



Arts & Humanities  
Research Council

# **Keeping Faith in 2030: Religions and the Sustainable Development Goals**

## **Workshop Report: Religions and Development in Ethiopia**

**Addis Ababa, September 20<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> 2018**

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## **Aims of the Workshop**

This workshop was the third consultation of an international research network funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council on the topic of religions and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) based at the University of Leeds and SOAS University of London, UK, in partnership with the [Humanitarian Academy for Development](#).

The workshop was organised in collaboration with the [Life & Peace Institute](#) and took place in the Golden Tulip Hotel in Addis Ababa. The workshop brought together academics, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs) for two days of papers and discussions with the following aims:

- 1) to facilitate a conversation between the academic study of development and the practical contributions of faith actors in various sectors of development;
- 2) to reflect on the role of faith actors in Ethiopia's development vision, policy, and practice;
- 3) to deliberate on the levels of knowledge and utility of the SDG framework and process among faith actors and their development practice.

The first day of the workshop consisted of paper presentations and discussion panels, which explored the contributions of faith actors to three main areas of development: Gender Equality (SDG 5), Quality Education (SDG 4), and Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (SDG 16). The second day was devoted to a set of discussion and workshop activities centred on the role of religions in Ethiopia's development vision and planning, especially with regard to the country's engagement with the SDGs.

The workshop was attended by approximately 50 participants, half of which came from various Ethiopian universities and colleges and the other half represented a wide range of mostly faith-based NGOs. All major faiths in Ethiopia were present (Ethiopian Orthodoxy, Islam, Protestantism, Oromo religion and Catholicism), both in the topics of discussion and amongst the attendant organisations.

The workshop successfully completed its aims and facilitated many new and productive discussions. It was the first of its kind in Ethiopia and the level of attendance, as well as the quality of presentations and discussions, exceeded expectations. As is typical of research networks, the results presented in this report should be seen as exploratory and a number of the findings below will not be representative of the whole sector. We hope that this conference will initiate further collaboration, research and discussion.

## **Background to the Workshop**

Following the expiry of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2015, a new set of globally agreed development goals and indicators, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – known more broadly as Agenda 2030 – were formulated. A consultation process preceded the unveiling of the SDGs, whereby national governments and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) were invited to provide input and contribute towards their formulation. They were accepted by all 193 member countries of the United Nations (UN) in 2015 and given a timeframe of 15 years. At the core of Agenda 2030 is a

heavy emphasis on inclusion within global development practice. Inclusion in development requires that all individuals and groups within society, particularly those that have traditionally been marginalised (such as those less able, the elderly, women, ethnic minorities) and – related to this research network, even religious groups – are included in development. This principle has become known as ‘leave no one behind’.

The SDGs are important to a wide range of stakeholders across countries of both the Global South as well as the Global North, from national governments through to the private sector, CSOs and FBOs. National governments are expected to translate these goals and targets into their national policies, to resource and implement these policies, and to measure their implementation. Other non-state actors and individuals also play a significant role in ensuring the achievement of the SDGs and this research project seeks to look at religions and the SDGs, specifically in India and Ethiopia.

Ethiopia has engaged actively with the SDG process and its predecessor the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), demonstrating a clear commitment to adopting international development language and its emerging target-driven frameworks. Owing to its high economic growth and low baseline figures in many of the indicators, the country managed to achieve six of the eight MDGs. The exceptions were gender equality (MDG 3) and maternal health (MDG 5), though significant improvements were registered in these areas as well.<sup>1</sup> In the SDG process, Ethiopia became one of 50 countries worldwide to provide data to the UN for the preparation of the SDG agenda and one of ten African countries to join in preparing the ‘Common African Position’.<sup>2</sup> It also submitted a Voluntary National Review (VNR) in 2017.<sup>3</sup>

Despite these engagements, there are a number of challenges for the implementation of the SDG agenda in Ethiopia. The first is that until now, development remained under the centralism of the ruling party, the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF).<sup>4</sup> As such, the ‘Ethiopian developmental state’<sup>5</sup> has celebrated remarkable achievements in economic growth and infrastructure at the cost of stifling the private sector, severely curtailing civil society, and encouraging corruption and rent-seeking through retaining central control over vital economic assets such as land. The most significant expression of the state’s curtailing of CSOs has been the Ethiopian Charities and Societies

<sup>1</sup> National Planning Commission and United Nations in Ethiopia, *Millenium Development Goals Report 2014, Ethiopia: Assessment of Ethiopia’s Progress Towards the MDGs* (Addis Ababa, 2015), <http://www.et.undp.org/content/dam/ethiopia/docs/UNDP%20MDG%202014%20Final2Oct.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, *The 2017 Voluntary National Reviews on SDGs of Ethiopia: Government Commitments, National Ownership and Performance Trends* (Addis Ababa: National Planning Commission, 2017), 3–4. [sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/16437Ethiopia.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/16437Ethiopia.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, *The 2017 Voluntary National Reviews on SDGs of Ethiopia*.

<sup>4</sup> See Sarah Vaughan, “Federalism, Revolutionary Democracy and the Developmental State, 1991–2012,” in *Understanding Contemporary Ethiopia: Monarchy, Revolution and the Legacy of Meles Zenawi*, ed. Gérard Prunier and Éloi Ficquet (London: Hurst & Company, 2015), 283–311; René Lefort, “The Ethiopian Economy: The Developmental State vs. the Free Market,” in *Understanding Contemporary Ethiopia: Monarchy, Revolution and the Legacy of Meles Zenawi*, ed. Gérard Prunier and Éloi Ficquet (London: Hurst & Company, 2015), 357–94.

<sup>5</sup> Christopher Clapham, “The Ethiopian Developmental State,” *Third World Quarterly* 39, no. 6 (2018): 1151–65.

Proclamation of 2009.<sup>6</sup> In seeking to cut off political influence from outside the country, the Proclamation stipulates that foreign and resident CSOs are excluded from working in numerous areas of human rights advocacy, while Ethiopian CSOs that do work in such areas may receive no more than ten percent of their income from abroad.<sup>7</sup> This has led to a massive reorientation in the civil society sector with organisations either shifting their focus to development purely to retain outside funding or, by remaining registered as an Ethiopian CSO, being forced to curtail operations due to a lack of funds.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the Charities and Societies Agency is given direct executive oversight over the CSO sector by being enabled to ‘determine the details of charitable purposes and the public benefit by directives’.<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, religious institutions are not counted as CSOs by the Proclamation, which effectively puts a barrier between religious purposes and development or advocacy. Development activities carried out by FBOs are separate entities registered independently as CSOs. They are faced with the same conundrum regarding access to foreign funds and/or retaining advocacy work. While this separation clause may be helpful in preventing the use of development contributions for religious purposes, it has also prevented faith-based actors from reaching their full potential in areas where religious inputs are beneficial, if not necessary, to reaching development goals, for example in the elimination of harmful traditional practices, the achievement of gender equality and the prevention of inter-religious or ethnic conflict.<sup>10</sup>

Given this centralisation of development and the state’s close monitoring of CSOs, there is little incentive and opportunity for the integration of CSOs in the SDG process. The 2017 VNR makes vague reference to involving different ‘stakeholders’ in various consultations but provides no specifics about either these consultations or who was involved. The document does recommend two instruments for facilitating wider CSO engagement with the SDGs, though.<sup>11</sup> Firstly, it advises the creation of so-called ‘public wings’ by each executive organ (ministries, agencies etc.), which facilitate ‘discussions pertaining to common development objectives’ including the private sectors, CSOs, NGOs and associations of various kinds. Secondly, ‘Technical Working Groups’ shall engage ‘development partners’ in the planning and monitoring of SDG implementation. However, the document does not indicate whether either instrument has moved beyond the planning/recommendation stage.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>6</sup> “Proclamation No. 621/2009: Proclamation to Provide for the Registration and Regulation of Charities and Societies,” *Federal Negarit Gazeta* 15, no. 25 (February 13, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> Art. 2 (2–4), Art. 14(5).

