

Original Research Paper

# Women and Girls with Disabilities and Intersectionality: A Poststructuralist Analysis of Ethiopian Social Protection Policy (2014)

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**Abstract:** Social protection policies are designed to eliminate poverty and vulnerability to risk by promoting employment opportunities and strengthening society to protect against man-made and natural hazards. Due to traditional views and patriarchal ideas of society towards women, women and girls with disabilities are excluded from sharing the benefits. Ethiopia, with a population of 110.1 million, is the second most populous country in Africa. However, poverty is also high in urban areas and has a particularly detrimental effect on households headed by women. This research is focus on Ethiopia's National Social Protection Policy 2014. This policy area is focus on how women and girls with disabilities are treated in the legal system by using the intersectional approach. What is the problem, represented to be and content analysis was used to find out the problem. The analysis showed that the problem in the policy is poverty, vulnerability and exclusion of poor people. The intersectional approach showed that women and girls with disabilities are not presented as a problem in the policy and that the legal protection system does not really provide services by specifying their physical, psychological, sexual, social and economic problems.

**Keywords:** Social Protection, Women with Disability, Legal Protection System, Intersectionality

## Introduction

Governments, organizations, and individuals design social protection policies to eliminate poverty and vulnerability to risk by promoting employment opportunities and strengthening society to protect themselves from man-made and natural hazards (Asian Development Bank, 2003). Despite the different approaches to problematization, policy makers always focus on disadvantaged populations. From the disadvantaged group, due to the feminization of poverty, especially in the least developed countries, women are the target group of social protection policy. In line with this, Berhane (2020) notes that efforts are being made to address the multifaceted nature of poverty and vulnerability, which directly impacts one of the main priorities of the SDG framework, which is to eradicate poverty and hunger by halving the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by 2030.

The poorest households in underdeveloped countries rarely receive direct government assistance.

Instead, they rely on transfers from various nongovernmental sources or on traditional forms of solidarity and collective organization based on the principle of reciprocity, which are dwindling as the economy becomes increasingly monetized and immersed in market and commodity transactions. However, many of the poorest people may be excluded from such forms of assistance and mutual support (Norton *et al.*, 2001). Due to traditional views and patriarchal ideas of society towards women, women and girls with disabilities are excluded from sharing from the benefits. In a general view of the problem, (Norton *et al.*, 2001) explain that the government has intervened for two reasons: To eliminate poverty and vulnerability in society. First, low incomes of some individuals or groups, and second, transitory poverty caused by high income fluctuations and ineffective consumption smoothing strategies (*ibid*). Ethiopia, for example, is the second most populous country in Africa with 110.1 million inhabitants in 2019 (World Bank, 2020, cited

in Berhane, 2020), where most people depend on traditional agriculture, resulting in high levels of poverty. However, poverty is also high in urban areas and has a particularly detrimental impact on female-headed households.

The document, the National Social Protection Policy of Ethiopia (MoLSA, 2014), was reviewed in detail. From it, the following can be deduced: Leadership and coordination of national and international platforms were considered in the development of the policy. In addition, various stakeholders from federal to regional levels, including nongovernmental organizations, were engaged. The policy document focuses on disadvantaged groups (women, children, the elderly, and people with mental or physical disabilities), and safeguards have been coordinated to protect them from potential risks. In general, the policy is divided into five priority areas: (1) Promoting a productive safety net, (2) Promoting and improving employment and livelihoods, (3) Promoting social insurance, (4) Improving equal access to basic social services, and (5) Providing legal protection and support to those at risk of abuse and violence (MoLSA, 2014).

The purpose of this essay is to analyze how the problems of women and girls with disabilities are represented in this policy. To this end, I use the “intersectional” perspective, which is critical to understand how multiple identities are dealt with. To make the analysis manageable, the essay focuses primarily on the fifth focus area of the policy (providing legal protection and support to those at risk of abuse and violence). However, relevant ideas and concepts from other focus areas and across the policy are also used to discuss with. The research methods used are “What is the problem represented to be (WPR)” and content analysis. WPR is most appropriate for finding out the silence in the policy document. WPR is most appropriate to find out the silence in the policy document. Regarding this, Bacchi (2009) stated:

*“What is the problem represented to be?” (WPR) approach offers a different way to think about policy. It suggests that, if you look at a specific policy, it can see that understand the “problem” to be a particular sort of “problem”*

The content analysis is used to see the content and context. More importantly, the easy use both WPR and content analysis an integrated way. Because the two

integrated analyzes are well suited to arrive at a strong and comprehensive research result.

