



## WIDE Bridge (extension)

# Ethiopia WIDE Bridge Methodology Notes

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### 1. Introduction

Ethiopia-WIDE has been implemented in four stages over the course of the last 25 years since 1994/95. In the course of these years, the project has developed a research method that could be well associated to its thoughts and practices. Like any approach or method it has strong aspects and areas that may benefit from improvement. Many scholars and students have been involved in the WIDE project over the years. Hence, the project has made tremendous contribution in regard to capacity building as well for many Ethiopian researchers in addition to its possible contribution for policy and knowledge generation.

In the course of our intensive and exciting operations since February 2018, we have had discussions on different issues about ways of doing things, including the WIDE method, within ourselves and with the different stakeholders that have come aboard along the process, namely the four universities (Ambo, Bahir Dar, Hawassa and Mekelle), Addis Ababa University (just on one presentation), the Ethiopian think tank Forum for Social Studies (FSS) as well as regional and federal government agencies (whose representatives attended meetings and workshops) and the NGO community. The purpose of this note is synthesizing the major aspects of the reflections we had among ourselves and with these partners in workshop events, most of which took place in the first six months of 2019<sup>1</sup>. Insights from earlier meetings with these universities and the High Level Discussion Forum (HLDF) held in October 2018 are also included. The note, focusing on just **key methodological issues**, is mainly made with a forward looking attitude, anticipating the commencement of WIDE4 in 2020. Most of these issues will need to be taken up again when revising the WIDE4 preliminary concept note which was prepared in the course of this WIDE Bridge phase, to transform it into a concrete proposal based on sufficient common grounds among all WIDE4 partners.

### 2. WIDE as an Approach and Its Theoretical Base

Complexity theory is at the base of WIDE project. One of the foundations of this theory is that social systems are complex and open with feedback mechanisms and cannot be understood as closed entities. The theoretical framework of WIDE developed on the basis of this theory by Dr Philippa Bevan, founder of WIDE together with Dr Alula Pankhurst, has been appreciated by WIDE stakeholders. This theory, which has its implications on the WIDE method, is going to be useful in the future as well. Theoretical and methodological

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<sup>1</sup>Specifically, between February and June 2019 the following events were organised: four regional workshops, series of four thematic workshops for federal agencies, a public lecture, and a concluding workshop with the 'WIDE4 partners' namely, the four universities mentioned here and FSS. See Dom 2019a for a review of the former events, and Dom 2019b for a review of the concluding workshop (all events have been ably organised by our communication and logistic coordinator Bizuayehu Ayele).

presentations made by Dr Bevan in these occasions, and in particular at the concluding workshop with the Universities and FSS, were well received and eye openers, especially for those who were being exposed to WIDE for the first time. This may also be because of the fact that the WIDE method supplements the limitation of the conventional quantitative, survey-based research method; mostly focusing on linear cause-effect relationships between variables. As the WIDE research tries to capture complexities of communities from different dimensions and their aspects, at a time and through time, there is special attention to deeper and more comprehensive case-based data on specific topics within the 'WIDE core community framework' with its seven-perspective holistic approach. The seven perspectives used to study the different aspects of a community in its entirety are: (a) the community in its wider context; (b) the evolving community eco-system - the socio-human-material place system; (c) People - social actors (nested sub-systems); (d) Five inter-penetrating domains of power/fields of action<sup>2</sup>; (e) durable structures of inequality – class, status and power; (f) households in the community (nested sub-systems); and (g) social interactions. (This section is very brief; see Bevan 2019 for more on the trajectory of WIDE methodological development from 1994 to 2019, including the development of the 'core community framework').

Whilst the methodological sessions of the June 2019 concluding workshop with the four universities and FSS in June 2019 went some way, it is clear that more and deeper training in the theoretical foundations of the WIDE approach, the associated method and the techniques of data collection will be useful for the staff of these institutions which have recently been coming aboard. Overall, I anticipate that future training events and interactions could provide additional leverage to further link complexity theory to data collection, analysis and write up, particularly in the face of the need to focus on specific topics, yet without losing WIDE's seven-perspective holistic approach that is looking at them in relation to other factors. For the sake of depth and comprehensiveness in data collection, there might also be the need to focus on specific topics while their associations and interactions with diverse factors in the open systems are studied. I anticipate further discussion on this within WIDE and with the universities and with FSS. To this effect, in consultation with our university partners and FSS, I expect that impacting training events will be incorporated while expanding and enriching the already developed concept note of WIDE4.

As the complexity theory is further elaborated in training with these research and academic institutions, more reflections are expected, especially from those who have not known WIDE thus far and may be joining the project later. Their reflections may depend on how close or far the existing theoretical foundations of research in these institutions and their departments stand relative to the complexity theory used by WIDE and its core community

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<sup>2</sup> These are involving and inter-penetrating functional sub-systems of a community and namely constitute livelihoods; human re/pro/duction; social re/pro/duction; community management; and ideas.

framework. Understanding this theoretical precondition as well as the research aptitude and temperament of the key research staff, including their masters and eventually PhD students, is expected to be useful for these training events, and to starting institutionalizing WIDE in the epistemological sense of the concept. That Dr Bevan herself made the presentation on WIDE theory and method in the concluding workshop and was able to sense the interest and academic background of some of the university research and teaching staff to be involved in WIDE4 could serve as an input to further tailor training events to the need of these participants.

