



**Report on Research Dissemination and Stakeholder
Engagement Workshop in Hawassa, Sidama Region,
Ethiopia.**

**The Social Sciences for Severe Stigmatizing Skin Conditions
(5S) Foundation**



February 10th 2026
South Star International Hotel, Hawassa

1. Introduction

The 5S Foundation Ethiopia Project successfully conducted its final research dissemination and stakeholder engagement workshop on February 10, 2026, at the South Star International Hotel in Hawassa, Sidama Regional State, Ethiopia. The event was organized by the 5S Foundation Ethiopia Project in collaboration with the Sidama Regional Health Bureau. The workshop created an important platform for dialogue and learning on Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs), particularly skin NTDs such as podoconiosis and scabies.

Skin NTDs continue to affect vulnerable communities across Ethiopia, significantly impacting livelihoods, education, and social wellbeing. In response, the workshop aimed not only to share research findings from the 5S postdoctoral and PhD researchers, and to highlight key public engagement activities undertaken by the project team and PiEE, but also to strengthen partnerships, stimulate innovation, and showcase national best practices in the prevention and management of these conditions.

The event brought together a diverse group of participants (69 in total, including 10 women), comprising representatives from the Sidama Regional Health Bureau, the Sidama Regional Public Health Bureau, the Bureau of Women and Social Affairs, Hawassa City Health Bureau, Hawassa City Women and Social Affairs Bureau, Hawassa University, hospitals, community representatives, religious leaders, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and partners working in the health and WASH-NTD sectors. This diversity of voices enriched the discussions and reinforced the importance of coordinated, multi-sectoral responses to NTDs.

Throughout the day, researchers presented findings from studies conducted across Ethiopia, exploring podoconiosis and scabies in rural communities, urban settings, refugee contexts, and among vulnerable populations such as school children and street-connected children. These presentations highlighted not only the medical dimensions of NTDs, but also the social, economic, and cultural factors that shape vulnerability, stigma, care-seeking behavior, and disease management. The workshop also showcased the 5S Project's public engagement work, including innovative approaches to working with schools, students, and community structures to promote awareness and behavioral change.

Lively discussion followed each session, with participants raising thoughtful questions, sharing field experiences, and offering practical recommendations. The discussions reflected a shared

commitment to strengthening evidence-based programming and ensuring research findings translate into real improvements in people's lives.

2. Opening of the Workshop

The workshop commenced with a warm welcome to the participants. Mr. Garedew Yilma, Coordinator of the 5S Foundation Ethiopia Project, introduced the purpose and agenda of the workshop and invited Mr. Belayineh Bekele, Vice Head of the Sidama Regional Health Bureau, to deliver the opening remarks.

In his address, Mr. Belayineh emphasized the growing attention being given to NTDs at both national and regional levels. He highlighted the importance of research dissemination forums in informing policy and strengthening evidence-based decision-making, while underscoring the need for stronger cross-sectoral collaboration to effectively address NTD-related challenges.



Following this, Prof. Getnet Tadele, Country Lead and Principal Investigator, warmly welcomed all participants. He noted that the dissemination and stakeholder engagement workshop builds on a series of public engagement activities conducted since the project's inception. He stressed the importance of reviewing the progress and developments achieved over the past six years. He also recalled that the 5S Foundation project began with an inception meeting and explained that this



dissemination workshop aims not only to share research findings but also to discuss strategies for translating evidence into action and ensuring sustainability.

Prof. Getnet further outlined the project's objectives and overall vision. He also highlighted key achievements of the project, including major research outputs, capacity-strengthening initiatives, and public engagement efforts that effectively bridge research and community practice.

3. Presentations on NTD Programs in the Sidama Region

Following the opening session, Mr. Melkamu Oygamo, Head of the Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) Department at the Sidama Regional Health Bureau, delivered a detailed presentation on the current NTD situation in the region. He explained that Sidama region continues to face a substantial burden of NTDs such as trachoma, soil-transmitted helminths, schistosomiasis, lymphatic filariasis, podoconiosis, and scabies, affecting large populations across multiple districts.