## Results and Discussion

The “problem represented to be” The first question of the WPR approach is “what is the problem represented to be?” “Recalling that WPR approach starts with a policy or a policy proposal, examine the recommended intervention and work backward to see what the “problem” is represented to be” (Bacchi, 2009). The problem represented in the policy is “poverty, vulnerability to risk and exclusion.” In this policy, children in difficult circumstances, vulnerable pregnant and lactating women, people with disabilities, people with mental health problems, and the elderly are the target groups because they are exposed to risks and victims of exclusion. Although man[human]-made or natural disasters affect all populations, the extent of harm varies from person to person and even from place to place.

The policy shows that the problem can be expressed in terms of economic and social aspects that emanate from poverty and the root cause of poverty is socio-economic exclusion. For example, when women are excluded from benefiting equally from the fruits of the country, their self-esteem and independence from others is reduced. So, from the policy document, we can see that the aim is to “Ensuring social protection helps reduce poverty and vulnerability with a meaningful impact to protect the poorest segments of society from falling deep into destitution” (MoLSA, 2014). Vulnerability to risk also has a gendered face. Regarding this, cited in Jones and Woldehanna (2010) notes that poor households are often exposed to a variety of risks, ranging from financial to social. Gender dynamics influence both economic and social risks, and significant differences can exist between men and women. Because they are socially constructed, gender roles and responsibilities are highly diverse and infused with power relations.

In addition to physical or mental disabilities, the hierarchical power relationship between the sexes also has a social and economic impact on women's decision-making power, both at the household and national levels. This hierarchical relationship not only impacts the household, but also poses challenges to the implementation of social protection programs. Jones and Woldehanna (2010) found that little attention has been paid to the role of gender in the implementation and effectiveness of social protection programs. Many transfer programs and public works programs target women. However, due to pre-existing gender dynamics within households and communities, it is likely much more difficult to mitigate the role of gender in social protection. To support this idea, I collocated women to see what women's socioeconomic problems look like (Table 1).

**Table 1:** Collocates of “Women” (stop words excluded)

Rank	Freq	Freq (L)	Freq (R)	Collocate
1.	5	4	1	Children
2.	4	0	4	Elderly
3.	3	2	1	Vulnerability
4.	3	0	3	Person
5.	3	2	1	Labor
6.	3	0	3	Disability
7.	2	2	0	Problem
8.	1	0	1	Youth
9.	1	1	0	Social
10.	1	1	0	Right
11.	1	1	0	Rape
12.	1	1	0	Pregnant

**Table 2:** Identified concepts, categories, and binaries (main)

No.	Concepts	Categories	Binaries	
			-----	-----
1.	Poverty	Women	Inclusion	Exclusion
2.	Vulnerability to risk	Person with disability	Advantaged	Disadvantaged
3.	Exclusion	Children	Natural	Man[human]-made
4.	Legal protection	Elderly	Formal	Informal
5.			Public	Private
6.			Federal	Regional
7.			Economical	Social

Most words that come via women collocates have a negative meaning or a double burden that is always associated with their lives. For example, the word “children” occurs most often, indicating that women spend much of their time taking care of children. As a result, the constant time commitment causes women to suffer from a lack of time, which stunts their personal development and increases their vulnerability to danger. Vulnerability is probably the most appropriate word to show the extent to which women are exposed to hazards for various reasons. Collocation presents the problem of women in such a way that women's and girls' impairments, social exclusion, rape, pregnancy, and denial of social and economic rights are the causes of poverty and vulnerability.

#### *Underlying Assumptions and Presuppositions*

To make the problem clearer, this problem must be interrogated by the second WPR question: What are the presuppositions or assumptions underlie the representation of the problem? Bacchi explained that “... binaries and key concepts is not to accept the categories as given but to see how they function to give particular meaning to problem representation” (Bacchi, 2009). Under the large umbrella of social protection policy of Ethiopia, there are binaries, concepts, and categories that need to be addressed and interpreted in this essay. After a thorough review, I have identified the key words that are consistent with the main objective of the paper: ‘Women’, ‘poverty’, ‘vulnerability to risk’, ‘disadvantaged’, ‘exclusion’, and ‘legal protection’.

Thus, to understand how the policy conceptualizes the problem, I sought to examine the second WPR

question using the identified concepts, categories, and binaries (Table 2).

#### *Basic Concepts*

Understanding how policy has conceptualized the problems of poverty, vulnerability, and exclusion is supported by concepts. This is because social exclusion can be caused by poverty, and poverty can create vulnerability to risk. The identified concepts are always existed together. Therefore, I will try to discuss all these concepts in an integrated way. Poverty can be caused by a variety of factors, such as social and economic exclusion. Individuals under the poverty trap is always exposed to risk. To give an indication of exclusion, (DFID, 2005) defines exclusion as a term that describes a process whereby certain groups are systematically disadvantaged because of their ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, caste, ancestry, gender, age, disability, and other factors. Vulnerability is a critical concept in social protection policy that must be thoroughly understood to provide public social services. Vulnerability refers to a person's inability to withstand a hazard or respond in the event of a disaster. There are two causes of vulnerability: Man[human]-made and natural (MoLSA, 2014). According to MoLSA, women, the disabled, the elderly, and children are the main socially disadvantaged groups that they are near to exposed to risk.

