



Poverty Action Network in Ethiopia (PANE)

GENDER, DISABILITY AND DEVELOPMENT

Discussion Paper

**Paper Presented at a Panel Discussion
On
Gender, Disability and Development**

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GENDER, DISABILITY AND DEVELOPMENT

1. Introduction

In 1999, the IMF and the World Bank launched the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) approach to poverty reduction in low-income countries. This was done in order to ensure that concessional funding through the IMF's Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF) and the World Bank Group's IDA, as well as debt relief under the HIPC (Highly Indebted Poor Countries) Initiative address poverty reduction more effectively. At present, nearly 70 low-income countries are engaged in the formulation of national PRSPs that, once approved by the World Bank and IMF Boards, become the basis of concessional assistance from the two institutions (ILO, 2002).

There is a general assumption that the PRSP approach is country-driven, fostered by domestic and external partnerships and based on broad consultation of all layers of society including the poor themselves. Participation of the poor is sought at all stages of the PRSP process: formulation, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation (ILO, 2002).

Ethiopia is one of the developing and poor countries that prepares PRSP (locally known as Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty, PASDEP). The upcoming PASDEP is the second. In Ethiopia, neither the Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Program (SDPRP) that precedes the PASDEP nor the first PASDEP itself has addressed people with disabilities. Although it is obvious particularly in developing countries that people with disabilities are among the poor, so far both documents have not addressed people with disabilities suggesting that no effort has been made to reduce and ultimately end poverty among this group of people.

Low level of awareness on the problems of people with disabilities among the general public including officials seems to be responsible for excluding this segment of the society from the development agenda. Many perceive people with disabilities as persons who cannot work, cannot be employed and cannot thus lead an independent life. They are often taken as persons who are dependent on charity. Whenever their problems come to

the forefront, many seem to think that faith-based organizations (e.g., the church) and NGOs are the ones who should address their needs.

The general trend appeared to be similar in other developing countries as well. But the others have gone one step ahead of us in addressing disability issues. Tanzania and Uganda are good examples in this regard. In these countries, Associations of Persons with Disabilities (APWDs) have played a major role in the effort to convince those concerned to include disability issues in the PRSPs. Apart from playing significant role in lobbying and advocacy, the associations fully participated in the formulation of the PRSP as well as in the implementation and evaluation phases (see Dube, 2005 for example).

Poverty Action Network of civil society organizations in Ethiopia (PANE) is a network of civil society organizations which attempts to advocate and lobby for an inclusive PASDEP. It plans to create discussion forums where all stakeholders come together to discuss and determine ways of addressing the widespread poverty among people with disabilities (PWDs) in relation to the upcoming PASDEP.

In particular, PANE organized a panel discussion with a view to creating a forum where the issue of disability or persons with disabilities (PWDs) in relation to the poverty eradication effort in Ethiopia could be discussed. One of the objectives of the panel discussion was to raise the awareness of all stakeholders including PWDs themselves about the widespread poverty prevailing among PWDs. The second objective was to discuss the importance of gender analysis in examining how men and women with disabilities experience poverty thereby to show the double discrimination of girls and women with disabilities in society. By so doing, PANE planned to create understanding among participants of the panel discussion on several points including (i) why it is important to address PWDs and their poverty in the upcoming PASDEP and (ii) ways of including disability issues in the development agenda taking into account the gender dimension.

Accordingly, the general aim of this discussion paper was to initiate discussion among participants by raising some important points pertaining to gender, disability and development in the Ethiopian context.

2. Disability and Development: Importance of the Gender Dimension

The importance of including a gender dimension in PRSP is well recognized (see PRSP Sourcebook on Gender). The underlying reason is that poverty is experienced differently by men and women. Thus, a full understanding of the gender dimension of poverty can significantly change the definition of priority policy and program interventions.

The implication of the above paragraph to disability and development is obvious. What can we say about men and women with disabilities? Do they experience poverty in different ways? Do they need different strategies? What about prioritizing program interventions? Should the program interventions be different for men and women with disabilities? In short, the gender dimension and its inclusion in the analysis of poverty among people with disabilities will have considerable importance. First, it avoids any assumption that men and women experience poverty the same way, implying that there is no good reason to ignore one of the groups. Second, by conducting gender analysis, one may come up with effective intervention strategies for each group.

