

Institutionalization of Community Engagement in Ethiopian Higher Education: The Case of Hawassa University

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Abstract: This study was intended to examine the institutionalization of community engagement in the Ethiopian Higher Education by taking the case of Hawassa University. A qualitative research approach was employed to collect data from key stakeholders of Hawassa University and the community partners. The data were parts of a PhD dissertation on higher education institutionalization carried out by the researchers. The set of key stakeholders involved the Ministry of Education, Hawassa University, community partners, students, faculty, deans, directors, and other administrators. The research utilized institutional theory, and a slightly modified version of the Holland Matrix for the Institutionalization of Community Engagement was used as an analytical framework for the analysis of data. The results suggest two intriguing institutionalization continuums: (1) Formal-structural alignment: Faculty members are encouraged to participate in community-based research and leave time to those who participate. Service-learning courses and volunteer opportunities were available to promote student participation. Hawassa University created equitable partnerships with community groups to meet community needs. Resources, such as research funds, primary offices, and dedicated staff, are provided to assist community engagement initiatives. The institution includes public service as a potential area in its promotion and tenure requirements, proving its commitment to community engagement. (2) Normative and operational misalignment: However, the strategic plan for community engagement is limited, with a focus on specific events, rather than a comprehensive university-wide approach. The distribution of resources for community engagement is unclear, and the absence of explicit mention of community engagement as a distinct promotion and tenure criterion creates confusion. A probe may be required to resolve this issue.

Keywords: Institutionalization, Higher Education, Dimensions, Community Engagement, Hawassa University

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1. Introduction

Globally, higher education institutions are charged with the responsibility to play three roles: teaching and learning, research, and community engagement (Selina Mudau et al., 2023, p. 1). In an era in which universities are expected to not only produce knowledge but also actively contribute to the public good, community engagement becomes a core component of an institution's mission. Community engagement plays a decisive role in influencing teaching, in conjunction with research functions. Teaching and learning, in addition to research in higher education, boasts greater attention and support from management, while community engagement remains at the periphery of this support (Mudau et al., 2023, p. 1). According to Ethiopian governmental regulations, universities in the country need to fulfill their triple mission by teaching, researching, and engaging with communities to advance national development goals (*Proclamation No.1152/2019, Higher Education Proclamation, 2019*).

The national policy framework establishes community engagement as a key strategic element in Ethiopia's development vision, which makes higher education institutions (HEIs) essential tools for transforming society and reducing poverty. The powerful national development goal naturally creates substantial public expectations for the Ethiopian HEIs to deliver meaningful outcomes. The exclusive concentration on service delivery and problem-solving activities as beneficial approaches for universities represents a risk because it can obstruct the development of collaborative asset-based methods needed to establish authentic community self-reliance. Institutionalization of community engagement is a complex phenomenon that includes a number of factors and dimensions. The researchers have tried to see other factors in the large-scale study. However, the core of this study is the understanding of how one university in Ethiopia has institutionalized community engagement,

integrating it into its mission, organizational structure, and daily practices.

1.1. Conceptualizing Community Engagement and Institutional Commitment

Carnegie, one of the prominent institutions studying community engagement in higher education, defines community engagement as “the collaboration between higher education institutions and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity” (Driscoll, 2009, p. 6). Community engagement is a university’s active role in sustaining a mutually beneficial relationship between on-campus and off-campus communities in a range of ways. According to Fitzgerald et al., (2012, p. 5), it is,

... a significant and mutually beneficial partnership with partners in education, business, and civic and community service. It involves using features of teaching that enable education beyond the campus walls, that facet of research that makes what we discover helpful beyond the academic community, as well as that aspect of service that directly benefits the public.

Community engagement is increasingly recognized as a vital aspect of higher education, particularly for institutions that aim to merge academic learning with societal impact. It fosters partnerships between universities and local, national, or global communities, creating reciprocal relationships that are intended to address community needs, while also enriching student learning and faculty research. For example, Community-Based Research (CBR) offers a wide range of benefits in higher education for students, community partners, and universities. However, CBR remains less common than other related high-impact practices (HIPs), such as service learning and undergraduate research, owing to a lack of effective institutionalization (Abell et al., 2023). Further, Shah et al., 2023, p. 1, contend that:

Community-based learning and teaching in higher education and other versions of it, such as service learning, are now part of many curricula worldwide. In the UK, there is a growing community of practitioners interested in student learning in partnership with local communities. With this expansion, however, there is little institution-based research which looks within, in terms of shared understanding and supporting this type of experiential learning at scale.

Different countries have diverse ways to implement community services in higher education. For example, to engage Americans in service at every key phase in life, most American institutions encourage young people to connect in service through school-based service-learning programmes (Dary et al., n.d.; ServiceNation, 2008, p. 51). In a case study analysis, O'Brien et al., (2022) found that higher education institutions in Europe address a variety of societal needs at extremely high levels of government and qualified bodies through public engagement (p. 7).

In Ethiopia, because CE is beneficial to students, faculty, institutions, and the community at large, and because universities put it as a core element of their functions and allocate resources to it, it would be prudent to have CE designed, planned, and implemented to maximize its benefits and to enhance its quality and effectiveness. This calls for institutional mechanisms to be in place for CE activities to be well-planned and integrated with other aspects of institutional performance and accountability to be established for CE objectives and resources allocated in the area - in other words, institutionalization. Institutionalization denotes the process of such attainment and institutionalism is a theoretical strategy that features institutional theories and seeks to develop and apply them (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991, pp. 45–53). Global, regional, and local contexts have shown that the institutionalization of community engagement faces

different challenges. A study in an American Land-grant university found that the institutionalization of community engagement was an adaptive challenge requiring a critical mass of boundary spanners enacting an array of roles within the university (Farner, 2019, p. 148).

1.2. Community Engagement Models in Higher Education

Historically, higher education has operated in an expert model of knowledge delivery but has now evolved into an additional engaged model where community and university partners co-create answers at local, national, and global levels. Public universities need to construct their experience and transition to building engagement that is more central to the heart of the institution (Fitzgerald et al., 2023, pp. 7–8). “There is a range of community engagement models in higher education counting engagement in the following ways: community service, service-learning, community-based learning, community-based participatory research, training and technical assistance, capacity-building, and economic development, among others, since community engagement is not necessarily scholarship” (Kecskes, 2008, p. 3). Although these terms are now used interchangeably, they intend to increase the communal impact of universities through partnerships with external organizations. Carl I (1994) suggested that serving the elderly, teaching children, and cleaning parks are examples of service-learning initiatives. Building collaborative relationships with community organizations, businesses, educational institutions, and individuals is an example of community involvement. Others include fostering communal and business innovation and encouraging cultural diversity and inclusion.

According to Preece (2017), there are three models of community Engagement: 'silo,' 'intersecting,' and 'infusion.' The 'silo' approach involves community engagement as a standalone activity, disconnected from teaching and research. The 'intersecting' approach incorporates engagement activities into teaching or research programmes, while the 'infusion' approach embeds it as a cross-cutting issue across disciplines. These approaches involve teaching and learning, curriculum design,

policies, research, external relations, social and cultural engagement, partnerships, economic engagement, and student participation.

Holland suggested and utilized a matrix for the institutionalization of community engagement. The matrix directs attention to organizational factors that together characterize institutional choices and actions: mission; promotion, tenure, hiring; organizational structure; student involvement; faculty involvement; community involvement; and campus publications (Holland, 2009, pp. 87–89). Successful community engagement requires a higher education institution's structure, strategy, and policies to align with its mission, philosophy, and devotion to community cooperation. As per the matrix, four categories can be used to classify leadership pledges in the institutionalization of community engagement: low relevance (rhetorical orientations), medium relevance (interest in short-term schemes), high relevance (commitment to sustainable engagement, ongoing financial support, and community contribution), and full integration (incorporating community engagement as an institutional core trait). The Holland Matrix (2006) highlights the importance of a higher education institution's mission and philosophy in humanizing community engagement. This approach encourages sustainable partnerships with community organizations.