While notable progress has been made through expanded lymphedema management services, integrated care approaches, and strengthened government–NGO partnerships, he emphasized that significant challenges persist. These include shortages of essential supplies, limited service coverage, weak monitoring and data systems, and socio-economic barriers that hinder access to preventive materials and health facilities. He also underscored that scabies remains a widespread yet under-recognized public health issue, particularly among school-aged children, contributing to stigma and economic hardship. Despite constraints related to WASH conditions, surveillance delays, medication shortages, and low awareness, improvements have been achieved through stronger surveillance, strategic integration into NTD frameworks, and enhanced health worker capacity.

4. Presentation and Discussion of Research Findings

4.1. Session One

The first presenter in the first session was **Dr. Kibur Engdawork**, a Postdoctoral Research Fellow with the 5S Foundation Project. He presented key findings from his study entitled “Short-Term Wins, Long-Term Challenges: NGOs & the Mainstreaming of Podoconiosis Services in Ethiopia.”



Dr. Kibur Engdawork

In his presentation, Dr. Kibur shared findings from our study examining how NGOs have delivered podoconiosis services in Ethiopia and the challenges of mainstreaming these services into the government health system. He explained that podoconiosis primarily affects rural communities, leading to disability, stigma, and deepening poverty. NGOs such as NaPAN and IOCC have played a significant role in

expanding access to care, training health workers, and raising community awareness important short-term achievements. However, sustainability remains fragile. Even with strong program design, technical expertise, and collaboration with government partners, services often struggled to continue once project funding ended. Moreover, social realities, including gender roles and household power dynamics, sometimes limited individuals' ability to access care, as illustrated by the story of Ayalnesh, a podoconiosis patient shared during the presentation.

He emphasized that mainstreaming is not simply about handing over services to government structures; it requires genuine government ownership, integration into routine health systems, and long-term financing. NGOs must design equitable and sustainable programs, while donors should prioritize systemic, long-term investments rather than short-term outputs. Strengthening NGO capacity in health systems thinking, community engagement, partnerships, financial sustainability, and adaptive learning is essential to transform temporary gains into lasting, institutionalized care.

Next, **Mr. Bikila Ayele**, a PhD candidate, presented his research titled "*Being-in-the-World with Podoconiosis: An Intersectional-Hermeneutic Study of Illness Meanings, Stigma, and Care in Rural Ethiopia.*" He highlighted that podoconiosis persists not only because of biomedical gaps but also due to complex social determinants. He explained that systemic neglect, local belief systems, intersectional identities such as gender, poverty, and age and patients' lived experiences interact to shape distinct pathways of suffering.

He noted that the disease is socially understood in two stages: early-stage *tegagno*, perceived as a minor skin problem, and advanced-stage *togba*, feared as contagious or cursed, which attracts stigma and social exclusion. He emphasized that stigma and care evolve in three phases: initially absent while the disease silently progresses; then intensifying with visible disfigurement, compounded by social disadvantages; and finally, repeated failure to access effective care leads to acceptance framed as destiny, reducing engagement with health services.



Mr. Bikila Ayele

Mr. Bikila stressed that these patterns reflect epistemic injustice, where biomedical knowledge is lacking, harmful local narratives dominate, and patients' experiential knowledge is silenced. He

argued that interventions must be phase-specific, socially informed, and incorporate decentralized care, community engagement, and recognition of patients' lived knowledge to ensure equitable and sustainable outcomes.



In the first session, following the initial two presentations, a question-and-answer session was chaired by Mr. Yehalem Abebe. During this session, workshop participants actively engaged with the presenters, raising a wide range of questions and comments related to the research methodologies, study design, and the practical implications of the interventions discussed. The presenters responded thoughtfully to these inquiries, providing detailed explanations, sharing additional insights from their research, and addressing concerns about the feasibility and sustainability of proposed interventions. This interactive discussion allowed for deeper understanding, knowledge exchange, and constructive feedback, reinforcing the value of the workshop as a forum for evidence-based dialogue and collaborative learning.

4.2.Session Two

In the second session, three presentations focused on scabies, followed by discussion. The first presenter, ***Dr. Addisu Tsegaye***, a PhD research fellow at the 5S Foundation project, shared findings from his study titled “*Understanding how precarity and marginalisation affect refugees’ vulnerability to, experience of, and response to scabies in Gambella, Ethiopia.*” He highlighted that scabies in refugee camps goes beyond a medical condition, serving as a symbol of systemic marginalisation and the broader neglect inherent in long-term encampment strategies.

