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# Building Effective Community Participation and Stakeholder Partnerships to Promote Positive Change in the Southern Ethiopian Rangelands

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## Building Effective Community Participation and Stakeholder Partnerships to Promote Positive Change in the Southern Ethiopian Rangelands

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*Recently there has been increased recognition that authentic community participation and creating strong inter-institutional partnerships are both important in the process of capacity building, generating innovation, and sustaining development achievements in rural Africa. Here we summarize a process of community participation and formation of institutional partnerships in support of pastoral risk-management interventions over the past seven years on the Borana Plateau. Community involvement has been stimulated using Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) methods. This has resulted in the proliferation of pastoral collective-action groups that have diversified livelihoods, engaged markets, and improved incomes. Implementing and sustaining positive change, however, has also been related to building a dynamic network of 46 like-minded partners across Ethiopia and northern Kenya. These partners include community based organizations, women's groups, policy makers, educators, researchers, private sector firms, various GO and NGO development agents, and others. It is argued that widespread impact across such a large area could not have been achieved without the assistance of many partners that contribute complimentary resources and expertise to plug gaps that can otherwise impede progress. Challenges and opportunities in creating and maintaining partner networks in support of such rural development are discussed.*

### Background

Community participation and multi-stakeholder partnerships are essential to ensure that agricultural research and development efforts are relevant and sustainable. This is different from the traditional, top-down model of basic research leading to extension and then impact. By engaging rural people and other stakeholders in a circular process of analysis, reflection, and action, human capacity can be built and prospects for greater innovation can be achieved (Ashby, 2003; Sanginga, 2006).

Participatory development approaches have gradually become popular. Community participation means different things to different people, however, and there are various degrees of participation (Arnstein, 1969). At the lowest level, a community can simply be engaged to provide information to researchers. At the highest levels a community is given power to help interpret research results and make decisions that affect their development process. We define community participation as in Heller (2003) as the "active engagement of communities that is rooted in the authentication of power and influence sharing in decision making at all levels." This process is based on mutual respect, knowledge, and trust.

Similarly, the value of authentic stakeholder partnerships has also received more recognition. Partnerships lack a precise definition. We use the definition of partnerships from Sanginga (2006) as follows: "a collaborative arrangement between independent organizations to plan

and implement a jointly agreed program with shared resources and information in a manner that generates collaborative synergisms."

Despite recent trends in thinking about the value of collaboration and partnerships, there are few tangible examples that illustrate the validity of these ideas. Members of the PARIMA project have been engaged in traditional survey and technical research concerning pastoral risk management for many years, both before and during the early years of the project. But it has been a commitment to engagement and action via non-traditional, participatory methods in recent times that has truly altered the trajectory of the project and increased the prospects that research can be translated into positive and tangible effects on the lives of pastoralists. In addition, the PARIMA project is too small to affect positive change on the vast rangelands by itself. Sweeping change requires the coordinated efforts of many partners. Our main objective, therefore, is to report on efforts made by PARIMA to enable genuine community participation and forge effective inter-institutional and other partnerships in southern Ethiopia and northern Kenya during 2000-2007.

### Findings

**Community Participation.** The PARIMA project used Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) as designed by Lelo et al. (2000) to bolster community participation in the

identification of local problems and shared implementation of possible solutions. Genuine participation increases the likelihood that communities will have ownership of their development projects. The major outcome of a PRA is a priority list of community problems and possible solutions. The best-bet problem-solving strategy is called a Community Action Plan (CAP). Various CAPs formed the basis for creating risk-management intervention projects that were jointly implemented among semi-settled pastoralists with help from various regional and local partners (Table 1). Engagement of the pastoral communities through PRA has augmented their self confidence, pride, initiative, creativity, responsibility, and willingness to cooperate.

This participatory engagement with pastoral communities

was initially pushed by PARIMA, but soon it was demanded by communities as word spread. By 2005 the number of collective action groups mushroomed into 59 with a total of nearly 2,200 members across five districts on the Borana Plateau. About 76% of the members are women. Successful in micro-finance and livestock marketing, the groups have since graduated into legally recognized producer cooperatives. Such positive outcomes have been instrumental in providing the incentives for inter-institutional and other partnerships to flourish, as noted below. More details on the PRA process in Ethiopia are provided in Desta et al. (2004).