#### *Human Rights of Disadvantaged Group*

Commitment to the rights of vulnerable and disadvantaged individuals and groups is one of the

characteristics of a human rights approach. Human rights legislation is based on the fundamental idea of the inherent dignity and equality of every human being. In accordance with this norm, the law establishes minimum conditions for a dignified life in the form of rights or entitlements that impose obligations on individuals and governments (Chapman and Carbonetti, 2011). Chapman and Carbonetti (2011) explained that concern for the vulnerable and disadvantaged stems from the recognition that in almost all countries, certain individuals and groups routinely lack access to a broad range of human rights. Typically, vulnerable, and disadvantaged persons are victims of violations of civil and political rights and, in certain cases, economic, social, and cultural rights. In Ethiopia, for example, people with disabilities are excluded from socioeconomic benefits and participation due to misunderstandings. Accordingly, people with disabilities become victims of sexual and physical violence because they cannot protect themselves and the case are mostly not displayed.

The rights of disadvantaged groups, countries have enacted national laws and signed international and regional declarations, conventions, and protocols. Take the example, Ethiopia has enacted a constitution and a civil family code to protect social and economic benefits of women. The 1995 Ethiopian Constitution states in Article 24(1) that:

*“All persons are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law ...the law shall guarantee to all persons ...without discrimination on ground of race, nation, nationality, or other social origin, color, sex... (FDRE, 1995)”*

In line with the Constitution, Ethiopia's 2014 National Social Protection Policy, Focus Area 5, asserts that legal protection for the disadvantaged is prioritized over the elimination of abuse to protect psychological and moral well-being, which is important for assuming social responsibility and contributing to economic prosperity (MoLSA, 2014). Thus, according to this focus area, they are applying human rights approach to protect vulnerable section of the society in the form of legal services.

### *Binaries*

The characteristics and types of binaries identified in the right column (Table 2) are mainly associated with women, while the binaries in the left column are mainly associated with privileged people. Thus, based on the concepts, categories, and binaries, we assume that the policy's legal protection services are not targeted to women and girls with disabilities, but to people with

disabilities in general. This is because the eligible disadvantaged groups are clearly defined in the policy as:

*“Children, women, older persons, and persons with disabilities... (MoLSA, 2014)”*

This assumption is further interrogated by WPR (4), which hides/conceals in the problematization of the policy

### *How has this “Problem” Representation Come About*

The problems represented in the policy document: Poverty, vulnerability to risk, and exclusion are assessed, and how they come about as a problem is the trigger for policy design (MoLSA, 2014). The history of the problem is thus addressed by the third question, “how has this representation of the problem come about?”

Poverty and vulnerability to risk are on the agenda at both national and global levels. Therefore, the sustainable development agenda aims to “leave no one behind” and this coincides with the objectives of Ethiopia's national social protection policy which aims to focus on poor and vulnerable citizens (FDRE, 1995; Lemma and Cochrane, 2019). In view of this, the essay attempts to chronologically arrange the genealogy according to time with its scenario.

After consecutive droughts and famines in the country, in 1960 and 1970 in the northern parts of Ethiopia, the Ethiopian government established emergency relief at the institutional level with the establishment of the Emergency Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (ibid). A few years later, in 1996, the government formulated a formal social protection policy that included preventive, rehabilitation, and developmental programs was called the “developmental social welfare policy” based on this policy, the national action plan of action on older persons (2006-2015), the national action plan of action for Persons with disabilities (2012-2021), and the Private organization employees' pension scheme were introduced (Berhane, 2020).

The current Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia government (FDRE, 1995) states that the Government of Ethiopia has established the essential legal framework for the development and implementation of a national social protection system. Article 41/5 of the constitution states, “the state shall provide, within available means, allocate resources to provide rehabilitation and assistance to the physically and mentally disabled, the aged, and to children who are without parents or guardian” (ibid). In addition, article 90/1 states, “...policies shall aim to provide all Ethiopians with access to public health and education, clean water, housing, food, and social security” (ibid). Despite all these efforts, over 21 million Ethiopians live in extreme poverty and are unable to meet their needs (World Bank, 2020). Finally, MoLSA (2014) noted that the 2010/11-2014/15 growth and transformation Plan, which provided the

basis for poverty reduction and contributed directly or indirectly to the well-being of society, provided the foundation for the establishment of a long-term social protection system. Thus, due to the various social and economic constraints of the poor and disadvantaged, the Ethiopian government came to develop the national social protection policy in 2014 to address the problem of poverty, vulnerability to risk and socio-economic exclusion (ibid).

