



**ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY**  
**COLLEGE OF DEVELOPMENT STUDIES**  
**CENTER FOR GENDER STUDIES**

**The contributions of Faith-Based Non-Governmental Organizations (FBNGOs)  
in addressing Gender-Related Issues via their project endeavour: The Case of  
ACT Alliance Member Organizations**

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This is to certify that Hildana Teklu's thesis, contributions of Faith-Based Non-Governmental Organizations (FBNGOs) in addressing Gender-Related Issues via their project endeavour: The Case of ACT Alliance Member Organizations, submitted in partial fulfillment of the Master of Arts requirements, complies with university regulations and meets the accepted standards in terms of originality and quality.

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## Acronyms

ART	Antiretroviral treatment
ACT	Action by Churches Together
BftW	Bread for the World
CBO	Community-Based Organizations
CHS	Core Humanitarian Standard
CSA	Civil Societies Agency
CSO	Civil Society organization
CoS	Church of Sweden
DCA	Dan Church Aid
EECMY-	Ethiopia Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus Development and Social
DASSC	Services Commission
ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
EOC-DICAC	Ethiopian Orthodox Church -Development and Inter-Church Aid Commission
EOTC	Ethiopian Orthodox Church
FBO	Faith-based organization
FBNGO	Faith-based Non-Governmental Organization
FGM	Female Gentile Mutilation
GAD	Gender and Development
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus and Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
HEKS	Swiss Church Aid
ICCO	Inter-Church Organization for Development Cooperation
LWF	The Lutheran World Federation
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
NCA	Norwegian Church Aid
NGO	No Non-Governmental organization n-Governmental organization
PADD	Protestant Agency for Diakonia and Development
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
SRV	Sexual and relationship violence
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights

SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nation
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UN Women	United Nation Women
WAD	Women and Development
WID	Women in Development

## **Abstract**

*This research paper aimed to examine the role of a faith-based organization in addressing gender issues in Ethiopia. This research aimed to understand the role of religion via faith-based organizations, as to how they manage to address the gender issues in development work, and the challenges they face. A qualitative research design was used to achieve the research objective. For primary data collection, a semi-structured one-on-one in-depth interview was conducted, allowing the researcher to consider the voice of each organization's representatives in addition to the forum coordinator. Purposeful sampling was used, and the target group for this research paper was gender-focal persons, directors and program staff. To get in-depth knowledge about the challenges each organization face while maintaining their religious identities in the development arena and how their religious identity helps or hinder gender integration in development work.*

*The finding of this research shows that faith-based organizations had a unique position in development endeavours because of its structure and acceptance in the community and how these organizations use this structure to address issues in the community. Even though these organizations have a religious background in their development work, they tend to separate their approaches. The presence of FBOs in the community made a definite difference, as community members trust these organizations more than secular NGOs. The target organizations implement projects collectively to bring every member to similar levels to create equal opportunity and understanding regarding gender-related issues in the project implementation area and within the organizations. The targeted organizations claim that faith does not orient their activities even if they are faith-based organizations.*

*The project implementation of the member organizations of ACT Alliance aims to address the gender issues in Ethiopia directly and contributes to the achievement of national and international goals. Their centre of development work is mainly on mainstreaming the issue of gender inequality in different projects and using gender-focused programs. The research found that FBOs, particularly the members of ACT Alliance, have a strong potential and responsibility to contribute significantly to closing the gender gap in Ethiopia. In this regard, the researcher recommends the action to achieve gender equality should include collaboration among member organisations, and means to promote equal participation among members need to be strengthened.*

**Keywords: FBO, gender-related issues and mainstreaming**

# Chapter One- Introduction

## 1.1 Background of the study

Ethiopia has one of the World's fastest-growing populations, with a 2.57% yearly growth, according to World meter 2021. Only 21% of the population live in an urban space, and 79% live in a rural setting, making it essential to consider the various challenges these areas encounter. This change in population growth comes with different socioeconomic challenges like food, housing, drinking water, access to schools, health centres, infrastructure, and so on.

The Government's capacity to address the country's socioeconomic challenges is limited. Therefore, businesses and nonprofit sectors support and/or complement the Government's development policies and strategies. Community structures are generally organized around three realms: the Government, business, and nonprofit sectors. Like a three-legged stool, all three sectors must be present, strong, and working together to achieve balance and stability (De Vita, 2021). Even though the presence of businesses in the rural part of the country is very limited, we see nonprofit organizations, on most occasions, trying to fill the gap between the community needs and what the government and other community structures cannot address.

The first nonprofit organizations in Ethiopia, which can be defined as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), were traditional self-help systems. In time developing further, some were registered as proper organizations, and today they are better known as Community-Based Organizations (CBOs). Some of these early self-help systems were the Debo and Afarsata, which provided mutual aid and reconciliation (Beurden, 1998).

In 1960 both foreign and local NGOs were established when these self-help groups could no longer suffice to support the country's needs. The first NGOs as we know them today were found in the country: the Ethiopian Red Cross and Swedish Save the Children. Following this and the famine of 1973 and later 1984, the number of NGOs increased, primarily international. Later, with the change in Government in 1990, a more conducive environment was established, further encouraging the growth of NGOs in Ethiopia. As their numbers increased, more local NGOs flourished (*Ethiopia – Country Profile 1998, Jos van Beurden,*

*GOM*). Faith-based organizations were among those established NGOs. As Ethiopia is one of the World's most religious countries, religious/faith actors play an essential role in addressing community needs during times of crisis by providing shelter for the displaced, food for the hungry, and guidance for the lost. Religions uniquely promote stability, cohesion, and solidarity, making faith-based organizations an essential part of civil society. Faith communities' social ties are an important part of the community infrastructure and sense of belonging.

The Ethiopian Government established the Ethiopia Charity and Society Agency (CSA) in 2009 to monitor and license NGOs that are implementers and donors under the newly introduced proclamation. The charities and societies proclamation No. 621/2009, which was introduced on February 13, 2009, drew criticism from the international media and a wide range of organizations for its regulation and restrictions on international NGOs operating in Ethiopia. According to Amnesty International, the law is intended to "strictly control and monitor civil society in an atmosphere of intolerance of human rights defenders and civil society organizations for most NGO operations in Ethiopia and donor organization support projects in the country. The proclamation created a significant need for organizations to examine their interventions, programs, and working methods. This proclamation also included faith-based organizations and established a distinction between their development work and religious practice.

The limitations of this proclamation were the restriction it puts on foreign NGOs, which according to the law, are NGOs receiving more than 10% of their funding from a foreign source. Significant areas of intervention for these "International NGOs" were reserved for only Local NGOs, i.e., NGOs that are receiving less than 10% of their fund from a foreign source. The activities reserved only for Local NGOs were. (Proclamation No. 621/2009, 2009)

- The advancement of human and democratic rights.
- The promotion of the equality of nations, nationalities, peoples, gender, and religion.
- The promotion of the rights of the disabled and children's rights.
- The promotion of conflict resolution or reconciliation.
- The promotion of the efficiency of the justice and law enforcement services.

For the reason mentioned above, many international NGOs had to revisit their intervention strategies and revise them according to the new proclamation.

The Organization of Civil Societies Proclamation No. 1113/2019, issued by the Ethiopian Government on March 12, 2019, is a new law governing civil society organizations (CSOs). This proclamation replaces Proclamation No. 621/2009 on Charities and Societies. This gave NGOs renewed optimism about the work they could do in the country. This proclamation's directives and regulations also lifted many of the restrictions imposed by the previous law.

The focus of this thesis ACT Alliance member organizations are engaged in various aspects of Development either directly or through partner organizations as part of the country's registered NGOs. They work in livelihood improvement, education, health, WASH, youth and women empowerment, peacebuilding, and reconciliation, to mention a few. These organizations all have a church background or originated from churches, so faith is a common factor in their formation. These organizations have a Western world background except for two, which were founded in Ethiopia.

## **1.2 Statement of the problem**

In the early years, the discussion about Development arose from a consideration of the welfare approach, which related to Development as a "public product" along the lines of education or health, services that must be provided to all those served by the State or any other entity (such as nonprofit organizations). The majority of development activities and funds have been directed toward providing various welfare products in the hope that this supply will reduce poverty and promote Development.

Another popular approach to Development is the rights approach which incorporates human rights into development planning and implementation. In essence, this approach views service receivers as team players on the field with a claim to the benefits of Development. According to this method, the fundamental purpose of fieldwork is to build communities so that they may seek Development and profit from the support provided to them and strengthen various governmental agencies on the other side. On the other hand, it enables them to identify and satisfy the population's needs, which also appears suitable. In this way, the emphasis is placed on the State's obligation to provide appropriate services as well as to strengthen and transform the local population into self-sufficiency.

Since the 1980s, there has been a search for alternative approaches to Development encompassing different social system variables. The most recent evolution of development

thought has been characterized by a multidimensional approach, also referred to as the human development approach. The human development approach prioritizes improving people's lives as the primary goal of Development. This approach draws attention to the significance of ethics and values in Development, including a rights-based and gender-sensitive focus.

In this research paper and building on value-based processes, I will focus on the objective of gender equality as a critical element of Development and the role faith-based organizations can play in this context. More specifically, I will explore faith-based organizations' approaches to addressing gender-related issues in Ethiopia.

When discussing gender issues in Ethiopia, we tend to focus on women and their place in society because they have historically been and continue to be marginalized. Women have been denied access to and control over resources such as money, land, education, information, and technology. Women's economic, social, and political status is inextricably linked to their involvement in household management and childbearing roles. Both culture and religion appear to play a significant role in limiting women's roles in the community. Traditions such as early marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM), and other forms of gender-based violence (GBV) can be mentioned as gender issues in the country. As a result, the Government has made addressing this issue the focus of its policy and intervention.

The 1994 Federal Constitution of Ethiopia has given special attention to women's equal economic opportunities and rights. It also provides that women be given equal treatment in the acquisition, control and administration, use and transfer of property, including land, and recognizes equal treatment in inheritance.

As a result of the Government's recognition and commitment to addressing gender-related issues in the country, established non-governmental organizations (NGOs) strengthened their gender components in their project implementations to address gender inequality and provide women with better representation and opportunities in social, economic, and political arenas.

