



---

# The Social Sciences at the Crossroads: Challenges and Opportunities at Addis Ababa University

Abeje Berhanu\*

---

## Abstract

The social sciences are at the crossroads in Ethiopia. This is because government's overt policy favours the scientific and engineering disciplines and this translates to allocating more money to them. This could lead to acute shortage of research funding for MA and PhD programmes in the social sciences and lack of investment in infrastructure, resulting in shortage of office space for staff and shortage of classrooms and offices for PhD students. In the long run, this could lead to much lower support for staff development with fewer and fewer students choosing social science fields. But the social sciences can convert these challenges into opportunities. One way of doing this is to emphasize quality education – this being the key issue identified in recent debates on the nature and direction of higher education in Ethiopia. The saying 'small is beautiful', which in this case can be stated, 'small is viable', is applicable to the future of the social sciences in the Ethiopian higher education system. A manageable student size, both at the undergraduate and graduate level, can help the social sciences to provide relevant and quality education for their students.

## Résumé

Les sciences sociales sont à la croisée des chemins en Ethiopie. En effet, la stratégie ouverte du gouvernement a favorisé les disciplines scientifiques et l'ingénierie et cela se traduit par l'allocation de plus de fonds à celles-ci. Il pourrait en résulter un manque criant de financement de la recherche pour les programmes de Master et de Doctorat en sciences sociales et le

---

\* Department of Sociology, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia.  
E-mail: abejeye2010@gmail.com

manque d'investissement dans les infrastructures qui aura pour conséquence le manque de locaux pour le personnel et le manque de salles de classes et de bureaux pour les d'étudiants de 3ème cycle. A long terme, il pourrait en résulter un appui beaucoup moindre en ce qui concerne le perfectionnement du personnel avec de moins en moins d'étudiants choisissant les domaines des sciences sociales. Mais les sciences sociales peuvent transformer ces défis en opportunités. Pour ce faire, il conviendrait de mettre l'accent sur l'éducation de qualité – ce volet étant la question centrale identifiée récemment dans le cadre de débats sur la nature et l'orientation de l'enseignement supérieur en Ethiopie. L'adage bien connu « tout ce qui est petit est mignon », qui pour ce qui concerne le cas présent peut être résumé par « tout ce qui est petit est viable », peut s'appliquer à l'avenir des sciences sociales dans le système de l'enseignement supérieur éthiopien. Un effectif d'étudiants suffisamment gérable, aussi bien pour les deux premiers cycles que pour le troisième cycle, pourrait permettre aux sciences sociales de garantir à leurs étudiants un enseignement pertinent et de qualité.

## **Background**

Higher education is largely a twentieth century experience in Ethiopia despite the highly sophisticated Christian-and Quran-based schools that have long been existing in the country (Amare 2005; Mekasha 2005). With the founding of the University College of Addis Ababa (UCAA) in 1950, this premier University in the country had its modest beginning at Arat Kilo Campus (Habtamu 2008). At the time, the core teaching faculty were expatriate staff from USA and Canada. In 1962, the University College was upgraded and renamed Haile Selassie I University, after the then emperor of Ethiopia. Following the overthrow of the Imperial regime in 1974, the University was renamed Addis Ababa University (AAU). It remained the only national university for a decade, serving as an umbrella institution for the different agriculture-and health science-related colleges established in various parts of the country at different times, including Alemaya College of Agriculture, Awassa College of Agriculture, Gondar College of Health, and Bahirdar Teachers' College.

The dominance of this University as the only national university came to an end in 1985 when Alemaya Agricultural College was upgraded to Alemaya University. With the coming to power of Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF ) after defeating the Marxist-Leninist Mengistu-led government in 1991, the late 1990s ushered an era of expansion of university education in the country with many existing colleges being upgraded to university status by end of the 1990s and beginning of 2000s. The list includes Jimma University, Hawassa University, Bahirdar University, and Gondar University. Most of them were created by the merger of existing colleges (Ashcroft 2004).

New Universities were established in the 2000s. Among these second generation universities were Dire Dawa University, Dire-Dawa; Jijiga University, Jijiga; Semera University, Semera; Wellega University, Nekemte; Debre Markos University, Debre Markos; and Debre Birhan University, Debre Birhan. A third generation of Universities is already being created, including Debre Tabor University in the Amhara region. Currently there are 31 public universities under the management of the Ministry of Education<sup>1</sup> (MOE 2010).

