



Read-out from CSSP's Learning Seminar: 'Dynamics & multiple faces of *Khat*: Stakeholder Learning & Engagement for Action'

Introduction

On July 12/13 2017, over 80 representatives from government, civil society, communities (farmers, former addicts), academic researchers and development partners came together in Addis to discuss learning from the experience of CSSP's CSO partners working on *khat* use and abuse in Addis Ababa, Harari, Oromia, SNNP and Benishangul Gumuz. Discussion about production, marketing and consumption of *khat* led to key issues requiring government policy attention and enhanced civil society interventions. This read-out provides an overview of debates, tentative conclusions and proposed actions.

Inputs to the seminar*

- Brief overview of current laws, policies and strategies: how these relate to substance use and abuse including *khat*;
- Presentations of different analyses of *khat* in society, drawing on civil society experience of approaches to: support people affected by addiction, prevent take-up; provide alternative income; and reduce effect on education;
- Evidence from CSOs: Benishangul Gumuz Development Associations Network (BGDAN), Assosa Environmental Protection Association (AEPA); Ethiopian Youth Network Harari Branch (EYNHB), Harari *Idirs* and *Afochas* Coalition (HIAC); Forum for Social Studies (FSS) and *Mequamia* Community Development Organisation (MCDO).
- Presentations from the perspectives of a) law enforcement, b) public health, and c) mental health.

"Government has realised the need for and has now started to draft legislation on khat regulation in relation to farming and production, marketing, transportation, chewing and consumption. This seminar has given us big inputs to that process from research, civil society, farmers and ex-addicts. Hopefully all these will feed into on-going drafting efforts designed to regulate rather than contain khat. This seminar shows a big gap in our coordination of efforts and actors working on the issue."

A representative and speaker from Federal Government



"Khat habituation and addiction are rolling like a juggernaut through the ranks of the Ethiopian youth."

*The Khat Conundrum, by
Yeraswork Admassie, FSS
Monograph 2017*

Key findings

- *Khat*, known in religious circles as either the 'Plant of Paradise' or the 'Headdress of the devil', is a natural stimulant leaf chewed in Ethiopia for centuries, primarily for spiritual reasons. Not considered an addiction-causing substance, people later consumed *khat* for recreation.
- Growth in *khat* consumers accelerated, among people from all walks of life, ages, sexes, religions, education and classes. Nationally 16% of Ethiopians between the ages of 15 & 69 are now consumers. And the trend is growing.
- Driving forces include: food insecurity, modernisation (expansion of education institutes, infrastructure enabling easy, cheap & timely supply) and peer pressure. It is profitable locally & nationally.
- Public discussion is limited. The first national conference was only in November 2011 (under public health), with a more broader event in April 2016. Research has helped expand understanding of the chemical effect of *khat* on the human mind and body and links between excessive use and physical/psychological disorders now posing challenges society and government struggle to address.
- *Khat* distribution involves children exposed to high risks. In *Khat* centres of Awoday & Wendo, children (8 – 18 years) constitute 50% to 70% of the workforce, and users too.
- Not classified as a hard drug, *Khat* is often a gateway to, and a cover for illicit drugs trade. *Khat* chewing houses (according to the Federal Police) are increasingly places of crime: sexual abuse of women and girls, theft, illicit trade of arms and illegal brokerages.
- Despite this, Federal and Regional governments do not yet have laws or policies to regulate production, marketing and consumption of the substance.

Key debates and conclusions

The debates focussed on three areas:

- Is *khat* good or bad for Ethiopia and Ethiopians?
- What policy options are feasible and desirable?
- How can government and civil society work more closely to address the multiple challenges of *khat*?

Ethiopian laws promulgated for hard drugs do not apply to *khat* despite what is now known of its addictive qualities and growing socio-economic impact. Reluctance of government is normally attributed to the fact that *khat* generates hundreds of millions of hard currency for the national economy. Others argued that the millions of dollars of benefit now is likely to cost Ethiopia billions in the near future through social damage (health, education, productivity) as well as reputational damage to Ethiopia's big institutions including its national carrier Ethiopian Airlines (a key link in the export chain of *khat*).

At the same time, millions of rural households have come to depend on income generated from *khat*. No immediate viable alternative is yet available for these households, and dependency is growing. Some even argued that *khat* consumption facilitates socialization, building social capital; others that it creates a sedated and less demanding population.

The large majority of participants, nevertheless, expressed deep concern about increasing social and economic damage and most worryingly the adverse physical and psychological health consequences caused by *khat* consumption. *Khat* addiction has led to family breakdown (fuelling violence against women and girls) as well as loss of household income as more is spent on feeding *khat* habits, and graduation to other drugs (and alcohol); increased delinquency among young people, disrupted education processes, and reduced quality of public service delivery.

