

ORIGINAL ARTICLE**Socio-economic Status of Handicraft Women Among Macca Oromo of West Wallaga, Southwest Ethiopia****Bula Sirika*****Abstract:**

Artisan women, who belong to social class known as ogeyyii, meaning expert, play a vital role in socio-economic life of community of West Wallaga. They are producers of implements/utensils which the broad base of the society is putting to use in its day –to-day indoor and outdoor chores. Equally, their role in sustainable development through diversifying livelihood options is of special concern. On the contrary however, the artisan women who had better socio-economic status in the society are currently under destitute socio-economic situation. Their economic status is adversely affected by factors that are challenging progress of the indigenous technology by disrupting artisans' rural market. Though much remains to be done in this regards, in this research which focus on socio-economic history of artisan women, the major socio-economic challenges of artisans are identified and also appropriate measures to be taken for mitigating them are forwarded.

Key Words: Socio-economy; Oromo; Macca; Women; Artisan; Handicraft.

INTRODUCTION

This research focuses on the socio-economic status of artisan women in West Wallaga. Alongside, it assessed briefly relevant topics such as economy of pottery making, pottery making and natural environment. Attempts are also made to show socio-economic status of artisans in the past and the current situation. In addition, identification of major challenges artisans facing nowadays is made.

The study area, West Wallaga Zone, is located in the southwest highlands to the

west of the Dhidhessa River. For it is difficult to cover the whole zone, I selected three villages (Dongoro Disi, Guyyi and Gulliso, see map below) as study sites in the region. During my stay at field for 40 days to collect data, which was more of ethnographic, I have recognized pains and pleasures that artisan women are deriving from the works.

The study sites were selected based on: the prevalence of widespread handicraft works in which women are playing vital role, the

* MA in Archaeology, Department of History, Faculty of Education,
Jimma University, Jimma, Ethiopia, P O Box 378
E-mail: bulasirika@yahoo.com

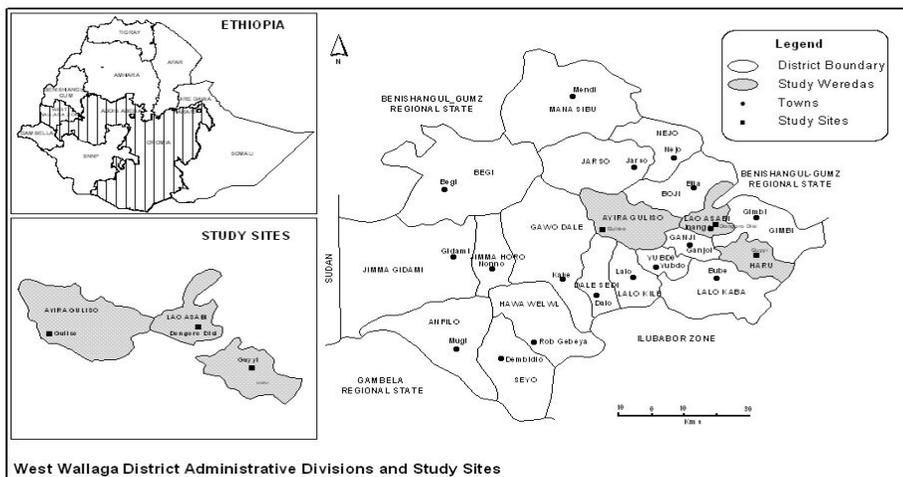
fact that currently the technologies owned by them are under great challenges that in turn are affecting artisan socio-economy and the rising need to identify the major bottlenecks hindering progress of the local technologies. My key informants were samples from potters (women), non-potter women, artisan males, some non-artisan males and government agents. The selected samples, those who assumed to be rich in information required to meet purpose of the research, were selected through non-probability purposive sampling technique.

The average altitudes of Dongoro Disi, Guyyi and Gulliso are 1863, 1938 and 1599 meters above sea level respectively. According to their altitudes, the study sites therefore lay in *Badda daree* (sub-tropical) climatic zone which extends from 1500-23000 meters above sea level. Owing to its

geological history, variations in parental material, physiographic, climate and vegetation, several resources both organic and inorganic have developed in the zone.

The major inorganic resources that have been dominantly used by artisans are iron, gold and clay soil. There are different types of soil in the region among which Pellic

Vertisols are some of them. These soils are dark and usually occupy along basins of streams/ rivers, which are waterlogged in wet season. They are soil types which commonly in used for pottery making in the study zone ((West Wallaga Zone Finance and Development Office, Unpublished Document, 2004).



A Brief History of Handicraft Women in Wallaga

West Wallaga is predominantly occupied by one of the Oromo groups known as Macca. The major sub-Macca clans that occupied West Wallaga are Leqa, Sibū and Sayyo. The majority of the people are followers of introduced religious organizations such as Protestant denominations, Islam, Orthodox Christianity and Catholicism though there are significant numbers of people who follow *Waaqeffannaa*, an indigenous Oromo religion (Bula, 2000). Traditionally, the Oromo of Wallaga organized into artisans and non-artisans based on profession. The artisans, skillful people in handicraft works (*ogummaa*), are collectively known as *ogeyyii*, meaning expert.