Following the establishment of universities in the different parts of the country, higher institutions' intake capacity has increased remarkably. Annual undergraduate programme admissions into public universities increased from 36,405 in 2004/05 to 147,037 in 2009/10 (MOE 2010). Similarly, undergraduate enrolment increased from 180,117 in 2005/06 to 434,659 in 2009/10. As expected, public expenditure in the education sector also increased from 5.990 billion Birr in 2005/06 to 15.719 billion Birr in 2009/10, the latter representing 25.4 per cent of total government spending in that fiscal year (MOE 2010). Recent statistics also suggests a more robust expansion of higher education in Ethiopia, with undergraduate enrolment reaching 494,110 in 2011/12 academic year and postgraduate enrolment rising to 25,660 during the same period (MOE 2012). Nevertheless, Ethiopia's higher education enrolment ratio is one of the lowest (1.5 %) compared to, for example, Sudan (7 %), Egypt (38 %), or even Sub-Saharan African average (3 %) (Teshome 2004).

Most of the new universities established their respective social science faculties which, in most cases, is a replication of the structure and curriculum of the Social Science Departments of Addis Ababa University. The establishment of several social science programmes in the different universities at the same time has created acute shortage of instructors and books in the different universities, especially at the undergraduate level. Some of these universities had to send newly recruited graduate assistants to Addis Ababa University to obtain teaching materials by photocopying from books and lecture notes used in the University.

Addis Ababa University has been quite supportive of the newly established universities. To alleviate the problem of shortage of teaching staff faced by them, the University has expanded its postgraduate programmes to create room for the young staff in the new universities to pursue their Master's degrees. To play the role thrust upon it by its premier status successfully, postgraduate enrolment in different disciplines during each session at Addis Ababa University often runs into three digits and, in some cases, some programmes were forced to admit two batches in a single academic year. Thus, Addis Ababa University was overstretched to meet the demands of the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Capacity Building – the two government agencies responsible

for implementing a programme of national capacity building especially in the fields of engineering, medicine and agriculture. This, of course, has affected the quality of higher education in the country.

Meanwhile, government is not the sole provider of higher education in the country as active private sector involvement dates back to the upgrading of Unity College to Unity University College in 2002 (Derese 2008). Several private university colleges were subsequently established from the 1990s through the 2000s. These include Kidist Mariam University College, Alfa University College, Admas University College, Rift Valley University College, etc. Currently, there are 56 accredited privately-owned higher institutions in the country. Although none of them has become a full-fledged University yet, some are however looking forward to this upgrading once they fulfil the appropriate requirements set out in the higher learning regulations governing the establishment of universities.<sup>1</sup>

It should also be stated that most of these new institutions have focused on business and management sciences, as well as health and law. A few have started undergraduate programmes in social science disciplines, such as sociology and anthropology; and some have even started offering MA programmes in the social sciences. An example is Kidist Mariam University College which offers an MA in sociology following its accreditation by the Indira Gandhi National Open University. The Rift Valley University College is also in the process of starting the first full-fledged MA programme in Sociology. One main issue of concern there, among others, is that the proposed teaching staff is largely made up of non-sociologists.<sup>2</sup>

### **Objectives and Research Questions**

The main objective of this study is to explore the challenges and opportunities facing the social sciences at Addis Ababa University, taking into consideration the government's recent policies in education and their impacts on the future of the social sciences. From this general objective, the following research questions are formulated:

- What are the challenges facing the study of social sciences in Addis Ababa University?
- How can the social sciences remain relevant in the face of the government's challenging education and training policies?
- What is likely to become of social science scholarship at Addis Ababa University?

## **Method**

The data used in this study was generated using qualitative research approach. Various qualitative research tools were used to generate relevant data. These include interviews, document reviews, direct observation and personal experience. Departmental heads, programme coordinators and assistant deans in the social sciences were interviewed to obtain their views on the status and future direction of the social science studies at Addis Ababa University.

Data on student enrolment and staff disposition in the College of Social Sciences was obtained from the Associate Registrar's Office and the Dean's Office, respectively, while university admission and enrolment data at the national level was obtained from Education Statistics (Annual Abstracts) produced by the Education Management Information System of the Federal Ministry of Education.

The activities of the College of Social Sciences were revealed largely through direct observation and personal experiences of the researcher. The former approach was used as an ongoing qualitative data gathering tool that enabled the researcher to assess the views of staff and students as events unfolded.

