



## **Education and the Economic Emancipation of the Women in Eritrea: A Study in Asmara**

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### **Introduction**

Female education is a better investment for the future, for liking standards merely for she has multiple roles and effects in social, economic and political affairs by influencing the families where she is the core (Castel, 1968). Aggey has also confirmed this issue by pinpointing that “when you educate a man, you educate an individual, but when you educate a woman, you educate a family” (Aggey, Cited in Castell, 1962). Then having this in mind, the paper tries to explore the function of education on women in different angle of life. It emancipates the woman and brings about significant social change. Moreover, it assists a woman to know how on social issues, that is nurturing, avoiding harmful cultural practices, child spacing, decision at marriage and alike. The education has a crucial role in access to employment opportunities and to have handsome payment value as provide economic security. In the political arena, as well as education for women have inseparable function to the above-explained status, which upgrades their participation in political hierarchies, and enable them to develop consciousness about their rights and duties. There are many importance of education has on women, but there are obstacles that hinder women for not reaching in the needed level of literacy to get the above-mentioned phenomena.

Based on the findings of the paper, we tried to identify the bottle-necks of female education and provide suggested recommendation that would help the governmental and non-governmental organizations (of women domain) to revisit their policies and to make amend ment that could help for employment of females.

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## **VAROIOUS TERMS OF CONCEPTS USED**

**Social Change:** As variations or modifications in any aspect of social process, pattern or form and as modification in established pattern of inter human relationship and standards (Robert, 1982). Other scholar by the name Valentine, has also defined, the phase social-change as the significant alteration of social structure (i.e Patterns of social action and interaction) including consequences and modifications of such structure embodied in norms (rule of conduct), values cultural products and symbols (Valentine, 1983). Social Change can be small-scale change such as gradual development of leadership role in small task oriented group, cyclical patterns of change, such as the succession of centralization and decentralization in administrative organization and revolutionary change, such as the overthrow of a government. This includes short changes in occupational structure both growth and decline in membership size, a social units, continuous process such as specialization and discontinue process such as particular technical or social inventions.

**Education** is the total process of developing human ability and behavior. It is a social process in which one achieves social competence and individual growth carried on selected, controlled setting, which can be institutionalized as a school or college. The UNESCO also defined education as an organized and sustained instruction designed to communicate a combination of knowledge, skills and understanding valuable for all of all of the activities of life (Page and Thomas, 1978).

**Feminism** the term feminism originally implies to the qualities of females. It began to be used in reference to the theory of sexual equality and the movement for women's rights in 1980s. Before the acceptance of feminism, womanism was used to refer women's movement. Feminists' beliefs have existed, throughout history, but feminism did not become wide spread until the mid-1800s. Until that many people regarded women as inferior and less important than men, the view that women's nature and virtues are emotional and passive justifies refers to everyone who is aware of and seeking to end women's subordination in nay way and for any reason. And now it has been expanded to women an awareness of women's oppression and exploitation within the family, at work and in society. (Encyclopedia of Feminism, 1986).

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Historically, we can see from literatures that there was less societal expectation of educating female. For instance in earlier literatures, Clarke has argued young women to study only one third as much as young men and not to study at all during ministration (Henslin, 1993). Nevertheless, this view could be seen a yardstick to measure the mind set of earlier generation's gender discrimination in school, and could also remind us now far we have swimmmed towards gender equality in education. However, we can't sat today's society has gender-fair view in all aspects of education. According to the time honored view of a girl, always know enough for her needs and since domestic duties are traditionally her load, girls leave schools as soon as the

distance between the home and the school becomes too great. Even parents most of the time, prefer to female drop outs as opposed to her male siblings in such cases. Understanding this situation, the NUEW is continuously exerting its effort to motivate females to continue their education in such circumstances. In a short talk we held with Tsega, last week she informed us that, her organization in collaboration with other NGOs had granted a huge number of mountain-bike cycles to students who are far from the secondary school around Nefasit, which otherwise would have resulted in significant drop out of female students. Furthermore, still today's schools are sex bias to sort students into different activities.( Weitzman, 1984; Foley 1990, cited @ Henslin, 1993). School teachers still nature the natural difference they find as in the past and continue to perpetuate the gender inequalities of the existing social order. This is mostly done by fostering sex linked aspirations by encouraging females to choose "feminine" occupation thought to be compatible with future husbands and children, while male choose work more benefiting the future roles for which they are being groomed. Hence girls are often engaged into clerical jobs, which hardly men join, males join to business and profession.