It is undeniable fact that agriculture is the leading sector in the region. As it is the case in the other parts of the southwestern Ethiopian highlands, west Wallaga is endowed with relatively good agro-climatic conditions and soil types that created good situation for the community to practice mixed agriculture, i.e. crop cultivation and rearing of livestock. Among the food crops cultivated in the area cereals such sorghum, barley, *teff*, maize, and finger millet are the major ones. Besides, pulses such as peas, haricot beans, beans, and oil crops like *nug*, grow in the study areas. Fruit trees such as lime, orange, mango, avocado, banana, papaya, pumpkin and spices -cardamom, long pepper, chilies, ginger etc are

commonly grown. Variety of vegetables like cabbage and mustard seed are also grown. Its relatively higher rainfall encouraged cultivation of roots crops such as anchote, Oromo potatoes, Irish potatoes, sweet potatoes, yam and taro. It is to steam these tuber crops that varieties of steaming pots are made in the region. The major cash crop cultivated in the region is coffee. In addition, livestock such as cattle, sheep, chicken and donkeys are reared.

Agriculture is supplemented by trade and craft technology. The *ogeyyii* involved both in agricultural and craft sectors though their focus is getting concentrated on agriculture since recent times. They involve in handicraft works mainly as part time workers especially in sowing and harvesting seasons of the year. In the region, inseparable relationship between agriculture and handicraft technology is observed. If there were no agriculture there would have been no such much demands for products of handicraft technology. Equally no agricultural activities can be undertaken without agricultural implements that are mainly products of the local handicraft industry. Therefore, agriculture is integrated with handicraft work for the two supplement each other by providing raw materials or other.

Handicraft works, which are owned and run by artisans involve in pottery making, iron smiths, jewelry, weaving, woodcarving, tannery and basketry. Besides, their direct or indirect involvement in all other



Picture 1
A young pottery shaping small pot



Picture 2
Potters firing pots Using straws and stalks



Picture 3 Pot under post firing treatment
(siileessuu)



Picture 4
Potters transporting clay vessels to market

craft works, women totally dominate pottery making (from identification of clay mining sites, mining, transporting clay to manufacturing sites, preparing clay mineral, shaping vessels, drying, firing, post firing treatments and marketing) in the study region and therefore throughout the literature a potter refers to a woman involved in pottery making (see the pictures above depicting roles of women in traditional pottery making in the study region). Hence, women are cornerstones in both farm and non-farm sectors in rural

areas of the study region. Potters make pots for storage, transportation, toasting, baking and steaming as well as for symbolic representations.

The origin of handicraft works among the Oromo could be traced back to the period before Oromo population movement and expansion. Studies show that even though it seems difficult to give the exact date to the emergence of handicraft works, it is apparent that had not the Oromo possessed iron tools, they would not have succeeded in their expansion (Hultin, 1988).

In conjunction with this, the Oromo who involved in livestock breeding and crop cultivation before their expansion (Hassan, 1990) might have unavoidably been using pottery objects for utilitarian purposes (like for transportation, storage etc). They might also be using for non-utilitarian or symbolic representations as it is the case in many parts of present day Oromia, where pots are being made in traditional ways. Accordingly, one can elucidate the fact that artisans had immensely contributed to the Oromo socio-economic and cultural development and to the success of Oromo expansion itself. Additionally, Oromo oral sources ascertain that handicraft works were not unique to a certain Oromo clan and learning craft works was open to every Oromo clan.

Studies uncover that in Wallaga, the handicraft people's social position was below the non-artisans (Bartles, 1983). The when and how such social hierarchy had originated among the Oromo society is not noticeable. However, scholars like Bartles (1983) and Negaso (2001) argue that such social ladder instigated after the 16th century Oromo expansion. They argue that before the movement, the ancestors of the *ogeyyii* were enjoying equal privilege (Bartles, 1983) with the non-artisans. In line with this, *ogeyyii* especially black smiths took pride in their works during the Oromo expansion since the other Oromo were dependent on their products such as spears and shields that they were popularly using during their movement (Bartles, 1983). Similarly, oral sources of the study area substantiate this argument and further ascertain that potters who were making pottery vessels (which were critically important to porting and storing as well as for symbolic representations) had a better social and economic status than nowadays. As a consequence, it generally seems that the social stigma is the later episode, after the expansion, in history of the Oromo.