Dr. Addisu explained that overcrowding, water scarcity, and a fragile health system contribute to a persistent cycle of infection, making scabies one of the leading causes of health center visits.



Dr. Addisu Tsegaye

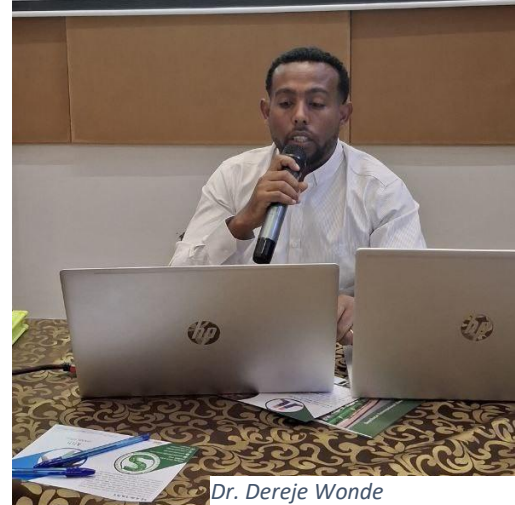
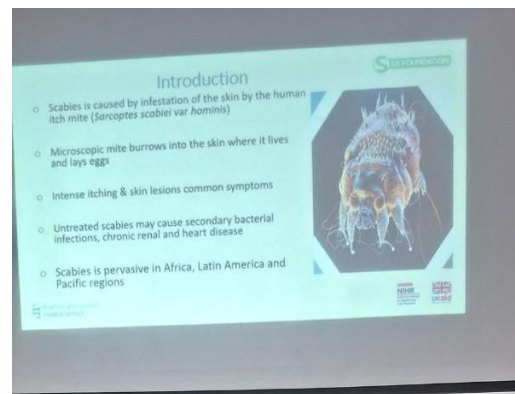
Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in Nguenyiel Camp, home to over 110,000 South Sudanese refugees since 2016, he found that limited healthcare delivered through one health center and two health posts below national and UNHCR standards reflects systemic neglect. Using a critical medical anthropological approach, he argued that the refugee protection regime restricts refugees' autonomy over their lives, well-being, and hygiene, shaping both their

vulnerability to and experience of scabies. Many refugees normalize the disease, perceiving it as unavoidable.

He concluded by calling for strengthened health systems and an end to protracted refugee situations, advocating for comprehensive, durable solutions in line with Ethiopia's refugee proclamation and regional and international commitments.

The second presenter, **Dr. Dereje Wonde**, a PhD research fellow at the 5S Foundation project, shared his research titled "*Everyday Life and Scabies in Debre Elias (Ethiopia): Implications for Disease Control.*" He explained that his study aimed to investigate how people in Debre Elias understand and manage scabies, using ethnographic methods to capture the socio-cultural dimensions of the disease.

Dr. Dereje highlighted that residents of Debre Elias are highly vulnerable to scabies and adopt multiple strategies to manage it at individual, community, and policy levels. Locally, scabies is known as *meshe mekeraye* ("the agony of the night") for the severe nocturnal itching, and also as *ekek* in Amharic and *gutsifar* in Geez, both meaning "itch." He noted that both community members and some health officials often



Dr. Dereje Wonde

regard scabies as a trivial condition, contributing to neglect. The disease is linked to ecological, supernatural, and socio-economic factors, as well as poor hygiene and substandard living conditions. Those affected frequently experience self-stigma, including embarrassment and shame.

Children, nursing mothers, and religious students were identified as the most affected groups. Dr. Dereje observed a pluralistic pattern of treatment, including self-medication, traditional remedies (herbal medicine and holy water), and biomedical care when symptoms persist or worsen. He recommended that the Regional Health Bureau extend Community-Based Health Insurance (CBHI) to religious students, develop gender-sensitive control strategies, and collaborate with traditional healers. He concluded that sustainable scabies control requires addressing living conditions alongside medical treatment.

The third presenter was **Mr. Bewunetu Zewude**, a PhD candidate, whose presentation was titled “*Street Children’s Susceptibility to Scabies in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.*” He highlighted that street-connected children in Addis Ababa experience disproportionately high vulnerability to scabies due to the combined effects of precarious living conditions, limited access to safe water and sanitation facilities, and significant barriers to formal healthcare services. He noted that although scabies research in Ethiopia has examined groups such as school children, institutionalized populations, and general communities, street children remain largely under-researched despite facing extreme exposure risks. He explained that street life often involves overcrowded sleeping arrangements, sharing of clothing and bedding, and limited opportunities for regular hygiene practices, all of which increase transmission risk.