<sup>8</sup> Sisay Alemahu Yeshanew, “CSO Law in Ethiopia: Considering Its Constraints and Consequences,” *Journal of Civil Society* 8, no. 4 (2012): 369–84.

<sup>9</sup> Art. 14(4).

<sup>10</sup> Tessema Mebratu Beyene, “Laws Governing Civil Society Organisations and Their Impacts on the Democratization of a Country: Ethiopia in Case” (PhD Thesis, PhD thesis, University of Liverpool, 2015), 162–64.

<sup>11</sup> Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, *The 2017 Voluntary National Reviews on SDGs of Ethiopia*, 4–5.

<sup>12</sup> A still quite rudimentary website suggests that five working groups have been set up since: <http://www.dagethiopia.org/content/dagethiopia/en/home/working-groups.html> (accessed 10 November 2018).

Beyond these issues of CSO engagement, the government also seems to appropriate the SDGs in a selective manner. Ethiopia's development programme is governed by successive five-year-plans, the so-called Growth and Transformation Plans (GTP). The currently operational second GTP (GTP II) was adopted just after the Sustainable Development Goals for the period 2015/16-2019/20 (2008-2012 in the Ethiopian calendar). As a result, the GTP II references the SDGs only in a very general manner, promising in a few places to 'integrate and mainstream' the global agenda of SDGs in its implementation.<sup>13</sup> Yet, the GTP II can only partially reflect the SDG agenda because its ten development priorities are aimed almost exclusively at economic growth. This is visible in a side-by-side comparison of the GTP II priorities and the SDGs drawn up in the 2017 VNR in which each economic priority was paired with eleven of the SDGs.<sup>14</sup> In this roster, the SDGs that are not primarily economic are only mirrored partially, such as gender equality (SDG 5) which is assigned to 'Prioritizing the development of human resources supported with technological capacity building' and 'Eliminating rent-seeking behaviors and ensuring the predominance of a developmental frame of mind'. Despite this misalignment between the SDGs and the GTP II, the government's VNR insisted on the priority of the GTP II:

Thus, in the context of Ethiopia, implementing the current Second Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP II) and its successors means implementing the SDGs. There is and will be one national development plan in which the SDGs are mainstreamed.<sup>15</sup>

As the VNR shows, this makes the implementation and monitoring of the SDGs highly dependent on what is contained in the GTP. The data included in the VNR (encompassing SDGs 1-5, 9, 14 and 17) does not reflect the various SDG targets and instead appears to only include what is relevant for the GTP. For instance, the performance on SDG 4 (education) is measured by gender-disaggregated enrolment numbers alone. It will be important to see whether the national performance indicators will encompass the wider remit of the SDGs or stay focused primarily on what is contained in the GTP priorities.

With the recent political changes since the ascension of Abiy Ahmed to the office of Prime Minister in 2018, some of these parameters are bound to change. An amendment to the Charities and Societies Proclamation is being drafted and parts of the government have distanced themselves from the GTP II as setting unattainable targets.<sup>16</sup> In general, Ethiopia has seen an unprecedented opening of political space in recent months with the lifting of press restrictions, the readmission of political organisations hitherto considered 'terrorist' and a changing geopolitical landscape in the Horn of Africa arising from the Peace Treaty with Eritrea. This workshop which, due to the political developments earlier in the year, had been postponed to this September date therefore took place in a very

<sup>13</sup> Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, *Growth and Transformation Plan II (GTP II) (2015/16–2019/20)* (Addis Ababa: National Planning Commission, 2016), e.g. 77, [http://www.ehda.gov.et/web/guest/gtp/-/document\\_library\\_display/48Gh/view/58840/18012](http://www.ehda.gov.et/web/guest/gtp/-/document_library_display/48Gh/view/58840/18012).

<sup>14</sup> Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, *The 2017 Voluntary National Reviews on SDGs of Ethiopia*, 8–9.

<sup>15</sup> Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 41.

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.afro105fm.com/afrofm.com/2018/11/02/charities-societies-law-amendment-comes-to-first-draft/> and <https://www.thereporterethiopia.com/article/ministers-say-gtp-ii-targets-likely-unattainable> (accessed 10 November 2018).

open atmosphere, characterised by a strong hope for meaningful change despite some anxiety owing to recent inter-ethnic violence.<sup>17</sup>

## Workshop Report

### Programme Overview

#### Day 1: 20 September 2018

9:00–9:30 Registration and Refreshments

9:30–10:00 Welcome and Opening Greetings

10:00–12:00 Panel 1: Religion and Gender-Based Violence (SDG 5)

12:00–13:00 Lunch

13:00–15:00 Panel 2: Religion and Education for Development (SDG 4)

15:00–15:30 Refreshments

15:30–18:00 Panel 3: FBOs and Community Organising (SDG 16)

#### Day 2: 21 September 2018

9:00–10:30 Panel Discussion: Religion and Ethiopia's development vision

10:30–11:00 Refreshments

11:00–12:00 Further Discussions on subjects raised by Panel

12:00–13:00 Lunch

13:00–15:00 Workshop Activities "Religions and the SDGs"

15:00 Close and Refreshments

#### Full Report Day 1: Paper Presentations

##### Welcome and Opening Greetings

**Dr Jörg Hauste**in opened the workshop by introducing the motivations for the research network 'Keeping Faith in 2030: Religion and the Sustainable Development Goals' and its Ethiopia workshop. He emphasised the growing interest in faith-based organisations in international development theory and practice. However, he also queried to what extent this was a 'donor-driven discourse' without real significance or consequence to the relationship between religious actors and the development aims and processes of the Ethiopian state. With the SDG process, this question had become even more pressing. The SDGs aim to be attuned to local cultural contexts – including religions – more than any other development programme before due to them being derived from what the UN claims was its largest civil society consultation ever.

Do these claims hold up when discussed with secular and religious organisations engaged in development practice in Ethiopia? To what extent were Ethiopian civil society actors and especially faith-based organisations involved in the SDG consultations? Are the SDGs and their implementation changing their work and if so in what ways? Have they made a difference to how religious actors engage with the development vision, planning, and implementation of the Ethiopian government?

