



CEDAW DOMESTICATION IN ETHIOPIA: EXTENT, BARRIERS, AND REGIONAL DISPARITIES ACROSS STATES AND GEOPOLITICAL ZONES

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the extent to which Ethiopia has domesticated the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), focusing on legal incorporation, implementation challenges, and inter-regional disparities across states and geopolitical zones. Using a qualitative document analysis, the research systematically reviews constitutional provisions, statutory instruments, policy frameworks, and treaty body reports alongside scholarly sources. Findings indicate notable progress in formal legal incorporation particularly within the FDRE Constitution (1995), the Revised Family Code (2000), and the Criminal Code (2004) but reveal persistent barriers to full and uniform implementation, including gaps in domestication frameworks, institutional capacity deficits, political under-representation of women in senior posts, and socio-cultural constraints rooted in patriarchal norms. The paper argues that without coordinated, measurable, and accountable implementation frameworks that cascade from federal to local levels, formal legal alignment with CEDAW is unlikely to translate into substantive equality. It concludes with policy recommendations to strengthen implementation architecture, mainstream gender in higher education curricula, expand targeted capacity-building, and address socio-cultural impediments through evidence-based public engagement.

Keywords: CEDAW, domestication, gender equality, women's rights.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Ethiopia is located in Eastern Africa and shares borders with Djibouti, Eritrea, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, and Sudan. The country's terrain is dominated by extensive high plateaus divided by the Great Rift Valley. Over recent decades, Ethiopia has experienced rapid demographic growth (Global Policy Unit, 2019). According to the Ethiopian Statistical Service (2024), the population was officially estimated at 109.4 million, based on demographic models and administrative records used for national planning and policymaking. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), as cited in Tosone (2024), placed the population at nearly 130 million during the same period.

Given these discrepancies and the absence of consistent national demographic data, it is reasonable to conclude that Ethiopia's population currently exceeds 110 million, reflecting the pace of its demographic transformation. Politically, Ethiopia operates a parliamentary system in which executive authority is primarily vested in the Prime Minister, elected from the ruling party or coalition within the House of Peoples' Representatives (FDRE Constitution, 1995).

Despite ongoing reforms, women in Ethiopia continue to face a range of human rights violations, including gender-based discrimination, violence, restrictive gender roles, denial of full personhood, and harmful traditional practices. Although numerous international, regional, and national legal instruments exist, persistent violations highlight the inadequacy of general human

rights frameworks in addressing the distinct experiences and vulnerabilities of women. Gender-specific legal instruments are therefore essential, as they provide targeted protections that general instruments often overlook. Among the international treaties ratified by Ethiopia, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) remains the most significant.

CEDAW, adopted by the United Nations in 1979, acknowledges in its preamble that pervasive discrimination against women continues to undermine equality and human dignity. It plays a crucial role in advancing women's human rights by prohibiting discrimination in all spheres of life. Ethiopia ratified CEDAW in 1981 and subsequently submitted a combined report in 1993 and two additional combined reports in 2002 (United Nations Human Rights Treaty Bodies, 1985; Criminal Code of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Report, 2004).

This study is necessary because, although Ethiopia ratified CEDAW in 1981 and later introduced several important legal reforms such as the FDRE Constitution, the Revised Family Code, and the Criminal Code the practical implementation of these commitments remains uneven and incomplete. Many women continue to face legal, political, and socio-cultural barriers that prevent them from fully enjoying the rights promised by these laws. Weak institutional capacity, inconsistent enforcement across federal and regional levels, and persistent patriarchal norms all contribute to the gap between policy and everyday reality. Regional disparities further complicate progress, as some states show greater commitment and resources for gender equality than others. By examining the extent of legal domestication, identifying the challenges that hinder implementation, and exploring variations across different regions, this study provides essential evidence for strengthening Ethiopia's efforts to translate CEDAW's principles into meaningful and sustainable change.

The primary aim of this study is to critically assess the extent to which Ethiopia has domesticated CEDAW. Specifically, it examines the scope of legal incorporation, the challenges affecting effective implementation, and the regional disparities observed across states and geopolitical zones. The study evaluates the alignment of national laws with CEDAW standards, identifies institutional and socio-political barriers to full domestication, and explores variations in implementation at sub-national levels.

