



Research article

Assessing the roles of stakeholders in community projects on environmental security and livelihood of impoverished rural society: A nongovernmental organization implementation strategy in focus

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ABSTRACT

The current study investigates how stakeholders' participation was used to improve environmental security and the livelihoods of the poor in rural community of Ethiopia. In particular, the study attempts to identify models of stakeholder participation and the factors that influence participation using qualitative methods. In-depth interviews, focus group discussions, organizational documents and observation used to collect the data. Thematic analysis of the data highlights consultation, collaboration, and partnership as key organizing constructs. The study offers a distinctive viewpoint on the literature and on rural community practice through the participation of stakeholders. We suggest nongovernmental organizations thoroughly utilize grassroots approach to gain acceptance, trust and sustainability of community projects.

1. Introduction

Carrying out a rural community project successfully is notoriously difficult (Usadolo and Caldwell, 2016). Challenges emanate from several potential factors, such as low community decision-making capacity and difficulty in managing communal property since projects were implemented on communal land (Zikargae et al., 2021). Further, information flow is often through government structure which is influenced by political contexts. It requires collaboration and understanding to manage community projects (Zikargae et al., 2021; Saengsupavanich et al., 2012). The success of the project depends on the participation of stakeholders at all levels. In projects which require environmental decision-making in particular, scholars like Depoe and Delicath (2004) argue for the importance of finding new ways to improve participation of citizen.

Stakeholder participation in the environmental decision-making process helps citizens exercise their democratic rights through combined involvement of ordinary people, the media, environmentalists, academics, and scientists (Richardson and Razzaque, 2006). In this sense, collaboration is a style of communication that encourages dialogue among stakeholders, rather than advocacy and dispute, as a means of problem-solving. Walker (2007) asserts that cooperation is characterized

by positive and open communication, typically in the form of discussion, with focus on power-sharing and a level playing field. This study demonstrate how the Organization for Rehabilitation and Development in Amhara (ORDA; after 2021 named ORDA Ethiopia) used collaboration as one of its strategies to implement projects.

Stakeholder participation boost up the quality and legitimacy of making decision leading to better results on environmental and livelihood challenges in rural society (Coenen, 2009). Rio Declaration on Environment and Development emphasizes the significance of information access for stakeholder participation and legitimacy in environmental decision-making processes (UNCED, 1992). At the European level, the EU contributed for the Aarhus Convention progress (UNECE, 2014) and the 5th and 6th environmental action programs (European Commission, EU, 1993; 2002). The convention indicates that participation and information access could be regarded as democratic rights, human rights and environmental rights in environmental policy and decision-making. This is in line with the statement of the Davos 2020 World Economic Forum, which emphasized the necessity of stakeholder participation in a cohesive and sustainable world (DWEF, 2020).

Mutual exchange of information concerning environmental issues could be achieved through interactions, discussions, persuasions, and repeated dialogues. Therefore, dialogues are processes of sharing

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information and developing an understanding of the perspectives of stakeholders (Zikargae and Ali, 2017; Zikargae, 2018, 2021; Zikargae et al., 2021, 2022a; Eisenhauer and Nicholson, 2005). Participation of stakeholders is critically important for sustainability and environmental security. This research found several challenges to participation of stakeholders in the studied project. The community neither participated in the planning phase nor in the validation workshop of the community projects. This exclusion eroded trust among the community projects. However, other stakeholders were invited during the validation workshop, but they did not have a stake in the community projects and were not part of the implementation phase and beyond. We argue that environmental policy and project success depend on stakeholders' participation since stakeholder participation is critically important for sustainability and environmental security. Stakeholder participation also invites and creates spaces (Berry et al., 2019). For example, members of the ORDA project community have their own culturally created spaces such as cultural institutions which help to encourage greater citizen participation in decision-making processes.

The study seeks to achieve three objectives: (1) to outline the roles of stakeholder participation in ensuring community project success; (2) to assess the facilitates or hinders of stakeholder participation in the sustainability of community projects, and; (3) to interrogate the methods of stakeholder participation used to coordinate stakeholder activities.

