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**Female Workers in Flower Farm Industry:**  
**A Study of Socio-economic impacts of the Job Opportunity**  
Case of Bishoftu City: Ethiopia

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## **Abstract**

As the foreign direct investment and international trade define and redefine the global economic landscape, the economic map of different corners of the world has also been in a constant state of change. As part of this change, the third world economy has also been able to better involve in the global economic interaction. One of the major elements taking place in this process is growth and expansion of the non-traditional agricultural sector. The non-traditional agriculture or horticulture sector beyond becoming one of the means in which developing countries got a window of involvement in a global market, it also intensified the concept of ‘feminization of labor’. Women are the major players of the sector, which in other words means the sector is able to create a very large number of paid job opportunities for women. Considering this fact, this thesis is aimed at assessing the socio-economic impact of the job opportunity on those women who get the opportunity of employment. Having this general objective, three research questions have been asked:

1. How does the job opportunity affect their life improvement?
2. What impact does the job opportunity impact women’s decision-making power at the household level?
3. How the job opportunity does affect their social participation within the community?

From the analysis, it is found that the income from the job opportunity rarely improved life of the women from the perspectives of saving, children is education, and household expenditures. With regard to family-decision making, the analysis uncovered that slight progress in freedom of expressing ideas in the household has been observed from the married women’s experience. On the other hand, the job opportunity is found to significantly increase the women social participation both in their neighborhood and at the work place.



## **Dedication**

I would like to dedicate this thesis for all female workers at flower farms in Ethiopia striving for survival!



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## **Operational definitions**

*Life improvement-* for this particular thesis is defined as a progress of the women workers household in terms of saving, children education, and monthly family expenditures.

*Family decision making-* is defined as the decisions that are made in a given family concerning children, how to use savings and on ways of spending money. In this thesis, it is used to assess any progress on women role in such decision-making resulted from paid employment of the women.

*Social participation-* is defined as women involvement in different social activities including *Edir, Ekub, Mahaber*. The thesis tried to uncover the role of paid employment on involvement of such social activities of the women.

*Social capital-* for this study, social capital is used from the point of view of women involvement in different social activities, which in turn enable them to build a stronger solidarity in their community. Therefore, the strong social solidarity is the social capital of the women.

## 1. Background

Are the women working in the newly flourishing flower industry winners or losers?

Floriculture can be defined as “a discipline of horticulture concerned with the cultivation of flowering and ornamental plants for gardens and for floristry, comprising the floral industry.” It can also be defined as “[t]he segment of horticulture concerned with commercial production, marketing, and sale of bedding plants, cut flowers, potted flowering plants, foliage plants, flower arrangements, and noncommercial home gardening” (Getu, 2009, as cited in Gudeta, 2012).

The floriculture industry is one of the newest and fastest growing sectors in the Ethiopian economy and has given the country’s export sector an alternative export commodity to the traditional predominant export of coffee. Floriculture has shown dramatic expansion since the turn of the new millennium. In 2002, there were only five floriculture farms in the nation. However, by 2008, this number had risen to more than a hundred, according to the report of the Ethiopian Horticulture Producers and Exporters Association. The same source also reported that the export earning of merely 1.5 million US dollars in 2002 had risen to 125 million US dollars by 2008. Furthermore, the flower farm sector, alone, was a source of employment for more than 139,000 citizens (Tewodros, 2010; Chala, 2010).

This newly flourishing industry has created a new hope of income generation for the majority of young females in the country, who have been largely ignored by the system for a long time (Tewodros, 2010). From a gender perspective, the sector can be said to have had a great positive impact on creating job opportunities for women. Statistics show that more than 75% of the sector’s total workforce is female. This is because flower growth needs intensive nurturing, which is said to be a natural inclination of females (ibid.).

Despite being an issue of great concern in the academic arena, very little research has been conducted into the way in which the work opportunity created by this new non-traditional agricultural sector has affected those individuals involved in the process. As a response to this silence, this research attempts to address the socio-economic impact of the work opportunity on the female laborers.

## **1.1 Statement of the problem**

It is generally true that new industry sectors provide valuable input into a nation's economic progress, as they enable revenue to be generated and create new employment opportunities for citizens. In the context of this study, the non-traditional horticultural sector has had a tremendously positive impact on allocating jobs – particularly for women, who had not been benefiting from the country's previous economic activities. This is believed to have affected women's socio-economic status in their communities.

However, in reality, the effect of the employment opportunity on women's socio-economic spheres has not been well-researched. Rather, published and unpublished studies have focused on the physical effects on women from working at the flower farms. Moreover, it is very difficult to assess the effect of this newly emerged sector, which is a combination of both foreign direct investment and domestic investment, without a critical assessment of its ground level socio-economic impact, modification and planning for better usage.

Considering the gap identified in terms of well-informed literature on the issue, this paper tries to provide a well-grounded description of the role this sector has played in improving women's life standard, decision-making power and social participation in the community. In order to achieve this, a purely qualitative approach was implemented to collect the required data from the field.

## **1.2 Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this research was to contribute to our understanding of the socio-economic impact of the job opportunity created through the newly flourishing flower farm industry on its female workers. For this purpose, three research questions were raised.

## **1.3 Research questions**

Presuming that job opportunities in the flower industry affect women's income, three key questions, expected to be answered by the findings of this study, were asked:

1. How did the job opportunity affect women's life improvement?
2. How did it impact women's decision-making power at the household level?
3. How did it affect women's social participation within the community?

#### **1.4 Limitations of the study**

One of the major limitations of the study was the amount of available literature on this topic in an Ethiopian context. Further, respondents found it difficult to gain free time to participate in the study, since they worked almost all the week and had only one day off. A third challenge related to access to documented data due to a lack of data documentation and transparency and extraordinary bureaucracy in government offices.

#### **1.5 Research objectives**

##### **1.5.1 General objective**

Considering the research gap identified above, this study attempted to address how the job opportunity in the cut flower industry – particularly in Bishoftu city – affected the socio-economic status of women workers.

##### **1.5.2 Specific objectives**

- Examining the effect of the job opportunity on the life improvement of the women (with regards to saving, child education and household expenditure)
- Investigating its impact on the decision-making power of the women at the household level (with regards to decisions on child issues, household expenditures and saving usage)
- Exploring its effect on improving the social participation of women in their community (with regards to participation in key social activities, including *edir*, *ekub* and *mahaber*)

## **1.6 Significance of the study**

The findings of this research may provide an immense contribution to our understanding of the socio-economic impact of the flower farm job opportunity on its women workers. Prior research in this area has focused on the environmental, physical and labor rights effects of the work condition on the women. However, as far as the researcher's knowledge is concerned, no researcher has attempted to look at the socio-economic impact of the job opportunity – at least in the context of this particular study area. Therefore, this study attempted to address whether the women benefited to the level they expected.

## **2 Research context**

Before going to deal with the theory chapter, I think it is logical to assess background information with regard to Ethiopia and the development of flower farm in the country. This brief chapter try's to give an understandable picture on the history of floriculture in Ethiopia and the major flower companies association: Ethiopian Horticulture Producer Exporters Association.

### **2.1 Floricultural industry in Ethiopia**

As far as the favorable geographical and climatic conditions are concerned, Ethiopia is said to be one of the best destinations for growing flowers. The country is endowed with landscape characteristics of high altitude and vast unexploited arable land. Apart from the natural factors tending to favor the country as an attractive destination for the industry, speaking of the labor with approximately 93 million population, (Embassy of Japan in Ethiopia, 2008; World Bank, 2015) Ethiopia has an abundant and unused human resource. The floriculture industry is tremendously labor intensive in general and highly dependent on unskilled labor, which is abundantly available in the country.

Furthermore, the government's commitment to attract as many as foreign direct investment (FGD) flow in the country has catalyzed it to provide plenty of incentives for those investing in the sector. Therefore, all this factors summed up has made Ethiopia the new spot of floriculture industry in Africa. (Embassy of Japan in Ethiopia, 2008)

The history of floriculture production in Ethiopia traces back to the 1980s, a period when state farms started producing and exporting flower to the European market. Even though it has almost been more than 15 years since a number of private companies joined the business, it is only after 2002 that dramatic increase in the number of flower farm companies had been observed. (ibid)

According to sources from the Ethiopian Horticulture Exporters Association (2014), currently there are around 116 investments, which are specifically in operation with production of

flower, fruits and vegetables, and herbs. The ownership type of the farms is a mixture of foreign direct investment (in number 61), domestic investment (46) and joint venture partnership (9).

Here we can observe a very important point, which is the upper hand control of FGD. The relevance of foreign direct investment in the contemporary economic globalization which is part and parcel of my master study was the major provoking factor which embarked me to focus my thesis on the resulted job opportunities for women and its socio-economic impact. From the total number of one hundred sixteen investments in flower and vegetable, 61 are foreign owned companies and the other nine of them are owned by share with the domestic investors. Fully domestic investors own the rest of the forty-six investments.

Currently, the flower farm takes up about 1,426 hectares in terms of land area, whereas fruits and vegetables cover 11,371 hectares of land. These two sectors combined have created an employment opportunity for more than 183,000 individuals by 2012. Considering their export value, the sector was able to generate 265.52 million USD. Despite of its very short history in Ethiopian economy, the sector is able to be the fifth largest export revenue generator for the country. (Ethiopian Horticulture Exporters Association, Brochure 2014)

The country now has 84 flower farms and was able to improve its share of production and export. The pace of change can be said dramatic as compared to countries already in the market. As a result, Ethiopia is now the second largest flower producer next to Kenya in Africa. (ibid)

## **2.2 Ethiopian Horticulture Producer Exporters Association**

Ethiopian Horticulture Producer Exporters Association is non- governmental organization, which was established in 2002. The organization has members of 110 horticultural producers and works as the main representative of its members in the negotiation of their interests with the government and the global market. EHPE members are collection of companies from flower, cuttings, ornamental plants, fruits, vegetables and herbs for the export market. (EHPEA, Brochure 2014)

According to *A series Studies on Industries in Ethiopia* (embassy of Japan in Ethiopia ,2008), the EHPEA was able to develop a strong bond with the government, which resulted in a

multifaceted incentives favoring members. The four flower farms taken as sample for this study in Bishoftu city, which all specialized in rose flower production, are legally registered members of the EHPEA.

