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Socio-economic Status of Handicraft Women among Macca Oromo of West Wallaga, Southwest Ethiopia

By Bula Sirika*

Abstract

Artisan women, who belong to a social class known as *ogeyyii*, meaning expert, play a vital role in socio-economic life of community of West Wallaga. They are the producers of implements and utensils that many people in their society are putting to use in day-to-day indoor and outdoor activities. Equally, the role of these artisans in sustainable development through diversified livelihood options is of special concern. However, the artisan women who once had better socio-economic status in the society are currently suffering relatively destitute socio-economic circumstances. Their economic status has been adversely affected by factors that are challenging progress of the indigenous technologies by disrupting the artisans' rural markets. Although much remains to be done in this regard, this research will focus on the socio-economic history of these artisan women. The major socio-economic challenges for artisans are identified and appropriate measures to be taken for mitigating those challenges are proposed. This ethnographic study can also provide highly valuable data for other researchers to use in formulating ethnographic analogies for use in archaeological investigations of craft production activities at other sites in Africa and the Americas.

Introduction

This research focuses on the socio-economic status of artisan women in West Wallaga in southwest Ethiopia. I also assess related topics, such as the economy of pottery making and the interactions of production activities with the natural environment. I explore the socio-economic status of artisans in the past, as well as in current conditions, and conclude by identifying the major challenges facing artisans today and some potential support structures to assist them.

The study area, West Wallaga Zone, is located in the southwest highlands to the west of the Dhidhessa River. Since it is difficult to cover the whole zone, I selected three villages (Dongoro Disi, Guyyi, and Gulliso) as study sites in the region (Figure 1). During my stay in the field for forty days to collect ethnographic data, I have observed the pains and pleasures that artisan women experience in their work.

The study sites were selected based on the prevalence of widespread handicraft works in which women are playing vital role, and the fact that currently the technologies owned by them are under great pressures that in turn are impacting the artisan socio-economy and the rising need to identify the major bottlenecks hindering progress in the local technologies. My key informants were samples from women potters, non-potter women, artisan males, some non-artisan males, and government agents. The identified samples, those who assumed to be rich in information required to meet purpose of the research, were selected through non-probability purposive sampling technique.

The average altitudes of Dongoro Disi, Guyyi, and Gulliso are 1,863, 1,938 and 1,599 meters above sea level, respectively. According to their altitudes, the study sites therefore lie in a *Badda daree* (sub-tropical) climatic zone, which extends from 1,500 to 23,000 meters above sea level. Owing to its geological history, variations in parental material, physiographic, climate and vegetation, several resources both organic and inorganic have developed in the zone. The major inorganic resources that have been predominantly used by artisans are iron, gold, and clay soil. There are different types of soil in the region, including Pellic Vertisols. These soils are dark and usually occupy basins of streams and rivers, which are waterlogged in wet season. They are soil types commonly used for pottery making in the study zone (West Wallaga Zone Finance and Development Office, Unpublished Document, 2004).