### **3. Research Method**

Over the course of the last 25 years, WIDE has developed a method well associated with its approach that has been in practice throughout this period. Based on a set of research questions; the case-based method and the core community framework that have been in use enable the collection of data on different topics and various aspects. That an aspect is researched in relation to other aspects to reveal the dynamic complexity of processes, events and outcomes, in a holistic community framework and wider context is a characteristic of the WIDE approach received by partners with interest. Community based conclusions, some of which were lost as data were nationally aggregated have been revealed by WIDE and this has been seen as a useful contribution of its methodology and overall approach. Improvement in women's empowerment and lack of equity in agricultural extension services and inputs provision are examples of knowledge unraveled by WIDE research. (Different methodological papers have been written by Dr Bevan over the years, culminating in Bevan 2019).

In the face of all these and other positive notes not mentioned here, there have been some reflections and concerns which could be considered with a view to further improve on its research method. In this section, I shall mirror these concerns, also anticipating further joint discussion with all WIDE partners while revising and re-developing the WIDE4 concept note into a fully-fledged and collectively composed project proposal. There might be scope to treat at least part of them and a note such as this might be helpful to synthesize ideas and structure future discussions on the subject.

#### **The WIDE approach has been fully qualitative save sketchy figures in some instances.**

Given the tendency towards quantitative research in academia and policy, and that most research, especially longitudinal, has been based on surveys, this is obviously a plus. However, there are some issues that may need consideration. As expressed by the participants in different occasions including the recent regional and federal workshops, the HLDf held in October 2018, and earlier meetings with the universities, measurement and quantification have been resurfacing as concerns. **Specially, as WIDE tracks change over the years, quantitative measure of the changes observed-positive and negative- was said to be crucial. This in turn, required having a baseline which needs quantification.**

So far, WIDE had been making use of qualitative descriptions in order to show changes, and lack of changes or continuity through time and space. ***While I still believe this practice could be maintained and made more systematic to better depict these processes, I say WIDE may also need a further discussion on the incorporation of some quantification, specifically about key parameters of interest that link with the qualitative conclusions.*** As far as I could figure out now, the application of the quantitative approach could be done at different levels and there could be a range of modalities between doing it and not doing it at all. After discussion with stakeholders, WIDE4 may land one or likely a combination of these modalities. This, however, need not compromise WIDE as a qualitative or largely qualitative research. In fact, it could boost WIDE's role in complementing the conventional, survey-based quantitative research (which has been dominating development policy research), by providing a synthesis of qualitative and quantitative micro analyses as impacts of macro policies and strategies.

WIDE can have another advantage over conventional quantitative research when combining some quantification to a qualitative research. In a qualitative research integrating quantification, the quantitative data collection questions can be informed by qualitative understanding of the research topics, which is not the case in quantitative studies. ***This practice may also place another opportunity for WIDE to serve as a pioneer and learning ground in combining the two methods that have been traditionally at odds; despite their being two ends of a continuum.***

Already existing quantitative data at kebele, wereda, zonal and regional levels may form a readymade data source for categorized, averaged and aggregated quantitative data. This could be done using structured matrices or formats and planning experts of the respective offices or the overall planning offices may do it with good efficiency. For instance, such information as that on total cultivated land in a kebele or a district can only be obtained from these government sources. The second possible mechanism, respective to each of the community to be studied and its discrete parts, is to develop simple and quick but useful structured instruments to collect data from purposively selected, if not all, individuals and households on specific or related topics. A potential third possibility is integrating small portion but key quantitative questions in a structured way in the modular protocols for the qualitative data collection. This may also serve to break monotony as some of the protocols from experience are quite long. A fourth option could be a combination of all these. I expect discussions with the stakeholders during the revision of the WIDE4 concept note to result in useful mechanisms, as I also anticipate its commencement in 2020. Of course, in so doing, there are cost and time implications, tradeoffs, priorities, and implications for the disciplines of researchers.

**The second key issue, also identified from discussions with some of our ROs, is the depth of the WIDE qualitative approach itself.** In-depth or rich or 'thick description', a hallmark of the qualitative approach, especially of those tending toward ethnography, has also been

the objective of WIDE. As some anthropologists say the researcher needs to look for things that lie under the carpet and not on the carpet. Over the years, this is what WIDE has been striving for-looking to see that exist 'beyond the numbers', and of course, averages and aggregates that concealed specific useful insights and findings that required policy attention. However, as the WIDE community framework is broader and has many research topics (though varying among the phases), and the protocols touch on many ramifications of these aspects in an open system approach where different aspects interact, and the time given for data collection is usually limited, there were instances where the data were not deep and detailed, at times limiting proper analysis. As WIDE partners at the regional and federal workshops have also commented, I say there is a need for focused research in the future that is beginning with WIDE4. I further say WIDE's holistic approach needs to be carried out at a manageable level good enough to generate in-depth data and analysis which may require revising the core community framework from time to time. However, the decision remains with WIDE and its university partners in regard to creating a balance between breadth and depth.