2. METHODOLOGY

To achieve these objectives, the researcher adopted a qualitative research approach, which is appropriate for exploring legal and policy frameworks in depth. The study relied primarily on document analysis as its main data collection method. Relevant documents such as national legislation, constitutional provisions, policy papers, international reports, state obligations under CEDAW, and regional implementation guidelines were systematically examined. These documents were selected based on their relevance to the research questions and were analyzed critically to identify themes, patterns, gaps, and inconsistencies in Ethiopia's domestication of CEDAW. The systematic scrutiny of

these materials enabled a comprehensive understanding of both the legal advancements made and the barriers that continue to impede full and uniform implementation across the country.

3. RESULTS

3.1 An Overview of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), 1979

The preamble of CEDAW explicitly acknowledges that "widespread discrimination against women persists" and affirms that such discrimination "violates the principles of equality of rights and respect for human dignity." Article 1 defines discrimination against women as "any distinction, exclusion, or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment, or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field." Furthermore, the Convention upholds the principle of substantive equality by obligating States Parties to adopt "all appropriate measures, including legislation," to ensure the full development and advancement of women so they can enjoy human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal footing with men (Article 3).

CEDAW is structured into six parts. Part I sets out core concepts related to discrimination (Article 1), the obligations of States Parties to eliminate discrimination (Article 2), the guarantee of basic human rights and fundamental freedoms (Article 3), temporary special measures (Article 4), the elimination of gender stereotypes (Article 5), and the suppression of trafficking and exploitation of prostitution (Article 6). Part II addresses women's participation in political and public life (Article 7), their representation at the international level (Article 8), and issues of nationality (Article 9). Part III focuses on socio-economic rights, including education (Article 10), employment (Article 11), health (Article 12), economic and social benefits (Article 13), and the rights of rural women (Article 14). Part IV guarantees equality before the law (Article 15) and equality in marriage and family relations (Article 16).

Part V outlines institutional and procedural mechanisms, including the establishment of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (Article 17), reporting obligations of States Parties (Article 18), rules of procedure (Article 19), the scheduling of committee meetings (Article 20), reporting and recommendations (Article 21), and cooperation with specialized agencies (Article 22). Part VI, the final section, addresses the relationship between CEDAW and other treaties (Article 23), undertakings of States Parties (Article 24), and administrative provisions relating to signature, ratification, and entry into force (Articles 25–30).

Overall, CEDAW plays a critical role in protecting and promoting women's human rights and in advancing gender equality globally. It prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in all spheres of life and establishes a comprehensive framework through which States Parties are expected to adopt, implement, and monitor effective

measures to eliminate discrimination and ensure women's full and equal enjoyment of rights.

3.2 The Extent of Ethiopia's Legal & Institutional Framework in Domesticating CEDAW into National Law

3.2.1 Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Constitution

The FDRE Constitution, enacted in 1995, stands as the supreme law of Ethiopia. Article 9 affirms that any law, customary practice, or decision by a state organ or public official that contravenes the Constitution shall be invalid. Comprising 106 articles arranged within 11 chapters, the Constitution provides a comprehensive framework for the protection of women's human rights. Several provisions incorporate the principles of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), reflecting Ethiopia's commitment to gender equality.

Article 25 establishes the right to equality before the law. It guarantees that all individuals are entitled to equal and effective protection without discrimination based on race, ethnicity, nationality, social origin, color, sex, language, religion, political opinion, property, birth, or any other status. This provision provides a constitutional basis for gender equality by affirming that both men and women are equal before the law.

Article 34 further reinforces women's rights by ensuring equality in marriage and family relations. It stipulates that men and women of legal age have the right to marry and form a family, and that marriage must be entered into with the free and full consent of both parties. This provision prohibits early and forced marriages and underscores individuals' autonomy in deciding whether and whom to marry. The Revised Family Code (2000) builds on this constitutional commitment by establishing legal guarantees for equality during the conclusion, duration, and dissolution of marriage.