In most cases, men and women differ in their aspiration when they join the college as they are nurtured in patriarchal worldview. Two extremes in bachelor's degree highlight this reality. 92% of bachelor's degree in home economics is awarded to female while 95% of bachelor degrees in military science got the males. Similarly, men earn 86% of bachelor's degree in the masculine field of engineering. Where, women are awarded about 90% of bachelor degree in the feminine field of nursing (Sociological Abstract, 1991: Table 284 Cited in Hensline, 1993). It is noted that the female's highest attrition rate occurs is engineering and mathematics, traditionally two strongly masculine fields (Hensline, 1993).

The above notion can be well proved in Eritrean context. The University of Asmara which is the only national university record shows the above reality in the so-called feminine and masculine departments. The engineering faculty (specially the Mechanical Engineering) is commonly said as monasteries where women are not allowed (such as Debre-Bizien Monastery). The mathematics department too, shows similar gender biases enrollment. Whereas, on the other side, the nursing, psychology, English, Biology have quite appreciated proportion of females, so the gender bias aspiration in which females are being socialized accounts a lot in hindering females to join special departments, where they can make radical change at least economically. Some scholars insist that the pay gap could behalf owing to the fact that women tend to choose lower paying jobs where as men are more likely to go into more lucrative or changing and rewarding fields, such as business and engineering, but the balance is due to discrimination of work world (Kemp, 1990 cited on Henslin, 1993).

Another big challenge in feminine world is the harsh realities of discrimination in searching jobs. In many nations, especially in USA the law states that family responsibilities cannot be a factor in hiring, transfer or promotion, and forbids employers from asking a prospective employee's family status, owing to the assumptions that child's need may interfere with a woman's ability to do her job. However, in ground the discrimination of this assumption has never ceased.

Employer's use different strategies to get around the law discover it to a woman is married (or has a child) (Berkeley, 1989 cited in Hensline, 1993).

In related literature of the Eritrean context, the national constitution applies to both genders with no discrimination (Article 5). Article 7, prohibits, "any act that violates the human reign of women or limits or otherwise thwarts their role and participation". Women are entitled to participate in all political, economic and cultural aspects. However, though the constitution states this right, we can't say there is equal normative access to job on the ground, specially on the private companies, as the negative patriarchal stereotype towards women, which has a deep root on the traditional of customary attitudes our society couldn't be eradicated in short period of time. However, taking this into consideration, the government of Eritrea has taken same affirmative action to increase the recruitments of female teachers with the focus on minorities and to empower female for the establishment of an effective support system and the integration of gender sensitive issues, methodologies and increasing awareness of the teacher's role in the educational process (NUEW, 1999).

Achieving gender equality and social transformations require a great educational effort in order to transform the domestic environment where men and women coexist. Education is both an issue of concern and strategy for achieving change both now and into the future. Access to and provision of education is clearly seen as the means through which gender equality will be achieved around the world. The employment of women is not possible without improving access to education. Economic stability and financial control likewise, require education in order to be successful. Because of the impacts of education can have in other areas of women's life, it is not surprising that, it is frequently mentioned. While getting gender equality into education programs needed, its access to education in the first places that continue to be vital concern for many equality advocates (Symington et'al, 2004).

Taking into consideration the government of Eritrea has made a lot of efforts to promote the economic and social status of women. The basic guide for a continuous process towards the emancipation of women and their full integration in economic, political, social and cultural development has been the formulation of Nairobi Forward looking strategies that intended to provide practical and effective guide for global action on a long term basis. Thus, the government develop a constitution in 1997 which favors the right of women and their participation in every aspect of life, among these, health and education issues, school infrastructures, penal code to exclude all discriminatory clauses and add protective measures for women. Education as a strategy shifts the focus from a matter of access to schools into a matter of content that the students should be taught. Thus, education is used as a tool through which gender issues are addressed and through which advocacy can occur. The roles education as issue and education as a strategy reinforce each other, means they favor of equality both through promotion and generation of attitudes (Symington et al, 2004).

The government of Eritrea believes that the core of its development strategy lies on the equality of its human resources. The direct need for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the economy will depend on the development of its human resources and the production of modern, literate and skilled manpower. To meet these objectives, the state declared free and compulsory basic education for all its citizens, irrespective of sex and ethnic origin. If we see similar literatures, the UNESCO 1960 also adopted the convention and recommendation against discrimination in education, based on sex, race and national or social origin (J. Chapeaud, 1974).

