

An e-newsletter
to facilitate networking and information exchange among CSOs and researchers

In this Issue

FSS holds 17th General Assembly Meeting



Cornerstone laid for FSS's future headquarters



FSS resumes dialogue on urban public service in AA

– The delivery of Telecom Services in Addis Ababa

– FSS organizes policy dialogue on Taxation Laws and Policies

– State of Private Health Care Service Delivery in Addis Ababa



FSS launches new dialogue series on Poverty and Its Mitigation in Ethiopia

– Role of the Private Sector in Poverty Reduction

– Role of Civil Society Organizations in poverty Reduction.

– Aspects of Rural Poverty and Its solutions

FSS holds 17th General Assembly Meeting

FSS held its 17th Annual General Assembly (GA) meeting on Saturday 14 March 2015 at the construction site of its future headquarters. The GA, thoroughly deliberated and approved the 2014 annual activity and audit reports and the 2015 activity plan.

The GA described the activities performed during the year as remarkable considering financial and man power limitations that the organization faced during the report period, and stressed the need for more efforts to strengthen financial capacity through multifaceted fundraising efforts.

The GA also called on members to continue to support and participate in the various activities of the organization, such as public dialogues and other activities.

The GA also noted the need to formulate strategies that will help FSS to gradually get out of donor dependency. The GA also deliberated on the progress in the construction of its future headquarters and urged the Board, the Management and the broader membership to exert their utmost effort to see the completion of the project. The members on their part assured their readiness to support the Board and the Management in whatever possible way to realize this important project.



The GA Meeting at the future FSS headquarters site

Cornerstone laid for FSS's Future Headquarters

A corner stone was laid for the future construction of FSS Head quarters on Saturday March 14th 2015, on sidelines of the 17th General Assembly. The corner stone was laid by Ato Dessalegn Rahmato, founder and former Executive Director of FSS.

The ceremony was a symbolic move that boosted the spirits of the members, staff and friends of FSS. Speaking on the occasion, FSS Board Chairman, Dr Akililu Kidanu, remarked that, the Board decided to invite Ato Dessalegn Rahmato to put the cornerstone in recognition of his immense contribution to social research in Ethiopia and his role in the establishment of FSS.

Ato Dessalegn, on his part, said he felt honored to be given the chance to lay the cornerstone for FSS' future HQ. He said the construction of FSS' building marked an important milestone in the organization's history and was a major step forward in realizing the causes and ideals for which FSS was established some 17 years ago. The Board, the Management and the Members also renewed their conviction to support the completion of the building.

The future FSS building is designed to serve many functions including offices, a conference hall and a library. The building will also help the organization to generate income through providing rental services of some of the flats.



Ato Dessalegn Rahmato laying the cornerstone of the future FSS Headquarters

FSS resumes public dialogue on urban public service in Addis Ababa, FSS held a policy dialogue on Telecom servic

Forum for Social Studies (FSS), in collaboration with the British Embassy in Addis Ababa, has re-launched the Policy Dialogue Series on Urban Public Services Delivery in Ethiopia with particular focus on Addis Ababa. This was in line with FSS long held tradition of providing a platform to facilitate an evidence-based and informed public debates on public policy issues.

In this respect, the dialogue series on urban services seeks to bring together relevant stakeholders including city government officials, service providers, regulatory agencies, service users, the media and civil society organizations to examine relevant policy frameworks and identify problems, and opportunities in the provision of urban services in Addis Ababa.

The latest series, which was a continuation to another series on similar theme which FSS successfully conducted in 2013, is planned to have three public dialogues on three different policy public policy issues, which are: 1) Telecom Services, 2) Ethiopian Taxation Laws and Policies, and 3) The State Private Health Care providers In Addis Ababa.

This latest dialogue series was conducted between December 2014 and March 2015 and the first session of this series was held on December 19, 2014 at Ghion Hotel.

During the occasion, Dr Meheret Ayenew, Executive Director of FSS underscored the importance of such forums in promoting informed public debates on policies and their implementation. He, however, cautioned that the purpose of FSS dialogue forums is not to allocate blames on anyone, but to make a constructive engagement with policymakers, practitioners and the public at large with the purpose of improving policies and their implementations.

