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# **THE WOMEN EMPLOYMENT IN ERITREA – REFLECTIONS FROM PRE AND POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD**

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## THE WOMEN EMPLOYMENT IN ERITREA – REFLECTIONS FROM PRE AND POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

By  
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### Abstract

*The role of Eritrean women in thirty years war of independence brought major changes and reflects in the present demography and economy of Eritrea in the development arena. Their participation in the economy contributes to local production and income by filling the gaps left by men who died in the war or who have left the country and settled in different parts of the world. Despite the growing importance of women for the formal economy, jobs and self-employment opportunities available to women are still clustered in low-productivity and/or low-status industries. To cope with the growing number of female-headed households, Eritrea needs to increase the earning potential of women. This paper indicates that providing women with education at secondary or tertiary level is one way to go. This paper deals with, why Eritrean women are entering into the labour markets: one, family ties and control of women is weakened due to absent men and increasing divorce rates. The second, there is a shortage of male breadwinners. The third, growing education levels increase their earning potential.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Women play an important role in the war-ravaged Eritrean economy. Many enterprises are owned and run by women, and women make up 30 percent of the workforce in manufacturing, services, and trade. It is to be noted that a legal framework for gender equality and equity is in place. Eritrea's 1997 Constitution prohibits the violation of the human rights of women and "mandates the Legislature to enact laws designed to eliminate inequalities in the Eritrean society because of gender discrimination."<sup>1</sup> Laws forbid the kidnapping of women and the exchange of dowries upon marriage, and women now can initiate divorce. Women gain the right to access land for housing and farming at age 18 (United Nations, 2001). While this can partly be explained by rural-urban migration of women, the surplus of women both in rural and urban areas indicate that war casualties, refugees and labour migration have played an important role in shaping the population. It is to be noted that, after independence the women fighters (from rural areas) settled in towns after demobilization rather than returning to their home villages because of their employment and other responsibility. Besides, better facilities motivated them to settle in towns than in villages (NUEW, 1993).

Although globalization has opened up new opportunities for women to enter the labour market, particularly in manufacturing and the service sectors, the trade-off between unpaid

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domestic works and paid employment is not always profitable. Women often enter at the bottom of the salary scale and occupy precarious jobs with little security and few benefits (United Nations, 2004). An examination of Eritrean society reveals a more traditional picture, however. Nearly 67 per cent of Eritreans live below the poverty line; this pattern is particularly acute among the 20-30 per cent of households that are headed by women. Women are concentrated in low-skill, low-paying jobs and earn only 50-80 percent of what their male colleagues earn. In addition, women's enterprises are concentrated in areas with limited growth, such as simple food processing and small tailor workshops. Thus, political and economic gender equality is still weak in Eritrea despite the enactment of mechanisms to empower women and to inform them of their rights. This may be because of lack of organizations to mobilize and support women. Indeed, only one women's organization i.e. National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW) is involved in advocacy and education on key women's issues, including health, education, microfinance, and human rights(NUEW, 1994-95).<sup>2</sup>

The gender gap is prevalent in the area of basic education. Household responsibilities, early marriage, and economic and cultural factors hamper girls' access to education. At the primary school level, girls have lower enrollment rates and higher-grade repetition rates than do boys, and only 13 per cent of eligible girls attend secondary school. The low education level among girls and women inevitably has a negative influence on their income-earning capabilities and on their access to economic opportunities (Gruber, 1998). Although, end of the Eritrean/Ethiopian war likely to have a negative effect on the economic participation of women because male workers tend to be the first to be employed in post-war jobs and enterprises, improvement in the availability and efficiency of the economic activities of women, and in turn their well-being, therefore is critical (NUEW, 1993; Tekle, 1996; Ruth, 1997; Rena, 2005).

### ***1.1 Objectives of the study and data collection Method***

Keeping the Eritrean women employment problem in view, an attempt has been made to focus on answering the question of what determines women's labour force participation in Eritrea. In addition, the paper tries to assess whether women are being discriminated in the labour market or not? Finally, this paper provides certain implications in identifying how women's earnings can be raised in order for the growing number of female household heads to become more self-reliant.

As part of the study, data were collected from secondary sources mainly government documents, survey reports of NUEW and UNICEF, research articles, news papers (Eritrea profile), books and other published and unpublished materials on Eritrea by and about Eritrean People Liberation Front (EPLF). The methodology used in this paper is essentially a descriptive analysis of data obtained from the secondary sources. The author personally observed and informally discussed with the women employees particularly the ex-fighters. About 15 women employees were met in this regard and their view are inserted in the analysis. Due to the problem of confidentiality, the names of the women fighters and their case studies are not mentioned in the paper. This study has limitations in

a way that it has confined to the women and their employment problems in the country only. However, various other issues that are related to women employment such as wage discrimination, male employees' attitudes towards the women employees etc., are not discussed in detail. The broader issues of the labour market and the women participation in economic development are beyond the scope of the paper.

The article is been composed of five sections. First section deals with introduction objective and methodology and provides socioeconomic background of the country. Section two delves the women and their employment in Eritrea both pre and post independent periods. Section three highlights the role of the NUEW and Government in the development of Women. Section four devoted to present the results and discussion of the paper with certain implications in the development women and business in the country and the final section provides some concluding remarks.

### ***1.2 Socioeconomic Background of Eritrea***

Eritrea was an Italian colony from 1890 until the Second World War when it was temporarily taken over by Britain and finally federated with Ethiopia by a UN resolution in 1952. The incorporation of Eritrea into the Ethiopian Empire in 1962 followed the Eritrean armed struggle for independence that started in 1961 and lasted until 1991. Eritrea got its independence in 1991 after thirty years freedom struggle.<sup>3</sup> It is located in the Horn of Africa, bordered in the North and West by Sudan, in the South by Ethiopia and Djibouti and in the East by the Red Sea. It is a small country with 125,000 square k.m.(or over 48,000 square miles). It has an estimated population of about 4 million. Women in Eritrea composed of more than 51 per cent in the society and the sex ratio is 51:49. The population is culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse with nine major ethnic groups<sup>4</sup> consist of both the Christian and the Muslim. Eritrea has nine ethnic groups and six administrative zobas (provinces/regions). It is also one of the poorest countries in the world with the per capita income estimated at around US\$ 200 and the poverty rate is 66.5 per cent in 2006. It has experienced a modest economic growth rate of 4 per cent and Eritrean Diaspora remittances contribute 40-50 per cent of its GDP. Its annual population growth is estimated at 2.9 percent in 2006. The Gross National Accessibility to schooling in 2003-2004 was reported to be 5.1 per cent, 56.6 per cent, 43.4 per cent and 27.2 per cent in pre-primary, elementary, middle and secondary education respectively. Its literacy rate is 60 per cent. Almost 50 per cent of the employees are working under National Service for about \$ 25-30 per month. The women employees are about 45-50 per cent in the total work force (see section 2.3). Like the economies of many African nations, the economy is largely based on subsistence agriculture, with 75 per cent of the population involved in farming and herding however the agriculture contributes only 16 per cent to its national income (National Statistics Office, 2003; Rena, 2006a). Eritrea's coastlines extend about 1200 kms, flanked by coral reefs and 354 islands, including the important Dahlak Archipelago. Since its independence, the country has been undertaking number of developmental programs in rebuilding its war-damaged economy.