Table 1: Levels of commitment to community engagement

	Level One: Low Relevance	Level Two: Medium Relevance	Level Three: High Relevance	Level Four: Full Integration
Mission	No mention or undefined rhetorical reference	Engagement is part of what we do as educated citizens	Engagement is an aspect of our academic agenda	Engagement is a central and defining characteristic
Leadership (Presidents, Vice Presidents, Deans, Chairs)	Engagement not mentioned as a priority; general rhetorical references to community or society	Expressions that describe institutions as an asset to community through economic impact	Interest in and support for specific, short-term community projects; engagement discussed as a part of learning and research	Broad leadership commitment to a sustained engagement agenda with ongoing funding support and community input
Promotion, Tenure, Hiring	Idea of engagement is confused with traditional view of service	Community engagement is mentioned; volunteerism or consulting may be included in portfolio	Formal guidelines for defining, documenting & rewarding engaged teaching/research	Community-based research and teaching are valid criteria for hiring and reward
Organization Structure and Funding	No units focus on engagement or volunteerism	Units may exist to foster volunteerism/community service	Various separate centers and institutes are organized to support engagement; soft funding	Infrastructure exists (with base funding) to support partnerships and widespread faculty/student participation
Student Involvement & Curriculum	Part of extracurricular student life activities	Organized institutional support for volunteer activity and community leadership development	Opportunity for internships, practical service-learning courses	Service-learning and community-based learning integrated across curriculum; linked to learning goals
Faculty Involvement	Traditional service defined as campus duties; committees; little support for interdisciplinary work	Pro bono consulting; community volunteerism for acknowledged	Tenured/senior faculty may pursue community-based research; some teach service-learning courses	Community-based research and learning is intentionally integrated across disciplines; interdisciplinary work is supported
Community Involvement	Random, occasional, symbolic or limited individual or group involvement	Community representation on advisory boards for departments or schools	Community influences campus through active partnerships, participation in service-learning programs or specific grants	Community involved in defining, conducting and evaluating community-based research and teaching; sustained partnerships
External Communications and Fundraising	Community engagement not an emphasis	Stories of students or alumni as good citizens; partnerships are granting dependent	Emphasis on economic impact of institution; public role of centers, institutes, extension	Engagement is integral to fundraising goals; joint grants/gifts with community; base funding

Note: Adapted from Barbara A. Holland (2006)

1.3. Purpose of the Study

This study examines the institutionalization of community engagement at Hawassa University and identifies the factors that determine its success. Through interviews and FGD with 25 participants, we examined how community engagement is incorporated into the institution's mission, how stakeholders (faculty, students, and community members) contribute to its success, and what challenges arise in this process. The findings of this study provide valuable insights

into how institutions can better structure and support their community engagement efforts, making it a viable and integrated component of their identity.

1.4. Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How is the institutionalization of community engagement manifested in Hawassa University's mission?
2. What organizational structures are employed to institutionalize community engagement?
3. How is the involvement of the faculty, the students, and the community manifested in the institutionalization of community engagement?

1.5. Theoretical Frameworks of the Study

The theoretical framework of this study is institutional theory. Powell & DiMaggio (1991) offered the following definitions: "institution is 'a social order or pattern that has attained a certain state or property'; institutionalization, 'denotes the process of such attainment'; and Institutionalism, is 'a theoretical strategy that features institutional theories and seeks to develop and apply them'" (pp. 45–53). David et al., (2019) note that institutional theory is a well-known perspective in organizational exploration, and the development of the theoretical framework has added to its long-term vitality. They added that institutional theory, beginning in the 1950s and 1960s, is a high-flying perspective in organizational research, centering on cultural understandings and shared prospects. It explains the adoption of official organizational structures, policies, and performances in the 1970s, with importance on taken-for-granted behaviors and assumptions generally known as "neo-institutionalism." (p. 1).

Institutional theory has emerged from political, economic, and theoretical perspectives. Early institutionalists, such as Weber, Veblen, and Durkheim, set the theory by focusing on how institutions shape individual and collective thoughts. In the 1970s and beyond, neo-institutional theory re-emerged, emphasizing how institutions are influenced by their environments to adopt similar structures, practices, and norms. Hence, institutional theory can be used to understand the role of community engagement practices in social transformation by examining the relationships between and impacts on communities and institutions. These theoretical frameworks allow not only the factors affecting community engagement institutionalization but also how the institutions vary in their approach to institutionalization because of the regulatory, normative, and cultural-cognitive environments.

This perspective highlights the strengths and challenges of institutionalizing community engagement, which is contextually relevant to universities. In line with this, Thomson et al., (2022) noted that “a group of institutionally affiliated individuals from various organizations or nations united by a shared concern for social equality can engage in transformative practice, learn from each other, and co-create knowledge through regular interactions to act on institutional change’ (p. 26). Institutionalization involves campus mission statement, leadership, policy, budget allocations, service-learning support, infrastructure, faculty roles, and integration with other aspects of institutional work (Bringle & Hatcher, 2000). The conceptual framework of the study was modified and developed based on the Holland Matrix (2006).

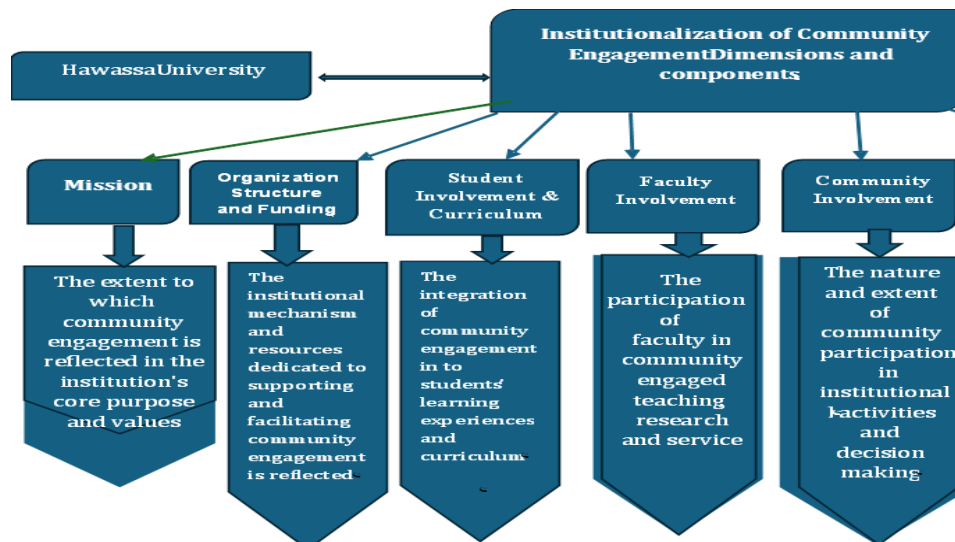


Fig 1. *Modified institutionalization of community engagement conceptual framework*

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

This article is drawn from the larger collective case study on the institutionalization of community engagement in Ethiopian Higher Education Institutions. The findings presented in this paper utilized an instrumental case study approach (Stake, 2005) of Hawassa University to explore the institutionalization of community engagement, providing a unique contribution that complements the cross-case analysis presented in another article in preparation for separate publication. This approach helped us to apply the specific case for a deep understanding of a broader issue. More specifically, data were collected between January and February 2025 from Hawassa University, the Ministry of Education,

and other community partners. About 26 participants were purposefully selected for their knowledge and relevance and interviewed, as shown in Table 2 below. The questions were directly linked to the institutionalization of community engagement. Moreover, questions that address factors that affect the institutionalization of community engagement in the university were included. Specifically, the interview protocol was prepared to capture qualitative data from each participant probed to provide insights into various aspects of the engagement process, such as the institution's mission, stakeholder involvement, and the challenges they face. A qualitative approach was selected mainly because it allowed for the exploration of the lived experiences of the participants, and it is well known for providing rich and context-specific insights regarding the institutionalization of community engagement from the participants' perspective (Creswell, 2007). This method allowed for the exploration of their experiences with community engagement in the institution (Patton, 2010). Qualitative research is particularly beneficial in this context, as it captures and communicates someone else's experience of the world in his or her own words (Patton, 2010, p. 47). There is no stern concern about ethics in the data-gathering process. The interviewer was an expert mainly interested in the academic attribute of the research. Research participants had no conflict of interest, as all were interested in understanding what was going on in the institutionalization process. The researchers maintained objectivity and critical distance but developed a rapport as a strategy to facilitate open and honest communication. Besides, the interview protocol was strictly followed, and data were triangulated.