The first dialogue session in this series focused on telecom services. Dr Dereje Tefera from the School of Information Sciences, Addis Ababa University, presented a research paper on the state of telecom services, its challenges and future prospects. In his presentation of the discussion paper titled: "Telecommunication Services in Addis Ababa: Achievements, Problems and Options to Enhance Service Delivery Performance in the Sector", Dr Dereje explained the genesis of Telecommunication services in Ethiopia,

The milestones in Telecom service delivery, Pricing, Telecom Expansion, including the various attempts made by the government to enhance management efficiency and meet growing customer demands. Most importantly, Dr Derege's presentation focused on challenges faced by Ethio telecom in its attempts to satisfy customer service. He said power interruption, damages to fiber in connection with ongoing massive construction works of the Light Train in the capital and the theft of fiber optics by individuals, were among the major challenges faced by Telecom. He said this has negatively impacted on the quality and flow of its services.

Dr. Derege said while the numerous strides made by Telecom are to be appreciated, including the challenges it is facing, it can still aim for the better, and ensure efficient services to its customers, if some of its services were liberalized, with the company taking the role of regulation of adherence to the terms and conditions to be stipulated in the contractual agreements with private investors. From the experiences of countries around the world, including African states, Dr. Derege said he was of the opinion that liberalizing the sector in Ethiopia greatly boosts mobile and internet penetration, while also improving service reliability as well as efficiency.

Following the presentation, Dr. Solomon Teferi who is Head of the School of Information Science, AAU, and Ato Abdurahim Mohammed, Communication Affairs Director with Ethio-Telecom, gave their views on the presentations made by the researcher.

The first discussant, Dr Solomon Teferi congratulated Dr. Derege for a very comprehensive and informative presentation. He recommended that the paper also include and explore other services that can be provided to customers by the state owned telecom company.

The second discussant, Ato Abdurahim Mohammed, also thanked the presenter for his presentation and expressed appreciation to FSS for organizing such a forum to discuss on what he said was a very crucial and well timed issue. He then spoke at length, on Telecom's achievements over the last 15 years or so. He underscored that Telecom was one of the few economically important and strategic institutions, supporting the government's development efforts. In this regard, he said the company was able to raise billions of Birr

to the national economy, thereby helping the Government to finance the construction of Light Train and other development projects in the country. He said the company still has the potential to be maximize its profits for the benefit of the country, and hence, he there was no point in privatizing the company. "Ethio-Telecom cannot be privatized just for the sake of privatizing only!" he said. In the hot discussion and debate that ensued, the audience forwarded several comments and suggestions on the presentation, and asked the discussant as to why privatization was impossible. The discussion focused on the issue of State ownership Vs privatization of Ethio-Telecom.

Government's position not to privatize Ethio-Telecom was defended by the discussant from Telecom, Ato Abdurahim, who argued against giving away what one of the discussants described as government 'cash cow'!

The following are some of what the director said were the factors which favor Telecom to continue to be owned and run by the government: → the state can only be on the same page with the agency if it is only owned and controlled by the government; → Profits and Tax revenues generated by Ethio-Telecom assist government's program to implement multi-million birr infrastructure development, and this will not be the case if the agency was under a private ownership; If privatized, investors will "use up" the telecom infrastructure and concentrate their services to the cities and major towns only, and this will not go in line with the Government's development program which aims to expand access to ICT services to the rural areas as well.

Moreover, Ato Abdurahim said some countries in the developing world which privatized their Telecom Services are now regretting to have done so, and considering a reversal to the status-quo. For these and other reasons, Telecom should not be privatized, the Communications Affairs Director argued. Around 65 participants drawn from government offices, businesses notably Banks, Insurance companies, and Civil Society Organizations, the academia and the media attended the dialogue session on Telecom Services Delivery.

FSS organizes policy dialogue on Taxation Laws and Policies

Forum for Social Studies (FSS) held a public policy dialogue on Taxation Laws and Policies in Ethiopia on Friday, January 23, 2015, as part of the Public Dialogue Series on Urban Public Services in Addis Ababa. As usual, a discussion paper was presented by a resource to make the discussion and debate evidence based.

