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Winners of Photo Contest Capture Dignity and Strength of Rural Ethiopians Facing Development Challenges

Addis Ababa—The Ethiopia Strategy Support Program (ESSP) hosted an awards ceremony today to honor winners of its photo contest and launch a forty-piece exhibition on “Empowering Rural Livelihoods.” The photos were selected from a national contest that encouraged amateur photographers to capture images of rural dwellers from across Ethiopia who are improving their lives and demonstrating a spirit of resilience, hope, and dignity.

Yonas Bogale won first place for his photograph of a young girl quenching her thirst from a water pump, while Jurgen Klein received second prize for capturing in beautiful light a young student eagerly doing her schoolwork in Zeway, Silti Zone. Third place went to Ataklti Mulu for his poignant image of oxen ploughing a field in Adi Kolakul, a rural village 40km from Mekelle.

“A far cry from the usual images of starving children and swollen bellies, the photos in this exhibit depict an outstanding diversity of themes and creative impressions of rural livelihoods,” said Professor Abiyi Ford, Dean of the Graduate School of Journalism and

Communications at Addis Ababa University and one of the contest judges. “They enrich the viewer with a spirit of human perseverance and empowerment, wisdom and innovation, and even humor.”

Established in 2004, ESSP is a collaborative initiative between the Ethiopian Development Research Institute (EDRI) and the Washington-based International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI). ESSP aims to develop a “think-tank culture” in Ethiopia by bridging the gap between knowledge and policy on rural development issues and enhancing dialogue based on solid analysis. IFPRI seeks sustainable solutions for ending hunger and poverty. It receives its principal funding from 62 governments, private foundations, and international and regional organizations known as the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research.

“The photo contest and exhibition are part of ESSP’s larger vision to conceive and address the rural development challenges facing Ethiopia in different ways and to broaden the debate nationally on these issues,” explained Dr. Eleni Z. Gabre-Madhin, ESSP Program Leader and IFPRI Senior Research Fellow. “There are many angles and lens to better understand how to empower rural livelihoods, of which research is only one.”

ESSP brings together national and international policy analysts and sets its priorities by working closely with a high-level advisory group comprised of State Ministers from the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, and other national institutions. The group is chaired by H.E. Ato Newai Gebre-Ab, Chief Economic Advisor to the Prime Minister and Director of EDRI.

“Just as individual Ethiopians are empowering themselves to improve their livelihoods, so too is Ethiopia taking its development into its own hands, including initiatives such as ESSP, a program that is designed and driven at the country level,” said Ato Newai. “Many of the photos

in this exhibition reflect important areas of research and analysis: urban-rural linkages, the impact of public spending on the rural poor, and the participation of smallholder farmers in national and global markets.”

Photos displayed in the month-long exhibition, which will be open to the public at EDRI beginning on March 31, were selected from nearly 250 submissions by a panel of judges with expertise in areas ranging from rural development to communications and photography.

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