Participants on both sides of the debate eventually agreed that banning *khat* altogether is not practical and would take a very long time because the drug is so entrenched in society. But they also agreed that allowing the continuation of *khat* transaction without some legal intervention is dangerous with far reaching consequences for the country. The consensus was to encourage government **in consultation with key stakeholders** to introduce viable regulatory mechanisms along *khat* value chains all the way to consumption (and treatment).



It was also agreed that failure to address the mounting problems could impede the country's ambitious plans for joining lower middle income countries by 2025.

Key lessons for the future

- **When civil society can demonstrate results on hard-to-touch issues, government can be inspired to start a policy response, and step up coordination of Gov/CSO efforts.** At the level of individual projects, the impact of CSO interventions is currently modest. Looked at together, however, CSOs' interventions offer potential for considerable change in: reducing *khat* production and marketing; discouraging consumers; treating and rehabilitating people affected by addiction; creating alternative income generating opportunities; undertaking massive awareness raising; evidence generation (research and videos) as well as organising learning and engagement interfaces. In all cases, ownership by government, shown through institutionalized support and strong coordination of actors and their actions, is essential for scaling up and guaranteeing sustainability.
- **Multifaceted approaches are required to address the challenges of *khat* in society.** CISP-supported CSOs designed a range of interventions to overcome challenges posed by *khat*. Each intervention has some degree of contribution but no single model of intervention is effective in isolation. The campaign to manage *khat* use and abuse demands multifaceted approaches across all sectors and stakeholders.
- **It is possible to convert a hard-to-touch/talk issue into a government and public agenda.** Alternative livelihood strategies to replace those currently met through the *khat* industry and value chain (and other challenges posed by *khat*) need to be addressed systematically and in a coordinated manner if Ethiopia is to achieve its target of lower middle income status by 2025. Tackling these challenges is no longer a matter of choice – but a matter of saving the next generation and protecting the image of the country and of its bigger institutions. Radical inclusion of the many and sizeable groups and communities in the *khat* industry – in their social, economic and political spaces - remains one of the necessary conditions for the country's stability and sustainable development.
- **Political leadership and commitment of GoE senior leaders makes a big difference.** Comprehensive and systematic regulatory mechanisms are essential for turning the tide of *khat*. There are cases where government officials took strong initiatives to regulate *khat* use but their efforts were in vain when they were transferred to other areas. (For example, in Bambasi town, the anti-drug taskforce stopped functioning when mayor of the town and chairperson of the taskforce was removed from his position). Failed past efforts to regulate *khat* in Tigray and Gambella are also examples. Strong political leadership and champions are required in the same way that HIV/AIDS was tackled in the 2000s. It has been done before in Ethiopia, and can be done again.

Key lessons for the future (cont'd)

- Policy development must be informed by CSO experience, and the views of people affected.** Country-level policy and legal responses/measures are required to curb the growing tide of *khat* consumption and addiction. But it would be easy to get this wrong because behaviour change is a highly complex area. Policy development must pay attention to the complex needs of people affected by substance use and abuse, and their very specific cultural and religious circumstances. For example, necessary clinical treatment and rehabilitation must be customised for different groups of people and provided in a dignified manner – protecting the human rights of *khat* addicts and people affected by mental ill-health.
- Changing *khat* norms requires government and civil society capacity to handle sensitivity and controversy.** Debating *khat* issues will generate controversy. Difficult conversations cannot be avoided, at the political level, in businesses and even within families. Policy formulation and regulatory framework must be handled with care, empathy, and respect for the feelings of all concerned. The campaign to regulate and manage better the *khat* industry and market must distinguish between the substance (and its effects on individuals and society) on the one hand, and its producers, marketers and ultimate users on the other. Demonization of people is not going to work – and could make things worse.
- De-linking children from the *khat* trade is a priority.** Protection of children who are connected to and consumers of *khat* in one way or another should be a priority concern for the government. Disconnecting children from *khat* transaction and use will have long term benefits for the country. This is an issue of the rights of children to a safe childhood and is in line with the government's commitment to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Incentivise civil society to work more on the issue and generate innovations that can be scaled up.** Despite growing awareness of the challenges of *khat*, CSOs have been reluctant to engage directly until recently. They felt hopeless and accepted the inevitability of *khat* assuming ever greater importance in the economy of individuals, households and country. CSOs' pioneering work, combined with research expertise to convert this experience into practical learning and influence, has helped civil society to turn a corner with government. But policies alone will not change deep behaviours. Civil society can help government develop the software approaches required as well.

