

# Gender at the Juncture of Political Reform

Shadow Report  
to the CEDAW Committee

Review of the 8<sup>th</sup> Periodic Report on Ethiopia

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## Executive Summary

The critical concerns that are discussed in this shadow report are based on the list of issues raised by the CEDAW Committee in the pre-session of reviewing the eighth periodic report of Ethiopia.<sup>1</sup>

This report is presented at a unique juncture in our country, which is undergoing massive changes led by a government in the process of reform, and we acknowledge that the political landscape changes on a monthly-basis. The information contained herewith is as current as the writers were able to ascertain, and is based on first-hand accounts of Ethiopian feminist activists, as well as an analysis of secondary resources issued by the Ethiopian government, multilateral and research entities.

While lauding the significant strides made in improving the lives of Ethiopian women and girls, this report highlights gaps in attainment in the major development areas of education and health, and in political representation and the strides to equality. We also note an overall absence of gender as a tool of analysis, and of gender equality as a goal on its own. The report raises an alarm on the rising violence that Ethiopian women and girls face, and underscores the weak implementation of existing laws, as well as the need for the promulgation of updated laws. Finally, the report draws attention to the multiple-disadvantages faced by women with disabilities, and by women in minority communities.

### *General and Data Collection*

Awareness of women's rights under the Convention amongst the public and the legislative arm of government is weak, as is gender-and-age disaggregated data collection across the board, and particularly regarding the experiences of violence. Understanding the impact of policy and legal measures aimed at gender-based discrimination in Ethiopia would require a renewed effort at quality data collection with gender-disaggregated data across all categories of enumeration.

### *Article 1: Definition of Discrimination*

Although gender equality is enshrined in the Ethiopian Constitution, and there are specific laws that prohibit discrimination on the basis of gender, there are serious gaps that need to be addressed in order to improve on gender equality gains.

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<sup>1</sup> This shadow report has been prepared by Setaweet Movement, an Ethiopian feminist network, following consultation with a range of individuals and representatives of the Ethiopian women's movement. The report also builds on a series of workshops organized by the Network of Ethiopian Women's Networks (NEWA) and Setaweet in the last year with the aim of articulating a set of demands for the new Prime Minister of Ethiopia, Dr. Abiy Ahmed.

## *Article 2: Policy Measures to be Undertaken to Eliminate Discrimination: The constitutional, legislative and institutional framework*

We note the absence of specific laws on gender-based violence, domestic violence and sexual harassment. Furthermore, forms of violence that were not known or identified at the time when the Criminal Code was formulated such as gang-rapes and acid attacks are now on the rise and they are not sufficiently criminalized. Sexual harassment is yet to be well-defined in the Ethiopian context, and marital rape has not been criminalized yet.

Discriminatory provisions of the Criminal Code as well as certain institutional policies which criminalize sexual minority women remain entrenched in the social context of pervasive and rising homophobia that is increasingly affecting the gender-equality and feminist agendas of the few organizations working on gender equality, predominantly in urban areas. For instance, the Ministry of Education often ‘checks for homosexual content’ of the materials of gender-equality trainings provided to secondary schools in Addis Ababa.

**As Civil Society actors who have seen the gaps posed by weak legislation, we are encouraged by the adoption of the State of the Maputo Protocol in late 2018 albeit with some reservations. We would like existing laws to be re-examined from a gendered perspective which would put Ethiopia on a stronger footing to eliminate all forms of discrimination. We particularly call for a new proclamation on gender-based violence with a particular focus on domestic violence, gang-rapes and acid attacks, and criminalizing sexual harassment as well as marital rape.**

## *Article 3: Guarantee of Basic Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms*

It is our observation that the state machinery is insufficiently supported to mainstream gender across parallel ministries. In the recent shuffle of federal Ministries, the Ministry of Women and Children has now been mandated to also serve ‘Youth’ thereby covering 75% of the population. We view this as a further de-politicization of the mandate of the Ministry, particularly when combined with the limitation in expertise in implementing gender-mainstreaming, and in monitoring gender-sensitive budgeting vertically and horizontally.