Mr. Bewunetu Zewude

He further emphasized that vulnerability is not only environmental but also shaped by knowledge gaps, stigma, and survival priorities. He explained that many street children have partial or incorrect understanding of scabies causes and symptoms, which influences when and where they seek care. Health-seeking behavior is often delayed or replaced by informal coping mechanisms due to cost barriers, fear of discrimination, or lack of trust in services. He stressed that effective

interventions must go beyond biomedical treatment and incorporate context-sensitive, community-informed approaches that address social exclusion, improve access to youth-friendly health services, and integrate prevention efforts with broader social protection and outreach strategies targeting street-connected children.



In the second session, following the three presentations, a question-and-answer session was chaired by Dr. Dagne Shibiru from Hawassa University. Participants actively engaged with the presenters, posing a variety of questions and comments regarding the research methodologies, study designs, and practical implications of the interventions presented. The presenters provided detailed responses, offering further explanations, sharing additional insights from their findings, and addressing concerns related to the feasibility, sustainability, and social relevance of the interventions. This dynamic exchange facilitated deeper understanding, encouraged knowledge sharing, and generated constructive feedback, highlighting the workshop's role as an important platform for evidence-based dialogue and collaborative learning on NTDs and related health challenges.

4.3. Session Three

In the third session, four presentations were delivered, two focusing on research findings related to scabies and two highlighting the 5S Foundation Ethiopia's public engagement initiatives followed by a discussion.

The first presenter, **Mr. Molla Yismaw**, a PhD candidate, shared his research titled "*Scabies among School Children in Sidama Region of Southern Ethiopia: Illness Pathways, Burden and Coping Strategies.*" Conducted in Boricha District using a phenomenological qualitative approach, the study combined in-depth interviews, focus groups, and key informant interviews.

He highlighted that while the community recognizes hygiene and direct contact as causes of scabies, traditional beliefs such as smoke transmission persist. The most significant impact, he noted, is social stigma, which manifests as peer rejection, teacher avoidance, family exclusion, and psychological distress, including shame and self-isolation.

He explained that scabies disrupts education and household life: children experience absenteeism, poor performance, and dropout, while families face sleeplessness, lost workdays, and financial strain. Coping strategies range from adaptive measures like seeking healthcare to maladaptive practices such as splitting medication doses, using ineffective remedies, or school withdrawal, which perpetuate reinfection.



Mr. Molla Yismaw

Mr. Molla concluded that current institutional responses are largely reactive, with gaps in school WASH infrastructure, inactive health clubs, untrained teachers, and medicine shortages. He recommended integrated interventions, including school screenings, WASH clubs, community myth-debunking campaigns, medicine availability, and incorporation of scabies control into broader public health initiatives, emphasizing the need to address stigma, cultural myths, and institutional neglect.



Mr. Desta Ayode

The second presenter was **Mr. Desta Ayode**. His presentation was titled *Exploring Perceptions on Vulnerabilities and Resilience to Scabies among Street Children: A Qualitative Study in Ethiopia*. He explained that street-connected children in Ethiopia experience heightened vulnerability to scabies due to structural and environmental conditions associated with street life. He described how overcrowded sleeping arrangements, limited access to water and sanitation facilities, and frequent sharing of clothing and bedding increase the risk of transmission. He also noted that many street children perceive scabies as a normal and unavoidable part of daily life, which often

leads them to deprioritize treatment, especially when faced with more immediate survival needs such as food, shelter, and safety. In addition, he emphasized that limited health information and misconceptions about causes and treatment can further delay care-seeking.

He further highlighted important gendered patterns in vulnerability, noting that boys are often more exposed due to spending longer periods on the street and being more likely to sleep in crowded public spaces. In contrast, girls may sometimes access relatively safer sleeping arrangements or basic resources through domestic work or social relationships, although they face other serious risks. Despite these challenges, he emphasized the strong resilience demonstrated by street-connected children. He described how peer support networks, individual coping strategies, and support from NGOs and community volunteers help children manage health risks and daily hardships. He stressed that effective interventions should build on these existing strengths through peer-led health education, gender-sensitive programming, and improved access to hygiene and sanitation services to sustainably reduce scabies vulnerability.