Eritrean society is ethnically heterogeneous. The largest ethnic group is the Tigrinya who composes up to 50 per cent of the population, while the Tigre makes up another 31.4 per cent. The balance of the Eritrean population is made up by the smaller populations. Each nationality speaks a different native tongue, but typically, many of the minorities speak more than one language. The most recent addition to the nationalities of Eritrea is the Rashaida. The Rashaida came to Eritrea in the 19th century from the Arabian Coast. The Rashaida do not typically intermarry, are typically nomadic, and number approximately 61,000. The Kunama were originally the only settled peoples in Eritrea. They adopted rain-fed agriculture and settled into communal villages. They originally settled in the 'lowlands' of Eritrea. Many languages Tigrigna, Arabic, Italian and English are widely spoken in Eritrea. The local Tigrigna and the wider Arabic language are the two predominant languages for official purposes. The dominant religions are Christianity and Sunni Islam, each group representing roughly 50 per cent of the population. The Christians consist primarily of the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahdo Church, which is the local Oriental Orthodox church, but small groups of Roman Catholics, Protestants, and other denominations also exist (NUEW, 1995; Wikipedia, on line encyclopedia).

The Eritrean region has traditionally been a nexus for trade throughout the world. Because of this the influence of diverse cultures can be seen throughout Eritrea. Today the most obvious influences in the capital, Asmara, is that of Italy. Throughout Asmara, you may find small cafes serving beverages common to Italy. In the town of Keren there is a clear merging of the Italian colonial influence with the traditional Tigre lifestyle. In the smaller villages of Eritrea these changes never took hold. Traditional Eritrean dress is quite varied with the Kunama traditionally dressing in brightly colored clothes while the Tigrigna and Tigre traditionally dress in bright white clothing. The Rashaida women are ornately bejeweled and scarved (NUEW, 1998; Wikipedia, on line encyclopedia). Most of the Eritreans eat enjira made of teff locally produced grain. Female circumcision is rampant.<sup>5</sup> Dowry system is still practiced in both rural and urban areas with few exceptions.

### ***1.3 Traditional Status of Women***

Men are historically the bread-winners in the Eritrean society. This position of men in society compounded with the patriarchal culture that gave men a greater opportunity in having an easy access to economic resources and education, and then ultimately left women in a subordinate position at all levels of the society and the state (Lionel and Basil, 1988; Negash, 1997). Women in Eritrea have long been under-represented at all levels of governance – as voters, candidates, party leaders, and elected officials at the local government levels. Cultural taboos and illiteracy etc. have impeded women's participation in the economic development and political process. Cultural norms and structures can also make it difficult to participate in the development process. Besides, Eritrean traditions and culture are often described as traditional and patriarchal with regard to women. Several factors influence the current circumstances of girls and women and hamper their greater social and economic participation (NUEW, 1993; Rena, 2007).

Although, some variations exist among Eritrea's nine ethnic groups, social life follows a predominantly patriarchal system. As in many other cultures, Eritrean women are largely expected to play the roles of wife and mother (Negash, 1997; Tronvoll, 1998). Girls are often encouraged to be quiet and mild, and being assertive or taking a leadership role is generally looked down upon.<sup>6</sup> Traditionally, girls could be pledged in marriage before they were born and were typically married around age 12 particularly in rural Eritrea (Wilson, 1991; Veronica, 1993; Gruber, 1998). Fathers would make the marriage decisions, and kidnapping and forced marriage have been accepted practices. Dowry system for the bridegroom has been commonly practiced. Although, the Eritrean Laws on Marriage strictly forbids dowry practices, however, these customs persist in many areas of the country (Connell, 1993).

Muslim and Coptic Christians in Eritrea differ with regard to their traditions, social practices, and gender-related attitudes. Variations in the level of restrictions placed on women also exist among different groups. It observed that there are also significant differences between pastoralist and nomadic groups in terms of women's responsibilities for such aspects as farming, packing tents, or caring for livestock. However, in general, women have been excluded from ownership of the means of production i.e., land and livestock (Halden, 1997; Tronvoll, 1998). The majority of people in the lowlands are Muslim. The participation of women in agriculture is limited and follows strict religious prescriptions regarding gender roles. However, their responsibilities in the home are wide ranging; in addition to common household chores, they take care of family members, sell what the family produces at markets, and make purchases. An exception to this pattern is found in the western lowlands among Kunama women, who take part in all farming activities (NUEW, 1995; Connell, 1998; UoA and MoA, 1998).

As is true in other countries and regions of the world, a fundamentalist version of Islam is spreading among the Eritrean population, bringing with it increasingly restrictive mandates for women (Halden, 1997; Tronvoll, 1998). Among some ethnic groups today particularly, in Tigre, Rashaida, Sahoo and Afar the women are restricted to their homes, have no public role, and must keep their faces covered. In this context, the opportunities of most girls and women have been severely limited for the employment. It is also to be noted that there is very meager or nil enrollment in the higher education from these ethnic groups. Literacy levels are lower among girls than boys, largely because they typically stay at home to perform household tasks (including fetching water, doing wash, gathering firewood, preparing meals, and caring for younger siblings). Men rarely participate in such activities (Connell, 1998; UoA and MoA, 1998; Rena, 2005, pp. 36-37).

Besides, some 10 per cent of the urban population is refugees who have returned home since 1991. However, one million Eritreans are still believed to live abroad, and many send their repatriation amount home country. The high level of remittances income sent from abroad has opened up for labour migration into Eritrea of Ethiopians, who constitutes some 10 per cent of the urban population.<sup>7</sup> This is illustrated by the pattern of marital status, indicating that nearly half of all urban households are female headed. The

largest group is the widows, constituting some 35 per cent of urban female-headed households (Bernal, 2001). Since many men have died from "non-natural" causes, widows are not necessarily old. As early as in their 40s, almost 20 per cent of women are widowed, and most widows have children living in the household. The second largest group (30 per cent) of female heads is married women with men absent on labour migration, followed by divorced women (25 per cent). Again, most of these women have children. Women who have not (yet) married constitute a small group. They are commonly young, and few of them have children. All these cultural taboos and other socio-economic factors have become major impediments for the women to enter the labour market (Arneberg, 1999).