**Partnerships.** The PARIMA project, which has always been small in terms of material and human resources, nonetheless

Table 1. Partnership network for the PARIMA project in southern Ethiopia and northern Kenya<sup>1</sup> during 2000 to 2007.

REGIONAL MEMBERS	LOCAL MEMBERS				
	Yabelo District	Moyale District	Liben District	Dugda Dawa District	Dire District
CIFA	AFD	LUNA	ELFORA	OCPB-DD	OCPB-D
OCPB	LUNA	OCPB-M	OCPB-L	OPaDB-DD	OPaDB-D
OPaDC	OCPB-Y	OPaDB-M	OPaDB-L	EPG-DD	EPG-D
KPWG	OPaDB-Y	EPG-M	EPG-L	DA-DD	DA-D
POLICY	EPG-Y	DA-M	DA-L		
BTL	DA-Y	BZA-M	SAVE/USA		
IMMIG	BZA-Y		GZA		
FIDS	EO-Y		COOPI		
KARI			GTZ		
OARI					
ALRMP					
LMA					
AU-IBAR					
PARIMA					
STI					

<sup>1</sup>Where regional or international members include: CIFA=Community Initiatives Facilitation and Assistance (Kenya and Ethiopia); OCPB=Oromia Cooperative Promotion Commission (Regional State); OPaDC=Oromia Pastoral area Development Commission (Regional State); KPWG=Kenya pastoral women's groups (100% women); POLICY=federal and regional policy makers for Ethiopia; BTL=Borana traditional leadership (Aba Gada); IMMIG=federal immigration officials (at Moyale; Kenya and Ethiopia); FIDS= Furra Institute of Development Studies; KARI=Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (Marsabit); OARI=Oromia Agricultural Research Institute (Yabelo); ALRMP=Arid Lands Resource Management Project (Kenya); LMA= Livestock Marketing Authority (Ethiopia); AU-IBAR=African Union Inter African Bureau for Animal Resources; PARIMA=Pastoral Risk Management team of the GL-CRSP; STI= Southern Tier Initiative of the USAID Mission to Ethiopia.

Where local (district) members include: AFD=Action for Development; LUNA=private exporting firm; ELFORA=private exporting firm; OCPB=Oromia Cooperative Promotion Bureau (Y=Yabelo branch, M=Moyale branch, and L=Liben branch, DD=Dugda Dawa branch, D=Dire Branch); OPaDB = Oromia Pastoral area Development Bureau (Y=Yabelo branch, M=Moyale branch, and L= Liben branch, DD=Dugda Dawa branch, D=Dire branch); EPG=Ethiopian pastoral groups (76% women and 24% men; Y= Yabelo groups; M=Moyale groups; and L=Liben groups, DD=Dugda Dawa groups, D=Dire groups); DA=district administration (Y=Yabelo, M=Moyale, and L=Liben, DD=Dugda Dawa, D=Dire); SAVE/USA=Save the Children USA (international NGO); BZA= Borana Zonal Administration (Y=Yabelo, M=Moyale), and GZA = Guji Zonal Administration, EO-Y= Education Office at Yabello.

had an ambitious research and development agenda. The PARIMA project began seeking institutional partnerships early in 2000 when it started field activities in southern Ethiopia. In addition to being small, PARIMA viewed itself only as a temporary entity, a perspective shaped by the uncertainty of three-year project-renewal cycles. More than anything else, however, the importance of partnerships to promote development was close to the heart of the PARIMA team from the beginning.

During the partnership formation stage PARIMA, in collaboration with local administrations, took a lead and organized workshops where potential GO and NGO partners could share ideas and discuss ongoing pastoral development programs. This gradually led to a collective recognition of a need to network more effectively. Overall, a grand total of 46 research, development, and community-based entities have filled complementary advising, implementing, training, and funding roles on the project over the past seven years (Table 1). Twenty five of these entities were key contributors to implementing risk-management pilot projects in Yabelo, Dugda Dawa, Negelle, Dire, and Moyale. The shared vision for intervention was to improve the livelihoods of semi-settled pastoralists via collective action, income and asset diversification, improved access to marketing, and non-pastoral investment schemes. Since the pilot projects have been widely distributed over five districts—and thus separated by an average distance of over 100 kilometers—the “PARIMA partnership system” is not one monolith for all the southern rangelands, but rather it has been replicated in several places with different local partners.

