood of the community they are part of. In this regard, the social and economic status of women living in different areas of rural Ethiopia appears to be critical when one looks into aspects of gender equality and land entitlements. Hence, this study tries to disclose the major impediments of women's access and ownership of land in Bodji Dirmeji district of Western Wollega. It investigates those obstacles which prevent women from effectively enjoying these rights.

### **Setting the scene**

Land and its sustainable use are of great local, national and global concerns. Dependence on land as the major source of survival becomes increasingly crucial to those parts of the globe occupying the bottom position in the hierarchy of global socio-economic development. Ethiopia being at the bottom of the scale of economic development, even by African standards, depends on land virtually for all of its needs. Besides, its economic significances, land entail vital socio cultural meanings and values. Land is the symbol of social identity including ethnic and religious values. Hence, scholarly investigation of the place of land in society is paramount.

Women's land rights are now frequently appearing in the debates on property rights. The world governments commitments to ensure gender equality and specifically to end discrimination across the spectrum of land access is realized in 2030 United Nation sustainable development goal number 5. In the report, FAO underscores women's equal access to and control over economic resources, including land and natural resources. Land is considered as the critical source for achievement of gender equality and empowerment of women and for equitable and sustainable economic growth and development. Greater gender equality in the distribution of economic resources contributes to economic efficiency and has positive multiplier effects for the achievement of a range of key development outcomes, including poverty reduction, food security and the welfare of households,

communities and countries.

Ethiopia has entered commitments through ratifying various women's rights conventions and has issued national policies supporting women's access rights to land in many countries. In spite of these commitments, problems exist in ensuring women's equal landholding rights with that of men in many countries, mainly due to deep rooted patriarchal gender power relations in societies. Women's land access and ownership has become more critical in developing countries like in Africa as land is a major resource for survival to the majority of the people.

This research is aimed to study women's access to and control over land in Bodji Dirmeji Woreda of Oromia region. Women's access to and control over land is vital for rural livelihoods. However, there are considerable social, economic, political and institutional challenges faced in ensuring women's access to and control over rural land. The persistence of impediments to their access to land access and use rights was due to an overarching and deep rooted social restriction imposed on women.

### **Statement of the problem**

Women's equality in land access and use right is a global issue. Women's access to land is a critical factor in social status, economic well-being and empowerment. It is also a social asset, crucial for cultural identity, political power and participation in local decision making processes. Moreover, land is a basic source of livelihood as it provides employment, it is the key agricultural input and it is a major determinant of women farmers access to other productive resources and services.

Various international and regional conventions and treaties such as the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination (CEDAW) and its optional protocol in 2000, the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action (BDPA), the protocol to the African charter on human and people's rights in 2003, and the solemn declaration on gender equality in 2004 have provided for the protection, respect and promotion of women's property rights in Africa, including land rights [5].

United Nation food and agricultural organization reported that the rural land policy provides equal landholding rights to men and women. However, effectiveness of the rural land policy in addressing rural women's specific issues and challenging existing gender disparities in access to and control over land needs to be examined from a gender perspective. Gender inequalities in land rights are pervasive. Not only do women have less access to land than men. They are often also restricted to so called secondary land rights, meaning that they hold these rights through male family members. Women, thus, risk losing entitlements in case of divorce, widowhood or their husband's migration. Evidence also shows that women's land parcels are generally of smaller size and lower quality than men.

Studies carried out on women's land rights revealed that women's access to their husband's land entitle them to secondary rights. Land rights acquired through marriage expose women to crisis especially when marital conflicts lead to divorce or separation or upon death of husbands. Besides, women's marital statuses and their status under different family structures affect women's access to and control over land. Women in male headed households and FHHs (single, widowed and divorced women) access to land and the control power they have over land, particularly decision making on land use and control of income earned from farm products is affected by their status in their households.

Another study by Kameri-Mbote dictates that men control land and women gain access mostly through their relationship with male relative. The customary law limits women's rights on land and this law underpins patriarchal system of traditional authority to reinforce patriarchal values which disadvantage women and place them to subordinate position in society. And also, where customary structures predominate, rights to land are typically determined by social and familial relations within a cultural group (e.g., a clan or a tribe). A woman's rights to land are dependent on her relationship with a male, usually her husband or her father.

Patrilineal or 'lineage societies', have been portrayed as working against women's right to property. "Autochthonous land tenure systems of the mostly patrilineal societies in Africa largely exclude women from the possibility of acquiring comparatively permanent and secure rights of land use such as those held by men". In patrilineal societies, it has also been asserted, that women (together with migrants and young men) are holders of secondary-rights to land. Some authors even went further to assert that women in lineages societies constitute "a homogenous group of exploited working people" who lack rights over land [6].

Researches carried out on rural land policy implementation in Amhara region revealed that policies favoring women's equal landholding rights didn't bring required changes at community level. These statutory provisions indeed recognize women's land rights, nevertheless it is not specific enough and apparently may create dichotomy that may not exist in different societies with diverse customary setting.

The study of women's access to land is not a new topic among scholars focusing on women's property rights. Much has been documented on the topic of women's property rights worldwide. Few studies on women's access to land in Oromo has been conducted, particularly in the Bodji Dirmeji district almost no studies were conducted on women's access to land and their problem related to land. However, the previous studies were descriptive in nature and only focused on the existence of gender inequality in access to land. The influence of deeply rooted socio cultural factors was underemphasized. Moreover, these studies mentioned that rural land policy is not implemented and gender equality still prevalent in many rural areas of Ethiopia. However, no study investigated the factors contributing to its lack of implementation.

Therefore, the study intends to examine underlying socio cultural issues that hamper women's access to land and effective implementation of the rural land policy in Bodji Dirmeji district of Oromia region. It tries to expand the knowledge on the issues of women's access to land and discloses the major obstructions to these indispensable rights of women in the study area.

### **Objective of the study**

The overarching objective of this study is to portray impediments to women's access to land and ownership in one of the districts in Oromia region; Bodji Dirmeji district.

More specifically, the study aimed to:

- To explore sociocultural practices that act as a barrier for women to be able to exercise their rights over land.
- Divulge and comprehend the organizational and policy contexts in regard to women access to land.

## Research questions

The following are the research questions for the study.

- What are the major impediments of women's access to land and ownership in Bodji Dirmeji district?
- What are the sociocultural restrictions on women's access to land?
- How organization and policies affects women's access to land?

## Limitation of the study

There are a number of limitations of the study. Firstly, this study is limited to one selected district. Therefore, the study findings may not represent all the impediments that women face throughout the Oromo society as well as the impediment's women face in other districts; rather, findings could be more specific to the selected study sites. Second, due to the current border conflict, people in few kebeles (two) were evicted and did not participate in the study.

Women in the district may not disclose the ideal owner of land than they may have some kind of a document that shows who the owner is. And also, there may be challenging when engaging in informal or semi-formal conversations as well as when conducting FGDs, since women would rely on men to reply and engage in discussions [7].

## Scope of the study

The study considered women's access to land issues, which is global and the most sensitive issue. Women's access to land is a critical factor in social status, economic well-being and empowerment. It is also a social asset, crucial for cultural identity, political power and participation in local decision making processes. Moreover, land is a basic source of livelihood as it provides employment, it is the key agricultural input and it is a major determinant of women farmers access to other productive resources and services. The study dealt with these critical issues with one of the least explored areas in Oromo studies, that is, the impediments to women's access to land of Wollega Oromo with particular choice on Bodji Dirmeji Woreda.

## Significance of the study

This study can be a bit of contribution to show significance of women's equal access to and control over land to the socio-economic wellbeing of women as well as the rural livelihood in the region.

The research provides insights into conditions that hamper women's land rights in the Bodji Dirmeji district Western Wollega and also looks at sociocultural and structural, legal, administrative and institutional barriers that women face in accessing and owning land, along with identifying the knowledge gaps among women. It also used as an input for policy makers. It

could help as a source of knowledge in policy formulation and implementation processes. The study also contributes civil society organizations who are working on the area of gender, land, and rural development issues.

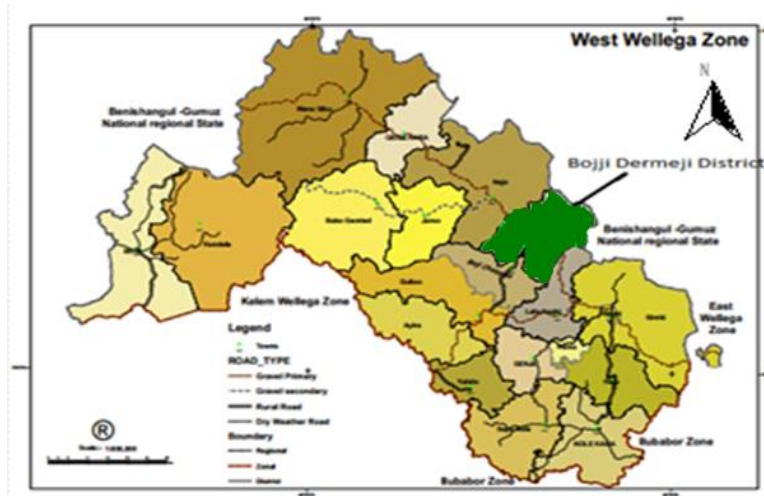
## Organization of the thesis

The thesis has five chapters. The first chapter introduces the overall pictures of the research. Accordingly, it encompasses objectives of the study, research question, statement of the problem, and limitation of the study, significance of the study and organization of the study while chapter two deals with literature review on the status of women's access to land and ownership, land tenure systems and land issues in Ethiopia and Oromia regional states are swotted in detail. Chapter three outlines research design and the methodology of the research, chapter four deals with the Result and discussion, the last chapter will present summary, conclusion and recommendation [8].

