

State, civil society & expanding SSE among informal sector women in Ethiopia

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Overview

- **Informal sector organizing under SACCOs/potential for SSE expansion**
- **Conceptualization under circumscribed vision of women's empowerment**
- **CSP law main nexus of contradiction**
- **NGOs ineffective catalysts of change**

3 Main critiques

- **Autonomy**
- **Ideology**
- **Alienation**

Objective: critique SACCO approach in context of an antagonistic state

Gender, poverty & the neoliberal state

- **Post-1991 neoliberal turn under EPRDF**
- **IMF/WB emphasis on a new kind of state – *to ensure conditions for people to act socially in market-conforming fashion***
- **Extra economic concerns – social engineering**
- **Reduced public spending**
- **Massive structural/urban poverty**
- **61% informal sector in Addis**
- **Feminist readings**

Labour appropriation

- **Informal sector & capitalist labour generation**
- **SSE a constitutive response under neoliberalism**
- **Solidarity economies in resistance BUT**
- **SHGs source of contradiction – autonomy vs. institutionalist logic (law)**
- **Recall critiques of micro-lending**

State feminism

- **State feminism obstacle to SSE – NGO mediation and legitimization**
- **State access through women's machinery**
- **EPRDF/TPLF de-politicization & de-radicalization of woman question**
- **Formal cooptation & discourse of 'protection'**
- **Negation of exploitation, incoherent and contradictory state actions towards informal sector**
- **Super-exploitation & restricted accumulation from below**

Dynamics of SACCO organizing

- **Range of informal sector work**
- **Sociological, psychological & economic role of SHGs**
- **Structure/functions:**

Federation (11 CLAs)

Cluster Level Association (6 – 8 SHGs)

Self-Help Group (15 – 20 members)



Observations

- **Modeling & limitations**
- **Autonomy / state suppression of CSOs**
- **Interrogate recuperation of historically unpopular SACCOs:**
 - **Imperial regime (1960-74) – smallholder agric.**
 - **Military regime (1974-92) – socialist economy**
 - **EPRDF/TPLF (1992-) – new legal f/work (2004)**
- **Retreat of state & modified nature of coops**
- **Reactionary state response – CSP law**

Charities & Societies Proclamation law No. 00/2008 (CSP law)

- **Strict, unregulated criminal & admin penalties**
- **Criminalizes human rights activities**
- **Funding restrictions**
- **Outlaws campaigning for gender equality, children's rights, disabled persons rights**
- **Disproportionate penalties for minor breaches**
- **CSA with broad discretionary power over CSOs**
- **Government surveillance, interference in CSO work**

Barriers:

- **Funding restrictions – Reconstitution and refocusing of NGO work;**
- **Liberal-capitalist focus on ‘empowerment’;**
- **From donor-dependence to private sector-dependence;**
- **Silencing of dissidence/weakened solidarity bases;**
- **Discursive shift from language of ‘rights’ assumes ethical questions settled**

Conclusion

- *Autonomy* thus critical – desirable proximity undermined under CSP
- Challenge to “territoriality/localism/subsidiarity”
- SSE under such estrangement of gendered poverty from its structural base?
- Alternative paths to subsistence/life-centered political economies?