With regard to the available prior researches, a numbers of studies have been conducted related to the sector. I have found some published studies, which try to address the different issues related to the industry. Mano & Suzuki (2011) have tried to showy in their study that how geographic agglomeration of the flower farms led them for far more cooperation and increased productivity. On the other hand, Mano et al (2011) have conducted a study from the employment perspective. Their study tries to explore the importance of local and personal networks in employment and development of labor markets. However, the vacuum was still wide open in relation to addressing the job opportunity's impact on its women workers who account for more than 75 % of the total labor force in the sector. Therefore, considering this gap, this thesis has at least tried to shade some light on the issue.



### **3. Theoretical framework**

This chapter is committed to provide a clear theoretical background in which this particular study depends. Having this objective in mind, the first section attempts to create a general understanding on the process of the period of economic globalization. The second part presents the benchmark approach of this study: women in development: the anti-poverty approach. The last section presents the important concepts that are the bridges for connecting the literature and the research questions of this study. The concepts include economic empowerment, family decision-making, social capital, the feminization of labor.

#### **3.1 Period of economic globalization**

The era of globalization has created a world society that has never been so interconnected, accompanied by almost unrestricted flow of financial capital, cultural elements and social elements facilitated by radical inventions of new communication technologies. Multinational companies are the major faces of economic globalization, in that firms have gone international by making their production chain global, rather than restricted to national soil. The other catalyzing factor of globalization is the tremendous exodus of people across borders, despite increased restrictions put in place by each nation on people crossing their border. Economic globalization also pertains to transnational economic activities, wherein markets and firms operate globally among increasingly less bounded territories (George & Wilding, 2002: 2).

The economic landscape of today's world is not comparable with the landscape of three or four decades ago. As stated by Dickens (2011: 14–48), the global economic map is always in a state of change due to long-lasting interrelated and preceding evolutionary changes. The major configuring elements in the process of economic globalization are production, trade and foreign direct investment (FDI). Trade and FDI have grown faster than global production, signifying the tremendous interconnectivity and interdependency of global economic interaction (ibid.).

Trade can be defined as the exchange of goods and services among member nations of the global economy, whereas foreign direct investment involves ownership of a given enterprise by a foreign-based enterprise with at least a 10% share of the total capital. Trade and FDI are the means for increased productivity, new job creation, expansion of new market destinations and spillover of knowledge, especially in Third World nations, with the poorest members of the world's population. The ultimate end of these processes is poverty reduction (Goldin & Reinert, 2012: 9–10).

Momsen (2010: 196–201) depicted the new international division of labor (NIDL) in contemporary economic globalization. She argued that national, regional and international economic policy agreements support the search for the cheapest possible labor. Global economic globalization is gendered by its very nature and is able to integrate, by default, far rural areas into the system through migration and communication technologies. Rural women migrate to urban centers, where seeds of economic globalization appear to first flourish, searching for paid labor. This cultural shift is putting tremendous pressure on the status quo system of patriarchy, due to the new trend of paid employment opportunities for women. Because of this shift, the workforce of many Third World countries is showing significant change in terms of the number of female workers.

Statistical figures testify this development and show that the employment rate of women has skyrocketed alongside increased economic activities – both in the least developed and post-industrial societies. This shift has redefined household interactions in terms of gender relations and parent–child relations, as young women have begun to get paid work and live independently in urban centers where the new job opportunities are located (Momsen, 2010: 198).

The success story of women's involvement in the employment opportunities created through economic globalization involves a mixture of failure and winning. However, arguments in support of each side are aggregate by nature and taken from unrelated areas that are not empirically evident. The meaning and effect of women's entry into paid employment have a different meaning depending on their social context. For women whose participation in paid labor is upheld by social norms, the connotation cannot be compared with that of women whose outdoor paid employment is not supported by their social system. Furthermore, the motivating factor for women to take employment can determine the effect on intra-household relations. Such factors can include supporting the family for a better life, taking a better offer

in relation to a previous job or fulfilling the extreme needs of the family. These factors have different outcomes with regards to shifting or modifying intra-household relations or the relation of the newly employed woman with the rest of the family, which might include a husband, mother, father, sister or brother (cited in Kaaber, 1997: 262).

Research has shown that women who are paid income improve their household expenditure in different ways. For example, a study in Cote D'Ivoire showed that the share of income added to the household by the female member had a significant positive effect on the family's food budget. On the other hand, a study in Taiwan indicated that women's paid income was found to increase expenditure on foodstuff and education, on the one hand, and to decrease expenditure on alcohol and cigarettes (Quisumbing, 2010: 162).

The aim of this research was to increase our knowledge of the life improvement experienced by women through the job opportunity created by the flower industry. To discern this, the study examined the women's savings, education (for their children, if they had any, or themselves, if single) and household expenditure. The study also tried to address whether any change occurred with regard to family decision-making relating to children, expenditure and savings in the family. Finally, yet importantly, the women's social participation, which I believe enhances their social status in their community, was assessed. The research examined whether there was any difference with regard to the scale of participation in social issues, mainly in *ekub*, *edir* and *mahaber*. Such social activities are directly related to one's power of expenditure – in other words, money.

### **3.2 Women in development (WID): the anti-poverty approach**

The concept of 'women in development' (WID) traces its origin to the influential work of the Danish Economist Esther Boserup, titled *Women's Role in Economic Development* (1970). The term was first used by a Washington-based network of female development professionals, who criticized the development theories of the time on the basis of Boserup's findings and their own experience (Tasli, 2007).

Considering the existing function of the economy, Boserup concluded that economic development negatively affects women's status and situation in terms of the sexual division of labor (Tasli, 2007:12). Boserup's work, showing the regressive impact of development on

women, provoked the advocacy of liberal feminists for the active involvement of women in the economic production process (Visvanathan et al., 1997: 17). Boserup also tried to include Third World women in economic development discourse for the first time, showing that women's involvement in the agricultural sector had resulted in a positive outcome on production and women's increased status in their relations with male counterparts (Tilsaa, 2007; Razavi & Miller, 1995).

The major theme raised by the liberal feminists was equal opportunity for women in employment. Their focus was on making women the central point in the economic production process, rather than welfare and reproduction (Miller & Razavi, 1995: 3).

The WID approach passed through several ideological shifts between its start in the 1970s and the 1980s. It began with the 'efficiency' approach, and then transitioned to 'anti-poverty'; from anti-poverty, it moved to 'efficiency.' Each focus had a unique aim and justification (Tilsa, 2007).

In the area of gender and development, WID is still a predominant approach. The anti-poverty concept is a focus of this study, providing a benchmark analysis. Therefore, the focus of the anti-poverty analysis is discussed and connected to the research questions raised.

Anti-poverty is the second approach of WID, and this approach simplifies the broader objective of gender equality – which is a focus of the 'equity' approach – by reducing gender income inequality. In another words, the agenda focuses on low-income women in order to curb poverty. The inequality between men and women is not linked to subordination, but to poverty. Therefore, the only way to fight inequality is to empower women by offering them paid employment opportunities. The essential goal, in conjunction with creating job opportunities for the poorest women, is the 'basic needs strategy,' which aims at meeting the basic needs of women, including food, clothing, shelter and fuel, as well as social needs, including education, human rights and participation in social life through employment and political involvement (Moser, 1993; Tisla, 2007).

Although its success has been limited, the anti-poverty approach has been implemented by giant international institutions including the World Bank and ILO, and by developing countries as a main part of their development projects. The project focuses on increasing women's employment opportunities and paving ways for income generating activities through skills training (Tisla, 2007: 16).

The anti-poverty approach, as described above, seeks to increase income generating opportunities for women. In other words, its focus is on the productive role of women and, in a way, it forgets the reproductive role of women in society (Moser, 1993; Tisla, 2007).

I admit the shortcomings of the theory in relation to undermining women's subordination to economic inequality and forgetting the reproductive role of women in the household. However, I support the theory's assertion that the income empowerment of women is at least one of the major factors that shift women's position in the household, as well as in society.

Therefore, considering the points reached by the anti-poverty approach, this study views employment opportunities as a major factor in the reduction of gender inequality to increase women's socio-economic status. I believe that women's monthly income empowers them for stronger involvement in improving their household life, family decision-making and social participation.

In the broader framework of the anti-poverty approach, theoretical concepts like empowerment, the feminization of labor, family decision-making and social capital fill the conceptual gap for understanding women employment. Therefore, I use these concepts as manifestations of the anti-poverty approach. The justification for this is that the empowerment of women, their improved role in family decision-making and their increased social participation are linked with and determined by women's financial independence, which is the major ultimate objective of the anti-poverty approach.

### **3.3 Economic globalization and women employment**

As already stated, the relocation of export-oriented factories and manufacturing firms from the developed to least developed nations has resulted in the creation of gendered employment opportunities. The main target of such export-oriented firms has been young women in the Third World. The single significant and visible motivating factor behind this trend has been the cheap labor of women, relative to their male counterparts (Nisonoff, 1997: 177–81).

Economic transformation has resulted because globalization factors have led to the 'feminization of the labor force,' wherein women workers have become actively involved in

the global economy through paid work in different corners of the world (Kabeer, 2008: 35). According to Kabeer, the feminization of labor can be understood from two points of view:

- A change in the percentage of women working who are either economically active or seeking a job. In other words, the upwards scaling of female labor participation.
- A change in women's economic participation rate, as compared to men. In other words, the percentage share of women workers, compared to total women.

One case that has repeatedly been cited as one of the predecessors of employment creation through transnational forms is that of the Maquiladoras. The Maquiladoras were a series of electronic and apparel assembly plants established between the US and Mexican borders after 1965, following the border industrialization program undertaken by the US and Mexican governments. The establishment incorporated women as more than 85% of the total labor force, and these women were predominantly unskilled and characteristically productive (ibid.).

Similarly, the cut flower industry, also known as the non-traditional agricultural sector, is a sector with a high proportion of female labor. Flower farming is often compared with child nurturing. As a result, women are considered the best choice for flower farm work, particularly for tasks in the greenhouses. More than 75% of the total labor force in the Ethiopian flower farm industry is female (Tewodros, 2010).

This trend seems a reality in all Third World nations. Research from Latin America, South Asia and Africa shows that more than 70% of flower industry workers are female. As far as African nations are concerned, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya and South Africa are the predominant export-oriented flower producers (Dolan et al., 2002: 13). However, the radically flourishing cut flower industry – particularly in the post-2001 context – has made Ethiopia the second largest flower exporter next to Kenya. The sector has been able to create more than 139,000 job opportunities, of which women have taken more than 70%. As a result, flowers are the country's sixth most exported commodity, and its share in export earnings has accelerated from 0.04 % in 2001 to 5.39 in % 2007, signifying the importance of this sector to the country's macro-economic foundation (Chala, 2010: 13–14).

