



WIDE Bridge (extension)

Ethiopia WIDE research outreach 2009-2019

Lessons learned

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9 August 2019*

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Ethiopia WIDE research outreach 2009-2019

Lessons learned

Introduction

This paper reviews and discusses the ways in which Ethiopia WIDE has engaged with various audiences on the research findings and their possible implications in the past decade, covering WIDE3 (2009-14), WIDE Transition (2015-17) and WIDE Bridge (2018-19) projects. It draws on and complements a forthcoming paper written by Philippa Bevan on *'the trajectory of Ethiopia WIDE'*¹. It also builds on an earlier paper called *'WIDE - engaging with policy since 2010'* (Dom 2016), which reflected on the experience of the growing engagement of WIDE with government between 2009 and 2016. This paper looks more broadly at all forms of engagement of the WIDE research with a range of different audiences. The main objective is to draw lessons with a view to developing a more robust engagement strategy for WIDE4 and further phases of the WIDE research.

Evolving nature of WIDE research and WIDE outreach

Initiated in 1994, Ethiopia WIDE has become a longitudinal research through a combination of serendipity and perseverance of its two founders, Philippa Bevan and Alula Pankhurst. From its inception in 1994 to mid-2019 when this paper has been written, Ethiopia WIDE has evolved in its nature and purpose, which in turn, led to an evolution over time of the WIDE research outreach strategies and activities.

The trajectory of the Ethiopia WIDE research is documented in considerably more depth in Bevan (forthcoming). In summary, **WIDE1** (fieldwork in fifteen of the twenty 'WIDE communities' in 1994/5, analysis and dissemination mainly in 1995/6) and **WIDE2** and its associated DEEP research project (main fieldwork in 2003 in the twenty communities, some dissemination in 2004/5, a much longer fieldwork in four of the communities and two urban sites in 2004/5, some dissemination in 2005/8) were **academic research projects** aimed to develop a theoretical and empirical methodology for studying Ethiopia's rural communities holistically and to produce reports and academic papers, although a few policy-oriented papers and briefs were written as well². The **WIDE3** project, started in 2009, maintained this **academic objective** whilst also aiming to make of WIDE a **policy-relevant research**.

The holistic scope of enquiry of WIDE1 and WIDE2, clearly articulated through the 'core community framework' developed by Pip Bevan at the outset of the WIDE3 project, was maintained. However, WIDE3 also looked into the 'development interventions' that were being implemented in the

¹ Bevan, Philippa (forthcoming). *WIDE Bridge Methodology Paper: The trajectory of Ethiopia WIDE – Where has it come from and where might it be going?*

² Papers on extreme poverty and power for the World Bank, migration for Irish Aid, and famine and food aid, HIV/AIDS and mothers and infants during drought.

communities. In WIDE3 and later WIDE Bridge, development interventions are understood as one of the types of factors that influence change (or lack thereof) in a particular community and/or for particular types of people, alongside and interacting with broader modernisation processes and community-specific local dynamics. The introduction of an explicit policy focus in WIDE3 led to a new major research question about government development interventions. Whilst the main outputs of WIDE3 were academically rigorous, they were intended for development partners and, increasingly in the 2009-2014 period, for government as well. Academic papers using the data were also produced for two International Conferences of Ethiopian Studies (ICES) in 2012 and 2015, and methodology papers and chapters written for the UK academic scene, although these were secondary to the policy outputs.

The WIDE3 outputs included a first series of five topic-specific, policy-oriented discussion briefs aimed at government as well as development partners and other Ethiopia-focused development practitioners. In the **WIDE Transition** project (2015-17) another series of discussion briefs were produced, **reinforcing the 'policy relevance' shift**.

A further shift occurred with the **WIDE Bridge** project (2018-19), in which it was agreed to **reduce the scope of the research**, moving away from using the whole 'core community framework' and focusing the enquiry on four aspects of political economy and three areas of development interventions. These were: farming, non-farming, social protection, and local government and governance for the former; and land use and local urbanisation, the impact of drought 2015-17, and the economic experiences of young people for the latter. It was also intended to look into the changing dynamics of inequality in the communities. The project was designed to focus on only four of the twenty WIDE communities, partly out of uncertainties and limitations with regard to funding and partly to take account of other ambitions.

The WIDE Bridge project had indeed yet another objective that is, exploring and experimenting ways of initiating a process of **institutionalisation** of the WIDE approach. This was reflected in the composition of the core research team and also led to the development of links, growing stronger over the Bridge period, with Ethiopian institutions potentially interested by WIDE. By the end of the WIDE Bridge research project, four **Ethiopian Universities** in the regions in which WIDE communities are located (namely Ambo University in Oromia, Bahir Dar University in Amhara, Hawassa University in SNNP, and Mekelle University in Tigray) and the Addis Ababa-based Forum for Social Studies, an **Ethiopian think tank** with a strong track record in development research and dissemination and policy engagement, had become 'WIDE partners' ready to take a much more prominent role in WIDE4.

Towards the end of 2018, two of the WIDE Bridge funders were willing to consider funding an extension of the project, aimed specifically at widely disseminating and engaging on the findings of the WIDE Bridge research. The WIDE team proposed to produce a book compiling the Series III DBs, and developed a packed programme of engagement activities aimed at a wide range of Ethiopia-based audiences, including for the first time, WIDE workshops at regional level, building on the links established with partner universities in the course of 2018. At the time of writing this paper these activities have all been implemented. Alongside this **focus on policy-relevant outputs**, a number of **academic outputs** were also prepared and are in the process of being finalised.

The box below presents an overview of the main forms of written outputs and events that have constituted WIDE outreach/engagement strategy since 2009.

Main written outputs

- Non-academic audiences mainly in Ethiopia: community profiles, research reports, papers, discussion briefs, books, numerous presentations
- Academic audiences: presentations, articles and book chapters – mainly geared to Ethiopianists except for those produced by Pip Bevan for international researchers
- None directed at the wider public and/or WIDE communities.

Engagement activities in Ethiopia/for Ethiopianist audiences

- Large number of meetings, workshops, seminars with donors
- Government-focused events: seminars, high-level discussion fora (3), bilateral meetings, regional and federal thematic workshops (WIDE Bridge, 2019)
- Workshops at/for Ethiopian universities (WIDE Bridge, 2018 and 2019)
- Presentations at ICES 18 (Dire Dawa 2012), ICES 19 (Warsaw 2015) and ICES20 (Mekelle 2018)

Wider audience

- Lecture at Addis Ababa University (WIDE3, October 2013)
- Media communication programme (WIDE Bridge, 2019)
- Public lecture (WIDE Bridge, 2019)
- Worknet

Wider academic audience

- Open access: website www.ethiopiawide.net
- Engaging on approach and methodology in seminars (in UK)
- Special issue on 'global rural Ethiopia' in the US-based International Journal of Ethiopian Studies (IJES) (forthcoming)
- Four chapters in a book to be published by the UK-based ZED publishing house, on 'Youth on the Move: Views from Below on Ethiopian International Migration' (forthcoming).

It is noteworthy – and I will return to this point later in this paper – that thus far, WIDE engagement activities have mostly been 'additional' i.e. **added to research projects afterwards or at the end**, and often requiring additional fundraising and funding.

In the following sections of this paper I review the different types of outputs and events with regard to their effectiveness in engaging on the Ethiopia WIDE research with a range of stakeholders. This discussion is based on the WIDE team's own assessment, which was supplemented by an in-depth discussion at a 'concluding workshop' that the team held with the four Ethiopian Universities and the Forum for Social Studies as WIDE partners, in June 2019.

WIDE Ethiopia-focused engagement

In this section I review outputs produced and events held primarily targeting a range of Ethiopia-based audiences. Before doing this, it is useful to recall the **assumptions** on which **WIDE evolving engagement strategy and activities** were **founded**. These assumptions, implicit in 2009 when WIDE3 began, were formulated at a later stage in Dom (2016).

First, whilst WIDE3 intended to be policy-relevant, the WIDE team were also keen for it to be an **independent research** not influenced by policy agendas. However, the policy relevance objective clearly made it necessary to reach out to Ethiopia's development partners (including our funders), through consultation during the research design process and discussions at various stages of the analysis and formulation of conclusions. We were also keen to reach out to Ethiopian academic circles and 'civil society'. That said, it was also evident that in Ethiopia policy-making is led by the Government of Ethiopia and therefore, GoE should be the major target audience of our engagement

strategy, at federal and ideally also regional levels³. The context when WIDE3 started (late 2000s/early 2010s) led us to take a conscious decision of **engaging separately** with **GoE** on one hand, and with **development partners** and other stakeholders, on the other. At the time, we felt that this would be a more effective way of addressing what appeared to be quite different ‘mental models’ of how development should be pursued, on government and donor sides respectively.