**We advocate for the creation of a Ministry whose mandate is Gender Equality and which is strongly supported in terms of budgeting and with technical skills in mainstreaming gender across the line ministries in order to meet international targets on gender equality.**

## *National human rights institution*

The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission which, as all government institutions has a designated ‘Women’s and Children’s Department’ has been criticized by international watchdogs for its lack of impartiality, and for failing to report on human rights abuses. For its part, the Commission has argued that its reports of

abuses were ignored until the reform process created the space for the reports of extra-judicial abuse to come to the surface.

#### *Article 4: Temporary Special Measures to Achieve Equality*

Affirmative action has long been a facet of Ethiopian public life, particularly in terms of education, political representation and employment. Such measures intersect with affirmative action in other spheres of inequality such as ethnicity. However, the impact of affirmative action on gender equality remains under-researched.

#### *Article 5: Sex Roles and Stereotyping*

Ethiopian cultures and the use of languages continue to devalue women mostly unchallenged, apart from limited activism by feminist actors that problematize Ethiopian sexism in literature and cultural production. Even in the current agenda of political reform, there appears to be a resurgence of narratives that essentialize women as peaceful and nurturing, and a persistent examination of women in relation to their men relatives devoid of a more nuanced understanding of women as political subjects in their own rights.

#### *Article 6: Trafficking and Prostitution*

Sex work engaged in by adult women is not criminalized in Ethiopia, and although numbers are difficult to come by, sex work definitely appears to be on the rise in urban areas with significant economic considerations for many Ethiopian women and their families. Although sex workers face violence to a great degree, crimes against them are hardly ever reported or prosecuted. Feminist research into sex work in Addis Ababa indicates that members of the Police Force are some of the worst offenders of violence against sex workers<sup>2</sup>. In addition, while underage sex work is criminalized, there is no evidence to show that the government has a strategy to curb minors' engagement in sex work.

**As citizen activists for gender equality, we would like to understand the measures planned by the State to protect sex workers, and particularly underage sex workers, from abuse and exploitation and in particular by police officers.**

#### *Trafficking and Migration*

The Ethiopian Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA) estimates that 35,000 women migrate internationally annually through registered channels, while an equal number go through unregistered channels. Other estimates put the numbers as high as 170-180,00 women who depart every year as domestic workers, with 60-70% estimated to be irregular migrants. The labor of Ethiopian women migrants

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<sup>2</sup> Ayele, 2015. Unpublished PhD Thesis, SOAS, University of London.

sustains the Ethiopian economy – with remittances from both male and female migrants, and from registered sources alone surpassing Foreign Direct Investment. Rising economic pressures of unemployment have been contained through emigration which has directly resulted from landlessness, unemployment and rising inequality.

Ethiopian women migrant domestic workers are often in vulnerable and disadvantaged position with high levels of violence, and exploitation reported, particularly in the Gulf countries. In addition to exploitation as well as physical and sexual abuse, there is a reported rise in mental health disorders among returnee migrants. The new Ethiopian Overseas Employment Proclamation No. 923/2016 (February 2016) aims to protect the rights of Ethiopian women migrant workers traveling internationally for domestic service. The Proclamation determines that all migrant workers need to have completed an eighth-grade education and have obtained a certificate of occupational competence issued by a competence assessment center. The proclamation also requires the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs to undertake regular pre-employment and pre-departure awareness raising to citizens in relation to the conditions of the receiving countries, the required skills and the rights and duties of workers as well as conducting awareness-raising activities to the public at large.

**While the law appears to be comprehensive, the extent to which these laws are being implemented and their effectiveness in limiting the exploitation of migrant women needs exploration by independent investigators.**

Lastly, some of the larger NGOs working on migration offer trainings for first respondent law enforcement officials and border guards on the gender-sensitive treatment of migrant women and girls but the impacts of such sporadic trainings are not apparent.