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.dw.com/en/ethiopia-talk-of-peace-fails-to-quell-ethnic-clashes/a-45620873> (accessed 10 November 2018)

In asking these questions, the workshop intended to achieve three aims of the research network:

- 1) *Strengthen voices from the Global South in the production of academic research on religions and development.* This was the main aim of the first day, which consisted of paper presentations by mostly Ethiopian researchers. Ten papers had been previously solicited through an open call in order to see what the current topics of development research in Ethiopia were. These papers were then loosely grouped around three matching SDGs (4, 5, and 16).
- 2) *Create a platform for exchange and dialogue between scholars and faith actors around religions and development, with a focus on the new SDGs.* As there is no academic study of religions at Ethiopia's state universities, it was especially important for this workshop to bring together academics and development actors from religious and secular bodies alike. The arrangement of papers, their discussions, and the workshop activities of day 2 were specifically designed to facilitate networking and an in-depth engagement between these groups through multidisciplinary and multilateral discussions of religions and development in Ethiopia. The workshop organisers hope that participants found this event useful and that they will continue to organise similar forums in the future.
- 3) *Improve how we research and understand contemporary religions and development activity globally, including refining robust and comparable methods for gathering data and generating evidence.* Given the nature of research networks, the workshop did not intend to create such methods. Rather, the workshop was intended to be a contribution to a saturated, localised understanding of how SDG implementation is affected by political, cultural, ethnic, and religious context variables in Ethiopia. This came to light through the broad spectrum of papers and the workshop activities of the second day. The most important insights have been laid out in this report.

Jörg Haustein ended his introduction by conveying special thanks to the organising team of the Ethiopia workshop, which consisted of Dr Dereje Feyissa, Dr Afework Beyene, Dr Dena Freeman and Professor Emma Tomalin, as well as our project partners at the Life and Peace Institute, represented by the Head of the Addis Ababa Regional Office, Mr Firew Kefyalew, and Ms Mignot Admassie, who was instrumental in all organisational matters.

These welcoming remarks were followed by opening greetings from Mr Firew Kefyalew, Head of the Addis Ababa regional office of the Life and Peace Institute, Mr Huluf Welde-selassie Kassay, Deputy General Secretary of the [Inter-Religious Council of Ethiopia](#), and Mr Ayten A. Birhanie, Executive Director of [Peace and Development Center](#). All three speakers emphasised the importance of religions to Ethiopia's development efforts and highlighted their organisations' aims and purposes in bringing about meaningful inter-religious and inter-sectoral collaboration to this end.

## Panel 1: Religion and Gender-Based Violence (SDG 5)

This panel grouped three contributions on female genital mutilation and cutting (FGM/C) and other forms of gender-based violence (GBV), which were presented separately and discussed together.

*Duretti Haji* from Islamic Relief Ethiopia presented a paper on her organisation's engagement of faith leaders in fighting gender based violence, titled '**Faith inspired action to end GBV: Lessons learnt from Somali Regional State of Ethiopia: Combating Gender-based Violence against Women and Girls in Dekasuftu Woreda**'. She argued that religious beliefs contribute to perpetuating gender-based violence but that they can also be mobilised in fighting these practices. As a faith-based humanitarian organisation, Islamic Relief is uniquely positioned to intervene and has formulated a policy to end the harmful traditional practices that affect women and girls, in particular early and forced marriage, FGM and domestic violence (DV).

The paper discussed a project funded and supported by Islamic Relief that focused on engaging faith leaders in the Dekasuftu Woreda of Liben Zone within the Somali regional state of Ethiopia from February 2016 to March 2017. Deploying a faith literate, community-based approach in mobilising and training religious leaders, as well as community volunteers on women's rights, gender justice and Islam, the project utilised a sequence of behavioural change communication methods to sensitise communities to the most prevalent issues of gender based violence in their surroundings.

As a result of the project, FGM was significantly reduced in quantity and severity, the inheritance of widows was condemned by religious leaders, domestic violence was reduced and women took the initiative to attend adult education classes. There were also some important learning points in engaging faith leaders, especially with regard to carrying out the necessary prior research, as well as selecting and integrating faith leaders.

*Romina Istratii* from SOAS University of London presented on '**Sustainable development through local knowledge: Understanding conjugal violence in rural Aksum and the role of the Orthodox Täwahädo Church and clergy in addressing the problem**'. This paper was based on the findings of her PhD research in the countryside of Aksum, which investigated spousal abuse forms, their aetiologies, and attitudes toward them among the Orthodox Täwahädo community. The study explored, in particular, how local worldviews mediated people's understanding and attitudes about spousal abuse to identify 'resources' and entry points within the local cosmological framework that could be leveraged to curb the problem. A particular interest of her research was the investigation of clergy-centred and theology-informed solutions considering the potency of the indigenous Orthodox tradition, a generally non-violent faith.

The study found that the question of the role of religion in gender-based violence needs considerable differentiation. Some forms of conjugal abuse, and attitudes toward them, reflected socio-cultural and religious norms. Others were understood as having been caused by entropies of modern life, while some situations of abuse were attributed to the individual character caught in a spiritual battle between Christian conscience and worldly temptations. Similarly, attitudes about the interrelation between cultural norms and faith varied

from an understanding of both as identical, to a juxtaposition of the spiritual and the cultural. This meant that diagnoses and proposed treatments of conjugal abuse varied widely, from resisting modernity's eroding force to challenging 'traditional' cultural norms in the name of religion. This also resulted in different attitudes toward clergy, although their usefulness as mediators in conjugal conflict was invariably asserted.

The role of faith was invoked in a highly gendered manner, with men emphasising the importance of religion in resisting temptation and women invoking religion as a coping mechanism. Istratii highlighted the importance of taking this wide and varied landscape into account when planning interventions to reduce conjugal abuse. Given the centrality of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in rural Axum, clergy had an important role to play, but would need to be better educated and resourced to assume this role. The church would also need to adjust its teaching to better address changing gender norms and their impact on marital relations. This would need to include the development of a complementary model of marriage (rather than a patriarchal one) based on the teachings of the New Testament and John Chrysostom, as well as more inclusive approach to those living outside the norms of the Church.

*Kidist Belayneh* from Norwegian Church Aid gave the final paper in this session, titled '**Faith based organizations' contribution to the Ethiopian government commitment to end FGM and Child marriage by 2025**'. Her paper introduced the work of Norwegian Church Aid with faith-based partners on eradicating FGM/C in Ethiopia. The country has seen a nine percent reduction in FGM/C prevalence in the last decade. However, regional variance is very high and interventions tend to be highly localised. FGM/C is practiced across all religions in Ethiopia with certain ethnicities being a significant indicator of FGM/C prevalence.

Religious actors are key in continuing the fight against FGM/C given their integration into local communities and the respect that they command. Norwegian Church Aid has primarily engaged the top leadership of religious organisations in sensitising them to this issue and activating their religious guidance. Religious organisations took ownership on the issue of FGM and the intervention process leaving Norwegian Church Aid playing the role of facilitator. Between 2009 and 2017, main faith actors such as the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, Evangelical Churches Fellowship of Ethiopia, and the Ethiopian Catholic Church made a public declaration against FGM/C and other harmful practices.

Subsequently, Norwegian Church Aid was able to aid in the dissemination of these theological declarations, as well as support subsequent dialogue initiatives and further theological training. Religious leaders have also engaged the government in their consultations and dialogue forums on the issue of FGM/C and have since begun to consult one another. This led to a joint inter-faith declaration against FGM/C in 2012. Altogether, this project demonstrated how a well-situated international NGO can limit itself to a coordinating role and still mobilise the resources and power of faith-based organisations.