In that respect, Dr. Wollela Abehodie, who is Assistant Professor at College of Business and Economics, Addis Ababa University, and an expert on taxation rules and policies, presented a discussion paper.

Dr Wollela started her presentation by providing a brief background on the tax system and structures in the country. She the tax system in Ethiopia follows the country's governance structure, and as a result, there are both federal and regional taxes.

Dr. Wollela further said that whereas the Ethiopian Revenue and Customs Authority (ERCA) administer federal and concurrent revenues, regional revenue departments administer their own revenues.

According to Dr. Wollela, tax revenue performance in Birr value shows increasing trend overtime with indirect taxes accounting for the largest share of tax revenue.

Moreover, Value Added Tax (VAT) and custom duties have major contribution to the total tax revenue, and as a result, tax revenues currently cover nearly 70 percent of the total government expenditures. Dr Wollela also noted that in spite of this significant improvement, revenue performance measured in terms of tax to GDP ratio stands at 13 percent. She added that, compared to some countries in the Sub-Saharan Africa, the figure is found to be low.

Dr. Wollela also shed some light on the reform efforts to improve the tax system in Ethiopia. She pointed out that the introduction of VAT, overhauling of income tax and reduction of custom duty rates, the introduction of tax identification number (TIN), the sales register machine, electronic tax system, and efforts to build a modern tax administration,

are among the measures that marked the significance of the tax policy space in Ethiopia.

After Dr Wollela's presentation, Dr. Abebe Yitayew, a senior faculty member at the College of Business and Economics, Addis Ababa University (AAU), offered his expert opinion on the Dr. Wollela's presentation and her findings and policy recommendations.

Dr. Abebe appreciated the speaker's comprehensive and through examination of tax rules and policies in Ethiopia. He, noted, however, that that Dr. Wollela's concerns were not accompanied by options to deal with glaring problems that she raised in the presentation to have featured prominently in the system of tax administration, tax rules and policies. Having agreed to what Dr. Wollela noted earlier in her presentation regarding the prevalence of inefficient Tax dispute resolution system, Dr. Abebe said he believes that both the availability of professional staff in the appeal commission and members' neutrality are to be called into question.

He further said that although the current constitution provides the decentralization of revenue collection that has not been accompanied by the right of local government institutions to spend the same. Following the intervention of the discussant, an animated discussion continued by the attending participants during which valuable comments and suggestions were raised to enrich the discussion paper. Limited managerial capacity; vague thresholds used to categorize business as A, B and C; delays and bureaucratic red tapes that businesses face particularly in the course of refunding VAT; and the magnitude of compliance burdens that the tax system has imposed on tax payers/businesses were among the major challenges that the tax system and administration faces, as agreed by the audience. It was agreed that all these will have negative repercussions on investment and business development in the country.

Around 65 people representing different government offices, civic society organizations, members of FSS, academics, graduate students from Addis Ababa University, and other invited guests and the media attended the event.

State of Private Health Care Service Delivery in Addis Ababa

Forum for Social Studies (FSS) held a public policy dialogue on the state of private health care services in Addis Ababa on March. Discussion paper on the topic was presented by Ato Bikilla Hurrisa, a Lecturer at the Department Public Administration of Development Management of the Addis Ababa University (AAU).

Most importantly, Ato Bikilla specializes in public policy, particularly on the health sector. In his presentation, Ato Bikilla highlighted on the achievements registered and challenges faced by the p health care providers, including their rate of growth over the past five years, the relevant legal and regulatory environment, service quality, medical ethics, accountability and affordability of their prices by the residents of the city.

After the presentation, two discussants from the government health sector gave their elaborative reflections on the presentation and contents of the discussion paper to be considered by the researcher before finalizing the paper and submitting for publication by FSS.