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Description of the study area

This chapter provides a description of the study area and the region in which it is located. It starts by providing the baseline information of the region based on the secondary information from many sources. The climatic and environmental conditions and economic activities and are therefore outlined here. Bodji Dermaji district is one of the 20 districts in West Wollega zone and located at about 50 kilometers west of Gimbi town, the administrative center of West Wollegga zone and at 475 kilometers from finfinnee, the capital of Oromia National Regional State, due west on the main asphalt road to Asosa. The district is bordered in the East by Lalo Asabi, North by Benishangul Gumuz Kemeshi zone, and West by Nedjo district and South by the Bodji Chokorsa district. The district has totally 19 kebeles of which 17 rural and 2 urban ones. It has a total land area of 656.6 sq. km with a density of 76 persons per km<sup>2</sup>. The district has a total population of 49,894 as per the secondary data collected from the district agriculture development office [9,10]. Agro ecologically, 80% of the district is categorized as mid highland, whereas the remaining 10 percent is lowland. Its altitude ranges from 900 to 2000 m.a.s.l. The district's maximum, average, and minimum temperatures are 24 °C, 20 °C and 18°C, respectively. It has an average of 7 months of rainfall lasting from April to November. The district has an average rainfall of 1900 mm, with actual distribution ranging from 1800 to 2000 mm. However, the rainfall regime shows high variability, especially in its distribution in all areas over the growing seasons. The district has increasingly experienced deforestation and land degradation (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Location and map of Bodji Dirmeji the district.  
**Source:** Adapted from GIS and other sources.

### Climatic conditions in Bodji Dermedji district

Bodji Dirmeji district experiences only two climatic seasons, thus the dry and wet seasons. The area receives between 150 mm-250 mm of rainfall per month in wet season. It is the time when farmers plough their lands and cultivate their crops. The dry season on the other is from of November to April. It mostly comes with hot and dusty air with very low relative humidity. Temperatures range in between 24°C in the day and 18°C in the night during such period. Rainfall during this time is very rare. As such, most rivers and small dams dry up in this period, the biggest dam in the district, thus the into dam also experience

reduction in its water volume, is idle there which is big resource

### Economic statuses and activities

Agriculture is the major livelihood activity inhabitants of Bodji Dermedji depend on. Almost all households in the area engaged in agriculture activities. Crop farming and livestock rearing are the two major agricultures activities households engaged. Majority of farms in the area are small size farms with less than two hectares (Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Cereal crops field in the study area.

Family labor is the most dominant type of labor use when it comes to agriculture activities. Dominated by subsistence farmers, most of the products from the farms are mostly use for household consumption. However, in situation where there is surplus, household sell it to take care of other pressing household needs. According to the district's administration, mixed agriculture, handcrafts, daily labor and petty trade are practiced by 94%, 3%, 2% and 1% of the district's total population respectively. Wage labor is also a significant source of daily income for poorest and landless households. The situations of the area's major sources of food/income are discussed in the following sections [11]. Owing to its significance to the area's

economy, agriculture is discussed with particularly great depth. According to the district's administration, mixed agriculture, handcrafts, and petty trade are practiced by 96%, 3%, and 1% of the district's total population. Wage labor is also a significant source of daily income for poorest and landless households. The situations of the area's major the main food grain crops grown in the area are teff, millet, sorghum, and maize, roughly in that order of significance (proportion of total household farm land committed to) and commonness. No significant variation was found in the composition and significance of crops grown along agro ecological lines. The area is also known by coffee production. West Wollega zone has traditionally been generally

understood as a coffee producing region. The major livestock commonly reared in the area are cattle, sheep, poultry, and sheep or goat [12].

### Research design

Anol state that the purpose of a research design is to provide a plan for answering the research question and “is a blueprint for action”. It is the overall plan that spells out the strategies that the researcher uses to develop accurate, objective and interpretative information.

This study uses cross-sectional research design. In cross sectional study designs, data collection occurs at one point in time. Often described as a ‘snapshot’ of a population in a certain point in time because exposure and outcome are determined simultaneously for each subject. The design often uses survey methods, and surveys are often equated with cross sectional studies. However, this kind of study can use other methods of data collection, such as observation, content analysis and official records.

Since the study of land access between women and men is in equally distributed, the design measures the differences and discloses the inferences based on the finding. The design is chosen because generalizability of the study will be good because they are representative of given populations when data is collected systematically, and some probability sampling technique could be employed and also the designs do offer benefits because it is quick and relatively inexpensive to conduct. The study employed mixed approach as a means to harness the strengths of both approaches, triangulate data and illuminate statistical findings with, for example, case studies and FGDs. Mixed method approaches to social inquiry involve the planned use of two or more different kinds of data gathering and analysis techniques, and more rarely different kinds of inquiry designs within the same study. Using methods that gather and represent human phenomena with numbers (such as standardized questionnaires and structured observation protocols), along with methods that gather and represent human phenomena with words (such as open ended interviews and unstructured observations), are classic instances of mixing data gathering and analysis techniques”. This is illustrated in the mix of a survey design with a cases in discussion and findings underneath.

The quantitative approach relies on field data collected using structured questionnaire that included questions on different issues on women’s access to and control over land. Basic information is collected on demographic and socio-economic situation of survey respondents. Vital information is collected on women’s access to land and on women’s control over land and other household resources including incomes from agricultural products and on household decision-making.

The qualitative approach relies on unstructured interview and FGDs. All interviews and focus group discussions was conducted using audio recorder and the researchers grasp as quickly as possible and put into paper. Then after, by removing the jargon data and translated the data to English. The study uses both primary and secondary sources. Primary data was collected directly from respondents using quantitative and qualitative methods. Secondary data was collected through review of relevant literatures on women’s access to and control over land in developing countries, Africa and Ethiopia. International policies on women’s land rights issues and land policies and legislatives

of the FDRE and Oromia region are thoroughly assessed. Research reports and publications on land and gender related issues are also considering getting clear understanding of women’s land rights issues. Background information on the researched Woreda was obtained from Woreda office records.

### Target population

The target population is “the entire aggregation of respondents that meet the designated set of criteria”. The target population or population of interest is the population that should be investigated. It is also the population to which the outcomes of the survey refer. The target population in this study constituted all Women households in Bodji Dirmaji district [13].

### Sampling techniques

A purposive and random sampling methods were used for selecting the kebeles to be included in the study. The study takes a random sampling from all 17 rural kebeles in the district. Accordingly, 4 kebeles were selected randomly from the 17 kebeles, that is, 24 percent of the total kebeles. There are 1294 households in the four kebeles; 139 households were selected within those kebeles using simple random sampling method. Likewise, a purposive sampling technique is used to select women to constitute the sample for in depth interviews and focus group discussions. Such women were selected by the researcher with the assistance of kebele manager and women committee.

### Sample size determination

Population for quantitative data collection for this study was women from rural households in Bodji Dirmeji Woreda. It was the total number of women from rural households in the 4 Kebeles each household represented by a woman. So, 1294 women representing 399 households from Burqa Bodji, 265 from Hamuma Hagalo, 220 households from Daro Sombo and 410 from Hidabu Tobe kebele.

The researcher deemed necessary to take independent sample for each Kebele to ensure equal representation of households as the four Kebeles have different number of households using proportionate to their size sampling method. Therefore, sample size were determined on the total number of households 1294 and independent sample were considered from households in each Kebele, 399, 265, 220 and 410 households from Burqa Bodji, Hamuma Hagalo, Daro Sombo and Hidabu Tobe respectively using random sampling method.

According to statistical information obtained from the village government offices, the four villages had a total of 1294 households. With such number of households, the sample size was to be 139 households in accordance with a 92 percent confidence level and 8 percent margin of error (+0.08) as based on Slovin.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where: n designates the sample size the research uses;  
N designates total number of households in four Kebeles assuming that women in all households are affected by the issue;  
e designates maximum variability or margin of error 8% (.08);  
1 designates the probability of the event occurring.  
Therefore:

$$n = N / (1 + N(e)^2)$$

$$n = 1294 / (1 + 1294(0.08)^2)$$

$$= 139$$

Sample size for each Kebeles is calculated using proportion of number of households in each Kebele to the total number of households of the four Kebeles. Therefore,

Sample size for Burqa Bodji Kebele is:  $399 \times 139/1294=43$

Sample size for Hamuma Hagalo Kebele is:  $265 \times 139/1294=28$

Sample size for Darro Sombo Kebele is:  $220 \times 139/1294=24$

Sample size for Hidabu Tobe Kebele is:  $410 \times 139/1294=44$

Sum of sample sizes taken from each Kebele=Survey sample.

$$43+28+24+44=139$$

## Methods of data collection

### Household survey

Sample for quantitative data was taken from four randomly selected kebeles from 17 of the total rural kebeles of the district. Two of the rural kebeles has concluded second round land registration program and one kebele, Burqa Bodji is selected and the other three namely Hamuma Hagalo, Daro Sombo and Hidabu Tobe kebeles are selected randomly from non-registered kebeles.

Data was collected from women in 139 eligible households, 43 households from Burqa Bodji, 28 from Hamuma Hagalo, 24 households from Daro Sombo and 44 from Hidabu Tobe kebeles using questionnaires. The household survey questionnaire has three sections. The first section aimed at collecting the women's demographic features; the second section have both closed ended questions with multiple choice answer options which asks respondents to tick or encircle the options given and open ended questionnaire questions which asks respondents to provide a response in their own words designed to recognize the general patterns of land access, use and ownership, impediments to women's access to land and ownership. The third section is especially designed to gain information on women's status within the context of land ownership, their knowledge about different legal provisions like knowledge on land rights and the existing challenges. This section also intended to know the status women's participation in decision making, and also questions related to land disputes and mechanisms in dealing with cases.

### Key Informant Interviews (KII)

Key informant interviews are qualitative in depth interviews with people who know what is going on in the community. The purpose of key informant interviews is to collect information from a wide range of people including community leaders, professionals, or residents who have firsthand knowledge about the community.

The KIIs for this study were respected elders, woreda land administration chairman and officers, kebele administration, legal experts and women committee at kebele levels. This community of experts is well connected and informed, with their particular knowledge and understanding, can provide insight on the nature of problems and give recommendations for solutions. Some selected individuals in each of the Kebeles were contacted and interviewed to gain in-depth information on the deep-rooted problems hinder women from access to land and

how women are treated in the community social interaction in different dimensions. Information collected from all of the key informants focused on provisions and constraining factors for women in gaining land ownership.

Interviews with Woreda land administration officials and kebele administration is intended to get information on government provisions to facilitate the land registration process for women and the related bureaucratic and administrative challenges. The interviews with legal experts centered on understanding the existing legal provisions and weaknesses in the legal system concerning opportunities for women to claim land rights.

The key informants with the community members focuses on understanding the societal perceptions on women's access to land and ownership; and, the difficulties women face while accessing services in the rural land administration offices. The interviews, in particular, are so helpful in building some positive case studies. In general, fifteen in depth interviews were conducted.

### Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

Focus groups discussion is a qualitative way of data collection which allows deeper examination of complex issues than other forms of survey research, because when people hear others talk, it often triggers responses or ideas that they did not think about before. It is a powerful exploratory tool used in this study to facilitate exploring thought patterns, expressing feelings and allowing the use of detailed information about various topics relevant to this study. Each Focus group discussion has 6-10 participants.

