

Exploring the Surrounding Community's View of Addis Ababa University: A Community Service Perspective

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Abstract

This qualitative study explored the perspectives of the external community surrounding Addis Ababa University (AAU), recognizing that these stakeholders are directly or indirectly connected to the University's services and outputs. Data were collected from three key informants through semi-structured interviews, one focus group discussion and two case studies. The sample was selected using purposive-opportunistic sampling and was drawn from the woredas of Arada and Gulele sub-cities. The findings of this Study show that the University students and staff are not strangers living in an ivory tower, completely disconnected from the community. The Study showed that communities living in the adjacent woreda of Arada and the Gulele sub-cities have a quite ambivalent/paradoxical perception of the University while they view members of the community as enablers of peace. They also tend to view the University as a contributor to the rise in deviance and crime. The community's view is intertwined with students' economic interactions with the local community, and the community's civic life (ranging from involvement in ordinary social life to economic interactions) and University community services shape the community's perception.

Keywords: Community Services, Community View, Economic Interaction, University-Community engagement

Background

There is a long history of continuous interaction between universities and communities (Walsh & Backe, 2013). This interaction is facilitated through 'teaching and learning' (Belete, 2024), 'research' (Kaba et al., 2021; Mashamba, 2003) and the need for casual economic interactions (Steinacker, 2005). Other literature has also demonstrated the ever-increasing phenomenon of students acting as a transmission belt between the community and a university, highlighting their political activism and involvement in social affairs within the wider community, a trend that has continued for decades in Ethiopia (Abebe, 2019; Adamu & Balsvik, 2017; Ahmed, 2005).

It has been almost half a century since the idea of a university as an ivory tower, detached from the community, has been rejected (Mashamba, 2003). It should be noted that faculty members and students are drawn from and sent to the community on a regular basis. The non-academic

community found adjacent to the university is also expected to integrate with the academic community. Here, by the community it means the local unity of a group of human beings who live their social, economic and cultural lives together, and who recognise and accept certain obligations and hold certain shared values. As Universities are very much attached to the perception of community, their satisfaction can be defined as the discrepancy between aspiration and achievement, ranging from the perception of fulfilment to deprivation. Therefore, satisfaction with the university's community services is highly personal and heavily influenced by past encounters and current expectations (Potter et al., 2014).

It was only by the middle of the 20th century that Ethiopia founded its first formal university, which is Addis Ababa University. Addis Ababa University (AAU) is the oldest and largest higher education and research institution in Ethiopia. Established in 1950 as the University College of Addis Ababa (UCAA), it has a long history. From its inception, the University has been a leading centre for teaching, learning, research and community services (AAU, 2024). Starting with an enrolment capacity of just 33 students in 1950, AAU has grown to host over 50,000 students (including undergraduates, graduate and post-graduate studies) and 8,709 staff (3,110 academics, 4,346 administrative support staff, and 1,253 health professionals). Across its 14 campuses, the university runs 70 undergraduate and 293 graduate programmes (72 PhDs 10.63990/ejtel.v3i1.13134and 221 Master's), as well as various specializations in Health Sciences. To date, the University has graduated more than 222,000 students in various fields (AAU, 2024).

Recently, AAU has been re-established as an autonomous university, entrusted with robust teaching, learning and research duties, as well as knowledge-based community engagement, for the economic development of the Country and its people. Thanks to its autonomy, the University will be able to improve its community engagement record in its newly reorganised setup and with its reinvigorated institutional infrastructure. Subsequently, the interim administration revised the existing strategic plan in line with the Country's priorities for homegrown economic development. The ten-year development plan of the University explains that it coheres with the global SDGs (FDRE 2020). One of the major themes of the strategic plan, 'Reimagining Our Future', is 'Outreach, Extension, Service and Engagement'. In this endeavour, it is evident how the community's perspective is relevant to and intertwined with the university's strategic plan.

Throughout its history, the University has engaged with the community as a way of nurturing good citizenship (Kaba et al., 2021). Since its inception, Addis Ababa University has notably registered to operate community engagement. Understandably, 'civic engagement' has been coterminous with 'community services' for most of its history, until recently adopting the definition of the Carnegie Foundation (n.d).