The 30 years of liberation war damaged most remaining economic and physical infrastructure. Economic growth after liberation has been at some 7 -8 per cent per year, based heavily on foreign aid and remittances as well as the promotion of private investment (Rena, 2005). The outbreak of the new war between Ethiopia and Eritrea in May 1998 has regrettably reversed the ongoing economic development. The population structure in Eritrea bears the sign of war and migration with high fertility (5.6) coupled with a lack of adults. There is a particular lack of adult men in the country, with 82 and 90 men per 100 women in urban and rural areas respectively. In urban areas, there are almost twice as many women as there are men in the age group from 30 to 40 years (National Statistics Office, 1997, p. 10).

## **2. WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT IN ERITREA**

### ***2.1 EPLF and the Woman in Pre-Independence Period***

Traditionally, all-male councils of elders had run Eritrean villages. Women had no formal role in public life—it was a male preserve. The EPLF's opening of its ranks to women, without any limitation on the kind of activities that females could undertake, was thus a momentous event (Ruth, 1983). Women's involvement in the EPLF, politically and militarily, was unprecedented. They participated in local and regional political structures, both in liberated areas and behind enemy lines. They secured the right to vote and to be elected to public office. Many of them assumed positions in village councils and regional committees. During the independence struggle, women served in EPLF alongside men in all capacities except the top ranks of leadership. It is reported that almost 33 per cent of Eritrean freedom fighters were women (Wilson, 1991, p.12). Thus, Eritrean women have the equal potentiality to contribute substantially for the achievement of freedom and economic development of Eritrea. As guerilla fighters, women fought side by side with men in mixed units and marched to victory with their male comrades (James and Stuart, 1985). In fact, the image of a khaki-clad woman warrior brandishing a rifle became emblematic of the nationalist movement. The woman fighter seemed to signify Eritreans' determination to fight on to the last man and, beyond him, to the last woman. The woman fighter also served as a symbol of the grassroots nature of the movement, which drew Eritreans from all walks of life and all

ethnic groups. Within EPLF, national liberation and advancement for women were seen as going hand in hand (Bernal, 2001, pp.133-134).

Women were drawn to the cause of Eritrean independence from the beginning. Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), however, limited women's participation to that of support, helping to supply the movement with provisions and information. Like ELF, EPLF also began as an all-male organization. But in 1973, when three women attempted to join the rebels, they were allowed to stay and were given military training. Thus, EPLF soon began to openly recruit women as fighters. Many of the first women fighters came from urban and educated backgrounds, but they were quite successful in mobilizing other women from rural as well as urban areas. Women from all ethnic backgrounds and walks of life joined the movement (Bernal, 2001, p.133). Fighters<sup>8</sup> had many duties besides serving on the front lines, however. EPLF maintained a base area with schools, hospitals, repair shops, and small factories. EPLF produced its own soap, rubber sandals<sup>9</sup> (which were worn by fighters), artificial limbs, pharmaceuticals, medical supplies, and even sanitary napkins (EPLF, 1989). EPLF also administered and provided services such as health care and education to populations in the areas liberated from direct Ethiopian control. Women received formal military training, and they lived and fought side by side with men in mixed units (Ruth, 1983; Doris, 1989). According to Worku Zerai, one of the first three women to become a fighter, rather than being spared from combat, the majority of women fighters were, in fact, assigned to combat duty because they lacked specialized skills that could contribute significantly to support activities (Worku, 1994).

Within its own ranks, EPLF attempted to put gender equality into practice. According to EPLF, women would gain equality through participation in political activities and socially productive labour (Stefanos, 1988). This was summed up in the slogan "Equality through Equal Participation." The approach of EPLF, in practice, was to expand the notions of what women could do and to break down gender barriers that had kept women out of certain kinds of work. Thus, women fighters were trained to work as mechanics, drivers, carpenters, and barefoot doctors, among other occupations (Doris, 1989). Furthermore, male fighters took part in food preparation and other tasks usually reserved for women in Eritrean communities (Erich and Tammy, 1996; Ruth, 1997). Besides, EPLF's approach to gender equality was grounded in Marxist ideas rather than feminist ones, however, and policies regarding gender were conceived and implemented in a top-down fashion by male leadership rather than by women themselves. Women was part of the cultural revolution advocated by EPLF, which saw itself as struggling against "backward," "reactionary," and "feudal" elements of traditional culture, as well as against colonialism (Bernal, 2001, p.135). However, recruiting women also served the pragmatic need to maintain a strong fighting force despite the heavy toll of war upon the entire population of Eritrea (Mary, 1980). The EPLF slogan, "No Liberation without Women's Participation", thus accurately depicts the hierarchy of goals in which national liberation was central and women's emancipation figured as one of the means to that end. There was no independent women's movement in Eritrea, only the male-led EPLF, which took up certain issues concerning the status of women and mobilized women to achieve the goal of national independence (Bernal, 2001, p.134).



An important component of the Front's strategy of popular mobilization was the formation of mass organizations (James and Stuart, 1985). EPLF created associations of peasants, workers, and youth as well as a women's organization, the National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW). Worku Zerai rightly points out, however, that NUEW never articulated its own goals as being distinct from the nationalist goals of EPLF; NUEW simply implemented programs that came from the top (Worku, 1994, pp. 35-36). Moreover, no woman served on EPLF's executive committee during the war, and the use of seniority in allocating positions of authority worked against women since the first members of the Front were all men. Besides, women and men dress alike in khaki and rubber sandals and wear their hair "Afro" style. Indeed, one foreign visitor to the field reported difficulty distinguishing women from men (Olivier and Claire, 1982, p. 25). Therefore, most of the women fighters felt like a man and faced the similar challenges as men in the front. The construction of women as not only equal to men but as male equivalents meant, however, that some profound issues of gender relations were not so much transformed by EPLF's cultural revolution as repressed and rendered invisible (Bernal, 2000, p. 64).

The Front's initial approach to issues of sexual relations was an attempt to suppress them. At first EPLF required its members to be celibate, forbidding fighters to have sexual relations with civilians and, after women joined the Front, forbidding sex between fighters. Responding to the reality of intimate relationships among fighters, EPLF introduced its own marriage law in 1977 based on a view of marriage as the partnership of a man and a woman who are each free individuals exercising choice, a radical departure from the marriage practices of Eritrean communities. EPLF not only forbade the repudiation of non-virgin brides, it encouraged premarital sex among its members and made contraceptives available and it is reported that most fighter couples engaged in sex before marriage (Doris, 1989; Worku, 1994; John, 1998).

Even as EPLF officially recognized the marital relationships and families formed in the field, it accorded them little social status in practice. Fighters lived a collective life, eating and sleeping with members of their unit (Doris, 1989; Tekle, 1991; NUEW, 1993). Loyalty to EPLF was to be un-compromised by other attachments. In the Front, fighters had little or no contact with their families of origin and such contacts were discouraged. Spouses were routinely assigned separate work duties, with permission given to spend one month of the year together (Mary, 1980). Children were routinely separated from their parents. Mothers were permitted to spend the first six months with their infants, after which the children were raised communally. Initially the children of fighters were all raised in one institution along with orphans. Since there was no proper care, thus, the children apparently did not develop properly. Therefore, the Front decided to allow children to be raised collectively by the unit of their parent(s) (Doris, et al., 1985). Many domestic tasks such as cooking, gathering firewood, carrying water, and child rearing were organized as collective responsibilities that were carried out as public work by all members of the unit in turn (Doris, 1989). It is important to note that some tasks, such as making *enjera* (the staple bread eaten with most meals) and carrying water, were used as

punishment in the freedom struggle. The Front revolutionized the social position of women by making them equal to men in all aspects (Bernal, 2001).