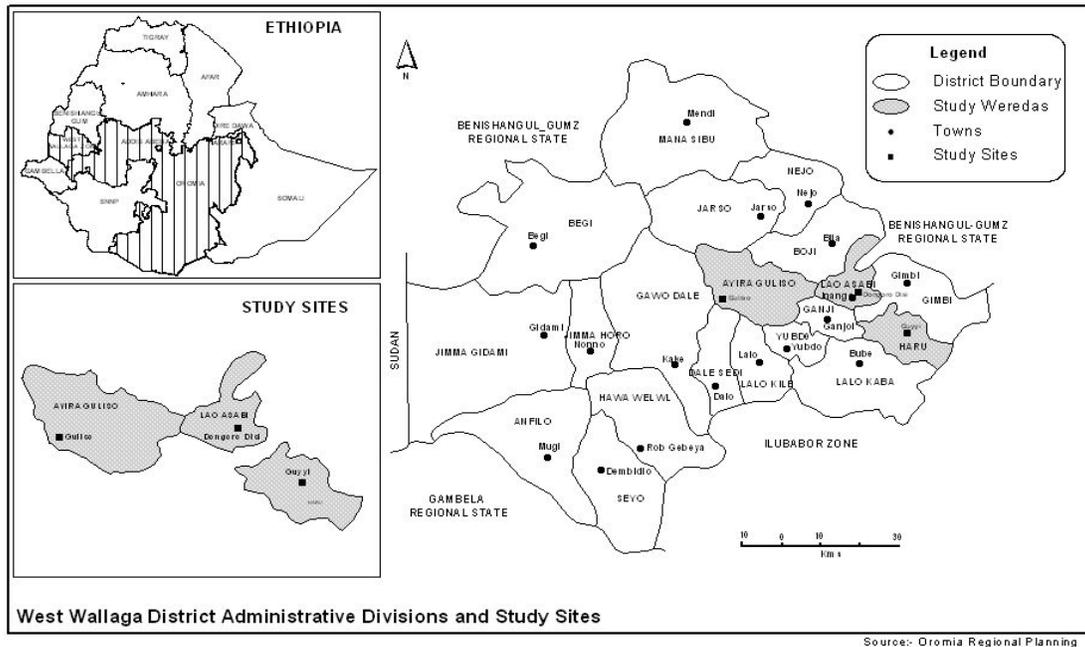


Figure 1. Map of Ethiopia and location of study sites (Image by the author).

A Brief History of Handicraft Women in Wallaga

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

Agriculture is the leading economic sector in the region. As it is the case in the other parts of the southwestern Ethiopian highlands, West Wallaga is endowed with relatively good agro-climatic conditions and soil types that created a good situation for the community to practice mixed agriculture, i.e., crop cultivation and rearing of livestock. Among the food crops

cultivated in the area are cereals such sorghum, barley, *teff*, maize, and finger millet. In addition, pulses such as peas, haricot beans, beans, and oil crops like *nug* grow in the study areas. Also commonly grown are fruit trees such as lime, orange, mango, avocado, banana, and papaya, pumpkin, and spices, such as cardamom, long pepper, chilies, and ginger. Variety of vegetables like cabbage and mustard seed are also cultivated. The relatively higher rainfall in the region encourages cultivation of roots crops, such as anchote, Oromo potatoe, Irish potatoe, sweet potatoe, yam, and taro. Varieties of steaming pots are made in the region to steam these food products. The major cash crop cultivated in the region is coffee. In addition, livestock such as cattle, sheep, chicken and donkeys, are reared.

Agriculture is supplemented by trade and craft technologies. The *ogeyyii* are involved both in agricultural and craft sectors, although their focus has begun to concentrate on agriculture in recent times. They are involved in handicraft works mainly as part time workers, especially in the sowing and harvesting seasons of the year. In the region, one observes an inseparable relationship between agriculture and handicraft activities. If there were no agriculture there would have been much less demand for handicraft products. Equally, no agricultural activities can be undertaken without implements that are mainly products of the local handicraft industry. Therefore, agriculture is integrated with handicraft work as the two supplement each other by providing raw materials for one another.

Handicraft works, which are owned and run by artisans, include the activities of pottery making, iron smiths, jewelry production, weaving, woodcarving, tannery and basketry. In



Figure 2. From left to right: a young potter shaping a vessel; artisans firing pots using straws and stalks; a vessel under post-firing treatment (*sileessuu*); and potters transporting clay vessels to market (Photographs by the author).

addition to their direct or indirect involvement in all other craft works, women largely dominate pottery making in the study region. This enterprise includes all activities, from identification of clay mining sites, mining, transporting clay to manufacturing sites, preparing clay mineral, shaping vessels, drying, firing, post firing treatments, and marketing. Therefore, throughout the following discussion, “a potter” refers to a woman involved in pottery making. Figure 2, above, presents photographs of women in traditional pottery-making activities within the study region. Women are the cornerstones in both farm and non-farm sectors in rural areas of the study region. Potters make pots for storage, transportation, toasting, baking, and steaming, as well as for symbolic representations.