I would say WIDE needs to be looking forward for further discussion with partners on this concern as well, as what is the WIDE method now is a result of chains of experience, reflections and improvement over the course of 25 years. For the moment, as far as I can think, the solution for this is to limit the number of topics to be researched that is to give the research a focus and/or to limit the number of sub-topics within topics in which case relatively more topics may be addressed. However, while focusing on a single topic, it is crucial that this topic serves as a linking thread of not only data collection but also of analysis and write up. Recalling the theory behind WIDE, all the seven perspectives (that is including their specific thematic areas) shall be investigated. The suggested approach here may not significantly reduce the burden of data collection but it will provide the depth and detail required from a qualitative research. ***There is always tradeoff in research, especially between depth and breadth. In relation to the tension between holistic enquiry and topical focus, a senior WIDE team member has also suggested that whilst maintaining the holistic approach, the core WIDE team could and would like WIDE4 to pay attention to issues that emerged as important from Bridge (and earlier) rounds. Such topics as climate change, water management and taxation highlighted by WIDE partners and other issues of very high importance for the country's development like young people, could be the centre of research activities. I hope further discussion with WIDE partners while revising WIDE4 would take account of this and the argument in favour of topical focus should not mean one-topic approach.*** Thus, the thinking that things are complex and need to be understood in the context of this complexity remains intact, as a major research tenet.

The problem of not collecting rich and deep enough data has further technical issues to address. Here again, one may envisage different options or modalities. In the first place, entertaining the complexity theory should not necessarily mean studying everything and everyone even in a single community, which anyways is impossible. Therefore, as already

stated, a few key or priority research topics to be selected for WIDE4 could serve as focal issues. Second, they could also serve as linking threads in the deliberation of protocol development and data collection so that detailed and deep information is generated not only about these specific issues but also about issues affecting them. Having relatively more topics and studying just specific aspects of these topics could also be an option. Further technical discussions with the methodology team of the respective university could hopefully lead to additional options.

**In addition to detailed information on specific topics, findings coinciding with earlier knowledge existing at the national level and earlier WIDE findings were also an area of concern. Some even suggested that this sounded like not fully committing to seeking new knowledge and insights that may affect policy and practice.** There is information or knowledge fatigue in the development research sub-sector so that it is not surprising to hear this concern. A qualitative research has to break this monotony by unraveling deeper understanding and insights. ***Even though at this moment it is not that clear as to how the project could address this issue, it could be taken care of while undertaking WIDE4. Adjusting the limelight to specific topics, as already stated, is very likely to provide the scope for new knowledge and insights.***

**The third issue revolves around the disciplinary mix of the existing WIDE team, and based on this, the forthcoming teams in the four universities. Over the years, the WIDE team has been dominated by sociologists and anthropologists.** A participant at one of the federal workshop said while this is understandable in the earlier years of WIDE, later years would have brought some change. Some participants of the regional and federal workshops were also asking involving experts from other disciplines such as economics, development studies and public health which may need to be considered in the future based on the nature of research topics to be selected. The involvement of the four universities may provide a special opportunity for this. And some of the universities have clearly reflected the need to involve researchers from other disciplines while sociologists and anthropologists may lead the project. However, the critical issue seems to be the coordination of researchers coming from diverse disciplines into one project. ***In a nutshell, I say this needs a trans-disciplinary rather than inter-disciplinary approach. In the second, team members walk their discipline; in the first, they walk all disciplines. Synthesis is of essence.*** Theories, concepts, perspectives, knowledge, views, ideas and techniques need to be shared and integrated among the different disciplines so that there is an organically, rather than mechanically, synthesized set of new knowledge and insights useful for policy and knowledge are discovered.

Jointly framing research problems, developing data collection instruments and co-authoring research outputs and publications could be among the mechanisms of ensuring this integration or synergy. However, I do not expect this may come by easily for people who may have been working in different epistemological paradigms or research traditions. My

take is that with good orientation, coordination and follow-up, there is an opportunity to achieve this at least on a limited scale during the forthcoming WIDE4. Things could improve after the next phase and thereby WIDE may set example for 'real' trans-disciplinary research in Ethiopia, as I think it has, for longitudinal research. This may also have cost and time implications as it adds activities to what the project has been doing and may want to continue doing.

As stated before, in these workshops, some were asking as to why the project did not address environment, climate change, population, health and other issues in its research undertakings. To this, I would like to add that as a longitudinal exercise there is good reason to pick again health in WIDE4 to compare with the results of WIDE3. Even though it is known that no study can cover everything, the comment could be useful to sharpen research topic selection towards most critical issues for poverty reduction and development. While all such new topics could be well addressed by qualitative social scientists, the perspectives of other disciplines mentioned above may add leverage. However, it has to be noted that practicing this is not straight forward. In addition to what is said above, this is contingent on how the project defines longitudinal research or on how it wants to use it to serve its research interest. As a longitudinal exercise, if a topic is chosen and researched this year, definitely it is going to be researched at least for a second time. The length of the interval between rounds also matters: the time we had between the different WIDEs in the past has varied since 1994. The shorter the periods and the greater the number of rounds of research, the more is the chance to pick and study different key topics (while still remaining longitudinal without the need to run for several years).

#### **4. Longitudinal Research as a Strategy**

There are different types of longitudinal research but there are common aspects such as data collection on same variables or cases in different times and analysis and comparison of the data collected in different times. They could also last for years or decades. In addition to qualitative descriptions, which WIDE has been doing thus far, quantitative measurement is also an aspect of longitudinal studies enabling the comparison of events, processes and outcomes. While the term longitudinal is broad and may have more variants than one may come upon in the literature, there were some concerns raised at these workshops. **These concerns revolve around the absence of quantitative data to make more discernible and easily convincing comparison between different periods, and systematic collection of data from same individuals, households or communities as cases across different periods. They hinge on the understanding that measurement and comparison not only in one time but also across time remain central.** In addition to what was said in section 3, my suggestion in response to this concern *is to review longitudinal research as a strategy and come up with a short commonly accepted operational definition without negating the broader literature.* In so doing, not only could WIDE broaden the understanding of

longitudinal research among its stakeholders and audiences, the project could also facilitate joint undertakings at any stage of WIDE4 implementation in the future.