Globalization has blessed women – both young and adult – through the creation of new employment opportunities. However, the extent to which this opportunity has changed their lives is debatable by social researchers in general and feminist thinkers in particular. Some

groups of researchers have claimed that paid job opportunities create bargaining power for women – especially those who are married – in family decision-making (Kabeer, 1997). I believe that in the current economically globalized world, where capital flows, foreign direct investment and trade are interwoven, it is the social researchers' professional duty to check whether stated theories hold true, particularly for the formerly subordinated and oppressed poor women in the Third World.

I firmly believe that the more women are independent of their husbands to finance social activities, the more they participate in the social sphere. This, in turn, lifts their general social status.

### **3.4 Concepts**

A well-grounded understanding of key concepts is important to address the gap this particular research tries to bridge. These concepts include empowerment, the feminization of labor, household decision-making power and social capital. The concepts have the power to highlight the socio-economic impact of flower farm job opportunities on young and adult women, both directly and indirectly. The significance of the concepts for the study is well-shown, with the relevant theory considered with each concept.

#### **3.4.1 Economic empowerment**

The concept of 'power' has been applied in the arena of social sciences for a relatively long time. Different social scientists have used it in varied contexts, and the term has contributed to a number of sub-concepts. In this regard, 'empowerment' is a significant and debatable concept in the social sciences. The major development related to this concept is 'women empowerment,' which feminist theorists formulated at the onset of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a major instrument for the improvement of women's work and personal life. These theorists firmly stressed that a radical improvement in education and employment opportunity was the benchmark for attaining female empowerment; in other words, the two elements were taken as the means for attaining the end of female empowerment (Gholipour et al., 2009: 57–8).

Rowlands (1995: 101–2) called for revisiting the way in which the concept of power is used by feminist theorists to discuss female empowerment. She showed the three ways in which the concept could be used: ‘power over,’ ‘power to’ and ‘power-from-within.’ From a feminist perspective, power over entails dominance of men over women. However, power over can also be exercised in other arenas of social life: men can exercise power over other men, and power can also be visible to any other socially, politically and economically marginalized group other than women. Therefore, it is a ‘zero-sum’ game, in that the gain of one side comes at the expense of the other.

However, the other two categories, power to and power-from-within can be used without any conflict of interest. This is particularly true of power to, which was defined by Kabeer (2001: 21) as “people’s capacity to define their own life-choices and to pursue their own goals [...]” In other words, the concept can be practically implemented without violence and the loss of agency by any party. The power to concept is referred to by the empowerment approach, and it can be achieved by improving one’s ability to resist and challenge power over.

As reflected above and in other studies, one significant way to empower women is to create female employment opportunities, which can enable women to gain financial independence from men. Therefore, this study tried to assess whether the employment opportunity created by the newly flourishing flower industry in Ethiopia had really resulted in women’s economic independence in a way that enabled them to contribute to their household livelihood, affect change in their family decision-making and influence their level of social participation.

### **3.4.2 Family decision-making**

Family decision-making and its workings within a household have been interest areas of feminist and other social researchers.

However, from a theoretical point of view, only a few feminist researchers have tried to achieve a single explanation for this relationship. The most cited theories are ‘resource theory’ and ‘social power theory.’ According to resource theory, the base of power for an individual as compared to another is the relative individual resources he/she obtains. The relative source can be manifested in different factors, including education, income and social status. Prior to World War II, men were the only breadwinners and had the sole opportunity

for education. As a result, men held sway over all-important family decisions on any issue. However, once women were able to gain relatively better access to both paid employment and education, family structure became much more egalitarian in terms of decision-making, especially in the United States (Belch & Willis, 2001: 114).

Considering the objective of this research, resource theory contributed to showing the effect that paid employment could have on women's involvement in family decision-making. The findings enable us to explain whether resource theory holds true in the way that employment opportunities helped to improve women's household, as well as social positions and contributions.

### 3.4.3 Social capital

Social theorists from different disciplines, including in the social sciences have used the concept of social capital in various ways, therefore it can be said that it is a multidimensional concept. However, in order to address the concept of women's social participation in their community, I use the sociological conceptualization:

Social capital is the goodwill available to individuals or groups. Its source lies in the structure and content of the actor's social relations. Its effects flow from the information, influence, and solidarity it makes available to the actor. (Adler & Kwon, 2002: 23)

Alder and Kwon (2002: 23–4) identified three types of social relations: 'market relations,' in which goods and services are exchanged for money or bartered; 'hierarchical relations,' wherein submissiveness and authority are exchanged for material and spiritual security; and finally 'social relation,' in which favors and gifts are exchanged as social capital for social relations.

Social capital is a long-term asset that allows individual actors to develop and participate in a group with the hope of return benefits. By strengthening their external relations, individual actors improve their social capital, which, in turn, grants them superior access to information, power and solidarity. Furthermore, such investment in the internal collective group leads members to benefit from collective capacity and action (ibid.).

As the literature shows, use of the term 'social capital' is broad and multidimensional. However, for the sake of narrowing down the concept for this particular thesis, I use the term from the perspective of women's social participation. I examine how income from flower farms enabled women to build better social capital through increasing their involvement in different social activities.

As stated above, in order to involve themselves in the group and benefit from it, individual actors must invest in long-term payback; the duration of this payback period can be unpredictable. For this study, I tried to see the women's side of the story in order to examine how the new job opportunity affected their social participation. In the context of this study, elements of social involvement included activities such as *edir*, *ekub* and *mahaber*. These terms are Amharic, and Mammo (1999) in his Book *The Paradox on Africa's Poverty* has clearly defined these social activities.

*Edir* is actually one of the most social activities practiced in Ethiopian society. It is a practice where members of community support other member in time of mourning both financially and psychologically. Mammo (1999) puts it in the following way:

*Edir* is established for the purpose of providing mutual help on the occasion of the final ceremony of one's life-death (Mammo, 1999: 187)

*Ekub* is the other social practice which can be considered as an informal financial institution, which especially is practiced by the poor members of the society:

The purpose of the poor participating in the *ekub* is that they are often incapable of saving enough money in their lifetimes to make the necessary investments. So they pool their small savings together and hand them over to one member on a revolving rota (Mammo, 1999: 187)

As far as the social gathering is concerned, *mahaber* is the other important practice highly practiced among women of low income:

*Mahaber* are religious gatherings to observe a holy day in honor of, say, one of the Apostles and are observed every month according to the Apostolic doctrine...members of *mahaber* and other invited guests, apart from enjoying the party, normally use the occasion to discuss their personal or social problems in an easy and informal atmosphere (Mammo, 1999: 184)

The abovementioned activities are the backbone of social activities and relations in Ethiopian society. Therefore, I believe that understanding women's involvement in the above and related activities can give us a better picture of women's participation in their community. On the other hand, income from work at flower farms is considered the source of investment in these social activities.

#### **3.4.4 The feminization of labor: agriculture**

The non-traditional and mainly export-oriented sector of agriculture has become one of the most important sources of employment for Third World women. The sector involves the production of flowers, vegetables and fruit, mainly for export to Western countries. In comparison with other sectors, such as industry, the agriculture sector is the most risky and seasonal. As the women involved in the sector are the least skilled and educated, employers have the ultimate bargaining power when adjusting their female labor force according to the season (Kanji et al., 2007: xi).

However, this non-traditional sector of horticulture has become a source of independent income for women who have previously been homemakers and for young females who have previously been dependent on their parents. Therefore, the study attempted to assess the ground impact of this relatively new feminization of labor from women's socio-economic point of view.

## **4. Methodology of the research**

This chapter provides a detailed description of the nature of the study population, clarifying the target study groups for this particular study. It also presents the sampling procedures employed to recruit study subjects for the data collection. Furthermore, the chapter provides a brief description and justification of the two data collection instruments used and the methods used in the process of analyzing the qualitative data. In addition, in this chapter the research is visited from ethical considerations point of view. Lastly, the chapter closes by discussing quality elements of the research depending on the concepts borrowed from Lincoln and Guba (1985).

### **4.1 Population and sampling**

The research population for this study consisted of female workers in the cut flower industry in Bishoftu city. Of the 16 flower farms in the city, four farms were used for the sample – two from foreign owned farms and two from domestically owned farms. For the purpose of anonymity, from this point onwards I use letters to represent the four flower farms. Accordingly, they are represented as flower farm ‘A,’ flower farm ‘B,’ flower farm ‘C’ and flower farm ‘D.’

#### **4.1.1 Marital status of sampled women workers**

##### *4.1.1.1 Married women*

I believe that married women are an appropriate category in research on household life improvement, family decision-making and social participation, as they give insight into progress in these areas between husband and wife. One important point that emphasizes the importance of married women in this study is that they are the only category that could be considered in all three of the research questions of this study. As members of families with children and a husband, their perspective was advantageous to giving a good explanation of life improvement in the family resulting from work in the flower industry. Also, as mothers and important symbols of social participation, married women offered an excellent standpoint

from which I could critically examine progress in family decision-making in the home and women's social participation in the community.

#### *4.1.1.2 Divorced women*

Initially, I only considered two groups of women: married women and single women. I thought there might be a potential variation in terms of perception and experience with respect to the research questions between these two groups. However, during data collection, I came across a very clear difference in the way in which married and divorced women related to the research questions. Divorced women added another excellent perspective from which I could better answer the research questions. This group allowed me to understand the clear difference that exists, especially in terms of saving and family decision-making, between married and divorced women. In addition, it was vivid from the data that progress in family decision-making was less explained from divorced and single women's points of view.

#### *4.1.1.3 Single women*

The final group of women in this study consisted of single young women. This group also offered an advantageous perspective that enabled me to discern some features that were shared by both single and divorced women, but not by married women. However, the young single women were also unique in terms of their experience of social participation.

Generally, each group offered a very insightful dimension, which, in turn, provided me with a better answer to the research questions of this thesis.

May (2011: 95) argued that generalization is not always necessary in social research, as quantitative researchers claim. As long as the samples considered in the research process give appropriate information that the researcher thinks will address his/her research questions, the representativeness of the sample of the study population is less important. I believe that the sampling procedures used should depend on the nature of the research questions under study. Non-probability sampling procedures are usually linked to qualitative research and emphasize the 'right' subjects for that particular research. Therefore, representativeness is not an issue; rather, the focus is on getting detailed and descriptive data on the issues the study deals with.