The origin of handicraft works among the Oromo could be traced back to the period before the Oromo population movement and expansion. Studies show that even though it seems difficult to give the exact date to the emergence of handicraft works, it is apparent that had not the Oromo possessed iron tools, they would not have succeeded in their expansion (Hultin, 1988). In conjunction with this, the Oromo involved in livestock breeding and crop cultivation before their expansion (Hassan, 1990) might have unavoidably been using pottery objects for utilitarian purposes (for transportation, storage, etc.). Vessels might also be used for non-utilitarian or symbolic representations, as it is the case in many parts of present day Oromia, where pots are being made in traditional ways. Accordingly, one can conclude that artisans contributed significantly to Oromo socio-economic and cultural development and to the success of Oromo expansion itself. Additionally, Oromo oral history sources indicate that handicraft works were not unique to a certain Oromo clan and learning craft works was open to every Oromo clan.

Studies show that in Wallaga the handicraft people’s social position was below that of the non-artisans (Bartles, 1983). When and how such a social hierarchy had originated among the Oromo society is not ascertainable at present. However, scholars like Bartles (1983) and Negaso (2001) argue that such a social ladder developed after the 16th century Oromo expansion. They argue that before the movement, the ancestors of the *ogeyyii* enjoyed equal privileges (Bartles, 1983) with the non-artisans. In line with this, *ogeyyii*, especially black smiths, took pride in their works during the Oromo expansion, since the other Oromo were dependent on their products such as spears and shields that were popular during their movement (Bartles, 1983). Similarly, oral history sources within the study area substantiate this argument and further indicate that past

potters who made vessels (which were critically important to transporting and storing, as well as for symbolic representations) had a better social and economic status than presently. As a consequence, it generally seems that decline in social status for potters occurred in later periods, after the Oromo expansion.

It is the Oromo population expansion that brought far-reaching alterations in social and cultural lives of the Oromo. By the beginning of the 16th century, the Oromo who were rather small in number and socially more or less homogeneous gradually transformed into a heterogeneous culture with different social groups (Hultin, 1988). It was in the process of the transformation that artisans who were ethnically the same with others emerged as socially distinct from the major groups of people among whom they lived. This means that Oromo people who took part in the handicraft works were given distinct social class inferior to the other major and dominant Oromo class for several years in the past. There were underlying factors for this. Traditionally, under the umbrella of the Gada system the Oromo would bring even the non-Oromo members from the social periphery into communal life through *guddiffacha/mogasa*, or an adoption, that provided assistance to the adopted people to enjoy more or less equal privilege as any Oromo (Mohammed, 1990). Nevertheless, this practice was gradually becoming ineffective among the Oromo of southwest Oromia, especially after the 17th century. The ineffectiveness was mainly due to the beginning of the decline of the Gada system (an egalitarian form of political organization) among the western Oromoland (Mohammed, 1990).

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

Hence, the tenants and artisans were not entitled to the *qabiyye* land rights. Perhaps, if any right to land ownership, they were given by the clan leaders, or the wealthy *soressa* as well as the kings. In some cases, they were allowed to have only small plots of land around their homes, *borqii*, fallow land or the less productive plot of land. Even the *borqii* could be expropriated by the respective *soressa* if need arise (Mekuria, 1980; Mohammed, 1990; Asefa, 1993). Because their access to farm land was not reliable, the artisans were dependent mainly on their crafts and not on farming as such. Likewise, those who were deprived of rights, but had no skills of craftworks, joined the craft sector as daily laborers. In due course the most skilled artisans were invited by landlords to establish homesteads and make utensils needed in day-to-day uses for the landlords. Artisans serving the landlords were more privileged than non-artisan tenants, although not as under Gada system. This shows that tenants and daily laborers in crafts industry were economically at the bottom layer in comparison with the landlords' artisans.

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

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

opposite sexes. One of the effects could be the wearing away of socio-political leverage granted to women in general and to the artisan women in particular.