## Panel 2: Religion and Education for Development (SDG 4)

The second panel originally grouped three papers together that addressed various aspects of religious education and teaching in bringing about or critiquing development. Due to a cancellation, one paper on media engagement was moved here from panel three.

*Addise Amado* from the Ethiopian Graduate School of Theology (EGST) presented on '**Gender, Health and Theology Interconnection in Academia and Engagement**'. This paper gave an insight into EGST's recently created three-tier engagement with development combining 1) MA teaching and research with 2) training of faith leaders and 3) outreach activities to women and children in preventative healthcare. The MA in Gender, Health and Theology (GHT) is supported by the Church of Sweden and SIDA and aims to equip its students with the abilities to deal with gender inequalities and the lack of preventive health services through theological reflection and 'proper' practical training.

As of December 2017, it has become an important cornerstone of EGST with 120 graduates, the majority of whom have been female and a number of whom have now proceeded to PhD studies. There is also ongoing interdisciplinary research focusing on 'Gender Justice and its Theological Implications' that brings together faculty, staff and graduate researchers. A total of 1,108 faith leaders have completed training on gender, health and religion, with half of them being women. The faith leaders trained come from all faiths in Ethiopia forming an important hub of interreligious engagement. This training also includes practical experiences of challenges around women's healthcare, which has helped to further mobilise these faith leaders to raise funds and activate their communities in female and maternal healthcare. As part of the outreach programme, more than 1,538 women and children have accessed improved preventive health services to date. This is built around counselling and advice by mentors giving clients advice on health, family planning and nutrition, and reducing scepticism toward Western medicine.

Altogether, the presentation of the three-tier model at EGST demonstrated the potential of integration and partnership in bringing together academic education with the training of religious leaders and community outreach.

*Julian Sommerschuh* of the University of Cambridge presented a paper titled '**Preaching the Limits of Growth: Confining Development in Protestant Southern Ethiopia**'. This paper was based on anthropological research undertaken in Dell, a rural community in southern Ethiopia, which, in the past two decades, has been marked by the rise of evangelical Protestantism and the promotion of economic development through state institutions. The local Kale Heywet church initially embraced development as an ally in the battle against 'tradition' but in recent years, the church has begun to voice a clear Protestant critique of development.

The paper looked at three main questions: 1) What is the local Protestant critique of development? 2) How does the church seek to instruct its members about the limits of development? and 3) What does this mean for development in Dell? The Protestant critique of development mainly grew from the observation that striving for development can lead people to violate Christian values, e.g. missing church events to go to the market and suing others for compensation instead of granting forgiveness, or boasting about their wealth rather

than being humble. This has led the church to preach against being overly concerned with worldly things and its leaders are striving to provide a better example of what to aspire towards. Illness and/or misfortune are increasingly interpreted as punishment for the wrong kind of development pursuit and an opportunity to change one's ways. This change in the perception of development has led to a tangible modification of behaviour with believers, in the interest of avoiding conflicts and sin, refraining from participating in microcredit schemes or sharecropping.

The paper thus highlighted an example of a limiting effect of religions on development attitudes and behaviour. Protestantism, in this setting, assigns to development an instrumental rather than intrinsic value, and therefore its engagement with development practices will be informed by the impact on attaining religious values. However, this limitation can also be understood as a resource because the practices critiqued were those considered harmful to the community, such as greed or taking advantage of others. Inasmuch as religions represent communal values, their critique of development processes can help bring about more sustainable practices.

*Mohammed Jemal Ahmed* from Wollo University gave the final paper in this session, titled '**Social Media as an Alternative Space for Faith: Inter and Intra-Religions Polemics among the Ethiopian Diaspora**'. His paper was based on a qualitative study of how religion is invoked among the Ethiopian diaspora on various social media outlets. As discussed in many other contexts, social media platforms can amplify divisive rhetoric, especially around sensitive topics. Such polemics have become a great challenge to peaceful coexistence and religious tolerance in many countries, with Ethiopia being no stranger to this phenomenon.

The Ethiopian diaspora communities residing in Europe, USA and the Middle East have played a central role in eroding formerly apparent religious tolerance and mutual accommodations in Ethiopia. Diaspora communities in general have better access to the internet and mobile technologies and a greater awareness of how to use social media. In this way, they have a disproportionate influence on the discourse and have replaced more traditional, peaceful ways of engaging in interreligious dialogue. This also pertains to print media with funding from abroad.

Based on a thorough scan of various discussion platforms, the paper identified central themes and topics in inter-religious debates and controversies between Orthodox Christians and Muslims, between Orthodox and Protestant Christians, as well as Protestants and Muslims. Given the prominent role that social media has played in recent political activism, it will be important for interreligious peace to monitor these platforms more closely and understand how they inform people's attitudes and perceptions toward other religions.

### **Panel 3: FBOs and Community Organising (SDG 16)**

This panel grouped papers which highlighted various examples of religions being involved in aspects of community development and forming partnerships.

*Maregie Habtu*, from World Vision Ethiopia presented on '**The Role and Significance of Faith in Transformational Development in Ethiopia: a Practical Approach**'. This paper was based on a World Vision project called 'Ethiopia's For Every Child Campaign Project',

which ran from 2012 to 2016 in different regions of Ethiopia. The project stated that its aim was to create an environment in which children experience life in 'religious fullness'. Most of this project was implemented through capacity-building activities and training workshops. A key element of the project was the establishment of faith-based forums in which faith leaders worked together on setting a common agenda for transformational development in their communities.

The work of these faith-based forums has shown that faith leaders can have a significant impact on implementing holistic, transformational development. Setting a common agenda around improving child wellbeing also enabled religious leaders to see what they have in common and to build personal relationships. In so doing, further peacebuilding measures between and within religious communities has been enabled. Furthermore, the close relationship between religious leaders and members of their community enabled the various training activities provided to have a stronger impact.

The outcomes included: strengthened family relationships, restored broken marriages, positive child rearing practices and a reduction of the corporal punishment of children. A significant highlight was the participation of women and children in the family decision making process through family discussion forums. Engaging faith leaders also led to a significant reduction in harmful traditional practices such as child abuse, child labour and exploitation, child trafficking and early and child marriage. Faith leaders felt empowered to lead community conversations on these issues, which included promoting justice and advocating for women and children.

The engagement of faith leaders and capacity building measures enabled World Vision to increase the impact of their project activities and affect behavioural change in ways that lasted beyond the cessation of the project. Collaboration between development institutions and religious actors, therefore, is shown to be crucial in achieving holistic, sustainable development.

*Menberu Bekabil Workneh* from Debre Markos University studied the engagement of an Orthodox monastic community in development in his paper titled '**The Role of Religious Institutions in Rural Community Development: The Case of Sellassie Monastery of Debre Elias Woreda, Amhara National Regional State**'. The studied monastery was established in 2002 and has had a significant impact on the community. It is unlike most other EOTC churches and monasteries in that it does not depend on financial vows, endowments and tithing for its livelihood.