The paper also draws on the author's extensive experience in the College of Social Sciences, first as student (1983-1987) and then as a faculty member serving in various capacities: Assistant Dean (1997-2000), MA Sociology programme coordinator (2006-2007), Chair of the then Department of Sociology & Social Anthropology (2007-2008), Chair of the Department of Sociology (2009-2010) and Dean of Faculty of Social Sciences (2010-2012). This rich experience, both administrative and academic, in addition to the teaching and research experience, gave the researcher valuable insight which shaped his thinking about the various issues in the College of Social Sciences.

Finally, the collected data was organized and analysed thematically. All the issues that emerged from the different approaches were used to create themes describing the challenges and opportunities facing the study of social science disciplines at the Addis Ababa University.

## **Overview of the History of the Social Sciences**

The Faculty of Arts, which was established in 1952, preceded the College of Social Sciences by two decades, the latter having been established in 1978. During the first decade of university education in Ethiopia, most social science courses were offered as electives for students majoring in the Arts. It was only in the second decade (from 1960 and onwards) that social science departments such as History (1960-61), Geography (1961) and Social & Political Science (1962) were established as proper academic divisions which then began to

offer courses with the aim of graduating students in their respective fields (College of Social Science Bulletin 2007). The teaching of social sciences in Ethiopian higher institutions continued throughout the 1960s and early 1970s even though the name ‘social science’ was not used until late 1970s. By 1978 all the cognate social science disciplines were formally organized into the College of Social Sciences.

As originally constituted, the College of Social Sciences was quite broad. Among the major divisions under its banner were the Departments of Accounting, Economics, Geography, History, Management, Philosophy, Political Science & International Relations and Applied Sociology. Its canvas was however reduced in 1992 when the Faculty of Business and Economics consisting of the Departments of Economics, Accounting, and Management was established. In 2008 the new Department of Social Anthropology, which was then part of the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, was established and in 2010 the Department of Archaeology and Heritage Management was created out of the former Department of History and Heritage Management.

However, the new university organization, following the implementation of the Business Process Reengineering plan (BPR) (in 2010 left the College without the Department of Philosophy, which was forced to join the Faculty of Humanities, despite repeated appeals from staff and students to let it remain within the social sciences. The college was also renamed Faculty of Social Sciences and was placed under an umbrella administrative organization – College of Social Sciences and Humanities, comprising three Faculties – Humanities, Languages and Social Sciences.

Each faculty was headed by a dean and allowed to retain its academic autonomy, while a college director was appointed to oversee inter-faculty academic integration and administrative issues including the appointment of support staff, finance and purchasing. The appointment of college directors over faculty deans created anomalies in terms of the undefined/under-defined role of the former in faculty affairs. In the new University structure the two positions were connected by dots (...) and became equally answerable to the Academic Vice-President and this made the director’s position somewhat redundant as only the deans had an executive role in dealing with faculty matters.

This apparently awkward structure lasted only two years. The appointment of a new University president at the beginning of 2011 led to the restructuring of the University in 2012 – this time the restructuring was more streamlined and more focused in terms of integrating the various allied disciplines. The social sciences emerged bigger and stronger by incorporating a school and an institute. The Department of Philosophy was returned to its ‘rightful’ place as member of the Social Sciences family, and School of Social Work as well as

Institute of African Studies joined the Social Sciences to be become ‘College of Social Sciences’.

### Academic Units

The core academic units of the College are the seven departments, one school and one institute. Listed in their alphabetical order, they are Department of Archaeology & Heritage Management; Department of Geography & Environmental Studies; Department of History; Department of Philosophy; Department of Political Science & International Relations; Department of Social Anthropology; Department of Sociology; School of Social Work; and African Studies Centre.

All of them have undergraduate and postgraduate programmes except the African Studies Centre which only runs an MA course in African Studies (see Table 1).

The programmes are offered in three modalities: regular (day), evening, and summer. The regular programme is common to all the departments/school/institute while the evening programme is mostly available at the undergraduate level. The Department of Geography & Environmental Studies and School of Social Work have recently begun to offer an evening MA programme. The summer programme is traditionally intended for geography and history teachers who would like to upgrade their education from diploma to degree.