Gender inequality is embedded in social, economic, cultural, and political structures and thus closely intertwined with every development challenge, from eliminating poverty to promoting peace and democracy. In other words, countries will not be able to combat poverty and the HIV/AIDS pandemic and ensure sustained Development without a deliberate attempt to overcome gender inequality. (National Action Plan For Gender Equality (NAP-GE), 2006)

The Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), which the UN General Assembly adopted in 2015, has given due recognition to Gender equality as the 5<sup>th</sup> goal, recognizes it as a human right, and is vital for a peaceful, prosperous world. Development and relief organizations start including this topic as the main area of work or consider it in their project planning. The organizations I will work with to address my research questions also have gender and gender-related projects around the country. Historically the focus of gender equality has been improving the status of women, which national and international development organizations and donor agencies backed.

As religion is an integral part of Ethiopian society, understanding the role of religion is the key to understanding the structure of Ethiopian society. (Karbo, 2013, pp. 43-52) Religion has influenced the Development of Ethiopia and has been involved in development agendas in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries of the country. (Evason, 2018)The interpretation of religion can be integrated into socialization by pre-existing religious structures, including their meanings to Gender. Religion can be both a source of emancipatory reinterpretations and patriarchal socialization. It is necessary to take a more refined approach to understand the role of religion in gender equality and how it is versed within the development sector. (Women, Gender and Religions in Ethiopia, 2015, pp. 11-19) It is essential to examine how this relationship was interpreted in development work, particularly in addressing gender issues and exploring how FBOs reconcile the already existing knowledge of gender equality in society with what they hope to achieve through their development work.

In a framework of faith-based organizations, this research paper will examine and analyze how faith-based organizations engage with gender- issues in Development. And focused on how faith-based and Development organizations handle gender sensitivity in development work, as well as whether and how, if at all, their religious connections impact this. To what extent does religion inspire these organizations while mainstreaming gender in development activities?

Gender issues and faith intersect and influence our perception of the subject. Even though globalization has brought people and ideas closer together, women's rights movements have struggled to redefine themselves in the modern era. Women's rights movements fail to recognize that the definition of gender equality varies by country. It is necessary to incorporate the beliefs and values of those with a faith background and include faith actors in

closing the gender inequality gap. Given the sensitivity of gender issues and the role of faith actors in the matter, the link between gender-related issues and faith and faith actors' role in addressing these issues is not a topic discussed thoroughly. Furthermore, there are a limited number of studies to help understand the topic of discussion.

### **1.3 The objective of the study**

#### **1.3.1 General objective**

This research aims to understand how faith influences development work and the role of ACT Alliance member organizations in addressing gender-related issues in Ethiopia.

#### **1.3.2 Specific objective**

1. Examine the selected organizations' areas of intervention and the approach they take to addressing gender issues in development work.
2. How do faith-based organizations use religion to influence the effects of gender-related issues?

### **1.4 Research questions**

The following are basic research questions this study will focus on answering.

1. What role does faith play in addressing gender-related challenges in ACT Alliance member organizations' development work?
2. What approaches do the selected organizations take to address gender issues in connection to Development?
3. What are the major challenges to addressing gender issues in project implementation?

### **1.5 Scope of the study**

This study was carried out in faith-based organizations, which are members of the largest collation of Protestant and Orthodox churches development work ACT alliance. The Alliance has more than 135 members worldwide and 11 in Ethiopia.

ACT Alliance Ethiopia- Forum includes International and local members engaged in the Development, relief or both. This research paper focused on member organizations' work in addressing gender-related issues. These member organizations are engaged in various Development and relief work across the country, with head offices in Addis Ababa city Administration. Employees of each organization were interviewed to help answer the initial research questions and better understand the work of each organization separately and collectively as members of the Forum. One employee from each organization was selected and interviewed gender focal persons and directors, program staff, and the forum coordinator. Each organization's strategic documents, policies, and project documents were reviewed to understand the nature of their work better.

### **1.6 Limitations of the study**

The research question indicates that the researcher seeks a more comprehensive understanding of faith-based organizations' contribution to Ethiopia's development work, notably when integrating a gender dimension. Faith and Development represent different knowledge systems and languages. They are two large world phenomena involving a wide range of areas that can be addressed from various perspectives. These challenges the conceptual frame of this research and require special attention. The topic is an intricate web of social, political, and religious factors. This research paper intends to understand something in a geographically limited area, within the frames of eleven organizations and a limited selection of people. Hence, while aiming to address general questions about the link between religious identity, development work, and gender mainstreaming, the geographical and other limitations may make it more difficult to draw general conclusions. Still, the study might reveal distinctions between organizations that all claim to be inspired by the same faith dimension.

## **Chapter Two- Review of Related Literature**

### **2.1 Theories of Development**

#### **2.1.1 Modernization Theory**

According to modernization theory, modern societies are more productive, children are better educated, and the poor receive more assistance. (Smelser, 1964, pp. 268-274) According to Smelser's Analysis, modern societies are distinguished by social structural differentiation, i.e., a clear separation of functions and political roles from national institutions. According to Smelser, while structural differentiation has increased modern organizations' functional capacity, it has also created the problem of integration and coordinating the activities of the various new institutions.

The major assumptions of the modernization theory of Development are that as time goes on, we will increasingly resemble one another because the pattern of modernization is such that the more highly modernized a society becomes, the more they resemble one another. (Social Patterns and Problems of Modernizations, 1967, pp. 189-207).

The strength of this theory was it identified the basis of the research focus even though a psychologist, a social psychologist, a sociologist of religion, and a political sociologist carried out the primary studies. Other scholars have extended the theory into their spheres. This theories author assumes that the third world countries are traditional and the Western countries are modern, and in order to develop the third world counties, the nations have to adopt Western values. (Social Patterns and Problems of Modernizations, 1967)

This theory was popular in the 1950s but faced criticism in the 60s. Some of the criticism was it only shows one model of Development, and the focus was only on the united states of America while other countries had advanced. Another criticism was regarding the theory's need to eliminate traditional values, especially when developing countries do not have a homogeneous set of traditional values and their value systems are highly heterogeneous.

### **2.1.2 Theory of Dependency**

The bases for the theory of dependency were the finding and principle points of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) research which states the importance of government control of the monetary exchange rate and the effective government role in terms of national Development. Generating a large internal demand by increasing workers' wages and salary, developing a more effective coverage of social services and developing national strategies according to the model of import substitution and protecting national production. (Dependency and imperialism: the roots of Latin American underdevelopment, 1970, pp. 49-53)

The theory of Dependency emerged in the 1950s. It combines elements from a neo-Marxist perspective with Keynes' economic theory, a liberal economic idea that emerged in the United States and Europe as a response to the depression years. The theory embodies the Development of effective internal demand in domestic markets and the importance of recognizing the industrial sector to achieve a better level of National Development. Increasing workers' income to generate more aggregated demand in the national market and promoting a more effective government role to reinforce national Development. (Dependency and imperialism: the roots of Latin American underdevelopment, 1970) The basis of dependency theory in underdeveloped nations is derived from industrial and technological production rather than from financial ties to monopolies from the core nations. Some critics of this theory argue that it lacks extensive empirical evidence to support its conclusion. Furthermore, the theoretical position uses an extremely abstract analysis level.

### **2.1.3 Theory of World Systems**

The various forms that capitalism took around the World, particularly since the 1960s, were a key component from which the theory of world systems emerged. Third World countries faced new challenges in their efforts to improve their living standards and social conditions. These new conditions resulted from the international financial and trade systems becoming more flexible, with national government actions having less and less influence. Essentially, the new global economic circumstances enabled a group of radical researchers led by *Immanuel Wallerstein* to conclude that there were new activities in the capitalist world economy that the existing dependency theories could not explain. (Long Waves of Colonial Expansion and Contraction in Studies of the Modern World-System, 1984)

The main assumptions of the world-systems theory establish that; There is a strong link between social sciences - especially among sociology, economics and political disciplines. This school recognizes that more attention is usually given to the individual Development of each of these disciplines rather than to the interaction among them and how these interactions affect, in real terms, the national conditions of a given society. In addition, it believes instead of addressing the Analysis of each of the variables, it is necessary to study the reality of social systems. And the importance of recognizing the new character of the capitalist system. (Africa: the politics of Unity, 1977) According to world-systems theory, the social system is the primary unit of Analysis, which can be studied both internally and externally. Social formation impacts several nations and, in most cases, an entire region.

The main differences between dependence studies and the world-systems approach are dependency studies use the nation-state level as their unit of Analysis, in contrast to the world-systems approach, which uses the entire World. The dependency school argues that in terms of methodology, the structural-historical model captures the boom and bust of nation-states. In contrast, the world systems perspective supports the historical dynamics of world systems in their cyclical rhythms and secular tendencies. The core, semi periphery, and periphery comprise the trimodal structure, described by the world systems theory and the core and the peripheral makeup the bimodal theoretical structure of dependence theory.

#### **2.1.4 Theory of Globalization**

Globalization theory emerges from global mechanisms of greater integration, emphasizing economic transactions. In this regard, this viewpoint is similar to the world-systems approach. One of the most critical aspects of the globalization position, however, is its emphasis on cultural aspects and global communication.

The fundamental assumption of the globalization theory is that cultural aspects determine what each community values. Another presumption is that, given the status of global communications and international ties, it is unnecessary to utilize the nation-state as the analysis unit in the current context. Additionally, as technological advancements become more standardized, more social sectors will be able to link with other groups globally. Both theories of globalization and world systems take into account the most recent economic

changes in world structure and relations that have occurred in the last couple of decades. (Social Change, 1991)

Gender is frequently overlooked in globalization theory. Gender inequality in the global World, according to feminist theorists, is not taken into account. Women everywhere suffer more than men, including those of the same race, class, and even family, from poverty and other global justice challenges. Feminist development theories have resulted from a focus on these distinctively gendered features of Development. In terms of the link between gender and Development, this notion has evolved into a number of perspectives.

## **2.2 Approaches of Development**

Different development approaches focus on enabling communities to better their living conditions. It is a positive change and value-based process aiming to address the imbalance in welfare and power based on inclusion, human rights, social justice and equality, to name a few. There are different approaches to Development, women in Development (WID), women and Development (WAD) and gender and Development (GAD). Each of these, in turn, has generated different development programs to achieve gender equality

### **2.2.1 Women in Development (WID)**

The popular discourse, Women in Development WID, is associated with the wide range of activities concerning women in the development arena. Financing agencies, governments and NGOs have become involved since the 1970s, which gave expression to the major preoccupations of women around the World: improved educational and employment opportunities, equality in political and social participation and increased health and welfare service.