Given the above missions of the University, one can easily assume what the community's view of the university is, as this is taken for granted. Perhaps the ontological content of community perception should be studied, as this remains an outstanding issue and a knowledge gap in this Study

Statement of the Problem

Although community engagement scholarship is grabbing the attention of policymakers and academia, many things happening in both the community and the university have not been sufficiently studied (Desta & Belay, 2018; Kaba et al., 2021). Among other things, the dynamics of communal peace along the university–community interface, environmental protection and solving societal problems that directly impact the needs of a community have been overlooked in community literature.

The literature conceptualizes community representatives as carriers of practical research (Swantz, 2008), conduits of service learning (Stoecker, 2016) and catalysts of the co-creation of problem-solving schemes (Fitzgerald et al., 2016). However, none of this research has contextualized the voice of community representatives, nor has it conclusively demonstrated how university services shape the community's view. More than seven decades have passed since universities began operating in Ethiopia, contributing to the production of professionals and researchers, and evolving their capacity to impact community life (Abebe, 2019; Adamu Balsvik, 2017; Belete, 2024; Kaba et al., 2021). Throughout its history, Addis Ababa University, the oldest in the country, has undergone enormous growth over the years. The University's founding documents (the autonomous University Proclamation No. 1294/2023) and the Council of Ministers Regulation No. 537/2023) presume universities to be interlinked with their local communities (Belete, 2024; Kaba et al., 2021). There is ample evidence showing the low participation of academic staff in research and community service (AAU, 2021; Desta & Belay, 2018), which is exacerbated by the lack of a comprehensive repository of community engagement activities (AAU, 2021). Other factors include the inability to track the outcomes of community engagement practices, a lack of sustainability and an inability to satisfy the community, coupled with community fatigue and attitudinal barriers. There is also an inability to build cultural competence in serving the community, misunderstandings about the mission and roles of partnerships, institutional bureaucracy and resource limitations (AAU, 2021; Desta & Belay, 2018, p. 13).

Despite the experiences of the University, little or no information is available on what the wider community thinks and says about AAU. Exploring the interaction between the university and the outside community would significantly contribute to filling the knowledge gap within community engagement scholarship. This Study examines the circumstances in which the perception of community is shaped by the services provided by universities, or the lack thereof,

resulting from the failure to integrate teaching, learning, research and community service practices in a way that is relevant to the community living adjacent to the university. Against this background, this Study aims to address the lack of empirical knowledge regarding the community's perception of the University and the experiences of its beneficiaries.

Objectives of the study

The main objective of this Study was to explore the views of the external community (beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries alike) in the vicinity of AAU towards the University.

Specifically, this Study intended to:

- 1) explore the community's view of AAU and how the university interacts with the local community, with a special focus on community service.
- 2) investigate the perception of the beneficiaries of the services that the university claims to provide to the community.

Methodology

As this Study was exploratory in nature, a qualitative approach was adopted since little research had been conducted to uncover the community's view of Addis Ababa University, to the best of the researcher's knowledge. As Brinkman (2020) eloquently argued, exploratory studies are well-suited to times when domains are little known or when newly emerging social phenomena are being studied, as the spontaneous expressions require the qualitative researcher to engage in dynamic social interaction rather than conducting casual individual interviews.

Sampling

As this was a qualitative and exploratory Study, purposive sampling was used. Specifically, the opportunistic sampling method was used, which is well-suited to this Study. According to Bryman (2012), 'opportunistic sampling' involves generating qualitative data from certain individuals by optimising the opportunity for frequent contact and a long-term relationship with the central issue or area under research. Hence, I was selective when engaging participants in the Study. In this endeavour, participants' frequent contact with the University community is often unforeseen, but this Study has capitalised on that. Unlike other qualitative sampling methods, such as stratified purposive sampling, it is sometimes unlikely that data saturation could be reached through opportunistic sampling. The trustworthiness of the Study has been maintained by selecting respondents who were familiar with the university and its services. After undertaking reconnaissance of the area, I observed that not everyone who sells at the University gate knows everything about the University. I often asked the vendors in the vicinity of the university a simple question. However, their responses justified their limited knowledge due to their limited involvement with the University, whether through business or community service. Initially, I used the list of community representatives from the community engagement office documentation and asked if they would be willing to take part in my research. Since the