2.2. The Participant Selection

The interviewed members included faculty, administrative staff, students, community partners, officials, and individuals who were directly involved in coordinating community engagement initiatives. This diversity of roles provides a holistic view of how engagement is implemented and supported across multiple organizational levels.

2.2.1. The Case University

Hawassa University, formerly known as Awassa College of Agriculture (ACA), is a first-generation university in Ethiopia, encompassing 9 colleges, 3 institutes, and 7 campuses. Established in 1976, it was restructured in 2000 as Debub University and renamed "Hawassa University" in 2006. With over 32,000 students enrolled in 309 academic programmes, Hawassa University (HU) has 10,988 staff, including 2,213 academics. It is working towards becoming one of the top ten research universities in East Africa by 2030. The university's focus is on advanced multidisciplinary teaching, problem-solving research, and delivering research-informed services to the community (*Background, Hawassa University*, n.d.).

Table 2 Research participants: Stakeholders of HU

Level	Participants	No.
Hawassa University	Deans	2
Hawassa University	Deputy Deans	3
Hawassa University	Academic Staff	4
Hawassa University	Administrators	3
Hawassa University	Directors/Coordinators	6
Ministry of Education	Official from the Ministry of Education	1
Hawassa University	Students (FGD)	6
Agricultural Research Office of Sidama Region	Community partner	1
Total		26

2.3. Generation of Data

The data for this study were collected using three primary methods: a review of key university documents (including department programmes and curricula), focus group discussions, and semi-structured qualitative interviews. The document review included the university's strategic plan,

policies on academic staff appointment and promotion, and annual reports, which provided essential insights into institutional structures, policies, and practices. Focus group discussions with students and semi-structured interviews were conducted in February and April 2025 with a group of participants. This group comprised two college deans, three deputy deans, four academic staff members, three university administrators, five directors and coordinators, an official from the Ministry of Education (MoE), one focus group discussion with 6 students (all Law majors of whom five were males and one was a female) and one representative from an external organization. The interviews and FGD that lasted for 45 to 90 minutes on average, provided an opportunity for in-depth exploration of community engagement (CE) issues, focusing on institutional missions, faculty and student involvement, community partnerships, and strategies for institutionalizing CE. The purposive sampling strategy ensured that participants with strong, informed opinions were included, such as college deans who oversee academic staff recruitment, evaluation, and promotion processes. Interviewees were selected from six of the university's nine colleges using Biglan (1973), who classified disciplines along three dimensions as hard/soft, applied/pure, and life/non-life (Simpson, 2017). The semi-structured interview format encouraged participants to express their opinions and experiences freely, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of how CE is integrated into disciplinary and institutional settings. This methodological approach was intended to illuminate CE practices and policies that are discipline-specific and universally applicable in the university. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and anonymized to ensure participant confidentiality.

2.3.1. Data Analysis

The Holland Matrix (1997; 2006) was used as a conceptual and analytical framework of the study. This is particularly valuable for assessing a university's overall commitment to CE and identifying variables that promote or hinder continued or extended involvement. The matrix provides a framework for evaluating the institution's CE policies,

procedures, and practices, and identifying both strengths and opportunities for development. The researchers used a deductive framework with the Holland Matrix for institutionalization of community engagement serving as the primary guide. For the large-scale study, we maintained the core structure of the original matrix, including mission, structure, stakeholders' involvement and support, promotion, tenure and hiring, leadership support, as well as external communications and fundraising, and the four levels. This provided the initially predetermined codes for the analysis. However, we performed inductive refinement. The major refinement was the addition of sub-codes that emerged directly through the iterative process of analysis of the data. For the organizational dimensions, such as mission, faculty tenure and promotion, organizational structure, faculty and student participation, and community collaboration, etc., we developed specific sub-codes. This process allowed for a precise description of the commitment indicators in each dimension, previously mentioned and created the granular and nuanced protocol for using MAXQDA. It was used for the analyses because it has functions for coding, retrieval, and, hierarchical code systems for organizing and developing thematic categories. In addition, it allowed us to create reflections and auditing through the logbook. The interview documents were imported into MAXQDA. Then the researchers developed the codebook as stated above. Then we populated the codes with the interview segments, and created memos as we developed coding. After the codes and memos were created, the researchers started to develop data visualization through the Maxmap, matrix browser, word cloud, and cod-correlations browser. The next step involved identifying patterns in the data and creating emerging themes for each of the sub-codes based on the modified Holland Matrix. Then the researchers developed the narratives and report writing.

2.4. Trustworthiness

The researchers triangulated data by cross-referencing interview data with documents, and FGD. Field notes were checked to see consistency in the emerging themes. Preliminary findings were shared with key participants for member checking, and the participants were contacted during the progress of the findings. A thick and in-depth description of the setting was ensured during writing. The use of MAXQDA allowed the researchers to audit trail through the logbook feature and the coding book that includes transcripts, memos, and field notes. The researchers scheduled a monthly online meeting to discuss the progress of the method, themes, and overall progress of the study for peer debriefing.

2.5. The Role of the Researchers and Ethics

All research procedures were followed with the highest ethical procedures. Ethical approval was obtained from Addis Ababa University, College of Education and Behavioral Studies' Research Ethics Committee. The approval was issued on 12.31.2024, and the protocol number was CEBS_IRC_CCEPS-002/12/2024. Before data collection in the case university, institutional approval was secured from the top leadership of the university, and formal permission was ensured. After securing their approval, the researchers approached the participants and explained the purpose, process, and potential risks of the research, and finally an informed consent of the participants was obtained. It was notified in advance that the interviews would be audio-recorded. All identifying information was removed to protect their privacy, and their anonymity was ensured. The participants were told they could ask questions, and that they had the freedom to exit the study at any time. They were also informed that their confidentiality would be maintained. All audio recordings and transcripts were stored securely on password-protected devices/servers, accessible only to the research team.

3. Findings

This section analyzes the institutionalization of community engagement stakeholder data using mission, organizational structure, funding, staff involvement, student involvement, and community involvement in Hawassa University. Let us first begin with contextualizing the Holland Framework for community engagement: Hawassa University. The Holland matrix is one of the respected frameworks to study the institutionalization of community engagement and service learning in Higher Education. The Matrix has four levels of institutional commitment to community engagement that represent eight institutionalization factors most often cited as definitive components that frame an institution's service-related activities (Holland, 1997; 2006). The organizational factors represent important aspects of organizational infrastructure, policy, communication, and participation that are typically affected by efforts to define and implement service as a reflection of campus mission. Figure 1 shows a slightly different structure from the Holland Matrix, as some factors of community engagement institutionalization in Hawassa University were not included in the analysis because the large-scale study, which was on progress, included all dimensions and levels, and sub-codes to a collective case study. But this article's scope is Hawassa University's mission and philosophy of community engagement, organizational structure and funding for community engagement, faculty involvement, community involvement, student involvement, and curriculum. Tenure and promotion are naturally linked to staff involvement. This article is expected to explore the institutionalization continuum that exists in this kind of modified structure.