#### *Article 7: Political and Public Life*

The current representation of women at the highest ranks of the Executive branch of government at the Federal level is impressive and includes one of the few gender-equal cabinet of Ministers in the world, with women in key posts such as Minister of Defense and Ministry of Planning, as well as the first woman President. In the Judiciary branch, Ethiopia now has its first woman President of the Supreme Court although at 20%, women are still unrepresented at the Judiciary level. In the Legislative arm, the Federal House of Representatives is 38.8% women. There are variations with the gender breakdown of the regional parliament in Tigray at close to 50%. In terms of Institutional building, the government which has been in a state of deep reform in the past year has augured the liberalization of media and the political space at large. We have seen the election of a woman Chair of the Election Board who was previously a staunch opposition member and a political prisoner. Representatives of the nascent women's movement are encouraged by the political changes of the last year.

**As feminist activists, we would like to see such reform institutionalized to sustain the move towards democracy. There is also a need to create a more welcoming environment for women in leadership positions within both the private and public spheres.**

In addition, despite the bold moves towards tangible democracy, including the release of political prisoners who in the words of Prime Minister Abiy, 'should not have been imprisoned in the first place,' the narratives on women still lags in making women full political subjects, and we have yet to attain a gendered analysis of the human rights discourse.

**Specifically, in investigating the treatment of political prisoners, it is important to acknowledge that while many Ethiopian women fought for their rights as members of ethnic or religious groups, their imprisonment and treatment in prisons was highly gendered with extensive reports of rape, and specifically gendered forms of humiliation.**

#### *Civil society and non-governmental organizations*

At the time of report-writing, the revised Charities and Societies Proclamation which is expected to overhaul the restrictions of the Charities and Societies Proclamation is awaiting final approval by the Federal House of Representatives. Therefore, Civil Society organizations and particularly the Ethiopian Women Lawyers' Association (EWLA) and the Network of Ethiopian Women's Associations (NEWA) are expected to fully return to their work of defending the rights of Ethiopian women. However, in the eleven years since the restriction placed on NGOs' funding and operations, many of the organizations with extensive experience in human-rights work have lost most of their institutional memory and capacity, and it will take them time, and decisive leadership, to regain them.

#### *Article 10: Equality in Education*

The education of girls is an important component of the Ethiopian Government's Education Sector Development Plan, which is currently in its sixth edition. In regards to girls' education, research findings indicate that while there have been huge improvements, gender equity continues to lag behind. While Ethiopian primary education enrolment is nearly at gender parity (0.91), completion of the first cycle of primary education (Grade 5) is 75.1% for girls compared to 77.1 for boys; and 52.2% of girls complete Grade 8 compared to 53.3% of boys. Approximately 30% of students in Grades 11 and 12 are female (World Bank, 2013).

**Persistent gender inequality, sexual harassment and violence against girl students, gender-insensitive curricula that fail to challenge pervasive gender stereotypes, and the scarcity of women teachers contribute to the high rates of failure of girls. In addition, there are questions around the quality of data collected and analyzed by the Ministry of Education for its annual abstracts, and there needs to be a clarification if the numbers of students who are counted in the enrolment data do in fact attend school regularly. In terms of adult education, 42.2% of those enrolled in Alternative Basic Education which is a life-skills-based form of adult education with encouraging results, are women.**

According to a research by the Population Council, child marriage was cited as a reason for non-attendance of school by 23% of girls in rural areas, and by 16% in urban areas. There is also some indication that with the rampant problems with the quality of education, as well as increasingly fewer job opportunities, formal education may be losing its value, at least beyond the secondary school level. However, research also indicates that girls' education contributes to changing social norms around gender; for instance, educated girls become more likely to resist forced arranged marriages. Moreover, development practitioners assert that even basic literacy and numeracy obtained by young women and girls is an important attainment, helping them access better jobs and improved life-skills.

