
Seventy per cent of Ethiopia’s burgeoning population of 100 million are under the age of 30 years old. Just over half – 35 million – are girls and young women. Securing better futures for girls and women in Ethiopia presents a major challenge, but also an opportunity for Ethiopia, as it seeks to ensure continued and sustainable development for all its citizens.

To build on existing research links and to encourage knowledge exchange between Ethiopia and Ireland on this topic, Trinity College Dublin welcomed two esteemed speakers from Ethiopia: Professor Tesfaye Semela, director of the Centre for Policy and Development Research, Hawassa University and Dr. Alula Pankhurst, Country Director for the Young Lives study in Ethiopia. Ms. Louise Yorke, PhD candidate from the School of Social Work and Social Policy was the third speaker for this event. The event was chaired by Professor Robbie Gilligan, also from the School of Social Work and Social Policy.

The three presentations explored Ethiopia’s past achievements, existing challenges and potential future gains in the areas of gender equality and women’s empowerment. Together they highlighted the critical period of ‘adolescence’ when gender differences in Ethiopia become more pronounced. At this important juncture, girls face a range of economic, social and cultural challenges to their education. While some are forced into marriage, others must weigh the potential benefits of continuing formal education against the decision to enter into marriage. For those who
manage to overcome the range of barriers impeding their education access, the dual burden of paid and domestic work duties can sometimes place significant constraints on their progression and achievement. For the small minority who complete formal education, their futures may still be uncertain due to the limited formal employment opportunities available. As such, many young women see marriage as the only remaining option.

The speakers provided a mixed picture, acknowledging the significant progress made, but also emphasizing the need for ongoing effort and concerted action across a range of fronts to achieve better futures for girls and young women. In particular this included the need to ensure their access to formal education. However, it was also recognized that there should be viable employment opportunities available for young women beyond formal education, in addition to alternative training and paid work options for those outside of formal education. Overall, there was a hopeful sense of the future and an appreciation that progress in this area in Ethiopia will provide an important model for other countries seeking better futures for girls and women.

Professor Susan Murphy from the School of Natural Sciences, Trinity College Dublin provided a response to the three papers, summarizing the key issues that emerged from the three presentations and helping to encourage lively discussion around the issues amongst the participants and attendees.

His Excellency Ambassador Redwan Hussein Rameto, former Minister of Youth and Sport in Ethiopia, was a special guest at the event. The audience members included researchers and academics from Ireland and the UK, individuals from a number of NGOs in Ireland, as well as representatives from Irish Aid. Many of the audience members had experience in Ethiopia.

This event was organised by the School of Social Work and Social Policy and Trinity International Development Initiative. The event was kindly supported by the Irish Research Council New Foundations Scheme, which seeks to promote knowledge exchange between Irish and International researchers.

Photos from the event can be found at https://www.flickr.com/gp/155192916@N07/nnY296

If you require further information on this event please contact yorkel@tcd.ie