## ***2.2 Woman in Post-Independence Period***

During three decades of war, family life was disrupted, kin were scattered, and domestic and ritual routines were upset (Berhane, 1993; Rena, 2006a). But with independence achieved and their guerrilla warfare days behind them, the first thing many fighters wanted was to reestablish family ties and to start their own families. As EPLF fighters became civilians, extended families were reunited and the older generation once again influenced over the lives of sons and daughters. Since 1991, when EPLF fighters returned to join Eritrean society at large, there has been a resurgence of the domestic that has meant very different things for women and men fighters as they resume their lives or improvise new lives as civilians. Women ex-fighters were painfully caught between the revolutionary aspirations they learned in the Front and the more conventional values and gendered expectations asserted by Eritreans in the civilian context.

Once the liberation struggle ended, Eritrean women fighters confronted a new struggle to build secure economic, political, and social positions for themselves within the nation. Women fighters who had spent much of their adult lives in the guerrilla movement faced the particular challenges of reintegrating into civilian life. The marriages and divorces of women ex-fighters were big topics of discussion in Asmara during 1995–96. At that time, there was a widespread perception among men and women that women fighters were being divorced by their fighter husbands in favor of civilian brides (Bernal, 2001). The majority of women fighters lacked resources, skills, and jobs. Some women ex-fighters felt they were being devalued in the new society of independent Eritrea. It is to be observed that some women ex-fighters are not in a position to earn Nacfa 500 per month (less than \$30 dollars) doing some pet jobs like public parking care takers and office clerks/secretaries.

It also observed that even in some cases, where a woman and a man have completed the same level of education where employed around the same time man tend to move to higher position faster than woman. The main factors that make the women inferior to men are: i] most employers or managers aspect the men and feel that men are more clever and hard-working than women; ii] some managers have the view, that women are less productive than men; and iii] some employers will term women employees as less reliable and inefficient. Due to these reasons, the women occupy lower positions in the society, and they did not get an opportunity to acquire adequate education and skill. The family assigned the women only to the household and given more chance to the men rather than to the women.

## ***2.3 Female employees in the Economy***

In 1996, women made up more than 40 per cent of the total workforce in Eritrea. The role of women in the micro-enterprise sector is even more important. Women own 46 per cent of these businesses, a figure that decreases as the size of the enterprise

increases.<sup>10</sup> Women also make up a major part of the large-manufacturing workforce—in particular, in the garments, leather, and tobacco industries. This participation probably increased during the war with Ethiopia as a result of the military mobilization of a large proportion of the male workforce (Stefanos, 1997; Wudassie, 1997; NUEW, 1998). Women make up 50 per cent of the workforce in the public sector, compared with 22 per cent in the private sector. About 80 per cent of the workforce in women-owned enterprises is female.<sup>11</sup>

The youth unemployment rate is around 50 per cent. Although fewer girls than boys are registered as unemployed (20-30 per cent), girls appear to have more problems finding a job. Nearly one-third are illiterate or have only elementary school education.<sup>12</sup> Women are engaged primarily as unskilled labor in the production process. Skilled women represent a very small percentage (7.4 per cent) of employment in large enterprises. In both public and private sector offices, women do predominantly secretarial work, with little participation in management. It observed that the average age of women factory workers is 35 years. About 12 per cent of the women workers, mainly those in public factories, are older than 50 years of age. Many of the women workers started working in these factories when they were very young(Stefanos,1997; Wudassie, 1997; Gerde, 2001).

Wudassie in her study (1997) concluded that managers and the heads of enterprises have a positive perception of women's work performance. In her interviews with managers, "they mentioned that women employees are disciplined and devoted to their work, careful and efficient in their activities, responsible and decisive in their positions, tolerant when faced with challenging work, receptive to new ideas and training, dependable and uncorrupted, and creative in fostering a positive work environment". This favorable opinion contrasts sharply with the reality of low-paying jobs and the factors that limit women's employability. Chief among these is that many Eritrean women—in particular, during the war—have carried the burden of family responsibilities. This trend is in turn exacerbated by the fact that many demobilized women fighters have not gone back to their families and therefore lack social support for childcare ((Wudassie, 1997, p. 42)

The number of female-headed households is estimated to be 20-30 per cent. In addition, social and cultural barriers prevent women's advancement, including the popular belief that women should not work outside the home. As stated by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), "The main reason for job misplacement, loss of seniority or promotion, and [low] wages of women is due to frequent pregnancy coupled with the demands for childbearing that results in absenteeism (Wudassie, 1997, p. 42)

Women's low education level is another limiting factor. Only about half of women workers are literate, and 35 per cent have only an elementary school education. Most vocational training schools are oriented toward male-dominated professions such as mechanics and woodworking (UNICEF, 1994; Stefanos, 1988). However, it is to be noted that there are women in the construction industry, taxi and truck drivers, barbers etc. Thus

the women are entering into different fields for their survival. In addition, the low level of education of women limits their flexibility to accept other jobs in industry. Consequently, they often do the same job for years and have less chance to upgrade their experience and receive training than do their male counterparts (John, 1998; Rena, 2007). It observed that very few women benefit from enterprise-level training because many are in non-regular employment and lack the necessary seniority and qualifications. In addition, it is more difficult for women to take evening classes because of their childcare and household responsibilities.

Half of the enterprises—in particular, small and medium-sized ones, consider a lack of qualified workers to be a significant problem.<sup>13</sup> Sex-segregation in the labour market appears to be strong in Eritrea. Thirty-six per cent of Medium Scale Enterprises (MSEs) employ only women, whereas 45 per cent do not have any women employees at all.<sup>14</sup> Although, women hold many jobs traditionally reserved for men—for example, in construction—they will most certainly lose these jobs as men in the military are demobilized and re-enter the labour market. As stated earlier, women do make up the majority of workers in garment, leather, and tobacco industries. These industries have export potential, but their wage levels are low (Stefanos, 1997; Wudassie, 1997; Gerde, 2001; Rena, 2006a). In order to understand the real situation, additional research is necessary to measure possible gender-related distortions, including pay differential and pay discrimination both among and within various types of jobs, differences in human capital, and differences in available jobs and types of jobs accepted.

Indeed, women in rural Eritrea play important roles in all productive activities, including male activities such as farming. These roles vary according to religious, ethnic, and regional affiliations (Halden, 1997). It observed that women living in the highlands and mid-altitude areas are predominantly Christian and actively participate in the social and economic life of the community on a more or less equal basis with men. In agriculture, women take part in such activities as weeding, clearing fields, harvesting, and transporting crops. Women do not, however, plow; women who are widowed, divorced, or unmarried depend on male relatives or acquaintances to plow their fields (Rena, 2007).