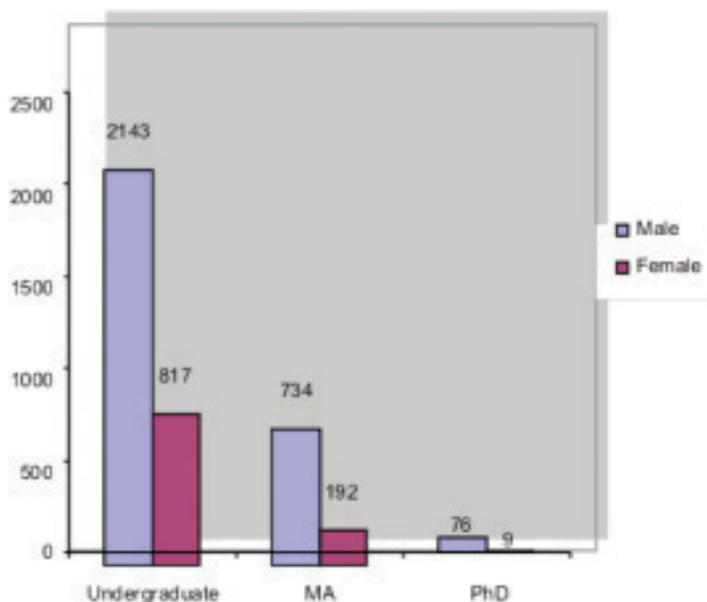
**Table 1:** Social Science Departments and their Programmes

Department/School/ Institute	Programme (√)		
	Undergraduate	MA	PhD
Archaeology & HM	√	√	-
Geography & ES	√	√	√
History	√	√	√
Philosophy	√	√	-
Political Science & IR	√	√	√
Social Anthropology	√	√	√
Sociology	√	√	√
Social Work	√	√	√
African Studies	-	√	-

*Source:* Compiled by the author from the respective departments.

While student enrolment in the College has been fluctuating over the years, close to 4,000 students were enrolled in the various departments and programmes in 2011/12 academic year.

**Figure 1:** Student Enrolment by Sex and Programme, 2011/12 AY



*Source:* Associate Registrar's Office, College of Social Sciences

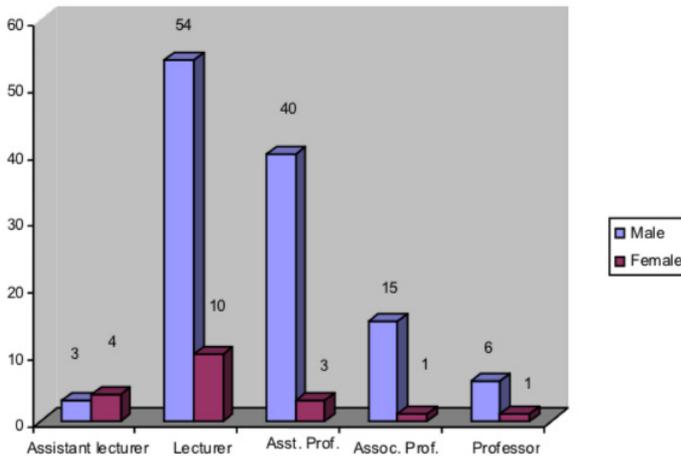
From Figure 1, it is clear that girls' education lags behind that of boys at all levels of the higher education system. However, the disparity between the two groups widens from undergraduate level (only 28 % are girls) to MA (21 %) and then PhD (11 %). It should also be noted that the expansion of PhD programmes occurred only in the last five years in response to government's push for local capacity building through the training of university instructors at that level. The Department of History, however, has had a long-running PhD programme spanning more than two decades.

### Staffing

The social science departments of the Addis Ababa University are better equipped with experienced faculty, some of whom have established an excellent reputation in their respective fields, particularly in history and political science. Currently there are 137 teaching staff with various aca-

demographic ranks ranging from assistant lecturer to professor. Professors and assistant professors with doctorate degrees or equivalent qualifications make up half of the teaching staff.

**Figure 2:** Faculty by Sex and Rank as of December 2012



*Source:* Dean's Office, College of Social Sciences

As shown in Figure 2, men dominate the teaching staff as only 14 per cent of the faculty in the social sciences are women.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the women occupy the lowest ranks: 74 per cent of them (14 out of 19) have academic ranks of lecturers or assistant lecturers. Individual heads of departments recounted the deliberate efforts they have been making to recruit women lecturers but they hardly stay. They are often tempted away with more rewarding positions in government, international organizations and NGOs compared with their male counterparts. While this suggests that the employment market has become more liberal and women-friendly, it must not be forgotten that the number of qualified women for these positions are relatively small, so it is easy to absorb them.

### Challenges

Social science education at AAU has faced a number of challenges. Some of these challenges are political and/policy related; while others relate to the inability of the university to retain qualified staff due to low salary. A University that is grappling with resource constraints could hardly be expected to start embarking on the expansion of graduate programmes, but that is precisely

what has happened at Addis Ababa and that, of course, has implications on the quality of education being offered. The different aspects of these challenges are discussed next.