The idea of WID was coined in the early 1970s by a Washington-based network of female development professionals on the basis of their own experiences in overseas missions, and they began to challenge 'trickle-down' theories of Development, arguing that modernization was impacting men and women differently. (Tinker, 1990, p. 30) Instead of improving women's rights and status, the development process appeared to be contributing to a deterioration of their position.

The liberal feminist perspective has influenced society at large and had a crucial role in developing the vocabulary of the political strategy used by WID advocates. The foundation of liberal feminism was the idea that stereotyped societal norms maintained by men, internalized by women, and reinforced through various "agencies of socialization" cause women's disadvantages. (Connell, 1987, p. 34) Another influence on WID was the emerging body of research on women in developing countries. The importance of *Women's role in economic Development* was that it challenged the assumptions of the welfare approach and highlighted women's importance in the agricultural economy. WID advocates took this work so enthusiastically because it legitimized efforts to influence development policy with a combined argument for justice and efficiency. (Tinker, 1990, p. 30)

WID advocates' emphasis on women's productive responsibilities meant that women's subjugation and overcoming that subordination was viewed through the lens of economics. The origin of women's subjugation was related to their exclusion from the marketplace. Explaining the difference in status and power between men and women in terms of their relative economic contributions. (Women, Gender, and Development , 2006, p. 64) It was, therefore, suggested that if women were more fully integrated into the productive sphere, not only would they contribute positively to the Development, but they would also be able to increase their position. As embraced by international organizations, the WID approach was firmly rooted in traditional modernization theory. It became an acceptable area of focus since it was considered as arising from modernization theory and the observation of Development as a gradual but steady linear process. (WID, WAD, GAD: Trends in research and practice, 1991, p. 8)

The WID approach has been given broad appreciation; however, some of the criticisms of this approach is that emphasizing women's productivity ignores the impact of a wide range of social divisions and social relations constraining women's economic choices and opportunities. Furthermore, people working in Development were doubting the sufficiency of focusing on women's isolation, which appeared to be a fundamental aspect of the WID approach, and the important relational component of their subordination had gone unexplored. This, therefore, impacts the rewriting of the approach and the formation of WAD.

### **2.2.2 Women and Development (WAD)**

Women and Development emerged in the second part of the 1970s. It is theoretically founded on dependence theory. The WAD approach developed from a concern about the explanatory constraints of modernization theory and its propagation of the assumption that women were excluded from earlier development strategies. WAD began its approach with the premise that women have always been a part of development processes and did not come from anywhere. The concept of engaging women in Development was intrinsically linked to the third World's, mainly African nations', economic dependence on industrialized countries. (Definitions of women and development: an African perspective, 1977, pp. 9-13)

It focuses on the link between women and development processes rather than only on strategies for women's inclusion in development. The WAD approach assumes that equality is necessary for improving women's situations, but it nevertheless defines the change in terms of providing women with access to the productive sector. While WAD may be more significant than WID, it also fails to explore further the structural issues linked with male-female interaction. (Rathgeber, WID, WAD, GAD: Trends in Research and Practice, 1990, p. 493). The WAD approach is not as frequently discussed. However, it was an essential bridge between WID and GAD.

### **2.2.3 Gender and Development (GAD)**

Developed in the 1980s, the GAD approach deviated from both WID and WAD and was based on socialist-feminist philosophy. And it has bridged the gap left between modernization theorists, linking the relations of production to that of reproductive and considering all aspects of women's lives. The GAD approach starts from a holistic perspective looking at the totality of social organizations and economic and political life in order to understand the shaping of particular aspects of society. (Gender and Development, 1987, p. 2)

This approach is more concerned with the social construction of gender and the assignment of specific responsibilities, expectations, and roles of women and men. It analyses the nature of women's contribution within the context of work done inside and outside the household, including non-commodity production. Additionally, the approach sees women as agents of change rather than passive development recipients and stresses the need to organize themselves.

GAD seeks to confront the root causes of gender inequality rather than implement short-term augmentations to the existing system. Development organizations have significantly shifted from considering gender issues a minor part of their agendas to a larger aspect of their campaigns. The question of is this organization is just grazing the surface of the problem of oppression and inequality or if they are attempting to create lasting systematic change will be explored in this research paper.

## **2.3 Gender and Gender-related issues in Ethiopia**

### **2.2.1 Gender**

The Oxford dictionary meaning of the word Gender is either of the two sexes (male and female), especially when considered with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological ones. The term is also used more broadly to denote a range of identities that do not correspond to established ideas of male and female." A condition that affects people of both genders."

Researchers and academicians define it as:

Gender refers to the characteristics of women, men, girls, and boys that are socially constructed. This includes norms, behaviors, and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl, or boy and relationships with each other. As a social construct, gender varies from society to society and can change over time (World Health Organization, 2013).

Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviors, expressions, and identities of girls, women, boys, men, and gender-diverse people. It influences how people perceive themselves and each other, how they act and interact, and the distribution of power and resources in society. Gender identity is not confined to a binary (girl/woman, boy/man), nor is it static; it exists along a continuum and can change over time. There is considerable diversity in how individuals and groups understand, experience, and express gender through their roles, expectations, relations with others, and the complex ways gender is institutionalized in society (Canadian Institutes of health research).

Genders are neither binary nor essential. Nor are they singular, unchanged, invariable, inherent, or flatly definitive. Genders are not names, labels, or identities; they are neither nouns nor adjectives. Gender is a verb, a process. Gendering constantly changes. Individuals

are always more than one gender. These multiple gendering's are culturally intelligible (What Gender Is, What Gender Does, 2016).

### **2.2.2 Gender-related issues in Ethiopia**

Gender issues encompass all aspects and concerns regarding women's and men's lives and situations in society, including how they interact, differences in access to and use of resources and activities, and how they respond to changes, interventions, and policies. Most Ethiopian communities, whether rural or urban, highlands or lowlands, rely on agriculture or are pastoralists reliant on livestock. The common thing in these communities is there is unequal decision-making and inequitable division of labor between men and women. Gender-based violence (physical, sexual, physiological, and economic) is prevalent, although there is significant variance in magnitude across regions and cultures and between urban and rural areas. Historically, disparities between men and women in the division of labor, the share of power, resources, and benefits have been justified and maintained by patriarchal social norms and structures. However, there are several positive advancements where women's voices and opinions are respected. (Gender in Brief Ethiopia, 2007)).

Ethiopia suffers from some of Sub-Saharan Africa's lowest gender equality performance indicators. While remarkable progress has been made in several Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), it lags in MDG. The Global Gender Gap report 2010 ranks Ethiopia at 121 out of 134 countries regarding the magnitude and scope of gender disparities (Advancing gender equality, leave no woman behind Ethiopia report, 2011).

Unequal decision-making power and economic and political participation. Deep-rooted patriarchal social norms, religious practices, and biased attitudes are barriers for Ethiopian women and girls across the nation. Women and girls do not have full control over their sexual and reproductive rights, their bodies, or access to health services and information. Sexual, physical, psychological, and economic violence against women is prevalent in many parts of Ethiopia due to unequal power relations between men and women. These are Some gender-related issues in the country.

Women occupy low status in society. Despite their contributions to the well-being of their family and community affairs, women experience low socioeconomic status and are marginalized from making decisions.

It has been widely understood that realizing the development goal cannot be attained without the very significant component of gender. Globally, it is proved that excluding women in development has rendered their development efforts futile. If a country successfully minimizes or closes the gender gap, it will have a better chance to develop through alleviating poverty (Tertilt, 2016).

Several studies have identified how recent policy initiatives have contributed towards increasing gender equality through, for example, more gender-equitable laws on marriage, inheritance, and property and land rights and strategies to increase women's political participation (Quisumbing, 2015).

## **2.4 History of Civil Societies in Ethiopia**

Civil society has been broadly defined as the "area outside the family, market, and state. Krishan Kumar argues that civil society refers to something "found in the economy and the polity; in the area between the family and the state, or the individual and the state; in nonstate institutions which organize and educate citizens for political participation; even as an expression of the whole civilizing mission of the modern society." (An inquiry into the usefulness of a historical term, 1993).

Typologies of civil society actors include (World Economic Forum, 2013, pp. 8-9):

- NGOs, CSOs, and nonprofit organizations with an organized structure or activity are typically registered entities and groups.
- Online groups and activities, including social media communities, can be "organized" but do not necessarily have physical, legal, or financial structures.
- Social movements of collective action and/or identity, which can be online or physical.
- Religious leaders, faith communities, and faith-based organizations
- Labor unions and labor organizations represent workers.

- Social entrepreneurs employ innovative and/or market-oriented approaches for social and environmental outcomes.
- Grassroots associations and activities at the local level.
- Cooperatives are owned and democratically controlled by their members.
- Youth clubs
- Independent radio, television, print, and electronic media.
- Neighborhood or community-based coalitions.
- Academic and research institutions.
- Organizations of indigenous peoples

Civil society roles include but are not limited to:

- Service provider
- Advocate/campaigner
- Watchdog monitoring government compliance with human rights treaties
- Building active citizenship, motivating civic engagement at the local level, and engagement with local, regional, and national governance.
- Participating in global governance processes.

Civil society organizations (CSOs) play critical roles in promoting sustainable development. The different roles of CSOs in ensuring sustainable development are widely recognized in international and national policies and academic literature. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which the UN General Assembly adopted in 2015, has given due recognition to the importance of enhancing global multi-stakeholder partnerships, in general, and public-private and civil society partnerships, in particular, 'to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in all countries, in particular developing countries. Many states give similar recognition to CSOs in their national legal and policy instruments. This is also the case in Ethiopia.

This narrow focus on Ethiopian law can be better understood considering the historical development of CSOs in Ethiopia. Modern CSOs are a relatively recent development in Ethiopia compared to religious institutions and traditional self-help groups, such as Edirs and Equbs, that have a long history. (The regulatory framework for civil society organizations in Ethiopia).

The 20th century in Ethiopia was marked by significant changes and reforms and became the turn of a new chapter of Ethiopian society. When Emperor Haile Selassie I became regent in

Ethiopia in 1916, it was with a particular desire to lead Ethiopia to modernization and centralization. Attention was drawn toward the internal development of the country. Education was a priority and an attempt to educate the people of the Ethiopian periphery (Zewde, 2002).