The Composition of the persons engaged in manufacturing sector indicates that there was a high rate of female participation in the manufacturing sector. It can be seen from the table-1 that the number of female workers increased from 5,591 in 1998 to 6,151 in 2001. As indicated in table-2, the rate of female employees in the manufacturing sector increased from 43.7 per cent in 1999 to 45.4 per cent in 2001. Thus this ratio reveals that the rate of female employment in the sector is increasing yearly. The high rate of female participation may be due to a large number of women enrolled in textile industry. In 2001, female employees engaged in textile industry numbered 2,141 and accounted for about 77.9 per cent of the total enrollment in textile industry. The foreigners engaged in manufacturing sector accounted for only four per cent of the total number of persons engaged. It is interesting to find that the non-Eritrean male percentage gradually declined

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from 4 per cent in 1999 to 2.5 per cent in 2001. This indicates that Eritrea is moving towards self-reliance. Most of these are engaged in manufacture of bakery, textiles and knitting, manufacturing of non-refractory clay and ceramic products. The table further reveals that the total number of employees by occupation almost remained the same with slight changes.

**Table -1 Composition of persons engaged by sex and Nationality 2001.**

Description	1998		Total person engaged	2001		
	Unpaid workers	Total Number of Employees		Unpaid workers	Total Number of Employees	Total person engaged
Eritrean male	304	8,037	8,341	191	6,760	6,951
Eritrean female	56	5,591	5,647	88	6,151	6,239
Total	360	13,628	13,988	279	12,911	13,190
Non-Eritrean male	10	987	997	17	334	351
Non- Eritrean female	1	438	439	6	189	195
Total	11	1,425	1436	23	523	546
Total male	314	9,024	9,338	208	7,094	7,302
Total female	57	6,029	6086	94	6,340	6,434
<b>Grand total</b>	<b>371</b>	<b>15,053</b>	<b>15,424</b>	<b>302</b>	<b>13,434</b>	<b>13,736</b>

Source: Ministry of Trade and Industry (June 2003) Eritrea Statistical Report on Census of Manufacturing Establishments-2001. Asmara: Ministry of Trade and Industry.

**Table - 2 Number of workers by Nationality, sex, occupation.**

Indicators	1999	2000	2001
<b>Persons Engaged</b>	<b>14,053 (100.0%)</b>	<b>13,350(100.0%)</b>	<b>13,736(100.0%)</b>
Eritrean Male	7,082 (50.39%)	6,891(51.61%)	6,951(50.60%)
Eritrean Female	6,143 (43.71%)	5,923(44.36%)	6,239(45.42%)
Non-Eritrean Male	583(4.14%)	430(3.22%)	351(2.56%)
Non-Eritrean Female	245 (1.74%)	106 (0.79%)	195(1.41%)
<b>Total number of employees by occupation</b>	<b>13,774(100.0%)</b>	<b>13,093(100.0%)</b>	<b>13,434(100.0%)</b>
Administrative employees	2,020(14.67%)	1,971(15.05%)	2,005(14.92%)
Technical employees	2,429 (17.63%)	2,392(18.26%)	2,495 (18.58%)
Production workers	9,325(67.70%)	8,730(66.68%)	8,934(66.50%)

Source: Ministry of Trade and Industry (June 2003) Eritrea: Industrial Statistics 1999-2001, Statistical bulletin, Asmara: Ministry of Trade and Industry.

Note: Figures in parenthesis indicate the percentages in relation to total.

### 3. THE NUEW, GOVERNMENT AND WOMEN

The National Union for Eritrean Women (NUEW) a women association in Eritrea had played an important role in drafting the Constitution of Eritrea by organizing workshops and sensitizing women on the crucial issues that concern women (Connell, 1998). It is the only big Women organization that addresses women's needs in Eritrea (Bernal, 2000). The NUEW is administered by a headquarters office located in Asmara, as well as by regional offices located in all six zones. It has the membership of over 200,000 women. Besides, the NUEW continues to play a key role in advocating for, monitoring, and

evaluating the formulation/planning and implementation of government policies and programs from a gender perspective. The NUEW's mission is "to promote gender equality and the development of women as an integral part of the political, economic, social, and cultural sphere." NUEW intervenes in various sectors, including health, education, and agriculture. It has received support from donors for its loan fund that operates outside Asmara, but repayment rates have been low because of the war. NUEW also organizes 3-6 month training courses for women in such areas as computer training, obtaining a driver's license, catering, and handicrafts. Women generally obtain information through family events, such as marriages and funerals, and through women's groups called *urq'ud*. These groups typically have 10-15 women members who save and pool their money. The money is disbursed either to one or group of people consists less than five.

The NUEW is striving hard to achieve the following objectives.

1] The development of women's confidence in themselves and respect for one another, and the raising of consciousness to ensure their rights in the political and legal systems; 2] Laws that protect women's rights in the family: entitlement rights and other civil laws; 3] Equal access to education and employment opportunities: equal pay for equal work and equal rights to skills development to promotion; 4] Improved access to adequate health care, paid maternity leave, and child care services; 5] The eradication of harmful traditional practices that endanger women's health and well-being; and 6] The reduction of poverty for Eritrean women and their families. To give the women better opportunities to participate in the economic development of Eritrea- a National Action Plan has been drafted.

### ***3.1 The National Action Plan***

A new National Gender Action Plan, covering the period 2003 – 2008, has been developed and endorsed by the Government. It has subsequently been distributed to all key stakeholders. Its main objective is 'To achieve equal opportunities and capabilities for women, men, girls and boys of different categories to participate in and access resources, and benefit from a supportive, sustainable and appropriate economic, legal, social and political development system'.

This objective would be pursued through the following strategies:

- 1]. Mainstream gender in policies, programs and projects in all sectors of the economy taking into consideration ways that empower women and men who have been disadvantaged
- 2]. Promote equal opportunities and increase capability of women and men to have access to and control over resources that would enable poverty reduction in a sustainable way.
- 3]. Increase the visibility of women in forms that recognize their contribution to productive, reproductive and community activities in relation to those done by men

4]. Produce, maintain and disseminate gender sensitive information, gender disaggregated data and gender sensitive indicators in forms that will be used in planning, implementation and monitoring of progress made at all levels and in all sectors

5]. Develop capacity of main actors in various sectors to undertake gender planning, analysis and monitoring to enable effective implementation of this Action Plan and other gender related policies and programs in Eritrea

6]. Develop, plan and advocate for gender sensitive budgets that enables allocation or reallocation of resources to gender responsive programs and projects

7]. Strengthen and/or establish gender networking at institutional level between and among government, Non-government, and private sector on issues of mainstreaming gender in their policies, programs and projects.