Considering the research objectives of this particular thesis, more substantive data was able to be collected through the inclusion of subjects who were 'fit' for the research according to certain characteristics. For instance, since I was looking for very rich and detailed raw data, I had to consider the research subject's 'expressiveness.' Women who could express their ideas well were able to provide me with rich data and facilitated further detailed discussion in the focus group interviews. The above justification becomes even more rational when considering the research questions, which are all related to life improvement, the household, decision-making and social participation. For a strong understanding of these issues, rich and detailed data were needed. Consequently, the samples for the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were purposively selected with this justification in mind.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with purposively sampled twelve respondents, who came from all four farms. I created these samples for the sole purpose of attaining sound qualitative data for the research questions, without consideration of representativeness (Matthews & Ross, 2010).

On the other hand, two groups were created for the purpose of focus group discussion, and the quality used for grouping was the marital status of the women. This homogenized group based on marital status facilitated better discussion that enabled me to discover the potential difference between groups in relation to the stated research questions.

#### **4.1.2 Semi-structured interview**

Interviews are one of the best data collection instruments, upholding the fundamental principle of qualitative research that it is the participant's perspective on an issue that should be unfolded, rather than the researcher's. The researcher normally designs general starting questions, but, predominantly, the setting unfolds more naturally (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

Semi-structured interviews, in particular, have won the interest of many social researchers; as a result, they are widely used. The justification behind them is that a flexible and openly designed interview is more likely to elicit the genuine viewpoint of respondents than a firmly standardized interview or questionnaire (Bryman, 2012). The general guiding questions forwarded by the researcher enable him/her to access each interviewee's implicit knowledge.

The ultimate objective of the interview is to make this implicit knowledge explicit in a way that can be used for further interpretation (Flick, 2006).

The two research questions relating to decision-making power and social status were more effectively addressed through in-depth interviews with respondents; this is because indicators of these two questions were qualitative – at least in the context of this study. This approach enabled me to collect the qualitative and natural data found in the field. I used a voice recorder and short notes to record the data collection.

#### **4.1.3 Focus group discussion**

Flick (2006: 191–2) argued that group discussion shares much closer attributes with the natural ways in which opinions are formed, asserted and exchanged. Furthermore, this data collection instrument provides a controlling mechanism for the participants, and can correct the researcher by allowing incorrect opinions to arise in discussion. In other words, the group dynamic creates a fertile ground for the conflict of ideas, leading to well-refined knowledge.

Ritche, et al (2003: 171) strongly put the dynamics of focus group discussion and its significance in data refinement as follows:

Data are generated by interaction between group participations. Participants present their own views and experiences, but they also hear from other people. They listen, reflect on what is said, and in the light of this consider their own standpoint further. Additional material is thus triggered in response to what they hear. Participants ask questions of each other, seek clarification, comment on what they have heard and prompt other to reveal more. As the discussion progresses (backwards and forwards, round and round the group) individual response becomes sharpened and refined, and moves to a deeper and more considered level.

Focus group discussion can allow powerful or influential decision-makers to understand the opinion of less powerful persons, who may otherwise struggle to communicate their thoughts. Individuals of the same status with characteristics such as low income and low literacy may feel comfortable expressing their thoughts in a focus group setting, as they are with peers who share their feelings and experiences (Morgan, 1993). This situation was manifested in this research, as the ultimate objective of the research was to uncover the genuine opinion of women with low income and low education.

Focus groups are known for giving researchers more in-depth and detailed responses than could otherwise be achieved from scaled and restricted questionnaires. In focus groups, respondents are free to comfortably mention possible contingent factors for the answers they provide. This fact makes focus group discussion ‘ecologically valid,’ unlike quantitative survey data, which is obviously not so (Stewart et al., 2007).

Ecological validity is concerned with whether the findings of studies are applicable to the real life scenario of the people under study. It pertains to whether the methods and instruments used in the research process are appropriate for expressing the natural social setting of the study population (Bryman, 2012: 48). Research cannot replicate the everyday life of the study group merely by mimicking its technical aspects; rather, it must consider the natural setting of the study target in order to be ecologically valid.

It is my strong belief that focus group discussions offer the benefit of the conflict of ideas among respondents. Particularly in the context of this study, in terms of addressing the two qualitative research questions related to household decision-making and women’s social status, focus groups were the most efficient forum for ideas to flow freely and enabled me to gain a general understanding of the research informants. I used one facilitator for these focus groups, and voice recorder was used for the data collection.

#### **4.2 Data analysis and the write-up process**

All the data from the individual interviews and the two focus group discussions were voice recorded. According to Bryman (2012: 482), voice recording is one of the best methods of data collection, especially for qualitative social researchers, because, in qualitative research, it is not only what people say that matters, but also the way in which they say it. Voice recording enables researchers to grasp the non-verbal communication that people use. It also enables them to review the recorded interview and attentively understand the subject’s point of view.

The recorded data was transcribed soon after completion of the fieldwork, as it was fresh in my mind. I took maximum care not to misunderstand the opinion of the subjects, as this could have misled my finding, and I tried to write down their responses word by word. The interviews were conducted in Amharic (an Ethiopian official working language); therefore, I was very concerned and careful in translating the interviewees’ words to English.

#### *4.2.1 Thematic analysis*

A thorough reading of the transcripts followed the transcription process. Once I had the full data material from both the individual interviews and the focus group discussions, my next step was open coding. “[O]pen coding is the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing and categorizing data; this process of coding yields concepts, which are later to be grouped and turned into categories” (Bryman, 2012: 569). Gibson and Brown (2009: 131) described data coding as a technique used by researchers to show commonalities and differences in the raw data by categorizing them accordingly. This improves researchers’ ability to comprehensively address the research questions raised at the start of the research process.

Before conducting my interviews I prepared separate interview guides for the individual semi-structured interviews and the focus group discussions. I designed the guides in a way that enabled me to address each of my research questions. The themes identified in my research questions were also addressed in the interview guides. Therefore, I coded the data set in full consideration of the themes of my research questions, including saving, child education, family decision-making and social participation.

After creating these thematic codes, my next task was to categorize the codes according to their interconnection with respect to the research questions. In this way, I was able to reduce my aggregate data into meaningful organized concepts. With the data organized as such, thematic analysis yielded a better understanding of the data, as the themes identified were in strict accordance to the research questions. As Gibson and Brown (2009: 127) stated, “[t]hematic analysis refers to the process of analyzing data according to communalities, relationships, and differences across a data set. The term ‘thematic’ relates to the aim of searching for aggregate themes within data.”

This approach allowed me to successfully utilize my data in a way that revealed the common and differing perceptions among the three groups of research participants: married women, single women and divorced women.

### **4.3 Ethical considerations**

In the process of conducting research, especially in the social sciences, where subjects are conscious human beings, the values of social research that revolve around treatment of the subjects of study and activities that researchers should or should not do are among the most important points to seriously take into account (Bryman, 2012: 130). In collecting the necessary data for this research, all protocols with regard to ethics were considered. Starting with my first contact, I informed managers of the flower farms from which I recruited my sample subjects that this research was part of my master's study program and I described the objective of the research. For confirmation, I was provided a letter by the Geography Department at NTNU, and this was very helpful in legitimizing my activities. The managers were well-informed of when and where I would interview the sampled workers.

At the time of the interviews, I briefed each interviewee on who I was and the purpose for which I would use the research. I also informed them that their participation was voluntary and they had the right to drop out at any time. Furthermore, I guaranteed all the interviewees that the information they would give me would remain confidential. For both groups in the focus group discussion, married and single, I briefly described myself and my research, then reconfirmed their interest in taking part in the study. Following this, I guaranteed the confidentiality and anonymity of all of their information.

In designing the interview guides for both the individual interviews and the focus group discussions, I tried to avoid any misleading questions and questions that may have made my participants feel uncomfortable. In fact, among the 16 flower farms in Bishoftu city, the management staff of one flower farm (which I am not going to mention by name for reasons of anonymity) asked to pre-edit my interview guide. This would have run against research ethics and may have made my research process unscientific. Therefore, in order to maintain scientific and ethical integrity, I decided to drop that flower farm from my sample.

Finally, in the actual interview sessions, participants were asked to grant permission for me to use a voice recorder. All participants allowed their voice to be recorded.

#### **4.4 Quality of the research**

Over time, researchers have developed mechanisms for confirming that studies in the social sciences truly follow scientific criteria. However, such confirming criteria are biased towards quantitative research methods and rarely accommodate qualitative studies. The concepts of ‘reliability,’ ‘replicability’ and ‘validity,’ which further divide into ‘measurement validity,’ ‘internal validity,’ ‘external validity’ and ‘ecological validity,’ are much more compatible with quantitative research methods and quantitative studies (Bryman, 2012).

In order to fill the gap observed in such a regard, proponents of qualitative research approaches have attempted to come up with equivalent terms to those used for quantitative approaches. The terms and typologies for measuring validity vary depending on the authors’ points of view and understandings.

For the purpose of this study, I used Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) concept of ‘trustworthiness’ in order to examine the strengths and weaknesses of this particular qualitative study. Lincoln and Guba defined trustworthiness as an issue related to:

How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences (including self) that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of? What argument counted to be mounted, what criteria invoked, what questions asked, that would be persuasive on this issue? (Lincoln & Guba 1985: 290)

As this study was completely dependent on qualitative approaches and methods, from data collection techniques to research analysis, Lincoln and Guba’s quality criteria could better explain the shortcomings and strengths of the research. For the ultimate objective of trustworthiness, Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued that four questions should be posed to a naturalistic researcher. These questions, along with their implications for this master thesis, are discussed below.

##### **4.4.1 ‘Truth value’ of the study**

For Lincoln and Guba (1985: 290), the ‘truth value’ of a study pertains to “how can one establish confidence in the ‘truth’ of the findings of a particular inquiry for the subjects (respondents) with which and the context in which the inquiry was carried out?” In

qualitative research, the main challenge that researchers must deal with is whether the subjects of the study tell the truth in response to the questions they are asked.

In an individual interview, informants can be influenced by many factors, including their perception or understanding of a situation, and this can potentially shape their response to the questions (Rognan, 2013: 30). The only thing that the researcher has control over is the clarity of the questions posed and the comfort of the informants in answering those questions. In this regard, I took maximum care to make my informants fully aware of the study and its objectives, so they would feel comfortable giving their honest opinion to the questions raised. Before starting each individual interview, I briefly introduced what the research was about and explained that it would be used for an academic purpose. I used simple words, so my informants would understand me well. One advantage that I benefited from here – as well as at other points – is that I was an Ethiopian. I did not have any problem with the local language or run up against any other local cultural barriers, as I was a member of that particular culture.