It is particularly important to consider gender issues and the different situations of women and men with disabilities. Women with disabilities are still expected to fulfill the same roles and responsibilities as other women in their community. For example, if a girl who has difficulty walking cannot fetch water, her family may consider her less useful than her siblings. They may even feel that she cannot get married because she cannot perform the duties expected of a wife. She may therefore be seen as a failure as a woman, making her very vulnerable to neglect and abuse (VSO United Kingdom, 2007).

Thus, in this discussion paper, attempts are made to explore the lives of men and women with disabilities and to see differences if any in their experiences of poverty. Although both men and women with disabilities are poor, what poverty means to women with disabilities may differ from that of men with disabilities. In other words, the two groups may actually experience poverty differently though both are poor. It is also important to examine the extent of poverty for each group.

3. Features of Discrimination against Women and Men with Disabilities

Discrimination and exclusion is an enduring issue for all people with disabilities. Women and girls with disabilities, however, are subjected to double discrimination because they are female and because they have disability. While the above statements are true worldwide, women with disabilities in the developing world face triple discrimination owing to their poverty and ignorance in addition to the ones mentioned already. In other words, though there are some points that make men and women with disabilities similar, there are several other points that make the two groups look different. One can safely say therefore that though men with disabilities face discrimination and exclusion, these problems are more visible and prevalent among women with disabilities. The following paragraphs explore these features in some detail.

(A) Discrimination and Abuse at Home

Experience and anecdotal evidence indicate that parents in Ethiopia, like the larger community, believe that the birth of a child with disability in a family is a curse and/or punishment from God for the parents' or family's wrongdoing. As a result, the child with disability is a source of shame for the family members as a whole. To avoid negative consequences, parents often hide the child at home (or keep the child out of sight).

A woman with physical disability who participated in a recent local study (Seleshi, 2009) sponsored by PANE (that explored various issues including disability, development and gender) recollected her past experience when asked about discrimination. She emphasized the point that discrimination begins at home. Continuing her statements, she said,

In traditional communities, like those in rural areas, a girl is expected to be a wife of someone, nothing else. Hence, her mother is expected to train her daughter for her future role as a wife, especially how to cook or prepare food. But when it comes to girls like me, the mother would not want to waste her time training her daughter with disability because the community, including the family, is of the opinion that no one will marry her.

Women and girls with disabilities not only face discrimination of the form mentioned above but also various forms of abuse including sexual abuse and labor exploitation at

home. Several of the interviewees and focus group discussion participants in the local study mentioned above have confirmed that abuses against women with disabilities are widespread in the country. One respondent, for example, summarized the problem as follows.

It is obvious that women/girls with disabilities are more disadvantaged than their male counterparts because they face more burdens. Females with disabilities are more frequently victims of HIV/AIDS. They are also victims of rape. Furthermore, they are more vulnerable than males with disabilities to exploitation. In general, women with disabilities are more likely to face more discrimination than men with disabilities.

When it comes to sexual abuse in the Ethiopian context, it is clear that women and/or girls with disabilities are the more disadvantaged groups. But both men and women with disabilities are likely to be subjected to labor exploitation although the degree of exploitation may differ. However, here also the dominant opinion was that women/girls with disabilities are the more disadvantaged group perhaps because they are kept at home most of the time.

(B) Discrimination in the School Setting

The main problem in relation to the schooling of persons with disabilities, men and women alike, is the point that parents do not often send children with disabilities to school. Once they are in school, they are likely to face several problems. Many elements in the school do not take students with disabilities into account. Examples include the following.

- The stairs are very difficult to climb.
- There are no toilets for female students. Even when there are some, female students with disabilities cannot use them. Thus, they would be forced to go home.

Raising a general issue including education, a respondent in the study sponsored by PANE suggested that the community considers persons with disabilities differently. Continuing her explanation, she said,

People with disabilities are not considered active in terms of education, emotionally and sexually. Many wrongly assume that girls/women with disabilities are virgins who have no sexual experience. However, like persons without disability, they can marry, give birth and transmit HIV/AIDS.

(C) Discrimination and Exclusion in Other Settings

It should be noted that discrimination against persons with disabilities is not limited to the family or home setting and the school. People with disabilities are discriminated against everywhere. Accessibility of transportation services, buildings and information, for example, are common problems. In Ethiopia, it is obvious that information is presented in limited formats and such a presentation serves not all segments of the population. A point an interviewee (who is deaf) raised about the importance of information for the deaf people would urge people who may think such things are less important.