Second, we also thought that it would be more effective to **engage with government at senior level**. This was based on the idea that senior officials would likely be more influential in policymaking and in strategically orienting the implementation of development interventions, and also would be more open-minded and ready to listen to constructively critical views on aspects of policy and practices. *Third*, we were convinced of the importance of **highlighting achievements** and positive aspects of the country’s trajectory first, so as to generate a context enabling us to **raise issues** deserving attention in a positive manner in a second stage; and that we needed to do so in a neutral tone, recognising that as researchers we were not policy experts so that our ambition would be limited to put forward ideas for consideration and suggestions. This is also the reason why the main policy-oriented outputs of WIDE have been called ‘discussion briefs’ and not ‘policy briefs’.

At the concluding workshop with WIDE partners it was agreed that this approach had been useful, to allow frank discussions on relatively sensitive issues with government officials who might have been more defensive in more mixed audiences. However, as illustrated in the thematic workshops held in June 2019, the **context has substantially changed since 2009/10**. This evolution is poised to continue with regard to the relationship between both government and development partners, and federal and regional governments; greater openness in policymaking may emerge, which would enable experts in government administration to voice their views more assertively. It is too early to say where the unfolding evolution will lead, but in any instance, the **assumptions** on which the engagement strategy of WIDE between 2009 and 2019 were founded would **need to be revisited at the outset of WIDE4**.

Engaging in Ethiopia - Key written outputs

Between 2009 and 2019 the two main forms of written outputs based on the WIDE research data and published in Ethiopia have been three Series of Discussion Briefs, and four books.

Discussion Briefs

The idea of writing Discussion Briefs came out of discussions within the team and with some of the development partners who, whilst acknowledging the value of the numerous presentations made by the team (see below) and of the WIDE research reports, noted that it was unlikely that anyone in government would engage with the latter. The main objective of producing ‘briefs’ was to find a more **suitable way to disseminate and engage in discussions with the government** about the research findings and their possible implications for policy and practice.

The WIDE Discussion Briefs (DBs) are therefore **short topic-specific papers**, reviewing the WIDE data on the topic, drawing conclusions and possible policy implications, and putting forward ideas for consideration by policymakers and practitioners interested by Ethiopia’s development. The briefs include an initial two-page ‘key messages’ part and a 10 to 15-page main text. The topics were selected for their policy relevance and salience for government policy agendas when each Series was conceived. A number of topics were identified in discussions with senior government officials. In all cases the WIDE team also assessed the feasibility of addressing the topic with the WIDE data at hands. The DBs were **rapidly made available online** on the Ethiopia WIDE website⁴.

³ As will be seen below, the opportunity to reach out to the regional level only arose with the WIDE Bridge phase in 2018-19.

⁴ See <http://ethiopiawide.net/publications/policy-discussion-briefs/> for Series I and Series II; <http://ethiopiawide.net/publications/wide-bridge-discussion-briefs/> for Series III.

The way they were produced differs for each Series. The five [Series I Discussion Briefs](#), produced in 2014 and based on the WIDE3 data made in the twenty WIDE communities, focused on agriculture, value chains, rural job creation, equitable service delivery, and models and realities of transformation. The **authors were not members of the WIDE team**, and had been commissioned to write these briefs based on their interest. The first three briefs were written by senior researchers from the Economic Policy Analysis Unit (EPAU) within the then Ethiopian Development Research Institute (EDRI)-now folded into the Ethiopian Policy Institute (PSI)-, a think tank close to government; the researchers' background was in economics and their experience mainly in quantitative research and data analysis. The other two briefs were written by consultants/researchers with a background in civil society development and political sciences, respectively, who had been working in Ethiopia since decades and one of whom was relatively familiar with the WIDE research, though not the data.

The process was **complex and somewhat stressful** for the writers, due to the volume of work arising in part from lack of familiarity with the data, and the WIDE team, keen to see outputs with which they would be happy in terms of approach to using the data, tone, and overall 'take' on the topic. In addition, the World Bank managing the Trust Fund from which WIDE3 was financed found it necessary to provide comments on draft versions of the briefs. This turned out to be on the whole rather unhelpful, among others as the reviewers did not fully share the commitment of the team and of the authors to stick to evidence and remain ideologically neutral. The process also added to the workload as the authors and the team together spent time to justify the final formulation in the briefs. These various difficulties meant that a sixth brief, which would have focused on gender, was never finalised.

The nine [Series II Discussion Briefs](#), produced in 2016, focused on ruralisation, inequality, youth transitions, education, women and young girls health and welfare, women economic participation, moving for work, economic success, and learning and 'technology transfer'. They were **written mostly 'in house'**: six of the nine briefs by members of the WIDE core team, one by an experienced Research Officer, who was therefore familiar with the nature of the data, one by the author of one of the Series I DBs, who was therefore aware of the complexity of the process, and the ninth one by a well-known colleague who had closely followed the research and had strong expertise in the topic. Core team members were closely coaching the other authors when necessary.

Many (but not all) of the briefs were **backed up by a longer paper** and in some cases summary data matrices, making explicit links with the WIDE data. The briefs were **all peer reviewed** by Ethiopian academic or policy knowledgeable people selected for their expertise in one of the topics. In addition to author and peer reviewer engaging bilaterally on each brief, the process included a one-day workshop where all papers were presented and discussed with all the authors and peer reviewers present, to strengthen the overall coherence in approach and make links between topics, where relevant. This peer review process was found to be really useful and enriching the quality of the briefs.

The seven [Series III Discussion Briefs](#) focused on land use and management and urbanisation, modernisation of smallholder farming, rural nonfarm livelihoods, young people's economic experiences, rural modernisation and economic inequalities, selected aspects of social protection, and local government and governance. They were **entirely written 'in house'** that is, by members of the WIDE Bridge core team, although three of them had only joined the core team at the start of the WIDE Bridge project in early 2018. The DBIII mainly drew on the WIDE Bridge data made in early 2018 in only four of the twenty communities. There was **considerably less time** to write the DBs than was the case for the first two Series, with two consequences. First, the links between each brief and the evidence on which it is based were less systematically established and documented. Second, there was no time (and also no funding) for organising another peer review process as for the Series II.

WIDE Books

Several WIDE books were published. They are listed below, with a few notes on each.

- (a) Pankhurst, A. (ed). 2017. *Change and Transformation in Twenty Rural Communities in Ethiopia: Selected aspects and implications for policy*. Addis Ababa: PDRC. This book is the result of the team's decision to build on the thorough analyses made to prepare the Series II Discussion Briefs and produce more academically grounded chapters that could be compiled in a book. The team was also keen to identify general themes that might emerge and conclusions that might be drawn across topics, and to write this up in a concluding chapter. An introductory chapter was also prepared which sets the scene, introducing the WIDE research and each of the chapters. In line with our commitment to make the research products available to Ethiopian audiences in the first place, the book was published in Addis Ababa (500 copies printed). The book chapters are also available online⁵. The book was launched at a high profile event in February 2017, which was attended by high level officials such as Advisors of the Prime Minister, some ministers and a range of other stakeholders from the development and academic communities.
- (b) Pankhurst, A. et al (eds). 2018. *Changing Rural Ethiopia: Community Transformation*. Los Angeles (USA): Tsehai Publishers. This book is an international edition of the first one, slightly amended. The objective in publishing it internationally was to make it available beyond Ethiopia and in particular, to western libraries and universities with programmes in development studies, African studies or Ethiopian studies.
- (c) Pankhurst, A. (ed). 2017. *Twenty Rural Communities in Ethiopia: Selected Discussion Briefs on Change and Transformation*. Addis Ababa: PDRC (English and Amharic). This is a compilation of the Series II DBs, with a short introduction to present the Ethiopia WIDE research. The Series II DBs were translated in Amharic and both versions were published in Addis Ababa (500 copies each). The chapters are also available online on WIDE website as DBs, including in Amharic⁶.
- (d) Pankhurst, A. and C. Dom (eds). 2019. *Rural Ethiopia in Transition: Selected Discussion Briefs*, 2018. Addis Ababa: PDRC (English and Amharic). This book is a compilation of the Series III DBs (based on WIDE Bridge data). In addition, it includes an overview chapter that draws overall themes and conclusions across the seven topics, which can also be read as standalone chapters⁷. The preface was signed by Dr Fitsum Assefa, Commissioner of the Planning and Development Commission with the Rank of Minister, who opened the high level forum held in October 2018 to discuss the draft briefs with government (see below) and highly appreciated the research. The Series III DBs were also translated in Amharic; the Amharic version will shortly be made available on the WIDE website, too. The English book was printed in 1,000 copies and the Amharic book in 800 copies. The books were launched through a series of workshops organised in April-June 2019 at regional and federal levels and a public lecture reaching out to a non-government audience (see section 'events' below).

