

መድረክ



MEDREK

The Newsletter of the Forum for Social Studies
A Centre for Research and Debate on Development and Public Policy

Issue 1 No. 1

October 1998

Inaugural Issue

This is the first issue of our bulletin, which we have named *MEDREK*, meaning *forum*. *MEDREK* will appear quarterly and will carry research news, short "think pieces", and discussions of problems of research and fieldwork. It is meant to serve as a forum for the exchange of experiences, and to share thoughts, observations and information about research issues and related subjects.

This issue of *MEDREK* is devoted to FSS's inaugural workshop.

A New Dawn in Research and Public Debate in Ethiopia.

The **Forum for Social Studies** (FSS), which obtained its certificate of registration from the Ministry of Justice in March 1998, is an *independent* research institu-

tion. Its primary objective is to provide an open forum for the discussion of development issues and public policy related to these issues. FSS believes that promoting public awareness about the challenges of national and local development, and encouraging popular participation in policy debates and decision making is an important contribution to the democratic process. The public should be informed about the development problems facing the country and the policies taken to address them. The greater the public participation in the policy dialogue, the more diverse will be the policy options open to decision-makers. Informed and knowledge-based policy design and formulation is the bases of sound development policies. We plan to promote such public awareness and participation by means of workshops and symposia on the one hand, and by the dissemination of research outputs in the form of reports, monographs, etc., on the other. Our publications will also be useful to development practitioners, donors, and educational and research institutions.

In addition FSS will:

- undertake inter-disciplinary research on a broad range of subjects and interests consonant with its broad objectives;
- publish the finds of such research and distribute them to the public;
- promote the inter-generational transfer of knowledge by ena-

bling experienced researchers to share their skills and knowledge with the younger generation;

- train young researchers and academics in research skills and encourage them to publish their work;
- organize public fora for the discussion of issues in development and public policy;
- collect and preserve documents, reports, monographs, and fugitive literature relevant to development studies and make them accessible to the public.

As part of its effort to initiate its public programs, FSS organized a one-day workshop entitled **Issues in Rural Development** on 18 September 1998.

INAUGURAL WORKSHOP

The inaugural workshop of the Forum for Social Studies was held at the Red Cross Training Centre in Addis Ababa and was attended by some eighty invited guests from government departments, international organizations, donor agencies, NGOs, and research and academic institutions. A large number of reporters from both the government and private media showed up to cover the event. Ethiopian Television and Radio as well as Radio Fana were also present. Seven papers on different aspects of rural develop-

In this issue

- About FSS
- Inaugural Workshop
- Feedback from workshop participants
- Future Plans

Structure of Governance

FSS is democratically governed, with decision-making shared by the General Assembly, the Board of Advisors, and the Management Committee. The General Assembly meets once a year to review and approve the broad policies of the organization. The Board, which meets more frequently, is responsible for drawing up the policies and strategies of FSS, monitoring the work of the executive, and reviewing and approving the finances. Of the nine members in the Board four are women. The Management Committee is the executive body of FSS. It is responsible for implementing the decisions of the Board and managing the activities of the organization.

Members of the Board of Advisors

Prof. Bahru Zewde *Chairman*
Ato Hailu Habtu
Dr Konjit Fekade
Dr. Makonnen Bishaw
Dr. Nardos W. Giorgis
Wzo. Original W. Giorgis
Wzo. Ruth Abraham
Ato Shiferaw Jammo
Dr. Zemedu Worku

Members of the Management Committee

Ato Dessalegn Rahmato *Manager*
Dr. Gebru Mersha
Ato Shiferaw Bekele
Dr. Yeraswork Admassie *Financial Officer*
Ms. Zenebework Tadesse *Editor*

Address

FORUM FOR SOCIAL STUDIES

P.O. Box 3089

Addis Ababa.

Tel: (251-1) 12-95-79.

Fax: (251-1) 55-02-66

e-mail: fss@telecom.net.et

ment were delivered by researchers from FSS, academics, and individuals from government departments, and independent professionals.