Here the researcher was acting as a facilitator to lead the discussion, and ensure that every person has an opportunity to respond. Four FGDs were conducted discussing the critical issues of land ownership, and obstacles faced by women. The participants were Women Households who have access to land, landless women, divorced women and specific groups of selected male participants and elders of each selected kebeles.

### Case studies

Case study is a method of intensively studying a phenomenon over time within its natural setting in one or a few sites by utilizing particular type of evidences gained through observation, focus group discussion, field research and etc. Multiple methods of data collection, such as interviews, observations, prerecorded documents, and secondary data, may be employed and inferences about the phenomenon of interest tend to be rich, detailed, and contextualized. Four (4) relevant cases of women households were selected from study area. It may be either the success story of women household who have access to land or the opposite who struggle with life because of landlessness.

### Observation

Interview data can be supplemented or validated with direct observation (e.g., attending different meeting at kebele level, land use and settlement pattern and session conducted at selected kebeles and indirect observation like the issue of women day to day life and activity outside their households, their situation in market areas, their wellbeing and bargaining power in different decision making areas.

## **Validity and reliability of tools used**

This study applies appropriate mechanisms to collect important information on the existing situation from survey respondents on women's access to and control over land. The research questionnaire is prepared in English. It is going to be carefully articulated to ensure clarity, to avoid bias and to get reliable information. The questionnaire will be translated into Afan Oromo, so that language shall not be barrier to respondents to spell out what they will have in mind. The translated version of the questionnaire is carefully cross checked with the initial English version and can be similar in content and structure. This is done to avoid error during data entry.

Surveys may be subject to respondent biases (e.g., subjects may provide a "socially desirable" response rather than their true response) which further hurts internal validity. To avoid this limitation, the findings of the study are expected to be internally consistent by using of triangulation; if words of survey respondents correspond with key informant interview, observational findings, FGDs and the cases.

## **Data collection procedures**

The researcher identifies Kebeles and household survey respondents are drawn from households of selected Kebeles. The participants for qualitative data were drawn from Bodji Dirmeji Woreda office of rural land administration, Kebeles and women in rural households. The quantitative data will be collected by employing four enumerators, 2 women and 2 men. Fluency in the local language Afan Oromo, experience in data collection and good knowledge about research Kebeles is considered in recruiting enumerators. One enumerator is assigned to each Kebele.

The researcher has provided two day training to enumerators assigned to each Kebele using well developed manual. Two day Training was arranged jointly for each Kebeles. The training focuses on the purpose and outcome of the study, contents of the questionnaire, how to administer the questionnaire and on clarity and appropriateness of questions. Afan Oromo is used on training enumerators since enumerators administer the local language translated questionnaire. Training is emphasized on situation of the target population because understanding situation of respondents is necessary to collect reliable and valid information. For example, enumerators are trained on collecting demographic information in cases where women cannot tell their ages but, relate it to some events to calculate and cross check with respondents physical conditions.

Enumerators are also trained on how to repeat and clarify questions and to be careful not to offend respondents even if they know responses are incorrect. The researcher also carried out the qualitative data collections like Interviews with Woreda experts and Kebele manager and other members, FGDs with rural women will be arranged on respective participants convenience and is conducted on places, dates and time of their choices.

## **Method of data analysis**

Data analysis is the process of interpreting the meaning of the data we have collected, organized, and displayed in the form of Table, bar chart, line graphs and other presentation while data interpretation is the process of making sense of a numerical data About 53% of the respondents are in 31-42 age groups, followed

that have been collected, analyzed and presented.

Quantitative raw data collected using questionnaires were organized and pre-processing test was carried out right after the field data collection was completed. Method of data entry was arranged categorically. Questionnaires are coded by Kebele to facilitate analysis of questions on which respondents are required to specify their opinions and to facilitate analysis of the open ended question on the questionnaire. Responses on these questions were carefully collected and entered into data analysis software (SPSS). Outputs are categorized into different components relating relevant variables for convenient use in analysis of findings.

Qualitative data collected through interviews, focus group discussions and observations were placed into different categorical variables. Major themes were identified and analyzed thematically in line with research questions and summarized for use in descriptive analysis. Identified themes of the qualitative data are related to categorical arrangements of the quantitative methods outputs.

Issues intended to be addressed by the research are analyzed using findings from both quantitative and qualitative methods applying triangulation method. Survey findings are used to draw arguments on relevant issues with data collected from secondary sources and to draw conclusions and recommendations. Data was presented using statistical techniques frequency distributions, tables, and pie chart. Explanation is provided to clarify information on observed data.

## **Quality and ethical consideration**

The researcher has received official permit from Wollega university college of basic social science and humanities to conduct the study on Bodji Dirmeji district. Bodji Dirmeji rural land administration office was willing to assist the researcher. Survey respondents and interview informants were provided with detail explanation about the overall objective of the study ahead of time. Interview was administered on free will of interviewees. Respondents were informed that they can decline if they don't want to be interviewed. Information provided by interviewees could not be transferred to a third party or could not be used for any other purpose apart from this study. Case stories are presented using hypothetical names.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This chapter presents and discusses the findings of the study. The data gathered using survey and qualitative methods of data collection are organized and synthesized into themes and issues, which include demographic features, women and land access, means of land acquisition and the impediments to women's land access, including sociocultural factors like patriarchy, the persisting traditional views which favors male over female, inheritance of land and property and other challenges to women's land ownership; and the knowledge gap and policy awareness and lack of its implementation.

### **Demographic features of the survey respondents**

#### **Age, marital status and type of marriage**

About 53% of the respondents are in 31-42 age group, followed



by 22% in 43-55 age groups while 20% of them are between 18-30 age and 5% are above 55 years of age. With regards to marital status, 67 % of the respondents are married, 24.5% are widowed, and 8.6 % are divorced. Regarding the type of marriage, 60% are

in monogamous marriage (are the only spouses in their marriage), 33% are widowed and divorced women and 7 % are in polygamous marriage (Table 1).

Demographic features	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Age group</b>		
18-30	28	20
31-42	74	53
43-55	30	22
Above 55	7	5
Total	139	100
<b>Marital status</b>		
Married	93	66.9
Widowed	34	24.5
Divorcee	12	8.6
Total	139	100
<b>Type of marriage women are in</b>		
Monogamous	84	60
Polygamous	9	7
Widows, divorcee	46	33
Total	139	100

**Table 1.** Distribution of respondents by age, marital status and type of marriage.

#### **Ethnic and religious affiliation of survey respondents**

Out of 139 survey respondents 96% are Oromo, and the rest 4% are Amhara. The population living in the area is almost homogenous group of people. They are predominantly followers of Protestant religion. About 79% of the respondents are Protestant Christians, and the others 21% are followers of Orthodox Christianity. Protestant Christianity is the most

common religion practiced in the study area due to the fact that Boji Dirmeji was the center of Sweden missionary, the place where the Gospel was preached in Afaan Oromo for the first time in history of the country by Eritrean born Qes Gebre Estatewos. He preached the Gospel at night at Bodji Karkaro in 1898 while he was serving Orthodox Church in the same Woreda by the influence of Onesmos Nasib or Aba Gamachis (Table 2).

Ethnic group	Frequency	Percent
Oromo	133	96
Amhara	6	4
Tigrai	-	-
Others	-	-
<b>Total</b>	139	100
<b>Religion</b>		
Protestant	110	79.1
Orthodox	29	20.9
Muslim	-	-
Others	-	-
<b>Total</b>	139	100

**Table 2.** Distribution of respondents by Ethnic group, and Religion.

### Socio-economic features of survey respondents

Socio-economic features of survey respondents are measured on educational background, annual household income and expenditure trends.

### Educational background

Figure 3 below displays responses obtained on educational

background of survey respondents.

Out of the total 139 respondents, 61(44%) have primary education, 52 (37%) are non-literate and 26 (19%) have secondary education. Survey findings on educational status of respondents reflects low literacy rate among women in the study area.

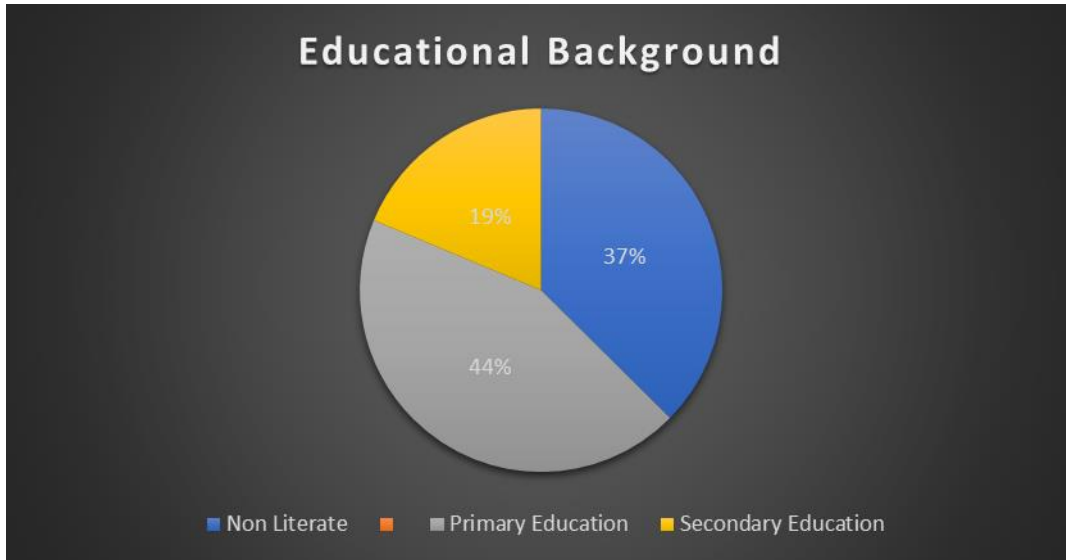


Figure 3. Distribution of respondents by educational background.

### Major sources of income

Figure 4 below shows that agriculture is the primary occupation in all the population surveyed. The data indicates that 74% of the households that were part of the study were practicing agriculture as the primary mode of occupation. Crop farming and livestock rearing are the two major agriculture activities households engaged in their primary source of income is from selling coffee and product from livestock. Sometimes they sell teff, millet,

sorghum, and maize for their immediate needs. About 7% of the respondents were involved in small scale business, which includes petty traders, small shops and local coffee houses. About 10% of the respondents were wage labors while 14% of the respondents are unemployed. Here the term unemployed was the name they call themselves not the researchers because women did not consider her home activity as work if she is not actively participating in farming and other activities outside home.