### *Girl Students with Disabilities*

Although the Ethiopian education system has an inclusive policy towards disability, and schools are prohibited from discriminating against students with disabilities, female students with physical and mental disabilities are under-served both in terms of access and due to a dismissive attitude towards disabilities by many teachers and school administrators. Physical access to dorms and classrooms as well as a shortage in teaching material in braille and in teachers who can interpret into sign language mean that many girl students with disabilities fall behind, and girl students with intellectual disabilities are often under-taught.

**Girls with disabilities are exceptionally vulnerable to violence and sexual exploitation by teachers, other students or their own family members. Difficulties with menstrual hygiene management, and non-accessible bathrooms make it difficult for girls with disabilities to attend school, and contribute to a high drop-out rate.**

## *Violence within Schools*

**Violence against girl students is a major issue throughout the education sector. Sexual harassment, verbal and physical abuse and the threat of abduction on the way and from school make education an unsafe experience for many Ethiopian girls.** Although corporal punishment in schools is now prohibited, research indicates that over 70% of all school age children have experienced forms of violent punishment by teachers in a school setting (African Child Policy Forum, 2006). **At the secondary as well as at the tertiary level, reports of rape, and of gang-rape in particular are becoming increasingly common with scant attention given to the problem by school administrators.** For instance, in December 2018, it took the online campaign of feminist activists in Addis Ababa for the administration of Jimma University to install a physical barrier between the women's and men's dorms, after women students repeatedly posted on social media of being threatened to be raped by male students. The problem was addressed after the Minister of Health, who sits on the Board of Administrators of Jimma University, intervened.

The expansion of state-run universities at a speedy rate (currently at 45, spread across the country, up from seven in 2007) often without proper facilities, affects not only the quality of education provided at these learning centers, but also the welfare of the students. **Lastly, the government requires universities to have 70% of students in engineering and natural science and 30% in humanities and social sciences, disadvantaging women students.**

**As most girl students complete secondary school having taken fewer Math and Science classes, they are at a disadvantage in competing to enter tertiary education institutions.**

## *Future Trends*

The recently revealed Ethiopian Education Development Roadmap (2018-2030) is a comprehensive guide for major shifts within the education system from the pre-primary to the higher education segments. While heavily researched, we note with some dismay that the Roadmap, written by an all-male team, takes a cursory approach to gender equality issues within education except for occasionally noting that girls' enrolment lags slightly behind boys'. The Roadmap, however, recommends that primary education should be compulsory for all girls and boys.

On the other hand, the newly appointed woman Minister of SHE (Science and Higher Education) has unveiled an ambitious plan of a 50% representation of women on all Boards of Higher Education Institutions, as well as the creation of a network of women scholars which we find to be encouraging trends. Lastly, acknowledging the direct link between education and women's economic participation, we argue that the feminized streams within the technical and



vocational streams need to open up to women so that women may be trained in the more mainstream fields such as wood and electricity work, and be supporting in finding work in these fields upon graduation.

**It is our hope that the education system and particularly the Roadmap receive a 'gender overhaul' focused on the delivery of quality education for all girls and boys at all levels of the education system and beyond the current focus on the rates of enrolment. We ask that the State adopts a Zero-Tolerance-Policy to violence and harassment within schools and that it takes swift measures to enact anti-sexual harassment and anti-violence policies.**

### *Article 11: Employment*

Ethiopian women are almost three times as likely to be unemployed as Ethiopian men, and their gross daily national income per capita is 1.16USD as compared to men's 1.886USD. Women are also more likely to take jobs that put them in vulnerable positions, and which do not protect their basic labor rights. Women are paid 63% less than men for the same work (IMF, 2018).

The Ethiopian government recognizes women as a major, if largely untapped, economic force. Accordingly, most of the jobs that are being created at the newly developed 'industrial cities' within Hawassa, Kombolcha, Mekelle Cities and on the peripheries of Addis Ababa feature feminized and unskilled jobs in textile manufacturing. Cities like Hawassa has seen the opening of a large industrial complex that will aim to generate one billion dollars a year in exports and which when fully occupied should create jobs for 60,000 people (majority of them women).