With the exception of the US-published '*Changing Rural Ethiopia: Community Transformation*', available for purchase⁸, the other books were **locally published and widely distributed for free** to Ethiopian stakeholders, including a large number of government agencies, through workshops,

⁵See <http://ethiopiawide.net/publications/>.

⁶ See <http://ethiopiawide.net/wp-content/uploads/Ethiopia-WIDE-Discussion-Briefs-Amharic.pdf>.

⁷ See http://ethiopiawide.net/wp-content/uploads/WIDEBridge_Rural-Ethiopia-in-Transition-Overview.pdf.

⁸See http://www.store.tsehaipublishers.com/product_info.php/social-sciences/changing-rural-ethiopia-p-192?cPath=71_63&osCsid=ea4520c37ca977e39848c3087eda1aae.

personal links, deliveries in agencies etc.; they are also all **available on the Ethiopia WIDE website** as indicated above.

These books target different audiences. The 2017 and 2019 books compiling the Series II and III **Discussion Briefs** are **more policy-oriented** and target mainly an Ethiopian or Ethiopia-focused audience. The **first WIDE book**, both in its Addis Ababa and international edition, targets a more **academic public**. Its content is largely Ethiopia-specific but it calls on analytical frameworks and provides insights that **might be relevant to other contexts** – such as for instance, the analytical framework on ‘youth transitions to adulthood’ or the insights related to the importance of space/ location and time in trajectories of change.

Discussion

As outlined above and also in the section ‘events’ below, continuous efforts were exerted to widely disseminate the WIDE outputs. In some instances, the team knows that specific book chapters or discussion briefs were read; in a few cases, senior government officials asked the team to direct them to the most relevant outputs in relation to a topic which was being discussed by the government; in other cases, other research teams expressed appreciation of outputs they had read⁹; senior officials agreed to speak at launching events and to sign the preface of the books. Most recently for instance, the Vice-President of the Regional State of Tigray asked what insights WIDE could provide on local government and governance issues, as the regional government was in the process of developing kebele level reforms (February 2019); and as noted above, the federal Commissioner for the Planning and Development Commission with the Rank of Minister signed the preface of the WIDE Bridge book. Development agencies have been using selected insights in internal discussions and possibly in discussions with government. Whilst it may be desirable in theory, a more systematic **attempt at assessing the readership** of the WIDE written outputs would probably be rather **difficult to do**.

As seen above, different modalities were adopted for the three Series of DBs. The process of **peer reviewing** the briefs before their being discussed with government officials was found to be useful. It was agreed at the concluding workshop that this good practice should be **systematically adopted** in future for all WIDE outputs.

For all three DB Series, the authors found it **challenging to strike the right balance** between outlining **overall trends** drawing on the commonalities found across cases, and emphasising and illustrating that **‘one size doesn’t fit all’** and that policymaking and practice needs to be responsive to different types of community, household, and people. This was challenging analytically and also because it is hard to be concise and yet avoid the risk of over-generalisation. Time constraints may also have affected the rigour with which the authors established and documented the **links with the evidence** supporting the statements made in the briefs. There is also the temptation for the authors to ‘policy-message’ particular points they think are important even in cases where the evidence from the data is relatively tenuous. As suggested in the WIDE Bridge Methodology Paper (Bevan forthcoming), the participants to the WIDE Bridge concluding workshop agreed that to address these challenges **all Discussion Briefs** should be **based on a longer research paper** that should explain the conceptual framework underpinning the analysis, outline the analytical techniques used to reach the conclusions proposed in the DB, and provide the results of the analysis clearly linking the DB statements to the WIDE evidence basis.

⁹For instance, in April 2019 the lead researcher of the joint IFPRI/GoE Ethiopia Strategy Support Programme noted that “*the overview chapter (of the WIDE Bridge book) is unbelievably insightful... it is the best read on changing rural lives in Ethiopia*”. Another member of the same team highlighted the potential of the highly complementary approaches of the mostly quantitative ESSP and of the qualitative WIDE research in reaching out to policymaking.

The concluding workshop participants also discussed the relevance of **other formats** of dissemination, and **language issues**. Participants highlighted that there may be a need for different types of outputs tailored to different audiences such as academics, policymakers and implementers. It was also suggested that in addition to DBs being compiled in books and individual DBs available online, it would be useful to have the briefs available as separate printouts for people interested only in one or a few topics; and possibly also simpler, shorter (4-6 pages) briefs or factsheets such as those produced by the Young Lives longitudinal research project¹⁰.

The participants also discussed the question of reaching out to zonal and wereda levels as well as the communities themselves. There are two types of language issues in this respect: how to communicate complex research findings in **layman language**, and **translation** from English which has been the language in which the WIDE research has been designed and outputs written thus far. The experience of translating the Series II and III DBs into Amharic suggests that this is a time-consuming and costly process. Some team members were of the view that the translation was often too literal, which at times affected clarity even after review by a professional translator used to provide quality assurance services. It was suggested that in future Amharic-speaking researchers should translate themselves the outputs that they write, although this is likely to represent a significant workload. Moreover, reaching out to more local audiences would require going beyond translation into Amharic, with associated implications with regard to the complexity, time and costs entailed. It was suggested that there might be a case for using very short pamphlets, posters etc. to communicate for instance, facts about a given community or a specific topic across communities.

With regard to **reaching out to the communities which WIDE is studying**, this has been a longstanding desire of the WIDE team and our university partners are also very keen. It was agreed that it would be valuable to **write the history of each community** as documented by the WIDE research projects over time, as a resource for local actors and also a way for the younger generations in the communities to better appreciate the present situation in light of the past. This would, however, require a skillset quite different from research, and might be better undertaken as a standalone project. Other ideas were suggested such as using interactive forms of 'getting back' to the communities, producing a film etc.

Engaging at federal level – Key events

Five types of events were organised in the course of the WIDE3, WIDE Transition and WIDE Bridge projects: 1) events aimed at development partners, 2) cross-sectoral workshops with government officials; 3) bilateral meetings with senior government officials; 4) high level discussion fora with government, and 5) thematic workshops for groups of federal agencies. These are reviewed and discussed below.

Events with non-government development partners

A **large number of seminars, meetings, workshops** etc. were held to engage with **donors** and less frequently NGOs, to consult them on what they saw as priorities that the research could help to better understand and discuss findings and possible implications for policy and development interventions. Various formats were used, including agency-based meetings and seminars, workshops with a gathering of donor agencies; and topic-specific events as well as events presenting a range of findings across topics and sectors. Events were organised in relation to the research timeframe and in some cases, to respond to donor programming milestones. In two instances the team presented to the Donor Assistance Group (DAG), at Head of Agency/Ambassador level. Between 2009 and 2019 several dozens of **tailored presentations** were prepared as inputs to these meetings.

¹⁰See for instance <https://www.younglives-ethiopia.org/sites/www.younglives-ethiopia.org/files/2018-05/ETHIOPIA-Growth%26Nutrition-Factsheet-Oct17.pdf>.

Discussion - The audience at these events was generally interested and appreciative of the value added of such longitudinal, qualitative, micro-focused research as a complement to the more commonly available statistical and sectoral data. However, only in a few instances does the team know that the WIDE findings were used as inputs in donor-internal or donor-government dialogue or documentation. Examples of such cases include the use of WIDE findings in DFID internal discussions on poverty and vulnerability trends; and references to WIDE in the World Bank Poverty Assessment of 2014. There may be other instances, but it has **not been possible to systematically identify and document** them.

Other challenges to sustained impact include **high turnover** among donor staff, as well as the **short time horizon of donor programming** (3-5 years) compared to the longer term perspective which the WIDE research advocates as necessary to inform development interventions. There are no easy ways of addressing these challenges other than repeated outreach efforts acknowledging that in any meeting there will be participants who are not familiar with the WIDE research.