In addition, in the study area – Bishoftu town, which is part of the Oromia Regional State, where the regional working language is Oromic (also known as Afan Oromo) – my ability to speak the language eased my fieldwork. As a number of respondents could explain their opinion better in Oromic rather than Amharic, I occasionally had to use it in the individual interviews. I believe this gave my informants tremendous comfort with the study and their involvement. As a result, I was able to easily build rapport with my informants. “In qualitative research, rapport is a distance-reducing, anxiety-quieting, trust-building mechanism that primarily serves the interest of the researcher” (Glesne, 2006: 110).

The smooth rapport tremendously helped me make respondents feel comfortable and forthcoming. This, in turn, potentially provided a favorable ground for raising the level of ‘truth’ from the respondents in both the individual interviews and the focus group discussions.

#### **4.4.2 Applicability of the study**

Applicability of a study pertains to the generalizability of a finding of a given qualitative study to other circumstances with other study subjects (Lincoln & Guba, 1985: 290). A challenge with meeting this particular criterion is related to a basic principle of qualitative

studies. Qualitative research does not intend to represent the population under study. “Instead, the findings of qualitative research are to generalize to theory than to population” (Bryman, 2012: 406). Wider applicability of research findings outside of the study’s geographical context is inseparable from the study sample’s representativeness to the population of the initial study.

This particular study attempted to understand the unique contextual experience of the study subjects with regard to the research questions, so that useful insights could be gained for studies in other contexts and with other subjects. The methodology was chosen in consideration of the uniqueness of the study subjects in this given place.

#### **4.4.3 Consistency of the study**

Consistency relates to the clarity of the researcher in describing the procedures he/she followed. According to Lincoln and Guba (1995), consistency can be cross-checked by replicating the same study with the same informants and context to see if the result is similar.

To ensure the future possibility of replicating this study, I attempted to clearly outline my methodological procedures, from sampling through to data collection and analysis. I also tried to ensure a logical flow in my writing, from chapter to chapter and from part to part, in order for readers to effectively follow and understand my descriptions. For stronger credibility, I also made sure that the findings of the study were linked with the theoretical concepts described in the theory chapter.

Therefore, I firmly believe that my study is consistent, as it clearly shows the procedures followed and lifts the credibility of the findings by connecting them with the theoretical concepts mentioned in the study.

#### **4.4.4 Neutrality of the study**

Lincoln and Guba (1985: 290) described the neutrality concept as follows:

How can one establish the degree to which the findings of an inquiry are determined by the subjects (respondents) and conditions of the inquiry and not by the biases, motivations interests, or perspectives of the inquirer?

Neutrality in its pure sense can be seen as unattainable criteria in qualitative research as it is against the overall qualitative research method . Glesne (2006: 119) clearly conveyed the way in which subjectivity is useful to the qualitative research process:

Qualitative researchers recognize that subjectivity is always a part of research from deciding on the research topic to selecting frames of interpretation, began to claim the term. Subjectivity, once recognized, can be monitored for more trustworthy research and subjectivity, in itself, can contribute to research.

Neutrality is difficult to attain in qualitative research, in general, and it was difficult to attain in this study, in particular. In addition, as mentioned in the above quote, subjectivity can be used as a sound element in the process of creating a friendly environment in the study process. However, it should be controlled in order to ensure that borders are not erased: “We cross borders, but we don’t erase them; we take our borders with us” (Behar, 1993, as cited in Glesne, 2006: 119).

Accordingly, in this study I tirelessly tried to ensure that I did not ‘erase’ borders when conducting individual interviews and focus group discussions. I was also aware of and tried to avoid raising any leading questions, which might have biased findings in the interest of my personal perception. In an attempt to reduce bias, I invited a colleague from my bachelors study at Dilla University to help me facilitate the focus group discussions. In this way, I tried to interrupt my subjective involvement in the discussion. Therefore, I believe that my research was not subjective beyond a tolerated limit that was needed for the study; this, in turn, lifted the credibility of the findings.



## **5. Data presentation and analysis**

In the data presentation and analysis chapter, the collected data are treated in a way that is meaningful to the research questions. The chapter is divided into three parts that aim at giving a comprehensive understanding of each research question, respectively.

The first part aims at addressing the first research question, relating to the impact of flower farm work on the life improvement of the women. As stated in the operational definitions, life improvement is understood through household livelihood activities that are related to children's education, saving and monthly household expenditures. In this part, I attempt to provide a better understanding of women's life improvement by examining their conditions with respect to their investment in these activities. The data for this first section and other two come from the individual semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. As already mentioned, semi-structured interviews were conducted with twelve women and two focus group discussions were conducted with seven women in each group. All respondents came from the four flower farms and were recruited through purposive sampling.

The second part of the chapter focuses on the second research question, relating to change in the women's decision-making power in family issues. Here, variations are observed not only among married, divorced and single women, but also between marriages, as also found in relation to life improvement. Therefore, I attempt to explore these differences and their implications for the job opportunity.

Finally, the last part addresses women's social participation. Here, I explore single and married women's different understandings of the social process. Furthermore, I attempt to understand how the job opportunity created ground for more social interaction in different groupings and activities in the local context. Differences in the importance of social participation for women in different marital statuses is also highlighted in this part.

## **Part one**

### **5. 1. Life improvement**

All respondents in the study agreed that some kind of path shift in their life had occurred in connection to the job opportunity at the flower farms. However, the pace and condition of these changes visibly differed depending on the individual's personal life. The inclusiveness of the respondents in terms of their family status enabled me to distinguish major variations in the different groups' understanding and experience of the research questions in this study. Three groups were identified in terms of family or marital status (married, single and divorced women), and all three groups were involved in the individual interviews and focus group discussions.

As a result, I was able to discern differences in the degree of life change between the three groups of women. Women with a working partner were found to be much better off compared to those who were divorced and single, as far as financial issues were concerned.

However, this does not mean that the employed women found their income appropriate for their contribution to the workplace. In fact, all women believed that their monthly payment from the flower farms was not balanced with their very tiresome contribution in the greenhouses. Danile Casale (2004) clearly accepted the gradual increase of paid employment opportunities for women in Africa in different sectors, which has, in turn, facilitated women's economic independence and family welfare. However, he also argued that this has not helped to change the long-lasting trend of female engagement in low-paid jobs with very low return for their contribution.

As I learned from both the individual interviews and the focus group discussions, for the least-skilled women, monthly payment was around 600 Ethiopian birr (or 30 US dollars), which clearly put them in the extreme poverty category according to the World Bank (2015). On the other hand, women who had two or more years of experience were paid around 900 Ethiopian birr (or 44 US dollars) a month, placing them just above the extreme poverty level. It is helpful to understand the views of the informants in relation to the research questions, bearing in mind that, statistically speaking, they were still under the poverty line.

## **5.2 Marital status and employment opportunity for women**

### *5.2.1 Married women's perspective*

Except for two women who mentioned that they had worked in the cobblestone sector and one woman who had been engaged in petty trade before working in the flower industry, all of the women had previously been full-time housewives. Because this job was their first paid employment, they had a tremendous positive impression of their effort. However, it was not only their first paid job, but also one of the few options available for them to be paid for their contribution despite very low education and skill.

The women saw the continued and stable source of income created through this job opportunity as the main advantage of working at the flower farms.

One divorced woman household head, whose opinion works well for married women as well, from flower farm 'A' who had engaged in petty trade before beginning work at the farm signified the importance of sustainable monthly income (which she had not received in her previous work):

I think this job is better than the grain petty trade I have been doing, because the grain trade market is very unpredictable. There are times you profit and also times to lose. You never know when that time is going to be. Therefore, you cannot really get going with this having children to educate. However, in this job [flower farm] at least you have a fixed and sustainable monthly income, which you can rely and plan on for your expenses.

All of the married women who participated in the data collection had at least two children. They saw the independent monthly income they generated as a very crucial help in paying for their children's education and basic needs. When asked if there had been any change in relation to the schools their children attended for their education, all but one respondent (from flower farm 'B,' who was able to enroll her children in private schools) responded that their children were enrolled in public schools, as they could not afford the tuition fees at private schools. However, they all shared the understanding that investing in their children's education was a way of saving for the future.

I considered the types of schools the children attended because there is an accepted social assumption that private schools provide a better quality of education compared to public

schools. As private schools are costly compared to the free (except for small registration fees) education in public schools, only households with significant income send their children to private schools. Therefore, the ability of mothers to send their children to private schools was used as an indicator of life improvement as a result of the flower farm job opportunity.

Even though the participants all agreed that their income barely covered their basic needs, I was able to learn that married women were far better off than divorced and single women. This was because women with partners had husbands who brought in additional income; therefore, family responsibilities for expenditures were shared. As a result, it was more likely for married women to have some money left for saving. A greenhouse worker from flower farm 'B' shared her experience:

My husband is a soldier so he also has a monthly income. I think I am able to save some money because I get additional money from my husband for monthly expenses and the children. Therefore, I was able to use my income for extra needs and save the leftovers.

Barneet et al. (1996: 5), in their book *She Works He Works*, argued that dual earner families ease household life as follows:

The dual earner family offers economic stability, protection against financial disaster, and often offers both adults and children a close knit, cooperative family style in which all members taken an active part in keeping the household running.

However, according to the study participants, such saving was not meant for big plans, as it was far from achieving these. Rather, it was just for short-term family expenditures that needed a relatively higher amount of money. For instance, when the new academic year started, expenditure on children's education was higher; if a family planned to buy some furniture, they had to save earlier; and in instances of poor health, small savings allowed families to try to get treatment.

When asked how long they thought they would continue working at their respective farms, all of the married women agreed that they would continue to work there until they were offered a better option. With regard to supporting their parents, all but one woman (from flower farm 'A,' who claimed that she supported her pensioned mother) stated that it would be unthinkable to help their parents at all.

Furthermore, the women were firmly pessimistic about the future prospect of their jobs. As already mentioned, they had decided to work in the flower farms due to their perceived slim chances of getting a better offer for their livelihood. Because of poor prospects of progress at the flower farm, they did not believe a better opportunity would come from their job.