3.1. Mission and Philosophy of Community Engagement

Hawassa University (HU) is one of the research universities in Ethiopia. The university focuses on delivering the best education in different

academic fields, conducting real world cross-cutting research to elucidate problems, and offering community services. Hawassa University has shown its dedication to research and community engagement consistently. This commitment is evidenced by the numerous research projects carried out in diverse areas, including agriculture, health, social sciences, and technology (Hawassa University, n.d.). Regarding the university's commitment to its mission, a leader in community engagement said, "I think it is dedicated to community services. It encourages use of research findings in the public. The institution strives to achieve the highest standards for research, teaching, and community engagement." He added:

The vision of our university is to be a preferred African top university in terms of quality education and community engagement. Therefore, it is also reflected in the vision of the university because we have given focus to it. I see that the institution is firmly committed to its purpose, vision, and values. It is working hard to achieve its objectives and contribute to national development. In this case, I would say the importance of internationalization is recognized by Hawassa University. Besides, for example, recently, our university has been differentiated as a research university by the Ministry of Education. Besides, we are moving to become an autonomous university. Both these may be realized or not. But even if they are not, any university must be very competitive internationally, and we have given emphasis to community engagement as our mission. (ParticipantHAWCED1, February 22, 2025)

The participants reported that the university has been involved in various research projects. One example they mentioned was a thematic research project on the topic of farming systems resilient to climate change adaptation. Different research projects have been conducted in different ranges of disciplines intending to address the challenges of the community. International research conferences and seminars are, in addition, hosted by the institution. According to the research participants,

the provision of community services in agricultural cultivation, animal husbandry, natural resource protection, education, health, nutrition, and legal services is part of the university's third mission. Support and enhancement of the livelihood of young individuals was achieved by the university. This is done in collaboration with local communities, with whom information and expertise is shared. The University has a strong academic discipline and significant participation in the community. This has contributed to its role as a knowledge generation and dissemination center.

The ideology behind community responsibility emerged as the core principle when service-learning programmes adopted non-exclusive practices. When research participants were asked the question, "Do you have activities that involve and support the students to participate in solving the problems of the community?" some said they were not even aware of it, and others said such activities were not uniformly implemented. Participant 1 said, "I find myself as more than just a teacher in the educational institution. I am creating future leaders who understand their obligation to contribute to society. I believe civic participation is an essential component of what I hope to teach the students. It causes enhancement and a sense of responsibility for the larger community". The institutionalization continuum at Hawassa University shows a strong relationship with the objective of addressing distinctive requirements of the local community. The university's philosophy states that they maintain relationships for mutual advantage between themselves and the community members based on research participant statements.

Table 3. Hawassa University's mission and philosophy of community engagement

Emergent Theme	Summary of Findings
Developmental Focus	There is explicit mention of community service and socio-economic development in the mission.
Multi-faceted Outreach	Agriculture, education, health, legal, and socio-economic issues as a broad range of outreach programmes
Reciprocity & Mutuality	The university and the community acquire knowledge from each other and benefit each other. Hence, community involvement is a two-way process.
Collaboration	The university is working together with the community, which is not just recipients but active partners.
Practical Application	Applying knowledge and research to address real-world problems, practically contributing to community development
Knowledge Sharing	Aiming to share expertise and resources through various outreach activities.
Social Responsibility	Disseminating knowledge through workshops and public lectures. Mission reflects that there is a commitment to contributing to societal well-being and to address ethical obligations as a public institution.
Inclusivity	Diverse community perspectives are benefited. Besides, promoting social equity through diverse student populations and staff is promoted.

According to a strategic document analysis, the Mission of Hawassa University is to produce efficient and internationally competent graduates and undertake innovative works, rigorous research, and technology transfer activities to foster social and economic development of the country. It envisions being one of the top ten East African research universities by 2030 with values such as excellence, honesty, inclusiveness, academic freedom, accountability, collaboration, innovation, and internationalization. In the next part, we will look at how

the institution's structure influences the efficacy of its community involvement initiatives.

3.2. Organizational Structure and Funding

Directors of Community Engagement are one of the essential positions that are employed as engagement advocates. Such positions organize activities, measure outcomes, and provide institutional support in the context of community engagement and institutionalization of a university. When one of the participants was asked about the primary offices coordinating engagement and their impact, he said that:

At the university, there is a Director of Community Services at a higher level under Technology and Research Transfer, at the Director level, and at the college level. At the college level there is a leader equivalent to the dean. Okay, in parallel, I say the Vice Dean centrally coordinates implementation. I think the Office of the Vice President of Research and Technology Transfer is critical in guaranteeing community engagement. This office works together with other university divisions (Participant 2, February 2025)

This suggests extensive autonomy in proposing and leading community engagement schemes by specific faculties and colleges.

Another participant said:

In my opinion, community engagement has been profoundly influenced by the university's commitment and strategic objectives. Strategic plans that comprise community engagement objectives are usually initiated by the colleges and departments. Besides, in order to guarantee accountability and progress towards these objectives of engagement, regular performance

assessments are conducted. Many community engagement efforts are performed as mutual projects in collaboration with different departments, staff, and external partners. Combining diverse expertise and resources, this strategy deals with complex community issues (Participant 3, 2025).

Another community engagement coordinator reported how this higher education institution's commitment has an impact on meeting the needs of its surroundings.

We try to give emphasis to community engagement success. It's all about the problems of the community. We try to solve the problems of the community through problem-solving research. We tried to solve the communities' problems through teaching-learning research and community engagements. Basically, we use the community engagement week in order to reach the farmers, and each university instructor is invited to develop a proposal that has a potential to solve the problems of the community and we do our work based on those proposals. Particularly when academic staff form teams for performing community engagement activities, our office (community engagement) is important in facilitating those activities (Participant 4, February 2025).

According to the research participants, the institutionalization of community engagement is shown by the presence of a specialized office. This is a result of the reflection of the commitment of the leadership to the mission of community engagement. The presence of an office that is dedicated to community engagement provides a single position for staff and students to access financial and logistical assets and thereby encourages and establishes engagement. The president and the vice president, as well as the executive leadership, have expressed their support for community engagement. This has been cascaded to the middle and lower administration to demonstrate and prioritize commitment. This office initiates controls and supports

students and staff involvement. In addition, it verifies that activities are aligned with the institution's objectives and mission.

Specific Job descriptions and KPIs

There are roles dedicated to community engagement, and it is defined by mandates and performance indicators. For example, the community engagement directorate office is tasked with planning, implementing, monitoring, and reporting all community services-related activities of the University. Besides, it facilitates knowledge and technology transfer in the areas of agriculture and natural resources management, education, health and nutrition, and socio-economic aspect. Their key performance indicators (KPI) include not only creating collaborative relations with the community but also identifying and prioritizing community services agendas /issues /for intervention. A university administrator noted, “We have national issues such as KPI and those KPIs have a place for performance as they are tied to quantifiable outputs such as the number of collaborative relations with the community, the number of staff and students involved in engagement, and funds secured”. He added:

For example, we have key performance indicators. It is part of our plan. This is part of the university's 10-year strategy plan. We plan to give four workshops per year, and there are key performance indicators for this. This has been put in place by the Ministry of Education. Even if that was not there, the KPI asks us to put it in the strategic document in our guidelines. This is part of our plan. This is part of our focus area (ParticipantHAWCED1, February 22, 2025)

Interdepartmental coordination and accountability

Beyond informal collaboration, the university employs formal mechanisms for inter-departmental collaboration for community

engagement activities, such as those performed by the associate deans for research and technology transfer in each college. The community engagement directorate, which is responsible to the Vice President for Research and technology transfer, is at the center of coordination. Besides, there are Deans for Research and Technology Transfer in each College, who perform community engagement activities. The College of Health Science has a slightly different structure. A university administrator has this to say:

At the college level, we have research and community engagement, directorate, and this office. Under this office, we have different offices. One of them is the Community Engagement Directorate. So, in addition to the Research and Community Engagement Directorate, we have a Community Engagement Directorate Office with its own director. We call it Community Service Director at the college level and it has two hierarchies. One is the Research and Community Service Directorate, and the other is the Community Service Directorate. We are directly responsible to the University's Research and Technology Transfer Office (Participant HACOHCED-02 _ February 24, 2025).