Article 35 provides an extensive and specific enumeration of women's rights, marking a significant advancement in Ethiopia's constitutional history. Recognizing the historical legacy of discrimination against women, the article authorizes affirmative action measures to rectify past inequalities and enable women to compete and participate equally with men in political, economic, and social life. The article also guarantees women's rights to employment and equal pay, maternity leave with full salary, participation in national development policies, and involvement in the design and implementation of programs that affect their interests. It further affirms women's equal rights to acquire, administer, control, and transfer property, including full equality in land use, administration, and inheritance. Women are additionally entitled to equal opportunities in employment, promotion, and pension benefits. To safeguard women's health, Article 35 guarantees access to family-planning education and related services. Collectively, these provisions reflect the Constitution's strong commitment to promoting gender equality and protecting women's human rights.

Article 38 emphasizes the political rights of women. It guarantees every Ethiopian national, irrespective of gender or any other status, the right to take part in public affairs directly or through freely elected

representatives. It also ensures the right to vote and be elected upon reaching the age of 18. Elections must be conducted through universal and equal suffrage and by secret ballot, ensuring the free expression of voters' will. This article lays the foundation for women's full participation in political and public life and aligns closely with CEDAW's requirements regarding political representation.

Overall, the FDRE Constitution incorporates key CEDAW principles by affirming equality, prohibiting discrimination, authorizing affirmative action, and guaranteeing women's civil, political, economic, and social rights. These constitutional protections form the cornerstone of Ethiopia's legal framework for advancing gender equality and safeguarding women's human rights.

3.2.2 The Revised Family Code of Ethiopia

The Revised Family Code of Ethiopia (2000) incorporates key principles of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Central to the Code is the recognition that women and men possess equal rights in all matters related to marriage and family relations. This includes the right to freely choose a spouse, to enter into marriage with full and free consent, and to participate equally in decisions throughout the marital relationship. By harmonizing its family laws with CEDAW standards, Ethiopia demonstrates a commitment to advancing gender equality and safeguarding women's rights within the family context.

The Revised Family Code comprehensively regulates family relations. Its provisions address the conclusion of marriage, the consequences of violating essential conditions of marriage, the effects of marriage, dissolution procedures, liquidation of pecuniary relations between spouses, proof of marriage, irregular unions, settlement of disputes arising from marriage and irregular unions, affiliation, adoption, and related matters. The preamble underscores the principle that the family recognized as the natural and fundamental unit of society must be protected by both the state and the community. One of the mechanisms for ensuring such protection is the establishment of a clear legal framework governing family relations.

Article 36 provides that a marriage entered into as a result of a fundamental error may be annulled upon request to a court. Historically, Ethiopian women faced significant disadvantages in marriage formation, including coercion and lack of consent. The recognition of "fundamental error" offers legal protection to individuals especially women whose consent may have been obtained through force, intimidation, or deception. This provision strengthens women's autonomy and reinforces the principle that marriage must be voluntary and based on the free will of both spouses, reflecting a clear respect for women's human rights.

The Code also addresses the economic dimensions of marriage. Article 62(1) stipulates that any income derived from the personal efforts of the spouses or from their joint or individual property constitutes common property. Article 66 further provides that the management of joint property shall be undertaken jointly by both spouses, unless they mutually agree that

one partner shall administer all or part of it. These provisions offer women legal recognition and protection regarding economic contributions and access to marital property areas in which women have historically been marginalized.

Overall, the Revised Family Code represents a significant advancement in Ethiopia's domestic legal framework for protecting women's rights. It strengthens women's decision-making power, guarantees equality in marital and economic relations, and aligns national family law with the broader objectives of CEDAW. For women who have long been excluded from equitable participation in family and economic life, the Code serves as an essential tool for promoting justice and substantive gender equality.

3.2.3 The Criminal Code of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia 2004

The Criminal Code of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (2004) makes an important contribution to advancing gender equality and protecting women's human rights by criminalizing a broad range of gender-related offenses. These provisions closely align with the principles of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), reflecting the state's commitment to addressing violence, discrimination, and harmful practices that disproportionately affect women.

The Code outlines several crimes specifically designed to safeguard women from gender-based violence and exploitation. Article 561 criminalizes acts that endanger the lives of pregnant women and children through harmful traditional practices, while Article 562 penalizes causing physical harm to pregnant women and children resulting from such practices. Article 564 prohibits violence against a marriage partner or a person cohabiting in an irregular union, addressing intimate-partner violence as a criminal act rather than a private matter.