### *5.2.2 Work opportunity: single and divorced women's perspective*

As opposed to the married women, the single women were very young and most had worked as house servants or lived with their family before starting work at the flower farms. These women highly stressed the tremendous freedom and independence that the job gave them. For those who had previously worked as house servants, free time and relaxation had been almost unthinkable due to the overloaded tasks they were expected to do. On the other hand, those who had been living with their family (in rural areas) had also been dependent on their family, as they could not achieve education. Therefore, personal income and free time were the biggest perceived successes from this job for these groups of women. A young woman from flower farm 'C' who had previously worked as a house servant for two years in Addis Ababa confirmed this point:

The only thing I love about this job is my freedom; I was able to attain it back since I left my work as a servant. I have time for myself, and use my spare time the way I want to.

All of the single young women who participated in the interviews lived in a rented house. Aside from those who had previously worked as servants, they had migrated from the surrounding and far rural areas for the sake of attaining paid employment and gaining independence from their family.

When asked about any improvement they had observed in their life since starting work at the farm, the women responded that the income did little more than fulfill their basic needs – and it only just covered these. I raised a related question of whether they had been able to save any money. However, they all stressed the impossibility of saving in their situation. One woman from flower farm 'C' addressed this question as follows:

It has been year and half since I start working here. I can only say that I am living by it, but there is nothing changed in my life at all. I have nothing saved now. I do not even know what would be my fate if I am critically ill anytime.

The group of single women agreed that the income offered nothing more than a means of survival at a very low level. Because of their migration from rural areas to Bishoftu city, looking for paid employment, their contact with their family was very limited. When asked in the focus group discussions if they supported their family, the women reacted with surprise and responded that such support would be unthinkable. This was because the very low income they received and the high cost of living in the city made their own lives tougher to fulfill – let alone their families' needs.

They agreed with the married women that they did not believe any significant change would come from working at the flower farms. Those young women who had migrated and left their family behind in the rural areas wanted to continue their education by going back home. Some women who did not want to go back home were ready to change their occupation at any time, should a better opportunity arise. A woman from flower farm 'C' explained it in this way:

Any time I get a better condition I am ready to leave. Because the situation of the work here is very challenging. For a normal person it is very difficult to hold and keep doing the tasks, but I do not have any options now. Sometimes, I even think why I come here to work in an ordinary working day, and I cry but when you get home and have some rest you will forget it.

The divorced and single mothers shared the same experience as the single women – at least in the sense of low saving. Unlike the married women, who had a partner supporting them financially, the single mothers were on their own, taking care of children, in particular, and family expenditure, in general. In this sense, they faced financial difficulty much as the single women did, but the challenge for the single mothers was far more difficult, as they had children to care for and costs of education to cover, in addition to higher monthly family expenditures. Over the last two decades, much research has emerged to find women who head the household as the 'poorest of the poor.' However, Sylvia Chant (2015) argued that this assumption should be revisited, though she admits that such a conclusion is at work in traditional societies, like Ethiopia, in which gender discrimination is at its climax:

While not denying that some female-headed households, especially in societies marked by extremes of gender discrimination, may find themselves worse-off than their male-headed counterparts, the automatic assumption that they are the 'poorest of the poor' bears witness to a widespread pathologization of 'non-standard' (non-patriarchal) family units that often flies in the face of empirical evidence. (Chant, 2015: 196)

When asked about any improvements they had observed in their household since starting to work at the flower farms, the single mothers had the same voice, stating that the mere point of working there was to keep themselves and their children alive and to attend to their children's education. A divorced 55-year-old mother of three from flower farm 'B' stated:

My only hope is to educate my children and maybe they can support me so that my life can be changed. That is why I am totally investing in my children. That is the saving for me. That is what life is all about.

As expected, the divorced women were generally older and their predominant concern was their children. For them, the flower farm was not the only available option for fulfilling their children's education and basic needs; it was also a dependable source of income. For one 60-year-old woman with three children who came from flower farm 'D,' it had been seven years since she had divorced her husband and five years since she had started working at the farm. As she was originally from the far northern part of the country and now working in central Ethiopia, she had no close relatives who could support her and her children. She said she would keep working as long as she could and would continue to educate her children. She supported the above opinions with regard to income from the farm:

I have nothing. It does not even go far from the student's school fee and food. I do not have anything to give to my children other than education. As you can see, my age is running, so I have to give a permanent asset to my children, which can help them even if I am not around.

Naile Kabeer (1997) argued that the way in which women experience the effect of a job greatly depends on the factors that initially triggered them to start that particular job. The economic situations that make women decide to work can shape the trend of their experience. In her own words:

The economic circumstances, which lead to women's entry into the labor market, are likely to determine how its effects are experienced: was it in search of better living standard for family? A preferred form of employment to those previously available or a response to extreme need? (Kabeer, 1997: 262)

It seems Kabeer's theory held true in this study, considering the multidimensional experiences among the different groups of women with varied family statuses. The married women, the single women and the divorced single mothers had their own experiences of the effects of the job on their life improvement. In the context of this study, even though it is more rational to say that the job was a response to an extreme family need, the level of extremity was visibly different between the married, single and divorced women.

Single mothers were responsible for dual demands. First, they had to obtain enough income to provide for the needs of their children – from basic needs to education; secondly, they had to be a good mother and, often, play the father role as well. To meet these demands, they needed paid employment. It is at this point that the uneducated single mothers in this study suffered from the insufficient low-wage unskilled job in their struggle to fulfill their households' demands (Edin & Lein, 1997: 7).

According to the World Bank (2015), Ethiopia is one of the poorest countries in the world, with 38.7% of its population living under extreme poverty, equivalent to an income of \$1.25/day in 2004–2005. Furthermore, in a society like many other developing countries, where women hold the most disadvantaged socio-economic position, it is not challenging to predict how tough life can be for single mothers to meet their family needs.

### **5.3 Work as a family stabilizing factor**

Two of my respondents held opposing views of how the job opportunity had created peace and restored agreement with their husbands. I learned from my respondents' experiences that it is always better to expect more than two explanations for how one factor affects one's life. In opposition to the dominant social norm, which allocates women as housewives, I sometimes found a husband disagreeing with his wife because she would not support him financially by seeking paid employment. A 38-year-old woman from flower farm 'B' had one child with her husband, but was also raising two of his own children. She mentioned that she and her husband had frequently argued about family issues and related factors before she started working:

If I could not start this job I think we would have got divorced by now considering the frequent disagreements we had. My job fixed the problems we had with my husband and restored love and order. Moreover, I felt the respect he gave me and I could not think of staying at home again.

She further explained how his claim had reached her family. He complained about his loneliness in the process of supporting the family. In this way, her employment had restored peace between them as he learned that she was a productive woman with her own independent income. Such an argument highlights how the pressure from living costs was changing the society's long-established male reaction to female paid employment.

On the other hand, I also came across supporters of the traditional social norm that women should stay at home to take care of the family and children. A 50-year-old woman from flower farm 'D' told me that her husband mistreated her whenever she voiced the idea of working for payment. He had always treated her as a woman incapable of anything other than caring for her children and home. She used to submit to whatever he said, so she gave birth to three children and took care of them until they became stronger. However, after they started school, she became tired of staying at home and decided to leave him and take her children with her:

I decided to leave him because he abandoned my right to work and go out freely. Then immediately I started the cobblestone work and I raised my children without any problem for one year and five months. There is nothing like working and being independent. Then he started asking elders for negotiation with me so that I could be back home. Finally, I decided to return with one condition since my children are all girls, and I did not want them to be raised without a father. My precondition was that I told him I will never stay home, as before, I want to work. He insisted asking what were the changes I experienced working the last year I was alone. I told him I was able to fulfill the needs of my children, got to know new people and became confident in myself. Lastly, he agreed that I could work; as a result I got back home.

Social acceptance of female paid employment has a tremendous effect on the shape and definition of women's experiences of employment in any society (Kabeer, 1997). For the woman at flower farm 'D,' the paid employment opportunity at the flower farm was all about

reversing the wrongly dominant norm of the society. She was able to gain her freedom to work as her husband did, and, in turn, she lifted her status in her husband's eyes.

#### **5.4 Social trust and self-esteem**

When asked if they had won any kind of social trust in their community, the women – particularly those with families – responded that the job opportunity and subsequent monthly income had brought them bargaining power in negotiations with others. The prominent point raised here was with regard to loans. Their acceptance by their society as an employed worker also enabled them to gain trust. People – and social institutions in some cases – were prepared to lend them money because they had full confidence that these women would be capable of paying it back. A 34-year-old woman from flower farm 'D' claimed that people did not want to lend money to a person they doubted would be able to pay it back. In such situations, social relations were difficult.

Social trust is capable of tremendously affecting women's social involvement in all ways – not only at an individual level, but also at an institutional level. Thus, social trust is of utmost importance. The most significant way of winning such trust is to have a sustainable and reliable income of one's own. In this regard, a single mother from flower farm 'C' mentioned how her employment had helped her persuade her *edir* chair to lend her some money, which she needed very badly to fulfill her children's educational needs at the start of the new academic year:

Well, I think that this has given me a bargaining power so I can be able to get loan from *idir*. I was able to be provided a loan with long-term payback. People can believe in me that I can give back what I took as a loan.

The data also show that having the bargaining power to borrow strengthened women's social relations with neighbors. Despite the new trend of women's involvement in paid work outside the domestic household sphere, in traditional societies such as Ethiopia's, women are still predominantly housekeepers. Therefore, there are occasions on which 'others' who are economically dependent on their husbands ask their neighbors, who have paid employment, for loans. A married women working at flower farm 'B' shared her experience:

My relation with my neighbors has greatly increased. Even they come to borrow some money from me. They ask because I have a job, so even if I do not have enough I will give them mine and borrow for myself. Because I can borrow unlike my neighbors without work.

The job opportunity also greatly affected women's social interactions and social lives, in general. Mere exposure to broader social interaction was a very significant factor in shaping the women's attitudes towards themselves and others. Furthermore, the respondents replied that it was more likely for them to look after themselves if they were in regular contact with other people. A woman from flower farm 'A' shared her idea about how starting work had transformed her with regard to looking 'normal' in the eyes of others:

If we, women, are to stay home as a housewife, we have the tendency of failing morally. At least I did not even wash my legs once a week when I was staying home, but since I started working I do my cleanings and follow up my condition frequently because I think of what others might think of me when I go out for work.