Accountability Frameworks

The university has implemented key performance indicators. These indicators are linked to annual reviews, and community engagement is tied to promotion and career progress. According to the findings of the document analysis, Hawassa University's College of Agriculture BSC-oriented Strategic Management Plan, the college ensures institutional autonomy with accountability, with the design and promotion of demand-driven community and consultancy services. A university administrator noted:

There is a procedure for applying and securing a budget for community engagement activities. In each college, the

Research and Technology Transfer facilitates the budget. Therefore, after a proposal is submitted, most of the activities are performed. We have a number of activities here as the College of Agriculture when you compare it with many other colleges. So, the probability of winning grants is very high here. It is, of course, transparent. There are focus areas at the university, such as agriculture, education, etc. So, any topic that is in those focus areas will be assessed, evaluated, and if they are found appropriate, they will be awarded the necessary fund. I think there is as such no problem (Participant HACOADean-01, February 19, 2025).

One might question how the structures are facilitating or hindering projects. The answer is that the university's organizational structures have directly influenced the success of community engagement projects. The creation of this office and the presence of decentralized coordination, for instance, have streamlined project approval and funding. According to a research participant:

After the establishment of a central bureau for community engagement, the general procedures have improved. I know where to go for structural and financial support. The office helps us to organize our activities and to be on track with the general objectives. The most needed structure and financial support is provided by the Community Engagement Directorate Office. Without it, there would have only been many ad hoc activities (Participant 5, February 2025).

Regarding outcomes, these structures, in addition, have helped to increase the number of beneficiaries and initiatives. A document analysis of Hawassa University, College of Agriculture, BSC Oriented Strategic Management Plan 2019-2024, shows that there are many

major activities with performance indicators, such as number of technology users and beneficiaries, demand-driven part-time activities, incentive packages, and experience sharing, to mention some. Similarly, the College of Natural and Computational Sciences has a good community engagement experience. For example, a project facilitated by the Center for Aquatic Science, Fisheries & Aquaculture (ASFA) successfully reached 18 ponders through agricultural training on how to breed fish in artificial ponds, and this scale would not have been achieved without the coordination and collaboration framework. Another University administrator noted:

We give emphasis to training. If you go to the Agriculture College, I have met many people in the College of Agriculture. What they do is, they usually breed better seeds, better animals, better technologies, and they give/transfer that to the community. Even when you go to natural sites, for example, if you go to the Department of Fisheries, they breed fish on this campus (Participant HACOEdcan03, February 21, 2025).

Although the current structures are helping the operation of community engagement, the staff identified significant challenges and gaps related to a lack of incentive and budget shortages, and sometimes accountability and commitment issues.

The first one, I think, is related to finance, a financial problem that is derived from the country. We are poor, we have a poor country, we are not poor in resources, but for some reason, we are poor, and that is a reflection. So, our budget and our finance is a major problem, and there is a lack of commitment. We are not committed to working day and night to see our country in a better situation. Because of so many factors, reasons that I am not about to mention, people are not as such devoted and are not investing their time and energy to see a bright future (Participant HACOEA dean-02, _ February 19, 2025).

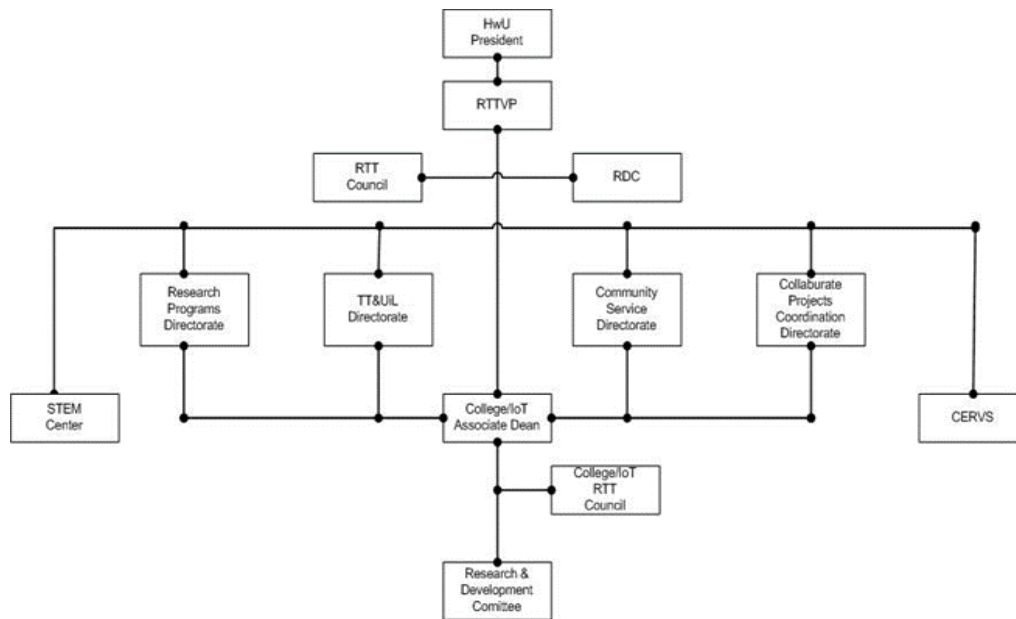


Fig. 2. Organizational structure of the Research and Technology Transfer Office

Hawassa University, College of Agriculture, has developed a BSC Oriented Strategic Management Plan 2019-2024. Analysis of this and other official documents showed that colleges have prepared Strategic Management Plans by cascading it from the University's Strategic Management Plan, which was designed to align with GTP-II. The university's strategic plans outline a clear mandate for different bodies. There is an annual budget for community engagement that is used for administrative costs and project management. A leader in community engagement talked about funding and its sustainability:

As I said earlier, 3% of the budget is allocated to community engagement. This is a government regulation. Besides, we don't just give community service based on this budget alone. We have different collaborative projects. We have around 97 international collaborative projects in our university. As a result, some of them have educational elements. Others have a community engagement element or research elements. And we have their financial support (Participant HAWCED1, February 22, 2025).

Table 4. Summarizing roles and responsibilities

Entity	Role in Community Engagement Coordination and Planning
Office of the Vice President for Research & Technology Transfer	The central coordination oversees the Directorate of Community Services which collaborates with other units and external partners for strategic planning and performance monitoring.
Individual Faculties & Colleges	Design and implement faculty-specific programme; leverage expertise to provide targeted training, technology transfer, and outreach, and conduct a research relevant to community needs.
Research & Development Directorate (RDD)	Coordinates consultancy services to external organizations and communities, facilitates knowledge transfer, and the practical application of research findings.
Student Affairs Committee (SAC)	Promotes student participation in community affairs, supports the establishment and management of student organizations that contribute to community development.
Charity Coordinating Committee	Under the College of Social Sciences and Humanities, it expands community services and provides support to vulnerable communities.

3.3. Faculty Involvement

In the context of community engagement institutionalization, staff involvement relates to all factors that support embedding community engagement. Faculty participation should adopt effective research and knowledge transfer initiatives. In the context of the institutionalization of community engagement in Hawassa University, stakeholders described the support and involvement of the staff in the university in various ways. Some say that there are opportunities, and the staff develop relationships with community partners, ensuring initiatives align with

academic objectives and community needs, and institutionalizing staff engagement. Others claim that the engagement is not enough. Still others contend that the university actively promotes research collaboration with external partners to enable the staff to participate in joint initiatives, to secure funding, and to expand networks. A participant said, "They help academics in acquiring funds and advocating their research interests. Their involvement is related to and motivated by the tenure and promotion criteria of the university".

3.3.1. Tenure and Promotion Criteria at Hawassa University

Responsibilities in the academic administration, committee work, and other contributions to the institution's operations are the most important requirements that are recognized as staff participation in the university affairs. It accounts for 15-20% of the promotion criteria. He continued, "The University has professional and other related service criteria that may be recognized as community engagement by the university. The legislation includes participation in the local and national committees, in public education programmes, and any other professional services to the community." Another argued that the weight of this criterion contrasts from 10% for Associate Professors to 15% for Professors, even though the 'Professional and Interrelated Public Services' criteria deliver a prospective opportunity for recognizing community engagement.