It is the Oromo population expansion that brought far-reaching alterations in social and cultural lives of the Oromo. By the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Oromo who were rather small in number and socially more or less homogeneous gradually transformed into a heterogeneous culture with different social groups (Hultin, 1988). It was in the process of the transformation that artisans who were ethnically the same with others emerged as socially distinct from the major groups of people among whom they lived. This means that Oromo people who took part in the handicraft works were given distinct social class inferior to the other major and dominant Oromo class for several years in the past. There were underlying factors for this. Traditionally, under the umbrella of the Gada system the Oromo would bring even the non-Oromo members from social periphery into communal life through *guddiffacha/mogasa* or adoption that lend a hand to the adopted people to enjoy more or less equal privilege as any Oromo (Mohammed, 1990). Nevertheless, this practice was gradually becoming ineffective among the Oromo of southwest Oromia especially after the 17th century. The ineffectiveness is mainly due to the beginning of decline of the Gada system (an egalitarian form of political organization) among the western Oromoland (Mohammed, 1990). In other words, democratic institution which controlled socio-cultural interaction of the society declined giving birth to Oromo feudal monarchies and the successive suppressive Ethiopian feudal and feudo-bourgeoisie governments which gave no room for socio-cultural equality among members of a given nation or different nations.

The development of feudal relations and accumulation of wealth gained from the *qabiyye*, landownership and controlling

trade routes were the basic and fundamental factors in changing the socio-economic relations among the different Oromo groups and their social status (Mohammed, 1990). In the later western Oromo traditional principle, after development of feudalism and feudal relations, many people were deprived of the right to landownership and did not have the right to communal as well as private ownership of land. Under this circumstance, those who were formerly practicing farming and handicraft works retained only the later activity for they lost access to farm land. The others who were only peasants became tenants of the feudal lords. The land right, *qabiyye* was therefore only for those who had land. Those who had land were called *Abba Lafa*, landlords, who apparently appeared as the major and dominant socio-cultural life of the society. Under such circumstances the supremacy of some Oromo personalities or wealthy class the '*soressa*' began to appear (Asefa, 1992; Truilzi, 1994).

Hence, the tenants and artisans were not entitled to the *qabiyye*, land right. Perhaps, if any right to land ownership, they were given by the clan leaders, or the wealthy, *soressa* as well as the kings. In some cases, they were allowed to have only small plots of land around their homes, *borqii*, fallow land or the less productive plot of land. Even the *borqii* could be expropriated by the respective *soressa* if need arise (Mekuria, 1980; Mohammed, 1990; Asefa, 1993). For their access to farm land was not reliable the artisans were dependent mainly on their crafts and not on farming as such. Likewise, those who were deprived of right but had no skills of craftworks joined the craft sector as daily laborers. In due course the most skilled artisans were invited by landlords to establish homestead and make utensils needed in day to day uses for the lords. Here what is worth of

mention is that artisans of the lords were more privileged than non-artisan tenants though not as under Gada system. This shows that tenants and daily laborers in crafts industry were economically at bottom layer in comparison with the lords' artisans.

Besides, traditionally, like other Oromo groups, the Macca Oromo believe in one Supreme Being known as *Waaqa*, God (Tesema Ta'a, 1980) and their traditional African religion, *Waaqeffannaa*. These people believe that *Waaqa* is *uumaa hundaa*, creator of all things (Daniel Ayyana, 1984; Gada Melba, 1988). Accordingly, *Waaqa* put every thing in its place in the universe and he guards it on its place in the universe (Tesema Ta'a, 1980; Bartles, 1983). Daniel (1984) argues the fact that the Oromo believe that *Waaqa* put everything in order and if anybody breaks his order, it results in sin, which in turn leads to punishment. They also believe that *Waaqa* could punish anyone who commits sin, because they consider him as the one who guards the truth. The punishment may be in the form of bad harvest, disease, famine and other hazardous events.

Toward the middle of the 19th century, the traditional religion among the Macca Oromo was in the process of declining because of the decline of the Gada system (Bartles, 1983; Daniel, 1984; Mohammed, 1990). Since the Gada system was pillar and steward of the traditional Oromo culture, its decline led to the disruption of the religion (Daniel, 1984). Although the traditional religious system of the western Oromo had previously been in the process of transformation (Daniel, 1984), the introduction of alien religions, Islam and Christianity, accelerated the process (Baxter, 1978; Mohammed, 1990; Asafa, 1996). The ruination of *Waaqeffannaa* thus created a widespread socio-political

imbalance in between the same sex or the opposite sexes. One of the effect could be the wearing away of socio-political leverage granted women in general and the artisan women in particular.

Status of Women in the Oromo Society

Discrimination of women became harsher after the decline of the egalitarian social institutions of pre-colonial African societies. The problems have been largely credited to the far-reaching colonial conquests, religious expansions, appearance of statehood and economic crisis. Prior to these external and internal pressures, women of African had relatively prestigious positions (Geylan, 2004). The case of Oromo women cannot be seen apart from this. The Oromo women had their own institution that wok towards securing them socio-political privileges they deserved. Women were also participating in political life through songs by praising the character of political and military leaders. Their pleasant melodies were sources of success in politics and victory at battle fields. However, their participation was only within the framework of the traditional social institutions.