The impact of education is obvious, women and men who are not well trained are treated as marginal workers who can be hired or dismissed at the desire of employer, especially in labor intensive industries like the garment of women, trades women with educational credentials provide a pool of cheap labor that enables industries to survive and flourish. Women have traditionally been paid less than men reflecting both their subordinate position in society and the assumption that women are never the principal sources of family income, but are dependent on men as providers. Unless women are educated to compute efficiently with men, they will continue to be discriminated, to occupy marginal positions and to continue to lag behind men in earnings (Pervcci and Knudsen, 1983).

As such the ministry of education in Eritrea to ensure equal distribution, equal participation and provision of quality education, has made a 5-year development plan (1995-2000). This is to make sure that the 50% of all primary school aged children have easy access to education by the year 2000, with 51% of enrollment rate achieved in 1999. Besides, regional seminars and workshops on girl's education have been conducted to raise awareness about the status, role and contribution of women and girls in society. Greater participation of the parents through the Parent Teacher Association to tackle the major problems of girls' education has been introduced at school and village levels. Furthermore, a review of education and an increase in the capacity of Asmara University to entertain more students has opened the opportunity for more high school graduates to join the university. Female enrollment had gradually increased with the introduction of positive discrimination by lowering the university entrance criteria. Female enrollment has reached 14% of the total day and evening participants. Education either function as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it or it becomes "the practice of freedom", the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of the world by eradicating patriarchy, by ending sexist oppression, by challenging the politics of domination on all fronts (Watkins, 1989).

Women's education always has lagged behind that of in all African societies and there are several reasons for this. It has been explained that in traditional societies, a major role for a woman is to ensure the continuity of the lineage as she was expected to marry soon after puberty. She did not need formal education to perform this function. Moreover, a woman was expected to be provided for by her husband, and since education become a means for entering a highly paid

job in the formal sector. It was considered more important for boys to have formal education, since they were thought to be breadwinners in the family (F.A. Dolphyne, 1995).

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Objectives**

The main objectives of this research is:

To study the role of education and the economic emancipation of female by making their access to employment and raising the income level.

### **Hypothesis**

Education has the power of economic emancipation among the feminine and brings about economic changes in the society.

### **Sources and Techniques of Data Collection**

Primary Data Collection Method is Based on Questionnaires: The total 80 questionnaire are distributed which are self-guided. These include close and open-ended questions.

**Secondary Data:** Relevant books and Research Journals are referred.

### **Probability Sampling**

The cluster random sampling techniques are used in the field of study i.e., Zoba Maekel (Central Asmara) and the differential percentage of the questionnaires are distributed as the following: Asmara (50%), Himbirti (19%), Adi Segdo (12%), and Adi Abeito (19%), to have better representation of the population.

### **Non-Probability Sampling**

We used judgmental/purposive sampling by choosing college educated and elementary level to the gap of emancipation that better suit to our study.

### **Characteristics of the Respondents**

**Gender:** All respondents are females

**Age:** Between 25- 50

**Marital Status:** Married, Divorced or Widowed

### **Limitation of the Study**

This research could have been concluded nationwide but unfortunately it is done within Zoba Maekel (Asmara) only due to lack of financial resources. Another limitation is the sample population comprises only female respondents.

### **DATA ANALYSIS**

#### **Significance of Education in the life of Women**

Educating a female emancipates her and brings about better economic changes. As Ann Cotton and Richard Synge said it, female education is “an investment in better standards of living in the future with multiplier effect in terms of health, nutrition, hygiene, smaller families and women’s improved social status. It is equally, the process of family and community’s own social, economic and political barriers to progress (Ann Cotton and Richard Synge, 2000). The above quotation indicates that educating females results a high rate of return in the form of income and economic emancipation.

### **EDUCATION AND ECONOMIC EMANCIPATION**

#### **Effect of Education on Work**

Education’s relevance to the world of work has been a debatable issue since the present educational system prepares students for the next level in general (Costley, 1986). In developing countries, educational system in the post liberalization era has started changing its orientation so as it is more relevant to the world of work. But mass education programme in Africa, due to heavy pressure of their society would not have a headway regarding re-orientation of educational system on any large scale.