Others reported the lack of consideration of community engagement towards the academic load of the staff, affecting staff involvement. They argued that academic responsibilities often involve balancing community engagement with teaching and other academic activities: "Balancing teaching, publishing, and community service can be challenging". Programmes like professional development seminars, engagement scholarships, and faculty fellows' programmes support staff engagement in community-based projects, despite academic challenges. Although involvement is growing, some departments still disregard it, leading to

inconsistencies. Despite these challenges, some staff are still motivated by the ideal of community engagement. A participant said:

I am required to give back to the community as a faculty member, but it is more than simply a duty; it is a passion. Participating in initiatives that have a direct influence on the neighboring community enhances my academic work. Seeing how my study advances not just my field but also the communities I work with makes me happy. In a way that traditional academic jobs could not have accomplished, I have been more involved in the area (ParticipantHACOAdean-02 _ February 19, 2025).

The following table clarifies the weightings assigned to each criterion for different academic ranks and highlights the potential for recognizing community engagement within the 'Professional and Related Public Services' category.

Table 5. Promotion criteria at Hawassa University

Criterion	Weighting (Assistant Professor)	Weighting (Lecturer)	Weighting (Associate Professor)	Weighting (Professor)	Potential for Recognizing Community Engagement
Effective Teaching	50%	60%	40%	35%	Limited
Research and Publications	30%	30%	50%	50%	Community-engaged research
Community and university service	10%	10%	10%	15%	Partnerships and collaborations
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	

Note: The weightings were obtained from the authors' PhD research findings from Hawassa University

As Table 5 shows, the criteria are in the three missions, and the weight allocated is consistently limited to community engagement, although the teaching and research roles shift significantly as the staff advances. The involvement of the faculty in community engagement is multifaceted. This involvement extends to support the institutionalization of community engagement at the university. It is based on the field of the staff and specific roles. For example, a staff member in the College of Agriculture may be involved in the development and transfer of agricultural outputs. As a faculty member noted:

.... Different field crops and horticultural outputs have been developed through research. So, through the community engagement work, we try to come up with outputs that introduce important findings to the community. For example, in the last four years, as part of my PhD work, I have been working on a clean planting material of sweet potato that means disease-free plants as an essential seed (participant 2, February 2025).

However, the faculty has faced some challenges in fulfilling this mission. One problem is a lack of time. Besides, there is a problem related to budget and transportation. A leader in community engagement mentioned some of the challenges in institutionalizing community engagement:

.... We need input for all these activities. We need research sites. Sometimes there is also a lack of motivation from the staff. The government wants the staff to create new technologies every year, to conduct research and produce something. So, whenever new technology is produced, or if the instructors do not invent new technologies, that would be very challenging. Therefore, we may not achieve our objectives of supporting the industry or the community. Not only the community, but also the

industry may not be supported if new technology is not invented (Participant HAWCED1, February 22, 2025).

3.4. Community Involvement

In the previous analysis, we have found that the support and involvement of staff in the Hawassa University is progressing continuously despite several challenges. In this section, we will explore the support and involvement of the community partners in the institutionalization of community engagement at Hawassa University. We will attempt to identify the roles that community partners play in achieving community engagement initiatives. Although the involvement of external communities in the academic, administrative, and other affairs of universities, at times, serves a ceremonial role, it also facilitates the exchange of knowledge between universities and external communities, enables universities to mobilize external funding, and enriches the learning experiences of students (Mugabi, 2015). A coordinator from the Sidama National Regional State Agricultural Research Office said, “We play an important role in the work of the university, providing insights into the local environment and ensuring that the projects conducted by the university meet the needs of our community”. The institutionalization of community engagement at Hawassa University includes co-production and shared ownership as well as the co-identification of needs. He added:

We face challenges in maintaining long-term relationships with employees due to different expectations and conflicts. We need a strong research network of farmers, for example, who actively participate in participatory selection and crowd-sourcing efforts to select the best crop varieties suitable for their unique agroecology. But we need a stronger relationship to generate knowledge, design policy, and develop two-way communication that enhances trust and long-term research networks (Participant SNRSARO, 2025).

This may imply the lack of an overarching institutionalization strategy for two-way engagement and may imply the way community service model or rhetorical engagements should operate, but in reality, there are still gaps in forming long-term sustainable relations with the community. This calls for a transparent and active co-creation for full institutionalization of community engagement.

But a leader in community engagement claimed that:

...this collaboration is sometimes even extended to the involvement of the community in the curriculum review stage. They may participate in different boards and different affairs. For example, through an experience-sharing workshop, the community and the university learn from them, there is an experience sharing opportunity. This extend into implementation of projects and resource contribution, as some agricultural projects indicated that local farmers were trained on fish farming and chicken breeding, and then they teach it to their neighbors (Participant HAWCED1, February 22, 2025).

Besides, participants mentioned that community partners contribute to students' learning as they are the fertile ground for experiential learning and students have access to community-owned land and facilities to practically see what they learned in class in the real community setting. This is one advantage. Even the communities can benefit from the activities that are provided by students during their stay. Regarding evaluation and dissemination, although the community (farmer) is a direct user of technology, a participant complained that community members are not evaluating staff for their contribution to the community. The participant added:

For example, a biotechnologist is not evaluated by the farmer for how many varieties she/he released. So, they are evaluated in

research and teaching, but not in their involvement in community service. The community service is not evaluated based on my professional service directly given to the community, who are direct users of my technology (the farmers) (Participant HACOAAdean-02 _ February 19, 2025).

Hawassa University collaborates with local leaders, community front-runners and partner organizations to foster strong connections with stakeholders to ensure effective and responsive activities. Transparent and inclusive discussions foster ownership and shared accountability, resulting in long-term relationships and sustainable solutions (Open, Inclusive and Transparent Infrastructure Project, 2024). There was a book donation project and the presence of many legal aid centers for the community.

In relation to community support and engagement, a participant said, "I think Hawassa University's commitment to learning without borders, in which open conversation resulted in a formal agreement to host volunteers, is an example of partnering with communities for mutual benefit to allow knowledge transfer, community service, and capacity building". He added:

Hawassa University and GIZ are working together to address environmental issues through open communication and collaboration. They involve stakeholders in conversations, consultation sessions, and seminars; rely on external resources and partnership with NGOs, such as NORHED II-ReRED, CORDAID Ethiopia, European Union, GTZ and the Mastercard Foundation), and government agencies and international organizations. This mechanism increases the impact of the university (ParticipantHAFSLDDH-01 _ February 21, 2025).

These organizations are one source of funding to the university, and they ensure projects align with development goals. They enable the university to achieve the national and international aspirations in tandem with them.

They help the university develop high trust and collaboration with local partners, such as cooperatives or community-based associations. On the other hand, as discussed previously, they are essential for coproduction and shared ownership as well as the co-identification of needs. This is because they have a good understanding of the existing challenges and reality of the local community. They help the university to implement objectives, although their contribution is more of indigenous knowledge than money. According to the analysis by Hawassa University, College of Agriculture, BSC Oriented Strategic Management Plan 2019-2024, the role of TVETs and Industries is to be the major actors involved in the generation, transfer, and use of scientific and technological knowledge in the national innovation system.

According to stakeholders, Hawassa University's approach to teaching, research, and community engagement is two-way communication and collaboration. Hawassa University strives to create critical, sustainable solutions that address local needs. Encouraging open discourse, actively seeking feedback, and collaborating with a variety of stakeholders contribute to a greater social development, but the university administrator regrets that saying:

I have no idea, honestly, because I know, like in our board system, the board members, and the regional government must be the board. But still, that's not enough for me. It's like I wanted a representative of the farmers, their representative certainly involved. So, it is like, you know, sometimes, as I tell you frankly, it is going to be politicized. Because like, OK, the regional government has a big part in the university because it is a board member but the farmers are not. (Participant HACOAAdean-02 February 19, 2025)

Regular communication with community partners and participation in collaborative planning meetings are key strategies to ensure successful

projects. These initiatives recognize the importance of community input and local knowledge, fostering a collaborative and responsive approach to community needs. The same official noted that not all community partners have a strong relationship with the university:

So, farmers have no voice. But, you know, our farmers need that. I do not think that farmers have a place, you know, in making decisions and formulating ideas. So, for most part, I never saw it, I never saw it. Because, as you know, I have been involved in a number of course developments. We invite the experts, but not the farmers. And finally, farmers, but I have never seen a female farmer getting invited; what is the problem? And no one wanted to talk about her. So, these kinds of high discretionary issues still exist (Participant HACOAAdean-02 _ February 19, 2025).