It is believed that creating a sense of ownership, prioritizing needs and interests, identifying community issues and concerns, facilitating planning as well as implementation, and establishing active participation boost understanding and consensus. These steps could be useful for democratic governance of community projects.

1.1. Background of ORDA

ORDA was established in 1984 as an Ethiopian relief organization to improve the living situations of the rural. It was legally registered as a local NGO in 1991. According to a recent mission, in the Amhara region, ORDA has been working to strengthen the institutions and disadvantaged communities there so they can achieve environmental and livelihood security. ORDA formulated four strategic plans over a 20-year period, followed by a fifth strategic plan, which is active in 2022 and beyond.

The study, which is consistent with the organization's sub-programs, concentrates on section five of ORDA's Environment and Forest Development Program (EFDP), which is meant to maintain environmental and livelihood security in the region. Forest development, biodiversity, watersheds, soil and water conservation, and climate resilience are the four sections of the EFDP. This study's focus is the EFDP. ORDA has been implementing EFDP community projects at study sites located in the central Gondar, south Gondar, and north Wollo districts (Zikargae et al., 2021).

2. Theoretical framework

The concepts of strategic participation and community involvement can be used interchangeably. They refer to the same phenomenon in the relevant literature. The fundamental presumptions of participation are included in both formulations. Stakeholder participation is an umbrella term for the concepts 'community participation' and 'citizen participation' in the current study. Thus, we operationalize the term 'stakeholder participation' to incorporate the community and other stakeholders.

Stakeholder participation pertains to involvement of individuals in neighborhood projects. Community projects differ depending on the types of tasks to be completed. Participation helps stakeholders in community projects to solve their problems. This is seen as a core democratic value and as a basic human right. It is important in integrated community projects. Communities affected by environmental and livelihood challenges should be given the opportunity to participate. The overall assumption is that contributing ideas, making decisions, understanding and taking responsibility are valuable acts. A community with considerable knowledge, skills, empathy, and pride is often overlooked or

forgotten. The integrated theory can uphold both these concepts of stakeholder participation and the participatory theory for the framework of the current study.

2.1. Participation theory

A theory represents a move from global, spatial, top-down strategies to more locally sensitive methodologies in participatory communication. As a modern approach that entails grass-roots intervention, community engagement is a valuable practice.

2.2. Stakeholders' participation

As stated by Simmons (2007, p. 6), "enabling citizens to respond to policies already chosen is significantly different than inviting individuals to contribute knowledge about how a policy will affect their community at the start of a decision-making process." The participation of stakeholders in policy decisions involves two dimensions (Simmons, 2007), specifically the degree of political decentralization or shared power and the degree of desired participant interaction. On the one hand, participatory communication strategies frequently take a pseudo-participation strategy to provide the impression that citizens are actively involved.

Full participation, however, necessitates that each participant have a say in how choices are reached. Ultimately, the participation of stakeholders as input for decision-makers incorporates different aspects such as the provision of information, filling information gaps, problem-solving and social learning, and contestability of information, empowerment of marginalized groups, democratic practice, and capacity building (O'Faircheallaigh, 2010). The participation of stakeholders consists of three overlapping issues: information dissemination, consultation, and participation of stakeholders as decision-makers.

According to Lindblom and Ohlsson (2011), stakeholders are any group that affects or is affected by management decisions on environmental issues. These at least include scientists, communities and professionals. The community is the most important stakeholder, but other stakeholders with specific skills and duties are also important actors to promote change.

2.3. Definition

Various academics define stakeholders' participation in environmental decision-making. They highlight participation in terms of involvement of all parties (stakeholders) who may be interested in and affected by environmental and development decision making at all levels (Simmons, 2007; Deope and Delicath, 2004). Stakeholder participation in environmental decision making is public concerns, needs, and values which are incorporated into a vested interest group (Creighton, 2005, p. 7). Better decisions backed by the public are the ultimate goal of this two-way dialogue and interaction. More broadly, participation of stakeholder is the process by which interested and affected stakeholders collaborate, and are consulted.