The Action Plan identifies priority areas of concern in the Eritrean context, which are:

- Women, power and decision making
- Education and training of women and girls
- Women and health
- Women, the economy and poverty
- Human rights of women, violence against women and armed conflict;

In addition to cross-cutting priority areas, namely:

- Women and the environment
- HIV/AIDS
- Gender disaggregated data

The Action Plan continues from there to lay out specific strategic objectives, planned actions, indicators to monitor progress and the institutional actors to be involved in implementation and/or monitoring.

Different stakeholders, including government ministries and non-governmental organizations were involved in the preparation of the Gender Action Plan, which was led by the NUEW.

#### *Activities and Strengths of the NUEW*

Although NUEW has its shortcomings, the organization has certain strengths like it is been working hard in conducting its operations in remote rural areas, and access to the GSE. Three areas of support would capitalize on those foundations, like:

1] The NUEW could play a similar brokering role between donors and initiatives around Eritrean development to ensure that resources reach those who are doing effective work but are not represented in Asmara.

2] Strong regional and local branches and reliable information will enable NUEW to become a credible representative of women's needs. To play this role, NUEW staff will require training in advocacy and organizational and strategic planning.

3] Information is a key component of advocacy activities (that is, fostering public awareness and influencing policy, legislation, and the allocation of resources). NUEW's scope enables it to observe and report the conditions and needs of women throughout Eritrea; the organization should take advantage of this position to expand its advocacy activities and increase its influence.

4] Some ministries are highly effective in their focus on women's advancement, including the Ministries of Justice and Education. Others, such as the Ministry of Agriculture, maintain separate units to address women's issues (for example, the Home Economics Unit) but would benefit from assistance in integrating gender perspectives into all their programs. There also are ministries that appear unaware of the gender-related implications of their policies or the opportunities available to integrate gender into their work. These include the Ministries of Transport and Communications, Information (which includes the Department of Public Works), Tourism, and Macro Policy.

5] It might also be possible for NUEW to facilitate the development of gender expertise by assisting government offices, businesses, and associations to identify gender-related issues that they confront and to design programmatic responses. This process would require a serious investment, perhaps involving three to four women who would receive in-depth training and then serve as trainers. Such individuals would probably be most effective as independent advisors, with NUEW serving as a broker by identifying those individuals with skills and matching them with public or private entities that are in need of guidance. There is a need to develop a women's committee within the Chamber of Commerce, as well as interest in such a project from the Federation of Eritrean Employers. In addition, a group of businesswomen should evolved in focusing on humanitarian support and fund-raising. In this regard, women could help women in business (NUEW, 1998).

### ***3.2 Women and the Legal Framework***

Following the referendum of 1993, the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) and the Government of the State of Eritrea (GSE) launched a series of legal reforms aimed at women, including the adoption of provisions in the 1997 Eritrean Constitution.<sup>15</sup> The Constitution favors the rights of women by mandating "the Legislature to enact laws designed to eliminate inequalities in the Eritrean society because of gender discrimination." Specifically, Article 7 prohibits "any act that violates the human rights of women or limits or otherwise thwarts their role and participation." Further, the GSE has repealed provisions of civil and penal codes that discriminate against women. As a result, laws forbid dowry and kidnapping, women have the right to choose their spouses and to initiate divorce, and the legal age for marriage is now 18. The penal code has also been amended to exclude discriminatory clauses and to add protections for women. The Land



Proclamation entitles women to equal ownership of land, stating that "every citizen, man or woman, has the right of access to land for housing and farming upon the attainment of the age of 18(GSE, 1994)."

Both the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) and the GSE have done a great deal for women.<sup>16</sup> Even before Eritrean independence was achieved, the EPLF promoted laws and policies within the areas that it controlled that secured the rights of women to land and equal pay for equal work, as well as their position in the family. Beginning at the community level, the EPLF established new norms regarding women's status, participation, and leadership. Furthermore, in the national and regional assemblies 30 per cent of seats are reserved for women.<sup>17</sup> Women compete against each other for the votes of both men and women. Women also run against men for the remaining 70 per cent of seats.

In November 1994, the GSE issued a Macro Policy Document. The Human Resources Development and Population Policy section contains a clause (No. 13.5) on gender issues that stipulates the following:

All efforts will continue to be made to sensitize and enhance the awareness of society about the decisive role that women play in the socioeconomic, political, and cultural transformation of the country.

- The equal rights of women will be upheld and all laws that detract from those rights will be changed.
- Participation of women in education, economic activities, and employment will be expanded.
- Appropriate labor-saving technologies will be introduced to reduce the drudgery of women in the household and in other activities.
- Mother-child health care services will be improved and expanded.

#### **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

It is believed that if the women are given rights and posting in a good position they show their talent and capability and will contribute more to the welfare of the society and the country as a whole (Bernal, 2001). It is to be noted that now-a-days, the Eritrean women are united among themselves and organising different associations like other African countries and to try to bring changes in the tradition of the society that oppress the right of its women. Thus, these African women association also made relationship with the European, Asian women and are sharing ideas and experience. They showed their capability to the society that they placed in any field based on their ability and manifested their talent in higher-level studies. Indeed, Education has a strong, positive effect on the probability of being employed in the wage sector, whereas the effect on self-employment is much smaller. For men, education above basic level has insignificant or and even negative effect on the probability of being self-employed. This strengthens the general impression that people with higher education aspire for public administration jobs, and

that self-employment is considered as a last resort except for a small group of entrepreneurial people (NUEW, 1995; Rena, 2006a).

The relationship between economic activity and age shows some similarities for men and women. Most teenagers go to school, and few enter the workforce before 20, may be due to their economic hardships (Bernal, 2001). The activity rate peaks from early 30s to mid-40s and declines thereafter. However, while most men are economically active when they reach 30, the activity rate for women hardly gets above 50 per cent. The rate declines sharply for women at around 45 years compared to men who do not leave the labour force in large numbers before they get close to 60 years (Arneberg and Pedersen, 1999). While men report health problems as the main reason for not being economically active, inactive women report that they do not wish to be employed and that they are doing housework. Hence, while the observed pattern for men is caused by drop-out from the labour market due to old age and subsequent physical problems, the observed pattern for women is most likely a cohort effect. Although there is a lack of historical data on female labour force participation in Eritrea, the fact that most women work in the houses as maid servants, and there are some house-wives which indicates that women started entering the labour market not long ago (Connell, 1998; Rena, 2006a).

Why the Eritrean women entered into the labour market, can be ascertained by different factors such as: 1) Poverty driven: Women have no other option than to provide for themselves since husbands have become a scarcity and earn very meager amounts. 2) Self reliance: Women have more autonomy than before, and can choose to work and earn their own income and thus become economically independent. 3) Incentive driven: Young women have more education than older women have. The resulting higher earning potential increases their willingness to seek employment (John, 1998; Rena, 2007).