main campus of the university is located in the Sidist Kilo area of Addis Ababa, the selected informants were chosen for their proximity to the area. Therefore, all the informants were selected from people living within a radius of about one and a half kilometers. The Study participants were picked from Arada sub-city (Woreda 6 and Woreda 9) and Gulele sub-city (Woreda 2 and Woreda 3), which are in the vicinity of the Sidist Kilo campus. Thus, the duration of participants' for staying in the vicinity and proximity to the University were taken into account. As the FGD participants were drawn from STEM beneficiaries, I consulted the STEM centre coordinator of AAU. Initially, I received a long lists of schools whose students participated in STEM programmes. The AAU STEM centre used to run a programme aimed at training members of the wider community, including high-achieving high school students, using the 'Electronics Lab and Virtual Computer Lab' facilities at the 'Samsung Building'. As the acronym suggests, the programme covers 'Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics'. The programme covered selected beneficiaries from Menelik Secondary School, Radical Academy, St Selassie School and Belay Zeleke School. In the 2023/24 academic year alone, the university claims to have provided services to 40 STEM beneficiaries in these schools. However, after consulting the STEM coordinator at AAU and the school director at Radical Academy, I selected five beneficiaries from Radical Academy, as it is situated almost 500 metres away from the main campus and next to the College of Technology and Built Environment (Amist Kilo Campus) of AAU. On the other hand, in this research, I considered two factors for the two case studies. The first is how well-known and significant the case is within the community, and whether it is influential enough to shape the community's perception. The second is how representative it is of the two objectives of the study and how well it can demonstrate them. The story of Eden, therefore illustrates the first objective, i.e. the community's view of university services, while the story of Ambachew illustrates the second objective, i.e. the community's perception of the university's services.

Methods of Data Collection

In order to address the general and specific objectives, both primary and secondary data were used. Relevant first-hand information was gathered from documents and fieldwork. As for the documents, written materials related to the University's engagement practices with the adjacent community were reviewed. In particular, the STEM reports and community engagement reports from the Community Engagement Office were accessed. Besides, various scholarly works which include articles, books and book chapters, were reviewed.

The fieldwork method enabled semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and case studies to be included. Face-to-face and online interviews were conducted with key informants representing the communities adjacent to the campuses. Semi-structured interviews were conducted and recorded based on the consent of the research participants. Although the guide

was prepared in English, all of the interviews and focus group discussions were conducted in Amharic. Furthermore, the focus group discussions took the form of informal, engaging discussions; the proceedings were also audio recorded. In resonance with this, case studies were drawn from subjects who could help to shed light on how the community is tied to or distanced from the nearby university. Greenhalgh and Aikins (2024) argue that case studies offer an opportunity to learn from particular features of lived experiences. Hence, case studies were used to develop a better understanding of the community's view of the University and to assess how beneficiaries found the services provided by the University. It should be noted that the case studies were instrumental in helping the researcher to analyse the interaction between the Addis Ababa University and the adjacent community. Finally, additional sources and different perspectives from existing literature indeed enriched the findings.

Methods of data analysis

In line with Bryman's (2012) characterization of thematic analysis, the frequent occurrence of certain words, suggesting certain types of discourse and patterns of interaction, have been thematised. Therefore, the Study has employed thematic analysis of interview and focus group discussion (FGD) transcripts in its methods of analysis.

Table 1: Summary on the Study participants' profile

Community Category	Gulele Sub-city Woreda 2 & 3 (no. of participants)				Arada-Sub-city Woreda 6 & 9 (no. of participants)				Data collection Tools
	Informant	Sex	Age	Education	Informant	Sex	Age	Education	
Residents /Woreda sector office	1	male	45	1 st degree	1	male	39	1st degree	Interview
Business community	-	-	-	-	1	Male	40	12 complete	
STEM beneficiaries	2	One male & one female	17 and 18	11 th and 12 th graders	3	3 females		11th and 12th graders	1 FGD

However, this was complemented by reviewing relevant archives and literature, and by interviewing participants in the research using non-probability and purposive sampling methods to identify the research participants. In line with the characteristic feature of 'opportunistic sampling', the research participants' frequent contact with the university community was a key factor in selecting informants. Accordingly, the participants of this Study were drawn from the

catchment community (residents, businesspeople and sectors) found in the vicinity of the Sidist Kilo campus (Arada sub-city, Woreda 6 and Woreda 9; Gulele sub-city, Woreda 2 and Woreda 3).