2.4. Stages of participation

The important aspects of participation consider the whole process of the project phases. Pre-planning involves identifying problems and assessing needs. Collaboration with the community and other stakeholders is used to identify problems. The participation of the stakeholders is important at this stage. To this end, project challenges can be solved throughout the project by engaging stakeholders at every phase. The overall cycle of the project requires mobilizing, training, awareness creation and dialogue.

2.5. Principles of stakeholder participation

According to the three pillars of the Aarhus Convention (Rahman, 2011), the concept of stakeholder participation includes access to vital

information for stakeholder participation; participation in planning and access to justice.

2.6. Benefits of stakeholder participation

Stakeholder participation, cornerstone, offers a number of demonstrable benefits as demonstrated in the 2030 Agenda (Berry et al., 2019) and other discourse on the subject. Basically, stakeholder participation strengthens democracy, increase accountability, improves process quality, manage social conflicts, and improves legitimacy (Zikargae et al., 2022b; Reed, 2008; Berry et al., 2019; Bastidas, 2004).

2.7. Influences of stakeholder participation

Several factors improve or affect participation of stakeholders. The factors are social, economic, cultural, and institutional which affect the impact of participation (Reed et al., 2017). Ultimately, these various settings might have an impact on the result. The engagement process is also another factor. Furthermore, the way the community constructs knowledge could affect participation (Reed et al., 2017). Community deterioration, mistrust, delays, information sharing, relational abuse, lack of participation, inefficient communication, tight budget, and miscommunications (Saengsupavanich et al., 2012) have been important constraints. These factors markedly affect the outcome of environmental decision-making processes. The participation of stakeholders shapes environmental decision-making. It also improves the implementation of policies. As a result, it increases legitimacy (Berry et al., 2019).

3. Methods

A qualitative research approach has been applied to explore stakeholder participation in the EFDP of ORDA community projects. The stakeholders' participation practice and other challenges were explored based on in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, observation and document analysis. In-depth interview was used since it enables exploration of the experiences of the participants. It helps acquisition of reliable information in respect of attitudes, views, motivations, etc as well as in-depth understanding of complex subjects (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). Interview also aids in obtaining exclusive knowledge or an interpretation held by the interviewee (Stake, 2010). Focus group discussions, on the other hand, are often used by researchers to gather qualitative data and in-depth insights on a particular topic. Focus group discussions are more naturalistic than other methods (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003) enabling a data environment where "interviewer focuses attention on a given experience and its effects" (Kothari, 2004, p.7). Observation, on the other hand, can provide empirical evidence through checklists. Moreover, ORDA documentation strategies help to provide insights on strategic plan, annual and performance conditions of the past and current contexts of community project implementations.

3.1. Selection of participants and sites

Forty-six participants were involved in the current study: Forty-three community members of the project and three experienced experts of the organization. To clear the ethical dilemma, oral consent was obtained from the participants. Moreover, written consent letter was provided by the organization.

An important portion of the local community was chosen using sampling criteria created scientifically based on prior theoretical and practical experience (Martinez-Mesa et al., 2016; Mosera & Korstjens, 2018). With the exception of the proportionate participation of important experts, different interviews used comparable criteria to achieve the practical purpose of the full study. The subjects were chosen using convenience and selective sampling (Zikargae et al., 2021).

Therefore, 46 participants provided data for the current study. The Amhara region's three zones community members provided the data.

The zones were the central Gondar, south Gondar, and north Wollo zones, which served as the EFDP intervention regions for ORDA. The intervention locations were in the Gondar Zuria, Libokemkem, and Gidan zones, namely Enfiranz, Derita, Muja, and Eyella (Zikargae et al., 2021).

3.2. Data interpretation and analysis

The information was organized into emergent main themes and sub-themes before being thematically examined. The themes came from theory and facts, respectively. In light of this, the data are analyzed and discussed below.

4. Results and discussion

The findings show community members intensively participated in community projects through performing different activities. These activities included successful campaigns, mobilization, and constructive discussion. They were also engaged in terracing, soil and water conservation, seedling or nursery preparation, rehabilitating and developing degraded lands, protecting degraded lands from grazing, and carefully delineating them to restore and cultivate them. Until now, they have participated in wealth-generating activities. To this end, the local community was involved in carefully negotiating environmental challenges like environmental conflicts (Zikargae et al., 2022b). However, early involvement was full of turbulence. The project community had virtually broken-down to some extent.