Civil society was slow to take root under the Ethiopian Empire regime from 1137 to 1974. It was also severely restricted under the rule of the Derg (a military junta) from 1974-91. Modern civil society organizations were first established as faith-based organizations in the 1930s, and welfare organizations like the Red Cross started operating in Ethiopia in the 1950s. As a result of the 1973-74 and 1984-1985 famines, many more non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with a focus on relief and humanitarian services emerged. After the downfall of the Derg regime in 1991, NGO numbers substantially increased (International Center for not-for-profit law , 2022).

Up to the passing of the Organization of Civil Societies Proclamation, CSOs operated more freely in the country. Whatever the rationale behind the 2009 law, it has made it more difficult for CSOs to operate in Ethiopia for over a decade. However, on March 12, 2019, a more liberal law, the "Organization of Civil Societies Proclamation", was passed by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's Government. It is seen as less restrictive than its predecessor since it allows NGOs more scope for activities and obtaining funding from abroad. While registration is still mandatory and the CSA will not be disbanded, its power and influence have been curtailed. This law potentially paves the way for a more collaborative relationship between the Ethiopian Government and its partners in civil society (*Lorenzo Ian Gubbini, The history of NGOs in Ethiopia, 2020*).

## **2.5 Non-governmental organizations (NGOs)**

The first nonprofit organizations in Ethiopia, which can be defined as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), were traditional self-help systems. They existed in the country for centuries before developing some structure. In time developing further, some were registered as proper organizations, and today they are better known as Community-Based Organizations (CBOs). Some of these early self-help systems were the Debo and Afarsata, which provided mutual aid and reconciliation (*Ethiopia – Country Profile 1998, Jos van Beurden, GOM*).

Non-governmental organizations can be categorized into two secular and faith-based the focus of this research will be faith-based organizations.

### **2.5.1 Faith-based organization**

Faith-based organization (FBO) is a term used here to describe a broad range of organizations influenced by faith. They include religious and religion-based organizations/groups/networks; communities belonging to a place of religious worship; specialized religious institutions and social service agencies; and registered or unregistered nonprofit institutions with a religious character or mission. Some CSOs began to operate as FBOs in the 1930s, while other welfare organizations like the Red Cross have had some presence in Ethiopia since the 1950s (*Civic Freedom Monitor*).

As part of the modernization processes, FBOs played an active role in implementing these changes and were highly valued by the Imperial Regime for their education and health services. The mission of FBOs were the first groups that began to work as non-government bodies during the 1930s, and their pioneering role is considered the roots of the first modern types of CSO in Ethiopia. Their effort led to an official decree issued in 1944, where the role of mission organizations was clarified and acknowledged (Arén, 1978, p.438f).

Until the DERG took over-power in 1974, the close links between religion and the state have led to a clear role within Ethiopia's development work for Christian faith-based organizations (FBOs). Emperor Haile Selassie I, who came to power in 1916, embarked on a modernization process with education as a major priority. The emperor highly valued FBOs and played a pivotal role in education and health services. In 1944, the role of mission organizations was acknowledged in an official decree, and this, together with the strengthened relationship with the international community, led to NGOs (mainly with Christian links) such as the Ethiopian Red Cross, the Boy Scouts Association and the Women's Welfare Association appearing in Ethiopia between 1950 and 1960. Still, such organizations were limited in scope and were confined to the cities.

The fall of the Imperial regime due to the 1974 Revolution changed Ethiopia's political, social, and economic environment. Under the Dergue regime, FBOs and religious institutions suffered from oppression and persecution, including imprisonment and extrajudicial killing of religious leaders. According to Eide (2000), these events in the history of FBOs are essential to consider when assessing their role and contributions in Ethiopia. (Revolution and Religion

in Ethiopia: The Growth and Persecution of the Mekane Yesus Church, 1974–85, 2000, p. 314)

This limited the involvement of FBOs until the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front came to power in 1991. The reform measures and liberalization policies brought in by this Government opened opportunities for a wide range of NGOs, including FBOs, to work in Ethiopia.

Significant changes took place in 2009 when EPRDF introduced legislation relating to the Registration and Regulation of Charities and Societies (CSP). The change has severely restricted the work of NGOs and FBOs throughout the country. Many observers have argued that the law violates international standards relating to the freedom of association. It also restricts NGOs that receive more than 10% of their financing from foreign sources and prohibits them from engaging in essentially all human rights and advocacy activities, areas seen as the core work of many FBOs.

Despite the restriction, organizations continued their engagement with the community with cautious use of their limited working rights. The regulation was no different for FBO; however, the benefit of this organization was their acceptance in the community and their relationship with the religious leaders at the grassroots level.

### **2.5.2 ACT Alliance**

Action by Churches Together Alliance is a global faith-based coalition organization in national and regional forums operation in 155 counties. More than 140 members work on development, humanitarian aid, gender and climate justice, migration and displacement, and peace and security to support local communities. To promote a locally led and coordinated approach to advocacy, humanitarian, and developmental issues (Alliance, 2021).

The Forum in Ethiopia has 11 member organizations, of which two are national NGOs (EOC-DICAC and EECMY-DASSC) and nine international organizations, which are the Church of Sweden (CoS), Dan Church Aid (DCA), Finish Evangelical Lutheran Mission (FELM), Inter-Church Organization for Development Cooperation (merged with CORD Aid), Swiss Church Aid (HEKS), The Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Norwegian Church Aid (NCA),

Protestant Agency for Diakonia and Development (PADD) also known as Bread for the World internationally.

The leaders of the member organization take turns taking on the responsibility of convener and co-convener. This changes every two years. The day-to-day activity of the Forum is led by the coordinator of the Forum and is responsible for organizing events conducted by the Forum.

The Forum has four thematic focus areas humanitarian response, environment (climate justice), gender justice and advocacy. Advocacy work was previously halted owing to government regulations. However, modification in government policy related to advocacy activity will be one of the Forum's future key areas. (Alliance, 2021).

Since it is an alliance, the interaction among the member organizations is voluntary. The members meet once a month, share updates from their project areas and offices, and actively discuss how to collaborate better to address any new crises or opportunities in the country under their mandate. The ACT Alliance Ethiopia forum is one of the strongest compared to other forums.

The Forum as an Alliance has several strategies which are mandatory for the members to have. Some of the strategies are international standards, Crosscutting and Sectoral Policy Guidance and guidelines from which ACT Global Strategy 2019-2026, ACT Code of Conduct, Child Safeguarding Policy, Gender Justice Policy, Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS), Code of good practice for NGOs responding to HIV/AIDS, Gender equality, Human rights, psychosocial support can be mentioned. The Forum has 16 mandatory policies, seven international standards, 21 Crosscutting and Sectoral Policy Guidance, and ten additional guidance documents that govern the activities of the member organizations.

The strategic period of 2019-2026 priorities is Climate Justice, Gender justice, peace and human security, migration and displacement and emergency preparedness and humanitarian response. Therefore, through gender justice, the Alliance will implement its gender policy by members and produce resources and online training opportunities (Global, 2019).

These policies and strategies serve the member organizations as a mechanism to protect the community's rights they are serving. Gender justice policy, for instance, aims to increase inclusivity and gender equality and minimize the risk of gender-based discrimination and

violence among beneficiaries the Alliance member organizations come across through their development work.

Policies like the code of conduct apply to the work performed by all members of the ACT Alliance and define the required behavior of staff. By becoming a member, organizations sign to adhere and abide to the content of the policy, which is in place to prevent misconduct, including corruption, fraud, exploitation, and abuse, including sexual, and ensure child safeguarding. It also promotes accountability and outlines the responsibilities of staff. It seeks to protect all staff and every community member whom the ACT Alliance members seek to assist.

Different policies and guidelines help the member organizations meet the standards of effective program implementation.

Regarding joint project implementation, the ACT Ethiopia forum coordination office supervises the process from planning to implementation and monitoring. The coordination office will also provide regular updates to the forum members during the regular members' meetings. Regarding the project, the two local members have the most significant presence in all regions of Ethiopia. The Forum has proven capacity and experience in responding to emergencies by coordinating activities, monitoring implementation, ensuring financial accountability, reporting, networking and collaborating with key stakeholders.

## **Chapter Three- Research Design and Methodology**

### **3.1 Study methodology**

This research paper used the qualitative research method to generate and analyze information obtained for the respondent. Qualitative research is a type of research method which tries to understand the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. It also refers to any research that produces findings not arrived at using statistical procedures or other means of quantification (Basic of Qualitative Research, 2014). Qualitative research methods are primarily concerned with the in-depth study of human phenomena to understand their meaning and relevance for the individuals involved. The most fundamental characteristics of this approach are its expressed commitment to viewing events, actions, norms, values, and other factors from the perspective of the people covered by the study. In other words, qualitative methods are most useful and powerful when they are used to discover how respondents see the World. (Research Methods, 1988)

Qualitative research involves collecting and analyzing non-numerical data to understand concepts, opinions, or experiences, and it can be used to gather in-depth insights into a problem. (Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches (4th ed.), 2014) The researcher found the qualitative research approach more suitable based on the research questions. This is because an analysis of the role faith-based organizations play in addressing gender-related issues demands a methodology that considers the voices of these organizations and how they perceive their role in their organizations' perspective.

Qualitative research methods are done in such a manner that they can disclose the target audience's behaviour and perceptions in reference to a given topic. There are several types of

qualitative research methodologies, one of which was an in-depth interview, which the researcher adopted as the major data collection method for the study.

This research method is conducted one-on-one and is entirely conversational, allowing for the possibility of obtaining detailed information from the respondent. The interview with the staff members of the selected organizations was virtually done because of the working schedule of employees of the selected organizations.

The study aims to understand and generate knowledge from a limited selection of people and focus on their perception and experience towards the issue raised. The social actor's meaning and understanding of the World are emphasized.

### **3.2 Study participants**

In this part of the thesis, the researcher traces the general role and progress of the ACT Alliance Ethiopia Forum member organizations, notably regarding gender-related issues in their development work. The researcher interviewed employees from each organization to help answer the initial research question and better understand the work of each organization separately and collectively as the forum members. Study participants for this research were selected using purposive sampling. This method helped the researcher to select participants that could provide fruitful data for the accomplishment of the study. The participants were selected from ACT Alliance Ethiopia- Forum member organizations, namely Christian Aid, Church of Sweden, Dan Church Aid (DCA), Ethiopian Evangelical Church of Mekane Yesus- DASSC( EECMY-DASSC), Ethiopian Orthodox Church -Development and Inter-Church Commission (EOC-DICAC), Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission (FELM), Inter-Church Organization for Development Cooperation (ICCO Cooperation), Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Norwegian Church Aid (NCA), Protestant Agency for Diakonia and Development (PADD), and Swiss Church Aid (HEKS). All member organizations have an office located in Addis Ababa City Administration.