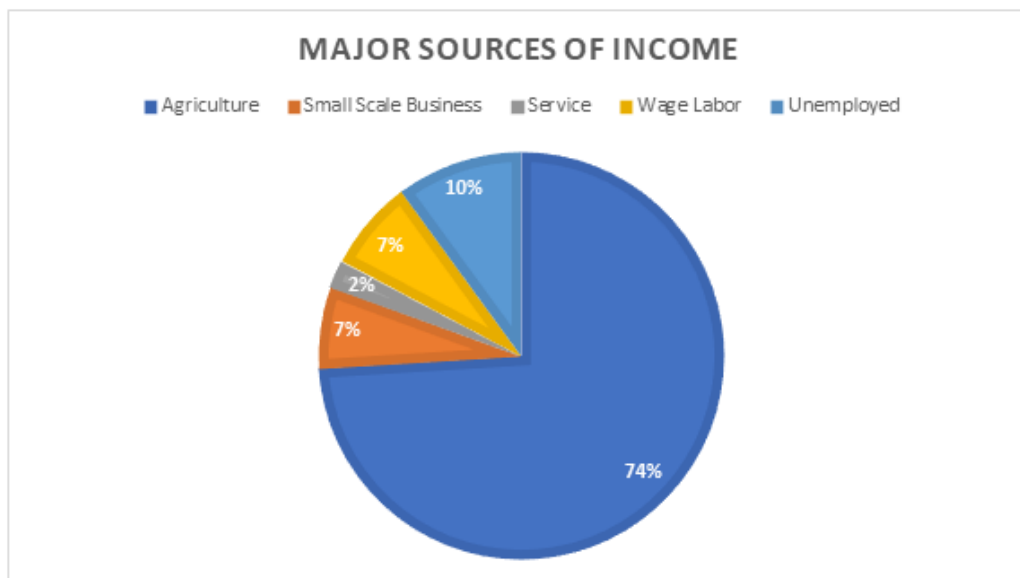


Figure 4. Major sources of income.

As shown in Table 3 below, the displays distribution of respondents by income and expenditure trends. On average, 42% of the respondents earn Birr 1000-3000, while 22% responded that they earn Birr 3000- 5000, 8 % responded that they earn Birr 5000-7000, 2% responded that they earn over birr. 7000, 26% responded that they did not earn income from sales of agricultural products. The source of income is primarily from coffee, livestock products, selling of grain crops like teff, millet, sorghum, and maize.

Data collected on trends in income expenditure reflect that 54.6%

Responded that they spend income on household need satisfaction, 9.3% responded they spend income on buying calf, sheep, hens, etc., 6.5% responded income is used for house construction and maintenance and 3.6% responded that income is spent on purchase of farm inputs like fertilizer, plough, oxen, etc. On the other hand, qualitative information obtained from focus group discussion with rural women on income and expenditure trends revealed that they give priority to loan payments mainly for fertilizer provided by Kebele administration on credit basis in fear of measures taken on delayance of paying back the loan.

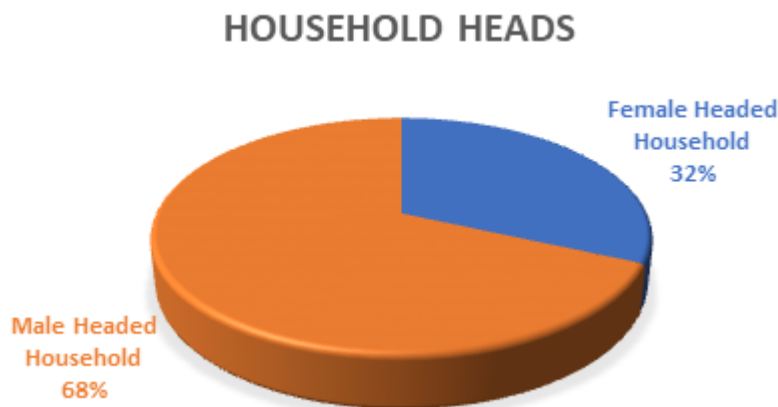
Average earning per year from sale of crops and other farm products	Frequency	Percentage
1000-3000 birr	58	42
3000-5000 birr	31	22
5000-7000 birr	11	8
Over 7000 birr	3	2
None	36	26
Total	139	100
Trends in income expenditure		
For household need satisfaction	76	54.6
For purchase of farm inputs; fertilizer, plough Oxen, etc.	5	3.6
For house construction and maintenance	9	6.5
For other stock ; buying calf, sheep, hens, etc.	13	9.3
Non respondents	36	26
Total	318	100

**Table 3.** Distribution of respondents by income and expenditure trends.

### Women and land access

A number of questions were included in the survey questionnaire to collect data on women’s access to land. Questions focused on

women’s access to land like who is the head of the household, land ownership, means of land acquisition and size of landholdings. Land access rights of different group of women are also included in the survey questions (Figure 5).



**Figure 5.** Female household head.

As displayed on the Figure 6 above only 32 per cent of the total surveyed households were headed by women. Women were normally becoming household heads by compulsion and not by choice in the study area. They become household head involuntarily, that is, only in the absence of their husband by death or divorce. In all the cases, women managed the household

and major responsibilities usually when the husband died or because of divorce/separation. As a result, women have to bear not just the responsibilities of the household but also agricultural production. However, women taking up the role of household head are wrestling to make major decision affecting their life and children.

This is related to the low rate of literacy and lack of confidence on themselves. They are not confident enough because they fear “Maal Naan Jedhu” literally means ‘What do people say about me’. Women are far less likely to hold a position of managing the household and other position. This fear comes from the social restriction imposed on women. Starting from the family, the way girls were socialized in subordinate position, relying on boys, her father, her husband’s considering them as the primary provider and protector and leader of the family.

In addition to this, their strong attachment to their mother who belief that a girl should grow disciplined and keep her voice low makes them weak and lack of confidence even when they get a position. One religious leader in Idabu Tobe made a point that we are so troubled with women in the church. When we take a decision to increase the number of women in decision making, they came to it very gladly, but we see them either boiling coffee or doing other activities. The women fear ‘Maal naan jedhuu’ what do people say about me because most of them consider male as their shadow, therefore it seems to them as they cannot go one step without men.

Although women have rights over their ancestral property either as a daughter or wife, in practice, they cannot force their parents or husbands to give their share of property while their parents or husbands are alive. As long as the husband is alive and non-consensual, practice shows, the wife cannot get separated even after receiving her share in property. In practice, a daughter with the consent of her parents and a wife with the consent of her husband get their share of property.

### Land tenure arrangements

Among the surveyed population, the ratio of households having their own registered land in all the studied kebeles was more or less the same, for example, 13 in Burka Boji, 10 per cent in Idabu Tobe, 7.2percent in Amuma Hagalo and 5 per cent in Daro Sombo. The others have access to land either through their husband or have rented others’ land ‘Irboo fuudhatu’ on the basis of sharecropping.

Sharecropping is also permitted only for the women with her husbands who have no land. This is only given to a family who is capable of farming and has livestock to farm on that plot of land.

If it comes to divorced or widow nobody will give to them even she did not ask to take a land as sharecropping because nobody can trust women to really work on their land brings grain to their barn. This leads the condition of landless women worse and leads them to live impoverished life. The narration below clearly demonstrates how it was so tough for women to get land as sharecropping: A widow aged 43 in Daro Sombo kebele raised about this issue. My husband died 10 years before, he did not have land by his name, he used to farm on his father’s land. But when he died, I left without land. His family prevents me to access their land. Then after I look to get land as a sharecropping. But I could not found anybody who is willing to give me land as share cropping because I am woman, powerless and so weak to manage farming systems.

### Trends in ownership of land

It was observed in all four study kebeles that the trend of women’s ownership over land has been increasing in recent years. One reason identified was to avoid possible intra-family conflicts over land. Usually, when the parental property is divided between sons, conflicts arise among brothers and they can be a long term issue. To avoid such potential conflicts, land is transferred immediately to women’s name by husbands to avoid future complications. The case of a polygamous husband in Amuma Hagalo kebele confirms this. He divided his portion of land to his sons and his wives before his death. This is to avoid future conflict over land among his family. There is also a time where land disputes cases were brought to courts in the study areas. When intra family conflict happened on the issue of inheriting their ancestors land. The court returns the verdict to local elders because most of them want this procedure. Women were not satisfied with the decision of the elder. They blame their partial judgment when sharing land. The elders take side, this is not because the local elders are embezzled and wicked, but they are also tied by the societal norm which favors good and fertile land to men and the other for women. In fact, the Leader of Bodji Dirmeji Land Administration Office attested that the trend of registering the land in women’s name is increasing recently especially active women usually receive land from their husbands and from their ancestral land (Table 4).

Name of Kebeles	Land access				Total
	Own land	%	No land	%	
Amuma Hagalo	10	7.2	18	13	28
Burka Boji	18	13	25	18	43
Daro Sombo	7	5	17	12.2	24
Idabu Tobe	14	10	30	21.6	44
Total	49	35.2	90	64.8	139

**Table 4.** Women’s land access.

### Women’s decision making power on land

It needs to be understood that ownership does not necessarily translate to control. Despite the encouraging trend of land access and ownership in women’s name, it was consistently observed that women do not necessarily have control over the property they own, and the decisions related to what to produce, how to produce, what portion of land can be given to sharecropping and

left for grazing of such property, even they don’t know their boundary. For instance, there was a case where a husband become so anxious to his wife because she gave the land as sharecropping without his approval. If somebody wants to take a portion of land as sharecropping from another family the one qualified to give is not women, it is male even if he is bed ridden. Even the women who have land registered in their name do not make appropriate decision on land; the existence of their name

on the paper does not necessarily show they have the ability to control and bargaining power over it. This and similar cases makes them to be subjugated under the men of the family, whether it is the father, husband or the son. A woman, aged 35 in Burka Bodji asserted in the case below that.

### Case 1: No land for women

Ms. Z,35, No land left for her from her family. It is exactly unlucky for a woman to become a landless. “Now I know how much burden I have carried because of my families ignorant of the value of land for women” She said.