The duty to address stakeholders' participation in PEC is to incorporate how to involve the stakeholders in every stage of the project phases. The stakeholders participate in the discussion of planned community projects (CI1, CI2, CI5, CI6, FGD1, FGD2). The discursive spaces developed by the community are important public spheres to build consensus and understanding among stakeholders. To guarantee the long-term survival of neighborhood projects, this stage of environmental communication is necessary. Through engagement during the project phases, the inclusion and exclusion of community project matters could be thoroughly reviewed. The stakeholder participation in the current study is identified as consultation, collaboration, and partnerships. These are usually the major thematic areas of stakeholder participation. Their willingness to participate in the project processes has a bearing on the level and extent of engagement. The findings show that the above-mentioned facets of participation are found to be the most essential part of the implementation of the community project (CI1, CI3, CI5, EI1, EI2, EI3). However, the results of this section show that there are not many venues created for the mobilization of the stakeholders. To guarantee the long-term survival of neighborhood projects, this stage of environmental communication is necessary. A number of tactics and elements of environmental communication enable the practice of participatory environmental communication. Participatory environmental communication is a crucial procedure for coordinating stakeholders. Understanding and integrating human dimensions into community projects reduce the practical hurdles of stakeholders' participation (Berry et al., 2019; Bonnett et al., 2019).

To guarantee the long-term survival of neighborhood projects, this stage of environmental communication is necessary. Stakeholders' participation to decide on environmental matters encourage social legitimacy along with trust and confidence building (Martinez-Mesa et al., 2016). The sharing of information and communication between different stakeholders, the trust that develops plays a key part in making collaborations work. The study presents a distinctive practice because of its emphasis on the nature of participation of stakeholders in the projects. The results demonstrate that the community plays a significant role in the community initiatives' implementation phases (EI1, EI2, EI3). Additionally, the participants reaffirmed that their full hearted involvement and dedication in the post-implementation can contribute to the community projects' long-term viability.

Rural community project implementation is intrinsically complicated (Usadolo and Caldwell, 2016), necessitating stakeholder cooperation, consensus building, and understanding. It is essential to manage the environment collectively through partnerships, consultation, and collaboration (Saengsupavanich et al., 2012). The success of environmental policies and projects depends on the involvement of stakeholders (Eden, 1996). Democratization and participation of all stakeholders at all levels are key components of the participatory communication concept.

Interactions, conversations, persuasions, and recurrent dialogues could be used to achieve mutual exchanges of information on environmental issues (EI1). ORDA begins the execution of community projects after debates and community discussions. Information can be exchanged through dialogues, which can help participants better comprehend one another's points of view (Zikargae, 2018; Eisenhauer and Nicholson, 2005). As a result, it makes the stakeholders' decision-making process seem more legitimate. Participants concurred that involvement of stakeholders is essential for environmental security and sustainability (EI1, EI2, EI3). For example, members of the ORDA project community have their own culturally generated venues, similar to cultural institutions. In conclusion, the involvement of stakeholders is necessary for environmental policies and programs to be effective. Participation of stakeholders is vital for long-term sustainability and environmental security. The ORDA project participants each have their own culturally produced spaces, not unlike those at cultural organizations. They can be used to increase meaningful citizen participation in decision-making. Most importantly, they have created discursive areas that could function as the public sphere.

4.1. ORDA's participation

ORDA took part in a number of events. As a nonprofit, ORDA assisted in reducing the dangers of conflict and drought in the Amhara region. They helped by supplying food and medicine. They also provided money so that the community could restore and equip itself. After ORDA was involved as a charitable organization, it began expanding to address development projects. Consequently, because ORDA is active in agricultural, forestry, road construction, irrigation, and drinking water, its participation drew a lot of attention (EI1, EI2, EI3). ORDA met with administrative, community, religious, and agricultural offices before inviting stakeholders to join. Collaboration and coordination with the numerous parties fell under the purview of ORDA. Additionally, the organization's structure is inextricably linked to the government's shared commitment. Accordingly, ORDA has vast experience in the implementation of EFDP community projects (EI1, EI2, EI3).