The Sellassie Monastery of Debre Elias has achieved economic self-sufficiency through agricultural activities, including irrigation. Its example has had a transformative impact on the traditionally rain-fed agriculture used in the surrounding rural communities. As a result, irrigation-reliant cash crops (such as sugarcane, maize, mango and banana) are on the rise, which, in turn, has positively affected the livelihood of the surrounding communities in aspects of health, community mobilisation and solidarity, as well as in the reduction of harmful traditional practices. These changes were, in part, affected by the association made between salvation and blessings in the afterlife, and hard work and helping others (as opposed to donations or religious vows). This has also led to the community perceiving

the monastery as no longer a site for religious activities alone, but also as an economic and social hub.

The study showed that even traditional religious actors can be important for community development, even though they may not describe their own work as development practice. Rather, by attaching religious value to hard work, improved agricultural practices and solidarity, they can mobilise communities for sustainable development. This engagement in transforming agriculture and society also reaffirms the status and leadership potential of religious institutions in Ethiopia.

*Dr Tesfaye Yacob* from the Kale Heywet Church gave the final paper in this session, titled **'Self-Help Groups in Holistic Transformational Development: Experiences from Ethiopian Kale Heywet Church'**. This paper presented insights from the systematic formation of self-help groups within the Kale Heywet Church, the largest Protestant church in Ethiopia with a long tradition of centrally organised development. Originally greeted with suspicion when first introduced in 2003, the establishment of self-help groups has proved transformational for the church's approach to development and community organising.

The self-help groups exemplify self-reliance and serve as stepping stone to combat poverty by encouraging financial saving and proper resource management, in combination with individual loans and group enterprise development. This is supported by a flexible system whereby the group develops its own regulation to ensure the mutual support of members. Even though the self-help groups target both genders, women were the largest group among the 1.8 million beneficiaries of the scheme, being empowered socially, economically, spiritually and politically, and reviving their dignity in desperate situations. The self-help groups extend beyond the community of the Kale Heywet Church and include members of other faiths without any expectation or observation of conversions. In a number of instances, self-help groups have also managed to influence political decisions at local and regional levels, including some group members being elected to parliament.

The paper presented the main principles and governing practices of the self-help group scheme, demonstrating its structural simplicity and local ownership. Since the conception of the scheme, there have been a number of studies and evaluations with university collaboration, which have documented the efficiency and positive results of the scheme. However, it is also important to recognise the limits of the scheme: the poorest members of society often could not maintain their contributions. As a whole, the self-help groups in the Kale Heywet Church are an example of a religious contribution to social and economic development that extends beyond the religious community itself.

## Full Report Day 2: Workshop Activities

### Panel Discussion: Religion and Ethiopia's Development Vision

This panel discussion aimed to explore ways in which the Ethiopian state could better incorporate religious actors in its development vision and what would be needed for better cooperation between the state and religions in the implementation of this vision. The panel was moderated by **Dr Dereje Feyissa** from the Life & Peace Institute.

Our panellists were selected to include perspectives from all major religious traditions in Ethiopia. They were given three questions around which to frame their opening statements:

- 1) What specific contributions are religions making to Ethiopia's economic, social, and political development? What challenges do they face?
- 2) Does the Ethiopian government's development vision do enough to incorporate religious perspectives and contributions?
- 3) What is required of the Ethiopian state and the Sustainable Development Goals process to better harness the contributions of religious actors and overcome these challenges?

These questions were taken in turn during the discussion. They are combined here for the purpose of the report.

**Mulugeta Jaleta**, an anthropologist from Addis Ababa University, began by giving a brief overview about Oromo Religion in order to give an example of Ethiopia's traditional religions, which are often discounted in conversations about religions and religious statistics in Ethiopia. He began by emphasising the continued importance of Oromo traditional beliefs, even among Oromo who have become Christian or Muslim. Certain Oromo views and traditions have persisted under the umbrella of Christianity and Islam, especially with regard to moral codes and views on the natural environment. Environmental protection and sustainable farming are among the chief development resources of Oromo Religion, which should be harnessed for SDGs 1, 2, 13 and 15. Another resource is the traditional *gadaa* system of social stratification and roles, which has been recognised by UNESCO as the indigenous democratic socio-political system of the Oromo and should be employed for the achievement of SDG 16. At present, these resources are not properly recognised by the state. Instead, the government tends to infringe upon Oromo social institutions and the environment in its development processes. More needs to be done in integrating anthropological research on development programming to better understand and harness traditional values. Furthermore, the government needs to move beyond the instrumentalisation of religions and work with local actors. Presently, tribal leaders and religions are used more to decorate government policy, which delegitimises their authority.

**Tezera Tabezew** from the University of Gondar noted that three aspects are important for explaining the rising importance of Ethiopian religions for development.

- 1) The first aspect relates to religious institutions, which are not only crucial for local society but have also made important contributions to the achievement of the MDGs

such as water sanitation and HIV/AIDS prevention. There are numerous ways in which religious institutions in Ethiopia complement and substitute the state in local development, sometimes even competing with the state where collaboration is not properly achieved.

- 2) The second aspect has to do with the role religions play in regulating human behaviour and thereby socio-economic development on a micro-scale. Through rituals and festivals they also create and facilitate various political spaces from peaceful exchange to fundamentalist clashes.
- 3) The third aspect relates to post-development thinking in that religious organisations engage critically with development overreach by the state, for example in the appropriation of religious sites. As such, they highlight the tensions produced by development projects and enable critical engagement with development ideology and programming.

Challenges arise when the government and religious actors do not collaborate but compete with one another in these areas. In order to better harness the contribution of religious actors, the government needs to give religion proper recognition given its likely permanence. This means the Ethiopian notion of secularism needs revision i.e. shifting away from a normative ideology toward the understanding of a historical process of social change which can take different forms. There needs to be greater will and commitment by the government to collaborate with religions and to provide a broader space for civil society actors. Furthermore, development needs to be turned into more of a participatory process, moving away from an 'ivory towers' approach and towards a grassroots approach, thus enabling proper engagement of religious actors in a truly sustainable process.

**Dr Aleign Aschale** from Addis Ababa Science and Technology University highlighted the contribution of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church to the Ethiopian tourism economy and the ethical and sustainable management of tourist sites. Other areas of development where the Ethiopian Orthodox church makes important contributions relate to ethical instructions against corruption, harnessing remittances for charity among Ethiopians living abroad, and furthering inter-religious tolerance. Since the Derg regime, the former central political power of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church has been curtailed and new models for church-state interaction are needed for the current secular framework of the constitution. The role of Mahbir Qədusan and many other youth schools (e.g. the Sunday Schools) are contributing a lot in maintaining the multiple values and spiritual power of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. They resist corruption and maladministration in the church. They are also disseminating knowledge and skills through critical research and widespread evangelical activities.

At present, the government *does* give space to religions, especially in moments of national crises or conflicts when it relies on religious leaders to make statements in the interest of maintaining peace. It has also begun to request data from religious communities for planning its development intervention. At the same time, the government tends to close some religious spaces by inciting conflict or labelling some religious groups as 'terrorists'. Moreover, the government needs to do more in recognising the importance of religious education and including religious perspectives in its formulation of development policy.

**Dr. Andrew Decort** from Institute for Christianity and the Common Good emphasised that all Ethiopian religions have a central principle of neighbourly love. This could form the core of a moral vision for Ethiopia that sees all individuals as human beings worthy of care and respect. However, it seems that many religions are themselves challenged in this area, focusing on personal attainment rather than building bridges or reaching out to neighbours from other religious traditions.