Ethical considerations

In addition to obtaining permission to conduct the study from the University's Centre for Sustainable Development and Office of Community Engagement, this Study has strictly adhered to privacy and informed consent procedures for the participants. This is in line with the views of Bryman (2012) and Brinkman (2020), who argue that social research ethics strongly recommend that investigators keep the privacy of anonymous interviewees, even when consent has been obtained from the subjects.

Challenges faced during the fieldwork

According to Conrad and Hepner (2005), field researchers often find it difficult to obtain reliable information, and information gathered from chance visits is frequently incomplete and inaccurate. Moreover, a literature review on the broader theme of this Study's title unveils that published information on the community's view of the University is notoriously difficult to obtain. Interviewing some community members or representatives was also difficult, which tempted the researcher to use covert means to collect the required data in a convenient way. Understandably, undertaking this research was not seamless, but rather involved overcoming several intermediate challenges, including:

- Difficulty accessing informants within a set timeframe
- Inability to access FGD participants limited the research to conducting one FGD.
- Some FGD participants hid behind alpha behaviour, resulting in their voices being disguised. Consequently, I was compelled to use covert means to collect the necessary data in a convenient and understandable way.

Being this Study based on a topic with which I had worked closely, it was very difficult to eliminate bias entirely. As a researcher, I sometimes found myself knowing better when the interviewees began to share their views on the University's community engagement practices. This is essentially the moment at which reflexivity comes into play. In accordance with Lincoln et al.'s (2024, p. 109) characterization of reflexivity, the researchers must interrogate themselves regarding the ways in which their research efforts are shaped and staged around the contradictions and paradoxes that form their own life.

Findings and Discussions

Before discussing the findings of the Study directly, this section explains the global and national trends as to how universities interact with the local community. The underlying assumption is that the eventual findings from the field could be understood within the framework outlined by

global practices and institutional factors (ranging from national plans to university strategic plans). After transcribing and translating the interview and FGD audio files, a thematic analysis of the data, which, according to Bryman (2012), is characterized by the frequent occurrence of certain words were done. Therefore, the words that appeared frequently in the interview and FGD transcripts were coded to identify if they suggested certain types of discourse and patterns of interaction. Accordingly, this section discusses two major topics: i) perceptions about university-community engagement and interaction, and ii) community perspectives on the benefits of university services.

Perceptions about University-Community Engagement and Interactions

It should be noted that universities around the world provide an ideal setting in which to test community engagement practices intertwined with the foundational philosophies of higher education, knowledge generation and transfer, and contributions to national and sustainable development, as well as the consolidation of democracy (Filho et al., 2024; McIlrath, 2008). Similarly, Barnett (2011:62) emphasized, “a University is always unfinished business”, requiring a level of uncertainty that a research university may not want to embrace. In line with this, literature has revealed that community engagement has become the norm rather than the exception since the 19th century land-grant university movement in the United States, which mandated that universities serve societal needs (Boyer, 1996). Over time, this concept has spread worldwide, influenced by initiatives such as the Campus Compact (Boland & McIlrath, 2008), which emphasised the civic roles and social responsibilities of universities.

Against the aforementioned background, the remainder of this section discusses the actual findings by combining data presentation with literature and relevant theoretical statements. In this section, community views have been categorized in to two. The first is the University as a threat or burden to the community, and the second is the University as an enabler of communal peace and security. The discussion strikes a balance between these two categories to avoid bias in the synthesis exercise.

Is AAU a Threat or Enabler for Communal Peace and Security of The Community?

It is true that the University hosts students from a variety of cultural backgrounds. As a result of this, AAU students may exhibit manners that are considered desirable or undesirable by the community. There were times when students were the source of security crises and crime in *Menen* (Northern Neighbour of the AAU) and the surrounding area (KII-1). This informant explained:

Some students who come from critical areas may turn out to be deviant and engage in the theft of student property. Worryingly, the Menen police station used to receive a similar report every day. In a few cases, students even report thefts to the police, but then go on to steal items such as mobile phones and laptops themselves.