Among other things, the discussants pointed out the need to consider service quality indicators such quality and standard of care, the problem of medical ethics, the risks of a private health sector system primarily motivated by profit, the inadequate capacity of regulatory and monitoring institutions of the private health sector, alleged abuses in the provision of medical treatment, allegations of unnecessary medical examinations and prescriptions to pile up profit. The discussants also noted the need for the discussion paper to explore on the reasons as to why, in spite of alleged malpractices and abuses by the private sector, nearly 42% of the population in Addis Ababa still opts to get the service from the private sector while the public health sector institutions run by the government are by far cheaper. The discussants also pointed out that comparing the service charges at the private and the public sectors can be misleading as the later is subsidized and therefore cannot show the actual price for delivering medical services. In the discussion session that followed, participants asked questions and forwarded comments to enrich the discussion paper. Some 75 participants drawn from various sectors including Government Health officers, private health sector providers, researchers and academics, and members of the media attended the event.

FSS launches new dialogue series on Poverty and Its Mitigation in Ethiopia: Role of the Private Sector in Poverty Reduction

Forum for Social Studies, with financial assistance from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) launched a new public dialogue series on Poverty and its Mitigation in Ethiopia on November 7th 2014. Six public dialogue sessions on topics identified around the main theme were organized between.

In his opening remarks on the launch of the public policy dialogue project, FSS Executive Director, Dr Meheret Ayenew, noted that organizing public dialogues was FSS's flagship program through which the organization provides a platform for stakeholders to debate on public policy issues, and generate evidence-based policy recommendations to policy makers, thereby enhance public participation in the policy making process in the country.

He pointed out that poverty alleviation was one of the core research programs that the organization initiated in the early days of its establishment. He said that, to that effect, and in line with its mandate, FSS had organized a series of public policy dialogues focusing on poverty and its mitigation some 10 years ago.

He added that policy ideas that came out of those public discussions duly compiled and presented to the Government, were used as inputs in the preparation of the Poverty Alleviation and Sustainable Development Programs (PASDEP).

Dr. Meheret also noted that since then, FSS has established a track record of conducting a series of policy dialogues on several policy issues. In explaining the rationale of the latest edition of the poverty dialogue series, Dr Meheret said while FSS recognizes the various efforts made so far towards alleviating poverty, his organization also is also aware of the possible changes in scope and magnitude of poverty in this country, hence the need to revisit the strategies, efforts, impacts and challenges that have unfolded over the past 10 years.

The six topics under the main theme of Poverty and Its Mitigation in Ethiopia included the following:

- The Role of the Private Sector in Poverty Reduction
- The Role of CSOs in Poverty Reduction
- Aspects of Rural Poverty and Solutions
- Gender and Poverty
- Financial Services to the poor
- Poverty among the elderly and disabled

Role of the Private Sector in Poverty Reduction

Ato Teshome said that private sector which is considered as the engine of growth is a sector which owns and produces goods and services. He noted that, the sector, in the process of production of goods and services, can play a vital role in the poverty reduction efforts. For this, he said, the Government must formulate policies to stimulate the private sector for greater participation and contribution in the country's development endeavor and thus play a role in poverty reduction.

Following Ato Teshome's presentation, a discussant-Ato Israel Kassa, Founder and Managing Director of Africa-Beza College, commented on the discussion paper.

He said he agreed with most of the mechanisms by which the private sector can play a role in poverty reduction, but he said the following should be added to the list of roles the private sector can and should play in poverty reduction efforts: Financial institutions (such as that of small and micro financial institutions) in poverty reduction; Small and micro enterprises should come out in bold, considering their immense contribution to poverty

alleviation in this country. Commercial Agriculture, tourism and livestock also need be included.

The discussant said that, the extent of poverty in Ethiopia should be included and duly discussed in comparison to other least developed countries like Niger. Moreover, the discussant said the paper should include data on the extent of poverty in the country, such as that which is mentioned in the Oxford University website where Ethiopia is listed as one of the poor countries with a large population.

Finally, the discussant said more efforts must be exerted jointly by the Ethiopian public and private sectors, aimed at realizing the targets of universal access to food, health and closing, education to the poor. To achieve this, a strategy must be formulated.

In the discussion that ensued, participants asked questions and forwarded suggestions to further enrich the paper so that it can provide useful inputs for poverty mitigation strategies and policies by the Government.