## 5. Data Collection Techniques and Skills

The principal data collection technique of WIDE has been face-to-face interviewing using extended modular protocols by experienced and trained ROs. Since WIDE2 in 2002/3 fieldwork has been done by one male and one female RO teamed up to collect data in one community, generally interviewing people of their respective gender. This is an advantage to be sustained into WIDE4. This section will propose a few new data collection techniques such as FGDS and attitude scales in addition to commenting on existing ones.

### Focus group discussions

Even though WIDE has been significantly relying on individual interviews, it approaches different sections of a community as well as government service providers and officials at kebele and wereda level. ***While this has tremendously contributed to triangulating data, and there was no concern from WIDE partners in this regard; I do believe WIDE data collection has some scope for improvement using additional data collecting techniques such as FGDS and building on existing ones. A variety of focus group discussions of homogenous members on selected key aspects of a specific topic and general background information about a community could be very useful. They might also be most effective if carried out at the beginning and at the end of a field research.***

### Longitudinal photo documentation

From the outset, photo documentation has been a technique of WIDE data collection. A few selected pictures appeared in books and many have been used over time in PPT presentations. They convey messages powerfully, compared to linguistic descriptions. Changes through time and space could be excellently depicted by photos captured at different points through time and space. While photos can capture many other aspects, in the context of country urbanization is taking place at a rate more than the global rate, more spatial reconfiguration of the landscape and predominance of the built environment is expected. While in WIDE3 and WIDE Bridge, ROs were given guidelines for photo taking developed by Dr Alula Pankhurst, and this was useful, experience shows that a) there is scope for greater attention to be paid about what pictures to take and why and b) there is a need for a systematic use of photos once they are captured.

The usefulness of pictures to illustrate research findings was regularly highlighted ever since the WIDE team has started using them in presentations etc. In one of the WIDE bridge regional workshops, a senior staff of Mekelle University highlighted the value of longitudinal studies, including photo-comparison, for policy influence. He mentioned of a NRM study using photo-comparison that the university conducted some years ago and which had a large impact both in the region (Ethiopia) and internationally. **Other**

participants in this workshop added that it would be similarly good for WIDE to make more systematic use of pictures. Hence, in addition to systematic documentation and use of photos in WIDE4, the use of already existing photos spanning several years, could be strategized. The wealth of photo gallery that is already in hand may result in rich historical and comparative understanding which we may not have thus far. ***WIDE is an advantageous platform to ascertain the old adage that 'pictures speak more than words'.***

***Representative pictures outlined in timeline could also be shared to the communities, as a useful repertoire of memory and knowledge that could be used in planning and execution.***

Certainly, this gift can serve as an input for the respective kebele and wereda administration and for future academic and non-academic studies. In a country where local histories of livelihoods, the environment and climate change are not properly documented and individual communities are rendered invisible in macro historiography, the role of photos in local historical documentation is quite invaluable. ***Improvement with the use of field pictures may need systematic and professional approach and skillset which may need to be fetched from outside of WIDE teams in order to do more justice to the photos already in store and to those forthcoming.*** It will also have cost implication which WIDE4 may need to accommodate. Ultimately, this means the communication strategy to be developed as part of WIDE4 basically needs to be forward looking and also backward looking with these pictures and non-picture data as well.

### **Informal module and observation**

Like WIDE2 and WIDE3, WIDE Bridge did also have a tool called informal module. The intent was for the ROs to record things that they ask, hear, observe and encounter informally on a daily basis, and to also serve as a diary. However, the volume of the main modules and time limitation did not allow them to properly make use of this tool. As far as I can see the future of WIDE, also based on remarks of many workshop participants, narrowing the scope of the research and providing comparably wider time for field work, including the informal module, during WIDE4 is necessary. This can be achieved without compromising the main modules. This notwithstanding, WIDE4 could also benefit from the application of systematic direct observation even though WIDE has had less of this.<sup>3</sup> While interactions so far with partners did not cause reflections in this regard, I would like to suggest the use of simple and to the point observation checklists. With margins for remarks, if need be, these tools may not take more than a few minutes. When necessary, short and intermittent questions could be interceded for clarification and explanation.

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<sup>3</sup> The ROs observe and look at the communities and the leads also visit and observe but observations have not been systematic and adequate.

## Attitude scales

***The third simple but useful tool I may want to suggest is attitude scale.*** There are five or four-point scales used by some social scientists, particularly social psychologists. Considerable portion of the WIDE datasets are attitudinal. Feelings, beliefs and action tendencies about policies, programmes, services or lack of services form significant amount of the datasets. However, since the modular data collection questions are less or semi-structured, systematic collection and processing of the data and quantitative presentation of attitudes were not thus far exercised. ***Attitude scales easily enable perfectly this and can meaningfully supplement WIDE's qualitative conclusions.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly ensuing suggestions and recommendations may carry more weight before policy policymakers and development practitioners.*** This may or may not require psychologists depending on the experience of the research team.