Ms, Z had dropped out of school to get married and she can hardly write or read. Since she comes to her husband’s family, they were farming on her in law’s land to fulfill their needs. After several years of living on her in laws, her husband passed away, without leaving any tangible productive resources for the family. At this time the question of ownership raised in her in laws. They did not want her inherit the portion of her husband then after her mother in laws chased her away from her ancestor’s land. She has a little knowledge on legal issues and she feels helpless when the issues of land disputes rose. She has no choice than finding land to farm as Irboo (sharecropping) to feed her children. Though she cannot find anyone who was willing to give land to her. Then after, she took the cases to the kebeles administration. In The kebele administration nobody pays attention to her demand. Then she took the case to woreda land administration, but they ask whether her husbands have a document of land

registered in his name before his death where he does not. She loses hope of finding land and decides to work a daily wage to sustain her children. As she rose the major impediment is lack of good governance on land administration. She entertains this by indicating that single individuals own more than 10 hectares of land while we are striving for a bunch of land for subsistence. We are also leading to lose a place where to graze our calf and oxen.

The case of Ms.Z clearly shows that there are surely discriminatory socio-cultural factors that blocks women to access land. Beside these women’s overarching burden in the house and lack of education made them to accept the statuesque rather than fighting and taking back what was taken away from them. The local people’s perception of not giving as sharecropping for women even worsen her cases even though she decides to farm and sustain her children. Finding daily wage labor in the rural areas for women is so difficult because most people work on their farm. So the option Ms.Z is either collects a firewood and sell it on the nearby road or looking for wage in the town.

### Means of land acquisition

During the study it was found that the land that is registered in a woman’s name is mostly through the earnings of either the husband or other family members (6.5% in Amuma Hagalo, 11.5% in Burka Boji, 4.3% in Daro Sombo and 10% in Idabu Tobe) (Table 5).

Kebeles	Means of land acquisition			
	Land redistribution	Inheritance from husband	Inheritance from family members	Percent (IFH+IFF/139)
Amuma Hagalo	1	6	3	6.5
Burka Bodji	2	11	5	11.5
Daro Sombo	1	4	2	4.3
Idebu Tobe	0	8	6	10

**Table 5.** Typical types of land acquisition in studied kebeles.

As can be seen in the Table 5 above, land inheritance or acquiring a share of family land is by far the major way of land acquisition in the research area. Inheritance is an indigenous means of land acquisition, which has been robustly persisting. On other hand land redistribution is another means of land acquisition. Most of these land redistributions were carried out informally by PA administration, particularly since 1991.

**Land acquisition by purchase:** No one has mentioned the idea of purchase of land or selling of land among the survey respondents because land sale is illegitimate both in the constitution of 1995 and federal rural land administration proclamation of 2005. Customary norms also do not encourage selling land beyond close kinship because it causes trouble not only to the seller of the land but also the potential buyer. But the idea of land acquisition through purchasing was confirmed while interviewing the former OPDO leader and now working in Woreda land administration as process owner of the office. He said “land selling is operated in disguised way by rural people

even though they are aware of both of the above mentioned limitations. Thus openly selling a piece of land has not been a frequent phenomenon. However, neither the customary norms nor the state legislation are absolute in their effect on controlling land sale. Local farmers never were passive observers of these constraints. People do sell land and they do it by maneuvering both constraints and by inventing new systems.

There are two major ways through which people reach land transactions deal. The first of these two ways is to sell the product of own labor, that is, properties on the land such as perennial crops and trees. Under this type of deal land is not mentioned but only implied. The second way is selling the land disguise contract, locally known as Kontraata; which is undergone through signing a contract without mentioning the specific time limit on informally recorded deal. These two ways are practiced either in combination or separately. In both cases, transactions are struck either with presence of some witness but

oral agreements or informal recording of deal entered into by the parties involved in land transactions.

### Land conflict at the family level

When women respondents were asked whether they had experienced any conflict related to land in their family or kebele,

79 % claimed not to have observed any conflict in their families, whereas 21% pointed that they were aware of land problems surrounding their families. However, when those who claimed to be aware were asked to clarify the sources, they confirmed that inheritance and the use of family land for farming were main sources of the land disputes for women, amounting to 14.5% and 6.5% respectively (Table 6).

Source of conflict	Frequency	Percentage
Inheritance	20	14.5
Use of family land	9	6.5
Grazing on family land	-	-
Marriage	-	-
Divorce	-	-
Personal interests	-	-
HIV/AIDS disease	-	-
Total	29	21

**Table 6.** Major sources of land conflicts at the family level.

The respondents were then asked as to the reporting mechanisms for the claimed conflicts. Women were asked to indicate measures taken after observing the conflict. Out of 29 women who had experienced any conflict related to land in their family or kebele, only 24% (7) stated that they had taken some steps. Women reported cases related to land to different bodies such as the kebele administration, elders, parish leaders, and woreda court. The major reasons why women were reluctant not to report their cases to the concerned body could be either unfairness of judgment, distance from their home, inaccessibility to legal services, unknowing rush to the incorrect body or reporting to the body deemed to be appropriate for them.

### Impediments to women's land Access

Women face several barriers to accessing, owning and controlling land and property. The study has made an attempt to identify such gender specific impediments, categorized as social,

cultural and organizational/policy impediments faced by women to secure land.

### Sociocultural impediments

A woman may have legal right to land and property, and yet the right may not be recognized socially. When economic activities and social responsibilities are defined along the lines of gender, women's access to productive assets such as land are often influenced by social norms and attitudes. In the four studied kebeles, patriarchy and conservative social setup persist, influencing women's life and status in society. This is often related to the absence of support to women in recognizing their land rights and fighting against discrimination in access to and control over land.

Table 7 lists down some of the major sociocultural factors that hinder women's land and property ownership. These figures are based on responses from women.

Sociocultural factors	Respondents (%)
Patriarchy is a tradition	37.6
Society's distrust in women's land ownership	24.7
Perception about misuse of property by women	23.2
Discouragement from neighbors	9.3
Others	5.2
Total	100

**Table 7.** Sociocultural factors preventing women's land access.

### Patriarchy

Patriarchy is a social relationship which causes domination of men over women in the different settings manifested through work, power, authority, wealth, and decision making. Patriarchy is a social system and societal structure that institutionalize male physical, social and economic power over women. Men are regarded as the authority within the family and the community

and power and possessions are passed on from father to son. In the study areas the proportion of land owned by women is significantly less in comparison to that by men. The strong patriarchal value was found to be a significant barrier to women's right over land ownership in all four kebeles. Inheritance, for instance, has traditionally been patriarchal in which the ancestral property is passed through the male line, except for some cases where in the absence of male ancestral

property is passed through the female line. As a result, there remains a wide gap between what is provided for in law and what is actually practiced. In the communities within the study area, there is a strong male dominance in land ownership. Moreover, it is usually men who have the decision-making power, as well as access to outside information, which means that women's priorities are often overlooked. Of the surveyed population, 37.6 per cent of women thought patriarchal values hindered women's claim over their land ownership rights.

In Bodji Dirmeji, patriarchy was traditionally accepted and men continue to hold the ultimate decision making power in the households. Land is registered in the name of male or husband because male is a symbol of the house and considered as a stewardship of the ancestral land. Due to the prevailing patriarchal norms, the legal document or proof of occupant land is received by men (mostly the head of the family). Even in kebele where the second land registration and titling was completed, for instance in Burka Bodji both the name and photograph of spouses were on the document nevertheless; the sense of land and ownership in women is still the same.

As a result, even if there is consensus between husband and wife to take the joint certificate of occupant land women do not necessarily have control over that land. Women's right to land is neither considered important, nor is valued. In most cases where women have land in their names, it is because male members of the household are far from the rural areas and live in urban areas or women who divorced her husband and also women have received land as legatee from her husbands.

In all of the surveyed kebeles, the perception that daughters are sent off to her husband's house after marriage remain as the prime obstacles for women to be considered center in family property. To illustrate, the elder in Burka Bodji described women as "Durbi maqaa soddaa baatti" (daughters carry the names of her in laws). Daughters not considered among the heirs because they switch their clan affiliation and take up the clan of their husbands. For a married woman, the clan of her husband takes responsibilities for such acts. This is one of the reasons they have raised why women cannot claim land from their fathers side after marriage. As a result, parent's property generally belongs to sons, and only rarely are daughters considered as the inheritors of parental property. There were few exceptions where men saw women's land ownership as equally important, and provided land to women as equal inheritors.

### **Case 2: Prohibiting women's access to land**

Ms. N, 46 years old women in Daro Sombo kebele. She is an eldest daughter in her family. After her father died, she asked her mother to give a land because of infertility happened on her land. But her mother was so angry at her by saying "intala safuu hin beekne" literally means a women/girl ignorant of taboo. She was considered as ignorant of taboo because in the study area women cannot ask the question of land while her mother alive. The local people accept this as a normal. Even if women ask she was considered as abnormal, the mother may prohibit not reaching on that land. Moreover, they fear more if she may have released curse upon her another bad thing would happen. Many years later, her mother died and she thought as she will get land left by their parents, but Ms. N's brothers denied her access to the land on the ground of the persisting male domination in land acquisition and existence of the belief that woman cannot inherit land. Ms. N. reported the case to the kebele elders which ruled in

favor of her brothers. She never appealed to Woreda court, because she did not have enough awareness about land rights and procedures.

The case of Ms.N shows clearly that women have carried the burden of cultural traditions, many of which have been described as oppressive, and which limit the advancement of women. In Bodji Dirmeji there is a situation in which men have highly preferential access, although not always exclusive rights, to those activities to which the society accords the greatest values, and the exercise of which permits a measure of control over others. The practices and beliefs carried out in the areas would increase prestige and status to the male gender and devalue the contributions and capabilities of females. Thus, the patriarchal setting in the study area whereby male dominate on matters concerning land makes it difficult if not impossible for women to access and own land in their own right. They allocated land by male forks within their clan or through their male spouses. This state of mind set has prevailed in different social strata for a time of immemorial.

### **Lack of trust on women**

Another presumption in the study area is that women cannot handle the financial responsibilities and ownership of productive resources like land equally as men does. There was a general sense of mistrust towards daughters and wives. A man shared, "if land is transferred to a woman at a young age she might take that away with her if she gets married or goes away with another man while her husband is away. They also fear that a woman with property cannot be a good wife. There could be a conflict on the question of controlling and managing property.