There seems to be a case for all three explanations, as illustrated by the example of divorced women who have very high labour force participation rates. They are facing social exclusion in the sense that they receive little financial support from relatives (Arneberg and Pedersen, 1999), hence there is a case for the explanation that they are driven to the labour market by poverty. However, exclusion and lack of support also make them less dependent on relatives who might refuse them to take a job, which makes a case for the autonomy explanation. To identify the various effects of demographic and other factors on economic activity, we evidently need a multivariate model. The individual choice is based on the person's preferences: If the utility of being employed is greater than the utility of not being employed, the individual will seek employment. However, the autonomy and responsibilities of women will to a large extent be determined by the woman's status within the household and larger family. The autonomy of women to make their own choice with respect to employment is assumed to depend on her closeness to relatives, and particularly a husband and family-in-law (NUEW, 1994-95; Gerde, 2001; Gruber, 1998). We can therefore measure this by her marital status and the absence or presence of a husband. Further, young children who require much care will reduce labour force participation by raising the woman's reservation wage, or equivalently by imposing

a cost on being employed. As self-employment activities generally are assumed to be easier to combine with domestic tasks and lack of autonomy than wage-sector jobs, we allow the effect of demographic characteristics to vary between sectors. The reason is that ex-fighters, who commonly work for the government, receive wages above that of persons with equal level of formal education. This might be justified by the practical experience and training they received during the war or after (Connell, 1998; Rena, 2006a).

The adult labour force participation rate is only 49 per cent; 69 for men and 34 for women. Combined with an unemployment rate at 20 per cent and a skewed population composition, this gives a high dependency burden with 3 dependents for every employed person. As much as 40 per cent of the households have only seasonally employed members or no labour market attachment at all. One out of three households have income from gifts and transfers as their main source of livelihood. Such income is mainly come from relatives residing abroad or elsewhere in Eritrea, as public social assistance is practically non-existent.<sup>18</sup>

The low local activity level and lack of economical self-reliance is a matter of concern for future economic growth and poverty reduction in Eritrea. There are reasons to believe that the foreign labour market will be less accessible in the future, since the main factors that brought Eritreans abroad earlier were their refugee status, and the now declining demand for unskilled labour in the Middle East, America and Europe (Rena, 2006a). As a consequence, domestic production will play a more important role in the provision of income for Eritrean families in the future. Secondly, large cohorts of children will soon enter the labour force. With a continuing low activity level, they are in danger of meeting a labour market too small to absorb them.

Working as self-employed in general seems to be more combinable with lack of autonomy and more family responsibility than wage sector jobs. They are ties to a family-in-law, which married women and widows have, are associated with higher propensity to be self-employed (Gruber, 1998). According to Arneberg and Pedersen (1999) estimates around 25 per cent of urban women (who are Moslems), and for women who have small children. Child-care responsibilities are associated with slightly lower employment probability in both sectors. Whereas having one additional child below 5 years lowers the wage-sector probability by 0.03, the effect on self-employment probability is somewhat lower at 0.02.

The high-skill jobs in government administration, finance, and health and education services are equally common among women and men (around 20 per cent), gender segmentation is more common at the lower end of the job ladder. Construction and transportation is mostly men's work but for the last few years it is observed that some people are entered due to the economic situation (Gruber, 1998). It observed that about 63 per cent of women work in typically low-skill and low-paid sectors such as trade, hotels and restaurants, domestic servants and self-employed small scale manufacturing. Hence the more important role of women in the formal economy does not prevent women from being recruited to work in low-paid industries (Ministry of Trade and Industry,2003;

Rena, 2006a). Women also earn less than men within the same industry. However, women who have received education above basic level seem to be treated equal to men once they have entered the labour market. Systematic gender bias in wages and career mobility is mainly found among people with no or little formal education. Hence, the future for Eritrean women in the labour market looks promising, taking into account the rapidly increasing education level among girls (Rena, 2005).

Besides educated women, women who are former liberation fighters constitute a group who has been able to break through the much of the traditional barriers in the labour market. Female fighters have the same earnings as male fighters, and fighter status alone gives women almost 80 per cent wage increase – twice the effect for men. Once they have entered the labour market, female fighters also seem to have the same promotion opportunities as male fighters. The new demographic setting in Eritrea with husbands who are dead or away on labour migration, increasing number of divorces, women entering the military arena as well as improved access to education for girls, are all factors that contribute to increasing the labour market participation for women. The lack of men has been compensated by higher utilization of women's labour resources, making women more important for the overall economic performance. However, women are clustered in low-status jobs with low returns. This poses a new challenge to policy makers: how to prevent the growing number of female-headed households to fall into poverty? This analysis argues that education is a way to go, but that in order to make any substantial impact, basic education is not enough (John, 1998; NUEW, 1998).

#### ***4.1 Implications for Women Development***

There is a strong need for business development assistance to the owners of small and medium-sized enterprises in Eritrea. This is probably true for men as well as women, but is most evident with regard to women seeking to start or expand their businesses.

Banking the women must be considered as future depositors and borrowers in Eritrea. There is a crucial need to first educate both men and women about what a bank does and how it can be helpful to them. Despite of the efforts made by the NUEW and the Saving and Micro Credit Program (SMCP) encouraging women to participate in micro-finance and developmental activities for women most of the women do not know how a local bank might fit in (Rena, 2006b). This situation can be improved in training loan officers by ensuring that women participate in training programs and that computer skills and familiarity with the Internet are the latest economically valuable skills that can lead to new professions and to which women have limited access (World Bank, 2001). The NUEW should identify sources of training and the women who need it. Linking women and services would likely require the dedication of resources for transportation and/or housing in those instances when training centers or courses are located far from women's homes. It is critical to ensure that women attain such skills and that the computer sector does not become gender segregated. It is also clear that this field will be the focus of job and revenue generation, and it is important that women have a presence in it.

A fund could be created for small women's businesses and gender-related projects. Its establishment would require at least two partners, and a committee with diverse representation would administer it. Activities could include: 1] Translation and dissemination of studies conducted by EPLF that could serve as baselines for further study by NUEW, university departments, or ministries; 2] Development and implementation of a women's oral histories project that would capture the stories of women ex-combatants. NUEW, NUEYS, and anthropology students at universities could carry out this project; 3] Small grants for activities that foster women's advancement and understanding of gender issues; 4] Women students at the University of Asmara have assessed their own needs and impediments to their work and progress. NUEYS has served as a partner in this process, which was completed in April 2001. Similar projects could be initiated elsewhere; 5] Dissemination of success stories about women in business and education, through both broadcast and print media. University students and journalists could carry this out; 6] Development of childcare facilities for demobilized women currently seeking employment and for businesses wishing to provide this service to its female employees with children; 7] the NUEW and other related organizations like National Confederation of Eritrean Workers (NCEDW) could conduct follow-up sessions after NCEW gender workshops; 8] Employers' discrete training needs could be met by matching a particular employer with a training facility or partner; and 9] A mentoring program for businesswomen would help ensure that new female entrepreneurs have positive role models and receive support throughout their endeavors. The Chamber of Commerce could establish and maintain such a program (NCEW, 2001).