### **Oppressive Regime**

The first challenge of the social sciences came during the revolutionary period when the Marxist-Leninist government targeted western-educated young social scientists as enemies of the revolution because of their active participation in the student movements of the 1960s and early 1970s. The military regime suspected the fledging Social Science Departments at Addis Ababa University of harbouring anti-establishment elements. The government agents did everything they could to suppress the faculty through the imprisonment of faculty, expulsion of expatriates, and the harassment of teaching staff irrespective of their areas of specialization. This development seriously hampered the growth of higher education in Ethiopia in general. The red terror campaign targeted opposition forces and carried out the mass killing and imprisonment of young educated people. This consumed some of the brightest and most dynamic change agents among the social science students who were actively involved in the student movements. Therefore, the social sciences had to go through a period of hibernation and dormancy to survive the turbulent years of the late 1970s.

The troubled relationship between the Addis Ababa University and government continued through the early years of the present EPRDF-led government. The beginning of the EPRDF reign was marred with suspicion, fear and harsh measures towards Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in general, and Addis Ababa University in particular (Derese 2008: 315). The tension reached boiling point when the government summarily dismissed 42 university professors in April 1993, 17 per cent of them from the social sciences suffered a heavy loss thereby.

Over the years, government's attitude towards the social sciences does not seem to have improved much, and the involvement of some social scientists in the opposition camp partly contributes to this rocky relationship between the government and social sciences. This has had a negative impact on the morale of staff and affected the learning process.

### **Brain Drain**

In the aftermath of the 1974 revolution, a policy of Ethiopianization of the teaching faculty at AAU occurred. To that end, young graduates were recruited as graduate assistants to fill the gap created by the departure of expatriates. As home-grown graduate programmes were largely absent in those days, many of the newly recruited staff had to be sent abroad for further education. Howe-

ver, not all returned after completing their education to resume their teaching duties. Some stayed away in the USA and Europe in search of opportunities for better pay and living conditions. This trend has continued to this day with many social science departments still finding it difficult to attract those who have been educated abroad mostly with PhD qualifications.

In the last 12 years, every social science department has lost at least one staff member, and some have lost more than 50 per cent of those who were sent abroad for further education. The Department of Sociology, for example, was able to regain only 38 per cent of those who went abroad to pursue their MAs and PhDs. The Department of History lost three of the four young staff it sent to the USA for their PhD training after completing their MA locally in the late 1990s.<sup>5</sup> Some other departments (e.g. Sociology, Political Science & International Relations, etc) provided financial support for the training of their staff abroad through project money. Unfortunately, most of these migrant academics have not been able to maintain contacts with their respective home departments. In the end, the departments that sent them abroad have benefited very little from them.

But not all needed to go abroad before leaving their teaching posts. Some have resigned from the job unexpectedly. All these deplete the stock of human capital formation in the social science departments of this premier institution.

**Table 2:** Brain Drain and Attrition of Academic Staff, 1990-2011

Department	Reasons			
	Fail to return from abroad	Resignation	Disciplinary action	Dismissal
Archaeology & HM	1	-	-	-
Geography & ES	4	2	1	-
History	4	2	-	-
Philosophy	2	1	-	2
Political Science & IR	3	1	2	3
Social Anthropology	2	9	-	2
Sociology	5	2	-	-
Total	21	17	3	7

*Source:* Compiled from the respective departments.

### **Sharing the Cost of Higher Education**

Until recently, higher education in Ethiopia used to be entirely public-funded. The trend only changed in 2003/04 when the government introduced a cost-sharing system<sup>5</sup> between the students and the public. This means that students would have to be market-oriented in their choice of fields of study. Their inclination would be to enter into professional fields such as law and business to get good-paying jobs after graduation rather than pursuing the more academic subjects such as sociology or history. Students would have to consider the cost of attending a three-year or four-year bachelor degree (in terms of time, energy, expenses, etc.) against the potential income they would expect to earn after graduation.

The recent history of the job market in the social sciences has been that most students are not likely to get jobs following graduation and even when they do, the jobs available for social science graduates may not earn a good income. Because of this, the share of social sciences in the overall intake of the student populations has been negatively affected. Besides, the cost-sharing scheme appears to partly debar students from poor backgrounds attending higher education (Shimelis 2004) and this in turn would negatively affect enrolment levels in the social science fields.

