

ET06

Government, community and donor relationships in NRM

Key Points:

- 1** Partnerships between different stakeholders in NRM are complex
- 2** Differences in power and resources of different stakeholders need to be understood
- 3** Different stakeholders work with different institutions at a local level
- 4** Different stakeholders' agendas' may lead to conflicts at the level of implementation

This Briefing is one of a series produced jointly by the Forum for Social Studies (Ethiopia), Centro de Experimentação Florestal (Mozambique) and the University of Sussex (UK). Each is designed to summarise research findings and encourage feedback. The Briefing is part of the 'Marena' research project, funded by the UK's Department for International Development.

The management of natural resources depends on the quality of relationships between government, international donors and the 'communities' with which they work. These relationships become especially important in the post-conflict context, when breaks in institutional legitimacy and authority may appear. Much attention is currently given to building 'partnerships' between these different stakeholders. However, aspirations towards partnership may hide discrepancies in resources and power, which give rise to rather different priorities and objectives. By identifying the nature and source of such differences, partnerships could be made more real than rhetorical.

In this *Briefing*, these issues are explored through discussion of NRM in post-Derg Ethiopia. Fieldwork with government and donor supported projects in North and South Wello reveals discrepancies in resources and power in a number of areas. Ideals of partnership are also thrown into stark relief by the effects of the recent war with Eritrea.

At the same time, it would not be accurate to present these discrepancies as strict oppositions. Interest groups cut across the apparently neat institutional boundaries of government, donors, and communities. Collective and individual memories play an important part in how people respond to management initiatives.

Old and new partnerships

Since the fall of the Derg and the official end of conflict in 1991, the government of Ethiopia has sought to rebuild relationships with international donors. An important focus has been the NRM sector. Government and donors alike see land degradation, population pressure, and chronic food insecurity as priority areas. A National Conservation Strategy is under discussion by each of the regions. This stresses participatory and community-based NRM. In Wello, Amhara Region, a large number of agencies are working on NRM issues. Some, such as the Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA) and World Food Programme (WFP) were also in the

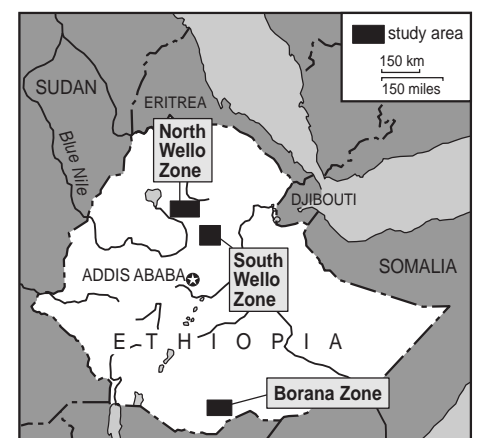
area under the Derg. Others, such as the British NGO SOS-Sahel, arrived more recently.

Working with unequal relations

The representatives of international agencies working in Ethiopia generally have many more resources at their disposal than their government counterparts. At the national level this gives them the power to allocate, or withhold, aid. Locally it allows them to influence the nature of the development process.

However, how this power is wielded reflects the strategic negotiations of individuals. A weakly positioned government official may strengthen his or her situation through alliances with both other officials and donors. This should not necessarily be seen negatively, but it does need to be understood.

In contrast, government officials at the local level, such as extension agents, may feel as much part of the communities with which they work as of the government. They may hold different views of the appropriate ways of 'doing development' to those they work with whom they are supposed to work. Official targeting of the poor, for example, may be contrary to farmers' and extension agents' logic in which it makes sense to also help the slightly better off who may act as a 'safety net' in times of crisis. In Ethiopia, for example, WFP-supported food-for-work (FFW) schemes officially target the poorest. However, many extension agents admit that



in practice this system is subverted (see *Briefing ET07*).

Community participation: who represents who?

Government and donors disagree in which institutions they see as the most appropriate vehicle for development at the local level. For representatives of the government, there are clear structures - the *Kebele* Administration (KA), and below this *Mengistawi Buden*.¹ These are seen as the best and only appropriate representatives of the population, particularly farmers in rural areas.

Donors, on the other hand, have been seeking out other 'community based organisations' (CBOs) with which to work. Both SIDA and SOS Sahel have been attracted to *kires*, informally organised burial associations, as more appropriate representatives of local interests. Environmental management activities have been initiated with *kires*, sometimes resulting in tensions with government officials. After considerable negotiation, both agencies have agreed to work more directly with government representatives. However, this compromise disguises remaining differences of view.

Differing agendas

Despite efforts to co-ordinate the activities of different agencies, there can be problems where they work in the same or nearby areas, yet give very different signals to the local population.

For example, SOS-Sahel and WFP are both working in North Wello, supporting participatory soil and water conservation

(SWC) activities. Their approaches and the resources offered are very different though. While SOS-Sahel has tried to improve tenure security as a prerequisite to better management, WFP focuses on food-for-work as both an incentive for management and a way of getting food to the poorest. Both programmes work through local government structures to implement their activities.

The differences between the two programmes are important for two reasons. First, the very size of WFP means that the energies of government agents may be diverted towards its activities. Second, farmers themselves sometimes move in search of WFP-supported activities. This can render the efforts of the SOS Sahel project rather superfluous.

SOS-Sahel has sought to encourage user rights and tenure security through the issuance of user-rights certificates, and to integrate this issue within its PLUPI (Participatory Land Use Planning and Implementation), methodology. There are efforts to promote replication of user rights throughout the region (See *Briefing ET08*).

However, government and NGO interpretations of the rationale and appropriate implementation of user rights are rather different. While SOS Sahel is working with groups of farmers to encourage collective management, many government agents stress individual control. Indeed, for some in the government, user rights may be as much about addressing the problem of the young landless as NRM.

Memory and institutional relationships

In Ethiopia, rural communities have historically experienced considerable coercion. People in the government have correspondingly been accustomed to being coercive. In addition there are considerable differences in the ability of individuals within the government hierarchy to control or access resources.

These observations are important because new development interventions do not enter into a vacuum. Development workers stay in one place only for a few years, sometimes only a few months. But many of those with whom they work have longer memories of intervention and political change. This applies to government agents as much as rural communities. It is therefore vitally important for external intervention to develop sensitivity to how such memories may influence people's current positions.

¹KA is the lowest formal level of government and covers around 1,000 households. Nonetheless, lower level village committees called *Mengistawi Buden*, are also directly answerable to the government structures.

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