Women thought that the way others thought of them was related to their level of confidence or self-esteem. A number of studies have shown how unemployment affects individuals psychologically. Theodossiou's (1997) study clearly shows that unemployment has serious negative psychological results of stress, depression and lower confidence and self-esteem. In this study, there was a very clear difference in these negative factors, even between unemployed and low-wage workers. In a traditional society like that of Ethiopia's, the normative standards that define the status and role of women in society significantly contribute to the negative social position of women. Furthermore, these standards can be taken as a strong negative influence on women's confidence levels.

## **Part two**

### **5.5 Family decision-making**

In contrast to the previous part, wherein life improvement was examined from the married and single women's perspectives, part two only addresses the married women. Both single and divorced women decided upon important life decisions independently, as they did not have a partner to share these with. Therefore, in this part, I attempt to assess the different experience of married women after beginning work at the flower farms, as far as participation in family issues is concerned.

As already mentioned, the sample of married women for this study was taken from an urban area; in other words, the women were residents of Bishoftu town, even though they also had a rural background. Their situation in an urban area also provided some advantages in terms of their participation in the family decision-making process. This is to mean that, in urban areas, with better accessibility to the media and modern family information, it is more likely that the women could adapt to this modern family elements. When asked if they had observed any changes in decision-making power at the household level, most married women agreed that the majority of decisions were made jointly with their partners. Their reaction and response to the question still vividly supports the upper hand of men in family decisions.

As recent as the 1970s, role specialization with regard to areas of responsibility in the family was a gender norm, even in the so-called egalitarian society of Western countries. Women's role was to look after things related to the kitchen and cooking. However, as socio-economic policies began to change in favor of women's position in society, joint family decision-making became a wider trend (Muelhbacher, et al, 2009). However, in Ethiopia's traditional patriarchal society, role specialization is a central norm and women continue to hold responsibility for the kitchen.

Nonetheless, I was able to understand that having their own income at least enabled the women to feel more independent and to openly express their opinions about different family issues. However, in a society in which women are less favored by the cultural norms and unequally treated – especially in low-income communities – low-wage employment (such as work in the flower farms) is less likely to change the problem from the root, as doing so would require the creation of dramatic awareness. The flower farm job opportunity as a

source of income was not able to empower women to significantly affect their family and the people around them, which in turn would have provided them with tremendous power. The negative gender norm, which has been embedded in the society for centuries, needs a much more multidimensional effort, apart from financial empowerment, in order to be tackled.

A woman with three children from flower farm 'A' shared her experience of family decision-making. She strengthened the idea mentioned above that having an independent monthly income tremendously reduced her emotional discomfort with regard to her financial dependency on her husband. Financial dependency was the predominant factor that forced the women to submit to the decisions passed by their husbands without comment. Women who participated in the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions repeatedly raised this issue. To use one woman's words:

Before starting to work here as I said before, I was even fearful to ask him for something. Now, it is both of us who prioritize things. I also have a say on what should come first and next. However, if he has a persuasive argument I accept and go with it. So we discuss and decide on the right one.

While not frequent, in some situations women won important decisions in the family. Such experiences were likely to happen among women who had married while already working or who had started working shortly after getting married. As far as my understanding is concerned, the length of time for which women stayed with their partners unemployed and their employment situations when meeting their partners also played significant roles in shaping their husbands' attitudes towards them in relation to family decisions.

In other words, the longer husbands knew their wives as employed women, the more likely it was that employment at the flower farm granted women a better say in family issues. A young married woman's experience from flower farm 'D' with regard to childbirth is a good manifestation here:

Well, children are life. As I told you, I decided to wait some time before we have our first child. I think my job was the reason making me reach this decision even though my husband repeatedly insists I give birth. Now I need to give birth because, I think we can host our own child financially, as I have my own income as well.

On the other hand, due to the small amount of money the women saved through *ekub*, they were able to have their own decision in matters related to the household. When asked about family food expenditures, they replied that men did not understand what was needed at home, and thought that the monthly money they gave was enough for the whole family's needs. The women added that it was very challenging to ask for additional money whenever they ran out of something. The flower farm job had apparently solved the struggle of women in the household. In the worst-case scenario, they could use their savings and fulfill their household needs and, in turn, improve their power to decide on family expenditures.

Furthermore, the job financially empowered women to fulfill the needs of their children at a much better level than they could when their husbands were the sole providers of financial needs for the family. In addition, the contentious monthly income allowed them to take care of their children's needs whenever their husbands were temporarily absent.

Despite this, and as I have stated above, the study was unable to conclude that the job opportunity changed women's decision-making power to a significant degree. This is especially true considering the women's psychological make-up that led them to view their male partners as superior and better, which, of course, they had learned as part of the socialization process. A 39-year-old married woman from flower farm 'C' showed the extent to which this belief had become a core value for the women:

How can it be possible to decide as equal to the men? But most of the time, he gives me the chance to decide on things what to buy or not to buy.

This particular quote vividly shows that women not only accepted the status quo of the patriarchal social system but also perceived their participation in decision-making in the household as a gift from their husbands. Attitudinal change among both women and men will require intensive and long-term awareness creation.

The data from the respondents support the resource theory on family decision-making that women's participation in family issues has a greater tendency to increase if women have paid income and education, or higher social status relative to others (Belch & Willis, 2001). Income, which was the only variable treated in this particular study for affecting the power of decision-making for women, came from employment at the flower farms.

## Part Three

### 5.6 Women's social participation

Women's labor force status relative to that of men is an important benchmark of their status in society. (Mammen & Paxon, 2000: 141)

Similar to most developing countries, Ethiopia has a traditional society that places high value on social solidarity. Interdependence and social interaction are at a maximum. Therefore, the individual's social life is determined by his/her level of participation in the community. As the society is patriarchal, the default is for men to be breadwinners and for women to be responsible for domestic and social activities. Such a normative set-up tremendously stresses the social participation of a given family – a key responsibility of women.

As explicitly stated in my research question, I tried to link women's social participation with their social status in their particular community. Respect and a positive attitude are highly related to a person's social presence in times of both sorrow and happiness. As a member of the society under study, I understood that social presence results in very strong credit from other members of the society. Thus, it is more likely that women with better interactions and participation in the community have better 'social capital.'

On the other hand, in order to engage in a variety of social activities, women need additional resources. It is at this point that having paid employment is helpful, as even very low-paid work is able to at least cover some commitments for social activities. In Ethiopian society, in general, and the study area, in particular, *edir* is the most important social activity in any neighborhood. *edir*, as defined in the theory chapter, is a traditional mechanism wherein members of the community mourn someone who has lost their close family or relative and support them emotionally and financially.

Other social activities, including *mahaber*, are social gatherings in which women help each other and use the events to strengthen social bonds and friendship. Apart from such purely support-initiated social activities, there is another activity called *ekub*. *Ekub* is different from the other mentioned social activities because it is an informal saving mechanism. A group of people – women, for the purposes of this study – saves a fixed amount of money at fixed time intervals. The saved money is then given to members of the group in circulation.

All the above mentioned social activities need financial resources in addition to time and labor. When asked how they had handled such social activities before taking up paid employment, all of the married women agreed that it had been very difficult for them to fulfill these activities, except for *edir* in which there is relatively mutual understanding, as they had been fully dependent on their husbands, and this had made access to money very limited and restricted. They clearly pointed out the importance of participation in social activities and how their paid income had empowered them to have their own resources to engage in these activities.

At this point, it is not difficult to understand that social participation was far more applicable to women who were married or divorced, bearing in mind that they had lived much longer in their particular communities. On the other hand, as mentioned in the previous part of this thesis, single young women working in the flower farms were predominantly from the surrounding or far rural areas. Therefore, as they were new to the town and the community, their social interaction was very limited to the friends they made at the workplace. As a result, the discussion in this part is based on the experience of the married and divorced women in the study.

### *5.6.1 Social interaction and network*

As mentioned above, a woman's social status is highly dependent on her level of social participation. The types and nature of social participation vary from country to country and society to society. The ultimate focus of this study was the low-status women of the Bishoftu city community in Ethiopia who made their living by working in the flower farm industry. The Ethiopian community, in general, and the Bishoftu city community, in particular, is characterized by very common activities for social engagement. *edir*, *ekub* and *mahaber* were the most frequently mentioned social activities by participants in this study. As an Ethiopian, I had the unique opportunity to observe how such social activities determined women's social status. In the study, I used these social activities as indicators of women's social improvement because, as described earlier, such activities require financial resources. Having said this, knowing how their monthly income had helped the women participate in such social activities allowed me to learn how their employment opportunity had affected their social participation, as well.

The first point that arises when thinking about the social aspects of the employed women is their better interaction with people. The employed women had the opportunity to frequently meet new people, especially at the workplace. In contrast, in their prior life, which was predominantly focused on taking care of domestic chores and children, they did not have this opportunity. The women saw this as a big achievement. Apart from being a mechanism for meeting new people, their work was also a way for them to form a social group for different activities, including *ekub*.

One married woman from flower farm 'A' expressed her experience in a way that magnified the significance of the job opportunity with regard to creating a platform for better social interaction and networking. In her own words:

Many people do not even notice me that I live around. One old woman asked me the first day I started working whether I live around there, and I told her that I have been living here in this compound for more than a year and I told her that I know her. I can say that, since I started working here I am able to know many people.

Therefore, in terms of intensifying social interactions, enabling women to know more people, the work opportunity at the flower farm undoubtedly created a significant fertile ground.

### 5.6.2 Social activities

As I have repeatedly explained, *edir* is at the core of social engagements in Ethiopia. Perhaps this will be much more convincing when supported by a strong statement by a divorced woman from flower farm 'A':

*Edir* is a very crucial thing. It takes care of your difficulty at home in times of sorrow very well. Rather than saying I have wealth it is better to say I have *edir*. There are two *edir* in my village, one is the major *edir* and the other is women *edir*, I am a member of both. Even if I do not have enough money for the membership, payment I do by borrowing. The *edir* is something inevitable no matter how I am challenged financially at home.

The importance of this social activity is unquestionable. However, it is a two-dimensional process: people expect others to be beside them in times of happiness or difficulty, and of

course they are ready to pay back others in the same regard (Alder & Kwon, 2002). In a similar fashion, membership and active participation are preconditions for a person to fully benefit from membership in the *edir* or *mahaber*. Membership and participation come at the cost of resource, because the social activities have a monthly membership fee and conditional fees. The women's key problem was having access to enough money for such social engagements from their husbands. Once again, the women's financial independence helped them tremendously to cover the costs of these social activities. A married woman from flower farm 'D' underlined the difficulty of getting money from her husband for these social activities:

Well, social participation is mandatory. Activities like *baltina/edir*, visiting neighborhood, etc. However, husbands do not understand this part and they are not ready to contribute financially most of the time. Now I am truly proud that I do not have to ask my husband to give me money for these activities.