## Debriefing workshops

Joint development or revision of the data collection protocols with the ROs has been a strong aspect of WIDE. This has allowed good internalization or interface between the ROs and the data collection instruments, also contributing toward the internal validity of the research. As standard WIDE practice, I look into continuing this in the future as well. Debriefing workshops following data collection come as additional portfolio with ROs that is before they will have written their field reports, which is the dataset. In the two debriefs we had for the Bridge phase, ROs were relying on their memories while reporting to a plenary. They were assuming the role of respondents and the rest of us (those who wrote the outputs) the role of interviewers. While to some extent useful, particularly in staving off the impact of time shortage; their relevance need to be considered in the context of university research/teaching personnel and students taking the role of ROs. In case of relying on these personnel, changing the format, as in allowing the ROs to do roughly structured presentations for those who write the reports may be of high value. What is more, this is very likely to happen if they are used to fill data gap and sharpen a second round of data collection used to write preliminary community reports. If the project has to use the best out of a second round research, the field reports for the first-round need to be prepared in writing, reviewed and then gaps identified to be filled through a second-round field work, if need be. This is to mean in case of two rounds of field work, the second could be done to collect data on issues that are not answered at all, that are not adequately answered or that are doubtfully answered or even that may need to be asked anew. Of course, this would require more time and longer gap. There is often a lot more to be done so that same number of researchers might be needed. If MA students are to be involved in fieldwork, the idea of giving more time and longer gap between rounds may be an issue as

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<sup>4</sup> This does not necessarily require psychologists as the tools are straightforward but as the universities are very likely to have psychologists some consultation with them may be of help.

fieldwork needs to synchronize with the university academic calendar. Hence, further discussion is in order to address this issue.

### **Researcher-data interface**

Perhaps another issue worth mentioning about WIDE as a qualitative undertaking is researcher-data interface. Social scientists take the most benefit out of this as their studies are mostly observational and involve direct physical and social contacts using all the senses. Data are being made in the interface with respondents as they are not out there for collection. In the case of WIDE, there had been limited scope for this, as the data collection process was entirely carried out by ROs, only a few of whom were involved in data analysis and write up. Otherwise, data processing and write up had been carried out mostly by senior social scientists and development experts, who, of course, did the entire designing of the research, including development of the modules. The practice of accompanying the ROs for a brief time by the senior writers who write the outputs is useful but cannot be part of basic data collection as such even though they assist in writing the research outputs. In such a process, one may expect some observational data or insights, including those to be gained through hunches, to run the risk of remaining hidden without surfacing in workshops with ROs and field reports they make to the senior researchers who do the writing. In one of the four universities, a senior social scientist clearly made the choice in favour of carrying out the data collection himself if he is going to be the one doing the analysis and write up as well. This might not be always possible within the approach of WIDE as many communities are compared and a person is unlikely to be able to deeply study all. However, it can be taken as a clear message that researcher-data interface, as a distinguishing future of qualitative or predominantly qualitative research, cannot be overemphasized.

### **Field research by lead researchers**

It is not only the technical concern just mentioned that might entice one to want to do something more in this regard. That social scientists in these universities are close to the research communities and could do some data collection, as they have been doing, is an opportunity to increase researcher-data interface in the forthcoming WIDE4. This can be further consolidated by having the 'core' WIDE researchers go to fieldwork and do some reconnaissance and selected interviews and systematic observation even though a very rapid bit of this was done in the past. They need these general pictures of the communities and the questions to be investigated particularly if they are, more or less, going to be involved in analysis and write up as well. While it is difficult for a researcher to cover all or many places or most of the data collections even in a place, they could divide the research sites amongst them. The practice of having community teams in the earlier WIDE phases for specific communities may see an even better opportunity with the four universities for

WIDE4. Analyzing data and writing are somehow different experiences even for those who have and do not have a sense of the research site.

### **Extended case stories**

The case-based method and other methods in research could benefit from extended case stories. A household, a farm, a nonfarm business or any other case can be studied in detail diachronically (based on memory when there is lack of data captured earlier) and synchronically, to show how specific cases have changed and the detailed processes they have gone through. Such extended and detailed descriptions could provide additional insights and perspectives to better understand other similar cases. Stand-alone articles and publications could also be made about a single extended case story which may also be shared to the public through radio. Past experience of capturing some shorter synchronic stories (particularly in the young people's modules), may serve as a base to do extended ones in WIDE4 and beyond.

### **The chain of impact approach**

Many studies of impact both in applied and academic study lack robustness. Even though WIDE may not be a research project that is primarily aimed at studying impacts, there are many WIDE policy suggestions which are about policy and development intervention impacts. The chain of impacts approach in data collection queries through successive and simple 'WH' questions (some call them child-like questions) to find out what outcome has led to another outcome as one outcome or a number of outcomes are a cause/causes for another. For instance, if a young woman purchased a dairy cow through personal credit and turned successful, she might have been able to open a small shop out of this income and might have done something else out of the benefit of the shop, etc. Therefore, this technique could be very useful to capture micro, personalized trajectories of individuals and households within the overall community trajectories.

## **6. Data Processing and Analysis**

The use of modular protocols as a major data collection instrument means the data are somehow structured as they are built. The field reports which follow almost the same structures as the protocols are used to process the data and start building them into a dataset. This way of data collection and processing is quite useful as long as the ROs do enough probing and prompting to unravel deeper data/messages. As a useful strategy, WIDE4 could carry this forward.

### **Use of software**

Data analysis was done in two ways – case-focused analyses and cross-case, often topic-focused comparisons. The case-focused analyses of all the data available on each community leading to the production of community reports could be done directly, using

software or both software or by hand. Until and including WIDE3 Stage 1 in 2009/10; data processing and analysis were done fully manually. The WIDE team started using qualitative analysis software for the community-focused analyses since WIDE3 Stage 2. In both the direct, manual and software-assisted processes of analysis, the community data was organized following the structure of the core community framework, using 'codes' to further break down each perspective in the framework. The advantage of using a qualitative analysis software to support coding is that it allows being more thorough in recording everything in the data which is relevant to a particular code. For WIDE Bridge the team used the MAXQDA software, which on experience, has both advantages and disadvantages compared to NVIVO which was used for WIDE3 Stage 2 and Stage 3.