In Hidabu Tobe and Daro Sombo, FGD participants highlighted cases where the same orphans growing together in one houses a boy and girl. It was the boys who have access to land as a gift not the girls. Gift is not widely practiced in the area due to land degradation and the strong belief in the local people to share their portion of land to their group/clan only. Here land is categorized as being acquired by gift when it is given to a 'non-family' member or individuals who would normally have no right to inheritance over such a land. Since girls are considered as a property of another, but the boy will hold the house from falling they prefer to give a portion of land to boy in the houses. Such incidences have "demoralized" women to make any claim on land and property even if they wished to.

In addition, ironically, some women were found to accept men as the ultimate decision makers and worthy of being the landowners. During FGDs in the four kebeles, some women argued that it was not necessary for women to have land registered in their names as long as the land is family's property. During a FGD, women unanimously maintained that the husband's role is more important in transferring land ownership to women; therefore, as they argued, men along with women should be aware of the positive aspects of registering land in women's name, because, as they said, "husband' support and trust is must." This was an interesting finding since women showed an understanding on what equality of gender would really mean and that gender equality is not necessarily only about women.

### **Case 3: Undependability: Do the house really fail?**

Ms. H, 31, of Burka Boji, was married to a farmer from the same

kebele. “I was so socked when I have heard my brother plant coffee on my father’s plot of land through enforcement of her deceased father she said”. When we raise the question of land acquisition he responds not to give a piece of land because me and my sister subsists from our husband’s land. The reason why we delay to ask for the partition of family land was that ‘the custom of the community was that female does not ask family land while her family alive. Women are not trusted to held land of her family. There is a saying that “Manni dhaala dhiira hin qabne ni jiga” translated literally as ‘a house who do not have male successor will fail’. This is to demonstrate that male dominance and signaling their strengthen though the name of the house is also called after male’s name.

She thought as her father enforce her brother to build his house on next to his house and plant a lot of coffee crops on his field because he trusts none of us because we are women. Even in the community we are living a woman trying to fight for her legitimate rights are looked down upon as greedy. But this incidence could not make her to lose her hope, she brought the case to kebele administration; the kebele administration refer the cases to woreda court. Then the court selects a team to investigate the cases for a verdict. Finally, the court orders the local elders to share their portion impartially. Then the elders share the land leaves the most fertile land on which our brother plants coffee for him. Women are limited to have access to small plots and poor quality land, the produce they get remains very low. Ms. H, confidently say the house without male inheritor cannot fail, women can uphold house even more than men.

“Manni dhaaltu dhiiraa hin qabne ni jiga” when translated a house who do not have male successor will fail is the old saying that even women themselves use. In the study area the position of land and its successful transmission to the succeeding generation is not only a matter of providing one’s descendants with a basis of sustenance. It is also a moral and social responsibility that a person bears as a mark of success, being a son of somebody in his community. This success is only maintained if and only if there is a boy in that particular family. If the family has only girls, they had better to look into their kinship and brought up a boy for keeping the house not to fail. If he decides to give the

land of ancestors to one of his girls, and they bring in laws to the father’s land, the community considers him as lazy and the one who failed his father’s house. This societal perception on women made them to become passive and not to be trusted in saving the name of the house from failing.

### Family structure

The structure of the family also has a bigger role to play in women’s awareness and life. A general observation of the study was that women living in nuclear families have more liberty and support from families, and thus realize more rights and ownership than other women do. Ancestral property is mainly in men’s name and it is likely to get transferred to the other men following the hierarchal order. However, women with family support are likely to have freedom to be socially active, be involved in politics and public spaces and also have better access to knowledge regarding rights. Educated families are women-friendly to some extent, with high acceptance of their freedom and rights. Educated men are aware about the legal systems and constraints so they are willing to support and encourage women’s land ownership.

### Social perceptions

Social perceptions play an important role in influencing whether or not women can claim their rights to land and property. 26 percent of the surveyed population consider it necessary for women to own land to ensure their rights and 17.8 per cent relate to using as share cropping or Irboo by women. The study observed that survey respondents rarely associated land related responsibilities to women. Another finding validated by this study was that ancestral property, assets and land is passed on to sons and not daughters, except for in special conditions (in case when daughters are unmarried, disabled or economically vulnerable because of divorce).

Table 8 presents the different social perceptions regarding women’s land rights.

Perception on land holding by women	Percent of respondents (%)
To assure women’s rights	26
To give as Irboo(Share cropping)	17.8
To secure the family position	13.8
To enhance social status in the society	11.1
To protect property	10.1
To minimize difficulties in the future	9.7
To provide socioeconomic security	7.7
To minimize domestic violence	3
To assure responsibilities	0.8
Total	100

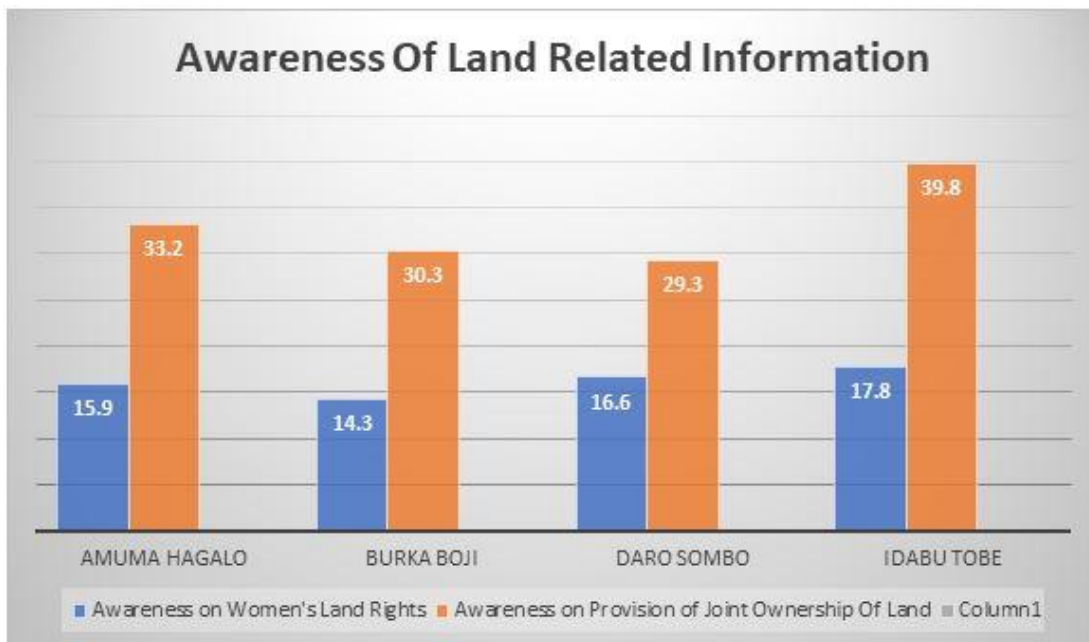
**Table 8.** Societal perceptions on the importance of women’s land ownership.

### Knowledge and information gap

Access to information is vital to access property rights, including land rights. It is important to identify the knowledge level on

legal and administrative policies regarding land, to understand the awareness in women regarding their rights under state and customary systems (Figure 6).





**Figure 6.** Awareness about land rights and joint ownership of land.

As the above Figure illustrate out of the surveyed population, 15.9 percent women respondents in amuma Hagalo, 14.3 percent in Burka Boji, 16.6 percent in Daro Sombo and 17.8 percent in Idabu Tobe are aware about the provision of women's land rights. Similarly, 33.2 percent in amuma Hagalo, 30.3 percent in Burka Boji, 29.3 percent in Daro Sombo and 39.8 percent in Idabu Tobe are aware about the joint ownership of spouses. Most of them lacked the understanding of legal provisions impacting their rights to own land and property, calling the legal strategies into question. The knowledge of legal provisions was minimal among women (3.4% in Amuma Hagalo, 4.6 in Burka Boji, 5.7 in Idabu Tobe and 7.3 in Daro sombo). Such lack of knowledge acts as a significant barricade to women's land and property ownership because without the information, they are not in a position to demand or exercise their rights.

Men were found to possess more information and procedural knowledge about policy and legal practices with regard to land and inheritance. Women, in contrast, are limited to doing household chores and taking care of the family, and are not regarded as capable of handling property and dealing with land cases. This was similar in all population studied.

"If women get land in their name, their decision making power will increase; but women are less informed about laws because they are confined within the house." Jeritu Birhanu, Western Ethiopian women empowerment program leader (NMS).

### **Organizational and policy context impediments**

In Ethiopia, statutory provisions and policies instituted by the state are usually influenced more by donor agencies or by a dominant trend in global development discourses than by the objective realities on the ground. The state usually strives to respond to such appeals as, "state intervention is necessary to alleviate the plight of women and to provide full access by women to land and other forms of property".

In Ethiopia, the politics of women's rights in general and women's land rights in particular strongly emerged after the 1974 socialist revolution. Mwangi seems to have missed this point by offering the whole credit to the current Ethiopian government for giving "women hope in their property and land rights" (2001:21). The end of conflict in 1991 seems to have given much hope to women with respect to their land and property rights. During the socialist regime (1975-91), these were virtually nonexistent. Ethiopia's then socialist constitution emphasized the role of men as the guardians of the means of production, basically land. No place or role was practically left for women, which could only adversely affect their land and property rights.

Contrary to Mwangi's claims, women's rights in general and land rights in particular had been highly publicized, perhaps for the first time in the history of the country, after the Derg came to power in 1974. One of the Derg era's revolutionary mottos, which goes yale setoch tesatifo abyotachin gibun aymetam, literally 'our revolution would not hit its goal without the participation of women', shows the attention the socialist regime had given to gender equality and an attempt to involve women in the revolutionary struggle, albeit ideologically instigated. During the derg women were politically given equal right to men. They had their own mass organization known as the Revolutionary Ethiopia Women's Association (REWA). Their rights to hold land was also implied in the rural land proclamation promulgated by the Derg. The rural land proclamation has given women legal access to organize themselves in peasant associations as heads of households, if they have an independent residence, even within the framework of polygamous family structure.

As indicated in the quotation above and vividly surfaced in the rural areas during the Derg, women were given the right to acquire land even when they are in a marital bond (particularly in polygynous households). This had its own shortcomings when it comes to implementation, the point I shall elaborate on the subsequent discussions. The current government position

regarding land rights in general is quite similar to that of Derg regime. But the current constitution seems clearer as far as women's land rights are concerned. The 1994 constitution states that: Women have the right to acquire, administer, control, use and transfer property. They have equal rights with men with respect to use, transfer, administration and control of land. They also enjoy equal treatment in the inheritance of property.