As stated above, socio-economic transformation of the Oromo can be attributed to their expansion, the appearance of feudal kings since the 18th century, the incorporation of the Oromoland into Emperor Menelik's Empire in the late 19th century, and the introduction of alien religions, Islam and Christianity. The introduction of Islam and Christianity dismantled *Qallu* institution which was followed by the dilapidation of the social privileges that women were given by the institution. Among other things, Oromo women who were playing indispensable role in the *Waaqeffannaa* by serving as *qallittii*, priestesses were overlooked in the introduced Islamic and

Christian institutions. Under these institutions, women are dominated and their involvements in religious decision making in the old days' come down to us only as history without repeating itself. The introduction of the institutions also affected potters and attributes of pots made. Potters were making certain pots for religious purposes. The pottery attributes were considered as idols by members of the new religions which eventually discouraged artisans. Therefore, modern religious institutions affected social status of artisan women in the society by affecting their roles in the traditional institution without concomitant absorbance of them into the modern religious institutions.

Likewise, under the *Gada* system women had the chance to come together to reveal their grievance against unfair treatment from men. One of the several practices supported by the institutions was *Atete*. Scholars elucidate *Atete* differently. Kuwee Kumsa (1997), for example, explains it as the coming together of women of the village to make public the grievances they have with their husbands. She further explains that *Atete* is a way of strengthening women's solidarity, a tool to argue against act of violence against them by men. Further Daniel (1984) states *Atete* as gathering of women for praying to *Waaqa* and *Ayole*, female spirit, for general well-being of their families. Furthermore, according to (Kuwee, 1997), the Oromo women had been given a shelter in the *Gada* System. Accordingly, the Abba *Gada* was given a *siiqqee*, ritual stick, to take home for his wife by the *Qallu*, the spiritual leader. The *siiqqee* was granted her to use whenever she performs important ritual performances and to symbolize her feminine rights and respect.

In addition, the demise of the institutions led to dilapidation of *saffuu* (moral concept that serves as the ethical basis for

regulating practices in order to ensure a high standard of conduct appropriate to different situations) which flourished under the custodian of the institutions. It helps individuals to avoid morally wrong actions and misdemeanors that harmed neighbors (Gemechu Megerssa, 1994). Further Oromo believe that *saffuu* involves avoiding humiliation, bad conversations, deceiving, stealing, and disgracing others by words or actions (Kuwee, 1997). That means, *saffuu* control societal interaction between similar or opposite sexes. Thus, disrepair of *saffuu* means there are no more such much moral laws that restrains the society from what are perceived as wrong doings. Its disorder led to the widespread of illegal divorce, gender abuse, early marriage and incapacitation of the systems that were giving leverage for women.

With regard to differences in economic status between artisan and non-artisan women, oral sources uncover that in contrast to some non-artisans, the artisan women had a better economic status. One can infer this from the fact that some non-artisans of the study area latter became the crafts people on their own free will to earn additional income to supplement what they earned from other sectors. That means they had two income generating sources, and when agricultural productivity predicted to be low, let say due to shortage or excessive rain, they used to give more attention to crafts works. The community thus depends on their traditional craft skills as a secondary source of income in times of drought or lean harvests. Therefore, their skills in embroidery, pottery making and weaving are a natural means to social and financial independence.

In addition, in the late 19th century non-artisan peasants, who lost their land due to land alienation and became tenants, changed their occupation from farming to

the handicraft work (Bartles, 1983). One can infer from this reality that among the Oromo skills of craft works was not by descent only but also by self-training and neighbors to meet one's needs. However, as stated elsewhere with the decline of Oromo traditional institutions, socio-economic status and political roles of Oromo women in general and that of artisan women declined swiftly and presently they are leading destitute ways of living. This informs us to raise researchable questions such as; what factors are adversely affecting economic status of artisans in West Wallaga? What appropriate remedial measures should be taken to mitigate the problems?

Major Challenges of Rural Craft Development in the Region

As attempts have been made above to elucidate, since recent time the economic status and its analogous social status of the artisans are deteriorating promptly because of a number of interacting factors. Researches done on the current situation of traditional handicrafts in developing countries reveal that mass production of goods supported by sophisticated marketing and advertising are destroying the livelihood of many, as there is no capacity to absorb them into modern industries (Sood, 2002). Similar experience is seen in West Wallaga. In Wallaga though there is no single modern manufacturing industry, modern industrial products, whether domestic or foreign made, are over-flowing remotest rural markets. Although it is an undeniable fact that the introduction of modern technology's products has advantages, it should not be at the expense of indigenous technologies and their owners.