I cannot forget what I heard about a deaf girl from a rural area who committed suicide simply because she experienced menstruation for the first time. Because she did not know anything about it, she wrongly believed that it was a serious disease.

Many of the buildings that give service to the public are not accessible to persons with disabilities. In this connection, it seems appropriate to end the discussion of physical accessibility problems with what Lakech (2006) experienced once.

I was invited to an event organized by a private promotional service organization in collaboration with public media that was having a panel discussion on the issue of disabilities. We were very interested and happy to attend the panel to raise these important disability issues. We reached the building where the panel discussion was held but unfortunately the building did not have a lift or other device. Some of us were in wheelchairs and others had problems of mobility to walk up the stairs. One of the producers said, please come, we can take you on our back. We were so disappointed and told them that first of all when you want to prepare a panel discussion you should know your audience. We thought they did not give much emphasis to our human value; they only paid attention to the topic to be discussed and transmitted to the media. (p. 1.)

4. Poverty among Women and Men with Disabilities

In examining the extent of poverty among men and women with disabilities, four main dimensions of poverty identified by different authors (see PRSP Sourcebook on Gender) are used in this study. These are opportunities (e.g., employment), capabilities (e.g., lack of access to public services like education and health services), security (e.g., vulnerability to different forms of abuse or violence) and empowerment (e.g., participation in community decision making).

(A) Employment Opportunities

Do men and women with disabilities have equal access to credit, financial services and land ownership? Do they have equal employment opportunities? Before answering these questions directly, it is important to see gender differences in the general population, if any. Studies report gender inequalities in access to credit and financial services as well as women's limited ownership of land. If the gender inequality is that visible in the general population, what would it look like in the disability population? In general, data collected for this study indicate that both men and women with disabilities do not have much access to credit and financial services. The same appears to be true in employment opportunities. Compared to the general population, people with disabilities have fewer employment opportunities. However, between themselves, men and women with disabilities do not fare equally well in many ways.

According to a fact sheet on women and disability (by Rehabilitation International and the World Institute on Disability, 1995), regardless of country or culture, from the least developed to the most highly developed nations, women with disabilities are employed at rates far lower than men with disabilities. The source puts the explanation for this difference as follows.

The pattern is established early on and is similar from country to country: as girls they have less access to education; as adolescents, they have fewer chances to socialize or receive guidance about planning their futures; and as adults they have fewer chances to receive rehabilitation services, enter training programs or the labor market. Additionally, unlike other women, they have little chance to enter a marriage or inherit property which can offer a form of economic security.

Thus, men with disabilities as a group have relatively better employment opportunities than women with disabilities. According to some sources (Disability Awareness in Action, DAA, 1996), in most countries, at least two-thirds of people with disabilities are unemployed. In an attempt to give some examples for individual countries, the source also indicated that in Tunisia, 85 percent of people with disabilities aged 15-64 are unemployed. It further stated that women with disabilities find it four times harder than men with disabilities to get work.

One can clearly see that the unemployment rate of people with disabilities in many countries is large. But a separate examination of the data for men and women with disabilities, whenever this is possible, clearly shows that the gender gap in unemployment rate is large. One US study (cited in Traustadottir, 2009), for example, showed that while men with disabilities have serious employment problems, they are in a significantly better condition than women with disabilities. Providing concrete figures, the study indicated that while more than 30 percent of men with disabilities work full-time jobs, only 12 percent of women with disabilities have full-time employment.

Because data are not available, it is difficult to make similar comparisons between men and women with disabilities in Ethiopia. However, given the above statistics for a developed country where the public is expected to have far less negative perceptions about persons with disabilities, one can easily imagine how serious the problem could be in Ethiopia. Besides, we know that begging is the most common means of survival for persons with disabilities particularly in urban areas apart from assistance from religious institutions and charities. Furthermore, anecdotal records and casual observations suggest that the number of persons with disabilities who are employed in government offices is generally small. However, among this small number of persons with disabilities who are employed by the government and are working in schools and other offices, men are likely to be larger in number than women. Moreover, most participants of a local study (Seleshi, 2009) indicated that men with disabilities are relatively better in several ways including employment opportunities.