The same constitution further bestows on regional states the power to act land administration law in conformity with the constitution. Accordingly, the Federal rural land administration proclamation no.456/2005, concerning acquisition and use of rural land in Article 5 states that 1/In accordance with land administration law: a) Peasant/farmers/pastoralists engaged in agriculture for a living shall be given rural land free of charge; b) Any citizen of the country who is 18 years of age or above and wants to engage in agriculture for a living shall have the right to use rural land; children who lost their mothers and fathers due to death or other situation shall have the right to use rural land through legal guardians until they attain 18 years of age; c) Women who want to engage in agriculture shall have the right to get and use rural land. But as usually the case, what is outlined in statutory provision can easily be manipulated since they may not fit into the reality on the ground.

As Beyani writes, in theory, under statutory land tenure systems, women could own land and property in their own rights. In practice, though customary and traditional perception override this possibility to the extent that land registration systems require proof of a husband's authorization for a woman to acquire a title independent of her husband. Beyani's arguments invite a number of questions; that there are two laws, the statutory and customary, operating side by side and these laws may collide or one category of law may hinder the other from fully operating. This was in fact, what happened in Ethiopia during the Derg, and it is still occurring in rural areas. Nevertheless, contrary to Beyani's observation where a husband seems to stand on his wife's way, in the study area, husbands fully supported and assisted their wives to register as member of peasant association in different localities so as to enable them to acquire land in their names. This has been a perfect strategy to gather lands from various locations.

#### **Case 4: Crying for justice**

Ms. Y, is a 37 years old widow living in Amuma Hagalo Kebele. Her husband was a Derg army before his death. She went with him from Gojjam to his families' land after downfall of the regime. After he comes to his family home he was so sick and unable to work and farm. His family did not share a land for him to work on it. So she decides to work wage labor and feed her husband. Her husband died after she got one baby boy. At that time, she did not ask his family to get a land and decide to work daily wage work looking after where found.

She said "after a while my boy start asking me why don't we have our own land, why my grandfather did not give us a land since they have a lot of land". Now I decide to ask my in laws to give us a piece of land to us as our share. But they admit that we have no land here for you and your son, it is your deceased husband fault that left you without land. This makes us to lose our hope on acquiring land. She was denied access and use of land not only because she was women but also because of her background. When she applies to kebele administration to get a piece of land even for planting tree on it, kebele administration

response was not positive; we cannot help you because we have no land for you.

Accordingly, she said that 'anybody can discern the very crucial of having land access and ownership for women's from a life I have been and living now while the tear is dropping from her eyes. She has raised the major obstacles for women not access and own land are lack of education which made women fail to know their rights and duties, social restriction hidden in structures of society. These are the unseen social norms reproduced by patriarchal structures and institutions, that favor one gender over others. Similarly, social attitudes towards peoples from different background can lead to extreme forms of exclusion. There is also lack of good governance and effective implementation of policy and strategy on the ground.

Ms. Y case clearly shows there are multiple forms of exclusion and impediments to women access to land. The first one is being women in this area made her to lose the access to land; the other is her background which excludes not only from owning land but also from the social relationship. The agenda of women's access to land which was promulgated in the rural land proclamation should be implemented with this kind of sensitive issues if it really works to the benefits of women. But here this woman was in complex life situation so, if the policy on paper did not solve this kind of cases it has to be revised and also their application on the ground has to be proven the contrary. There is frequent divergence between law and practice. Full enforcement of the law's provisions is still a dream for many women in the study area. In some situations, there are still provisions of other laws that are outdated and in conflict with each other. Weak land institutions and poor governance intensifies the problem.

#### **Land registration and titling**

One of the most common approaches advocated by the development community for enabling secure rights to land is titling. Land titling and registration provide landholders formal recognition of their rights by the state. Often these are considered to be necessary instruments for ensuring landholders tenure security. Proponents of land titling argue that it increases security of tenure and therefore investment in land, land use conflicts are reduced, access to financial services is easier, and common areas are protected from encroachment through land use plans. Although their study did not focus on the benefits that women gain from land titling, results from their study could imply that women would greatly benefit from land titling programs.

The benefits of joint titling include guarding against capricious action by one spouse, protecting against the dispossession of women through abandonment, separation, or divorce, and increasing women's bargaining power in household and farm decision making. Some theories also endorse land titling as essential for land market efficiency and argue that such efficiency will enable land to be transferred to those who can use it most productively and thereby contribute to economic growth.

The finding from the study area shows that land titling increased alienation of women from accessing land. Without specific affirmative measures to repair the discriminatory practices of the past, women may not have any decision making powers over land even though their names are on the titles. The knowledgeable elders on key informant interview said that key land is on the hand of those who occupy large portion of land in the past, their male counterparts. So titling without giving into

consideration the past discriminatory and male dominated land redistribution lefts not only women but also the current generation landless. They add also, the Qeerroo or “youth” are landless; a farmer who holds small size of land could not have a land to transfer to them.

Furthermore, land registration at the household level resulted in registering land holdings exclusively in the name of the traditional head of household, who is usually a man. About 68% of the surveyed population where male is the household head, most of them responses ‘we have no land’ when the question about land access was raised, this because of the fact that only putting the name of women on the title does not mean women have access and control over land. The question of really owning and controlling on the land should be raised when the issue of land and women was raised. To the worst, the household where polygamy is practiced, registry at the household level exacerbated the tenure insecurity of some households as the land registration records merely reflected only one of several households. The households of subsequent wives were excluded from the registration process and thereby deprived of the corresponding rights to land. In addition, the limited registration of marriages and divorces often intensified the tenure insecurity of polygamous wives.

Land rights may be defined as complete when the following three conditions are met: They are legally recognizable, socially recognizable, and enforceable by external authorities. If one of these three elements is missing, the rights are incomplete. For instance, a land right that is legally recognizable but not socially recognized or enforceable is an incomplete right. The interview with woreda the head of justice office confirms this. He said ‘without society’s recognition, it is so difficult to succeed in any kind of endeavor. Only if the society recognizes the law made and resolution passed could have brings into work. That is why it is very important getting their consent and will for any reform.

The society perception on women’s land ownership and control is far behind the expected. The society does not consider the importance of women’s land access; they thought that why it was needed to give a land to women as long as her husband have a plot of land. Even the women’s self-image is also low, low level of literacy combined with harmful traditional practices was affecting women not to become bold on asking their rights.

Land policy has remained a major bone of contention between the party in power and major competing party in the country. Land issues are also frequently raised by donor agencies and international financial institutions in their dealings with the government. The argument has been whether to keep the land under ownership of the state by providing the peasant with use right for unlimited period of time or to privatize the land so that its values are determined by free market forces. Both sides have been striving to justify their position from different points of view as will be discussed shortly. However, these debates appear to be circular and tend to cling to a rigid dichotomy. The possibility of instituting communal control of land by community rarely appears as a part of these debates.

### Summary of major finding

Over 80% of Ethiopia’s population lives in rural areas and depend on land almost for all of its needs. This makes land, by any measure, the most vital resource for the people of Ethiopia. It is because of significances of land that land issues are the most hotly debated topics both in academic and political circles in the

country. Access to and control over land is critical for rural women’s empowerment in terms of economic benefit and social status. Rural land reform policies affirming women’s equal rights to land hardly bring intended changes in reality and bring about women’s empowerment. Most land reforms institutionalize systems that usually fail to challenge existing community gender perspectives on women’s access to and control over land. Rural women’s access to land and control power they exercise on it is constrained by multiple interweaving factors. Major factors affecting women’s access to and control over land are summarized below:

**Sociocultural and structural barriers:** Although a woman have legal right to land and property; the right should be socially recognized. Women’s access to productive assets such as land is often influenced by social norms, culture and attitudes. This study reveals patriarchy and conservative social setup persist, influencing women’s life and status in society. This is often related to the absence of support to women in recognizing their land rights and fighting against discrimination in access to and control over land.

**Customary laws and practices:** Women’s access to and control over land is affected by customary laws and practices in the study area. These practices not only affect women as a whole in these communities but, make differences among group of women under different marital statuses. Study findings reflect that patrilineal inheritance system is the dominant inheritance system applied by communities. This system restricts daughters from inheriting land from their parents. Study finding on the relationship between marital status and means of land acquisition in the study area reflect that only few unmarried girls accessed land through inheritance and few of the divorced women accessed land through marriage.

Study findings reflect that traditional practices in the study area make widows’ access to their deceased husband’s land conditional to having child/children from that specific marriage. Widows are allowed to live on their deceased husbands’ land to raise their children and to farm on their children’s land.

Most survey respondents are married women and widows comprise the second large number. Married and widowed women get access to land through marriage as widows get access to land by inheriting their deceased husbands’ land. The study reflects that unmarried girls/women hardly access land through inheritance and divorced women hardly access land through marriage. Legal provisions on female land inheritance and the right of divorcees to marital land are not fairly recognized in the study area.

In the study area there are beliefs that women cannot handle the financial responsibilities and ownership of productive resources like land as well as men do. Men are considered as knowing everything while women are not at all, instead women are limited to doing household chores and taking care of the family, and are not regarded as capable of handling property and dealing with land cases. This was similar in all groups studied. Another factor is the structure of the family and status of families also has a bigger role to play in women’s access to resources and life. The study discloses that women living in nuclear families have more independence and support from families, and thus realize more rights and ownership than other women do. Educated families are women friendly to some extent, with high acceptance of their freedom and rights. Educated men are aware about the legal systems and constraints so they are willing to support and encourage women’s land ownership.

Social perceptions play an important role in influencing whether or not women can claim their rights to land and property. In the study area the societies view on the importance of women's access to land ownership of property was obstinate by old belief and attitudes. In the finding only 26 percent of the surveyed population consider it is necessary for women to own land to ensure their rights and 17.8 percent relate to using as share cropping or Irboo by women. The women themselves rarely associated land related responsibilities to women.

**Knowledge and information gap:** Access to information is vital to access property rights, including land rights. It is important to identify the knowledge level on legal and administrative policies regarding land, to understand the awareness in women regarding their rights under state and customary systems. Most of them lacked the understanding of legal provisions impacting their rights to own land and property, calling the legal strategies into question. To the worst, the knowledge of legal provisions was minimal among women (3.4% in Amuma Hagalo, 4.6 in Burka Boji, 5.7 in Idabu Tobe and 7.3 in Daro sombo). Such lack of knowledge acts as a significant barricade to women's land and property ownership because without the information, they are not in a position to demand or exercise their rights.