Eritrea, not only has a poor record of school enrollment and dropout rates, due to socio-economic compulsions, but also a gender disparity, which “widens enormously in rural areas at higher ages”(NSO, 1997). Moreover, lack of educational infrastructure and training institution has compounded the problem. School-leavers generally turn to the labor market and hence aggravate the problem of unemployment. Gender-disparity in education has further dampened the prospect of women employment in general and promotional avenues in particular. Such a scenario promoted to hypothesize that women worker must be less qualified and skilled and hence engaged in vacations requiring less or no education. The following table-1 presents distribution of women workers by educational levels.

Table 1: Women Workers by Educational Level

<b>Educational Level</b>	<b>No. of women workers</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>No. of total workers</b>	<b>Women as % of total workers</b>
Illiterate	4759	30.7	11371	41.9
Primary	3349	21.6	10477	32
Secondary	6766	43.7	20660	32.8
Certificate	9	0.05	43	20.9
Diploma	289	1.9	1273	22.7
University Incomplete	182	1.2	926	19.7
First degree	130	0.8	826	15.7
Masters	7	0.04	86	8.1
PhD	2	0.01	33	6.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>15493</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>45695</b>	<b>33.9</b>

**Source: Research and HRD Division, Ministry of Labor and Human Welfare, 2001**

Distribution of women workers by educational level shows maximum percentage of secondary educated followed by illiterate and primary educated women workers. In fact, these three categories account for 94% of the total women workers, meaning thereby only 6% of them have education beyond the secondary level.

But the distribution of women workers in terms of labor presents even more depressing situation. Women are around 42% of the total illiterate workers followed by secondary (32.8%) and primary educated (32%), (Research and HRD division, MOLHU, 2001: 20). This trend indicates that there are a very few women who are reaching the higher level and the majority of the women are in the lower educational level which make them to remain behind at the bottom of the occupational status and to be exploited by the low-wage work which is even sometimes, hazardous work to their health. So, from this can be concluded that education, is the primary factor that women compete in the work place. Especially with the increasing of educational level, increase women's opportunity of getting work and permanent recruitment.

For people, who cannot write and rewrite, many occupations are closed to them in modern times. At least will passing prestigious occupations. Those people by virtue of the fact that they lack an education can be unaware of their legal, gender and work related rights. Lack of a considerable amount of education can make an individual laborer vulnerable to exploitation, which is what happens to women.

Education in principle has a direct bearing on the choice of occupation. It is assumed that employment in a particular occupation depends mainly upon the level of education, though there has been controversy and debate about the relevance of education to the world of work. Interesting facts and inferences may be expected from the analysis of occupational distribution of women workers in Eritrea.



**Table 2: Women Workers by Occupation and Educational level**

Occupation	III	Prim.	Sec.	Cert.	Dip.	Uni.inc.	degree	Mast.	Ph.d	Total
Legislators sr. official & managers	294	295	373	-	32	14	39	2	-	1076
Professionals	10	32	230	-	102	52	53	4	2	475
Technicians and Asso. professionals	31	55	357	8	13	14	4	1	-	483
Clerks	62	172	1631		80	58	29	-	-	2033
Service, shop & market sales	623	830	877	1	2	5	3	-	-	2340
Skilled agri. & Fishery workers	8	1	7	-	-	-	-	-	-	16
Graft & related trades	597	528	695	-	45	5	-	-	-	1870
Plant Machine opera& assembly	1130	737	374	-	12	4	2	-	-	2259
Elementary occupations	2004	1868	1063	-	3	3	-	-	-	4941
Total	4759	4518	5597	9	289	182	130	7	2	15493

**Source: Research and HRD Division, Ministry of Labor and Human Welfare, 2001**

Illiterate and primary educated women workers have concentration in the elementary occupations, while secondary educated have their largest percentage in the occupational category of clerk. Around 90% of t certificate holders are technicians and associate professionals. But diploma holders have their largest percentage in the category of professionals followed by clerks. University dropouts are largely absorbed as clerks followed by professionals. More than two fifth degree holders, one half masters and 100% PhD holders are in the professional's category( Research and HRD division, MOLHW, 2001).thus, the inference is women with low level of education hired in the low professions and those who are with high level of education recruited in the high professional areas. Though, education has a great role in the accessibility of women in the labor force. Indeed, education has a direct proportion of increment with job opportunities or chances for women.