### **70/30 Education Policy**

Recently, the government introduced the 70/30 education policy designed to increase the intake capacity of engineering, natural science, health, agriculture and related subjects in higher education. All public universities and colleges have to allocate 70 per cent of the admissions to students who would major in the above subjects. The remaining 30 per cent is allocated to business, economics and other social sciences (including law, humanities, languages, education, etc).

It is interesting to note that the social sciences are classified in Band 6 as 'other social sciences' along with humanities and education. As a result, their share in the allocation of new undergraduate students has been substantially reduced. This would have implications in the allocation of budget, staff development and utilization of infrastructure such as office buildings and computer facilities. One such change has been the allocation of social science classrooms to pre-engineering classes while the various social science departments have been forced to use staff offices, documentation centres, computer labs and the like to conduct postgraduate classes.

### **Quality Vs Quantity**

In recent years the government has been pushing towards a policy of mass production of tertiary degree holders, as stipulated in the Higher Education Proclamation Number 351/2003 (FDRE 2003a). To this end, the number of universities has significantly increased to 31 and student enrolment in public universities and colleges has reached more than half a million. In order to meet the growing demand for instructors, the Ministry of Education ordered Addis Ababa University to open as many graduate programmes in many fields as possible<sup>6</sup> and to train as many graduate assistants and lecturers with masters and PhD degrees respectively.

The various social science departments within AAU had to increase their intake capacity of candidates for their respective MA programmes and had to introduce sub-specializations within the various programmes. At one point, some departments (e.g. Geography & ES, Social Anthropology, and Political Science & International Relations) had to admit students twice a year (one in September and another in February) and finding thesis advisors (for as many as 50 to 60 students for each batch) became a headache for departmental heads and programme coordinators. In some departments, each advisor had to supervise as many as 15 MA theses and in many departments it was common to find a lecturer supervising 6-10 MA theses. This has affected the quality of supervision given to students and, ultimately, the quality of education students received. Meanwhile the departments were also ordered by the university to develop PhD curricula and open PhD programmes to train staff for the new universities.<sup>7</sup> Some departments did not have the necessary staff to run a PhD programme, yet they had to comply.

The undue emphasis on postgraduate programmes has also affected the undergraduate programme. Most of the experienced and senior faculty members have been devoted to postgraduate programmes. Consequently, new and less experienced recruits with MA qualifications are now teaching the undergraduate classes. The participation of senior professors in conducting undergraduate courses has been kept to the minimum, mostly confined to advising final-year students with their senior essay projects.

### **Poor Infrastructure**

The rapid expansions in the postgraduate programmes have not been accompanied by provision of improved physical facilities (e.g. buildings) and information technologies (e.g. high speed internet) which would facilitate the teaching-learning process. This is especially the case with the social sciences where all postgraduate programmes (9 MA and 5 PhD programmes in the

College) have to be accommodated within facilities<sup>8</sup> built for the undergraduate programmes. There is one social science building built during the late 1970s but it is now being used by other colleges such as Education and Languages. Some of the lecture rooms have been also vacated to accommodate the ever increasing number of students entering engineering fields.

Consequently, currently there exists an acute shortage of classrooms for postgraduate programmes. Some instructors teaching in the graduate programmes are forced to conduct classes in their offices (for smaller size groups), documentation centres, labs and stores. The existing postgraduate rooms (initially built for large size undergraduate classes) are not equipped with LCD and computers. Instructors have to carry these facilities to and fro every time they conduct classes. The equipments are sometimes not easy to set up and, in any case, they consume much of the lecture time. There is also shortage of office space for instructors and sharing an office (2x4 M<sup>2</sup>) for up to 2-3 people has become a common practice. Because of this instructors have to advise students in turn.

### **Opportunities**

Article 6 of the higher education proclamation (351/2003) states that the role of higher education is to train citizens who can serve their country without prejudice to ethnicity, religion and political views. The social sciences, because of their level of understanding of the principles of multiculturalism, diversity and equity are best positioned to inject in citizens a sense of fairness and justice in the provision of public services such as education, and health. Despite the fact that some of the challenges discussed above can be sometimes overwhelming, there is a window of opportunity for the social sciences to convert some of these challenges into positive advantage.

### **Expansion of Postgraduate Programmes**

The expansion of postgraduate programmes has created an opportunity for the various social science departments to enhance their staff development efforts through staff training. The university has actively supported staff development especially for the PhD programmes in two ways: (1) By encouraging graduate assistants (those with BA degree) to pursue their MA locally; and (2) By encouraging lecturers with MA to enrol for PhD programmes at home or compete for government-sponsored PhD programmes in places such as India. These two approaches have helped the social sciences to strengthen their staff development profile.