His Excellency Ato Mekonnen Manyazewal, Vice Minister at the Ministry of Economic Development and Co-operation, delivered the opening address on behalf of His Excellency Ato Girma Birru, the Minister in the same Ministry, who was scheduled to open the workshop but was unable to do so due to unexpected circumstances. His Excellency Ato Asrat Bulbula, the Commissioner of the Ethiopian Science and Technology Commission, closed the workshop at 5.15 p.m. with a short statement.

Nurturing a Rich Heritage

In his welcoming address delivered to a packed conference hall, Professor Bahru Zewde, noted historian and Chairman of the Board of Advisors of FSS, remarked that the workshop had the dual purpose of focussing attention on the fundamental problems of our society and embarking on the novel experiment in independent research embodied by the Forum for Social Studies. He reminded his audience of Ethiopia's rich tradition of scholarship going back to at least a millennium, and expressed his appreciation at the continuity of this heritage by Ethiopia's contemporary scholars. He perceived many ways in which FSS is likely to make a significant difference. He was confident that FSS "will chart a new path of interdisciplinary research- research that combines the rigor of economic theory, the depth of historical research and the pertinence of development analysis." His hope was that in FSS 'research will control bureaucracy rather than

the other way round.' In addition to conducting research that is of great social relevance, he expected FSS to open a new chapter in the dissemination of research findings and thereby bring to an end the insulation of Ethiopian research endeavour. He concluded that the "future holds great promise. But it also abounds in challenges."

Prof. Bahru then introduced H.E. Ato Mekonnen to deliver the opening address.

Building Domestic Capacity

The Vice Minister set out by noting that he was conveying H.E. Ato Girma's speech which the Minister had prepared carefully but was unable to deliver in person. The Minister's message appreciated the initiative taken to establish an independent research institution. It pointed out that the topic chosen for the inaugural conference as well as the research priorities identified by FSS were all well chosen. In outlining the challenges facing Ethiopia's economic development, the Minister underscored the critical need for the existence of a "critical mass of domestic capacity in generating and managing sound policies, strategies and programs. Key components of domestic capacity include research, policy design and analytical capacity".

Locating the emergence of the Forum for Social Studies as part of the domestic capacity building process, the Minister noted that "independent policy research centers play an important role in policy formulation, complementing the in-house capacities within the public sector". The emergence of the Forum, he stated, comes "at an important and opportune time" and he

pointed to the direction that would “ensure the Forum’s long-term sustainability”. In his view, “it is the quality of its research outputs—that is, its objectivity, non partisan, constructive practical relevance and its professional ethics that will help to establish the Forum as a center of excellence, and a credible institution worthy of its name.”

The First Independent Think Tank

The next speaker was Ato Dessalegn Rahmato, manager of FSS who spoke on behalf of the Management Committee. Having recalled the centrality and pertinence of the theme of the Workshop, Ato Dessalegn noted that “the Workshop is the first of what will be a long series of public debates we hope to organize in the months ahead.” He then highlighted the main motivations behind the decision to establish FSS and the unique features of the institution. The first noteworthy feature is that it is the first independent think tank in the country with a mandate to undertake interdisciplinary and innovative research on development issues and to provide a public forum for the discussion of these issues. Research and public discussion are perceived as the means to extend the democratic process,

“The greater the public participation in the development dialogue, the more diverse will be the policy options available to decision makers.” Independent institutions like FSS are better equipped to take a fresh look at development problems and suggest new and dynamic approaches to solve them. At present, he pointed out, the government has no other source of advice to turn to except its own staff; this means that the government is only able to talk to itself. FSS believes that the



government should seek and have access to independent opinion. Likewise, FSS hopes to play a significant role in promoting a partnership between civil society and the state, and between popular initiatives and government programmes. An important element of FSS’s programme, the speaker stressed, was the establishment of a documentation unit within the institution to collect and preserve for future generations records, documents, films, maps, and pictorial material that are useful to development studies. The unit will be accessible to the public. Yet another concern, the speaker stated, was the promotion of a variety of programmes to enable the inter-generational transfer of knowledge and experience and to encourage young and promising researchers to acquire the necessary analytical skills.