Apart from activities done to strengthen social solidarity, as described above, social participation created a favorable ground for practicing *ekub*. The flexibility and nature of *ekub* to provide money for the women greatly helped them ease their life to fulfill their needs – especially those demanding a relatively larger amount of money. Their work at the flower farms both generated the resource for saving and allowed them to meet new people to save with. Therefore, it is possible to say that, as far as the job opportunity is concerned, it enabled the women – especially the married women – to create a social network, allowing them to better manage their income. When considering *ekub*, divorced and single women were the exceptions, as they clearly stated that their income was only able to fulfill their basic needs; they did not have anything left after covering their living expenses.

### 5.6.3 Social gatherings as places of experience sharing

In an industry where more than 75% of the total workforce is female (Tewodros, 2010), the workplace creates a fertile ground for employed women to interact with others. When asked if there were any other things they were able to do when coming together in the different social activities mentioned, the respondents frequently mentioned how these activities had helped them share ideas on different issues in life and allowed the young women to learn life experiences from their older fellows. They also allowed women to share their household

problems and look for possible solutions. A woman from flower farm 'C' referring to the social activity *mahaber* stated:

It is not just to eat food and drink that we organize these events, it is majorly to discuss our problems and help each other as a group.

Therefore, the benefit of idea sharing can be taken as an indirect effect of the employment opportunity in such a way that the job opportunity enabled the women to participate in social activities and this, in turn, facilitated an experience of sharing. The women mentioned that this experience was very helpful in their struggle to overcome the challenges in their lives with such low income.



## **6. Concluding discussion**

This final chapter of the thesis is allocated to discussing the concluding remarks in relation to the three research questions, followed by an overall remark on the findings.

### **6.1 Job opportunity and life improvement**

The first question of this thesis assessed how the job opportunity in the flower farm industry affected the life improvement of the women who took up paid employment at these farms. To narrow down the concept of ‘life improvement’ to make it fit a small project such as this, three household activities were given a high emphasis; in particular, saving, child education and household expenditure.

- How did work at the flower farm affect the women’s life improvement (in relation to saving, child education and household expenditure)?

A ‘feminization of the labor force’ resulting from radical economic globalization provided unpaid homemakers with paid work outside of their domestic chores. However, whether the job opportunity economically empowered women is a somewhat complex question to answer. For the women working at the flower farms – as it was their first paid job opportunity – even the very small amount of income they received had great value, particularly in comparison to their previous situation as housewives, for which they had received nothing in return in terms of material benefit. Therefore, it is safe to say that the job opportunity added something to their family life, at least financially. However, this benefit cannot be said to have been equal for all groups of women – married women, divorced/single mothers and single women.

For all groups of women, work at the flower farm was crucial because it provided them with a continuous means of livelihood that they could not achieve through other small businesses or petty trades. However, in relation to the indicators of life improvement that are addressed in this thesis – saving, child education and related household expenditures – I learned that married women with employed partners were far better off compared to divorced and single women, who led their lives on their own. In terms of saving, the practice among married women was much better than that of the single mothers and single women, whose monthly income was hardly enough for their children and themselves, respectively.

Furthermore, the job favored the married women by improving their self-confidence and, at times, played a very crucial role in restoring family order through easing the financial stress experienced in the household.

The single mothers used the resource to educate their children and fulfill their basic needs; the single women used the resource to meet their monthly needs and rent. Therefore, as compared to the married women with partners, it can be said – at least in the context of this study – that the single mothers and single women were the ‘poorest of the poor,’ facing life challenges all alone. The situation was even more bitter for the single mothers with young children to care for.

In spite of the life differences between the women in each group, all groups of women agreed that the wage they earned for their contribution at the flower farm was not even close to what they deserved, and they had no hope that there would be a better future from the job. They perceived it as merely a means of survival. To generalize, even though the job empowered the women financially and implied some changes in their life at the household level, these changes were not quite significant and the experience varied among the different groups of women.

I want to highlight the weakness of the thesis in this regard. The elements taken to understand life improvement – saving, child education and household expenditure – are sufficiently wide in scope that a very short project such as this is incapable of addressing them in detail. Therefore, a bigger project with detailed field work could have enabled me to address the points I raise here more precisely. However, the study has boldly shown that the elements mentioned are good manifestations of the socio-economic improvement of women and could yield a much better result, if examined in depth.

## **6.2 Family decision-making**

- What impact did work at the flower farms bear on women’s decision-making power at the household level?

In addressing this research question, the two groups of women – single mothers and single women – were found to be less significant, as single mothers were the sole decision-makers in relation to matters of their children and the family in general; also, the single women were

alone in making decisions for themselves. Therefore, it was impossible to assess the possible improvements in family decision-making in such a regard.

The married women, however, allowed me to discern the dynamics between partners on the family issue. The confidence developed as a result of better social interaction and an independent source of income from work at the flower farm gave the women the chance to express their opinions at home. In some situations, they could independently decide on some issues. Therefore, from the findings, some aspects of resource theory are visible: the income empowered women by giving them a slightly better space to voice their own opinions. Even though this is not enough, the initial progress seen in such a regard warrants further critical attention in other related research, especially in patriarchal societies.

However, the job's impact on decision-making power at the household level is less convincing, at least from this study's perspective. This can be attributed to a number of methodological shortcomings. For instance, the study did not engage in enough 'persistent observation' – a qualitative study technique that enables the researcher to achieve an in-depth study of the factors involved in a given study (Lincol & Guba, 1985). Because of time and budget limitations, I was unable to achieve the depth of study that could have provided a better explanation of the changes in family decision-making. In addition, the sample size could have been increased to widen the platform of understanding had it not been for time and budget limitations.

The study's sole dependence on qualitative data is another drawback. A combined approach of qualitative and quantitative research would have had a far higher probability of providing a clear picture on the issues discussed and both techniques would have complemented each other for the ultimate end of a much more complex and comprehensive understanding of the research questions considered in the given study.

However, as this research – to my knowledge – is the first of its kind in the Ethiopian context, it could provide a crucial benchmark for further treatment of the study topic with a bigger and more detailed project. Most importantly, it could be a good starting point for other researchers who are interested in issues related to this study.

### 6.3 Social participation

- How did the job at the flower farm affect the women's social participation within the community (particularly in relation to *edir*, *ekub* and *mahaber*)?

The data conforms to the theory of social capital in that the job opportunity exposed the married and divorced women, particularly, to greater social interaction and financially empowered them to participate in more social activities; this helped them build stronger social capital in their community. In the study area, the social activities of *edir*, *ekub* and *mahaber* are pillars of social participation, and the main social activities in the neighborhood revolve around them. To participate in these activities, each member must contribute financially, as well as physically.

Apart from being a meeting point for women to become involved in such social activities, the flower farm industry tremendously helped the women finance themselves to take part in the activities; this, in turn, improved the women's – as well as their families' – status in the community. A clear difference was observed between the married and divorced women and the single women, such that social activity and involvement were far more applicable and important to the former group. The social activities mentioned were also good platforms for these particular groups of women to share ideas on life in general.

However, for single women who had come from far rural areas and lived alone (as they were new to the city), the workplace created a good platform for them to get to know new people.

### 6.4 Concluding remarks

To summarize, it is easy to see that in the globalized economy, where FDI and international trade dominate, women in the Third World are certainly able to gain paid employment outside the home. This is a relatively a recent development in Ethiopia, where FDI and international trade relations have tremendously increased over the last decade. The presentation of this study has a clear connection with theories of the feminization of labor, economic empowerment and resource theory and, in a broader perspective, with the approach of women in development. Considering the research objectives of this particular study, it is understood from the data that such work had a rare impact on the women's life, beyond

becoming their means of survival. Furthermore, its impact on their socio-economic situation, as contextually treated in this study, further varied among the different groups of women, which, in turn, defined the job's impact on their lives in general.

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## **Appendix**

### **Data collection instruments**

1. Semi-structured interview
2. Focus group discussion

#### **In-depth individual Interview guide**

##### **Personal information**

- 1 Age?
- 2 What is your marital status?
- 3 What is Labor status of your husband?
- 4 What is your amount of income?
- 5 Do you have Children?
- 6 Educational status of children?

##### **Questions related to life improvement**

- 7 Where does your children attend their school?
- 8 How do you think your income helped you to contribute for family expenditure?
- 9 Is there any change with regard to saving practice after starting job at the flower farm?
- 10 How do you think the job affected your life in your family?

##### **Question related family decision-making**

- 11 How do you describe your role in important family issues needing decision?
  - Decision with regard to children
  - Decisions concerning how to use savings
  - Decisions related to monthly expenditures.
12. Have you noticed any change in decision-making role on the issue identified above after starting the job here at the flower farm?
13. Is there any change with regard to hearing of your opinion on family issues by your husband?

##### **Question related to social participation**

14. How do you describe the role of the job opportunity on your social interaction?
15. How do you explain your social involvement in your neighborhood and work place?

16. Have you experienced any change with regard to your level of involvement in social activities after start working at flower farm?

17. If there are changes, how do you explain the effect of the job?

18. How do you think the social involvement benefited your life?

### **Interview Guide, Focus group Discussion**

#### **Questions related to life improvement**

1. What was your family living condition before starting this job?
2. How do you compare your job at the flower farm with other jobs available in town and private business?
3. How do you think the income helped you as married women whose partner has also paid income?
4. How do you explain the benefit of both partners being employed for the family?
5. What is the benefit of being employed single women?
6. What is the disadvantage of being employed single women?
7. How do you think the job affected your life as a single women?
8. How does your job contribute for saving practice?

#### **Questions related to family decision making**

9. In which part of family issues do you have a role in the process of decision making?
10. Does your individual income improve your involvement in decision-making process in the family?
11. Have you observed any change on your husband with regard to his perception towards your opinion?
12. Do you think you have been able to have a better say in family issues after starting this job?

#### **Question related to social participation**

13. Do you think the job in the flower farm exposed you to social interaction?
14. How do you explain the changes in the level of your social participation both at the work place and in your neighborhood?
15. What are the types of the social activities you participate?
16. How are they useful in your life?