Presentations on Public Engagement Activities

Mr. Yehalem Abebe, Executive Director of Partners in Education Ethiopia (PiEE), presented on project activities implemented in partnership with the 5S Foundation. His presentation, titled *“Beyond the School Walls: Our 5S Experience Engaging Students and Leveraging Existing Structures to Scale Change,”* began with an overview of the Partners’ holistic model. He explained how this model integrates school and community initiatives, showing how 5S interventions were effectively embedded within existing Eye Health and WASH programs to maximize reach and sustainability.

Mr. Yehalem explained that the main objectives of the interventions were to increase awareness and promote service-seeking and supportive behaviors among students, families, and communities. The project targeted over 101,000 students across five schools and surrounding communities in Awi and East Gojjam Zones, and it was implemented over 18 months, from February 2023 to August 2024. Key activities included securing buy-in from stakeholders, conducting baseline surveys to assess knowledge, attitudes, and practices, training students, teachers, health extension workers (HEWs), and community health workers (CHWs), distributing IEC/BCC materials, and carrying out awareness-raising activities and events both inside and outside of school settings.

He shared several lessons from the project. Integrating 5S activities with existing Eye Health and WASH programs improved the speed of implementation, cost-effectiveness, and reach,

particularly to hard-to-reach groups. Strengthening existing structures, such as the woreda-level Steering Committee composed of education office heads, experts, principals, teachers, students, family representatives, and NTD focal persons, fostered local ownership, multi-stakeholder coordination, joint planning, timely remedial action, accountability, and scale-up of interventions. Empowering students as community change agents proved highly effective: with training and IEC/BCC materials, students disseminated messages through edutainment, Q&A sessions, focus groups, school events, flag ceremonies, home visits, and religious gatherings. This approach was cost-effective, allowed for rapid reach to large audiences, and promoted sustainability.



Mr. Yehalem Abebe

Finally, Mr. Yehalem emphasized the importance of community-based solutions for water, sanitation, and treatment access. A door-to-door approach enabled the identification of vulnerable groups and mobilized support for community-based treatment and sanitation initiatives, reinforcing the value of combining school- and community-based strategies to achieve broader, sustainable health outcomes.

Following Mr. Yehalem's presentation, **Mr. Garedew Yilma**, Coordinator of the 5S Foundation, highlighted that public engagement has been a central pillar of the project since its inception. He emphasized that the public engagement team has worked deliberately to create sustainable platforms that connect researchers, practitioners, policymakers, affected communities, and other stakeholders.

Garedew noted that one of the major achievements has been the establishment of Communities of Practice in the Amhara Region, which serve as collaborative forums for shared learning, experience exchange, and coordinated action on issues related to severe stigmatizing skin conditions. He further explained that the project has actively built strategic partnerships and co-

organized events with key governmental and non-governmental stakeholders to strengthen ownership and promote long-term integration of project outcomes.

In addition, he underlined the importance of capacity-building initiatives designed to enhance the skills and knowledge of local actors, alongside a series of stakeholder engagement workshops, consultative meetings, and research dissemination forums aimed at translating evidence into practice.

Garedew also stressed the project's commitment to community-centered approaches, including the development of creative communication and awareness-raising materials such as music productions, documentary films, short films, brochures, and posters. These efforts, he explained, are intended not only to disseminate research findings but also to challenge stigma, foster dialogue, and encourage inclusive community participation.

In the third session, a plenary discussion followed the four presentations and was moderated by Dr. Kibur Engdawork. The session provided an open platform for participants to reflect on the issues raised and engage directly with the presenters. Attendees contributed thoughtful questions, observations, and critical reflections focusing on research approaches, study design, implementation processes, and the broader practical implications of the interventions.



In response, the presenters offered comprehensive clarifications, expanded on their key findings, and shared additional contextual insights from their field experiences. The interactive exchange fostered meaningful dialogue, strengthened mutual learning, and generated constructive recommendations, underscoring the workshop's significance as a vibrant forum for evidence-informed discussion and collaborative engagement on NTDs and related public health challenges.