Gender-related issues that are arising out of the mobilization of so many women for work relate to the availability and quality of housing they are able to access, protection and safety issues, the health impacts of factory work and the unintended burden of added household tasks on the women left behind in the homes of migrant workers.

Lastly, a study of Ethiopian workers released in October 2016 by US National Bureau of Economics Research found low-wage factories in industrial parks to be less desirable, more dangerous and even less paying than self-employment in the informal sector with 77% of the study cohort leaving factory jobs within the first year.

In the past two years, there have been encouraging trends in women's employment. The government has extended paid maternity leave to four months, although these are not yet codified in the labor law and do not extend beyond Federal employees. Government institutions are now mandated to have child-care facilities on site, and women government employees may bring their children with them on free public service buses. In addition, in rural parts of the country, there are efforts to build child-care facilities within the Safety Net, a major food security program implemented by the government and supported by development partners.

While we applaud these moves, we find that these developments are crafted with only women as parents in mind. Future policy reforms need to invest in fathers' participation in childcare including through a progressive paternity leave system, and through the State's encouragement to the private sector for implementing progressive maternity and paternity leave policies. Moreover, the percentage of women who can benefit from such policies is relatively low; most Ethiopian women who work for pay are hired by the informal sector.

A large swathe of poor Ethiopian women work as domestic workers, with a high level of insecurity and threats to their well-being. The supply and demand of domestic work has in the past decade been highly affected by the migration of tens of thousands of young women to countries of the Gulf Region for domestic work – the relative decrease in the available pool has led to an increase in the payment offered to domestic workers, and perhaps also to a better treatment in people's homes.

Women with disabilities are particularly under-served by financial institutions and they find it more difficult to obtain loans to involve in businesses. Despite the Proclamation on the Right to Employment of Persons with Disabilities, employers are reluctant to hire women with disabilities and they usually fail to provide reasonable accommodation when they do.

**As feminist activists, we acknowledge the efforts of the government to create more employment opportunities for women. We hope to see in the coming few years, a gendered analysis of all economic policies that views women as more than an economic resource. We hope to find policies, in particular with the ever-expanding industrial parks, that ensures the well-being and safety of women workers while investing in much-needed economic growth for the country.**

## *Article 12: Healthcare and Family Planning*

The EDHS put Ethiopian women's fertility at 4.6 births per woman in 2016, down from 4.8 in 2011 and significantly lower than 5.5 in 2000. Reducing maternal mortality has been of paramount significance for the government of Ethiopia in the last ten years.

The births occurring at a health facility grew to 26% in 2016 from 5% in 2005 while the number of births attended by a skilled provider grew to 28% in 2016 from 6% in 2000. In addition, the EDHS indicates progress in terms of family planning services - in 2016, 36% of fertile women were using either a traditional or modern family planning method compared to 8% in 2000. However, the EDHS also shows that large segments of Ethiopian married and unmarried women still have unmet needs for family planning services.

The government deserves credit for rolling out the Anti-HPV vaccination among 14-year old girls through the education system during this past academic year.<sup>3</sup> However, there is a resurgent resistance to vaccination, in Amhara Region in particular, which is affecting the deployment of maternal and child health services. In addition, with the loss in funding of HIV-related interventions in response to the significant decrease in new infection rates (current prevalence of HIV in urban Ethiopia is 4.1 among females, and 1.9 among males), there is a risk that HIV infection rates might resurge particularly with existing power inequalities between Ethiopian women and men, and with high levels of sex work in urban areas of the countries.