The sampling method chosen for the research, purposeful sampling, helps express phenomena of interest in identifying important patterns that emerged while doing interviews and reviewing documents. The participants were gender-focal persons for the seven participating organizations, and in their absence, which applied to the other four organizations, country directors and program officers were chosen based on their

responsibilities and expected familiarity with both the ACT Alliance and the work of the organizations they represented. The forums coordinator was also selected as a participant for the above-stated reason, age ranging between 29-57, seven male and five female. Purposeful sampling is a widely used in qualitative research technique to identify and select rich information for the most effective use of limited resources (Qualitative research and evaluation methods 3rd ed., 2002). This involves identifying the sample group based on their knowledge and experience of the subject of phenomena.

To have a comprehensive and in-depth grasp of the research questions, it is critical that the selected sample be most productive and have sufficient knowledge and expertise in the working field of the organization they represented. Choosing a sample is all about finding the greatest match to offer the essential data for the study. As a result, the researcher used purposive sampling to identify specialists involved in developing and implementing gender-related projects in the selected organizations.

The same sampling technique was also applied when reviewing each organization's strategic document for 2017-2021. Understanding these papers enabled the researcher to determine each organization's focus areas and areas of interest. Documents such as Gender Justice, Climate Policy, and Code of Conduct will allow the readers to understand how the target organizations interact with their beneficiaries and handle project execution daily. Projects that are mainly designed to address gender issues in the country and projects that include gender issues as a cross-cutting activity were also part of the review to assist in comprehending the actions taken to achieve gender equality in the implementation areas and the organizations' commitment to gender equality.

This section examines the member organization's role in addressing gender-related issues in Ethiopia and their activities to address gender disparity. These organizations represent a variety of activities in Ethiopia, all of which have been analyzed and evaluated on the following pages.

### **3.3 Data type and source**

Data for the study were collected from primary and secondary sources. Primary data were obtained through an in-depth interview which was semi-structured with the selected participants, seven gender focal persons, three country representatives, one program officer

and ACT Alliance Ethiopia forum coordinator. The secondary sources of data were collected from Strategic documents, published and unpublished documents, policies and assessment reports.

In addition to the interview, Project documents were reviewed to ensure the study was not one-sided and only presented the custodian's point of view. This will help to balance findings from the interviewees and what is on the ground.

### **3.4 Interview guidelines**

As interviews were used as the primary source in my data collection, it was a semi-structured interview. In the area of methodology, this kind of interview is usually characterized by its middle position in relation to structure and formality (Semi-Structured interviews : A Team-Based Approach to Design, implementation and Analysis o Design, 2020, p. 12). The semi-structured interview helps provide insights into understanding the subject's World and perspectives (Social Research Methods, 2021, p. 438).

The researchers used an interview guide, which helped to construct the interview context and allowed for the transition between text and discussion. Six females and six males took part in the study. By adopting a semi-structured interview, the researcher was able to edit and adjust the interview guide as the interviews progressed. The flexibility enabled the researcher to seek out an intriguing viewpoint presented throughout the interviews. The researcher prepared the interview guiding questions in English as the researcher was confident in the selected participants' grasp of the language. A recording device was used throughout the interview to prevent focusing on taking notes rather than focusing on the conversation.

### **3.5 Methods of data analysis**

The shifting, organizing, summarizing and synthesizing of the data to arrive at the research results and conclusions is referred to as data analysis (Methods in Second Language Research: Introduction, 1991, pp. 109-112). The researchers analyzed the data using qualitative data analysis, which translates obtained qualitative data into an understandable, insightful, dependable, and original interpretation. In addition, participant interviews were recorded in order to organize, assess, and produce a cohesive flow of ideas from the data.

Following data collection, the researcher uses the research questions to classify information systematically into the same category. Coding is the process of organizing the data by bracketing chunks of information and writing a word representing a category in the margins. It involves taking text data gathered during data collection, segmenting sentences, and paragraphs into categories, and labelling those categories with a term. (Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches (4th ed.), 2014). The collected data were categorized based on the research questions and the similarity of the response of the respondents.

Following the meticulous coding of the acquired data, the following stage systematically categorizes familiar information into the same category. Different categories were created, and data that included relevant information was grouped. This helps to reduce bias in the case analysis. Thematically convergent data in the analytical process strengthens the conclusion by tying together multiple data bits to support a better knowledge of the situation. (Case study research: Design and Methods, 2003)

### **3.6 Ethical considerations**

The respondents were provided with a detailed explanation of the study's overall objective. The data were collected after the respondents were fully informed and verbal consent was obtained. The respondents were informed that they could withdraw from the process at anytime. Additionally, the respondents were notified that the interview was being recorded and only used for this research. And the data was only used for the stated purpose.

## Chapter Four- Research Findings

### 4.1 Findings

#### 4.1.1 What role does faith play in addressing gender-related issues in ACT Alliance member organizations' development work?

*The faith actors' advocacy can influence political leaders and ordinary citizens alike. The teaching and guidance can inspire people to new levels of responsibility, commitment, and public service. And by their example, they can promote interfaith dialogue and bridge the chasms of ignorance and misunderstanding (Annan, 2005).*

Knowledge and attitude have been considered critical components in addressing gender-related issues for a successful implementation of addressing gender issues in development. Working practices, knowledge and attitude, are crucial deciding variables that must be considered. The assessment of participants' knowledge of the role of faith in the development field focused on gender-related issues would aid in comprehending the notion of faith in resolving gender-related issues in this study.

Were respondents asked about the role of faith in addressing gender-related issues in the development work of ACT Alliance? All respondents had a similar answer in relation to this question: faith plays an important role in addressing the gender-related issue, and the role of FBO is unique in this regard. A respondent from EECMY-DASSC said,

*Faith-Based Organizations are considered to have a high potential for reaching out to large numbers at a grassroots level because most of the Ethiopian population is religious. Religious leaders often have credibility and legitimacy within local communities far more significant than government officials, enabling them to facilitate development successes.*

The Ethiopia Charities and Societies Agency (ECSA) is given direct executive oversight over charity and society organizations, including faith-based ones, by being able to determine the details of charitable purposes and public benefit through directives. Faith-based organizations have been identified as fundamental actors in the Ethiopian development process. Like many other African countries, Ethiopia is rich in faith and culture associated with life. The role of FBO emerged as an essential catalyst in the county's development processes. They began to play an important role in the drive to provide sustainable development, better living conditions, equality, social justice, and peacebuilding. They also rally public opinion and mobilize grassroots communities.

Respondent from EOC-DICAC said,

*The people of Ethiopia still value religion. And every Sunday, the churches are full of people. Young, old, every generation is there. So, it is an essential strategy to work through FBOs, and I said this because faith actors can reach remote areas and people with less exposure.*

A respondent from CoS said

*Despite barriers from the proclamation FBOs use their wide network and church structures and include faith actors in their project implementation to address issues in a given project area. And the newfound relative freedom, these actors will continue to use their inference in the aspect of development work, specifically gender-related issues.*

The majority of interviewees agreed with the views that were presented. The respondent was aware of the concept of using religion in the execution of their projects and of the distinctive position that being a faith-based organization gives them in the field of development.

However, a respondent from CORD Aid mentioned:

*I have worked in secular and faith-based organizations but haven't seen a difference in how they perform development work.*

The respondent mentioned above has twenty-plus years of working in the development field.

#### 4.1.2 What approaches do the selected organizations take to address gender issues in connection to development?

Respondents were asked what approach their organization take in addressing gender issue.

Gender justice is one of the approaches mentioned. The forum coordinator said,

*The Gender justice program is a project led by NCA and EOC-DICAC with a fund granted by NCA. This program aims to contribute to gender justice in the ACT Ethiopia forum members by increasing the role of faith actors in addressing Gender-Based Violence*

The forum coordinator also mentioned,

*The gender justice community of practice is where member organizations come together to discuss work experience, what projects have a positive impact and what has to change in project implementation. Initiatives like the gender justice community of practice can be an example of promoting positive change within the member organizations.*

Respondent from EOC-DICAC

*The gender justice program is making a difference within the forum member organization and in their work. As the leader in this program, we give forum members and employees different training to bring each member to the same level and to equip them better in regards to addressing gender-related issues.*

A respondent from Christian Aid mentioned:

*Although platforms such as the gender justice community of practices aid in improving our work, our organization's engagement are limited due to workload and other priorities.*

Another approach the member organizations uses is having strong policies in relation to gender and, at the same time, aiming to mainstream gender-related topics in the project implementation. It is important to have strong policies, according to respondents.

*For the implementation of projects that focus on gender-related issues, first, leadership commitment must be there, and strategic documents show a level of commitment.*

Said a respondent from HEKS.

*Our organization's commitment to implementing strategies and achieving the set goal is impressive. Since the organization is not an implementing organization, it is essential for us to find partners that share the same values and implement projects that add up to achieving our organization's goal. And gender is an important area of intervention for us.*

Said a respondent from PADD.

The commitment of leadership is not even across the board. A respondent from EOC-DICAC mentioned:

*Having a strategy was never a problem for my organization. We have different policies and strategies that are collecting dust in our office. In the past few years, we have seen commitment change in the management in relation to implementing policy and strategic documents, including revising the organization's gender policy.*

The Forum is guided by local communities' initiatives, organizations, and churches close to those communities to enable the most appropriate and effective relief and development activities. The forum coordinator said,

*ACT Alliance Ethiopian Forum member organizations have agreed to adhere to the policy and prepare an additional specific and relevant policy to their local cultural and programmatic context.*

The other respondent also shares the idea of the above-mentioned respondents.

Another approach the forum members follow is gender equality. The member organizations have a strategic goal to promote gender equality within each organization, and in their project implementation, attention to gender remains an important development goal. The importance of gender equality is highlighted in its prominence in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN-SDG), which has been commonly accepted as a framework for measuring development progress.