Issues in Rural Development

The main part of the workshop was devoted to the presentation and discussion of seven papers focussing on various aspects of rural development. The following is a synopsis of each of the papers.

Revisiting Rural Development through a Gender Lens

By Zenebework Tadesse

The dismal social indicators in Ethiopia point to the absence of rural development. Given the nature of gender relations, including the socially and culturally accepted rights and responsibilities between men and women, the state of underdevelopment tends to disadvantage women doubly. Firstly, they suffer from gender subordination. Secondly, the general lack of resources and services make household responsibilities especially onerous. Rural development programmes only allocate meager resources on women’s projects most of which are geared only towards a slight amelioration of women’s traditional domestic roles. There is a gulf between government policy of gender equality and everyday reality experienced by women. In the absence of a development strategy that is geared towards transforming the gender division of labour and providing rural women with new skills, value orientations and aspirations, sustained rural transformation is unlikely.

Privatization of Rural Land: To Protect whose Security

By Gebru Mersha

In the last four decades, the various state interventions in the rural areas have been misguided, inappropriate and inadequate; the exception to this is the land reform of 1975. The outcome of these faulty strategies has been a sustained agrarian and economic crisis. Some scholars argue that government control of land has led to tenure insecurity and fragmentation. They posit privatization of rural land as the solution of some of the structural problems



of the agrarian economy. This argument for privatization is not based on well-grounded historical and empirical evidence and there is a lack of sustained debate on the possible outcomes of such dramatic reversal of the 1975 land reform. A major outcome of privatization of land will be a massive eviction of peasants, dislocation of pastoralists, and exacerbation of ethnic inequity. The requisite course of action to take would be to facilitate the development of the productive capacity of agriculture through synergetic efforts of all those who have a stake in the sector. The social, economic and political welfare of the peasantry should be the guiding principle in formulating any development strategy in Ethiopia.

Rural Organizations and Rural Development in Ethiopia
By Yigremew ADAL

Diverse forms of rural organi-

zations both state-initiated and autonomous are a essential for sustainable rural development. A major constraint of rural development in Ethiopia has been the absence of adequate institutional structures through which rural people can articulate their needs, protect their interests, manage resources and have access to services. Indigenous institutions such as *Mahiber*, *idir*, *iqub* and *Debo*, and elders' councils are flexible, dynamic and complex organiza-

tions and social capital which provide socio-religious, economic and quasi-legal services. These autonomous organizations have been totally neglected by policy makers and researchers. The focus of government policy and research has been devoted to state-initiated and state-controlled rural organizations such as Peasant associations and cooperatives most of which have been grossly mismanaged and discredited by the rural people. Given an enabling political and legal environment and the will to strengthen rural organizations, indigenous organizations are the most promising institutions for sustainable rural development.

Why Fertility will not Decline in Ethiopia
By Aklilu Kidanu

Ethiopia has a high fertility as well as high (but declining) mortality rates. Rapid population

growth negatively affects rural development since it contributes to the degradation of resources and the environment, accelerates landlessness and food insecurity. To mitigate these problems, population growth should be checked through fertility control. In the case of Ethiopia, the major determinants of fertility include early age at first marriage, non-use of contraceptives, and high infant and child mortality. Given these constraints, and the lack of access to maternal and child health services, it is unlikely that fertility will decline in the country in the near future.

Integrating Indigenous and Modern Agricultural Practices in the Drought-prone areas of Ethiopia
By Belay Tegene

Indigenous agricultural practices denote the ensemble of skills and techniques that were developed by farmers and continuously adapted to the changing circumstances and environmental conditions, and are passed on from one generation to the next. Some of these practices include strategies against the risk of drought, crop and soil fertility management, soil conservation and excess water management. However, these indigenous practices as well as the modern techniques that have been introduced in the rural areas have serious limitations, and each on its own cannot effectively overcome the diverse constraints to crop production. A more sustainable agricultural management package would require the integration of indigenous practices with the modern extension package through adaptive technology development programs. Such an integrated approach would be low cost, increase the knowledge and skills of farmers and be socially



acceptable.