### *Silences and Left Unproblematic*

What is left unproblematic in this presentation of the problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the “problem” be thought about differently? Policy proposals identify the problem by problematizing it. As mentioned earlier, the aim of this study is to problematize Ethiopia's national social protection policy to find the sciences. Regarding this, Bacchi stated, “...the underling intent is to problematize the problematizations on offer by subjecting the problem representation they contain to critical scrutiny” (Bacchi, 2009). Based on the main goal of the research, I focus on the silences related to women and girls with disabilities from an intersectional perspective. Before I set out to identify silence, it is good to know what the intersectional view of the problem is. This is because silence is interrogated for what it is and how it is understood by policy makers:

*“Using this as a guideline for analysis, advocacy, and policy development that addresses multiple discriminations and helps us understand how different sets of identities impact on access to rights and opportunities (Association for Women’s Rights in Development, 2004)”*

Using this as a guideline, this research tries to identify the sciences in the policy problematization.

The policy problematization silenced the multiple problems of women and girls with disabilities that make them poor and vulnerable to risk. In similar fashion, the legal protection service is not understood women and girls with disabilities as a category. The category in the policy is that “... segments of society... children, women, persons with disabilities...” (MoLSA, 2014). This quote generalizes by referring to “persons with a disability.” It implies that the policy assumes that women and girls with disabilities and men with disabilities face the same level and type of problems. Because the policy is problematic about multiple (intersectional) problems. As a result, the interventions designed for the problem did not address the multiple problem. To make it clearer how policy makers understood the problem, I concorded women using the content analysis application AntConc version 3.5.9.

Hit	KWIC
1	ore specifically, vulnerable children, women and the elderly under difficult
2	omic problems, especially, children, women, persons with disabilities, elderly,
3	the legal rights of children, women, persons with disabilities, the e
4	, rape and child labour. Children, women, the elderly, and persons with
5	• Vulnerable pregnant and lactating women, • Vulnerable people with disabil

**Fig. 1:** Concordance of women

Figure 1 shows the policy categorization of the groups, women and girls with disabilities are generalized under “people with disabilities”. However, the fact is that women and girls with disabilities are subject to physical and psychological violence not only because they are disabled, but also because they are female. Although Ethiopia's national social protection policy has not considered these issues in policy development, the preamble to the United Nations convention on the rights of persons with disabilities 2006 highlights how women and girls with disabilities are violated and discriminated against in society. Therefore, the Convention recommends that it is everyone's responsibility to care of and protect from physical and psychological discrimination and abuse (UN, 2006). Similarly, Humphrey (2016) also confirmed that the layers of discrimination and violence are acute when poverty, disability, and gender come together (ibid). In addition, despite all these facts, Ethiopia ratified the Convention on July 7, 2010, but the 2014 Social Protection Policy does not take into account that women and girls with disabilities experience discrimination and violence in multiple ways, instead generalized in person with disabilities.

It should not be unproblematic because it is serious that the violence does not only come from outside, but mainly from the caregivers of the household members. Not only where the violence comes from, but who trusts them when they display their experiences? No one, because the perpetrator uses their physical and mental disabilities as an advantage to hide what they have done on them. Cited in Dessie *et al.* (2019), women and girls who experience violence are not told what happened to them because of the nature of their disability. Thus, the legal protection services to the disadvantaged groups do not consider the crime happen on women and girls with disabilities being as disabled and being as female. If this is so, I would like to ask how the multiple discrimination and abuse of women and girls with disabilities case handled in the courts? No way, the legal protection system only gives for those identified as disadvantaged categories.

## Conclusion

This essay analyzed the national social protection policy of Ethiopia. The objective of the essay was to examine how Ethiopia's national social protection policy understood women and girls with disabilities in the problematization, especially in focus area five (legal protection services for those exposed to abuse and violence). The essay attempts to use the "intersectional" lens to see how the policy understands differently the various issues faced by women and girls with disabilities. Given the selected text and stated purpose, the essay used the WPR approach to answer the first four sequential questions (1, 2, 3, and 4) that helped explore the silences. In addition, content analysis was used to complement the WPR. The implicit problem represented in the policy document are poverty, vulnerability to risk, and exclusion. This problem conceptualized as being solved by a human rights approach in the form of preventive and protective measures. The analysis showed that the policy problematization silenced the multiple vulnerabilities of women and girls with disabilities to risk and social exclusion. Legal protection services for victims of abuse and violence conceal the fact that women and girls with disabilities have multiple problems; instead, they are viewed as people with disabilities. However, they are not only victims being only disabled but also being they are women. Therefore, the identification of victims in the policy is not well studied. This means that the non-representation in problematization means that there are no proper policy interventions designed to protect women and girls with disabilities from abuse and mistreatment.

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## Ethics

Clear citation and reference is applied that the ideas of the authors are acknowledged and respected.

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