Faith and gender equality have a complex relationship. In many regions of the World, including Ethiopia, Faith plays an important role in creating cultural, social, economic, and political standards. Similarly, gender roles and women's and men's social status are inextricably linked to how religious texts have been interpreted for generations by men in positions of authority.

The respondent from CORD Aid mentioned:

*I believe that gender equality is one of the core principles of faith. However, the missed link is in the interpretation.*

Taking on the task of exploring the influence of religion in addressing gender equality in Ethiopia and pushing and investing in the preparation of a document that states the stands of EOC-DICAC and EECMY-DASSC theological reification.

A respondent from EOC-DICAC said:

*EOC-DICAC is working on drafting a paper that I believe will be extremely helpful in moving Ethiopia closer to achieving gender equality. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church's theological reflection on gender equality can help us overcome numerous hurdles in our efforts. In addressing gender-related issues.*

Interview with the respondent from EECMY-DASSC:

*Finalizing and disseminating the theological reflection on Ethiopia Evangelical Church of Mekane Yesus, making it a working document at various levels of the church network, and incorporating it into FBO development activities. Despite the challenges this document might face, it is a task EECMY-DASSC is eager to take on.*

The theological reflection document includes what the concept of gender justice is from the perspective of the two church inflations, the biblical perspective of gender justice and gender-based violence and the way forward and implications of the document.

The document can be used as a guide to move forward with educating and training of religious leaders, campaigning and advocating for women's rights, and empowering women and men stakeholders.

All informants appear to share the same ideology; however, the process of achieving this equality appears vague among interview participants, despite the organizations' commitment.

Meaningful engagement with men and boys is increasingly recognized as critical to advancing gender equality and an opinion that surfaces in the interview sessions. It is

necessary for women's empowerment and to transform the social and gender norms that reinforce patriarchy.

This global and national recognition has encouraged/influenced many local and international secular and FBOs to start focusing on working in this sector through their development work also in Ethiopia.

ACT Alliance is committed to ensuring gender equality as a common value and an inalienable human right. The principles of universality and non-discrimination apply to all people with whom ACT Alliance works. It considers gender mainstreaming as an appropriate strategy to achieve gender equality. The Alliance also recognize gender equality as both a human rights issue and as a precondition for and indicator of sustainable people-centered development.

The respondent from EECMY-DASSC said:

*FBO has worked predominantly within existing cultural and legal frameworks. While the effort of faith actors in advocating for gender equality was minimal in the past years, there have been promising efforts in the last few years.*

The respondent from EOC-DICAC said:

*The people of Ethiopia still value religion. And every Sunday, churches are full of people. Young, old, every generation is there. So, it is an essential strategy to work through FBOs. I said this because, through faith actors, we can reach remote areas and people with less exposure.*

#### **4.1.3 What are the major challenges to addressing gender issues in project implementation?**

According to the interviewees, the major challenges to efficiently implementing projects aimed at addressing the issue of gender equality are several, as listed below:

Respondent from CoS

*Women's inclusion and participation are challenging in implementing a project addressing gender-related issues. In many parts of the country, women are not free to make decisions in the household; hence unless they get permission from their father or husband, their chances of participating in projects are minimal.*

Respondent from FLEM

*As we primarily work in pastoralist and Simi-pastoralist communities, cultural restrictions women have in different parts of the county have been challenging as women are not encouraged to participate in our development work.*

Respondent from EECMY-DASSC

*Even though we engage religious leaders in implementing our projects, their gender perspective might be challenging. The leader's viewpoint on what a woman should be and what a woman should have is complex. How can we engage these leaders when we know their point of view is fundamentally opposed to what we are striving to accomplish?*

Respondent from EOC-DICAC

*Government regulation is one challenge it separation the church and its development wing. If EOC-DICAC had fully utilized the Ethiopian Orthodox Church's potential, the result would have been significantly substantial.*

Bringing people from different walks of life and creating a platform for discussion is essential in planning an effective project. However, a respondent from HEKS mentioned:

*The platforms for exchanging women's experiences do not represent the experience of the vulnerable group. And this has significant implications for project planning.*

Other respondents share these challenges and the effect it has on project implementation.

The study's finding shows the importance of faith groups in civil society because religions have a unique ability to promote stability, cohesion and solidarity. The social tie formed within faith communities is an essential part of community infrastructure and a sense of belonging. The focus area of intervention for the member organization and how they integrate gender related-issues in their project implementation, and how they include religious leaders in the implementation process is discussed in the pages that follow.

## **4.2 Activities undertaken by ACT Alliance member organizations concerning addressing the gender-related issue**

### **4.2.1 Gender Justice**

The ACT Alliance (Action by Churches Together). ACT is one of the largest global faith-based alliances worldwide for humanitarian work, development work, and advocacy. Its objective is to coordinate cooperation to find solutions to challenges facing the World at the local, national, and global levels, with operations in 155 countries.

ACT Ethiopian Forum was established by ACT Alliance members in 2010 and is open to other churches and church-related organizations active in Ethiopia engaged in humanitarian, development, and advocacy work. It is a forum of consultation and coordination where the members jointly develop the aspect of collaboration.

The Forum as an Alliance has several mandatory strategies, the international standard, Crosscutting and Sectoral Policy Guidance and guidelines from which ACT Global Strategy 2019-2026, ACT Code of Conduct, Child Safeguarding Policy, Gender Justice Policy, Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS), Code of good practice for NGOs responding to HIV/AIDS, Gender equality, Human rights, psychosocial support can be mentioned. The Forum has 16 mandatory policies, seven international standards, 21 Crosscutting and Sectoral Policy Guidance, ten additional guidance documents that govern the Forum's activities, and partly member organizations.

The strategic period 2019-2021 priorities are Climate Justice, Gender justice, peace and human security, migration and displacement and emergency preparedness and humanitarian response. Therefore, through gender justice, the Alliance will implement its gender policy through members and produce resources and online training opportunities. (ACT strategy 2019-2021)

In response to a shift in government policy on advocacy work, members are starting to embrace the new opportunity individually and collectively. Exploring the gender justice policy and what it means in the Ethiopian context was the first step the Alliance took in working to contribute to the efforts of gender equality.

The disparities or inequalities between gender exist not just in economic growth but also in opportunity and power. This can also deny certain people's civil political, economic, or social rights while enabling others to enjoy them. Gender justice, in its basic form, refers to the fair treatment of all persons, regardless of gender. However, gender justice, on the other hand, has such a broad scope that, as a process, it brings an extra critical component: accountability (Goetz, Gender Justice, Citizenship and Entitlements, 2007).

Gender justice is a concept. Contemporary discourses on gender justice have a variety of starting points, including philosophical discussions of human agency, autonomy, rights, and capabilities; political discussions of democratization and citizenship; and legal discussions of judicial reform and practical issues of access to justice. Throughout these debates, we find the same unresolved quandaries: should an absolute and universal standard be established to determine what is right or good in human social relations? How should individual rights be balanced against the needs of the family, community, ethnic 'nation,' or territorial state? (Spinner-Halev, 2005).

Activists, academics and development workers have increasingly used the term gender justice because of the growing concern and realization that terms like gender equality or gender mainstreaming have failed to communicate or provide redress for the ongoing gender-based injustice from which women suffer (Goetz, 2007). In the interviews, the informants share the opinion of Marie Goetz that achieving equality alone is not enough but also just equality.

Gender justice is a key goal of the ACT Alliance's 2019-21 strategy. Several times during the interview sessions with the informants, the concept of gender justice and its importance in development work came up. These organizations have projects that ensure gender justice throughout their project interventions, whether as standalone projects or mainstreamed as part of a larger project intervention. The same is true for the forum's engagement.

*The Gender justice program is a project led by NCA and EOC-DICAC with a fund granted by NCA. This program aims to contribute to gender justice in the ACT Ethiopia forum members by increasing the role of faith actors in addressing Gender-Based Violence.*

According to the finding, the plans and strategies of the ACT Alliance's member organizations appear to recognize that building partnerships and conversations with local and national religious leaders. It is essential to address the country's gender issue and the added value of including religious leaders and joining hands in the matter. As an entity formed by various members from various religious backgrounds, the ACT forum attempts to bring various actors to the matter and discuss ways forward, beginning within the already established forum and joining resources and different expertise each organization has.

Initiatives like the gender justice community of practice can be an example for promoting positive change within the member organizations.

*The gender justice community of practice where member organizations come together to discuss work experience, what projects have a positive impact and what has to change in terms of project implementation.*

In addition to discussing the members' work, they also share best practices and influence positive change within the organizations. However, it was evidenced that not all members have equal participation, and the platform is not as active as the coordinator of the Forum plan. And the potential of the platform is not fully explored.

Furthermore, while reviewing strategic documents of member organizations, it was discovered that including women in leadership is an important part of gender justice: the ACT Alliance Gender policy states that:

*ACT Alliance works with a gender-inclusive rights-based perspective which always includes consultations with the participation of people irrespective of gender, building upon their own capacities. Women and men have full participation, including Women being empowered in decision-making in all areas of the ACT Alliance works.*

Church of Sweden's strategic document states:

*Church of Sweden promotes gender-conscious leadership within the organization and partner organizations by creating venues for reflection and exchanging experiences relating to gender and power hierarchies.*

PADD/BftW strategic document 2021-2025 states that:

*The empowerment of (young) women is a particular focus for us. They should be able to demand their rights confidently and grow into leadership roles within their societies. Global cooperation between organizations and defenders of women's rights is essential for this.*

Member organizations have joint projects that are implemented to build the member organization's capacity and bring them to a similar status in addressing gender issues while aiming for gender justice.

In the Interview session, the forum coordinator highlighted that:

*The Gender justice program, a project led by NCA and EOC-DICAC with a fund granted by PADD, can be mentioned as one of the engagements of the Forum in the advocacy arena. This program aims to contribute to gender justice in the ACT Ethiopia forum members by increasing the role of faith actors in addressing Gender-Based Violence.*

*From all the forums around the world, the ACT Alliance Ethiopia forum is one of the strongest participation of members.*

Members of the forum hope to use this strength to address gender concerns that arise during project execution. According to the informants and project documents I've examined, the forum examines the challenges of communities and looks within each member organization's capacity.

The forum members work on different thematic areas jointly as a consortium to plan, implement, and monitor projects collectively. Humanitarian response in Afar, Amhara and Tigray regions assisting the displaced because of the war and Desert locust response and resilience-building project collaboration of HEKS, ICCO, LWF and PADD can be mentioned as an example of the collaborations.