### *Gaps in Women's Health Services*

Women with disabilities are often underserved by the medical system which fails to make facilities accessible both physically (with ramps, elevators and disability-friendly toilet facilities) and through communication including availability of sign language interpretation, proper signage and reading material in braille. In addition, women with disabilities often complain of maltreatment by medical personnel who show them pity and not the rightful access to health services that they deserve. Reproductive health services are often the most difficult to access with medical personnel often treating women with disabilities as devoid of sexuality and with the foregone conclusion that where a woman with a disability is pregnant, that it must lead to a complication. In one report issued by a local NGO working on Persons with Disabilities, violations of the reproductive rights of women with disabilities include unwarranted referral to disability services as opposed to the Reproductive Health service that they sought; a visually impaired pregnant woman who received unsolicited advice to get an abortion and a hearing-impaired mother who was fitted with a permanent contraceptive method without her consent.

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<sup>3</sup> Forms of cancers that affect women disproportionately such as cervical and breast cancer are on the rise in Ethiopia with very limited medical services to help affected women.

Furthermore, healthcare providers in general are inadequately prepared to deal with violence against women and girls and in particular with emergency care in the case of gang-rapes and acid attacks. For instance, according to the observations of feminist activists, gaps in emergency health care by referral hospitals in Addis Ababa and two regions have been implicated in the deaths or severe bodily impairment of the following young women in the last four years:

- Hanna Lelango: a 16-year old who was gang-raped by five men and who died from an alleged infection in Addis Ababa, in 2014
- Atsede Nigussie: a 24-year old who had acid thrown on her face and who lost sight in both her eyes after a forty-day stay at Ayder Hospital in Mekelle, Tigray Region where she was given no further assistance than the regular cleaning of her wounds. Although she was later referred to Yekatit 12 Hospital in Addis Ababa, she did not receive any more appropriate medical care there
- Chaltu Abdi: a 14-year who died in August 2018 at Yekatit 12 Hospital following a stay of several months after being referred by Jegol Hospital in Harari Region for 'burn injuries sustained while cooking' although Chaltu's testimony to the advocates who spoke to her was that a flammable liquid was poured on her by her employer and his wife after she was repeatedly raped by him. It is also not clear if medical negligence contributed to her unexpected death months after her injury<sup>4</sup>.

Furthermore, beyond emergency care, the health system often fails women in terms of delivery of quality services, with high incidences of reported rates of misinformation and malpractice. Regarding the care that Ethiopian women received during and after delivery between 2007-2016, only 56% had their blood pressure, urine and blood samples taken during an antenatal care visit, while only 44% received a postpartum checkup in a health facility after delivery and before discharge (Lancet, 2018).

Moreover, the results in healthcare that have earned accolades for Ethiopia in terms of reach of services have largely depended on the corps of female health workers who offer front-line health services including the provision of basic forms of contraceptives. The opportunities for advancement, and the level of compensation offered to these women requires further analysis. Furthermore, observations by feminist activists in many parts of the country point to the neglect of responsibilities and corruption by medical personnel. Lastly, the political unrest of the past few years has left the health system in a dangerous state, affecting maternal and child health delivery as services are suspended with a high turnover of staff.

**In order to sustain the gains made in the health sector, the Ethiopian government needs to invest in the quality of services being delivered as well as**

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<sup>4</sup> Setawet Report, 2019.

in the strengthening of the health system and its accountability to women and men clients. It is also important that women service providers are not instrumentalized and receive sufficient compensation and recognition for the gains made in the medical sector.

#### *Article 14: Rural Women*

There has been a strong gender-equality focus in the recent land certification process, with the aim that women's names on land certificates can help them access credit for micro-finance, helping them move from group collaterals to individual borrowing. However, the effects of the land certification have not been straightforward, and researchers have noted difficulties related to polygamous families in particular (USAID, 2017). In addition, trend observers have noted that where there is still a strong taboo against women ploughing in most parts of the country, the land certificate process has not yet realized its potential to contribute to the economic empowerment of rural women. Likewise, micro-credit services, unsupported by robust financial business solutions appear to not have made a major impact in the economic lives of poor women.