**Organizational and policy context impediments:** The regional rural land use and administration proclamation has no provision on promoting the policy and familiarizing communities with the land administration system. Knowledge of the regional rural land policy and the land administration system is low, particularly among women as information is communicated on community meetings. Information is less accessible to rural women given the high illiteracy rate, low access to information and low participation in community meetings. Knowledge of the regional rural land policy and relevant legislations affecting women's rights to land is also low in the study communities. Women's knowledge on other relevant policies such as the national policy on Ethiopian women and the Oromia family law is also very limited. In addition, the regional rural land policy and the implementation regulation had overlooked women's participation in the land administration process. There is no provision on women's participation in the land administration process at community level.

Regardless of policy provisions, implementation in the study area revealed discrimination against women in access to and control over land. Survey findings on widows access rights to land reveal that practice remains discriminatory to childless widows. In spite of policy provisions on equal rights on inheritance and divorce, survey findings reflect that women barely access land through inheritance and secure share of marital land at divorce.

## CONCLUSION

Land is basic resource for agricultural production in Ethiopia. Over 80% of Ethiopia's population lives in rural areas and depend on land almost for all of its needs. This makes land, by any measure, the most vital resource for the people of Ethiopia. Agriculture accounts for almost 41% of the GDP, 80% of exports and 80% of the labor force. Women in Ethiopia constitute more than half of the country's population and the majority of them live in rural areas. Despite this, most of them lack independent access to production resources, particularly land. Women's contribution to agricultural production and household food security is very significant though not valued in economic terms. Age-old patriarchal beliefs and practices in society have

disadvantaged women in the socioeconomic and political spheres trapping women in poverty. The majority of women in the study area is illiterate and lack marketable skills. They also have no access to credit and adequate social services. This factor leads them to keep silent on the issue of their rights on land and other productive resources.

This study concludes that the social and cultural barriers are still a major challenge for women to have land ownership and other property rights in Bodji Dirmeji. Usually it is the male member in the family who gets all the parental property and is also at the forefront of all land related transactions. Traditional beliefs in surveyed population are so strong that only sons are considered as the inheritors of parental property. In such cases, the most common source for women to access land is through inheritor from her husband.

Women in the study district are often limited to traditional gender roles and often seem to readily accept discriminatory customs and practices. Women are confined to the domestic or private spheres and are less active in public spheres. The practices and perceptions of women's position in the household, family and community affect the extent to which they can exercise their land rights. Lack of proper legal and administrative support has further aggravated the situation. For instance, among the surveyed population in the study area, only 13 in Burka Bodji, 10 percent in Idabu Tobe, 7.2 percent in Amuma Hagalo and 5 percent in Daro Sombo have land registered in women's names.

The larger share of the land is still under men's control. On the other hand, even if women own land, they rarely make any decision with regards to the land.

Moreover, using households as unit of rural land allocation in the land administration system has impacts particularly on women's control over land. Women's access to land should not be thought as an overall policy goal although it is a means to women's control over land. This is a significant policy drawback as rural women cannot get empowered and achieve equality without gaining control over land. Control over land therefore is very important for ensuring gender equality in land rights as rural women's empowerment brings about sustainable rural development, alleviates poverty and ensures food security.

As per findings of this study, implementation of the land administration policy process has not fully achieved its aims in women's access to and control over land. This is reflected on policy limitations to address competing factors that hinder women's equal access to and control over land in the study area. Rural land policy should apply effective implementation strategy to address women specific issues that affect their equal rights to land. Gender mainstreaming strategy should be applied in the rural land administration system to remove existing barriers that retard women's equal access to and control over land. The rural land administration system needs to be gender inclusive and gender responsive to ensure women's equal access to and control over land.

This study reveals that the regional rural land administration system lacks an autonomous institution to implement the policy regardless of policy commitment. This is a significant gap because policy implementation requires institutional mechanism with clear duties and responsibilities at all levels. Support from a well established institution at Woreda level will facilitate policy implementation at Kebele levels.

Knowledge and awareness on women's equal land holding rights is critical to all concerned bodies including women themselves to

realize women's rights on land. Knowledge and information on the regional land administration and use proclamation and other relevant legislations is limited among women in the study area. Knowledge and information is essential for women because most women hold secondary rights. They have to be aware of the rules and their legal rights to raise claims and to challenge denial of opportunities and rights. As reflected in the two case stories, women's awareness on their land rights plays vital role in breaking traditional barriers to women's access to and control over land.

The study reveals that customs and traditions affect women's access to and control over land in the study area. Land acquisition by unmarried, divorced, widowed and women in polygamous marriages are affected by community customs and traditions. Rural land policy needs to address issues of these different groups of women to make sure that rural women get equal right to land as well as equal benefits from land. Access to land has become challenge to single/unmarried women. Daughters are not protected by customary laws on inheritance and statutory law has not yet challenged community customs and traditions.

Therefore, the land administration system should consider issues of unmarried, divorced, widowed and women in polygamous marriages and should design strategy to bring attitudinal change on the deep rooted gender prejudices that hamper women's equal rights to land and to ensure women's equal rights to access land in these communities.

The ineffective legal provisions, in combination with prevailing social perceptions have remained a challenge for women to exercise their land rights. However, the information dissemination and communication systems are inadequate, ineffective and inefficient to the extent that many rural women still are not aware of such provisions. Only 37.9 percent of women contacted for the study were aware about the provision of joint ownership. Women mostly gained inheritance through their husbands earnings. Interestingly, women have started realizing that owning land not only provides social security and but also contributes in reducing domestic violence. The need for now, therefore, is to sensitize women and aware them regarding their entitlements to progressive provisions to promote women's use, access and control over land.

Addressing the land access and tenure security needs of women is essential for gender equality and social justice in a more egalitarian society. Since rural women's day to day activities are anchored in land, equity in access and control of land is very key towards achieving development in general and women empowerment in particular through enhanced decision making powers, both in the private and public spheres. In order to see change towards women's land access gender justice should be prevailed through empowering women and girls, and redressing the power relationship between women and men, which is the very crucial work to be done.

In conclusion, the traditional practice of landholding, allocation and titling, which has been dominated by a purely male hierarchy needs to be questioned shifting the boundary of popular thinking and attitudes towards land access and ownership in a more promising direction. Indeed, development and gender experts have long maintained that these traditional custodians need to be sensitized in using different approaches to landholding and allocation among men and women. For instance, community leaders could use the rights based approach, which stands to deliver a fair and improved distribution of land. It could also

offer better and quality local justice to both men and women when it comes to issues of women's access to and control over land.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

This study clearly points out existence of gender disparity in access to and control over land in Bodji Dirmeji of Oromia region. Contributing factors to women's inequalities need to be addressed effectively to ensure women's access to and control over land in the study area. This can be achieved by reviewing the regional rural land policy, establishing autonomous land administration institution, mainstreaming gender in the land administration system, carrying out advocacy and awareness creation activities on women's land rights, establishing strong women's organizations, initiating women's involvement in community activities and decision making, upholding gender justice and by carrying out further research in the subject area. Recommendations are to be implemented by the regional government, development organizations, research institutes, donors, NGOs, CSOs, CBOs and local communities.

**Reviewing rural land policy:** Gaps within the policy and between policy and implementation made evident in this study should be addressed by issuing rural land policy that explicitly focuses on region specific socio-economic issues. To solve the titling problems, measures that allow the independent registration of land in the name of women or in the form of shared tenure, whether between husband and wife, extended families, communities, or women's groups, may need to be put in place. This will avoid ambiguities and enhance better understanding and interpretation of the law. Therefore, the current rural land policy should be revised in a gender sensitive manner to address existing gaps and factors that retarded women's equal access to and control over land.

**Establishing autonomous land administration institution:** Existence of governance structures and local institutions is necessary to carry out women's land related activities. Therefore, land administration institutions should be established at regional, Woreda and Kebele levels to translate policy commitments on women's equal land rights to reality without compromising.

**Mainstreaming gender in the land administration system:** Gender mainstreaming strategy should be applied in the land administration system in order to address women specific needs, to initiate their equal participation in the process and to ensure women's equal benefit from the system. The government should implement a gender sensitive monitoring framework for land ownership including joint or individual ownership. It could help as strong tool to provide land to the women in the country.

**Carrying out advocacy and awareness creation programmes:** Promoting women's equal access to and control over land requires addressing socio-economic issues particularly customs and traditions that affect realization of women's equal rights to land. Therefore, the rural land administration system should design strategies to address these issues through advocacy and awareness creation programmes to change community attitudes and practices.

**Establishing strong CSOs:** Organizations working on women's rights, human rights and land rights should continue to raise awareness on women's land rights through a comprehensive information, education, and communication campaign. They should also work to challenge the perception that women are not capable enough to handle land and property. Additionally, CSOs

should also offer free legal advice and aid to facilitate rural women to improve their access to land.

CSOs should provide trainings to frontline workers at the government offices as well as social mobilizers at community level on legal provisions in relation to women's property inheritance and ownership.

**Establishing strong women's organizations:** Women's organizing has an aspect of empowerment and women's associations could serve as forum to women focused interventions. Thus rural women should be initiated to organize and struggle for their equal landholding and administering rights. Initiating women's involvement in community activities and decision making: Women should be involved in the land administration program implementation process including in dispute settlement and should be empowered to assume leadership positions in LACs. Therefore, the land administration system should design strategies to initiate active involvement of women in the land administration process including at decision making levels.

**Upholding gender justice:** Empowering women and girls, and redressing the power relationship between women and men, is crucial to ensure women's access and control over land. Gender justice is maintained by eradicating hidden and invisible power structures which are the unseen social and political norms reproduced by patriarchal structures and institutions, that favor one gender over others. Gender Justice is achieved through maintaining a world of:

- Social justice and just power relations, where all people, irrespective of gender, are equally valued in society and empowered to pursue their human rights and fundamental freedoms, including reproductive health rights.
- Political justice, in which all people are able to have an equitable, active and influential say in decisions that affect their lives, irrespective of gender.
- Economic justice, whereby power relations, access to and control over resources, business and market activity, and regulation, shift to become more gender equitable, providing sustainable benefits for all.
- Environmental justice, whereby gender is no longer a barrier to accessing, controlling and sustaining the natural resource base upon which we all depend.
- Spiritual enriching, where everyone can live alongside one another in peaceful and just relationship, equal without exclusion

**Further research:** Researches on land issue will help to point out problems on women's land rights. Therefore, in depth research on women's access to and control over land should be carried out to come up with sound implications on the rural land policy and its implementation.

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