From the foregoing discussion, it appears that women with disabilities are significantly poorer than men with disabilities, partly due to the fact that they are more likely to be unemployed and partly due to the fact that when they are employed they earn considerably lower wages than their male counterparts. Apart from the very low employment opportunities, it should be noted that people with disabilities do not have other economic assets like land and house. Furthermore, they do not often have access to micro-credit programs. Finally, it is important to note that both men and women with disabilities face various problems in Ethiopia. However, men with disabilities appear to be in a slightly better situation in terms of employment. There is also suggestion that some men, but not women, with disabilities in rural areas benefit considerably from their ownership of land (Seleshi, 2009).

Despite the problems raised above, the government of Ethiopia has adopted and implemented a number of laws, policies and standards pertaining to people with disabilities, including their right to productive and decent work (ILO, 2009). However, much remains to be done with respect to the effective implementation and enforcement of the legal framework pertaining to persons with disabilities in Ethiopia.

(B) Access to Public Services (Education and Health Services)

Another set of factors (or dimension) that determines whether a person is poor is his/her educational level and health status, which are determined, at least in part, by the person's past education and health history. In developed countries like the United States, studies have reported that women with disabilities are likely to have received less education than both women without disabilities and men with disabilities. In particular, the study underscored the point that women with disabilities are five times as likely as women without disabilities to have less than eight years of formal education; 17.4 percent of all women with disabilities have less than eight years of formal education as compared to only 3.5 percent of women without disabilities. The study further affirmed that only 16 percent of all women with disabilities are likely to have any college education compared to 31 percent of women without disabilities and 28 percent of men with disabilities (Traustadottir, 2009).

How different are women and men with disabilities in Ethiopia in relation to education? Is the picture similar to the one described above? Or is it different? In general, the picture could not be different. A recently released Education Statistics Annual Abstract (MOE, 2009) provides evidence that most students with disabilities, both males and females, complete their primary education (that is, eight years of education) only. For example, in 2007/2008 academic year, there were 35,177 (20,484 male and 14,693 female) students with special needs in primary schools (Grades 1-8) whereas the figure for secondary schools (Grades 9-12) was only 3317 (2149 male and 1168 female).

Because the data are cross-sectional (not longitudinal), a decreasing trend cannot be inferred directly. However, the very large difference (more than ten fold) between the sizes of students with special educational needs enrolled in primary and secondary schools in the country might point to the possibility that most students with special educational needs drop out before they reach grade nine. What is more, the number of students with special needs who are enrolled in both primary and secondary grades is smaller for girls with disabilities. Particularly in secondary grades, the number of boys is almost twice as large as that of girls.

Furthermore, in its Special Needs Education Program Strategy, Ministry of Education (2006) admits that though Ethiopia has come a long way in the Education for All process, there is still a gap in providing access to all children and actualizing special needs education. Several problems or challenges can be raised as explanations to the low enrollment of students with special needs in Ethiopia, the main ones being misconceptions and negative attitudes of the community toward the education of children with disabilities or special needs. Asked particularly about the major problems and challenges of women with disabilities not attending school in Ethiopia, Lakech (2006), from Ethiopian Women with Disabilities National Association, identified two factors. The first is misconceptions of parents and the community which force parents to be ashamed of having a child with disability. As a result, the child is kept at home and she/he does not get appropriate services. The second is preference of boys to girls.

In an attempt to explain the second challenge, Lakech (2006) said,

Starting from birth, women are discouraged. When the child is male everybody becomes happy and there is a big ceremony. In traditional societies, females are not seen as productive citizens; their duty is to marry someone and raise children. So the family doesn't want to invest more in them. To fulfill the criteria the girl should be beautiful, attractive and physically fit. (p. 2)

It should be noted that Lakech has clearly shown particularly through the second challenge that women or girls with disabilities are more likely to have faced much more discrimination and exclusion than their male counterparts. Thus, although both men and women with disabilities encounter problems of access to education and other public services, women with disabilities often face more severe problems.