The Criminal Code also explicitly targets harmful traditional practices. Article 565 criminalizes female genital mutilation (FGM), and Article 566 prohibits infibulations of the female genitalia both long-standing practices that have severe physical and psychological consequences for women and girls. Articles 587 and 588 address that the abduction of women, including those who are unconscious or unable to defend themselves, recognizing the historic use of abduction as a precursor to forced marriage in some communities.

Furthermore, Article 597 addresses trafficking in women and children. It provides serious penalties, including rigorous imprisonment of five to twenty years and substantial fines for perpetrators. The provision applies to anyone who recruits, transports, hides, or transfers women or minors for forced labor through violence, deception, kidnapping, or similar means. It also punishes those who knowingly assist in these acts, emphasizing Ethiopia's firm stance against human trafficking.

Sexual violence is also addressed under the Code. Article 620 criminalizes rape, while Article 648 prohibits early marriage, both of which are essential for safeguarding women's bodily integrity and autonomy. These provisions play a crucial role in deterring violations and

creating a legal framework that recognizes the dignity and rights of women.

Historically, Ethiopian women have faced systemic discrimination and violence rooted in cultural norms, traditional practices, and gender-based power imbalances. The 2004 Criminal Code represents a significant shift toward strengthening legal protections and ensuring accountability for perpetrators. By criminalizing a wide array of gender-based offenses and aligning national law with CEDAW obligations, the Code demonstrates Ethiopia's commitment to promoting women's rights and combating gender-based harm.

4. CHALLENGES AND CRITIQUES IN DOMESTICATING CEDAW IN ETHIOPIA

4.1 Legal Factors

In Ethiopia, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) has been domesticated through its incorporation into several national legal instruments, including the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, the Criminal Code, and the Revised Family Code. While these legislative measures represent important progress, significant challenges persist, particularly with respect to enforcement and effective implementation. As Gebrehiwot (2015) notes, the absence of a clear and comprehensive domestication framework fundamentally weakens the operationalization of CEDAW at all governance levels.

The domestication of CEDAW through legal adoption alone does not guarantee effective enforcement. Legal incorporation constitutes only the initial step; meaningful implementation requires a well-structured, coordinated, and context-responsive approach. To translate CEDAW's principles into measurable realities, Ethiopia must adopt a coherent implementation framework that aligns responsibilities and actions across federal, regional, and local governmental institutions. Such a framework should include detailed implementation strategies, measurable targets, strong accountability mechanisms, and sustained capacity-building efforts for all stakeholders involved in the protection and promotion of women's rights. Only through such a coordinated system can the commitments Ethiopia has made under CEDAW result in substantive and lasting improvements in the lives of women and girls.

The literature further underscores these challenges. Dairia (1984) highlights that the absence of comprehensive and holistic implementation plans has contributed to weak enforcement of CEDAW, including inadequate monitoring mechanisms, insufficient resource allocation, limited technical capacity, and institutional fragility. Similarly, Fiseha (2006) argues that Ethiopia's federal structure complicates the uniform application of international human rights treaties. The division of legislative powers between the federal and regional states creates inconsistencies in interpretation, prioritization, and enforcement of international obligations such as CEDAW.

Overall, despite Ethiopia's formal domestication of CEDAW, significant legal and institutional barriers remain. These challenges hinder the Convention's transformative potential and underscore the need for a

robust national implementation architecture that integrates federal and regional responsibilities, strengthens institutional capacity, and ensures accountability throughout all levels of governance.

4.2 Political Factors (Representation at National, Local and position)

As Asfaw (2014) argues, ensuring women's political participation is essential for legitimizing governance and establishing genuine democracy. When women who constitute approximately half of the population are excluded or marginalized from political and public institutions, the legitimacy, inclusiveness, and credibility of democratic processes are called into question. In recent years, Ethiopia has witnessed notable improvements in women's representation within decision-making bodies, reflecting incremental progress toward gender equality. Despite these gains, women remain significantly underrepresented in senior leadership positions at the federal level. As Chekol and Hadaro (2024) note, Ethiopia has never had a woman serve as Prime Minister, a position that continues to appear inaccessible to women. Nonetheless, Ethiopian women have historically played influential roles in national leadership and defense. During the nineteenth century confrontation with Italy, women made decisive contributions to Ethiopia's resistance. Empress Taytu is a notable example, remembered for her leadership and strategic role during the Battle of Adwa, where Ethiopia successfully defended its sovereignty (Zewde, 2001).