The use of MAXQDA was found to be helpful – as coding is more systematic and once done, this means everything related to one topic is “in one place” and can be retrieved easily, at any time. However, coding the data took quite a long time of every team member except those familiar with it, to know and apply the software. As most of us were new to it, the benefit might not have been as good as the effort. Also, ultimately, as a team, we ended up not using most of MAXQDA analytical features so that the analysis was finally supported both by software (to some extent) and other techniques. Especially, the topic-focused cross-community analyses underpinning the WIDE Discussion Briefs have remained entirely manual to this day. However, using MAXQDA was learning by doing exercise for most of us. With better training and perhaps professional assistance in the beginning, analytical features not used in Bridge could be used in WIDE4 and better benefit drawn out of it. For the universities and FSS, this could also be an important aspect of capacity building. That said it is important to note that this will have financial, logistics and time implications for the project and those to be involved in it.

### **Use of secondary and other data sources**

The case-based study helps to focus on problems, issues and concerns. In the WIDE research, communities have been studied as cases while data about and the different issues they face are collected from individual interviewees. While this has been appreciated by many, linking the local to the regional and the national levels in the analysis of data is something that has not been planned for. Analytic induction in which insights and reasoning starting from the community can build up into the larger picture is necessary and may raise the relevance of WIDE findings in the face of government, policy makers, experts and the academia. This has a methodological implication: documents, archival records and policies, laws and strategies need to be consulted. Of course, interpretation, which WIDE tended to be not doing much so far, may also come as a necessity here.

In all WIDE phases since 2009, an impressive policy analysis was done in order to inform the design of the research; in WIDE Bridge (Dom with Vaughan 2018) this focused on the topics that had been selected as scope of enquiry. However, the policy review has not been used

as fully as might be the case. Only some of the DB authors used it implicitly in writing the DBs. Therefore, my suggestion here builds on what is already in practice. ***The evidences at the local level need to be corroborated and augmented by other evidences both at the local and higher levels (regional and national) in order to make generalizations and broader recommendations.*** There are some references in WIDE bridge outputs made to national and global influences, but those references remain in just few instances and are short of doing the job I am talking about here. Largely, WIDE cases seem to have been thus far mostly detached from the larger pictures while this is not in the nature of communities as open systems interacting with regional, national and global factors as well. **The interest and need of many participants of the recent workshops also reflect the same thing, valuing generalizations and broader conclusions for their relevance to policy and practice. In fact, a participant at one of the federal workshops candidly demanded for recommendations that are strong enough to compel government to do things differently.** This (that is generalization) may require having a shared analytical perspective or guideline which may be forged through collective discussions before or when WIDE4 launches.

### **Remaining faithful to the evidence base**

However, some workshop participants also shared their concern that conclusions need to be based on findings and not on general knowledge or expectations of the writers. In this regard, subjectivity was also raised as an issue, stating the need of controlling it so that it does not make the writers judgmental in their analyses. ***Even though no specific conclusion was referred to in the Bridge outputs in this sense, the comment is very useful for WIDE4 in which many researchers from diverse disciplinary backgrounds and experiences come together to do research and to write. As anthropologists say it is true that it is not possible for one to be free of values. However, researchers need to know this human frailty at the outset and need to guard their values or judgments against influencing their findings.***

Here WIDE teams may recall Dr Bevan's emphasis on the importance of clear and explicit links between statements made e.g. in Discussion Briefs, and the evidence from the data which support the statements. To do this, she recommends that each DB should be supported by a longer research paper outlining the conceptual framework used to analyze the data showing how comparisons between cases (or over time) were made (e.g. through data comparison matrices), and wherever useful, indicates where the 'raw data' can be found (which module etc.).

### **Maintaining differential perspectives**

The use of multiple sources of evidence is a striking quality of WIDE as a case study (women/men; adult/young; poor/rich; and age sets within the youth). However, once data are collected and converted into field reports, then community reports/profiles and then discussion briefs, the variations or similarities among these multiple sources might not

come up enough ***to allow sufficiently disaggregated qualitative analysis and to give readers the sense of the full rigour of the research.*** This may be because the similarities dominate but, in the future, some scrutiny might help bring a positive difference in this regard. ***As this may not require much preparation save a simple guideline to be shared among the writers, even WIDE4 could do much, reflecting the multiple data sources in its outputs: findings and conclusions.***

## **7. Writing and Presentation of Research Results**

So far, among others, the WIDE research data has been used to produce field reports, community reports, discussion briefs, power-point presentations, books and web-based documents as its major outputs. The data that come from the field, structured in narrative report documents using the same headings across communities, is also part of these outputs, always available for those who may want or need to do archival research. Thus far there were only a few instances in which the 'raw data' was used by non-WIDE researchers, but the WIDE team is keen for this to be done more in future, and it is intended for report documents to be available on the WIDE website (this is already the case for most of the WIDE3 RDs).