The introduction of products of modern technologies such as ceramics, plastic and metallic utensils that are steadily replacing

utility of indigenous craft products in both urban and rural areas, is affecting economic status of the artisans. Under this circumstance artisans have lost and are still losing their traditional rural markets and their position within the community. This incident is chiefly heavy to artisan women. In the area, it is not the manufacturing industries which have been introduced but their products. If there is, it would have been at least absorbed some of artisans. The consequence is, therefore, firstly the product is affecting progress of indigenous technology. Secondly, it is leading to widespread unemployment by destroying the labor-intensive crafts and intimidating livelihood option and also it is directly or indirectly intensifying environmental degradation. Besides, by affecting the progress of indigenous technology, this affects the positive interdependence between agriculture and craft sectors. Furthermore, enhanced machinery is hardly ever introduced in rural areas. Even when introduced, women are usually excluded from access to get employed into the new institution by the associated criteria set for recruiting for employment.

Secondly, handicrafts sector has got inadequate attention from both the regional governments and non-government agencies. Though some studies have been conducted on socio-cultural lives of artisans in the region, a few studies have as yet been done on economic potential of non-farm economic activities like craftworks. This is in spite of the fact that handicraft industries in the region have produced various goods both for own consumption and for local market. Beyond that handicrafts sector is a “home-based” industry, which involves less expenses, infrastructure or training to establish. It uses existing skills and locally available resources. Thus, inputs required in the works can easily be provided. Furthermore,

income generation through craft is very important in a rural society, as it does not disturb the socio-cultural balance of either the home or the community.

The scanty researches done on pottery making in the country mainly focus on the direct importance (economic significance) of handicraft works and utilitarian purposes of the products. However, the significance goes beyond that and the utensils that are shaped may have additional socio-cultural values. In other words, a pot shaped by a potter is not only for functional/utilitarian purposes (e.g. for steaming, boiling, storage etc.) but also for social and non-utilitarian or symbolic values (e.g. self-expression and identity marks) which can be sources of tourism industry. Further, women’s skills in embroidery, weaving, and basket-making are not only means for generating income but also sources of social and emotional independence for them. In addition, since recent time, handicraft works and other rural non-farm sectors in rural are declining due to unnecessary urban-rural migration. This development partly associated with fact that the major institutions of micro-finance, which invest capital on non-farm activities, are situated in the urban centers and thus to get access to the opportunity many people are leaving rural areas.

The other challenge is mainly related to training program and marketing. There is a need to give training regarding design, training, business management and marketing resources that create opportunities for artisans, and a self-sustaining crafts production business. Training on design, business management and marketing resources is mandatory to improve demands for local and tourist market to create opportunities for artisans, and a self-sustaining crafts production business. However, no training is given to

artisan to improve the quality of the utensils they make. Though a large number of NGOs have been established, the majority of their projects are mainly concerned with issues of gender and health without explicit focus on handicrafts improvement for poverty alleviation.

So as the export market in handicrafts represents the highest earnings potential for artisans, knowledge of the marketplace is crucial. Craft cooperatives, organized as a central buying exchange where many tiny producers can combine to satisfy large orders, are often useful. Much is left to deal with demonstration of the links between crafts development and sustainable development and to make artisans aware of market tendencies for ecological products. Likewise, there is a great need to acquaint artisans with the wide range of local natural resources available for the work and train them how to use them. It is also important to have training on how to create new crafts sample. In addition, the artisans have no shop where they can display their market. Bearing in mind that majority of potters are from rural areas, they take the utensils to market on market days. After selling some of the utensils, potters take the remaining utensils back to their rural home for they do not have where to keep them until the next market day.

Studies disclose that handicraft association helps coming together of people involved in related types of business activities and create an environment that may result in decrease of costs, increased in productivity and profitability (Lanjouw et. al, 2001). In line with this, artisan association increased access to good quality business input, market expansion, and access to advocacy and lobbying. These facilitate for the artisans to sell their products and increase their profits. The association also creates suitable environment to give members of

the association training regarding saving, developing new design, undertake further need assessment and to have fund for the project from concerned bodies. However, there is no well organized handicraft association in the study region. Therefore, provided that the union is realistic and all have equal access without any form discrimination, its absence is at the expense of these advantages.

Traditional handicraft woks and their products are fairly environmentally friendly than whether traditional or mechanized farming and modern manufacturing industries. It is clear that environmental degradation is among the bottlenecks in development of agriculture in Ethiopia. One of the major causes of the environmental degradation is population pressure. In order to sustain the ever expanding family members, peasants are clearing and burning forest trees that even kill the underground root and disables the land to regenerate. Another factor that is affecting natural environment and its resources are the discarded modern industrial products such as plastic and metallic objects. Here my intention is not to go detail. Leaving aside this for future researchers, I want to underline that in the study area significant number of livestock like sheep, goats, cows and oxen loss their lives annually of swallowing discarded plastic bags, particularly disposed festal, used in day to day chores.

Regardless of these, however, rural development policies often neglect the role of rural non-farm activities including handicrafts. Policies are sometimes there but without practical implementation. Presently in Ethiopia and particularly in Oromia regional state, a large number of NGOs have been dealing with issues of gender and development. However, the majority of studies in this area are largely

concerned with topics of family planning, health status and poverty. However, as my informants pointed out they do not explicitly focus on improvement of status of women through endorsement of handicraft works.