Cross-sectoral workshops for government officials

Over the years the WIDE team also presented the research findings and possible policy/programming implications through **workshops for a cross-section of government agencies, convened by EDRI** and chaired by the EDRI Executive Director or his representative. These were **half-day events** organised for cross-sectoral audiences, generally mixed in terms of participants' seniority, including at times a few State Ministers alongside Department Directors (later called 'process owners') and experts. The aim in convening multi-sectoral audiences for multi-sectoral presentations was to highlight the importance of understanding the interactions at local level between policies and interventions across sectors, often overlooked because of the strong sectoral demarcations in government policy and programming processes. In addition to the EDRI-convened, multi-agency half-day workshops just mentioned, a **half-day meeting** was organised in 2016 specifically for the **Planning Commission**. The meeting, chaired by the Deputy Commissioner, was attended by a wide cross-section of macro and sectoral experts of the Commission.

Discussion- In practice, **mixed audiences** presented **difficulties** as sector experts were rarely able to go beyond their sector-specific concerns, the time available limited the possibility to address these concerns comprehensively even when the WIDE evidence would have allowed it, and less senior representatives often appeared to defer to the positions expressed by more senior ones. It was also a challenge for the research team to concisely explain the **WIDE research approach and type of analysis** as well as the implications with regard to the type of findings and conclusions that can be drawn. Most government officials, familiar with the variable-based approaches used to analyse large-scale survey data and sectoral administrative data, had little exposure to the exemplar/case-based approach underpinning the WIDE research. The team was therefore often challenged with regard to the representativeness of the data, findings and conclusions, although a number of officials appreciated the value addition of this different approach¹¹. Other challenges included the fact that each seminar had to start practically from scratch given the high turnover among government officials. English used as a language in these seminars may have been a challenge for some participants as well.

The **thematic workshops** organised under the WIDE Bridge phase (see below) aimed to address some of these difficulties.

Bilateral meetings with senior officials

Occasionally members of the team also had **bilateral meetings with senior officials** at Minister or State Minister level. These were few in number usually arising from personal contacts and/or a

¹¹The Director of the Central Statistical Authority, who attended one of the workshops in 2013, was among those who highlighted the complementarity of survey, sector and qualitative research data.

specific reason why he or she was interested in WIDE. The most continuous relationship has been with Dr Abraham Tekeste, who was a supervisor in the first round of the Ethiopia Rural Household Survey with which WIDE1 was associated in 1995 and therefore knew the WIDE communities. We met Dr Abraham in his capacity of State Minister in the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, Deputy Commissioner of the Planning Commission, Minister of Finance and Economic Cooperation and finally in 2019, Vice-President of the Regional State of Tigray. These meetings were very useful and several of them prompted the development of DBs on topics that Dr Abraham had highlighted as being of particular interest for the government.

Other meetings occurred with the Minister of Agriculture, State Ministers of Agriculture and Education (TVET), Dr Yinager Dessie and Dr Fitsum Assefa as heads of the Planning (and Development) Commission in 2018 and 2019 respectively, and the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs in the current government, Dr Ergogie Tesfaye. The meeting with Dr Yinager prompted the half-day meeting with experts of the Planning Commission mentioned above. It also paved the way for the important role played by the Planning and Development Commission at the dissemination stage of the WIDE Bridge project in 2018-19, when Dr Fitsum opened the high level discussion forum of October 2018 (see below) and signed the preface of the WIDE Bridge book (see above), as well as for the Planning and Development Commission to convene and jointly organise with the WIDE team a series of thematic federal workshops held in May-June 2019 to launch and discuss the findings and suggestions of the Bridge book (see below). The role of the Commission, especially its Gender Directorate, was very instrumental in organising these workshops.

Discussion - Beyond these processes and their outputs, it is **difficult to assess the impacts of such meetings**. Some of the challenges are similar to those encountered in relation to development partners. For instance, the 2009-19 period has been characterised by relatively frequent high level government reshuffles so that continuity was hard to maintain, and policymakers also have a rather different time horizon from researchers. Moreover, securing attendance at such meetings is difficult as senior officials are often hard pressed by urgent priorities emerging on a daily basis (a fact which was particularly noticeable throughout the 2016-2019 period, characterised by a continuously troubled political climate); and although the independent nature of WIDE may have contributed to its credibility, it also meant that we could rarely rely on the convening influence of key donor agencies such as the World Bank or DFID.

High level discussion fora with government

'High level discussion fora' were initially conceived at a time when the first EDRI Executive Director, Ato Newai Gebreab, was also the Senior Economic Advisor of the Prime Minister. They were **aimed at high level policymakers** at State Minister or Senior Advisory level. They sought to offer an opportunity to discuss the WIDE research findings and possible implications at that level, **based on draft briefs** to be finalised considering the comments from the HLDf's. Thus, three fora were organised between 2009 and 2019, mirroring the preparation of the three Series of DBs. They are listed below, with a few remarks on each of them:

- 1) **High Level Discussion Forum, March 2014**, focusing on the Series I Discussion Briefs. The event was **convened by the World Bank** and invitations made by the WB to officials at Minister level in a cross-section of Ministries and agencies. The event, attended by the then Country Director and Senior Economist of the WB, who, as agreed remained silent, attracted few but senior people, including three of the PM's Advisers and four Ministers and State Ministers in charge of agriculture, social protection, and overall development planning, respectively. Discussions were frank and constructive, convincing, for instance, one of the PM Advisers to appreciate that 'one size does not fit all', and that acting accordingly would require a drastic change in government policy implementation systems and processes and genuine decentralisation.

- 2) **High Level Discussion Forum, March 2016**, focusing on the Series II Discussion Briefs. The event was **convened by EDRI** through the EDRI Director of Programmes. Following the WIDE team's suggestion it was agreed to widen the audience beyond government ministries. A number of think tanks also close to government, such as the Meles Zenawi Leadership Institute and the Centre for Policy Studies headed by the former Senior Political Advisor of the PM, were invited and attended, as well as the Civil Service University (CSU). The attendance was more numerous (around 25) although representatives were for the most part less senior than in March 2014. However, Dr Abraham Tekeste, then State Minister of MoFED, and the Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs of the CSU were in attendance. The **debate was fairly open although possibly lacking in depth**. Insightful closing remarks were delivered by Dr Abraham.
- 3) **High Level Discussion Forum, 31 October 2018**, focusing on the Series III Discussion Briefs (WIDE Bridge DBs). The event was **convened by EDRI** again, and this time invitations were also extended to key representatives from academia in Addis Ababa University, as well as to representatives from the WIDE partners (Ambo University, Bahar Dar University, Hawassa University, Mekelle University and the Forum for Social Studies).

Whilst the compressed timetable of the WIDE Bridge project left little choice but to go ahead as planned, the **timing of the event was problematic** as it took place shortly after a major reorganisation of the government administration and reshuffle in Ministerial positions, a few months into the tenure of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. As part of this reorganisation, EDRI was merged with the former Centre for Policy Studies and the resulting new Policy Studies Institute (PSI) was placed directly under the authority of the Minister for the Planning and Development Commission. On the positive side, as a result of the new status of EDRI, the event was **opened by the Commissioner for the Planning and Development Commission with rank of Minister**, Dr Fitsum Assefa, who highlighted the value of research such as WIDE to support the PDC in its mandate of overall strategic development planning¹². This reinforced the links initiated by Dr Fitsum's predecessor, and in turn allowed the WIDE team a few months later to approach Dr Fitsum in relation to the federal thematic workshops (see below). However, the discussion forum audience was mostly academic and counted **only five government agencies**.

Discussion - The three HLDF had similar formats – as half-day events featuring an introduction to the WIDE research, an expose of the latest findings of the WIDE research across the topics covered in the Series of DBs for which the HLDF was organised, and a plenary discussion. This format worked relatively well for the first HLDF, owing to the small number of participants and their seniority enabling them to speak with authority. It worked less well for the other two HLDFs, suffering from the same challenges as for the government workshops mentioned earlier in trying to engage a range of stakeholders beyond their sectoral 'comfort zone'. There was no continuity in terms of who attended the HLDFs. It also appeared to be increasingly hard to get senior people to attend, as the daily emergencies tended to become more numerous and pressing over the years, especially since 2016 with the outset of widespread unrest in the country and the events that unfolded since then.