Although women's contributions across political, economic, social, and cultural spheres have been substantial, their representation in key decision-making positions remains disproportionately low. Parliamentary seats, ministerial portfolios, and local leadership roles continue to be dominated by men, indicating the persistence of structural and socio-cultural barriers that limit women's full participation in governance. For this reason, it is widely argued that Ethiopia must intensify efforts to enhance women's political empowerment and ensure their meaningful inclusion in public leadership.

Historical data also illustrate the uneven trajectory of women's political representation. Since the first national elections in 1995, when the House of People's Representatives consisted of 97% men and only 2% women, representation has gradually increased, but significant disparities remain. Recent statistics show that women now hold approximately 36% of ministerial positions and 42% of parliamentary seats (Chekol & Hadaro, 2024). Although these increases are significant, they do not fully address underlying power imbalances. Moreover, while women have assumed leadership positions in various ministries including the Ministry of Defense and the Ethiopian Customs and Revenue Authority the issue of substantive representation persists. The appointment of Sahle-Work Zewde as Ethiopia's first female president in 2018 marked a historic milestone; however, the presidency in Ethiopia is largely ceremonial, raising questions about the depth of women's actual decision-making power.

At the grassroots level, the gap becomes even more pronounced. According to UN Women (2017), women at the kebele (local) level face substantial social, economic, and cultural barriers to effective participation. Their

representation is often symbolic rather than substantive, with limited influence on decision-making processes. This undermines participatory, accountable, and transparent governance features essential for addressing the political, social, cultural, and economic priorities of the wider population (Asfaw, 2014).

Overall, while legislative reforms and policy commitments have contributed to visible improvements in women's political representation, Ethiopia still faces entrenched obstacles that limit women's full and meaningful participation in governance. Bridging this gap requires transformative efforts aimed at dismantling structural barriers, challenging restrictive social norms, and fostering an environment in which women can exercise political power at all levels of government.

4.3 Socio-Cultural Factors.

Tadesse (2004) notes that patriarchal cultural and religious traditions often conflict with the principles promoted by CEDAW, which aims to ensure gender equality and eliminate discrimination against women. In many societies, these deeply rooted traditions are privileged over legal obligations, thereby undermining the full implementation and effectiveness of CEDAW. Religious teachings across various belief systems frequently reinforce patriarchal norms by positioning men as authoritative figures and prescribing subordinate roles for women. For example, certain interpretations of Christian doctrine that emphasize the precedence of Adam over Eve are used to justify male dominance. Similarly, specific interpretations of Islamic law, particularly those applied in conservative contexts, may restrict women's autonomy over property and decision-making by requiring male guardianship. These religious interpretations, whether applied literally or adapted culturally over time, significantly shape social norms, institutional behavior, and legal frameworks, contributing to the perpetuation of gender inequality.

The persistence of entrenched socio-cultural norms further compounds these challenges. Bade et al. (2022) argue that customary norms and practices remain formidable barriers to the realization of gender parity. Likewise, Asnake (2013) observes that resistance from religious leaders and faith-based communities has slowed the adoption of legal reforms aligned with CEDAW, particularly in contentious areas such as marriage, inheritance, and reproductive rights. The notion of "cultural rights," as recognized in UNESCO's 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, can sometimes conflict with universally recognized human rights particularly those intended to protect marginalized groups such as women, children, and stateless persons (Thubauville, 2012). This tension between cultural preservation and human rights contributes to ongoing limitations on women's freedom and equality.

In many male-dominated societies, women continue to be perceived as subordinate and excluded from influential decision-making roles traditionally reserved for men. This socially constructed division of gender roles long explored in gender scholarship remains deeply embedded, reinforcing systemic inequalities across communities (Bade et al., 2022). Ethiopia is no exception. The country's socio-cultural landscape is

shaped by longstanding patriarchal norms, religious teachings, and traditional values that collectively sustain male dominance and restrict women's participation in public and private life. Leadership and decision-making positions at national and local levels remain primarily occupied by men, reflecting the wider societal imbalance. One of the driving forces behind the reproduction of inequality is the gendered socialization process. As Almaz (1991) explains, gender norms reinforced from early childhood shape individual behaviors and expectations, contributing to lasting disparities between women and men. Ethiopian society commonly teaches boys values such as independence, leadership, and financial responsibility, while girls are socialized to be submissive, obedient, and dependent. Girls' roles are frequently limited to domestic responsibilities such as cooking, cleaning, fetching water and caring for children (Haregewoin & Emebet, 2003; Hirut, 2004). These early gendered expectations influence not only family life but also access to education, political participation, and economic opportunities later in life.