With respect to access to other public services such as health and water and energy services, experience indicates that the condition is likely to be the same. Both men and women with disabilities have problems of access to these public services but women with disabilities are likely to have substantially limited access. According to Lakech (2006),

... Women with disabilities are kept at home in fear of stigma. Consequently, a woman with a disability does not have access to education services, information, health service, social interaction and employment. In general, there are limited resources and coverage of social services, but people with disabilities do not even have access to these existing services. (p. 2)

In summary, one can see that many people with disabilities have been prevented from developing their skills because of discrimination in education and training. The major causes of this discrimination are erroneous belief and negative attitudes of the community toward the education of people with disabilities. Along with women without disabilities, the situation of women with disabilities is compounded by the idea that education for women is an unnecessary waste of time and money (DAA, 1996).

(C) Vulnerability to Domestic Violence and other Risks

Asked about their perception of gender and disability, many of the respondents, regardless of whether they have disability or not, stated that women with disabilities are subject to frequent abuse of different forms: physical, emotional and sexual (Seleshi,

2009). One interviewee, a lady with physical disability, for example, stated the forms of abuse women with disabilities encounter. In her own words,

It is obvious that women with disabilities face several forms of oppression: (i) labor exploitation; (ii) sexual abuse; (iii) they also face problems in reproductive health. Many of them give birth from their male partners who would leave them immediately after they give birth. They are thus forced to bear and rear the child alone.

With respect to sexual abuse, the responses from most of the study participants indicated that

- women with disabilities are sexually abused or raped by persons very close to them, their friends or by their neighbors;
- since most women with disabilities are hidden away at home, the sexual abuse usually occurs at home; and
- being ashamed of the abuse, parents do not often report such abuses to the police.

Regarding sexual abuse and other problems associated with it, another interviewee with physical disability told the researcher (Seleshi, 2009) that

Sexual abuse perpetrated against women/girls with disabilities is widespread. The perpetrators are close relatives of the victim or her neighbors. The sexual abuse is one problem. A related problem is the victims have no courage to report the incidence to parents. But even if they have the courage, their parents would be angry and subject the victims to further psychological problem.

Apart from sexual abuse, both the interviewees and the focus group discussion participants have indicated that women with disabilities especially those in rural areas work for their families and thus are subjected to labor exploitation. Because they are often kept at home, women with disabilities are expected to carry out several household chores such as grinding, cooking, cleaning and taking care of children. Almost on daily basis, women with disabilities in rural areas spend long hours carrying out various tasks. What makes the lives of women with disabilities in rural areas more disappointing, according to one interviewee, is the fact that no one acknowledges their contributions.

With respect to natural (e.g., earth quake and flooding) and man-made disasters (e.g., war), it is obvious that children and women are the most vulnerable and affected groups. But women with disabilities are the most vulnerable more so than women without disabilities because even if they want, they cannot escape disasters.

In summary, the above paragraphs clearly show that for one reason or another, women with disabilities are more vulnerable to various risks than men with disabilities. Their parents often require them to work for long hours at home. However, regardless of their hard work, no one acknowledges their contribution. Besides, they are often victims of sexual abuse; they may become pregnant and may give birth to a child without partner. But even if there was a partner, it is more likely that the person would leave her soon after. Overall, all these challenges impact the lives of women with disabilities and make them the poorest of the poor in the community.

(D) Empowerment and Participation

The major source of problems of women with disabilities appears to be the double discrimination. Besides because women or girls with disabilities are kept at home, sometimes no one knows whether they do exist in the first place. In such restrictions, it would be very difficult to blame others including the community and government institutions on the grounds that the institutions are not responsive to women with disabilities who are hidden. That is to say, if there is anyone to blame for the life of such women and/or girls, then it is the misperception or the erroneous belief that a person with disability is a result of punishment from God or curse.

It follows from this then that any effort to improve their participation in society or to make government institutions more responsive to poor women and men with disabilities requires extensive sensitization programs that aim at changing the community's misperceptions and negative attitudes. Earlier, it was stated that more boys than girls with disabilities or special needs attend school. If we consider boys and girls with disabilities to be roughly equal, then one can say that more of the girls/women than the boys/men with disabilities are kept at home. If this argument is valid, then this means that effort should be directed toward empowering women with disabilities who are hidden at home.

In fact, according to one respondent (Seleshi, 2009) who has wide experience in community-based rehabilitation (CBR) and who has witnessed so many changes in the lives of people with disabilities and their families in Ethiopia, CBR has the potential to empower not only those with disabilities but also their families and the community at large. Thus, along with the educational programs that should be directed toward awareness creation and awareness raising, CBR can be adopted to empower both men and women with disabilities so that they can have improved participation in society.