The situation is even has worsened by perception society have on artisans in Africa regarding the natural environment. In this continent, non-artisans perceive artisans as the main agents of environmental degradation (Haaland, in Press) that unavoidably discourage the latter and retard progress of the indigenous technology. This has become other major challenge to the progress of the technology. Although basically handicrafts involve some activities that have impact on the natural environment, it seems to be hasty generalization to conclude that artisans are the major agents of dilapidation of the environment. For instance in west Wallaga, potters do not cut green trees for firing pots. They mainly use straws and stalks of crops and already fallen wood for firing pots. They also avoid using green wood for it is traditionally believed that it is immoral and is against environmental ethics of the society to cut green tree to fire pots that will be used in preparing food that sustain soul. This tenet seems to have been developed in association with traditional Oromo environmental knowledge that give values for trees for their ritual, economic, medical and aesthetic values. Likewise, it is traditionally believed that firing pots using green wood leads to cracking of the pots.

In addition, artisans women who involve in direct utilization of forest trees or grasses for making mat, bags, etc, take care of species of trees/grasses they use and even they plant them for future use. In other words, for women have involved in income-generating activities based upon

the sale of forest products and crafts made from reeds and grasses, they take great care of the natural environment. Thus, although this tradition Oromo environmental ethics in the region is declining due to intricate socio-economic problems being witnessed over there, it is still acting as corner stone for the survival of naturally growing forests or that are planted by men/women.

As a consequence, in West Wallaga the prevailing large scale deforestation/environmental degradation is related to agricultural and constructional activities than handicraft sector. High population growth in the zone, which is worsened by resettlement, is escalating the needs for farmlands and timbers for constructional purposes. The needs are temporally being met by clearing forests and cutting trees. The absence of land redistribution policy that would give chance for recently married landless young men to have land force them to go for clearing the common forestland to have farmland to support the newly established families. Further, the fluctuating price of coffee has its own dividend in this regard. Fall in price of coffee force peasants want to have larger farm land to have surplus product for home consumption and for sale. Having larger farmland is possible only through clearing forests.

Women are in general keepers of cultural traditions and knowledge. They build strong communities through supporting religious functions, producing handicrafts, using natural medicines, wearing indigenous traditional dress and performing indigenous songs and dances. Roles of women in maintaining intangible heritage are of particular significance, and encompass what may be described as fundamental domains and expressions of cultural heritage, which are very often

central to maintaining cultural identity. Their skills in this sector are sources of cultural and ecotourism. Policy is beginning to reflect the potential positive outputs of well-managed eco-tourism that can bring in the context of conservation in several developing countries. The other promising source of development potential may be found in what is known as cultural tourism (Lanjouw et. al, 2001) which links tourist attractions to the cultural practices of the indigenous peoples such as colorful ceremonial celebrations; exotic dances and music; and fascinating ethnic arts and crafts. Cultural and ecotourism involve the survival of threatened cultures, and the conservation of rapidly disappearing wild lands. Hence artisan women who are blamed of environment degradation are stewards and custodians of indigenous knowledge which is source of healthy environment. They are sources of alternative livelihood options like craft sector. Crafts development can represent a constructive, positive contribution to the development of alternative to resource-destructive agricultural practices, based on the provision of gainful employment. Therefore, it is smartness to promote non-farm activities like pottery making in the region to reduce the extent of environmental degradation.

In West Wallaga, a cook who uses clay-pot for cooking food mainly use fire woods whereas a cook who use metallic pots use charcoals. The firewood is mainly obtained from eucalyptus trees. However, for metallic pots there is a need to make charcoal especially from trees such as acacia (*laaftoo*), *Szygium guineese* (*beddeessaa*), *Croton* (*bakanniisa*), *Ebergia* (*somboo*) etc. whose charcoals are believed to be very good in quality. In addition a cook who use metallic pot rarely use and appreciate charcoals made of eucalyptus trees whereas a cook who use clay pot

commonly use firewood of eucalyptus trees. Therefore it is not difficult to argue based on this fact that using metallic pots have adverse effect on forests than ceramic pots. Although I leave issue regarding comparative analysis of the resource effectiveness of firewood and charcoal for future researchers, I want to underline the fact that using of locally made clay pots in cooking has relatively low impact on indigenous forest trees in comparison with imported metallic pots.

Therefore, rather than simply focusing on artisan women's adverse impacts on environment, it looks hale and hearty to assess their role in devising environmentally confirmatory livelihood options. Consequently, given the pressures on indigenous lands, resources and ways of life, artisan women are pedestal in conservation of biological diversity and the sustainable management of fragile ecosystems. Their roles in rural poverty reduction, sustainable development attainment and alleviate pressure on forests through creating alternative livelihoods are outstanding. As a result, artisan women who are miscounted as agents of environment degradation are playing immense role in reducing environment depletion. If proper training is given them on wise uses of the natural resources, many further questions related to sustaining healthy environmental would be addressed.