Resettlement: A Strategy for Vulnerable Groups?

By Kassahun Berhanu

A considerable number of Third World countries have embarked on planned resettlement programs as a panacea to a host of problems such as land fragmentation, unemployment, food insecurity and marginality. The outcome of these experiences has varied from success to dismal failure. In Ethiopia, various forms of resettlement programs have been launched since the late 1960s as a response to landlessness, unemployment and dislocation caused by famine and conflict. The poor planning, hasty implementation and inadequate resources that characterized the resettlement programmes of the 1980s resulted in a staggering rate of attrition, family breakdown, exile and illegal return to home villages. However, given an enabling environment consisting of imaginative planning, voluntary participation of beneficiaries and provision of infrastructure, planned resettlement can lead to improvements in agricultural production and better employment opportunities.

Science and Technology in Rural Development

By The Ethiopian Science and Technology Commission

In Ethiopia, rural development has not yet addressed the daunting challenge of rural poverty, of diseases affecting humans and animals, and the vulnerability of the peasant household to natural disaster such as recurrent drought. Science and technology can play a key role in breaking this vicious circle through the application of knowledge and technical methods, which are appropriate to the socio-economic environment of the country. The Commission's Policy and Strategy, which is a component of the government's Agricultural Development Led Industrialization, promotes innovations in pursuit of this goal. In the immediate future, the main area of focus in rural development will be increasing food security and conservation of forest resources and soil fertility.

Closing Session

Feedback from Workshop Participants

Following the presentation and discussion of the papers, there was a short session inviting feedback from workshop participants. The aim was to solicit suggestions regarding the future direction of FSS. Following are some of the

main recommendations offered by the audience.

- ◆ FSS should try to influence and convince the Government and for this it should have easy access to Government officials.
- ◆ There is a gap between policy and social science research. FSS should establish links with relevant Government institutions to promote debate.
- ◆ To influence public policy, it is important to determine when to intervene before policies are finalized, i.e. at the time they are being drawn up or formulated. It will be too late to intervene after that.
- ◆ FSS will draw its strength by keeping its independence. FSS should maintain and prove its independent status.
- ◆ While it is important to intervene in the debate before policies are enacted, FSS should not give up even after that. FSS should continue the dialogue and try to change the policies.
- ◆ FSS should play an important role in creating a culture of dialogue. It should avoid polarized views and debates. The culture of hard-line arguments and rejectionists

attitudes should be replaced by respect for diversity of views and dialogue.

Closing Remarks

The Workshop was then officially closed by His excellency Ato Asrat Bulbula, Commissioner of the Ethiopian Science and Technology Commission, who had attended the afternoon session as a participant delivering the paper prepared by the Commission. He congratulated FSS for its initiatives and expressed his best wishes for its success.

Media Coverage of the Workshop

The Workshop was widely covered in both the public and private media. Ethiopian radio and television carried reports of the workshop in the three local languages in the main evening news on the day of the workshop. The next day, 19 September, *Addis Zemen* and *The Ethiopian Herald* wrote extensive articles

about the workshop. Reports and interviews of FSS officials also appeared in the independent weekly papers, in particular *Addis Tribune*, the English edition of *Reporter*, and the Amharic *Tobia*. The response of the public was also quite encouraging.

FSS is grateful to the Friederich Ebert Stiftung and the Ethiopian Science and Technology Commission for their financial and material support.

Future Plans

Within the next eight months, FSS plans to organize two important workshops, one on **Rethinking Land Rights and Tenure Policy in Eastern and Southern Africa, an International Symposium**, and another on **Development and Public Access to Information**.

Announcement

The Proceedings of the inaugural workshop will be pub-

Attention Readers

Readers are invited to send us news of research in progress, workshops upcoming conferences and a new publications