The destruction had become a daily reality for many men and women in the program implementation area. This reality calls for special attention to be given to women as stories of sexual violence and physical abuse surface. Integrating the issue of gender justice in humanitarian assistance was found to be crucial by the project holders. Psycho-social support for victims of sexual abuse and those who fear sexual violence was incorporated into the initiative to keep women safe and have access to food distribution centers. The project included creating a safe space for victims in collaboration with United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

#### **4.2.2 Gender Strategy of ACT Alliance**

Act Alliance believes in, as read in their strategic document, ending gender inequality and injustice, gender-based discrimination and violence, closing the gap and addressing unequal power relationships to promote human dignity.

The importance of having a gender policy for the Alliance while working in development and humanitarian aid is paying attention to how occurrence affects women differently than men. When a crisis happens, gender inequality is even more acutely heightened. Such situations

call for including the needs and rights of the vulnerable groups separately from the general population.

The strategic document has five main parts:

- The introduction clarifies why it is important to have the policy.
- The second part focuses on concepts that will be stated in the following chapters, which are retrieved from the ACT Alliance training manual.
- Part three of the policy states eight principles of the policy
  - Ensure gender balance in participation, decision-making, representation, and staffing
  - ensure gender equality through gender mainstreaming in all strategic areas, including program design
  - Adopt a board-approved gender justice policy
  - Ensure training and capacity development are provided for all staff
  - ensure that communities, partners, and others are informed of the policy
  - promote strategies that guard against human rights violations perpetrated on the grounds of people's gender identity
  - Ensure protection from gender-based violence.
  - Ensure access to sexual and reproductive health and rights.
- Part four puts the date for plan development and rolling out the policy. While doing so, the Alliance will provide support in training member organization staff to better equip them with the necessary tool to implement the policy.
- The final part policy review states the policy document will be reviewed every four years if/when there is any significant program or contextual change.

The Forum is guided by local communities' initiatives, organizations, and churches close to those communities to enable the most appropriate and effective relief and development activities. The forum coordinator mentioned:

*ACT Alliance Ethiopian Forum member organizations have agreed to adhere to the policy and prepare an additional specific and relevant policy to their local cultural and programmatic context.*

Furthermore, as stated in the strategic document, member organizations take on every priority area and aim to address it through their implementation or partner organization. Except for HEKS, all member organizations have adapted the gender policy and combined the document to fit the Ethiopian context. HEKS is in the process of implementing this policy in

collaboration with its headquarters. This can be an illustration of a different level of dedication and prioritization among the member organizations.

In addition to sharing experiences and resolving community issues, monthly meetings and cooperative project execution try to bring member organizations to the same level of dedication on topics such as gender equality and other forum priority areas.

### **4.2.3 Gender Equality**

Attention to gender remains an important development goal. The importance of gender equality is highlighted in its prominence in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN-SDG), which has been commonly accepted as a framework for measuring development progress.

Gender equality has emerged as a critical issue in the global development and human rights discourse during the last three decades. Worldwide support of gender equality by a wide range of actors, such as transnational organizations, civil society organizations, national governments and donor countries, suggests that gender equality has been established as a global norm. This is manifest in the development policies in donor countries (Haukanes, 2016).

Women play a critical part in spiritual life, despite their conspicuous absence at the highest levels of religious decision-making. They execute embodied religious teachings and traditions within the family and community and pass them on to future generations. While rooted in patriarchal traditions, the member organizations are powerful agents of social change.

Adding to the already existing connection communities have with religion, the teaching of the local religious leaders is essential in addressing gender inequality. The respondent from EECMY-DASSC mentioned:

*To engage in a successful project promoting gender equality in the society, it is good to begin by investigating how women engaged in religious life, as described in the Bible. This will assist us in engaging religious leaders at the community level and leveraging their influence.*

Members of the forum also engage in positive interaction with religious networks and religious leaders to reduce different types of gender inequity. Faith leaders understand the community's culture and the difficulties it encounters; consequently, they may be in a great position to address gender disparity in contextually relevant ways. EOC-DICAC and EECMY-DASSC use their church network to train and accompany faith leaders to use the scriptures and traditions to capitalize on women's challenges, misconceptions, and misinformation about gender equality.

#### **4.2.4 Gender-Based Violence (GBV)**

Gender-based violence has been defined as follows "any act that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life (UNHCR, 2021).

My informants argue that religious beliefs contribute to perpetuating gender-based violence but that they can also be mobilized to fight these practices. As FBOs and using their unique stand in the community, the target organizations have formulated policies to fight GBV internally and in the project implementation areas.

Even though male engagement in addressing gender-related issues was not a popular approach initially, the past few years, development actors started understanding that addressing gender-related issues without male involvement is a road that takes nowhere. *"It only works when everyone plays,* says an informant from HEKS while talking about gender equality and male engagement

The interviews with informants also suggested that the hypothesis mentioned above is valid. The respondent from LWF said:

*"When we educate women about their rights and make the world a little better place for them, we also need to create a community that is ready to take these empowered women". I often think about this quote when I see a project planned to address the problem of women without including men. And we see these projects more often than we should.*

Member organizations and their partners work with communities, faith actors and government offices to address GBV and implement equality programming to prevent, mitigate and respond to the issue of GBV. The member organizations of the ACT forum

Ethiopia have created and implemented projects to reduce the magnitude and impact of various forms of GBV.

The respondent from ICCO/CORD Aid said:

*We mainstream GBV in our projects, giving awareness-raising training on women's rights, basic service, and family law for beneficiaries of our project areas.*

The forum coordinator also said:

*ACT alliance holds a zero-tolerance approach to GBV, not only in armed conflicts but also during peacetime. It includes all forms of violence, sexual and physical abuse, neglect and exploitation of all people it works with.*

The current global pandemic has dramatically increased the number of GBV, and epidemics worsen the existing inequalities for women and girls and the discrimination of other marginalized groups, such as persons with disabilities and those in extreme poverty. In addition, the forum coordinator mentioned:

*ACT member organizations must consider how COVID-19 will disproportionately affect women, including young women and girls, particularly the vulnerable and those living in crises and conflict-affected regions and ensure a gendered perspective in the analysis and responses to the pandemic. This will enable the designing and implementation of programs and the establishment of monitoring and reporting systems appropriate for differential preventive measures.*

The respondent from HEKS said:

*When the pandemic happened, many organizations, including ours, shifted attention to minimizing the effect of COVID-19. However, we included a minimization mechanism of the impact of the outbreak on women in domestic work and GBV through our already established community networks.*

Although the prevalence of GBV has increased in my project document review and interviews, it has a long and challenging road ahead compared to the severity of the problem.

#### **4.2.5 Female Genital Mutilation**

The issue of Female genital mutilation (FGM) was the most frequently mentioned topic in the interviews. The issue kept reoccurring and illustrating examples concerning several other

subjects, such as behavioral change, community development and religious leaders' involvement. When prompted by questions, all informants mentioned the project their respective organization is implementing in this regard. The respondent from HEKS mentioned:

*When a religious leader addresses the topic of FGM, it is highly respected, so the work we do is highly dependent on the understanding of these leaders. The issue of FGM is intertwined with norms, values, culture, and traditions. While working in rural Ethiopia, where FGM is widely practiced, projects include religious leaders as one of the targets.*

The religious leaders are included in training and project planning. FGM was used to demonstrate the strategic considerations of involving religious leaders in the development process.

The respondent from EOC-DACAC:

*In the issue of FGM, there are different religious leaders. We have religious scholars with formal education and traditional religious leaders. Many conventional religious leaders support the practice of FGM, which makes the implementation of projects challenging.*

EOC-DICAC strives to target a specific group of traditional leaders who uphold FGM practice. Furthermore, it is also indicated that educated religious leaders call for the abandonment of this practice. My informant indicated that the Ethiopian Orthodox Church's theological reflection would be a huge milestone for their development work.

It was mentioned that female genital mutilation (FGM) has long been linked to religious law in rural Ethiopia. FGM is a deep-rooted tradition of Ethiopian society; however, it is not explicitly linked to religious law, whether Christian or Muslim. During one of the interviews, I was given a leaflet by the Ethiopian Evangelical Churches Fellowship, which indicated that this behavior is often justified and supported by religious leaders' interpretations. Uncut girls are thought to be dreadful omens which will bring the Creator's wrath, and their prayers would be ignored.

All the interviews gave an impression of how FGM is being approached in the development work of the selected organizations. In different parts of the country, religious leaders opposing FGM are increasing and gaining momentum. The organizations regard religious

leaders' involvement as crucial to their success stories. Local faith communities can provide valuable, safe spaces and faith leaders can be valuable allies for survivors.

A project implemented by NCA in Siraro district in Oromia region aims to shift the practice of FGM through community engagement in collaboration with its partners facilitating consecutive community conversations, engaging community-based organizations working with influential community leaders supporting survivors and establishing or equipping gender clubs in school lead to a successful in the project area. In 2019 the community made a declaration to abandon the FGM practice. A step in the right direction for the well-being of women and girls in the district (GBV project document of NCA).

According to a research paper by NCA titled “Faith-based organizations contribution to the Ethiopian government commitment to end FGM and child marriage by 2025”, Ethiopia has seen a nine percent reduction in FGM prevalence in the last decade. However, regional variance is very high, and interventions tend to be highly localized. FGM is practiced across all regions of Ethiopia, with certain ethnicities being more significant than others. FBOs play a role in primarily engaging the top religious leaders in sensitizing them to this issue and activating their religious guidance.

NCA played an essential role in facilitating between 2009 and 2017. The main faith actors, such as the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, Evangelical Church Fellowship of Ethiopia and the Ethiopian Catholic Church, made a public declaration against FGM and other harmful practices.

Member organizations of the ACT Alliance were able to disseminate the theological declaration and support subsequent dialogue initiatives and further theological training. The engagement of the government bodies in this training was also an important part of the work.

#### **4.2.6 Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH), HIV/AIDS in particular**

ACT Alliance's gender policy document states that "we want our work to ensure access to sexual and reproductive health and rights for all individuals so that they can make their own informed decision concerning their sexual relations, contraceptive use and reproductive health, free from discrimination, coercion and violence."

Many believe that integrating SRA and HIV/AIDS services is essential to overcome missing opportunities of meeting the needs of overlapping target populations in SRH service.