Thematic workshops for groups of federal agencies

To address some of the challenges identified above with cross-sectoral audiences and multi-topic discussions, the WIDE team decided to experiment with a **new format** as part of the engagement activities in the Bridge project. The idea was to organise a **series of half-day theme-focused workshops for groups of federal agencies** for which the theme appeared to be relevant; they were scheduled to take place over a 6-8 week period in May-June 2019. As noted above, we approached the Minister for the Planning and Development Commission to seek her support in convening these

¹²See <http://www.edri.org.et/index.php/8-edri-news/204-edri-organizes-high-level-forum-of-ethiopia-wide>.

workshops – which she agreed to. One of her senior advisors oversaw the process whilst two experts, including the Director of the Gender Directorate, were designated to work with us on the organisation.

In practice, four thematic workshops were organised, focusing respectively on:

- **Land** use and management and urbanisation - Half-day, ten agencies invited, 7 June 2019, Ato Dessalegn Ramato (FSS) as discussant;
- **Rural economies** in transition: farming and nonfarming - Half-day, thirteen agencies invited, 11 June 2019, Dr Teferi Mequaninte (Agricultural Transformation Agency) as discussant;
- **Young people's** economic experiences and **gendered** transitions in rural Ethiopia - Full-day, 16 agencies invited, 13 June 2019, Dr Tsegay Gebrekidan Tekleselassie (Policy Studies Institute) and Dr Genet Zewdie (former Minister of Education and Ambassador in India, now Director and Founder of the Women Development Strategic Centre) as discussants;
- **Inequalities** and **social protection**– Half-day, 11 agencies invited, 18 June 2019, Dr Yeraswork Admassie (FSS Executive Director) as discussant.

Presentations made by the WIDE team drew on the related Series III DBs. For each theme a **senior discussant** was invited to present her or his take on the WIDE findings, also drawing from her or his own expertise, knowledge and experience. Invitations came from the Planning and Development Commission (PDC) and the PDC and WIDE teams **closely followed up through phone contacts, emails and meetings** to try and secure attendance. Following an earlier meeting of the WIDE team with a representative from the Prime Minister's Office, the PMO was invited to all four workshops and so was the Ministry of Finance and Economic Cooperation. The **timetable** for the series was **very tight** as the PDC had at some point indicated that they would not be able to assist in May 2019.

Discussion – The experience with this new format was **on the whole positive**, although not without **challenges and weaknesses**.

With regard to **audience**, it became clear that even an invitation from the Planning and Development Commission did not guarantee attendance. One challenge emerged for agencies invited to several workshops, but relevant for different directorates. As usual in government administration, invitations were addressed to the head of agency (Minister, Commissioner) so, one agency might receive invites for several workshops at dates very close to each other; this may have created confusion, and made it difficult to target specific directorates for specific themes. The PDC and WIDE teams' efforts to directly contact the agencies prior to the workshops worked in some cases but not in others; and confirmation of attendance was not always followed by actual attendance.

However and largely thanks to continuous efforts of the PDC experts, especially the Director of the Gender Directorate, a quite remarkable **total of 18 federal agencies** attended one or several workshops, ranging from 6 agencies for the land and rural economies workshops to 9 agencies for the youth & gender workshop, with audiences of 15 to 20 participants (excluding the WIDE team). There were **some noteworthy absences** such as the Job Creation Commission failing to attend the youth workshop and the Ministry of Agriculture failing to attend the land workshop. The Ministry of Women, Youth and Children was under-represented as well. On the other hand, a number of **agencies attended a WIDE workshop for the first-time**, including the Ministry of Urban Development and Construction, whose experts actively contributed to the debate on land issues, the Ministry of Trade and Industry, and the Federal Small and Medium Manufacturing Industry Development Agency.

With regard to **length, content and proceedings**, the **half-day** available to address each topic restricted the debate to plenary sessions as there was **no time to organise working groups**. This would have been possible with a full day on each topic but it would have been challenging to keep federal officials away from their desk for a full day, for an event organised in Addis Ababa for which lunch was provided but no per diems. The **more focused presentations and discussions on each**

theme seemed to **work better** than cross-sectoral multi-theme events, allowing more space/time for participants to engage in richer and at times quite critical debates. The contributions of the discussants were valuable and helped in kicking off the debate.

The **collaboration with the Planning and Development Commission** was highly valuable and worked well, thanks to the commitment of the PDC Gender Directorate Director especially, and the perseverance of the PDRC Coordinator and Dr Mulugeta who worked closely with the PDC team. In addition to getting the invites signed, the PDC team took care of the protocol preparations for each event; and in one instance assisted the WIDE team in identifying a discussant. Moreover, the PDC experts who attended the workshops made very useful contributions to the debates.

Overall discussion

The above suggests that the **thematic workshops** were an **effective** form of engagement, although they were **hard work** for the PDC and the WIDE teams with regard to organisation, there were difficulties with inviting the same agency at several workshops, and for the WIDE team it was challenging to keep up with the pace and deliver useful content throughout the series for the WIDE team, whilst there also was a sense of repetitiveness. Consideration might be given to fewer and longer (one-day) workshops organised around broader themes (e.g. economic development vs social development like what was done for the June 2019 public lecture, see below). The issue of identifying the most effective **convening agency** among federal agencies may need to be regularly reviewed as the government administration structure and agencies' mandates may continue to evolve as well as the actual 'clout' of the different agencies.

Over the 2009-2019 period it seems to have become **increasingly difficult to secure time from policymakers and senior officials**. This may be linked to an overabundance of workshops, meeting fatigue and senior officials having other priorities, and also the unsettled national context since a few years after Prime Minister Meles's death, which has continued to this day. The assumptions we made when starting the WIDE Bridge extension project, that the government administration would gradually settle and the context stabilise in the months following the October 2018 reorganisation, need to be revisited. It may take **years rather than months for a more stable context** to emerge, which could be more conducive for government senior officials to engage with research findings and suggestions.

On the other hand, the discussions at the federal thematic workshops, involving mostly experts, indicated that there has already been some opening: **experts** were distinctly **more willing to engage on critical issues** and challenge current government practices and programming priorities than a few years ago. Together with the less likelihood of a more stable context in the near future, this suggests that it might be more **effective to engage with experts in a first stage**, but then with time and resources to **follow up** with agency-based and/or high level meetings, if they suggest that this would be useful and would be willing to organise events or suggest ways they could be organised.

Engaging at regional level

The WIDE Bridge programme of engagement activities for the first half of 2019 included for the first time the organisation of **workshops in the four Regions** in which the WIDE communities are located and aimed mainly at reaching the Regional Governments. The idea was that these workshops would be **co-organised by the WIDE team and the partner University** in each Region (Ambo for Oromia, Bahir Dar for Amhara, Hawassa for SNNP and Mekelle for Tigray). The Universities, assumed to be closer to the Regional Governments than the WIDE team, would take responsibility for the invitations.

The details were discussed through visits of one of the WIDE team members to each university to prepare the workshops, in February 2019. It was agreed that there was a need to ensure sufficient consistency in approaches across the four Regions whilst also leaving space for specificities with regard to the regional government organisation, the existing relationship between the regional

government and the University etc. The workshops were designed as **one-day events**, held in the regional capital, and targeting mainly regional government officials both at **senior policymaking and expert level**. To this effect the workshops were organised in two parts:

- The **morning** was allocated to the presentation of the research, the research findings, and key policy-relevant suggestions for consideration **across all topics** addressed in WIDE Bridge, in the **presence of the more senior regional officials**, followed by a plenary discussion allowing them to express their views and raise their concerns.
- The **afternoon** included parallel **thematically-focused working groups** allowing more detailed discussions of each of the topics, which **regional experts** attended depending on their interest; followed by a plenary session for the working groups to report and a final discussion.

It had been agreed that each University would form a team (of maximum eight people) which would help prepare the workshop (invitations, organisation of protocol etc.) and also facilitate sessions in chairing one of the plenaries, co-facilitating one of the working groups alongside a WIDE team member, or assuring the role of master of ceremony for the day. The members of these **University teams** received a small financial compensation for their time.