Besides, the expansion of postgraduate programmes in the social sciences has enabled the various social science departments at the Addis Ababa University to play a leading role in the training of staff for the new universities at MA and PhD levels. This has increased their profile and presence nationally as candidates come from various disciplinary backgrounds in the younger universities, many of which are organized regionally.

### **70/30 Education Policy**

Earlier, it was indicated that the 70/30 education policy that gives priority to engineering and science subjects is likely to weaken social science education nationally as most students are forced to join the science stream starting grade 11 in the high school. However, this too can have a positive contribution to the social sciences in the country. This means that the social science can now concentrate on quality instruction as there would be fewer students in each department and fewer students per batch. For example, admission into sociology department has been reduced by 30-40 per cent in the last three years. As a result, an average class now stands at 50-60 students per batch, down from 80-100 a couple of years back. Reduced class size would enable departments to offer quality education as staff-student ratio increases. Instructors would also have more time to supervise students, give assignments and mark papers and give feedback to their students in time.

### **Rich Human Capital-base**

As noted earlier, social science departments at AAU are provided with a relatively developed human capital in the form of teaching faculty where close to 50 per cent of the faculty have PhDs compared to a mere 10 per cent of senior faculty nationally. They have produced prominent historians, geographers, philosophers, political scientists and sociologists who have made tremendous contribution to national development. Many of them have written books, teaching materials and policy dialogue papers which are used by social science students and others outside the field.

The social sciences have accumulated more than half a century of teaching and research experience that has provided inputs for the establishment of new social science departments in the emerging universities. Many social science professors also provide mentorship for young social scientists who are assuming leadership and lectureship roles in the new universities. A good example has been the contribution of senior faculty members to the design and development of various social science departments (e.g. participation in curriculum development workshops) in the new universities.<sup>10</sup>

Therefore, the social sciences at AAU should continue to play their leading role in the organization and delivery of social science education in the country. They should continue to put to use their rich experience by actively participating in programme development, programme reviews and by making their scholarly work available to young social scientists through publishing, organizing workshops and conferences. However, the brain drain resulting in part from government inability to improve the working conditions of university professors is continuing to pose a threat to AAU's effort to retain senior faculty (Teshome 2004).

### **Diverse Cultural Landscape**

Ethiopia is a diverse country, as reflected in its cultural, linguistic, historical and ethnic outlooks. There are over 80 ethnic groups in the country, each having a distinct history, language and culture. Social science knowledge is important to understand the mosaic nature of Ethiopia and to convert this cultural asset into a positive force for the development of the country. Promoting multiculturalism and pluralism through social science education will help fight seclusion, marginalization and unfair treatment of the minority groups especially, which, as Habtamu (2004:10) notes are threats to democracy, national unity, peace and development.

To address Habtamu's fears, therefore, the various social science departments could employ two approaches. The first is to offer courses (including gender, ethnicity, and nationalism) that contribute to understanding and promoting multiculturalism. The second one is that the College of Social Sciences is made to serve as the sole coordinator of the university-wide course – Civic and Ethical Education – that teaches students about civic duties and ethical responsibilities as citizens.<sup>11</sup> The latter provides an opportunity for the faculty in the social sciences to instil the virtue of building a multicultural society in all students as a vital process of their university education.

### **Concluding Remarks**

As things stand now in Ethiopia, there is no doubt that the social sciences are at the crossroads. The government has an overt policy that is skewed in favour of the scientific and engineering fields. As a result, there would be less government funding for social science education. This could result in acute shortage of research funds for the social science programmes, and lack of investment in infrastructure. It could result in shortage of office space for staff, and classrooms for students, etc. In the long run, staff development could be so affected that fewer and fewer students would want to be in the social science fields.

But the social sciences can convert these challenges into opportunities. One way of doing this is to emphasize quality education – this being the key issue identified in recent debates on the nature and direction of higher education in Ethiopia. The saying ‘small is beautiful’, which in this case can be stated, ‘small is viable’, is applicable to the future of the social sciences in the Ethiopian higher education system. A manageable student size, both at the undergraduate and graduate level, can help the social sciences to provide relevant and quality education for their students.