### **Education and Access to Employment**

The primary goal of education is to harness and develop man's talents and potentialities that she/he can fulfill for his/her moral, intellectual and material needs and contribute effectively to the general survival and development of society. In this sense, then, education is a process of knowledge acquisition, which is one facet of development while knowledge utilization through employment, is the second facet. Moreover, education is both an education itself and a means of attaining other ends. In an ideal sense, it is an ultimate value and hence, through provision as a social service, it is an aspect or object of employment (Blaug, M1973, et al).

Thus, educational institutions are significant for getting the opportunity of employment, because one of the main functions of education is to take an occupational preparation.

**Table- 3: Respondents Correlation of Education and Access to Employment**

<b>Level of education</b>	<b>No. of respondents</b>	<b>Highly correlated</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Moderately Correlated</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>No responses</b>	<b>%</b>
Primary	9	3	33.3	4	44.4	2	22.2
Junior	21	7	33.3	9	42.8	5	23.8
Secondary	36	12	33.3	19	52.8	5	13.8
Higher education	14	8	57.1	3	14.9	3	21.4
	80						

The table illustrates the level of education and access to employment. From the number of respondents, primary(33.3%), secondary (33.3%) and junior(33.3%) lies in the highly correlated category of response, while higher education female respondents are 57.14%. in the moderately correlated column, primary school respondents are 44.4%, Junior (42.8%, secondary (52.8%) as well higher educated females are 14.28% of the total respondents . Majority of the respondents are the primary, 22.2% and junior 23.8%. The number decreases in the secondary (13.8%) and higher education (21.4%) of the overall responses in the non-response data.

Hence, an inference can be taken from the above shown data that the more one is educated, the more opportunity once gets an employment. Majority of the higher female respondents are in the highly correlated criteria which shows that the importance of education on the employment contribution. The other educational level categories have similar percentage ratio that is 33.3% that indicates they have some awareness (knowledge) of the function of education in the job relevance. In the rest of the respondents' answer, percentage of the higher educated women decreases, but the remaining academicians' ratio increase except for the none respondents, who might not have a clear idea about the relation or they may not take education as a guarantee for employment. Then, one can conclude that education is a good stream of attaining job.

### **Education and Income Level**

It is argued that, education has little relevance to the world of work. Therefore, no direct relation may be expected between the levels of education and wages. However, data analysis is supposed to accept or reject the hypothesis stated.

**Table- 4: Shows Distribution of Women Workers by Education and Wage Level**

Education level	No. of respondents	Income level							
		<500	%	500-1000	%	1000-1500	%	>1500	%
Primary	9	7	77.7	2	22.3	-	-	-	-
Junior	21	5	23.6	13	61.9	3	14.2	-	-
Secondary	36	4	11.1	27	75	5	13.9	-	-
Higher education	14	-	-	-	-	10	71.1	4	28.7

The table is about the educational level of women and their level of income accordingly. There are different categories of wages received. Those women who are primary level are in the income level below 500 Nakfa which consists 77.7% of the sample population. In the junior and secondary level women workers, are 23.8% and 11.1% respectively, while the higher educated women are none.

In the wage level between 500-1000 Nakfa, the trend of income payment increases towards the high level education i.e. in primary only, 22.3%, junior 61.9% and secondary 75% of the total paid women falls in the above income. For the wage 1000-1500 Nakfa also the salary rises with the upgrading of education, which can be seen from the table as higher education. 71.14% the majority lies and the other levels also decreases its percentages towards the bottom of educational standard.

The final salary paid greater than 1500 Nakfa are the higher educated women workers per se. the remaining educational level of women workers are not competitive in this wage as the sample indicates.

Therefore, the data shows education has a great relation with the income level of educated women in the work place. To start with, the primary level educated women workers are confined to the low level wage, which is meager to compare with the other levels which are followed by the junior women workers. However, more likely the secondary educated women workers and particularly the higher educated women enjoy the good wage payment. Then, education for women is inseparable part of their livelihood improvement through the income they receive.

To clarify and assist the above idea, as Senait Elfu (1998) argued, women's as well as men's labor market opportunities are affected by the level and kind of education they acquire. Generally, women who have graduated from higher educational institutions tend to get jobs with good pay. They are also likely to have better opportunities than with lower levels of education. The meaning is that women should have to learn to be self-reliant in order to get the demanded income for improving and running their household. At last, a change in one level of education, there is a rise in the level of income.

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