In practice, the attendance to the workshops **differed quite markedly** across the Regions, notably with regard to the **mix of government and university representatives**; the **number of government agencies** represented (ranging from 7 in Bahir Dar and Hawassa to 3 for Oromia); the **level of seniority** of the regional government representatives (in Tigray the Regional Vice-President Dr Abraham Tekeste attended the morning sessions, as a longstanding supporter of WIDE; in Amhara the Senior Economic Advisor of the Regional President was in attendance). In Oromia and SNNP members of the **Regional Councils** were in attendance. Tigray and SNNP were in the process of establishing regional government **think tanks** modelled on the federal Policy Studies Institute, and senior representatives from these institutions were in attendance. In Oromia and Amhara representatives from the **Regional Planning Commissions** attended and in both cases actively contributed to the discussions.

In each Region the **University senior leadership** was supportive and actively involved including in opening the workshop and attending at least the morning sessions. The President and Vice-President for Research of Ambo University attended the whole day and actively contributed to the discussions.

Discussions – The **joint organisation** process worked well, thanks to Catherine’s preparatory visits and close follow-up by the PDRC Coordinator. The **format** of the workshops, combining cross-sectoral plenary sessions and parallel thematic working group sessions, worked quite well too. With regard to **language** it was agreed that whilst presentations would be in English, for the plenary and working group discussions each participant could express her/himself in the language of his choice. This **flexibility** seemed to have been working fairly well too.

At the concluding workshop our university colleagues highlighted that in spite of their strenuous efforts (involving handing out invitation letters in person rather than through the university courier service, repeated calls, visits to regional officials etc.), it had **proven difficult to secure attendance** of regional government officials even at expert level. They linked this to three main factors: 1) the **broader unsettled context** already mentioned in relation to federal events; 2) the **time of the year** chosen for the workshops (May-June), highly demanding for all experts and senior officials as it is the end of the Ethiopian fiscal year; 3) the **absence of per diems**. In the case of SNNP, in addition, when the workshop was organised the Regional Government was a ‘lame duck’ since months, in the words of a university colleague.

With regard to **per diems**, some of our university colleagues were of the view that it would be strongly advisable to hold such workshops away from the regional capital so as to be in a position to pay per diems in line with government regulations; others thought this might not be more effective

as the level of per diem authorised by the same regulations is too low to represent an incentive. It was also mentioned that some research projects financially compensate senior University representatives who for instance, open or close workshops.

With regard to **timing**, it was acknowledged that avoiding 'hot times' when officials are busy with emergencies is difficult as emergencies are unpredictable by nature. Clashes with other high profile events are also difficult to avoid as events are organised by different institutions which do not regularly communicate with one another.

There was a suggestion that it might have been more effective for the **workshops to be organised from within the Regional Government**. Some of our colleagues thought that it would be good to **reach out more to intellectuals**. For instance, the Amhara Intellectuals Association was invited at the Amhara workshop and its senior representative was a highly knowledgeable contributor to the debate. It was noted that there are other such bodies within Amhara and they could be found in other Regions too.

Our university colleagues also unanimously thought that an **inter-regional workshop** would be useful to allow regional government officials to share views as many of the issues that the research raised are relevant to all Regions, and this is likely to continue to be the case. Such workshops are also an opportunity for Regions to learn from each other. It was recognised that this would have **substantial logistic and cost implications**. The WIDE team raised the **question of who might convene** such a workshop. University colleagues suggested the workshop could be held in one of the Regions with the Regional Government inviting the others and working on the organisation of the workshop with the WIDE partner University in that Region; and this could rotate over time. The feasibility of this approach largely depends on whether and how fast relationships among regional governments can be mended in the forthcoming months.

Wider Ethiopia-focused audience

In this section I review successively the experiences of the WIDE Bridge media communication programme, the WIDE public lectures and the worknet.

The WIDE Bridge/FSS media communication programme

With the Forum for Social Studies (FSS) involved in the WIDE Bridge phase came the idea of running a **media communication programme** for the first time in the life of the WIDE research, drawing on FSS's extensive experience in working with the media. An FSS-managed media communication project was developed and integrated in the WIDE Bridge extension work programme. The major objective was to disseminate the results of the WIDE research to the **general public**, in line with FSS's longstanding commitment to promote wide public participation in the policy process. The project entailed the production and airing/tabling of twelve radio programmes, four TV programmes and six newspaper articles in media outlets with a wide coverage.

FSS commissioned a **professional media team to work on the production** of the programmes/articles with close guidance by the FSS and WIDE teams, and to interface with the media organisations. In the WIDE team Dr Mulugeta Gashaw took the lead, supported by Dr Alula Pankhurst. In FSS the two main actors were the FSS Communication Officer Abera Woldekidan and the FSS Senior Researcher Dr. Zerihun Mohammed, while Abera took the lead. Dr Zerihun had also been involved in other WIDE Bridge activities. The programmes/articles were conceived as series, with an agreed sequence of topics covering both earlier WIDE phases and the Bridge phase, based on the **WIDE Discussion Briefs** (available in Amharic for the Series II and Series III). The radio and TV programmes were complemented by **interviews of resource persons** involved in various ways with the WIDE research, identified by the FSS and WIDE teams. The media team was responsible for carrying out the interviews and combining interview excerpts and reading based on the DBs.

Four TV and thirteen radio programmes were produced and aired between 8th March 2019 (the first TV programme introducing the WIDE research) and 30th May 2019 (last ‘wrapping up’ radio programme). The TV programmes were shown on **WALTA** at prime time (Friday early evening); the radio programmes were aired on **EBC national channel** at a convenient time too (Thursday morning when people travel to work or take their morning coffee in towns and many rural settings). A total of **eleven resource persons** agreed to be interviewed for either the radio or both radio and TV programmes, from among the peer reviewers of the Series II DBs and the FSS and WIDE teams as well as a few more recent contacts¹³. Eleven resource persons were interviewed and their inputs used accordingly.

The **newspaper articles** were published in Amharic to be able to reach a diverse and broad readership, in a **weekly Sunday series** focusing on development issues and run by FSS in the **widely read Amharic edition** of *The Reporter Newspaper*. The FSS and WIDE teams eventually wrote the articles, considering the high workload that the TV and radio programmes represented for the media team given the compressed timetable. Moreover, written work based on research writings is difficult and it was thought that better products would be achieved in this way.

The radio, TV and articles series were **advertised** by the media houses as well as through FSS and WIDE websites, email communications and SMS alerts regularly released by the FSS Communication officer some minutes ahead of the programmes to be aired. The radio and TV programmes were converted to audio and video records and **uploaded on YouTube**, with a link from the FSS and the WIDE websites.

Discussion – Considering the small size and limited length of the project, a formal impact assessment did not make sense and there was also no budget for this. However, the FSS team **obtained feedback** from listeners who called the stations and the journalists/editors at the media houses disseminating the programmes. This gives an idea of how the programmes were received. **Listeners** said that they learned a lot and enjoyed the programmes, which dealt with a serious subject matter. They were pleased that the programmes not only analysed the problems but also forwarded suggestions; some thought the programmes were too short. The **journalists** thought that the programmes, based on the findings of a longitudinal research, were helpful both for the audience and the media outlets to enhance their reputation. They also appreciated that the programmes showed both successes and failures in the country’s journey towards development, which made them different from most media outputs. However, more creativity was needed to do justice to the seriousness of the content whilst also responding to the preference of the audience which they said, needs to be entertained to keep listening/ watching. Better production techniques would also have been helpful.

The FSS and WIDE teams identified a **number of challenges/weaknesses**. First, it was difficult to convince **resource persons** to be interviewed: a number of individuals declined due to busy schedule or reluctance to talk about research done by someone else or to talk on public media, and there was no budget for honoraria. Sudden **hikes in prices** by some of the media houses squeezed the already tight budget. The **time** allowed to ensure production and actual dissemination was **short**, and **communications** between actors were hampered by **internet interruptions** of several days and the **power rationing** that was in place right during the most critical months for the project.

More fundamentally, the media team commissioned by FSS was more used to produce media content based on interviews only, and found it **challenging to use written research material** as well as interview excerpts. The team learned by doing, but overall this meant that the **FSS and WIDE teams** had to **work considerably more** than planned to ensure quality and relevance of the content. Among the media team, the media houses’ journalists and FSS, there was a view that **fieldwork by**

¹³ Resource persons were: AtoDessaegnRahmato and Dr Zerihun Mohammed (FSS), Dr Asnake Kefale, Prof TegegneGebreegzabhier, Dr Melese Awoke and Dr Emebet Mulugeta (AAU), AtoEzanaAmdework (AAU), AtoSetotawYimam (independent), Dr Genet Zewdie (WDSC Director), and Dr Mulugeta Gashaw and Dr Alula Pankhurst from the WIDE team.

the media team in the WIDE communities would have provided stories ‘giving a human face to the programmes’ and would have allowed getting more relevant field footages, which was not possible due to budget constraints. However, on our side we would want to further discuss how to ensure a **livelier content** better grounded in the WIDE communities **without jeopardizing the main research activity**.