### Notes

1. There are four government higher education institutions outside MOE’s jurisdiction – Ethiopian Civil Service University, Defense University College, Telecommunications and Information Technology College, and Kotebe College of Teachers’ Education.
2. The Higher Education Relevance and Quality Assurance Agency (HERQA) is responsible for giving accreditations for higher education institutions.
3. Only one (out of the four nominated instructors during HERQA’s assessment for accreditation) was a sociologist.
4. The national average is that only 7 per cent of the faculty positions are held by women in Ethiopian universities compared, for example, to Morocco (24 %), Tunisia (33 %) and South Africa (36 %) (Habtamu 2004:11).
5. The government attempted to curb the problem of brain drain by requiring staff to produce exit visa and enter into a bond with the University before leaving the country (Baye 2008). But both measures could not halt brain drain.
6. Under this system, students would be given loans to cover meals, accommodation and medical services which they would have to pay in the form of graduate tax from salary or other incomes obtained after they graduate and start to earn a salary.
7. Today the AAU offers some 280 graduate programmes (graduate diploma, specialty certificate, MA/MSC, and PhD).
8. Some departments (e.g. Sociology) that reluctantly started their PhD programmes were scolded by the University president at a meeting of all department heads held sometime in 2007.
9. The social science building which has served the Faculty exclusively since the late 1970s is now shared by departments from Education and Languages.
10. The author himself participated in a number of national workshops on curriculum development leading to the establishment of various social science departments (e.g. Sociology) in the new universities.
11. The role of civic and ethical education in curbing corruption in public institutions was raised at a recent meeting organized by the Federal Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission. However, poorly developed curriculum and inadequately trained teachers were some of the serious concerns identified to be undermining the role of civic and ethical education in building an ethical citizenry.

## References

- Amare Asgedom.2005. 'Higher Education in Pre-Revolution Ethiopia: Relevance and Academic Freedom'. *The Ethiopian Journal of Higher Education*, Vol.2. No. 2, pp. 1-45.
- Amare Asgedom, Ayalew Shibeshi, Dawit Mekonnen, Mulu Nega, Tefaye Semela, Wanna Leka, Wossenu Yimam, Yalew Endawoke and Yohannes Woldetensae, 2009, *Quality of Higher Education in Public Institutions*, Addis Ababa: Forum for Social Studies.
- Ashcroft, K., 2004, 'The Massification of Higher Education: A Comparison of the UK Experience and the Emerging Ethiopian Response', *The Ethiopian Journal of Higher Education*, Vol.1, No. 1, pp. 21-40
- Baye Yimam, 2008, 'Academic Freedom at Addis Ababa University: An Overview of its Past and Current Experiences', in Taye Assefa, ed., *Academic Freedom in Ethiopia: Perspectives of Teaching Personnel*, Addis Ababa: Forum for Social Studies.
- College of Social Sciences, 2007, *College of Social Science Bulletin*, Addis Ababa: CSS.
- Derese Getachew, 2008, 'The Cases of Unity University College and HiLCoE School of Computer Science and Technology', p. 315-356, in Taye Assefa, ed., *Academic Freedom in Ethiopia: Perspectives of Teaching Personnel*, Addis Ababa: Forum for Social Studies.
- Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 2003a, *Higher Education Proclamation (Proclamation No 351/2003)*, Addis Ababa: FDRE.
- Habtamu Wondimu, 2004, 'Gender and Regional Disparities in Opportunities to Higher Education in Ethiopia: Challenges for the Promotion of Social Justice', *The Ethiopian Journal of Higher Education*, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 1-15.
- Ministry of Education), Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (2010). Education Sector Development Programme ESDP IV (2010/11-2014/15). Addis Ababa.
- Mekasha Kassaye, 2005, 'Ensuring the Quality of Ethiopian Higher Education in the Face of the Challenges of the 21st Century', *The Ethiopian Journal of Higher Education*, Vol. II, No. 2, pp. 103-131.
- Ministry of Education, Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 2012, *Education Statistics. Annual Abstract. 2004 E.C/2011-12 G.C*, Addis Ababa: MOE.
- Ministry of Education, Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 2010, *Education Statistics. Annual Abstract 2002 E.C./2009/10*, Addis Ababa: MOE.
- Shimelis Tsegaye, 2004, 'The Introduction of Cost-Sharing at the Addis Ababa University and the Inevitable Concomitant Demands for Good Academic Governance: Preliminary Observations', *The Ethiopian Journal of Higher Education*, Vol. I, No. 1, pp. 105-139.
- Teshome Yizengaw, 2004, 'The Status and Challenges of Ethiopian Higher Education System and its Contribution to Development', *The Ethiopian Journal of Higher Education*, Vol.1, No. 1, pp. 1-19.