Key actions and results proposed – by actor

Combating challenges and problems associated with *khat* use and abuse is not an easy task. It requires big resources and lengthy interventions. In light of the news that Federal government is now drafting laws to regulate supply and use of *khat*, the following action points were identified and planned for the coming 12 months – described in more detail in the table included on the final page of this read-out:

Government actors...

...at all levels want to develop an effective regulatory legislation for socio-economic management of *khat*, tobacco and alcohol to reduce abuse and the negative impact of substance abuse on government's wider plans for national development. This needs to be drafted and endorsed by the federal house of people's representatives. It will need popular support, or at the very least public understanding and acceptance – to be implementable.

Representatives from people affected by *khat* use and abuse...

...with which CSSP-supported CSOs have worked want to have their voices considered in the *khat* regulatory frameworks and access to alternative livelihoods options to mitigate potential negative consequences from policy changes

Civil Society Organisations...

... want to promote the debates and conclusions stimulated by their interventions and research to feed into the policy drafting process, and to take up the invitation from government to do this**...

...also want to help increase public awareness on the adverse impacts of *khat* consumption and the opportunity for alternatives so as to contribute to conditioning the environment for fuller public acceptance of government regulations once these are ready for implementation...

... and also want to continue developing and testing interventions for supporting desired behaviour changes along the *khat* value chain, with greater coordination by government of efforts and contributions of all stakeholders. In particular they want to see children protected from the industry.

Development Partners and CSSP...

...want to see sustained support to ensure continuation of the momentum; and could support experience sharing from other contexts dealing with substance abuse where this is considered useful.

**FSS has just published the following report: *The Khat Conundrum in Ethiopia: Socio-economic Impact and Policy Directions* FSS Monograph No.12 by Yereswork Admassie, ISBN 978-99944-50-63-3. 2017, available from book shops. FSS (and other CSOs) have now been invited to provide inputs to the policy drafting process.

This table provides more detailed description of actions that each actor proposes to take. These actions will be monitored through a follow-up process after the end of CSSP.	
What each actor would like to see within 12 months	What each actor plans to do to achieve this
Government actors from local/regional and federal level want to have a regulatory legislation on <i>khat</i> , tobacco and alcohol drafted and endorsed by the federal house of people's representatives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wider consultation and inputs in the drafting and public hearing processes on <i>khat</i> law, including with civil society actors involved with both development of interventions and research into these efforts, and the socio-economic dimensions of <i>khat</i>.
Representatives from Hard to Reach communities with which CSSP has worked want to have their voices considered in the <i>khat</i> regulatory frameworks and access to alternative livelihoods options.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create spaces for debate on the draft legislation Involvement of <i>khat</i> traders/marketers and farmers in the law-making process, as well as those affected by <i>khat</i> use (and abuse) Awareness on the socio-economic impacts of <i>khat</i> to deepen public understanding (and be more open to change)
Civil Society Organisations want to see increased public awareness on the adverse impacts of <i>khat</i> consumption.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct genuine and transparent public discussions and debates on <i>khat</i> use over the mass media and community assemblies; Advocate to include the subject in the school curriculum, such as through the Civic and Ethical Education Courses (as well as other relevant subjects such as science and personal health) Promote and expand the service offered by existing rehabilitation and treatment centres and institutions, drawing on tried and tested approaches to tackle addictive behaviours; Help establish new rehabilitation centres that meet acceptable standards; Promote provision of free mental ill health care in all hospitals/health centres.
<i>Khat</i>-focussed Civil Society want to communicate to and engage with lawmakers to help develop laws that regulate <i>khat</i> supply and consumption.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participate in law-making processes to help regulate who ought to produce, process and consume <i>khat</i>. Make sure the would-be law regulates <i>khat</i> marketing and consumption locations, type of persons that can legally engage in its business as well as bans its advertisement in public places; Organize stakeholders including lawmakers' discussion and debate on the subject matter to make sure that views and interests of all are well considered (in the drafting of the legislation). Identify additional stakeholders left out in the learning seminar to consider their viewpoints on <i>khat</i> use; Organize a workshop to design workable mechanisms acceptable to all to coordinate efforts of all stakeholders and avoid duplication of efforts in the campaign process. Include a very strong focus on the different ways of removing children from the <i>khat</i> value chain – at household and society levels.
Development Partners and CSSP want to have continued support to ensure sustainability of the campaign.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Help ensure connection between CSSP I & the upcoming CSSP II in relation to this area of policy development and implementation. Support immediate activities to communicate to lawmakers in charge of drafting law on <i>khat</i> use. Consider options for experience-sharing in other parts of the world.