This statement exposed a power imbalance and a lack of true community representation. There may, in fact, be a gap between the rhetoric and the reality of the institutionalization of community engagement. There may be projects as discussed above, but still there is a disparity in achieving an integrated level of community involvement in defining, conducting, and evaluating community-based research and teaching, and sustained partnerships. The absence of women's voices exposed a systematic problem to inclusive community engagement that may undermine authentic and relevant engagement with the community.

Table 6. Hawassa University community involvement and support of community engagement

Emergent Theme	Summary of Findings
Accessible Outreach	Community entry of diverse outreach programmes (Agriculture, Education, Health, Legal, and other Socio-Economic issues)
Regional Presence	Establishment of eleven legal aid service provision sites in regional states.
Collaborative Visibility	Recognition as a vital partner by Book Aid International for literacy initiatives.
External Recognition	Active partnerships with various organizations to enhance worldwide support.

3.5. Students' Involvement and Curriculum

Students are a crucial element for the success of the university's community engagement efforts. Their participation is generally in service-learning courses, internships, practicums, and voluntary activities that are part of their academic experiences. Participation in such activities helps them to get practical experiences, to develop a sense of civic responsibility, and to positively contribute to the public good. The most common method of student participation is service learning that is a pedagogical strategy that connects academic courses with community service. Students in these courses are encouraged to apply the concepts of classroom theories to real-world community issues. This method improves learning as well as deepens the partnership of the university with the external community. However, the participants have various perspectives about student community engagement and support. A staff from the Students' Services Office of Hawassa University noted that the university promotes and encourages student involvement through awareness-creating campaigns, different opportunities, leadership development, and recognition programmes.

“The university offers orientation to new freshman students, and the students in such events are offered important information about university policy, extracurricular opportunities, academic requirements, and accessible assets for engagement. During these orientations, the president frequently urges students to consider the university as their ‘home’; and emphasizes the need for responsible behavior, academic rigor and open communications,” said the office holder. The campus organizes a variety of information sessions and environments to create awareness about certain subjects, such as students getting training and partaking in discussions to advance peacebuilding and conflict resolution abilities. This is confirmed by member students (FGD) from Free Legal Service Club of the university:

We are eager to participate, and you can see how these experiences have shaped our perspectives on civic responsibility. We leave these undertakings with a better awareness of how we may contribute to society. Learning through Free Legal Service has been a game-changer for us. It's one thing to read about social issues in the classroom and it's quite another to be out in the community working on them personally. The initiatives demonstrate how we can apply what we learn to make a difference, and this is what we appreciate about these initiatives. It's not only about receiving a degree, but it's about contributing to the community (Student FGD, February 22, 2025).

The Free Legal Service is a mandatory programme and part of the curriculum, although it is not graded. A staff member who coordinates service-learning courses, such as Free Legal Service, stressed how important these initiatives are to student education. When they see the actual results of their efforts, students are more interested and motivated. He asserts, “Free Legal Service learning gives students a feeling of purpose frequently and allows them to see how their degree may be utilized for societal benefit.” Many students lead community engagement initiatives through student clubs or recreational activities. This is in addition to established service-learning courses. These

leadership positions enable students to take ownership of initiatives, interact with community partners, and learn skills such as project management, communication, and collaboration. Another research participant reported how “the institution recognizes the significance of inculcating community responsibility in students and providing prospects to them to contribute to the growth of the community”. Normally student participation in their communities is more than just familiarizing them with the community to learn. It is also about confirming that the university's efforts have an important impact on partners.

The university encourages students to participate in committees, councils, and decision-making organizations, promoting excellence in teaching, research, and community involvement. Participants, in addition, reported on student leadership in the community engagement of the university. For instance, they appreciated that the opportunity to take on a leadership role in a community project was an amazing experience. During the FGD, a student council member stated, “I've learnt how to collaborate with a variety of stakeholders and gained skills that will help me in my future profession. The beautiful thing about these initiatives is that I get the opportunity to lead. I am not only performing chores; I am also managing assignments and making decisions that have a real-world impact.” Although staff members and students involve in engagement projects to foster community collaborations and innovative ideas, some students struggle to balance academic responsibilities with extracurricular activities and may not understand the connection between their field of study and community service. The university has specific programmes that embed community engagement into the curriculum. For example, the College of Health Sciences has a Community-Based Teaching Programme (CBTP), and a Team-Teaching Programme (TTP) that have direct relation with the curricula, because they are specified in the curricula. It is not pass or fail, it is rather graded. A coordinator explained:

Even the credit is very high for TTP, because the duration is, as I said, between six weeks to two months. It has a minimum of four credit hours or about six to eight ECTS, I think. That is the integration. But for research and community engagement part, it has no relation with curriculum. Simply, the domains of higher education are teaching, research, and community engagement (Participant HACOHCBEC-01 _ February 17, 2025).

Regarding learning outcomes and assessment, the coordinator further explained:

It has three credit hours. The student-centered activities that are in line with this office are community-based education, team teaching programme, and student research programme (SRP). Instructors are assigned for these activities, specifically for outreach attachment. That's designed for a determined period. It can be one month, or it can be six weeks. Specifically, for TTP, it is around six weeks currently, but in the curriculum, it is for about eight weeks because of team training. Every graduating class has this attachment before graduation. This is one graduation requirement, and it exists in the curriculum as well Participant HACOHCBEC-01 _ February 17, 2025).

Table 7. Student responsibilities at Hawassa University

Category	Responsibility
Academic Engagement	Attend classes, examinations, and other instructional activities. Actively engage in discussions, complete assignments, and undertake practical tasks. Independently pursue the truth, engage in transmission and application of knowledge, and nation-building. Conform to the academic functions and regulations of the University. Engage in research that benefits society and contributes to professional growth.
Social Engagement	Engage in a broader civic engagement agenda, such as fostering a respectful and inclusive campus environment. Respect the rights and dignity of others, demonstrate tolerance for differences, and open dialogue. Build positive relationships with peers, faculty, and staff. Although it is not fully institutionalized, participate in extracurricular activities that promote personal development, and the university community showed earlier stages of CE.

Note: Obtained from the authors' PhD research findings from Hawassa University

Students are engaged in research that benefits the community. For example, health students identify problems by visiting the local community and develop action plans of two types (for some disciplines). Action plans for statistics and for outreach. For statistics, it is specifically for intervention activities. For outreach, it is more of health promotion, disease control, and disease prevention activities. Every two weeks, they have a fortnightly report. At the end of every programme, there is a symposium, a final presentation of their work. Through all this, they develop documents. This is the procedure they follow for this programme.

4. Discussion

Dimension 1. Mission

Despite the above justifications, however, Hawassa University's activities must still demonstrate a strong commitment to generating impactful research and addressing real-world challenges through its community engagement initiatives. This, might then lead to staff involvement in community activities to be more directly linked to the institution's public service mission, which enhances its staff participation. Although rhetorically, the university's deep-rooted mission to address local and regional needs remains its core focus, the organization must teach students about their civic duties while also promoting community engagement. It appears the essential nature of community engagement defines the institution's mission and its fundamental nature. Hawassa University views this as a core element. The institution considers this operation crucial. The role of the staff at a public institution goes beyond teaching. The institution's mission demands both educational work and community service; this goal unites all members from leadership with students. But the university claims that it uses its mission as the driving force behind its community involvement activities and uses its core values and financial support for initiatives that benefit the community. They further claim that staff members hold community engagement as a vital part of their professional tasks, and the institution's main purpose as a trailblazer in public service development leads to this outcome.