KII-2 also shared a similar experience, which resonates with the above tendency of students seeking security. There used to be a few places around the Campus where students could fulfil their addiction to khat, shisha and other substances, especially a chat chewing house near Dire Dawa restaurant. It took several attempts before the woreda administration was able to close the house. It is clear that AAU trends deviate from the traditional methods used by university campuses to protect their students from security concerns. In contrast, Maurrasse (2001, p. 17) observed that universities often invest in campus security to protect students from criminal behaviour in urban areas. Often, across the global spectrum, such dynamics lead to tension between universities and their surrounding communities, manifesting as crime, protest and overall resentment. Contrary to Maurrasse's (2001) contention, AAU students used to be a security concern for the community, rather than being innocent prey to the local community's criminal activities.

Also, KII-3 shared his thoughts on the vibe closer, 'Arat Kilo Campus'. He explained that:

There are a few houses that are still a threat due to their potential to act as an addictive site for students. I know they are dangerous places because they are also nightclubs at night. Especially at weekends, the atmosphere is dangerous. I think the woreda authorities should force the closure of such houses.

Assessing this retrospectively, such a tendency among AAU students is, contrary to the new AAU 2024 Student Code of Conduct, Arts. 9.14 and 9.15, which demand that AAU students be responsible for being exemplary in their interactions with the local community.

Another informant (KII-2) disclosed that the entire student population (drawn from Sadist Kilo main campus, FBE and Arat Kilo) is a chief source of income for the local population, especially in the Amest Kilo area. Furthermore, he stressed that:

Especially firfir tera (a dish of sliced injera mixed with sauce), which is entirely dependent on serving students from Sadist Kilo and Arat Kilo. Firstly, students are served at a very affordable price. Students are happy that firfir houses prepare food according to their preferences and needs. Conversely, these small enterprises will profit from the mass customers they receive from the university student bodies.

Furthermore, this informant stated,

I was personally involved in photocopying teaching materials and other resources for students. Most of them thanked me even after they had graduated. So, I see my business as a service rather than a source of profit. I only make a profit when I copy multiple pages.

The above excerpt resonates with Steinacker's (2005) argument that university expenditure and rents in the surrounding area are markers of its contribution to the local economy, but are often

overlooked by university bodies and local authorities. To the University's credit, the informant (KII-2) disclosed that the area adjacent to Amest Kilo-AAiT was used by young people as a place to work as a parking assistant, since customers and students of the Amest Kilo campus used to park there. Some of them are now lamenting the demolition of the parking spaces to make way for the redevelopment of the area next to the campus. Regrettably, there is a risk of delinquency unless their livelihood as parking attendants is maintained.

Community View on AAU Student Behaviour

The rationale behind discussing the community's view on AAU student behaviour is that there are issues beyond merely assessing the community's view of university services, which sheds light on the community's view from all possible vantage points. This means that the AAU community services are very important to the community and affect other areas of interaction between the university and the neighbouring community. In this endeavor, an informant (KII-2) disclosed that:

I can confirm that no one blames the Amist Kilo students for their behaviour. In all their economic interactions with the neighbouring community, they demonstrate amicable relationships. They are not blamed for disposing of rubbish recklessly. I don't remember any students disturbing the community with an alcohol-related hangover. I probably don't know about the FBE or Arat Kilo campus students either. But I am certain of the community's view of Amist Kilo students.

In contrast to the above response, informant KII-2 continued to recount the exceptions.

I remember a few students who were addicted in 2006 and 2007. They were known in the local area and went so far as to be completely dismissed, yet they are still roaming around the neighbourhoods. Fast forward to 2009, I remember a few students who showed similar deviant behaviour. Apart from that, most students at Amist Kilo area are by far decent.

Given the response of the aforementioned informant, it is clear that the community views AAU students as decent and peaceful, despite the behaviour of a few deviant students. A tale from community members about students' love affairs with members of the community: KII-2 shared that students' interactions with the local community can follow the natural patterns of life, such as love and hate. The following story illustrates a student's love affair with local vendors.

Case study 1: Ambachew is a local bookseller whose kiosk is located next to the Amest Kilo campus of AAiT. His customers come from a variety of backgrounds, including university students, faculty members, and members of the local community. One day, Merhawit (a former AAiT student) approached Ambachew casually to buy a rare book. She then became a loyal customer. Eventually, they became romantically involved. Their relationship has continued even after they graduated.

The aforementioned story aligns with what Peters et al. (2018) termed 'jumping into civic life'. In that small book, the authors — drawn from student and faculty members alike — argued that academicians faced patterns of life journey that were no different to those of other members of the outside community. The essential insight is that we are all human, and our humanistic instinct drives us beyond the institutional walls separating the university from the community.