5. Concluding Remarks

Discrimination and exclusion are common features that people with disabilities encounter in Ethiopia and other developing countries. In fact, these are true for all people with disabilities, men and women alike. Women and girls with disabilities, however, are subjected to double discrimination because they are female and because they have disability. Thus, the problem of women and/or girls with disabilities is more serious than that of men/boys with disabilities. For this reason, the literature refers to women with disabilities as the poorest of the poor in a community.

It is important to note that data on gender and disability are almost non-existent in Ethiopia. Without data, one cannot build evidence to convince officials that people with disabilities are poor. In response to an interview item, one respondent in Seleshi's (2009) study clearly showed how useful data could be in the effort to lobby and convince officials. In her own words,

The problem is obvious. Women with disabilities face various abuses. But evidence that supports the abuses and other forms of disadvantages and discrimination should be presented to easily convince concerned officials. With strong evidence and data, one can easily convince other people including officials. All these indicate that strong evidence and data are important. In other words, because the knowledge we have about disability is very limited, we must overcome this problem by conducting studies and come up with evidence and data not only about the gender dimension but also about many issues surrounding disability and development in Ethiopia.

Finally, it is important to note that conducting a survey will be helpful to know much about the disability population, its distribution across categories of disabilities as well as

the gender proportion. It is also important to strengthen the lobby and advocacy work with the participation of key stakeholders including associations of persons with disabilities, to organize sensitization programs that are directed toward the public and to campaign for strong legal protection with a view to alleviating all violence perpetrated against women with disabilities.

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Summary of What Happened After the Presentation

Immediately after the presentation, the panel discussion continued. The following summary presents the five issues selected by the facilitator for discussion and the discussion conducted and the understanding reached based on the five issues. The issues were the following.

- (A) When talking about gender, we know that men and women are not equally valued. What do you think are the underlying reasons for this gender difference?
- (B) Different studies show that there is a link between disability and poverty. Women with disabilities in Ethiopia are the poorest of the poor. What are the causes for this?
- (C) Most people with disabilities in Ethiopia are engaged in begging. What are the reasons?
- (D) Girls with disabilities do not go to school. What are the reasons?
- (E) Girls and women with disabilities are at risk for domestic violence. This is also true for labor exploitation, sexual abuse, and HIV. How do this happen?

In response to each discussion question, the panelists as well as the participants expressed their opinions. The main points the panelists and the participants raised are summarized below.

1. The Underlying Reasons for Gender Differences

Both the panelists and the participants raised several pertinent points and what must be done to redress the problem. The following points are among those emphasized.

- Nowadays, the mass media is telling us a lot about equity. We, persons with disabilities, are treated differently and that usually begins at home. We don't have equal educational opportunities. The community undermines the education of girls. When the girl has a disability, she is hidden at home. How can such a girl get educational opportunities? Even when she gets the opportunity to go to school, how does the school community perceive her? All these barriers are playing against us. To make things worse, we (persons with disabilities) ourselves contribute to the problem by accepting the community's views of and attitudes toward people with disabilities.

- In our country, men and women are not equal for cultural, religious and other reasons. Among other things, women do not fare well in terms of educational qualification, job opportunities, and political participation. This is even worse when it comes to women/girls with disabilities. Let alone women with disabilities, those without disabilities neither participate nor benefit in society in comparison to men. Our office, the Ministry of Women’s Affairs, is working hard to make women beneficiaries regardless of age and religious differences. However, when we support women, we may not consider women with and without disabilities equally. We give special attention to those with special needs.
- It is appropriate to see the issue of disability and gender together. Our problem is not that complex. It is the community’s perception that makes our problem worse and complicated. Discrimination begins at home with mothers. If I (a male with disability) and my sister stay out in the evening and I come back home earlier than my sister, my mother may ask me “Where did you leave your sister?” Remembering only that I am a male, our mother can even forget that I have a disability. This is something customary in the society.