Similarly, while the lives of some women living in semi-urban and urban areas who have joined savings groups and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) may have improved financially (women account for 60% of beneficiaries), access to large-scale loans are often elusive for most women's groups.<sup>5</sup>

#### *Article 15: Equality Before the Law*

##### *Women in Detention*

In the context of the current reform, the Ethiopian public has been made aware of wide-scale rape and humiliation of political prisoners. Prisoners in the notorious Maekelawi Prison in Addis Ababa, and 'Jail Ogaden' in Somali Regional State were gruesome sites of abuse of women and men prisoners which included rape, torture, overcrowding, inadequate food and lack of health care and sleep. According to a Human Rights Watch Report, women gave birth to babies conceived of rape by prison guards, alone and in unhygienic conditions in Jail Ogaden. The Zone 9 Bloggers, a group of women and men advocates of human rights, many of whom served prison terms on charges of 'terrorism', have documented the cruel treatment of women political prisoners in particular. Both prisons have now been closed.

##### *Access to Justice*

Access to Justice remains a key concern for Ethiopian women and girls. Women's rights and their violations are often instrumentalized and politicized, and in this regard, we would like to raise the case of Chaltu Abdi, a fourteen-year old who died in August 2018 at Yekatit 12 hospital in Addis Ababa where she was being

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<sup>5</sup> (Solomon, 2010, Addis Ababa Chamber of Commerce)

treated for third-degree burns from an unidentified flammable liquid. Chaltu sustained these burns after being allegedly raped repeatedly by her employer in Harar City in Eastern Ethiopia. Although under police custody since July 2018, her alleged assailant was only charged with a crime in January 2019.

The death of Chaltu, who comes from the Oromo ethnic group has taken an ethnicized dimension as her alleged assailant belongs to the Harari ethnic group, which although a minority, has political dominance in Harari Region. In the investigation of the organization that brought the issue to the public, Jegol Hospital in Harar, as well as members of the Regional Police appear to be implicated in an effort to cover the crime, and it is also not clear what exactly Chaltu died from. Lastly, there have reportedly been efforts by politically powerful people to keep the case under-reported.

The report period has seen an expansion of shelters for survivors run by AWSAD, an Ethiopian NGO, as well as a few government-owned ones (one operational in Addis Ababa is administered by the Addis Ababa Women and Children Affairs Bureau) and the one-stop services for survivors from one to three in Addis Ababa, supported by UNWomen. While this increment needs to be lauded, there are gaps in the communication of available services for survivors of violence, and the service needs to reach a much higher number of women.

**Sexist attitudes and a prevalent acceptance of violence as a norm result in large gaps in the provision of appropriate services by police officers who on occasion have been accused of rape themselves and who routinely victim-blame survivors. The Women and Children Units within Police Stations have availed some services, but survivors of sexual violence, even within urban areas, often have no idea where to go to get services, or what their rights entail. At this political juncture, we look forward to civil society organizations re-engaging in the sector, improving not only services but also the government's accountability in ensuring access to justice.**

#### *Article 16: Marriage and Family Life*

Although women within marriages have, on paper, equal rights to use, administer and transfer common property, true ownership often proves elusive to women who are in unequal power relationships with their husbands. Furthermore, a national study is required in order to recognize the economic value of unpaid care work by Ethiopian women and girls. Such unpaid care work should be included in policy analysis, followed by a provision of adequate support to women and girls in recognition of the opportunity costs of women's and girls' unpaid care work.

#### *General Recommendation 19: Violence against Women*

In the 'New Ethiopia' where the government has disavowed violence and torture, the current displacements and ethnic-based clashes have a specific gender component to them with reports of the gang-rapes of girls as young as five, and

with women reportedly raped in front of their husbands. We consider these outrages as a warning that rape is becoming a weapon of war in Ethiopia.

Normative rape culture means that women and girls live with the constant threat of violence in the private and public sphere with prevalent victim-blaming ensuring that the focus remains on the survivor and not on the perpetrators which to a large extent remain invisible.