Community Perspectives on the Benefits of the University Claimed Services

Case study 2: The story of Eden¹: she was a recipient of the scheme to maintain houses for low-income families. She was selected because she was a single mother with a low or no income. As part of a challenge initiated by PM Abiy Ahmed, the University renovated her old house during one of the summer campaigns. Due to the home maintenance, Eden's neighbour became resentful, believing that she deserved the renovation support more than Eden. This is because her neighbour is disabled and believes that she is more in need of the service than Eden. Later, her neighbours quarreled with Eden because her maintained home was draining rainwater towards them. As a result, the hostility between them grew and they denied Eden a typical invitation to a neighbourly coffee ceremony. The community knew, however, that this was the result of envy. In fact, the informant remembers that, later, another ministerial office came and maintained the house of another neighbour. As a result, the quarrel caused by envy eventually stopped.

The key implication is that one should not take for granted the benefits to society as a whole, assuming that this can keep the neighbourhood intact. As can be seen from what happened to Eden, University intervention in the community can result in the breaking of community ties. From the standpoint of the disabled neighbour, it would be reasonable to assume that the University's intervention would be perceived as the action of a discriminatory institution. The aforementioned encounter resonates with Peters et al.'s (2018) memoirs. In his Book, he has made clear that universities should be aware that communities sometimes lack the civic infrastructure or cohesion to withstand the effects of an intervention.

View from STEM beneficiaries: The focus group discussions (FGDs) with STEM beneficiaries reveal that the students' views as members of the community have never been heard to date. The following section will explain the students' narratives from their perspective as participants in the STEM programme.

As the FGD participants have revealed, the service was good. Since it was held in the summer, it barely conflicted with regular education. The programme turned theoretical lessons into practical applications. One informant disclosed that the STEM programme brought hardware

¹ Pseudo name used for ethical purpose

closer to beneficiaries, whether they were in grade 10, 11 or 12. This is important because, in comparison to other public schools, neither their wealthy families nor the relatively better private schools (e.g. Radical Academy) could make electronics accessible to students. Their testimony attests that physics has become more accessible to them.

One of the participants argued that it would have been better if the STEM centre had considered subjects beyond physics and engineering. Nevertheless, the investigator is curious about the fact that one of the STEM beneficiaries joined the social science stream after being promoted to grade 11. This is an important issue that needs to be addressed, as it is a blind spot in the data. This shows us that tracing beneficiaries is not always successful. It tells us that, somehow, wastage of investment in the community can be detected if one traces it meticulously. The STEM beneficiaries have reservations about the university not exhausting its potential to support extracurricular endeavours. In this Study, one of the investigators asked the participants to define extracurricular engagement. Most of them replied, 'Extra-curricular means an academic activity that is separate from regular teaching and is often required by scholarship grantors throughout the application process'. Although they understood the concept of extracurricular activities correctly, they seemed to lack the appropriate motivation. As an investigator, I interjected to explain the rationale behind launching someone's extracurricular engagement as part of their civic duty. Notably, the FGD participants agreed with the investigator's view that the motivation behind extra-curricular engagement is the fulfilment of civic duty and a virtue, rather than a means to obtain further opportunities. Understandably, extracurricular engagement is about far more than grabbing scholarship opportunities; it speaks volumes about higher education and high schools alike. In this endeavour, Kassaye (2023) emphasised that universities offer a variety of extracurricular activities, including student unions, training sessions, workshops, and community service, which are supported by legislation and the education sector roadmap. Nevertheless, this finding suggests that the university could seize the opportunity to link its extracurricular activities with those of the surrounding schools.

In short, based on the data from the focus group discussion (FGD), it could be argued that the STEM programme did not help the high school students of Radical Academy to form an emotional connection with AAU. The researcher observed that STEM participants did not develop an emotional attachment to the university. Indeed, the relatively short period of time that they participated in the programme contributed to the lack of sentimental attachment. Nevertheless, Walsh et al. (2013) noted that partnerships for school intervention remind both the university and the school community that they are all members of the same human community. Community view on Faculty member's participation in Fund Raising:

By and large, the AAU community service targets government institutions, businesses, non-profit organisations and society at large, and is always geared towards solving societal problems.