2. Women with disabilities in Ethiopia are the poorest of the poor. Why?

- The problem begins at home. If parents have the opportunity to empower their children, they choose their sons over their daughters. If there is a son with disability, obviously the one without disability will be preferred. A daughter with disability will be the last choice. In the developing world, poverty is the source of problems pertaining to persons with disabilities. Mostly, women become rich because of their husbands. But if they have disabilities, however, they cannot marry and they cannot thus be rich.
- If we consider women with disabilities who are educated, there are several problems. If I want to go somewhere, I may spend 10 birr when others spend only two birr. I may be forced to take a taxi when I can walk. I have to have a guide whenever I have to go somewhere. When I get a job, I will be satisfied with the simple fact that I have a job and do not negotiate about my salary. Even if we get money, we don’t save much; we spend a lot. When renting a house, I choose the one that is comfortable

which makes the rent very high. Even when we want to work, no micro-financial enterprise may be interested to give us credits. Because all these things have detrimental effects on us, we become the poorest of the poor.

- The principal reason why women with disabilities remain the poorest of the poor in our society is the family's perception that disability is a result of punishment from God. Because of this perception, parents do not often want their kids with disabilities to stay or play with others. They isolate the kids. They don't send the kids to school. As a result, the kids often lag far behind their peers. In fact, males with disabilities go out. Mostly, females with disabilities do not go out; they are far from information. In keeping with this general trend, females also develop low self-esteem and may even consider themselves worthless.

3. Most people with disabilities in Ethiopia are engaged in begging. Why?

- Places of worship are responsible for this. Although I don't know much about Islam, I know that the churches educate the public to give alms (food, money, and clothes) to persons with disabilities. The people implement what they heard in churches. There was time that I stopped going to the church. When we go to the church, some want to give us alms (especially money). When we say no thank you, they want to insult us. They perceive a person with a disability as someone who cannot work. What makes this condition worse is that some persons with disabilities beg the public using expressions such as "I cannot work; I cannot live on my own."
- People with disabilities, at least most of them, live on begging. These are mostly the ones who came from rural areas. They come to town to get treatment or to get some supportive devices. With the objective of getting some money for their transportation back home, they begin to beg. They don't look for a work. The public gives them money. No one knows them. The money they get encourages them to go on begging.
- Persons with disabilities are not beggars. The conditions, however, may force them to be so. The main thing is to identify ways that do not encourage them to beg. We need to change the society that encourages people with disabilities to be beggars.
- The sources of problems are cited to be places of worship such as churches. The public strongly believes that giving alms to beggars is one way of securing a place in

the kingdom of heaven. For this reason, let alone persons with disabilities, the money has attracted many farmers. Leaving behind everything they have, many farmers come to town to beg. There is a law that is put in place recently that prohibits begging on the street. This is something encouraging.

4. Girls with disabilities do not go to school. What are the reasons?

- The main reason is the fact that most people with disabilities live in rural areas. There is a geographical barrier. That is one problem. The family does not have the capacity to send their children to towns. In fact, at present there are schools everywhere. This makes us happy. In fact, there are shortages of supportive devices. The Ministry of Education has started well. Though small, it allocates budget. In fact, it is very small.
- Persons with disabilities often go to school late or very late. My mother gave birth to me and stayed for seven years before she gave birth again. I feel that she was in a problem because of me. They go to different places to get some cure or medicine for us. She may not remember her husband. The same is true with our fathers. It is after they are tired and become hopeless that they remember about our education.

5. Girls and women with disabilities are at risk for domestic violence, labor exploitation, sexual abuse, and HIV. How?

- Girls/women with disabilities are more vulnerable to these abuses. Beyond sexual and physical abuse, they encounter emotional abuse such as insulting and belittling. The public considers persons with disabilities worthless. At the same time, they force us to work far beyond our capacity. But they don't recognize or acknowledge our contribution. What is surprising is the fact that the perpetrators are very close to victims: mostly family members.
- Women with disabilities encounter three kinds of abuses: labor exploitation, physical abuse, and psychological abuse. Mostly, women with disabilities do not go out. Even if they go out, many believe that they don't go out with male partners because of their disabilities. As a result, many believe that women with disabilities are not vulnerable to HIV and want to have sexual intercourse with them. Because of information barriers, women with disabilities may not have good information about HIV which

puts them at a greater risk. Even if they say no, they will be raped. If they report the rape, rejection begins at home. Because mostly the perpetrators are very close relatives, family members want to keep it confidential.