Sustainable development in Ethiopia will need real collaboration to facilitate trust, altruism and self-sacrifice. Religious communities need to recover their own traditions of neighbourly love to make this possible. One of the major challenges is that even though Ethiopia is a highly religious country with a soaring youth population enrolled in higher education, there is no academic study of religion in the nearly 40 universities across Ethiopia. Thus, many graduates are profoundly ignorant about their own religious traditions and have no way to engage critically with them in the interest of dialogue. Moving forward, it will be important to inspire a new imagination in the Ethiopian youth. To do this, the government needs to provide space for open and creative dialogue, such as centres, think tanks and other platforms of exchange. There needs to be a publishing house for religious literature that can inspire others. Furthermore, Ethiopia needs to create a culture of volunteering, for example through updated online platforms advertising volunteer opportunities.

**Ibrahim Bushra** from Addis Ababa University emphasised the need to differentiate between economic, social and political activities and institutions and the need to maintain balance between them to prevent one area from dominating the others. In its emphasis on morals and the greater good, religion is important for keeping such a balance, as well as having the ability to influence each of these activities. For example, Max Weber has shown clearly how certain Christian ideas influenced the economic order of Europe in the rise of capitalism. Islamic doctrine and piety also greatly influence the economic activities of Muslims in finance, endowments, poverty alleviation, trade, and economic cooperation. This extends beyond merely influencing certain economic activities. It encompasses some basic paradigms of economic scholarship concerned with the scarcity of resources, the nature of human activity, specific work ethics, and the economic role of consumption.

Through various regulations in the finance system that do not leave sufficient space for Islamic finance, the economic potential of Islamic banking and microfinance is severely curtailed, and by extension, so is the Islamic contribution to Ethiopian poverty alleviation and development. This problem is exacerbated by the government's strict monitoring of Islamic activities and the co-optation of the Islamic clergy. With the current political reforms, hopefully more room will be given to Islamic economic activities in their own right.

Dr Derje Feyissa highlighted the following points for further discussion:

- 1) On question 1: The role of religious norms in defining the boundaries of development processes was highlighted by most contributors, including a selection of what is important and the creation of a moral vision for the country. Sacred sites in particular provide a social space for developing a vision of development that extends beyond mere material or economic development and includes human development. In addition, most religious actors provide social services that are needed in a subsidiary function to the state.

- 2) On Question 2: The co-optation of religious actors in times of national crisis was one major challenge mentioned as it corrupts and erodes the moral authority of the religious leaders that the government is leaning on. The lack of the academic study of religion in Ethiopia is a major challenge as well.
- 3) On question 3: Ethiopia needs to develop its own version of secularism or a secular public sphere that takes into account the continued importance of religion. This also includes a more open space for CSOs that permits true partnership with religious actors, and avoids their instrumentalisation in projects of political control that can undermine religious authority.

Following the panel input, the discussion was continued by inviting each participant to respond to the panel discussion and the three questions asked. The most important issues picked up in the discussions were:

- the problem of instrumentalisation and co-optation of religious actors;
- the need for the government to give more space to religious actors;
- the need for an Ethiopian vision of secularism, which accounts for the historical and continued role of religion in the country, whilst promoting inter-religious equality;
- how to account for specifically religious intentions and practices in development without simply imposing secular models of development vision and practice upon them;
- how to account for the limitations of religions in secular development including the often difficult – if not impossible demarcation – between religious and secular activities;
- the question of motivation in religious involvement in development;
- the proper integration of religious studies in secular universities and the role of religious debate on university campuses more generally;
- the need to develop more spaces for exchange and collaboration on these matters, such as think tanks but also furthering opportunities for volunteering;
- the need for better measurements and tracking mechanisms to determine the added value of religious contributions to development;
- the importance of religions for ecological discourse;
- challenges of religions themselves with regard to competition within and between faith organisations, ethnic conflict and leadership failures;
- the marginalisation of traditional religions by mainstream religions;
- the need to involve faith groups in the moral development of individuals in the interest of the country's development.

## Workshop Activities ‘Religions and the SDGs’

During this interactive workshop session, the participants were divided into four groups, each attending four discussion activities in turn. The activities were organised in a similar way to the earlier Birmingham and New Delhi workshops, with one activity changed slightly to reflect previous insights. The main responses collected from all groups in each of the activities are recorded below:

### 1) To what extent were you able to take part in the consultation process to decide the SDGs and around setting the indicators?

This activity included the discussion of questions such as:

- How were you involved in the SDG planning and implementation so far and in what capacity?
- How does your experience reflect the three or four rounds of consultations that were held in Ethiopia? Are you aware of other faith actors who were involved in the consultation process?
- In what ways and to what extent do you think religious perspectives were included in the formulation of the SDGs?

We found that none of the represented FBOs were involved in the consultation processes around setting or implementing the SDGs, nor were they aware of their country office or other FBO representatives being consulted in this capacity. This is a significant outcome as the most important FBOs in Ethiopia were present at the workshop and their experience can therefore be taken as representative for the sector as a whole.

One academic participant had provided sectoral feedback to the UN, UNICEF and other INGOs through online facilities. However, this came through direct contacts and previous involvement in the MDG process. Another academic had been present at a sectoral consultation around the post-MDG process. One non-religious NGO was involved in SDG consultations having been invited by the government to participate. Others had been made aware of the SDG consultations through their international headquarters and are still encouraged to engage with the SDGs in this way.

Participants mentioned that the CSO sector was consulted in the making of the GTP II. Such consultations are facilitated by the Consortium of Christian Relief and Development Associations (CCRDA). Despite its name, the CCRDA today is an umbrella organisation for NGOs in Ethiopia from all faiths and none, which currently encompasses around 400 organisations.<sup>18</sup> It serves as a main conduit for coordinated discussion and feedback on government development policy, mostly in sectoral consultations. As it is not a funding body, and due to the limited political space for CSOs, participation in CCRDA consultations tends to be rather low, however. At any rate, the engagement process between the CCRDA and the government was described as a one-way street: members and the CCRDA leadership discuss the GTP II and are expected to adopt its goals and targets without a clear pathway for them to influence state development planning. Furthermore, the government collects information from CCRDA members and consultations and yet the

<sup>18</sup> Consortium of Christian Relief and Development Associations, “CCRDA Members’ Profile: Addresses of International and Local Member Organizations of CCRDA” (2016).

aggregated information and its impact on development policy is not fed back to the CCRDA or the involved NGOs. Beyond this GTP II engagement, participants had not heard about the CCRDA being consulted in the SDG process.

Despite this lack of engagement, some organisations purposely align their own programmes and plans with global development discourses, including the SDGs. In most cases, this has not yet led to internal consultations on SDGs. Others felt more compelled to align their activities with the GTP II because it preceded the SDGs and provides closer ties with government development priorities and funding opportunities.