4.2. ORDA's stakeholder participation

A number of ORDA stakeholders were identified by the study, including donors, agriculture offices, land tenure and management offices, local government, the project community, and cultural and religious institutions (landholding) (CI1). The study discovered that donors, agriculture offices, environmental protection offices, local administrations or governments, the project community, and cultural and religious institutions are among the ORDA EFDP stakeholders (Zikargae et al., 2021; EI1). A different participant (EI2) noted that agriculture offices, local government or administration, environmental protection offices, youth and women are among the stakeholders in ORDA (Zikargae et al., 2021). Emphasizes the use of inclusive participation of the community (ORDA, 2016; ORDA, 2021a; ORDA, 2021b). However, the community's families do include children and women. If they could participate in the initiatives that generate revenue, some of them would support the project community (entrepreneurs). The expert added: "Environmental protection and land administration organs are also our stakeholders in matters related to land tenure". The expert identified the previous attachments of communities to other stakeholders throughout the implementation of the project. The community, however, "works mostly with the three;

agricultural, administrative, and land management" (EI2; Zikargae et al., 2021). Project community participation only functions through these already established structures. Scholars assert that stakeholders are able to overcome communication barriers and build a conventional platform as their best discursive space. They can also achieve consensus by engaging others. This implies that the communication process is interactive serving as a mediating mechanism for the impact of government stakeholders on project communities, beliefs, attitudes, and behavior related to environmental issues.

Theoretically, there are several ways to conceptualize participation as an empowering strategy. There are two kinds of involvement. Since becoming a charity to address the dangers and calamities of war and drought in the Amhara region, ORDA has been active in a number of projects (Zikargae et al., 2021). A participant said that "ORDA started out as a charity during the drought... provision of food and medicine, loans, and aid groups". ORDA is now fully engaged in development work... engaged in provision of agriculture, forestry, road construction, and forestry through irrigation and drinking water" (EI1). ORDA employed Participatory Diagnosis and Action Planning (PDAP) to guarantee the participation of underserved communities (ORDA, 2016). Scholars agree that local stakeholders are a driver of sustainable development (Brédif and Simon, 2014).

ORDA communicates with donors in two ways: through funding proposals and the funding source's own interests. Donors contribute money via the ORDA project proposal application for funding, or sporadically they express a self-driven desire in taking part in the ORDA-approved program. Here, to mention a few, the Norwegian Forestry Group and Green Ethiopia Switzerland are the main supporters of ORDA's community projects. They also aid in the monitoring and assessment of activities. For instance, they are responsible for keeping track of the plantation's survival rate. Moreover, they offer some cutting-edge and technical information help to raise the survival rate of the seedlings that have been planted. Still, there is financial support for these projects from the regional government. In this sense, ORDA fills the gap between the regional government and the desired community projects.

In order to build relationships and communicate to raise awareness and engage the community, the other stakeholders resolve issues relating to common land and offer a governance structure. On the other hand, there were many intriguing ways to look for the community. The first was the group of farmers who had access to neighborhood initiatives. The second category consisted of women who did not participate in community initiatives but yet gained access to them via wages paid for the growth of seedlings. The kids who were not involved in community programs but benefited from side business projects arising from them are last but certainly not least (FGD5, CI5). Cultural and religious institutions provide land or grant places around Orthodox churches. The landholdings of religious organizations have a great deal of expertise with the processes of forest development and protection (FGD1, FGD2, EI3). They also handled and mediated EFDP actions and problems in the public sphere (CI1). Social emancipation of women was identified as a rewarding scenario.