Strengthen women's participation in their electoral and legislative systems, improve women's access to justice and public administration, and develop greater capacity to deliver basic services to women.

Government and the private sector throughout Eritrea are clearly committed to achieving gender equity. The translation of this commitment into reality is, however limited with the implementation of gender policies. In addition, women can play a crucial role in Eritrea's socioeconomic development if they are recognized as vital resources and given opportunities to participate. This includes women completing their national service, women entering and active in the formal economy, and rural women. Attention should be paid to gender-based issues and opportunities thus bring more stronger, more positive results and opportunities to support both the development and the gender equity goals of the Eritrean people.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

The role of Eritrean women in thirty years war of independence brought major changes in the country. This analysis of women guerrilla fighters during and after the liberation struggle in Eritrea draws attention to the ways the national arena is itself constructed and the different dynamics of gender in processes of national liberation and nation-building.

By examining the liberation struggle and postwar development in Eritrea, an attempt is made to reveal some of the issues related to women employment. The analysis of gender within EPLF reveals that, to some extent, women were integrated not so much as the equals of men, but as male equivalents. Moreover, within its ranks, EPLF did not so much revolutionize domestic relations as suppress them. After independence women and men faced a resurrection of the domestic, coupled with a profound shift in the nationalist project from one of liberation to one of capitalist development. This shift however, created conditions that marginalize large numbers of people as poor, uneducated, unskilled; women largely fall into these marginalized categories. This suggests that women may have potential allies among some sectors of the male population, and it draws attention to the significance of historical processes as opposed to the character of the male leadership or to men in general.

### **Notes:**

1. The Labor Law in Eritrea has been drafted by representatives of workers, trade unions, NUEW and the various governmental bodies. Eritrean labor law is governed by the Provisional Labor Proclamation No. 8/1991. This proclamation was enforced since September 15/1991. Thus, Article 113(3) abrogated all laws and proclamations that existed prior to this provisional labor proclamation. Article 47 requires an employer to pay the same starting salary for the same work. Thus, this proclamation leaves no room for discrimination based on sex, race, religion or any other ground. Moreover, Article 42(2), as amended by the proclamation No.42/1993, allows a woman to take paid maternity leave of 60 days which is counted after the day of delivery. She can also take paid leave before the delivery day if a doctor confirms so (Article 42.1.3).
2. NUEW has issued a report based on a meeting in December 2000 to recognize the organization's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Discussions from that event have contributed to the setting of an agenda for NUEW's future development.
3. According to UNICEF, the Eritrean war of independence also gave rise to an Eritrean Diaspora as many as about one million fled to other countries where they lived as refugees and exiles (UNICEF, 1994). The armed struggle ended in 1991. More than 65,000 fighters died in the war. Eritrea's independence was officially declared on May 24, 1993 after an internationally supervised national referendum in which Eritreans overwhelmingly voted for the nationhood. At that time, women comprised one-third of the roughly 95,000 fighters in EPLF. In the aftermath of the war, some 30,000 women fighters thus began new lives in Eritrea.
4. The nine ethnic groups are: Afar, Bilen, Hadareb, Kunama, Nara, Rashaida, Saho, Tigre, and Tigrinya. And languages of these ethnic groups are: Afar, Bilen, To Bedawi, Kunama, Nara, Arabic, Saho, Tigre, and Tigrinya respectively.
5. According to a 1997 Eritrean Demographic and Health Survey of 5,054 women nationally, 90 percent of women in Eritrea have undergone the practice of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). Most girls are circumcised while they are under the age of seven. However, the Government issued a Proclamation in March 2007 and prohibited this practice.
6. An exception is the Kunama, a matrilineal group that greatly respects women and affords them significant autonomy and power. At the same time, this central position is closely linked to reproductive roles because women are viewed as maintaining the community precisely because they are mothers. Women in other traditions are not allowed to leave their tents or reveal their faces, even to their husbands. A woman at a time on a monthly basis, or the group as a whole saves for a year and then spends the money on a big celebration.

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*Urqu'd* meetings give women the opportunity to eat, drink, and talk together without the presence or oversight of men.

7. The figures relates to the period before the latest war. At present, most Ethiopians have (temporarily) left Eritrea.

8. Eritreans use the term "fighter" (*tegadelti* in Tigrinya) to include all those who served in EPLF forces in Eritrea during the war.

9. Popularly known as Congo *Shidda*. Eritreans honour these rubber sandals including the president Isaias Afewrki wear on certain occasions like Independence Day, Martyrs Day. Besides, government set up a square with big portray of Congo *Shidda* in the capital city Asmara.

10. For example, there was only 29 percent female ownership of medium-sized enterprises.

11. Source: Different publications and tables of the Ministry of Labor and Human Welfare of the State of Eritrea during the period 1998-2004.

12. "Urban Youth Unemployment and Poverty Eradication in Eritrea," ILO and the Ministry of Labor and Human Welfare of the State of Eritrea, Fabi Consulting & Trading Plc, September 2000.

13. Based on the "Labor Market Trends" section, the Demobilization and Reintegration Program report.

14. A Study of the Private Sector in Eritrea, with a Focus on the Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises, prepared for the Macro Policy and International Economic Cooperation Department, July 1996.

15. In February 1994, the Eritrean National Assembly elected a 50-member Constitutional Commission of which 20 were women members. The Constitution has been ratified but has yet to be implemented.

16. The number of women in the Government is an indication of women's opportunities for decision-making. Three out of 15 ministers are currently women (Justice and Labor, and Human Welfare and Tourism). In the National Parliament, women make up 33 of 150 members (22 percent). Less than 5 percent of director generals (2 of 41) and less than 8 percent of directors are women. There are two female Provincial Governors, and only 3 of 53 (5.7 percent) sub-regional administrators are women. Two of 18 ambassadors are women. At the local level, 30 percent of local assembly (*Baito*) seats are reserved for women. Women's representation in regional (*zoba*) councils increased from 20 percent in 1996 to 30 percent in 1998.

17. Proclamation No.86/1996 on the establishment of Local Government stipulates that 30 per cent of the seats in the Regional Assemblies would be reserved for women and that they would also contest the remaining 70 per cent.

18. The economic analysis is based on data from the first Eritrean Household Income and Expenditure Survey (EHIES) conducted in 5,000 households in the 12 major urban areas of Eritrea during the period from July 1996 to October 1997. The population, inhabiting the 12 towns covered in the EHIES makes up approximately 495 thousand individuals or 115 thousand households, and covers about 57 per cent of the population which for the census is classified as "urban" (based on a very broad definition of urbanity). The survey was conducted by Eritrean National Statistics and Evaluation Office in Asmara in co-operation with Fafo Institute of Applied Social Science in Oslo. The survey was mainly financed by the Norwegian government.

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