While largely researchers who are not directly involved in the actual data collection process (save development of instruments and field visits for a few days in some communities) write the community reports based on the field reports developed by the ROs, the involvement of the latter in the reporting process as they have to read and comment on the CRs is very useful. The DBs series II were all peer reviewed and in fact some of the reviewers were also interviewed for the radio and TV series which WIDE Bridge Extension carried out in collaboration with FSS and media specialists. Both of these experiences leave good lesson for WIDE4. **The process of peer reviewing the community reports and all other outputs is outstanding to improving the quality of the outputs.** This practice could be more formalized and rendered more beneficial when more university researchers come aboard in partnership for WIDE4. **In fact, the team leader from each university might need to take the responsibility of coordinating this.**

Relatively speaking WIDE has good dissemination strategy and practices. Even though it is also difficult to judge its effect on policy and practice, there were instances that it indirectly facilitated people's thoughts and perceptions and this has been the case with some donor institutions which financed WIDE in the past. I do not think this is common with many other research outputs in this country. However, as also mentioned in the recent workshops, ***there is always scope for improvement. As FSS was mentioning, an inbuilt communication strategy needs to be made part of the forthcoming WIDE4 project.***

A number of comments have come from these workshops on the communication strategy. The issues of language and use of different media including FM radios were usefully mentioned. Although there were reservations expressed by some particularly in the current

volatile context, the use of social media such as Tweeter and Face book were also raised. However, more visible as reflected in the workshops was the need to reach the wider popular audience and the need to concentrate the dissemination activities in the regions, involving communities, wereda and zones.

There is one more point to emphasize here. The target of the communication strategy could be made at different levels. One is at the policy level and the other, at the practice level. Rethinking the suggestions and recommendations of the Bridge phase and earlier rounds, one may be enticed to say that most of them pertain to practice as they do to policy. This means there are many things that could be improved through changing practice that is without involving policy analysis and revision or change. Within each of this level, there are more levels of audiences as also reflected by the workshop participants. These are the general public, communities themselves, and also, government at wereda, regional and federal levels. The conclusion at the concluding workshop was that these are all worthwhile target audiences but there needs to be tailored ways of engaging with each, also considering time and resources availability. (For more see Dom 2019a).

The media dissemination activities just completed as part of the WIDE Bridge extension were successful. However, there were also unexpected challenges that needed to be surmounted. The allocated budget was an issue as it was not adequate, also owing to the fact that these activities came as add-ons after the project started. This can be resolved in WIDE4 as the project is going to develop a communication strategy as part of the overall design and execution of the research from the outset. In its current shape, the preliminary concept note submitted to potential donors, does not fully accommodate this need. ***When time allows, the communication strategy needs to be done in collaboration with the universities, FSS and regional mass media agencies or other such regional facilities. FSS shall proceed with being the lead as in the Bridge phase, this time around to land a robust, continuous and actionable communication strategy, in addition to guiding its implementation. This may have cost implication which might mean reducing what the project can do in terms of data making and analysis. However, much of the work in the beginning can be done virtually to reduce cost and prevent this from happening. Limiting the role of the regional mass media agencies to dissemination of findings and very important or landmark project events could also be taken as an option if cost is going to be a very serious issue.***

#### **Discussion briefs and their translation**

The discussion briefs published in English and Amharic were well received by WIDE audiences. The idea suggested in the workshops that they need to be preceded by extended articles, which may also be printed in journals despite the long time factor, is quite agreeable. ***As the bridge experience shows, however, translating the DBs written in English into Amharic was very challenging. Editing and re-writing brought difference, but***

***there could have been a better way of ensuring quality.*** In the future, translation work may need to be done by people who speak the local language and have been involved in the research. This was also the view of a few workshop participants from informal discussions. If this is not possible, other social scientists in research and academia could be of help, as long as they are familiar with the research topics. ***The use of different communication approaches such as other Ethiopian languages than Amharic and the use of popular as opposed to expert languages were discussed and agreed in the WIDE Bridge concluding workshop.*** Cultural variations among communities were also rightly mentioned as factors to heed to. (The details of the discussions or remarks on a future communication strategy are covered in Dom 2019a).

### **Data on specific households**

The audiences reached through workshops at both regional and federal levels were most appreciative of the WIDE approach and the results for policy analysis, planning and execution of interventions. However, that a longitudinal study more or less focuses on same issues and cases to show if they have changed or not through time, might raise the feeling of the same results being repeated from one time to the other. This concern was reflected by some participants in these workshops. Given the nature of a longitudinal study, it is difficult to fully deal with this issue. However, providing some quantitative measure to the qualitatively described changes, as already mentioned, and providing enough qualitative descriptions to show variations, when there are, may partly address this concern. Shifting among key topics after some rounds or periods could also be a means here. A typical example of this concern was reflected in Bridge findings relating to farmland and pastureland shortage. That population is increasing and hence cultivable land decreasing from time to time has become an obvious public knowledge. Bridge qualitative descriptions sometimes supported by anecdotal quantification have seemed to be not strong enough to obviate such a concern. Rather than an all-case quantitative survey, a few households could be purposively selected by stratifying the community to get this quantitative dimension, in addition to the different possibilities mentioned in an earlier section of this methods note.