Women took part in various ORDA EFDP activities. A participant (EI2) explained that they could be empowered to use fuel-efficient technology and stoves. Women are also trained to perform on nursery sites (EI2). Furthermore, women participated in a program to water the nursery. After training, they received an income from working in nurseries. Thus, women are the main contributors to the greening program. Participants confirmed that, on an equal footing with men, women participate in environmental and development projects (CI7, FGD5, FGD6). Women carry most of the burden with domestic work in this country. As a result, their project participation is typically limited. The development of soil and watershed requires a lot of work. Their involvement, on the other hand, has recently increased. Their participation is primarily focused on seedling processes, and they help in the garden by planting flowers. They continue to work on terracing projects. In the vast majority of cases, women spend time in their surroundings and contribute to forest protection (EI1, EI2, EI3). In this sense, their

performance suggests that they are in a prime position to defend their forests.

4.3. Stakeholders' participation in different phases of the community project

The study identifies three types of stakeholders' participation: consultation, collaboration, and partnerships.

4.3.1. Consultation

Environmental communication supports civic engagement (scientific citizenship). Specifically, the community can articulate their alternative discourses (Dodson and Palliser, 2016). The community was consulted due to their knowledge about the opportunities and challenges of the intervention areas, except for the Enfiranz community projects (CI3, CI4, CI5, CI6, CI7). The community was consulted to study the background of the areas, which helped ORDA to understand the intervention areas (EI1, EI2, EI3). A participant said:

The local community is the most knowledgeable about the place. The community understands the region better than anyone else. We go back and study the history of that area when we first want to learn about it. The first step is to pinpoint the issue at hand driving our enquiry. To comprehend the influence of the circumstances on those in positions of leadership, we use people who are older than us. As a result, we can comprehend the consequences. We look for someone we know who can help us find what we're looking for. EI2

Stakeholder participation can influence the consensus building of the project community. However, the findings show that the initial phases of the project design lacked substantive contribution from the community. Thus, the process lacked inclusiveness. In addition, the form of participation in the community projects suffered from at least three additional elements: the lack of regional advisory councils, the lack of alternative participatory structures, and the lack of public-private partnership.

4.3.2. Collaboration

The participants emphasize how collaboration is important to achieving community projects. "We do not do it alone. It is a great cover for the government. It is not the work we own, but the work we do in coordination and collaboration with the government, the community, and other stakeholders" (EI1). ORDA concludes:

Funding organizations and government stakeholders believed that ORDA is a capable organization to implement projects in collaboration with regional, zonal and district governments. The government stakeholders at various levels play crucial roles in the coordination and facilitation of project implementation (ORDA, 2021b, p.4).

The motto of ORDA is insisted on "transformation through collaboration" (2021, p.4). Collaborative stakeholder participation incorporates invitational and deliberative democracy that entails understanding and mutual agreement (Callister, 2013). The numbers weren't constantly falling because the earth was deteriorating. However, as a result of such a participatory watershed development plan and implementation, the number of trees planted is steadily increasing. Activities for conserving soil and water are encroaching on a lot of lands. People are concerned about tree preservation and are increasingly planting trees. Cumulatively, things are better now (EI1, EI2, EI3, CI3, CI4, CI7, FGD3, FGD4). To resolve environmental conflicts, community cooperation on the project is crucial (EI1, CI5, FGD5).

Cox (2010) claims that cooperation "has the potential to increase community and individual capability in areas including conflict resolution, leadership, and decision-making" (p.127). However, successful collaboration can be affected by the characteristics of the stakeholders, access to resources and opportunities, and consensus (Zikargae et al., 2022b; Cox, 2010). They have to be local residents who work together to solve issues.

The agreement to participate is a prerequisite for participation. Participants adopt a problem-solving communication style which precludes adversarial or manipulative exercises. The goal of issue solving is to define concrete problems and related concerns through debate, conversation, and information. Consensus is formed by discussions and collaboration rather than forced attempts. Thus, community-based collaboration solves local problems. As a result, the community is working together to overcome environmental concerns, based on cultural institutions.

4.3.3. Partnership

For ORDA to attract donors, partnerships and image-building are essential (EI2). ORDA's fourth and fifth strategic plans indicate that partnership is one of its implementation strategies (ORDA, 2016; ORDA, 2021b). In order to mobilize and effectively use resources, transfer knowledge and skills, and scale-up best successes, ORDA "strives to develop genuine and strong relationships and collaboration with funders, the business sector, and government line offices" (ORDA, 2016, p.55). In the intervention regions, there are also relationships with local stakeholders like community and religious organizations. To ensure project or program sustainability, local resources are used and social values are harnessed (ORDA, 2016). The religious institutions have a responsibility to assist in the execution of the neighborhood projects. The other stakeholders do not clearly demonstrate this. However, there are no public-private partnerships.