Concluding Remarks

In general artisan women are producers of indoor and outdoor implements that rural communities are depending on. In addition, their works in the sector are sources of livelihood diversification that reduce pressure on land and hence alleviate environmental degradation. Further, craft sector opens job opportunity for many and it is also a potential source of cultural and ecotourism. Nevertheless, the sector is on

its last legs and the economy of artisan especially of women is dilapidating and women artisans are living in the study area in desperate situation. The underlying reason is the lack of attention from both government and non-governmental institutions. Therefore, if it is to maintain craft sector to enjoy its fruits both institutions should involve and take appropriate measures to promote the sector.

One possible way of promoting the sector is giving training to artisans to improve quality, quantity and design of their products to be competitive in local or national market. Training through workshops is also required on saving i.e. proper time, resource and capital managements. Receiving training in product quality, entrepreneurship, market identification, pricing and negotiating buyers is also mandatory in order to improve the sector. They need assistance to set up saving and credit cooperatives, making capital available for further investment. Groups' saving and credit cooperatives are helpful to link the local cooperative unit to mainstream financial institutions in the country. Furthermore, training is required regarding proper utilization of natural resources. There is a need to teach them the fact that existence of their technology is wholly based on the availability surrounding natural resources and devastation of the resource cycle lead to interruption of the craft works. They should be encouraged to plant trees/ grasses for maintenance of healthy natural environment and future uses and. This may be become visible through revitalization of traditional environmental principles and incorporating them with the modern one where appropriate and rewarding individuals who play role models.

Micro-finance institutions that give loans with minimum interest rate should be set

up in rural areas. Of course there are a number of such institutions in different towns of the regional government. However, the institutions are focusing mainly on farming which alone cannot be a guarantee to help a given society to attain reliable development. Agricultural sector needs to be supplemented by other sectors. Therefore, the institutions which are emphasizing on agriculture in rural areas need to broaden their range and include non-farm rural sectors like handicraft works in their domain. Appropriate fund need to be made available on improvement handicraft works. This helps to mitigate two fundamental problems. Firstly, it limits unnecessary rural-urban movement and its associated social problems. Secondly, it encourages livelihood diversification that reduces scale of environmental degradation caused by activities linked to agriculture. This contributes toward the attainment of sustainable development.

As attempt is made to state elsewhere, one greatest handicap of artisans is lack of shop/ store in market centers where they may display their utensils for sale or store them for the next market day. Therefore, government agents in the respective urban areas need to cooperate with them in providing sites where to set up building and facilitate for credit for the project. Equally, to integrate environmentally sound craft works, there is a need to ensure good natural resource management, which protects the key resource upon which handicraft work is based. Further, promotion of forest based benefits for local people to integrate it with forest conservation is mandatory to sustain healthy environment. Skills and knowledge of craft sector benefit not only artisans but also a broad range of community members. Thus, there is a need to ensure that decisions about crafts development are made by bodies reflecting the interests of

diverse groups of community members, and that these groups genuinely share in the benefits of the development.

REFERENCES

- Asefa Jalata. 1993. *Oromia and Ethiopia: State Formation and Ethno-national Conflict, 1868 – 1992*. U.S.A.: Boulder: Lynne Renner publishers Inc.
- Bartels, Lambert.1970. "Dabo: A Form of Cooperation between peasants among the Macha Galla of Ethiopia: Social Aspects, Songs and Ritual." *International Review of Ethnology and Linguistics*, Vol. 70, Anthropol, *Miscellanea* 3.
- _____.1983. *Oromo Religion: myth and Rites of western Oromo of Ethiopia: An Attempt to understand*. Berlin.Reimer.
- Bula Sirika.2000. "A History of the seventh-day Adventist in Gimbi" B.A Thesis. Addis Ababa University.
- _____.2006."Traditional Pottery Making in Wallaga with special focus on Dongoro Disi: An Ethnoarchaeological Study". M. A. Thesis. Addis Ababa University.
- Cerulli, Enrico. 1922. *The Folk-Literature of the Galla*. Harvard African Studies, Varia
- Daniel Ayana. 1984. "Protestant mission in Wallaga: A Study of the Activities of the Missionaries and the converts 1898-1935," M.A. Thesis. Addis Ababa University.
- Deruyttere, Anne. 1997. "Indigenous Peoples and Sustainable Development: The Role of the Inter-American Development Bank IDB Forum of the Americas." Washington, D.C. No. IND97-101. (<http://www.indigenous.peoples.PDF>).
- Ehret, C.2002. *The Civilization of Africa: A History to 1800*.University Press of Virginia.
- Gada Melba .1988. *Oromia: An Introduction*. Sudan: Khartoum. Gallagher, J.A.1991.Contemporary stone tools in Ethiopia. *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 23, pp, 1-33.
- Gedef Abawa .2005. "An Ethnoarchaeological Investigation of potter making Among Traditional potters of Gondar" MA Thesis: Addis Ababa University.
- Gemechu Magersa.1994."Knowlegde, Identity and the Colonizing Structure: The Case of the Oromo in East and Northeast Africa,". University of London: School of Oriental and African Studies.
- Haaland, Randi.In press.Porridge and pot, bread and oven, food ways and symbolism in Africa and the Near East, from the Neolithic to the present. University of Bergen.
- Haberland, Eike.1979. " Special Castes in Ethiopia," in R. Hess (ed.) *Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference on Ethiopian Studies*, Session B. Chicago: University of Chicago.
- _____. 1963.Galla Siid, Athiopiens: Stuuttgart Kohlhammer Verlag.
- Hultin, Jan.1977. "Man and Land in Wallaga, Ethiopia", Unpublished paper. Gottenburg,.
- _____. 1979. "Political Structure and the Development of inequality among the Macca Oromo," In *Pastoral Production and Society*. Cambridge: Madison, Cambridge University Press.
- _____.1982. "Kinship and Property in Oromo Culture," In *Proceedings of Seventh International Conference on Ethiopian Studies*. University of Lund, 26 – 29 April.
- Huntingford, G.W.B.1955. *The Galla of Ethiopia; The Kingdoms of Kafa and*