On the whole the **experience is positively assessed**. The **heavy workload** for the FSS and WIDE teams who throughout the project spent time reviewing, editing, commenting, and even producing media content in close interaction with the media team, paid off in terms of **quality** of the production. Both teams learned by doing, which will be beneficial for any further WIDE media programme. The **relevance of TV programmes** was discussed, with some participants doubting it considering their much higher costs and more limited outreach especially in rural areas, and the use of somewhat random footages. It was also suggested that **local language radios** should be used if the intention is to reach out to local rural people.

The WIDE public lectures

Our experience with public lectures is limited to two events. In **October 2013** a public lecture was organised as part of a **World Bank-financed series of events run by the Economics and Business Department of Addis Ababa University**. This, which took place whilst the WIDE team was still in the process of formulating its research conclusions, focused on service delivery in rural Ethiopia. The event was well attended with over a hundred participants presumably mostly students and academic staff.

The second public lecture, jointly organised by FSS and WIDE under the **WIDE Bridge** extension project, was held on **25 June 2019** as part of the flagship programme of ‘public dialogues’ which FSS has been running for decades since its foundation. The lecture, entitled ‘*Rural Ethiopia in Transition*’, aimed to discuss the recent WIDE findings and suggestions with a range of non-government stakeholders, to complement the government-oriented activities outlined above. It was also one more venue to launch the WIDE Bridge book. The programme was in two parts: a more economic-oriented session with presentations on land, urbanisation and rural livelihoods, and a more social development-oriented session with presentations on inequalities and social protection, gender, and young people’s transitions. A little over 200 invitations were sent to **donor agencies, government and private higher education institutions, other research teams, CSOs** etc., drawing on both FSS and WIDE networks and followed up by phone contacts etc. Around **65 individuals** from various sectors attended, which was quite remarkable considering the particularly difficult timing politically.

Discussion - As a **one-off event** with regard to WIDE, it is likely that the AAU public lecture of October 2013 had a **limited impact**: with possibly a handful of participants the audience was totally unfamiliar with WIDE, there was no follow-up event and at the time no WIDE publication which the audience could have taken with them. The **more recent lecture may** be more directly useful as a source of reflections for some of the participants, for a number of reasons. Among others, the WIDE research in mid-2019 is somewhat better known than was the case end 2013, and the fact that more people in the audience were somewhat familiar with its approach made it for more interesting discussions. The WIDE Bridge book which all participants received is a source to which they can return, should they wish to do so, and/or also contact the WIDE team or visit the website. It was also an advantage for it to be organised as part of a well-known series of events run by FSS since a long time. This is supported by the fact that the event succeeded in attracting a fair number of participants in spite of the very unfortunate time at which it took place, just a couple of days after the assassinations of four high level government officials.

The worknet

The WIDE ‘worknet’ was initiated in 2009/10 at the outset of WIDE3, as a **network of mainly non-government Ethiopia-focused stakeholders** that would be regularly contacted through **email**. One

reason for not involving government officials in the worknet was in line with our decision of engaging separately with government and non-government audiences explained earlier. Over the 2009-2019 period the worknet grew in size and since a few years it has comprised **around 200 'members'**, including donor, INGO and a few local NGO staff, for most based in Ethiopia; and Ethiopian and non-Ethiopian researchers, academic staff and consultants based in or outside of Ethiopia. A few worknet members are people interested in the WIDE approach without being focused on Ethiopia. There are also 'WIDE friends', usually people who at one point in time were involved in Ethiopia, came across and appreciated the WIDE research, and have asked to remain included in the worknet even after moving on.

Initially we were hoping to use the worknet as a **network of stakeholders actively interested**, through for instance providing feedback on research design ideas and findings etc. That **never worked**, in part because of the large number of worknet members who are 'transient' in Ethiopia. Instead, we have used the worknet:

- For **general updates** in the course of research phases
- To **send outputs** (sometimes asking for feedback on drafts which was never given)
- As a **basis for invites** for wide-ranging events such as book launches and workshops
- To get in touch with specific individuals/agencies on a selected basis with a view to organising smaller meetings, seminars etc. of consultation and/or dissemination.

The **frequency of communication varied** over time, depending on the intensity of activity over the course of the successive WIDE projects, but has been at most one email in three months.

Discussion - The fact that a number of people have asked to remain members after moving on suggests that the worknet is an **appreciated way of remaining informed** about how WIDE evolves. It is a **cheap way of communicating** with a large number of diverse stakeholders. However, it **requires regular updating** of the list of addressees, and this is not a task that could easily be systematised¹⁴. One question is whether the worknet should be replaced through making the WIDE website more active. However, it also is the case that as it stands, the worknet is among others a **way of reminding people of WIDE**.

Overall discussion

With regard to reaching out to the wider Ethiopian public, some of the concluding workshop participants highlighted the **need to communicate more continuously**. This could include a more systematic **use of non-WIDE platforms** such as workshops and other events organised by other programmes/actors. Preparing simple written material as suggested above would help in this regard as such material could easily be made available in non-WIDE events. However, it is also important to note that engagement activities detract from time available for analysis and write-up, and may need dedicated staff with relevant skillsets.

There was also a discussion about the **value of using social media** to communicate. Some participants supported this, highlighting that these days Twitter and Facebook are widely used even in rural areas. Others stressed that whilst this is the case there is a need to be careful in using social media and especially Twitter as its very brief messages can easily be distorted when taken out of context; they highlighted that whilst there are examples of useful and ethically acceptable content, in the current context in Ethiopia (mid-2019) social media are fairly frequently used abusively.

¹⁴ The necessity of regularly updating the list of addressees derives from the high turnover of donor and INGO staff who constitute about half of the worknet members and not all of them want to remember members when they leave Ethiopia.

WIDE academic dissemination

Academic dissemination took **two forms**. A number of WIDE team members wrote articles using some of the **WIDE research findings**, for international academic publications. Alongside this, Philippa Bevan engaged with mainly UK-based academic audiences on the **methodology of the WIDE research**.

Academic dissemination in relation to Ethiopia

Earlier phases

The WIDE2 and DEEP research and theory informed three papers by Philippa Bevan and Alula Pankhurst on power and poverty for the World Bank, a paper on migration for Irish Aid, and a paper by Philippa Bevan for the American Political Association Conference in 2006.

WIDE3 and WIDE Bridge

Philippa Bevan also presented a paper at an international conference on chronic poverty in September 2010, using WIDE3 Stage 1 research and theory. In a short transition project between WIDE3 Stage 1 and Stage 2 three long academic papers were written using the WIDE3 Stage 1 data, on:

- *The Role of the 'Government Go-Betweens' in Changing Rural Ethiopia*, by Catherine Dom
- *Changing Inequalities in Rural Ethiopia*, by Alula Pankhurst
- *Youth on the Path to Adulthood in Changing Rural Ethiopia*, by Philippa Bevan.

Shorter stand alone summaries were also produced as policy-relevant outputs. Long papers and summaries are available on the WIDE website and were otherwise not widely disseminated. The conceptual frameworks used in the analyses, in particular, on inequalities and youth, were used again in later phases of the WIDE research.

Over the 2009-2019 period a number of presentations drawing on the WIDE data were made at the **18th, 19th and 20th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies (ICES)**, organised respectively in Dire Dawa in 2012, Warsaw in 2015, and Mekelle in 2018. At the 20th ICES in Mekelle the WIDE team organised a panel focusing on '*globalisation in rural communities*', in line with the overall theme of the ICES, which featured twelve presentations based on the WIDE Bridge data as well as two papers by other researchers. Following the 18th and 19th ICES some of the presentations were further developed for publication in the **conference proceedings**. For the presentations made at the 20th ICES, the editor of the US-based **International Journal of Ethiopian Studies (IJES)** agreed to publish most of them as **articles in a special issue** of the Journal. Most of the authors have completed draft manuscripts and the remaining ones are being finalised, for submission for the peer review process. Three of the other 20th ICES presentations are being developed into **chapters for a book** entitled '*Youth on the Move - Views from Below on Ethiopian International Migration*', edited by two Ethiopian scholars teaching at Addis Ababa University and accepted for **publication by the UK-based ZED Publishing House**. Some of the most experienced WIDE Research Officers are among the authors or main authors of several of these articles and book chapters.