Nevertheless, participants felt that in general, the SDGs aligned well with religious values and that they provided a broad framework that they can use to synchronise their own activities. The language of the SDGs, however, does not reflect religious language well and may be seen by religious people as more of a government document. Some goals and targets (such as gender equality) require contextualisation and interpretation by religious actors as the phrasing of these goals does not incorporate or promote indigenous knowledge. At the same time, other participants provided examples how properly contextualised global development language has helped to move the conversation within religious organisations around controversial issues such as sexual ethics. Such processes of contextualisation require time, and some organisations tend to act on what they feel is expected of them to the loss of local ownership.

2) *To what extent do the indicators to the SDGs reflect how you measure progress in your work?*

This group discussion was facilitated by providing the group with indicators for the SDGs 4 (education), 5 (gender), 16 (peaceful & inclusive societies). These SDGs were the main ones discussed the previous day. The targets and indicators were given to the participants to look at for a few minutes. The following question was posed to the group:

*To what extent do the indicators for the SDGs reflect how you measure the success or progress of your work?*

These sub-questions were also discussed:

- What is missing?
- Would it look different if faith actors had more of a say?
- Have you seen these before?
- Does this reflect your approach?

All four groups discussed one particular missing element; morality and ethics. Many felt that faith actors would bring a discussion of this to the table if they were more visible. It was also noted that a secular perspective, such as that seen in the SDGs, only views humans from a material perspective, whereas faith leads to a 'holistic' view of the individual. How this might be brought into the SDGs though was not clear and we discussed the benefits of having a secular and universal set of goals versus goals that might come across as biased towards a faith perspective. If faith actors were explicitly mentioned in the goals then they might be perceived as having a particular role to play, such as either solving or

working against the SDGs. Neutrality was therefore seen as a benefit of the SDG framework.

Other discussions noted that there was a large emphasis on quantitative measurements for the success of the SDGs and fewer subjective perspectives. Also mentioned by several participants was the restriction on NGOs getting involved in SDG 5 or 16 due to the legal implications of the CSO law.

There was a lot of material to discuss, and it was not always easy nor opportune to separate a faith perspective from a more general criticism of the targets and indicators. This can be seen in the below lists, which arose from a discussion of the following targets and indicators (words in inverted commas are quotes directly from participants):

**Goal 4** Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all:

- Focuses on a basic, service provision perspective;
- No focus on moral education and emotional intelligence, on cross cultural education and indigenous knowledge education;
- *4.1 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes* – Civic education is not included here;
- *4.4.1 Proportion of youth and adults with information and communications technology (ICT) skills, by type of skill* – This might not be relevant for rural communities. One participant told us that when computer skills are taught the students often do not have a computer and therefore are learning in theory about how to use a computer;
- *4a Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all* – Does this include accessibility of places of worship?

**Goal 5** Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls:

- Someone argued that there is a need to adopt an Ethiopian view on gender equality, others argued that there are local cultural proprieties in achieving gender equity. Another participant strongly disagreed arguing that gender equality is not different in different places. Moreover, NGOs are not allowed to perform gender rights advocacy if they get outside funding;
- *5.2 Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation.* – Most victims of this are women and girls but men and boys are also victims. Men are only included as perpetrators.
- *5.3 Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation* – The extent to which faith leaders become committed to this could be used as an indicator to measure the likelihood of Harmful Traditional Practices coming to an end i.e. the proportion of faith leaders that signed up to reduce FGM would act as an indicator of a commitment to this SDG.

- 5.4 Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate – There is a need additional indicator for equal pay.
- 5.5 Ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life – This indicator needs to include something about building women’s confidence;
- 5.6 Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as – Catholics do not work on reproductive rights.
- 5a Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws – This indicator misses our pastoralists and other livelihoods (e.g. focus on agriculture in the indicators).

**Goal 16** Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

- The focus is on formal institutions, one could mention other relevant institutions including faith actors; has the Ethiopian government committed to these?
- Countering violent extremism is not there;
- NGOs cannot work on SDG 16, they officially can’t report on this, not everything can be undertaken by all actors;
- Who is promoting peace? Moral issues are missing and faith actors play a role here;
- 16.7.1 Proportions of positions (by sex, age, persons with disabilities and population groups) in public institutions (national and local legislatures, public service, and judiciary) compared to national distributions – This ignores qualitative dimensions;
- 16.6.2 Proportion of the population satisfied with their last experience of public services – This is more subjective, asking people about their perceptions.

3) Which SDGs have you engaged with most and why? Which ones present difficulties for religious actors?

In this group discussion activity, participants were asked to identify (by placing stickers on an SDG poster), which three SDGs their organisation prioritises the most, and which three it prioritised the least. In addition, the participants were asked to identify the SDGs (up to three) that they found the most challenging for religious actors to engage with and why. The results of this exercise (votes per SDG) are tabulated overleaf. It is important to remember that these results incorporate religious and non-religious NGOs and academic representatives.

SDG	Title	Most	Least	Most challenging
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No.		Important	Important	for Religions
1	No Poverty	14	0	3
2	Zero Hunger	4	1	5
3	Good Health and Well-Being	12	0	2
4	Quality Education	15	0	2
5	Gender Equality	13	0	13
6	Clean Water and Sanitation	3	4	0
7	Affordable and Clean Energy	0	6	5
8	Decent Work and Economic Growth	3	4	4
9	Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure	2	8	12
10	Reduced Inequalities	0	0	14
11	Sustainable Cities and Communities	3	8	2
12	Responsible Consumption and Production	1	5	5
13	Climate Action	1	8	5
14	Life Below Water	0	19	7
15	Life on Land	2	10	2
16	Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions	8	1	2
17	Partnership for the Goals	3	3	2

In a first discussion round for this exercise, participants were asked to explain their selections, which mainly meant identifying how they prioritised their work and discussing whether the SDGs played a role in this process. Participants agreed that their prioritisation of goals does not revolve around the SDG language but is informed by their respective organisations' vision and strategic plans, main constituents, needs analysis, donor interests, government plans, and the immediate environment (rural/urban). Moreover, due to the interconnected nature of the SDGs, organisations often find that their work in one area incorporates multiple SDGs.

The global framework of the SDGs also means that Ethiopian organisations will find it hard to relate to all the goals in their particular circumstance. Other goals around infrastructure and economic strategy are owned by the government and there is little space for the involvement of CSOs in a critical or even constructive capacity. Many emphasised that given the level of poverty in Ethiopia, development here is guided by a basic needs approach, which automatically prioritises (SDGs 1-6) and de-emphasises others, such as environmental concerns (SDG 14-15). Some pointed out that this may even be reflected in the way that the SDGs were set up, with the traditional, basic needs SDGs ranked first, whereas the later ones reflect challenges for the so-called 'developed world'. In this way the SDGs reflect that they are an extension of MDGs.

In a second round of discussions participants were asked to reflect on why they flagged certain SDGs as problematic or challenging for religious actors. Some flagged up a lack of ownership in defining or contextualising what the globally articulated goal might mean, so that goals automatically transport a set of secular or Western values. In this way, certain SDGs actually project stereotypes about what they mean, such as organisations working on gender equality being seen as pursuing a certain kind of gender equality that clashes with religious values. So it really matters how an organisation frames its work for an SDG in a strategic manner in order to resist such stereotypes in the perception of their work. This also means not to enforce something that misaligns with the existing religious values, resources, and cultural contexts.

