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The role of multi-stakeholder forums in subnational jurisdictions

The SHARE Bale eco-region MSF

Oromia, Ethiopia

Key messages

- This multi-stakeholder forum (MSF), which followed an integrated and multisectoral approach, was effective in tackling the diverse constraints to sustainable land use in the Bale eco-region.
- Livelihood interventions increased the 'ownership' of the MSF's processes and outcomes.
- Limited representation of, and attention paid towards, women and the private sector in the decision-making processes constrained the effectiveness of the MSF.

MSF at a glance

Participants	   
Organizers	
Year started	2014
Funding	
Forum type	Knowledge sharing and decision-making
Outcome	Recommendations and coordination

Summary

There is current interest in Ethiopia of the potential of multi-stakeholder forums (MSFs) to address constraints to sustainable land use and stimulate inclusive decision-making processes related to interventions targeting land degradation.

To explore this potential, we examined the MSF established in 2014 under the Supporting Horn of Africa Resilience in Bale Eco-Region (SHARE-BER) project in Oromia regional state (Figure 1), funded by the European Union.

For this research, in-depth interviews were carried out with 20 MSF participants and 9 non-participants, 3 MSF organizers, and 4 key context informants from different sectors with knowledge and firsthand experience of land use and land-use changes in the Bale eco-region. The study aims:

1. to identify the processes and outcomes that influence the MSF's effectiveness in achieving sustainable land use in the eco-region;
2. to examine how the MSF addresses issues of power and inequity in decision-making processes.

The SHARE Bale MSF aims to improve the eco-region's biophysical conditions and increase the livelihood benefits provided by land resources, and to identify the biophysical and sociocultural factors that aggravate land degradation and address them through a joint decision-making process with the active involvement of actors in relevant sectors such as agriculture, natural resources management, and health.

The MSF seeks to enable the equitable use of resources with an increased adoption of participatory approaches in forest and rangeland management; and to contribute to sustainable land use in the eco-region through an inclusive design and process that brings together stakeholders from different sectors to discuss common problems and find solutions that benefit them all.

The MSF contributes to the government's development goal of creating 'climate smart' families and communities in the eco-region. The SHARE BER project works towards creating harmony between people and the environment through interventions in technology, livelihoods, gender, and family planning. This is done with the goal of enabling each family to work on a package that facilitates livelihood improvement in harmony with the eco-region (Figure 2).