Methodology-focused engagement

Philippa Bevan developed the WIDE3 theoretical methodology through **engagement with European academics** in a series of seminars between 2003 (WIDE2) and 2016. The members of the network involved in these seminars worked within the **complex realism paradigm** in a range of policy-relevant areas, though not in international development. As a result of this engagement Philippa Bevan used the WIDE research to further develop her own complex realism-based methodology. In addition to forming the bedrock for further WIDE research phases Philippa Bevan used this methodology:

- As the main example in a book chapter on problems associated with trying to do multi-disciplinary research – Bevan P 2007 ‘Researching Wellbeing Across the Disciplines: Some Key Intellectual Problems and Ways Forward’, Chapter in I. Gough and J.A McGregor (eds.), *Well-Being in Developing Countries: New Approaches and Research Strategies* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/253193239_Researching_wellbeing_across_the_disciplines_Some_key_intellectual_problems_and_ways_forward
- As the main example in a book chapter on using case-based methods in development contexts - Bevan P 2009c ‘Working with Cases in Development Contexts: Some Insights from an Outlier’, Chapter 28 in D Byrne and C Ragin (eds) *The Sage Handbook of Case-Based Methods* London: Sage.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/334894858_Chapter_28_Working_with_Cases_in_Development_Contexts_Some_Insights_from_an_Outlier_Philippa_Bevan_2009_in_D_Byrne_and_C_Ragin_ed The_Sage_Handbook_of_Case-Based_Methods
- As the main example in a book chapter on researching social change and continuity in development contexts – Bevan P, 2014 ‘Researching social change and continuity: a complexity-informed study of twenty rural community-cases in Ethiopia 1994 – 2015’ in L Camfield (ed) *Research in International Development: a Critical Review* London: Palgrave.

Discussion - No other WIDE research team members were involved in this methodology-focused engagement process. However, at the concluding workshop Philippa suggested that in future research phases, considering the **academic interests of the partner Ethiopian Universities**, there is scope to **connect with international academics using complex realist approaches and case-based methods**, to develop and disseminate a simple methodology to study rural communities in Ethiopia and elsewhere, and to produce academic papers and books using the findings.

Website

The **website** was established in 2016. In its current form it functions mainly as an **archive of the WIDE research since 1994**. As it stands **most of it is of interest mainly to academics** keen to discover not just the WIDE research outputs but also the approach and methods used. It has pages on the communities, the history of WIDE, a large gallery of photos which can be used as data, a news and events page as well as a publication pages containing the written outputs reviewed earlier in this paper. Much of the WIDE database can also be downloaded. Developing and enriching the content has happened thanks to Pip Bevan investing **vast amounts of largely unfunded time** over the years; yet **more data and outputs are waiting to be uploaded**, and this will continue to be the case in future research phases. Thus far, **regular updates** of the website with news etc. have also been taken care of by Pip Bevan.

Discussion - Pip and the concluding workshop participants agreed that the WIDE website **should be sustainably funded in future**, including funding to keep it online as well as for its regular management. It also **needs to be possible to call on professional website expertise** for more substantial revamping of the website from time to time. Such expertise will be required to outline options on how to manage uploading access whilst maintaining the website integrity and sufficient coherence in the content, in the next phases of research which will involve several research teams; and to build and regularly upgrade the website management capacity of the teams (core team, FSS and Universities).

The website should **ideally also be more ‘active’**, with more frequent updates of the ‘news’ content and the possibility for stakeholders to register to get **‘news alerts’** whenever changes are made to the website content. It was suggested to **consider establishing a blog**, with an agreed division of labour between team members to ensure regular publication and/or funding for a blog author responsible for all blogs or for mobilising other contributors. Members of research teams could for

instance be asked to contribute an agreed number of blogs over the duration of a research phase as part of their responsibilities.

Lessons for the next WIDE research phases

Bevan (forthcoming) proposes the following **broad lessons** with regard to the WIDE research engagement with stakeholders. *First*, there is a need to acknowledge that there will always be **competition** for time and financial resources between various aims of the future WIDE research phases, including **research** itself, **communication/engagement** on the research, and **capacity building** especially in the initial phases of involvement of new WIDE partners taking key roles in the research. The tensions that this will prompt must be explicitly tackled by clear managerial decisions made on a consultative basis.

Second, a **full-fledged strategy for dissemination/communication/engagement** over research findings, developed with specialised professional advice, should be an **integral part of each research phase**. Communication should not be an after-thought as it has thus far been. Such a strategy may need to use a **more diverse range of communication/engagement means** tailored to different audiences. However, regardless of the means and the audience those in charge of communicating should **carefully use rhetoric** and avoid the use of dramatic language, avoid importing pre-conceived ideas and prior expectations, stay clear of unwarranted generalisations, and be able to trace back the evidence underpinning the communication. As part of this, the communication/engagement strategy should include a **funded quality assurance system** and sufficient time should be allowed for all outputs to be reviewed before publication. There also needs to be clarity about roles and responsibilities, with researchers leading on the content and communication experts supporting, and not the reverse.

Last but not least, it is important to **clearly communicate** the specific strengths and limitations of the **WIDE approach**. Stakeholders should be explained that WIDE is too broad to evaluate specific interventions; its value lies in discovering and disseminating processes not covered by standard in-depth evaluations, and assessing the effects of programmes in the context of the broader community changes and the effects of other interventions that the research documents.

These points were reflected upon at the concluding workshop and broadly agreed. In addition, a number of more specific points arise from the sections above, which should be **considered** in elaborating the **WIDE4 engagement strategy and activities**. In summary:

Research outputs

- Develop different types of outputs for different audiences, including simpler, shorter, standalone briefs; and possibly posters, pamphlets etc. especially for local level audiences (including communities); this should include attention to using language tailored to the audience;
- Develop a separate project aimed to writing the history of each WIDE community in a way accessible to community members;
- Pay attention to issues of translation; discuss options including the possibility of researchers translating themselves their outputs (or writing directly in Amharic or another language?);
- All policy-oriented outputs such as Discussion Briefs should be based on a longer research paper, explaining the conceptual framework and outlining the analytical techniques used, and establishing and clearly documenting the links with the evidence in the data;
- All WIDE outputs should be quality assured through processes such as peer review by external reviewers, writing workshops among authors etc.

Events

- Consider the balance between thematic events (easier to manage, more focused/deeper discussions) and cross-sectoral events (presenting a more holistic view, going beyond sectoral 'comfort zones' of stakeholders)
- Pay attention to clearly explaining the WIDE approach and its strengths and limitations in all events (see Pip's point above)
- Regularly review options with regard to convening events, to take account of changes in government structure and in the mandates and 'convening power' of different agencies
- Consider an approach of engaging with government experts in a first stage, with time and resources to 'escalate' to higher level if asked to do so
- Regional workshops – Consider organising them on invitation by the Regional Government; avoid scheduling events in periods known to be demanding; discuss the issue of per diems; reach out more broadly to e.g. intellectuals' associations, other universities in the Region etc.
- Consider the feasibility of an inter-regional workshop;
- Consider including a media programme in the engagement strategy; assess most adequate means (radio vs TV; types of outlets e.g. national vs local etc.) and possible implications (e.g. images or footages or interviews in studied communities, alongside or as part of the research?; possibly realising a film on the WIDE communities?); allow more time for production, draw more on research teams' members/authors for interviews etc.
- Keep the worknet – but this will require a clear system to manage the updates of the worknet list as presumably all WIDE partners will have inputs to provide to this
- Maintain and further develop the WIDE website as an integral and sustainably funded component of the WIDE research engagement strategy; as part of this consider options for a decentralised approach to website management/content uploading
- Consider ways of communicating more continuously, including the use of non-WIDE platforms
- Discuss the option of using social media.

Academic dissemination

- Connect with international academics on methods, to develop and disseminate a simple methodology to study rural communities in Ethiopia and elsewhere, and produce academic methodologically-oriented papers/book chapters
- Continue to encourage the production of academic outputs based on WIDE findings by all members of the WIDE teams
- Clearly include the production of academic outputs in the teams' work plans and set aside time to this effect.

General

- Consider the relevance, feasibility and cost of regularly undertaking 'ex post' impact assessments as part of engagement strategies in future WIDE phases.