Against this background, there is a tenuous link connecting the university community to fundraising, though support could never be professional. Nevertheless, faculty members' support for the community extended beyond mere professional assistance. As informant KII-1 disclosed: 'I remember the staff participating in fundraising activities for disadvantaged people in the community. The university's community service office was receptive to written requests from the Menen police department; later, the university also made efforts.'

From the AAU's perspective as an enabler of communal peace and security, an informant recounts that the university's support for the community extended beyond mere professional assistance. He recalls that:

The University's community office was receptive to the police department of the Menen area's written requests; the university also made efforts later on. We received various training sessions free of charge, including computer literacy training. The training we received was important in increasing our computer literacy. In addition, I remember the training provided from the law school staff, which introduced us to legal concepts. Such free capacity-building exercises are important for the police force.

Similarly, another informant (KII-2) recounts how the AAU staff, particularly a few professors from AAiT, approached the local woreda which is found in the vicinity of the Campus. In this endeavour, he recalls that:

At one point, one senior staff approached the woreda authorities in person to offer his voluntary services in design and engineering. Another senior staff member also made efforts to find out what areas the woreda authorities needed professional support in. However, in my opinion, the woreda authorities did not respond to the gesture of the university community. Unfortunately, the woreda authorities did not utilise the goodwill of the Amist Kilo academicians.

Another informant (KII-3) also disclosed that they always appreciate the University staff showing their cooperation when they share lunch (in Amharic, 'maed magarat') during holidays. Moreover, KII-3 believes that AAU is fulfilling its social responsibility, citing the Natural Science Campus's provision of groundwater access for the community located behind the Arat Kilo Campus. Similarly, the university has rescued communities in danger, for which the communities are grateful. He said,

Years ago, 300 households were displaced due to a city administration development project. The university was committed to providing them with temporary work, such as gardening and cultivating nursery plants. However, I don't think they continued later on, since their new placement/house is far away

from the Arat Kilo campus. Nevertheless, the effort to create employment opportunities is commendable in itself.

In summary, the community representatives prioritise what the University's strategic plan undervalues or neglects in terms of university intervention in the community. According to the AAU (2021) document, 'Rubrics for Guiding University Community Engagement', the University does not promote mere cash transfers; rather, the Policy insists that university staff should capitalise on their professional excellence, which is needed more for contributing to the community. What are we missing from the community's view? What is missing from the community's view is that the AAU community, particularly the student community, could also benefit from the local economy through formal or informal part-time work.

According to the community representative response, the University's contributions to the community were overemphasised. They did not consider what the community could give back, such as part-time job opportunities for students. Internationally, Maurrasse (2001, p. 113) argued that students plan to join colleges and universities elsewhere with the intention of earning money from part-time jobs in the local area. The community representatives are unaware that AAU students are providing paid-for tutorials to the children of affluent parents. From the university's perspective, this misses the point of community partnership. Murrasse (2001) argued that it is difficult to develop community-driven higher education/community partnerships unless communities uphold the appropriate hope for a more engaged role for universities. In this endeavour, the AAU is detached from the community and avoids forming an ongoing partnership with it.

Conclusions and Implications

Against the backdrop of limited knowledge regarding the community's view of AAU, this Study has explored how the surrounding community and beneficiaries perceive the university and the services they receive from AAU.

Contrary to what an outsider might expect, the findings show that AAU students and staff are not strangers to the community and are not living in an ivory tower. This Study has revealed that the community living in the adjacent woredas of Arada and Gulele perceive the university as either an enabler of communal peace and security or a contributor to an increase in criminal activities and deviance. However, this view is intertwined with economic interactions between the University community and the local community, as well as AAU community services and STEM programmes. In summary, despite some token interaction between the university and its staff and the surrounding community, the problems explored in this research arguably contribute to the University's mixed record of being both attached to and detached from the community, as it significantly shies away from continual partnership with the local community. By implication, the University's fulfilment of its social responsibility and civic engagement rests on community

perception of its services and its actual existence within the community. Praise is due to those Higher Education Institutions and their campus administrations that implement community engagement in a way that reflects the needs of the local community. Consequently, the views and voices of the community must be contextualised. Further studies must focus on:

- (i) the interaction between academic programmes and community views;
- (ii) community views on university researchers; and
- (iii) the factors that influence the community's perception of the university's institutional image.

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