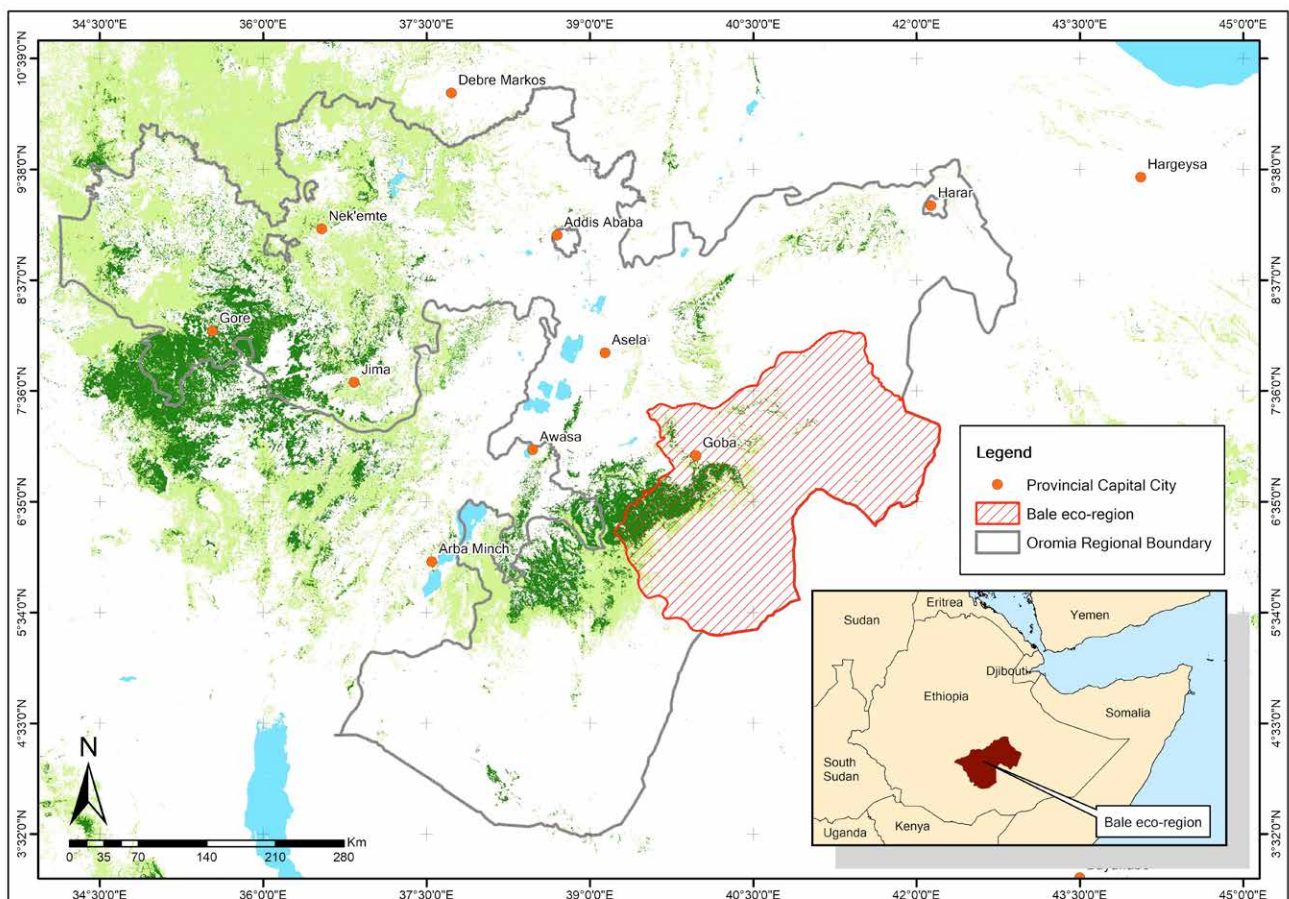


Figure 1. Location of study area: the Bale eco-region.



Figure 2. Land use in the Bale eco-region. Photo by Mastewal Yami/CIFOR.

The packages are developed within the MSF, taking into account government and non-governmental organization plans in the specific *kebele* (the lowest level of administrative unit in Ethiopia).

How effective was this MSF?

The MSF was set up to address constraints to sustainable land use in the Bale eco-region. The MSF has introduced a multisectoral approach that allows for cooperation and collaboration among stakeholders from different sectors, which has been effective in enabling inclusive decision-making processes by involving stakeholders with different interests and priorities in planning and implementation processes. The MSF also improves forest management by mobilizing collective action and devising mechanisms to equitably share economic gains among community members. The establishment of the MSF in line with the different levels of subnational government structures has contributed to its effectiveness.

The MSF has worked on balancing population growth with the natural resources available in the area, increasing awareness on sustainable land use among stakeholders and reducing the increasing land-use conflicts in the eco-region due to illegal settlements and agricultural expansion. The main differences of opinions are those between stakeholders who prioritize production and those who prioritize conservation, regardless of their level of participation in the MSF. For instance, stakeholders working on watershed management and livelihood improvements for governmental or non-governmental organizations focus on devising alternative livelihoods for local communities as a mechanism to address unsustainable land use and land-use change.

In addition, the MSF contributes to the planning and implementation of interventions such as Participatory Forest Management, Participatory Rangeland

Management, rule enforcement, family planning, and livelihood diversification activities such as beekeeping. The Participatory Forest Management cooperatives and multi-stakeholder taskforces enhance equitable benefit sharing, and work to prevent deforestation and forest degradation. Both structures enable rule enforcement aimed at activities that aggravate deforestation and forest degradation, such as encroachment into the forest and forest clearing. Factors including agricultural expansion, illegal settlements, political instability, and funding constraints limit the MSF's effectiveness.

Was this MSF able to address inequity?

The MSF works on addressing inequity by devising mechanisms to share economic gains among community members in an equitable manner through the Participatory Forest Management cooperatives. It also attempts to address gender inequity by assigning quotas for women in the committees of those cooperatives. However, the effort is minimal compared with the level of gender inequity in the eco-region. The equity of the MSF is constrained by limited representation of women and the private sector, and little attention being paid to them in decision-making processes. However, inclusion of political leaders and technocrats in the MSF is important in embedding Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) activities with wider development goals, and in strengthening rule enforcement.

Nevertheless, the dominance of powerful actors in the MSF (e.g. they chair sessions) might limit the sharing of opposing views, and thus effective participation, by less powerful stakeholders such as women. The study also found concerns among community-based stakeholders, as their representatives might not represent their interests in the MSF, promoting the interests of more powerful stakeholders instead.



Equity

The MSF was perceived to be equitable or very equitable by 100% of its participants.

100%



Effectiveness

The MSF was perceived to be effective or very effective by 95% of its participants.

95%

Recommendations

- *Gender equity:* Women are underrepresented in the MSF, raising issues concerning equity and the processes' future effectiveness. The MSF should invest in mechanisms to develop their capacities for a more inclusive participation.
- *Extending stakeholder representation:* Improving the representation of the private sector and women at all levels of the MSF is crucial for an enhanced impact on the livelihoods of the local communities.
- *Power balance:* The MSF needs to revisit the power relations among stakeholders by using different and more procedurally just practices, such as taking turns in moderating the forums, and by balancing the number of powerful and less powerful stakeholders at all levels of the MSF.
- *Funding:* The MSF is facing funding constraints following the phasing out of the SHARE Bale eco-region project. The MSF's plans and activities need to be embedded in the government structure to mobilize funds and ensure its sustainability.
- *Monitoring:* To strengthen the MSF's effectiveness, its objectives and its processes should be monitored in such a way that supports adaptive learning, enhancing actions and results that go beyond strengthening forest and rangeland management.

This publication is part of the **Integrating REDD+ with development goals at the landscape level: The role of multi-stakeholder forums in subnational jurisdictions project.**

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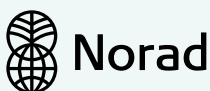
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