Status of Women in the Oromo Society

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

As stated above, socio-economic transformation of the Oromo can be attributed to their expansion, the appearance of feudal kings since the 18th century, the incorporation of the Oromoland into Emperor Menelik's Empire in the late 19th century, and the introduction of foreign religions of Islam and Christianity. The introduction of Islam and Christianity dismantled the *Qallu* institution, which was followed by the deterioration of the social privileges that women were given by the institution. Among other things, Oromo women who were playing indispensable roles in the *Waaqeffannaa* by serving as *qallittii*, priestesses were overlooked in the introduction of Islamic and Christian institutions. Under these institutions, women are dominated and their involvement in religious decision-making in the old days came down to us only as history without repeating itself. The introduction of the institutions also affected potters and attributes of pots made. Potters were making certain pots for religious purposes. The pottery attributes were considered as improper fetishes by members of the new religions, which eventually worked to discourage artisans from producing such symbolically-laden items. Therefore, modern religious institutions affected the social status of artisan women in the society by affecting their roles in the traditional institution without concomitant incorporation of them into the modern religious institutions.

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

In addition, the demise of the institutions led to dissolution of *saffuu*, a moral concept that served as the ethical basis for regulating practices in order to ensure a high standard of conduct appropriate to different situations. This moral framework had flourished under the custodian of the institutions. It helped individuals to avoid morally wrong actions and misdemeanors that harmed neighbors (Gemechu Megerssa, 1994). Oromo believe that *saffuu* involves avoiding humiliation, bad conversation, deceiving, stealing, and disgracing others by words or actions (Kuwee, 1997). That means *saffuu* helped control societal interactions between similar or opposite sexes. Thus, the dissolution of *saffuu* meant there were no more such much moral laws that restrained the society from what were perceived as wrongful actions. This growing disorder led to widespread incidents of illegal divorce, gender abuse, early marriage, and incapacitation of the systems that had provided leverage for women.

With regard to differences in economic status between artisan and non-artisan women, oral history sources indicate that in contrast to some non-artisans, the artisan women had a better economic status. One can infer this from the fact that some non-artisans of the study area later became the crafts people on their own free will to earn additional income to supplement what they earned from other sectors. That means they had two income generating sources, and when agricultural productivity was predicted to be low, perhaps due to insufficient or excessive rain, they gave more attention to crafts works. The community thus depends on their traditional craft skills as a secondary source of income in times of drought or lean harvests. Therefore, their

skills in embroidery, pottery making, and weaving are a natural means to social and financial independence.

In addition, in the late 19th century non-artisan peasants, who lost their land due to land alienation and became tenants, changed their occupation from farming to the handicraft work (Bartles, 1983). One can infer from this reality that among the Oromo skills of craft works was not by descent only, but also by self-training and neighbors to meet one's needs. However, with the decline of Oromo traditional institutions, socio-economic status and political roles of Oromo women in general, and that of artisan women in particular, declined swiftly and presently they are leading relatively destitute ways of living. This motivates us to pursue research questions such as identifying the factors that are adversely affecting the economic status of artisans in West Wallaga. Similarly one can seek to identify remedial measures that should be taken to mitigate the problems encountered by these members of society.

Major Challenges of Rural Craft Development in the Region

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

The introduction of products of modern technologies such as ceramics, plastic, and metallic utensils that are steadily replacing the utility of indigenous craft products in both urban and rural areas, and this trend is affecting the economic status of the artisans. Under this circumstance artisans have lost and are still losing their traditional rural markets and their position within the community. This development has particularly impacted artisan women. In the area it is not the manufacturing industries which have been introduced, but only their products. The consequence is, therefore, first that the product is affecting progress of indigenous

technologies. Second, it is leading to widespread unemployment by destroying the labor-intensive crafts and also it is directly or indirectly intensifying environmental degradation. By affecting the progress of indigenous technologies, this trend also impacts the positive interdependence between agriculture and craft sectors. Furthermore, enhanced machinery is hardly ever introduced in rural areas. Even when introduced, women are usually excluded from access to get employed by the new institution due to the associated criteria set for recruiting new employees.

The handicrafts sector has received inadequate attention from both the regional governments and non-government agencies. Though some studies have been conducted on socio-cultural lives of artisans in the region, only a few studies have as yet been done on economic potential of non-farm economic activities like craftworks. This is in spite of the fact that handicraft industries in the region have produced various goods both for household consumption and for the local market. Beyond that handicrafts sector is a “home-based” industry, which involves less expenses, infrastructure, or training to establish. It uses existing skills and locally available resources. Thus, inputs required in the works can easily be provided. Furthermore, income generation through craft is very important in a rural society, as it does not disturb the socio-cultural balance of either the home or the community.