Role of Civil Society Organizations in Poverty Reduction



The Panelists of the Policy debate on the role of CSOs in Poverty Reduction Ethiopia

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Aspects of Rural Poverty and its Solutions

Forum for Social Studies (FSS) held a public dialogue session on rural poverty and its solution on Friday, April 3, 2015- at Ghion Hotel. The session was organized as part of FSS' policy dialogue series on the theme of Poverty and its Mitigation in Ethiopia.

A discussion paper was first presented to the audience to initiate discussion and debate on the issue. Dr Abraham Seyoum, Assistant Professor at the Center for Rural Development, College of Development Studies of the Addis Ababa University (AAU), presented a discussion paper titled: Rural Household Poverty and Vulnerability in Ethiopia: Dynamics, Determinants and Policy Implications. In his presentation, Dr Abraham highlighted on state of rural poverty, the progress made so far towards alleviating the problem and forwarded policy recommendations for further improvement of the situation regarding rural poverty in the country.

Before the floor was open for discussion, Dr Demese Chanyalew, a senior researcher and development consultant, reflected his comments on the overall content, scope and methodology of the discussion paper including its conclusions and recommendations. The discussant said he agreed with Dr Abraham's suggestion about the significant progress that was made towards mitigating rural poverty. But he said the fruits of the agriculture sector are unfairly benefiting the industry sector.

Following the intervention of the discussant, there was an animated discussion about the challenges and opportunities the country faces regarding mitigating rural poverty. Some 55 participants drawn from various sectors including Government officers, researchers, the academic community and members of the state and independent media attended the event.

FSS participates in annual book fair

FSS participated in the annual book fair that was held from 9-16 March 2015. The book fair organized by the Addis Ababa University was said to attract over 30,000 visitors from around Addis Ababa and surrounding cities.

According to organizers, over 60 publishers, including FSS participated in the book fair to showcase their publications dealing with a wide array of subjects-fiction and non-fiction. As usual, FSS used this opportunity, not only to display its research reports and publications dealing with various policy issues, but also to promote its objectives and boost its visibility. FSS's Chef Librarian Fanaye Fekade said FSS's publications attracted visitors greatly than ever before and a large number of volumes of its latest publications were sold during the event

Policy Research and Publication on Natural Resource, Governance, Access and Management in Dry Lands of Ethiopia

The Project is financed by the Danish Government and administrated by the Inter Governmental Authority for Development (IGAD) under its Drought Resilience in the horn of Africa Initiative through providing a grant to facilitate the establishment and operationalization of a regional dry land applied research.

FSS is implementing this project which seeks to investigate the potential of the dry land forest resources for the implementation of REDD+ in Ethiopia by taking the case of Benshangul-Gumuz Regional State.

Ongoing Research Activities FSS SECURES NEW FUNDS TO CARRY OUT RESEARCH

Owing to its track record on conducting policy oriented research and policy dialogues among stakeholders, FSS has recently won three project awards from three donors to continue research on three thematic areas, and organize policy dialogues. FSS believes that constructive and knowledge-based dialogue between policy makers on the one hand, and civil society groups and the public, on the other, will promote improved state – society relations, enhance transparent and participatory decision-making, and contribute to more sustainable development interventions. To this end, the organization provides high quality and evidence-based research works to serve as useful inputs for consultation in policy making and policy review. The present research project is part of that endeavor. These three research projects are:

1. Socioeconomic Impacts of Khat Addiction in Ethiopia: A Comparative Study of Harar and Assosa towns: This is a project on the socio-economic impacts of khat addiction in Ethiopia and on the relevant pathways for strategic intervention by governmental and non-governmental actors. The project is supported by the Civil Society Support Programme (CSSP) Strategic Partnership Grant. The research will explore the various policy implications around the issue and come up with concrete recommendations which will gradually catalyse the formulation and consequent implementation of a clear and comprehensive policy on the issue of Khat in Ethiopia.
2. Land and Livelihood Improvements: A Program of Research and Policy Dialogue. FSS was awarded a research grant Land, Landlessness and Poverty, by USAID through its project called Land Administration to Nurture Development (L.A.N.D) to undertake research on Land, Landlessness and Poverty. Under this project, researches will be conducted in four regions with a view to provide inputs to policymakers and practitioners.

Latest Publications from FSS