Although the mission statement boldly emphasizes interactive approaches, departments face multiple challenges when implementing these ideas. The institution shows an unmistakable trend where research and teaching activities take precedence over community engagement, despite its declared mission to provide public service. According to the University's strategic document, community engagement is positioned as its primary service function, which serves as the basis for strategic initiatives. The university requires its staff and student body to embed communal involvement within their professional

responsibilities. The institution's vision statement establishes a definitive dedication to advancing regional development. Faculty members consider engagement as the practical extension of their mission work. The primary purpose of these community engagement initiatives extends beyond achieving success to reach their core mission. The university exists for educational and service purposes through its institutionalization process. The organization's strategic objectives directly focus on public service, thus establishing community engagement as an inherent component for all university activities.

Dimension 2. Organizational Structure and Funding

According to some research participants, after its significance in the academic programme, engagement is integrated into the institution's strategy. Several suggested that engagement activities could benefit from better departmental cooperation and clearer communication between leaders and professors, which implies that the university's structure is essential in promoting engagement. Dedicated offices, leadership support, and clear standards ensure that involvement is a fundamental part of the academic process (Mugabi, 2015). This office helps, supports, and monitors faculty and student involvement initiatives. It is, in addition, ensuring that activities are aligned with institutional objectives. In order to achieve community engagement initiatives, the coordination of different departments and the central office is required. This collaboration is important to address complex social and economic problems and to ensure the institution's structure provides financial support and other assets, both internal and external, to make successful community engagement in the community-based programmes.

Dimension 3. Faculty Involvement and Tenure and Promotion Criteria

The university's professional and related service criteria include community-engaged research, collaboration with local groups and

outreach activities. However, the broader conceptualization of community engagement is not clear. This has created confusion and misunderstandings about the necessity for clear promotion and tenure criteria. The evaluation procedure for 'public services' lacks clarity. This could lead to inconsistencies in the evaluation and weight allotted to community engagement. These uncertainties may lead to issues with the staff. This was a great challenge for the staff who may not be clear about how their community engagement work would be perceived and evaluated during the promotion process. Departments and evaluation committees may apply unequal standards in the absence of clear guidelines. This may result in inconsistent recognition of community engagement.

The promotion criteria have been disapproved by participants. The university lacks a clear incentive system in the promotion and tenure guidelines. This undermines the prospects of community engagement for expanding teaching, research and community engagement and it may lead to wasted opportunities. Community engagement is asserted as a goal of Hawassa University. However, this is not unequivocally documented in staff promotions. The 'Public Services' criteria could have explicitly encompassed community engagement. The absence of clarity on community engagement as a promotion criterion causes misunderstanding for us. Because of this, there are inconsistencies in how we are evaluated. If they want to effectively encourage staff support and involvement, they (the university) must provide clear guidelines, recognition methods, criteria and assessment rubrics. The university's approach to community participation should be consistent with the university's strategic objectives and priorities. This includes staff development.

Dimension 4. Community involvement

Building and maintaining long-term relationships with community partners is critical to the success of engagement initiatives. These relationships promote continuity, trust, and deeper collaboration.

According to the institutionalization idea, community engagement becomes institutionalized when there are regulatory standards, cultural, and cognitive behaviors. How would we know if there are long-term relationships? Over the years, staff have been working with community partners, focusing on more than just one-off effort, to ensure a deeper understanding and impact on their work. When they are interested in receiving training in a particular subject, they ask university leaders, unless there is a direct chain link between an external organization and the university. Essentially, as a collaboration, they seek support, and the university tries to help them by networking with different departments according to their needs.

Dimension 5. Student involvement and curriculum

We have seen that community engagement helps students manage their academic duties by integrating community service into their studies, fostering practical skills, social responsibility, and a stronger connection to their academic pursuits. Service-learning experiences have shown students how to apply what they are learning in the classroom to serve others in the real world. It may gratify their education. What is amazing about service learning is that it is not all theory. The students believe in, 'I am out there making a difference', which makes the academic subject much more relevant. But we are not sure if everyone is equally benefited, and many struggle to reconcile these activities with their academic responsibilities. This is especially true for students enrolled in challenging programmes with significant academic requirements. We can, therefore, clearly discern uneasiness with the workload balance. No data were observed in the participants' interviews that contradict with students' taking on leadership responsibilities in engagement initiatives, such as directing teams, planning logistics, and working with community partners. The absence of involvement and support, which is against students' responsibility to acquire important leadership abilities that are transferable beyond the educational context, has been noticed. Almost

all involvement was related to a community programme teaching the students how to lead a team and collaborate with many stakeholders. Much was not observed to incentivize the students for taking the lead in these initiatives to increase the students' confidence and to make a difference, not only in the university, but also in the community.

5. Implications for Theory and Practice

The study has significant implications for many stakeholders. The university can revise its academic promotion guidelines to incentivize community engagement. The university may have to redefine the roles of the faculty and try to enhance the mission of the university, not only rhetorically but also in practice as well, to attract students, qualified staff, and the community. To enhance clarity and encourage faculty engagement, Hawassa University could consider the following: First, it should define Community Engagement by clearly articulating what constitutes community engagement and offering examples of valued activities in the promotion and tenure guidelines. Then, it should develop evaluation rubrics to establish transparent community engagement, by considering factors like project impact, collaboration with community partners, and the dissemination of findings. The other recommendation is that it should increase the weight given to 'Public Services' within the promotion criteria, particularly for ranks where community engagement aligns with the university's strategic goals. Moreover, the university should regularly spotlight and honor academics who thrive in community participation, serving as models and motivation to others. Finally, they should create platforms and processes to encourage cooperation between academics and community partners, promoting a culture of participation. The university needs to further strengthen equitable partnership and co-creation of problems and leverage university expertise to address the actual problems of the community.

6. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The study is an ongoing research, and this may limit the participants' diverse views and representativeness, and it will evolve as the large-scale study is completed. The instrument used is primarily semi-structured interviews and FGD, which may produce subjectivity and different result at the end of the final large-scale study. The study's findings are currently limited to Hawassa University, and the authors do not claim any generalizability of the findings. Some factors of community engagement institutionalization in Hawassa University are not included in the analysis due to the dearth of data. Besides, other researchers might consider these limitations and plan both quantitative and qualitative studies in the future.

7. Conclusion

The institutionalization of community engagement interview data from Hawassa University showed that, regardless of the possible hurdles, Hawassa University's dedication to community participation and cooperation is a significant step toward inclusive and sustainable development. By proactively addressing trust-building and resource constraints, Hawassa University is deepening its relationships, increasing the effect of its projects, and making a significant contribution to the well-being of the communities it serves. Interviews with 18 university staff and six students, one community partner, and one official from the Ministry of Education indicate a significant stage of institutional commitment to community participation. Analysis of data using the Holland Framework for the institutionalizing of community engagement confirmed (1) Formal-structural alignment: The institution's goal clearly prioritizes public service; faculty members are encouraged to participate, and leadership provides strong assistance, such as resources, funds, staffing, and structure, to ensure that participation is incorporated in both the academic curriculum and faculty activities. (2) Cultural and

operational misalignment: However, challenges remain, particularly in terms of balancing faculty responsibilities, focusing on specific events, unclear resource distribution, limitations in the strategic plan, and aligning academic goals with community needs. The sustainability of engagement is supported by institutional structures, but ongoing efforts are needed to ensure that engagement remains a priority in the future.

The Holland Matrix for the institutionalization of community engagement in Higher education contains several important concepts and tools for the institutionalization of community engagement. We have seen from the interview data that a number of challenges exist in institutionalizing community engagement in the case university, although it claims that progressive results are achieved. In the case of Hawassa University, community engagement is explicitly mentioned, the university has an organizational structure and some resource is allocated, staff and students are encouraged, and partnerships and collaborations are beginning to develop. Considering the various challenges in institutionalizing community engagement, the next question is how to deeply, authentically, and institutionally embed community engagement into the core mission of the university. Barbara Holland's answer is that the institution should focus on the nature of institutionalizing community engagement, integrating engagement into the formal structures, policies, flows of funds, and the norms of the university. If it remains in the periphery, community engagement is not institutionalized properly.

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