### **Creating a baseline with Kebele data**

A backward looking exercise to reconstruct the baseline of the studied communities, at least focusing on key aspects could be attempted as WIDE needs to be trying to incorporate some quantification in the future. The concern about baseline is proper so that the design of WIDE4 would be made in such a way that this is possible at least with jointly agreed economic, social, and natural environmental conditions at kebele, community, and household levels (the sum is greater than the parts). Carefully and systematically developed research instruments could easily capture these very useful data. Land registers at kebele level are quick source of data, say, on kebele or village land ownership and land use practices. ***Registers, reports and even wall posts maintained with agricultural development agents could reveal at some glance the cropping patterns, use of modern***

***farm inputs, crop yield, livestock holding and other key data that could serve to build a baseline and real-time data for future research.***

### **From the local to broader policy considerations**

The dictum ‘one size does not fit all’ is a message that WIDE had already gotten across to some of the higher policymaking bodies and senior experts in the past. The same may be true with the broad-based audiences WIDE did reach, including those during the Bridge phase from 2018 through 2019. That said the findings of WIDE also suggest that there is a limit to which policies have to fit specific, individual cases. Local conceptions of social change are in order, based on WIDE findings so that local but important problems missed in macro policies focusing on the larger pictures are unraveled and brought up for public attention by WIDE. ***These local conceptions could synthesize the local challenges, problems and opportunities into a supra-local analysis that could provide input for medium-scale policies to address them. For this, methodological awareness and skills in synthesizing, generalizing and concluding findings and writing recommendations are necessary. As already said, there is a limit to which policies could be tailored to local specific problems, but appropriate and flexible programming could better answer more specific issues.***

### **Linking the communities to the universities**

Dissemination of research findings to the communities are part of the recommendations and common understanding made on the workshops with WIDE partners and other invitees, particularly the concluding workshop. This may increase people’s understanding of their local conditions and circumstances from outsiders’ perspectives. This notwithstanding, there are two issues I do expect to see. One is that the presentations need to be done after the analysis and write up is complete so that findings are not confounded by influential people or those with vested interest. However, this should not mean that the concerns and reflections from these dissemination workshops would not be included in the reports. Second, the overall exercise, as also discussed in the workshops, may raise some expectation on the part of the communities at large in the form of development assistance. This may owe to the fact that the research will be very likely to gain more visibility at the community level that it did not before. Here, I am ***contemplating having joint discussions on this potential need with the universities and concerned regional authorities. Linking these communities with the university community and outreach services could be an ideal solution to address this concern. The workshop has also raised the question of who could execute such an intervention.***

### **Data to conclusion link**

As already mentioned under section 5, remaining faithful to the data is crucial. However, the reflections of writers from experience, expertise knowledge and theories they may

subscribe to need to be made explicit. This is only to say that there has to be the need to clearly differentiate their commentaries and positions from the findings, generalizations and recommendations arising specifically from the data.

## **Impact**

**Questions about the impact of the WIDE research have been perennial everywhere.** The notion that WIDE findings, suggestions and recommendations are relevant to policy and practice seems not to have been good enough to stop the audience from forwarding this question. In a country where it has become the motto that every research act should be geared towards addressing practical problems of the people, this concern is quite expected. *As already mentioned in this note, while there are some signs that WIDE results are being used in development discussions, a systematic way of getting at least proxy indicators for its impact could be attempted during WIDE4. The strategy of disseminating the results at community, wereda and zonal levels in a participatory manner would have been ideal but would be very costly and time consuming. While this can be tried as far as budget is permitting and there is time, involving representatives from these levels in regional workshops could be more feasible. The involvement of these representatives is more likely to make WIDE4 more impacting as planning, budgeting and execution could be improved by local governments themselves if they want to utilize WIDE findings.* However, it is also important to note that not all applied research activities can solve practical problems as all academic research have some contribution to address practical problems. With WIDE4 as a research to be carried out by and in collaboration with universities where intellectual exercises have due space for academic and theoretical knowledge, my expectation is that it is possible to achieve a good balance.

## **8. Summary and Conclusion**

This methodological note is prepared with the intent of enabling WIDE4 to become more participatory and have more influence, as an undertaking to be implemented in a complex institutional framework never tried before. It envisages further reliance on the WIDE methodology that has been developed over the last 24/25 years and the theorization behind its methods. Methodologically, the salient concerns are treated with some hope for improvement: instituting some degree of quantification (WIDE is largely qualitative); working at scale to include basic kebele, wereda & higher level data (to enhance comparison and generalization); use of group interviews; use of qualitatively informed quantitative questionnaires and matrices; use of systematic observations; use of extended case stories; use of attitude scales; use of the chain of impacts approach in data collection and analysis; systematic use of pictures; historical and comparative use of data, including pictures; balancing between breadth and depth of data; balancing between applied and academic research; and the focus on specific topics while maintaining the holistic approach which has been a hallmark of WIDE.

The note also suggests that the core community framework reflecting complexity theory as an overarching, umbrella concept could be used to facilitate the design, data collection and analyses of WIDE4 while focusing on specific key policy relevant topics and looking at their different aspects holistically. Apart from the balance between a holistic coverage and topical focus, WIDE4 will also have to face the challenge of maintaining balance between policy and academic interests. This need could become even more pronounced as many university research and teaching professors will be participating in WIDE4 from the start to the end. The other issue of balance emanates from the need to bring on board other disciplines than sociology and anthropology which have been dominating the WIDE teams over the years. A truly trans-disciplinary approach is envisaged as much as possible given different factors. The involvement of scholars from different disciplines and perhaps different research traditions as well may also broaden not only the methodological but also the theoretical base of WIDE4. As a community-based research, more emphasis in the future on indigenous or traditional and local knowledge, attitudes and practices to supplement scientific/official knowledge and practices is quite a need. To do this, such theories as ethnoscience could be relied on. The note also places greater significance on dissemination of WIDE results and towards this supports the idea of a built-in and actionable communication and dissemination strategy to be implemented by the universities and the prior WIDE team and to be spearheaded by FSS.

## References

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