Some pointed out that the different life worlds of their constituents were a challenge in engaging with certain SDGs because they might appeal to urban constituents but not rural ones or vice versa. This also relates to doctrinal conflicts around issues like sexual ethics or gender equality, conflicts that are occasionally amplified by a fear of extremism. Here, the religious challenge has to do with an internal plurality of life worlds and worldviews that needs more reflection when involving religious actors. Others emphasised that the religious focus on life after death also made it difficult to engage certain SDGs, such as environmental concerns.

Certain goals, like reducing inequality, were seen as challenging to religious organisations themselves in much the same way as they are to the wider public sector. Inasmuch as religious organisations themselves mirror the cultural context of the country (such as patriarchy), they are also challenged by the same goals. For others, the main challenges with certain goals emerge from political constraints, such as the government's failure to integrate religious views in educational curricula. Religions do not tend to be on the vanguard of culture change.

#### 4) *To what extent do the SDGs influence what you do and how you work?*

In this activity, participants were asked to reflect on if and how the SDG framework was relevant to their practical work in the planning and implementation of projects or whether this was more of a global donor discourse.

The majority of participants indicated that the SDGs made no practical difference to their work, neither in planning, nor operation, nor fundraising, nor communication. Participants gave a number of reasons for this. The reason most frequently cited was the ownership of the SDGs by the National Planning Commission. As the National Planning Commission has integrated the SDGs into the GTP II and all development organisations had to adhere to the latter, there was no need for direct engagement with the SDGs. Some participants criticised this government ownership, while others stated their belief that the GTP II reflected the SDGs in the most suitable way for Ethiopia and affirmed the government ownership of the SDGs.

Related to this was the mention of the uncommon local ownership of development processes. As everything was planned centrally and top-down with little discussion at the local level, there was no use in even using the SDGs to speak back to the government with an alternative development vision.

Members from international NGOs offered additional reasons for not directly engaging with the SDGs which was related to the level of their roles. While they acknowledged that their international headquarters might engage with the SDGs in their global planning and setting of strategic plans, they noted that their work at country level was informed by the organisation's strategic plan and various local variables at country level, such as national planning, legal parameters, and development needs. One participant added that in this way, their long-standing work had informed the SDGs, rather than the other way around.

The importance of a needs-based approach was also affirmed by representatives of other, more local organisations. Actors working in relief operations, in particular, pay no attention to the SDGs; their work was informed by other international agreements, such as the Geneva conventions. Others emphasised that their project planning and implementation was informed by the needs of their constituents, so that there is no need to engage with the SDGs. This observation also extends to local values and beliefs, which guide practical development work rather than a global articulation of development goals and ethics.

Finally, a number of participants mentioned that there was a lack of capacity and knowledge for engaging with the SDGs in a sustained manner. As the government planning and monitoring was adjusted to the GTP II, there was little incentive to change this and little opportunity to encounter the SDGs in day-to-day project planning and monitoring. This is even true for the engagement with the SDGs at university level as their planning and curricula are primarily aligned to the GTP II as well. One academic participant noted that the first he had heard about the SDGs was through the call for papers for this workshop. Others had only heard about the SDGs when engaging with UN publications or events.

There were some exceptions to this general agreement on the remoteness of the SDGs. One member of an international, evangelical FBO noted that the organisation had streamlined its planning and monitoring to reflect the SDG language. A delegate from one national Pentecostal development organisation stated that the SDGs had informed their strategic plan as well and guided them to adopt combatting climate change as a goal as well. However, this participant also noted that the availability of funding plays more of a factor in deciding detailed plans and their implementation. There also was evidence of the SDGs shaping curricula and research at two institutes of higher education, both Protestant private institutions.

All participants had no difficulty in accounting for their work in SDG language, even if this did not reflect a practical change in the planning and implementation of their work. The SDGs were affirmed as a comprehensive, general framework that all types of development work could be slotted into. As such, they also enable discussion about development values and major goals.

Participants therefore saw potential for the SDGs becoming more relevant in the future. Many assumed that they would gain in importance as a global framework for fundraising and communication. This might also drive an increased use in development communication and education in Ethiopia. Furthermore, the government might adopt a more streamlined approach to monitoring of the implementation of the SDGs (as it did with the MDGs), after having been prevented from doing so by the political turbulence of the past two years. One participant also voiced the hope that as civil space opens up in Ethiopia, devel-

opment actors might be able to use the SDGs as an advocacy tool in challenging some of the government's plans and bringing about greater liberty in the planning and implementation of development work by religious actors. Others noted that more local ownership and an adjustment of values would be needed for this to happen, not just in relation to the government, but also to the global development language articulated by the SDGs.

## **Workshop Summary and Main Findings**

The workshop was planned as a small, exploratory event in line with the aims of the research network. The response to the call for papers and participation exceeded our expectations and we were pleased to have such a broad representation of the major faith-based organisations alongside academics from ten Ethiopian universities and colleges.

While a number of findings are in line with what we have seen in the UK and India, there are some observations and recommendations which are of particular importance to Ethiopia:

- **Need for increased academic research:** So far there has been very little research on the impact of faith-based actors on development in Ethiopia. This is in line with the lack of religious studies in the country altogether, which as of yet, has no place in universities and is left to faith-based institutions. As the papers and discussions during the workshop have shown, there is considerable potential for research into faith-based engagement with development in Ethiopia. This will require a more sustained effort and religiously neutral spaces in academia and civil society.
- **Limits of FBO language:** With the Ethiopian Charities and Societies Proclamation of 2009, Ethiopia has installed a wall of separation between faith-based activities – mainly understood as proclaiming a particular religion –, and development – mainly understood as the economic advancement of the country. This makes the international language around FBOs (understood as faith-based organisations engaged in development) ambiguous and leads to misunderstandings, as we have found at various points during our workshop. This wall of separation between religious articulations and development may help address concerns about proselytization, inter-religious conflict, and corruption. However, multiple contributions to the workshop have shown that it also erects artificial boundaries in development cooperation and practice and therefore can stand in the way of sustainable development. As Ethiopia is about to revise the Charities and Societies Proclamation, it has become clear from our workshop that a more nuanced model of state neutrality and secularism is needed.
- **Government ownership of the SDGs:** Due to the mainstreaming of the SDGs into the GTP II and the government's centralised approach to development, there has been very little engagement with the SDGs and their implementation on behalf of civil society actors. Knowledge about the SDGs and the appreciation of the SDG process was considerably lower than in our workshops in the UK and India. On the one hand, this demonstrates the level of ownership Ethiopia seeks to retain over its development strategy, prioritisation, implementation and monitoring while complying with this new international framework. On the other hand, this national ownership of

development has stifled the very grassroots approach that the SDGs claim to possess. The usefulness of the SDG process in widening civil society participation in development strategy, implementation, and monitoring has yet to be proven.

- **An aspirational moment:** The workshop took place in the midst of considerable political changes prompted by the new Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and his commitment to more democratic processes. Ethnic clashes and political factionalism are a cause for concern, but the outlook of workshop participants on the whole was positive and hopeful. Participants consistently expressed their hope and desire to engage more freely in the formation of development policy and practice as political processes are liberalised, and most participants reflected the aspirational rhetoric of the state about Ethiopia's potential. As civil societies continue to play an increasingly important role in Ethiopia's development, it remains to be seen what the contribution of the SDG process will be to this sector.

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For the report,

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