5. Closing Session

In his closing reflections, Prof. Genet Tadele expressed his appreciation to all participants for their active engagement and meaningful contributions throughout the workshop. He emphasized the importance of fostering community ownership in both research and program implementation, noting that sustainable impact can only be achieved when communities are genuinely involved and empowered.



Prof. Genet Tadele

Prof. Genet underscored that health outcomes are shaped not only by biomedical factors but also by broader social, economic, and environmental conditions. He highlighted the critical role of social determinants of health such as poverty, education, and inequality in influencing vulnerability, access to care, and overall wellbeing.

He further stressed that social science perspectives are indispensable for achieving project objectives. By contextualizing health problems, acknowledging their complexity, and incorporating the lived experiences of affected populations, social science contributes to the development of culturally responsive and socially informed interventions. He noted that such approaches help in examining differential

exposure to risk factors and understanding patterns of vulnerability to disease.

In addition, Prof. Genet called for strengthening implementation research, particularly within the frameworks of primary health care and universal health coverage, and urged for greater integration of NTD interventions into broader health systems.

In conclusion, he reiterated that addressing health challenges effectively requires moving beyond purely biomedical solutions to also consider the social and economic realities that shape people's

lives, affirming the vital role of social science in understanding and responding to the human dimensions of health.



The workshop concluded with closing remarks from Mr. Ongamo Hanaga, Vice Head of the Sidama Regional Public Health Institute, who reaffirmed the region’s commitment to tackling NTDs through partnership, research, and coordinated action.

The Hawassa workshop marked another important step in strengthening collaboration among researchers, policymakers,

practitioners, and communities working toward the prevention and control of skin NTDs in Ethiopia. With this, the dissemination and stakeholders’ engagement workshop concluded.

Acknowledgements

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**Social Sciences for Severe Stigmatising Skin Diseases (5S Foundation) Project
Research Dissemination and Stakeholders Engagement Workshop
Date: 10 February 2026 South Star International Hotel, Hawassa
Workshop Agenda**

Time	Activity	Facilitator/Presenter
8:30 - 9:00	Registration	5S Team
9:00 - 9:10	Welcome and opening remarks	Mr. Belayneh Bekela
9:10 -9:25	The context of NTDs in Sidama Region and efforts underway	Mr. Melkamu Oygamo
9:25 – 9:45	Overview and key achievements of the 5S Foundation Project	Prof. Getnet Tadele
9:45 – 10:05	Short-Term Wins, Long-Term Challenges: NGOs and the Mainstreaming of Podoconiosis Services in Ethiopia	Dr. Kibur Engdawork
10:05 – 10:25	Being-in-the-World with Podoconiosis: An Intersectional-Hermeneutic Study of Illness Meanings, Stigma, and Care in Rural Ethiopia	Mr. Bikila Ayele (PhD Candidate)
10:25 – 10:55	Q & A on the presentations/Discussion	Mr. Yehalem Abebe
10:55 – 11:20	Health Break	South Star Int. Hotel
11:20 – 11:40	Everyday Life and Scabies in Debre Elias (Ethiopia): Implications for Disease Control	Dr. Dereje Wondie
11:40 – 12:00	Understanding how precarity and marginalization affect vulnerability to, the experience of, and response to scabies among refugees in the Gambella Region, Ethiopia	Dr. Addisu Tsegaye
12:00 -- 12:20	Street children’s susceptibility to scabies in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia	Mr. Bewunetu Zewudie (PhD Candidate)
12:20 –13:00	Q & A on the presentations/Discussion	Dr. Dagne Shibiru
13:00 – 14:00	Lunch	South Star Int. Hotel
14:00 -- 14:20	Scabies among School Children in Sidama Region of Southern Ethiopia: Illness Pathways, Burden and Coping Strategies	Mr. Molla Yismaw (PhD Candidate)
14:20 -- 14:40	Exploring perceptions on vulnerabilities and resilience to scabies among street children: a qualitative study in Ethiopia	Mr. Desta Ayode
14:40 -- 15:00	Beyond the School Walls: Our 5S experience Engaging Students and Leveraging Existing Structures to Scale Change	Mr. Yehalem Abebe
15:00 – 15:15	Major Achievements of the 5S Project Public Engagement Activities	Mr. Garedew Yilma
15:15 - 15:30	Q & A on the presentations/Discussion	Dr. Kibur Engdawork
15:30	Closing Remark	Prof. Getnet Tadele