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3 targets eliminating HIV from being a public health threat by 2030. In response, many seculars and FBOs are working towards this goal. Members of the ACT Alliance Forum Ethiopia have taken on several projects on Reproductive health and HIV/AIDS mitigation through their implementation or through their partner organizations. This program mainly focuses on young people and women.

Working on HIV/AIDS was not an easy intervention to do, especially when the antiretroviral treatment (ART) was introduced in Ethiopia. This treatment was not entirely accepted by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOTC) because it denounced the power of the religious treatment of 'holy water', said one of my informants. Instead of receiving the ART treatment, people went to their priests, who gave them 'holy water' to drink and pour over them.

For years this case was a dispute within the Church of EOTC stance on HIV/AIDS medication remained unclear. In 2007 in collaboration with different FBOs, the patriarch of EOTC called for the simultaneous use of ART treatment and 'holy water' to reduce HIV/AIDS-related deaths.

According to my interview with EOC-DICAC staff, resolution in these cases was found within close cooperation with FBOs. The respondent from EOC-DACAC stated:

*Through good cooperation with FBO's 'our father,' the patriarch of EOTC allowed for the drug to be used for HIV/AIDS alongside the 'holy water'.*

The acceptance of the drug by the EOTC was a significant milestone for the work we do in the community regarding HIV/AIDS, said an NCA employee in the interview session.

ACT forum Ethiopia member organizations use community dialogue in their approach toward HIV/AIDS and sexual and reproductive health projects emphasizing community conversations as an effective means to reach people. The respondent from DCA mentioned:

*We use community conversation actively in this work. We reach the community through social gatherings like 'edder' HIV/AIDS is discussed, and we use the member of that community to facilitate the discussion.*

Ethiopia is renowned for its force of health extension workers (HEWs) who provide community-based preventive care across the country and has shown remarkable progress in

preventing and controlling the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Yet, still, they carry a high burden of HIV/AIDS in the World.

## **Chapter Five- Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **5.1 Conclusion**

As stated in the introduction, the objective of this thesis has been to explore the role of FBOs, particularly members of the ACT Alliance Ethiopian forum, in development work, specifically in addressing gender inequality. And better understand the work they do in this arena. My findings have been based on interviews with staff and reviewing strategic and project documents of the 11 member organizations.

This thesis did not intend to generalize faith's role in development processes in Ethiopia. For this purpose, the scope of the research is too narrow, and the findings are not representative of all development actors and activities in Ethiopia. However, I have carried out this research

within the frames of one Forum and a limited selection of people that may provide specific new insight into the role of faith in development, specifically regarding gender.

The thesis has mainly focused on program and project areas and projects dealing with gender justice, gender-based violence, female genital mutilation and Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH), HIV/AIDS in particular, where the subject of faith has had a special significance.

My finding shows that ACT Alliance Ethiopian Forum members are working towards achieving the SDG target 5 Gender equality, among other goals, to their forum's vision and specific organization's strategic goal. Member organization has made gender equality and gender issues in Ethiopia the centre of the development work, mostly in mainstreaming the issue through their project implementation and using a gender-focused program.

With their development programs, FBOs mobilize individuals at the grassroots. This organization's power comes from religious institutions and religious leaders in the community. Churches and mosques carry ideals and standards with which people identify. The people trust them to operate, preserve and develop these societal values and norms. This indicates that these religious institutions, compared with secular establishments, have a superior position and power in defining the prevailing norms and values of the communities.

Faith actors have access to large networks and communication channels. They are crucial to consider when planning because they influence public opinion, mobilize volunteers and advocacy support, and significantly impact government policy.

Moreover, enabling religious leaders to critically reflect on and analyze deeply established patriarchal beliefs and behaviours is necessary for engaging them. They must then be given the freedom to make adjustments in their own lives that reflect their commitment to gender equality.

Working in a religious country such as Ethiopia, whose majority is a believer and upholding traditions, the need to include religious leaders in addressing topics like gender equality and GBV is an essential pursuit for FBOs, given the influential position of these leaders.

In the interview sessions, the importance of the inclusion of faith actors while addressing gender issues is to integrate the deep-rooted preconceptions surrounding gender equality and the role religion has in this matter. The theological reflection can be a significant accomplishment if this document can reach the general population and use the faith actors as a tool for advocacy. Gender issues start at the household level and go to the community. If

the Church starts condemning discrimination based on gender, the follow-up work can be smooth.

Gender inequalities have a large and wide-ranging impact on society. The inequalities increase the risk of acts of violence against vulnerable groups. FBOs, I have selected to study work towards achieving gender equality through their development work and formulation of strong policies to implement projects in this regard. In my analysis, I have examined concrete outcomes of how religion is perceived and considered in development practice by ACT Alliance members. Even though the member organizations are faith-based, their implementations are not faith-oriented. They follow the rule of their background religion. For instance, in the case of working on HIV/AIDS, the EOC-DICAC does not promote the use of condoms. However, they encourage abstinence and faithfulness to one partner.

The findings show that religion has a role in various areas of the target organizations. Cooperation with religious leaders and faith-based groups is seen as critical for achieving some development goals. I also looked at the tangible effects of how religion is viewed and used in development practice by development professionals in member organizations.

It is important to recognize that FBOs and CSOs generally operate under restrictive laws. For this reason, they have shifted their resources from advocacy to livelihood improvement and other projects. When the law changed in 2019, domestic resource mobilization was not a shift that was taken overnight. The organizations required strategic revision. Even though a few members took a swift change, for instance, PADD started working with the Ethiopian Human Right Council and Consortium of Ethiopian Human Rights Organization, which played a big part in the country's 2021 election. This was the first step in working in the advocacy arena.

It is feasible to see how religious leaders influence the process of development, particularly when it comes to gender equality, through a value-based conception of development. The different roles of religious leaders appear to give them a certain normative legitimacy significant for endorsing prevailing religious values and social norms of behaviours in society.

Religious leaders have participated in FGM-related activities as community educators, and their important status as leaders is particularly stressed and cherished. Due to their roles, they have access to the community and are able to offer theological advice that addresses and clarifies the religious view on FGM.

From all the policy and project documents that I have reviewed for this thesis purpose, I have noticed gender is integrated as a crosscutting activity as well as a standalone project. By doing so, the organizations can address issues specific to the implementation area even though they have limited projects specifically designed to address the issue of gender inequality compared to the wide range of projects.

In addition, while addressing gender issues as a crosscutting, the level of inclusivity increases the meaningful inclusion and the leadership of women and girls by the number of projects the member organizations implement.

The member ACT Alliance appear to understand that the legitimacy of religious leaders has both a positive and negative potential. The forum member are all FBOs with an experience of more than 50 years of working in Ethiopia and development, giving proper support to the community through their already existing church network, which goes to the grassroots level and uses their unique stand in the community.

The member organizations strongly emphasize the benefits of partnering with other FBOs and within the forum. They appear to be advancing development goals on the backs of religion and religious organizations, as demonstrated in work being done to combat HIV and AIDS, prevent FGM and promote gender equality.

## **5.2 Recommendation**

The study found that FBOs, particularly those affiliated with the ACT Alliance, have a strong potential and responsibility to contribute significantly to closing the gender gap in Ethiopia and promoting integrated approaches to gender equality. In this regard, I suggest the best action to achieve gender equality.

- Collaboration among member organizations and means to promote equal participation among members needs to be strengthened.
- Leadership commitment to implement policy documents should be promoted so that the community can benefit from projects.
- The forum must play a key role in member organizations' capacity-building initiatives to level the scale in terms of understanding and engagement in gender-related projects.

- The members should work to achieve meaningful engagement of girls and women in the project beneficiaries and within the organizations.
- The finalization of theological reflection for the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and Ethiopian Evangelical Mekane Yesus is a significant step in using faith as a supporting factor for gender equality. Education and training of stakeholders about the finding of this document are essential in taking the document to the next level in putting it into action.

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## **Annexes**

### **Annexe One: Interview guide for staff of member organizations**

#### **Interview guiding questions for ACT Alliance Ethiopia Forum Member organizations.**

1. What are the primary interventions activities of your organizations?
2. What role does your organization play in the ACT Alliance Forum?
3. To what extent do the ACT member organizations work together towards achieving gender equality?
4. What is the level of engagement between your organization and its partners?
5. What is your organization's overall strategic direction? How does gender equality integrate into your strategies?
6. Does your organization have a specific objective in combating gender inequality? If so, please specify practical measures you have undertaken/ plan to undertake in such an instance?
7. How many gender-responsive projects do you have?
8. Does faith dictate your organization's intervention activities? If so, please elaborate on how? How do you integrate/introduce the gender element in your work in such a context?
9. What influence does faith have in the mainstreaming of gender equality?
10. Do you think faith is exploited to justify gender inequality? If so, what is the contribution of the ACT Alliance forum members in combating this?
11. What specific example can you give regarding your organization's contribution to gender equality in your project intervention activities?
12. What plans does your organization have for establishing, strengthening, and maintaining the existing gender equality plan?
13. Do you think the current approach to combatting gender inequality is practical? if not, what do you recommend as a substitute? What can be done differently?

## **Annexe Two: interview Guide for Forum Coordinator**

### **Specific questions for the Forum Coordinator**

1. Tell me about ACT Alliance and its member organizations?
2. What are the roles of the forum in development work in Ethiopia?
3. What is the level of engagement among the member organizations in combating gender inequality?
4. To what extent do member organizations work together?
5. What is the forum's overall strategic direction? How does gender equality integrate into your strategies?
6. What plans does the forum have for establishing, strengthening, and maintaining the existing gender equality plan?
7. What specific examples can you give regarding the forum's contribution to gender equality?
8. Opportunities and challenges of the forum in combating gender inequality?

<b>Organizations</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Age range</b>	<b>Position</b>
Christian Aid	M	50-57	Gender Focal Person

Church of Sweden	M	45-52	Country Director
Dan Church Aid	M	34-39	Program Officer
EECMY-DASSC	F	52-55	Gender Focal Person
EOC-DICAC	F	32-37	Gender Focal Person
FELM	M	36-39	Country Director
HEKS	F	29-32	Gender Focal Person
IOCC/CORD AID	M	45-50	Country Director
NCA	M	34-37	Gender Focal Person
LWF	F	30-33	Gender Focal Person
PADD	F	30-33	Gender Focal Person
ACT Alliance Ethiopian Forum	M	39-45	Forum Coordinator