- Janjero, *Ethnographic Survey of Africa: North –Eastern Africa II*. London: International African Institute.
- Kassam, Aneesa. 1884, "Gabbara Ritual and Seasonal Calendars," *Eighth International Conference on Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. I, A.A.U. 26–30 November.
- Haaland, Randi. In press. Porridge and pot, bread and oven, food ways and symbolism in Africa and the Near east, from the Neolithic to the present. University of Bergen.
- Knutson, K.E. 1967. *Authority and Change: a Study of the Qallu institution among the Macca Galla of Ethiopia*. Gottenburg.
- Kuwee Kumsa. 1997. "The Siiqqee Institution in Oromo women." *Journal of Oromo studies*.
- Lanjouw, Peter and Feder, Gershon. 2001. Rural Non-Farm Activities and Rural Development ([http://www.worldbank.org/.../\\$FILE/Lanjouw_webfinal.pdf](http://www.worldbank.org/.../$FILE/Lanjouw_webfinal.pdf))
- Lewis, H. S. 1970. "Wealth, influence and Prestige among the Showa Gala," In *Social Stratification in Africa*, Arthurs Tuden and Leonard Plotnicov(eds.), New York: The Free Press, Collier Macmillan, 1970. Ethiopia. *American Anthropologists*, 105, Pp. 515- 530.
- Mekuria Bulcha. 1980. "Land ownership and Social Class formation among the Macha of South Western Oromia – Ethiopia," Unpublished paper presented to the Institute of Sociology, University of Stockholm.
- Mohammed Hassen. 1990. *The Oromo of Ethiopia: A History 1517-1860*. Cambridge University Press.
- Negaso Gidada. 1984. *History of the Sayyoo-Oromo southwester Wallaga, Ethiopia from About 1886-1941*. PhD Thesis, Johann Wolfgang Goethe University Frankfurt-an-main.
- Ngo, Duc Anh. 2005. "Blending handicrafts and tourism development the good way of preservation of tradition and poverty alleviation in rural areas." NEU and VDF Researcher.
- Nuri Kedir. 1993. "Women and Agriculture in Ethiopia: A paper Presented on Regional workshop on women and Development. Nazareth (Ethiopia)" October 12-14, 1993.
- Scheyvens, Regina. 2000. "Promoting Women's Empowerment through Involvement in Ecotourism: Experiences from the Third World." *JOURNAL OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM*, Vol. 8, No. 3, School of Global Studies, Massey University.
- Sood, Anubha. 2002 "Crafts as Sustainable Livelihood Option in Rural India." MSc Thesis. London School of Economics and Political Science University of London.
- Tesema Ta'a. 1980 " The Oromo of Wallaga: A Historical survey to 1910." M.A Thesis .Addis Ababa University.
- _____. 1986. "The Political Economy of Western Central Ethiopia: fro the Mid.16th to the Early 20th Centuries," Ph.D. Dissertation Michigan State University.
- _____. 2000. *Hambaa Weeduu Oromoo (Some Oromo Traditional Songs)*. Alpha Printer Private Ltd.Co Finfinnee.
- Tilahun Gamta. 1989 .*Oromo-English Dictionary*, Addis Ababa University press.
- Truilzi, Alessandro. 1994. "Frontier History in Ethiopia, Western Wallaga: The Making of A frontier Society," *Proceedings of the Eleventh International Conference on Ethiopian Studies*.
- _____. 1996. "United and Divided: Borana and Gabaro Among the Macca Oromo in Western Ethiopia," In *Being and Becoming Oromo, Historical and Anthropological Enquiries*, P.T.W. Jan Hultin, Baxter and Alessandro Truilzi(eds.), Nordiska Africa Institute, Uppsala.