Specialist input or material support has been solicited from many partners to fill certain gaps. For example, Egerton University (Kenya) was important to train people in authentic participatory methods. The Kenyan NGO called Community Initiatives Facilitation and Assistance (CIFA) was enlisted to help make contacts with women’s collective-action groups in northern Kenya that had a proven track record of achievement and hence could provide models for the Ethiopians. The Southern Tier Initiative (STI) of the USAID Mission to Ethiopia was approached to provide funding. The Fura Institute of Development Studies (Ethiopia) implemented capacity-building short-courses. CARE-Borana provided logistic support at the initial phase of the Dida Hara Community Development project, GTZ provided a water pump to a community project in Negele, Ethiopia, to assist in a horticulture component. Kenyan women’s groups mentored their Ethiopian colleagues to help pilot projects get underway. Ethiopian federal and regional policy makers and Boran traditional leaders provided their input to project activities. The LUNA and ELFORA are private-sector, livestock-export abattoirs that linked to selected community projects and have dramatically enhanced livestock trade. The AU-IBAR (Nairobi) provided working capital to enhance market involvement of selected

communities. The Ethiopian Livestock Marketing Authority (LMA) facilitated marketing linkages.

Challenges in this process have been numerous. They include efforts to instill a common vision and approach among partners, agreeing on roles and responsibilities, overcoming mistrust among various agencies that needed to work together, and sharing credit for project successes to reduce competitiveness. To navigate these waters, the PARIMA staff made a sustained effort to operate in a transparent fashion and put the needs of project beneficiaries at the forefront. The PARIMA staff members have had to endure very high transaction costs to carry out this agenda.

Partnerships have been maintained via regular information sharing and mutual help. The PARIMA project, with support from the USAID Ethiopia Mission, took the lead to train partners in participatory approaches, micro-finance, and small-business development. Partners have also joined hands to co-fund, administer, and monitor local activities.

All partnerships have not been sustained throughout the entire project life. Some partners come and go depending on circumstances. For NGOs—in particular, those having a limited project cycle—may not remain as long-term partners. As most NGOs are heavily donor driven, they can change their emphasis and priorities quickly. Staff turnover and institutional restructuring in government have been problems also. Some government offices have turned over their staff 10 times in seven years, for example. Institutional restructuring involving two major Ethiopian agencies also occurred over five times during the same period. The restructuring often has been accompanied by changes in the institutional mandates that affect roles in the partnership, and thus this requires readjustments.

There is a growing tendency among major Ethiopian GOs to work together and mobilizing joint resources on the Borana Plateau. This has also been manifested in new programs concerning prescribed fire and dairy processing. PARIMA is receiving requests from other regional states to provide assistance through training and consultation to replicate partnership models.

## Practical Implications

The success observed so far underscores the value of participatory approaches and stakeholder partnerships. This culture is now taking root on the Borana Plateau. We have learned that if researchers and development organizations are committed to engage communities, participation and collaboration can indeed create space for added energy, creativity, and capacity building, even in a difficult pastoral setting. Genuine community participation involves power sharing.

The partnerships have been vital to helping create the generally positive and sustained outcomes of the community pilot projects. In the past there were virtually no development traditions on the Borana Plateau of embracing community-led initiatives or forging inter-institutional linkages. One challenge is how to sustain partnerships and community participation approaches. This could be facilitated when the major donors

or ministries that underwrite development in the region begin to link project performance—and positive impact on pastoral people—with their continued financial support, and when improved project performance, in turn, is explicitly linked to the benefits of community participation and stakeholder partnerships.

## Further Reading

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The GL-CRSP Pastoral Risk Management Project (PARIMA) was established in 1997 and conducts research, training, and outreach in an effort to improve the welfare of pastoral and agro-pastoral people with a focus on northern Kenya and southern Ethiopia. The project is led by Dr. D. Layne Coppock, Utah State University. Email: lcoppock@cc.usu.edu



The Global Livestock CRSP is comprised of multidisciplinary, collaborative projects focused on human nutrition, economic growth, environment and policy related to animal agriculture and linked by a global theme of risk in a changing environment. The program is active in East Africa, Central Asia and Latin America.

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