Despite progressive constitutional and legal protections, Ethiopian women and girls continue to face widespread discrimination throughout their lives. Deeply entrenched patriarchal customs, religious doctrines, and socio-cultural norms remain powerful forces in shaping gender relations. According to the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Report (2019), religious and socio-cultural norms, together with intersecting forms of discrimination and restrictive gender stereotypes, continue to hinder efforts to eliminate gender-based discrimination, despite national, regional, and international commitments to gender equality.

As a result, the promise of gender equality embedded in CEDAW and national legal frameworks is frequently undermined by the resilience of traditional practices and societal attitudes.

5. IMPACTS OF DOMESTICATING CEDAW IN ETHIOPIA

The 1995 Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) enshrines foundational principles guaranteeing equality between women and men across all spheres of life. It also introduces affirmative measures designed to accelerate progress toward gender equality, particularly through Articles 25, 35, and 38. These provisions collectively establish strong constitutional guarantees for non-discrimination, women's rights, and equal political participation.

Incorporating the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) into Ethiopia's domestic legal framework has played a critical role in strengthening national efforts to address and eliminate gender-based violence and discrimination. The domestication of CEDAW ensures that international human rights standards become legally binding and enforceable at the national and local levels. This legal commitment obliges the government to take concrete steps such as reforming discriminatory legislation, strengthening legal protections for victims, ensuring access to justice, and adopting gender-responsive policies and institutional practices. These measures collectively contribute to promoting equal treatment and opportunities for women and men and support the

creation of a more equitable and inclusive society. In this way, CEDAW serves as a catalyst for addressing systemic gender inequalities and creating an environment in which women can exercise their rights fully and participate equally in national development.

Evidence from government reports reinforces this assessment. According to the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (2019) report to the CEDAW Committee, both governmental institutions and private organizations have prioritized addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by women and girls. These actors have implemented interventions across various sectors legal, social, economic, and educational aimed at enhancing the social inclusion, protection, and overall well-being of women and girls. Many of these initiatives are embedded in national development strategies, women's rights policies, and sector-specific plans, ensuring that gender equality is mainstreamed across the country's development agenda. The report highlights that targeted programs, legal reforms, and institutional frameworks have been developed to align national priorities with international obligations, thereby strengthening the integration of gender considerations into Ethiopia's broader development priorities.

6. MERITS OF DOMESTICATING CEDAW IN ETHIOPIAN GOVERNMENT

The domestication of CEDAW in Ethiopia offers significant benefits across multiple sectors by providing a comprehensive framework for addressing the persistent challenges of discrimination and inequality faced by women. As a comprehensive international human rights instrument, CEDAW seeks to eliminate discrimination in all spheres of life political, economic, social, cultural, and civil, making it one of the most far-reaching mechanisms for advancing gender equality. Its multifaceted approach works to eradicate discrimination through legislative, policy-based, and institutional mechanisms.

As noted by Kidist (2002), CEDAW employs three complementary strategies prohibitive, corrective, and protective measures to address both historical discrimination and contemporary gender-based inequalities. Prohibitive measures outlaw discriminatory acts and practices; corrective measures aim to remedy the injustices women have historically experienced; and protective provisions recognize the unique needs of women, including safeguards related to maternity and reproductive roles. Together, these elements create a holistic and effective framework for combating gender inequality more comprehensively than any single-measure strategy (Bade *et al.*, 2022).

CEDAW's contributions extend beyond specific sectors to the full spectrum of human rights. The Convention affirms that women are entitled to the full and equal enjoyment of civil and political rights such as participation in public affairs, equality before the law, and freedom from violence as well as economic, social, and cultural rights, including access to education, employment, health care, and social protection. This reflects the principle of the indivisibility and interdependence of human rights, emphasizing that gender equality cannot be achieved in one sphere without progress in others.