The EDHS 2016 sample gives an overall average of 35.2% of women between 15 and 49 that have been affected by at least one form of physical, psychological or sexual violence. The data and analysis provided in the EDHS are surprisingly low which may indicate hesitancy on the part of respondents to disclose their experiences, or perhaps a lack of understanding on the concepts of violence as articulated in the EDHS.

The role of police in gender-based violence cases needs serious oversight. 'Women-and-Children's Desks' have been created throughout the government structure, including at police stations, and there are Child Justice projects throughout the Ethiopian court system. In addition, women police officers are usually the first contacts for survivors of violence. While this structure has had some success in gender-responsive legal services, there is also in our communities, a widespread mistrust of police, and we know of incidences where police officers have allegedly raped women and girls, particularly sex workers. The impunity enjoyed by the Police has meant that incidences of sexual violence are further underreported. Lastly, weak accountability system and lax punitive measures combine with criminal acts by the police to normalize the violation of rights of women and girls.

**We argue that the gross violations of the rights of Ethiopian women and girls starkly undermine the State's commitments to elimination discrimination. At this juncture of change into a more democratic order, we would like to see the Ethiopian state address gender-based violence as a matter of priority. We would appreciate particular oversight by the new Ministry of Peace (headed by a woman Minister) which overlooks the Federal Police Department as well as the office of the Attorney General, in order to implement existing laws with fidelity and to ensure accountability of the Police.**

### *Female Genital Mutilation and Child Marriage*

The rates for Female Genital Mutilation remain high in Ethiopia, with the latest EDHS (2016) stating that 65.2% of the 15-49 age group of Ethiopian women has undergone one of the three forms of Female Genital Mutilation. While some success has been achieved in reducing rates of female genital mutilation and other 'harmful traditional practices' through the combined interventions of the government, NGOS, religious organizations and local institutions, there is also evidence that in other parts of the country, due to the government ban on FGM, the practice has simply gone underground with unintended effects. Longitudinal studies such as the WIDE study indicate mixed reactions to the ban among communities. Elsewhere in the WIDE sites, the age-old rationales given for female

genital mutilation, particularly around curbing their sexual urges were found to still be salient. In addition to making women sexually submissive, female genital mutilation often remains a prerequisite for women to become marriageable. Child marriage is also a 'harmful traditional practice' that has been banned with the official age of legal marriage raised to 18 in the Revised Family Code (2000). Research including data from the WIDE longitudinal survey shows mixed results from the ban - it may be that with increased urbanization and modernization, these 'harmful traditional practices' reduce in absolute numbers. However, the trends indicate that unless the power imbalance that characterizes the relationship between Ethiopian women and men is redressed, violence against women and girls will continue even as 'harmful traditional practices' decrease.

### *Women Who Require Special Considerations*

Women in pastoralist areas are vastly under-served with basic services and the protection of their rights. For instance, in the Education Roadmap, the suggestion is given that 'pastoralist communities should be served with appropriate education services' without examining the complexities of providing education to girls within a mobile population. In addition, elderly women in all Ethiopian communities deserve better dedicated services.

### **Women in Minority Communities**

The Ethiopian Constitution states that 'the Nation, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia have all equal rights', therefore, there is no clear definition as to what ethnic and religious groups may be classified as ethnic minorities. However, Ethiopian Muslims have long complained of social and political exclusion in a country dominated, until relatively recently, with Orthodox Christianity as a state religion. Furthermore, certain communities such as the 'Fuga', 'Gafat Bete Israel', 'Negede Weyto', 'Menja', 'Me'enit' and Gumuz live amongst ethnic groups who treat them as inferior. Women and girls within these religious and ethnic groups are understood to be doubly-excluded.

**Lastly, Ethiopian lesbian and bisexual women as well as women who identify as Intersex, majority of whom hide their sexual orientation and identity are completely ignored even within the Ethiopian human rights discourse that does not include sexuality, or the rights of sexual minorities, as an issue at all.**