ORDA's recent strategic plan (ORDA, 2021b) indicates that partnership is used to increase the engagement of different stakeholders, such as donors, government bodies, and the community, where public-private partnership is missing. The project community participated in project phases including problem identification, capacity building, and monitoring and evaluation.

4.3.4. Problem identification

As a kind of engagement, problem identification is used to bring attention to the issues and draw donors' attention of the challenges to the community (EI2, EI3). The donors join together to work on community interests. They develop a plan of action when they first arrive. Cooperation was shown by ORDA working with them to raise quality of life. More ideas could be provided to the donors so that they can solve the community's prior problems. "By including this, we generate more concepts that will hasten development and ownership" (EI2).

Stakeholders were involved in the identification of issues when ORDA went out to the community with projects. They also had the chance to talk about the problems' root causes. They did not participate in technical elements, which could be left to technical professionals (EI2).

The project community will not move until ORDA has collected funds. ORDA identifies the problem and discusses the causes with the stakeholder participation. The challenges hinder participation of stakeholders. Then, in essence, ORDA provides technical assistance to technically-minded individuals. Participation necessitates a significant amount of work. However, it went unnoticed. Although they claim to be somewhat invested in the project, the participants indicate that they agree with the ideas of the project.

4.3.5. Capacity building

ORDA uses a knowledge management strategy (implementation strategy) to increase the implementation capacity of the staff and stakeholders (ORDA, 2016). Experts and the community are empowered when they are capacitated. They can then build credibility and confidence for their decision-making processes.

Capacity building is provided at the district as well as at the kebele levels. It includes training and surveying farmers which is provided in collaboration with the agricultural division, we further do monitoring work together (EI1).

In order to empower stakeholders and their institutions, ORDA also used capacity building. Building the capacities of the community and its

institutions, ORDA's workers, and government employees was one of EFDP's thematic areas for ORDA (ORDA, 2021b). One of ORDA's capacity-building mechanisms was through training of staff working at nursery sites and surveying farmers. The training was provided in collaboration with agricultural offices. The trained farmers also monitor the activities in collaboration with agricultural offices (EI1).

4.3.6. Implementation

Every stakeholder participation process started with a prerequisite phase. Discussions with the project community were necessary. Thus, numerous discussions were held in order to come to an understanding regarding the advantages of community projects. Most stakeholders participate more in the implementation of the community projects than in other phases of the projects. Some community members focused on their day-to-day lives to fully fill their livelihood needs. According to Reed et al., 2017, contextual elements such as economic, cultural, and institutional aspects may have an impact on the results of participation.

4.3.7. Monitoring

According to ORDA performance reports, the monitoring and learning processes occurred throughout the project phases (ORDA, 2021b). Participants were also asked by ORDA employees to take part in monitoring community projects as they were being implemented (EI1, EI2, CI5, CI7, FGD3, FGD4, FGD6). They want to use the neighboring woodland to their full advantage and to safeguard cattle grazing. The participant stated, "We work together on monitoring" (EI1). One of ORDA's implementation strategies claims that "quarterly and annual monitoring will provide the space for reflection and assessment of performance" (ORDA, 2016, p.62). An annual performance evaluation was conducted after the assessment in order to incorporate the findings into the upcoming yearly performance improvement plan. Additionally, stakeholders are actively involved in the mobilization of locally available resources as well as the coordination and facilitation of the implementation of community projects (ORDA, 2021b).

4.3.8. Factors of stakeholders' participation: participants' perspective

Lack of information was attributed to weak communication networks among the stakeholders, project community, and ORDA staff. There are several vested interests, attitudes, and behaviors among the community members. One participant said: "doing personal work" (CI5). The competing interests among the project community (EI1, CI5, FGD5) also affect the community participation. Lack of comprehension, the inability to create places, a lack of transparency, and incomplete information are some of the difficulties. The report also identifies a top-down implementation model for community projects.