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

The other challenge is mainly related to training program and marketing. There is a need to give training regarding design, training, business management and marketing resources that create opportunities for artisans, and a self-sustaining crafts production business. Training on design, business management and marketing resources is mandatory to improve demands for local and tourist market to create opportunities for artisans, and a self-sustaining crafts production business. However, no training is given to artisan to improve the quality of the utensils they make. Though a large number of NGOs have been established, the majority of their projects are mainly concerned with issues of gender and health without explicit focus on handicrafts improvement for poverty alleviation.

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

Studies disclose that handicraft association helps coming together of people involved in related types of business activities and create an environment that may result in decrease of costs, increased in productivity and profitability (Lanjouw et. al, 2001). In line with this, artisan association increased access to good quality business input, market expansion, and access to advocacy and lobbying. These facilitate for the artisans to sell their products and increase their profits. The association also creates suitable environment to give members of the association training regarding saving, developing new design, undertake further need assessment and to have fund for the project from concerned bodies. However, there is no well organized handicraft association in the study region. Therefore, provided that the union is realistic and all have equal access without any form discrimination, its absence is at the expense of these advantages.

Traditional handicraft works and their products are fairly environmentally friendly and appear superior in that regard to mechanized farming and modern manufacturing industries. It is clear that environmental degradation is among the bottlenecks in the development of agriculture in Ethiopia. One of the major causes of the environmental degradation is population pressure. In order to sustain the ever expanding numbers of family members, peasants are clearing and burning forest trees that even kill the underground roots and disables the land's capacity to regenerate. Another factor that is affecting the natural environment and its resources are the discarded modern industrial products such as plastic and metallic objects. Here my intention is not to go into detail. Leaving this aside for future researchers, I want to emphasize that in the study area significant numbers of livestock like sheep, goats, cows and oxen lose their lives annually of swallowing discarded plastic bags used in day-to-day chores.

Regardless of these, however, rural development policies often neglect the role of rural non-farm activities including handicrafts. Policies are sometimes there but without practical means for implementation. Presently in Ethiopia, and particularly in the Oromia regional state, a large number of NGOs have been dealing with issues of gender and development. The majority of studies in this area are largely concerned with topics of family planning, health status and poverty. However, as my informants pointed out, they do not explicitly focus on improvement of the status of women through endorsement of handicraft works.

The situation is made worse by perceptions of artisans within many Africa societies regarding the natural environment. Non-artisans often perceive artisans as the main agents of environmental degradation (Haaland, in press), and such views unavoidably discourage the activities of artisans and inhibit progress in the indigenous technologies. This has become another major challenge to the progress and further development of such technologies. Although basically handicrafts involve some activities that have impact on the natural environment, it seems to be a hasty generalization to conclude that artisans are the major agents of dilapidation of the environment. For instance, in West Wallaga, potters do not cut green trees for firing pots. They mainly use straws and stalks of crops and already fallen wood for firing pots. They also avoid using green wood because it is traditionally believed that it is immoral and against environmental ethics of the society to cut green trees to fire pots that will be used in preparing food that sustains the soul. This tenet seems to have been developed in association with traditional Oromo environmental knowledge that give value to trees for their ritual, economic,

medical, and aesthetic uses. Likewise, it is traditionally believed that firing pots using green wood leads to the cracking of the pots.

In addition, artisan women who utilize forest trees or grasses for making mats, bags, and similar products usually take care of the species of trees and grasses they use, and propagate those resources for future use. The women involved in income-generating activities based upon the sale of forest products and crafts made from reeds and grasses therefore take great care of the natural environment. Although traditional Oromo environmental ethics in the region are declining due to intricate socio-economic problems, such traditions are still acting as a cornerstone for the survival of naturally growing and propagated forests.