A critical component of CEDAW is its authorization of temporary special measures, often known as affirmative action. These measures are designed to achieve substantive rather than merely formal equality by removing structural and societal barriers that prevent women from exercising their rights in practice (Kidist, 2002). Such measures ensure that legal equality is translated into actual, lived equality by addressing entrenched disparities in access to power, resources, and opportunities.

The domestication of CEDAW within Ethiopia's national legal system reflected in constitutional guarantees, statutory provisions, and policy frame works has contributed to substantial progress in promoting the rights of women and girls across social, economic, political, and cultural domains (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 2019). National strategies and institutional reforms have increasingly aligned with CEDAW obligations, supporting gender-responsive governance and development planning.

Beyond legal reforms, CEDAW calls for transformative change at the societal, institutional, and individual levels. Englehart and Miller (2014) argue that CEDAW is an especially ambitious human rights instrument because it seeks profound cultural and normative shifts despite lacking strong enforcement mechanisms or financial incentives. Its transformative purpose extends beyond altering state behavior to challenging deeply rooted socio-cultural norms and discriminatory attitudes that sustain gender inequality. Through this broader transformative agenda, CEDAW contributes not only to legal reform but also to shifts in social consciousness, institutional culture, and gender norms.

Overall, the domestication of CEDAW in Ethiopia represents a vital step toward advancing gender equality and protecting women's rights. Its comprehensive framework, coupled with its emphasis on substantive equality and transformative change, provides a strong foundation for addressing systemic gender-based discrimination across all sectors of society.

7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Conclusion

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was adopted by the United Nations in 1979, and Ethiopia ratified the Convention in 1981, becoming one of the early State Parties committed to advancing women's rights. Since then, Ethiopia has incorporated CEDAW's principles into its national legal framework through several key legislative instruments, including the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (1995), the Revised Family Code (2000), and the Criminal Code (2004). Together, these laws demonstrate the country's willingness to align domestic legislation with international human rights standards.

However, despite these legal commitments, Ethiopia continues to face significant challenges in effectively domesticating and fully implementing CEDAW across all sectors and levels of government. These challenges arise from a combination of legal, political, and socio-cultural factors that hinder the translation of formal legal guarantees into substantive equality for women. Legal

challenges include gaps in implementation frameworks, inconsistent enforcement, and limited institutional capacity. Politically, women remain underrepresented in influential leadership positions, limiting their ability to shape policies and decisions that affect their rights. Socio-cultural barriers deeply rooted in patriarchal norms, religious interpretations, and traditional practices further undermine efforts to eliminate gender-based discrimination.

Historically, Ethiopian women have been subjected to discriminatory laws and practices that privileged men while limiting women's social, economic, and political participation. Nevertheless, the current Ethiopian government has taken considerable steps to reform these inequalities. The 1995 FDRE Constitution, particularly Article 35, provides a strong foundation for the recognition and protection of women's rights by guaranteeing women equal rights with men and authorizing affirmative action measures to remedy historical injustices. Complementary laws, policies, and national development programs further reflect

Ethiopia's commitment to gender equality.

The domestication of CEDAW has therefore played a crucial role in strengthening Ethiopia's legal and institutional frameworks for women's rights. It has contributed to the reform of discriminatory laws, enhanced legal protection against gender-based violence, and encouraged the adoption of policies aimed at improving women's participation in social, economic, and political life. These developments underscore the continued importance of CEDAW as a tool for addressing gender-based discrimination and advancing the rights and well-being of women and girls in Ethiopia.

7.2. Recommendations

Based on the above discussions, I suggest the following recommendations:

- Ethiopia's government should increase women's representation in parliamentary seats, ministerial positions, and local government roles. Means that the government should increase women's representation in decision-making positions at all levels of government to reflect CEDAW's commitment to gender equality.
- To ensure the implementation of CEDAW in all Ethiopian government institutions, the government should adopt practical policies and enforce them effectively by providing specialized gender-sensitivity and human rights training for the concerned bodies.
- The government of Ethiopia should raise awareness to eliminate political, social, cultural, and religious challenges related to the domestication of CEDAW through educating women's and marginalized communities, which follow traditional norms and values about their rights and the importance of CEDAW.
- The government of Ethiopia should incorporate gender issues and the concepts of CEDAW in the educational curriculum of Ethiopian universities and colleges.

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