In sum, the main hurdles during stakeholder participation are poor monitoring, moisture stress, inadequate management, delayed start of the program, and wide coverage of the program, which have limited the success of participation in the seed multiplication program. Due to government-sponsored conferences, line office employees and farmers were unavailable throughout the execution of the program. Additionally, lack of advisory and consulting, low level of strategic roles for empowerment and participation, and poor planning and reporting are obstacles to participation of stakeholders. Low community participation with a weak capacity to communicate results to various stakeholders, as well as predefined project ideas from donors, serious time constraints and the procedural requirements of the call for proposals affect the organizational trust of stakeholders, including the farmers' community, district, zonal, and regional level stakeholders who lack strategic complementarities with regional partners. Stakeholders affect the planned participation of ORDA in regional development agendas.

Low community participation and government commitment affected project design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. A strong achievement of ORDA is that participation of the community in the project manifested in terms of collaboration, consultation, and partnership. Although collaboration, consultation, and partnership are formed

with stakeholders, the stakeholders' participation is minimal with respect to the broad application of community interventions. It also lacks genuine participation due to its top-down approach. As a result, the project community resisted in the initial phase of the project's start.

Therefore, ORDA collaboration and cooperative changes with stakeholders focused on EFDP community projects. Collaboration and partnerships, with the exception of public-private partnerships, are seen as national initiatives, as are the many Ethiopian stakeholders. ORDA has demonstrated that advances in environmental security and livelihood have a strong symbiotic relationship. This suggests that the modifications might have a significant impact on the Amhara region's sustainable growth. Furthermore, ORDA's operational frameworks and efforts are closely aligned with the partnerships and collaboration of the government's commitments to the green economy and green legacy. Building relationships and a positive reputation are essential to community projects if they are to continue. Various media were used as a communication hub and as an effective platform to effectively deliver organizational program successes and awareness-building.

5. Conclusion

The prevailing global and regional challenges outpaced ORDA's goal of triggering changes. The changes span environmental issues, livelihood, and climate change and are informed by the theory of change. Partnerships challenging the status quo of ORDA emanated from the strategies for implementing community projects. Moreover, environmental communication, as employed in the Amhara region seeks to improve the development of relationship and image building among various stakeholders. The implementation strategies are intentionally developed to benefit from the work to address environmental and livelihood challenges. To realize its goal and basic values, the organization has had to navigate a complicated web of obstacles. While interacting with the project community, ORDA has not yet established a uniform policy.

Although it maintains an effective implementation strategy, the organization has not demonstrated how it considered all types of communication knowledge, channels, and networks to serve the project community and local stakeholders. Putting the community projects into action is the missing piece. Although it lacked this mechanism, the most effective and competent elements of the organization were seen as the culture of recording successful communication and the seeming failure of project procedures. In comparison to the boundless potential they have in more affluent places, ORDA's ability to adapt and communicate the intended results to multiple stakeholders is significantly less strong.

The specifics of how and when to implement the EC strategy were not made clear by the appropriate location for a grand strategy. Environmental communication has been hampered by a lack of communication infrastructure and a possible delay in responding to pertinent comments from potential sponsors. As a result, with respect to the wide use of community interventions, stakeholder participation is kept to a minimum. Due to the top-down approach, meaningful engagement is also lacking. We suggest that nongovernmental organizations thoroughly utilize the grassroots approach of stakeholder participation to gain more acceptance, trust and assure sustainability of community projects.

Declarations

Author contribution statement

Mekonnen Hailemariam Zikargae: Conceived and designed the experiments; Performed the experiments; Analyzed and interpreted the data; Contributed reagents, materials, analysis tools or data; Wrote the paper.

Amanuel Gebru Woldearegay; Terje Skjerdal: Conceived and designed the experiments; Contributed reagents, materials, analysis tools or data; Wrote the paper.

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Data availability statement

Data will be made available on request.

Declaration of interest's statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Additional information

No additional information is available for this paper.

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