As a consequence, in West Wallaga the prevailing large scale deforestation and environmental degradation is related to agricultural and construction activities, rather than due to the activities of the handicraft sector. High population growth in the zone, which is worsened by resettlement, is escalating the needs for farmlands and timber for construction purposes. The needs are temporally being met by clearing forests and cutting trees. The absence of a land redistribution policy, that would provide opportunities for recently married landless young men to have land, force landless individuals to clear the common forestland to have farmland to support their newly established families. The fluctuating price of coffee has its own impact in this regard. Declines in the price of coffee force peasants to have larger farmland to have surplus products for home consumption and for sale. Obtaining larger farmlands is primarily achieved through the clearing of forests.

Women in these communities provide vital roles as the keepers of cultural traditions and knowledge. They build strong communities through supporting religious functions, producing handicrafts, using natural medicines, wearing indigenous traditional dress and performing indigenous songs and dances. Roles of women in maintaining intangible heritage are of particular significance, and encompass what may be described as fundamental domains and expressions of cultural heritage, which are very often central to maintaining cultural identity. Their skills in this sector provide important resources for developing cultural tourism and ecotourism. Policy is beginning to reflect the potential positive outputs of well-managed ecotourism that can bring in the context of conservation in several developing countries. The other promising source of development potential may be found in what is known as cultural tourism (Lanjouw et. al, 2001) which links tourist attractions to the cultural practices of the indigenous

peoples such as colorful ceremonial celebrations; exotic dances and music; and fascinating ethnic arts and crafts. Cultural and ecotourism involve the survival of threatened cultures, and the conservation of rapidly disappearing wild lands. Hence artisan women who are blamed of environment degradation are stewards and custodians of indigenous knowledge which is source of healthy environment. They are sources of alternative livelihood options like craft sector. Crafts development can represent a constructive, positive contribution to the development of alternative to resource-destructive agricultural practices, based on the provision of gainful employment. Therefore, it is smartness to promote non-farm activities like pottery making in the region to reduce the extent of environmental degradation.

In West Wallaga, a cook who uses clay-pot for cooking food mainly use fire woods whereas a cook who use metallic pots use charcoals. The firewood is mainly obtained from eucalyptus trees. However, for metallic pots there is a need to make charcoal especially from trees such as acacia (*laaftoo*), *Szygium guineese (beddeessaa)*, *Croton (bakanniisa)*, *Ebergia (somboo)* etc. whose charcoals are believed to be very good in quality. In addition a cook who use metallic pot rarely use and appreciate charcoals made of eucalyptus trees whereas a cook who use clay pot commonly use firewood of eucalyptus trees. Therefore it is not difficult to argue based on this fact that using metallic pots have adverse effect on forests than ceramic pots. Although I leave issue regarding comparative analysis of the resource effectiveness of firewood and charcoal for future researchers, I want to underline the fact that using of locally made clay pots in cooking has relatively low impact on indigenous forest trees in comparison with imported metallic pots.

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

Concluding Remarks

In general artisan women are producers of indoor and outdoor implements that rural communities are depending on. In addition, their works in the sector are sources of livelihood diversification that reduce pressure on land and hence alleviate environmental degradation. Further, craft sector opens job opportunity for many and it is also a potential source of cultural and ecotourism. Nevertheless, the sector is on its last legs and the economy of artisan especially of women is dilapidating and women artisans are living in the study area in desperate situation. The underlying reason is the lack of attention from both government and non-governmental institutions. Therefore, if it is to maintain craft sector to enjoy its fruits both institutions should involve and take appropriate measures to promote the sector.

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

Micro-finance institutions that give loans with minimum interest rate should be set up in rural areas. Of course there are a number of such institutions in different towns of the regional government. However, the institutions are focusing mainly on farming which alone cannot be a guarantee to help a given society to attain reliable development. Agricultural sector needs to be supplemented by other sectors. Therefore, the institutions which are emphasizing on agriculture in rural areas need to broaden their range and include non-farm rural sectors like handicraft woks

in their domain. Appropriate fund need to be made available on improvement handicraft works. This helps to mitigate two fundamental problems. Firstly, it limits unnecessary rural-urban movement and its associated social problems. Secondly, it encourages livelihood diversification that reduces scale of environmental degradation caused by activities linked to agriculture. This contributes toward the attainment of sustainable development.

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

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